The WORLD of LEARNING

Lessons from 52 Countries

Editors

Marmar Mukhopadhyay

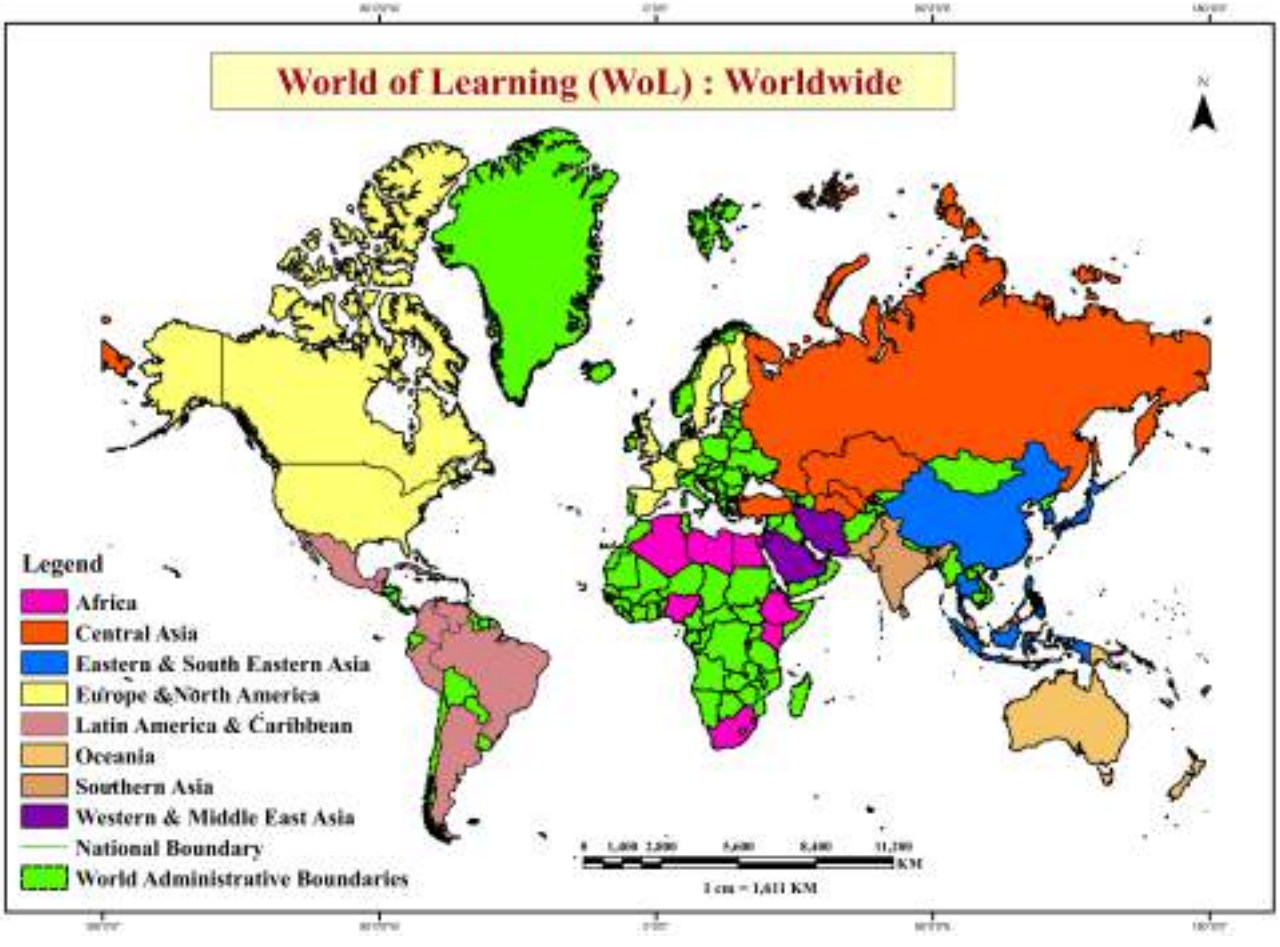
Mrityunjoy Kaibarta Bidhan Gantait

Mrinal Mukherjee

An ETMA Publication

Volume Two

The World of Learning
Lessons from 52 Countries
(Volume II)


World of Learning (WoL) : Worldwide
N
Legend
Africa
Central Asia
Eastern & South Eastern Asia
Europe &North America
Latin America & Caribbean
Oceania
Southern Asia
Western & Middle East Asia
National Boundary
World Administrative Boundaries
KM
1 cm = 1,611 KM

The **Educational Technology and Management Academy** (ETMA), established in 1993, stands out as a pioneering Indian institution dedicated to educational research and development. Operating as a non-profit charitable trust, ETMA integrates educational technology with management practices to enhance educational quality. Guided by a diverse team of interdisciplinary scholars, it focuses on five core areas: Research and Consultancy, Capacity Building, Seminars and Conferences, Media and Publications, and Social Outreach through its Personal Social Responsibility Programme (PSR).

Significant publications include Scientific Parenting, CCE in Depth, Quality School Education for All, and Indian Education: A Developmental Discourse. ETMA publishes an online peer-reviewed open-access research journal, Education@ETMA. It also earlier published Education Matters@ ETMA, an educational magazine.

The institution has made notable contributions to education by supporting underprivileged students, many of whom have gained admission to prestigious institutions like IITs. Additionally, ETMA has effectively addressed school dropout rates among rural children through engaging learning interventions.

As a thought leader, ETMA pioneered many innovations and research. As early as 2012, ETMA initiated capacity-building programmes supported by self-learning material on blended learning. Its pioneering research is on the employability skills of teachers sponsored by ICSSR. The World of Learning (WoL) is the most extensive comparative education research study, involving 52 countries and 41 scholars. It is the largest study of its kind globally. For more details, please visit www.etma-india.in.

The World of Learning
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(Volume II)

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Marmar Mukhopadhyay

Mrityunjoy Kaibarta Bidhan Gantait

Mrinal Mukherjee

Associate Editors

Subhash Chander Manju Narula

Khaleda Gani Dutt

Educational Technology and Management Academy

Gurugram

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Abhishek Kumar Singh

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Soumendra Nath Panja

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www.etma-india.in Email: etma.india@gmail.com

Dedication

To the children of the world,
the hope of humanity

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Volume I: Country Case Studies

Continents/Regions	Countries
Northern & Sub-Saharan Africa	Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, and South Africa
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan
Eastern & South Eastern Asia	China, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand
Southern Asia	Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, and Sri Lanka

Volume II: Country Case Studies

Continents/Regions	Countries
Western & Middle East Asia	Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates
Europe North America	Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and USA.
Latin America and the Caribbean	Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela
Oceania	Australia, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Soloman Islands

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Latin America & The Caribbean

Oceania

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Abbreviations

3R	Reading, Rating and Rhyme
ABC	Abstinence, be faithful, and use Condoms.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	
ACCESS	Assessment for Communication and English Language Acquisition
ACEI	Academic Credentials Evaluation Institute
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMIS	Asociación de Instituciones de Música de Colombia (Association of Music Institutions of Colombia)
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
AQEP	Access to Quality Education Programme
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AR	augmented reality
ARTTLe	Assessment Resources Tool for Teaching and Learning
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEP	Brevet d'Études Professionnelles
BMFSFJ	Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth)
BNC	Bolivarian National Curriculum
BNCC	Base Nacional Comum Curricular (National Common Curricular Base)
BP	Brevet Professionnel (Vocational certificate
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAA	Commission for Academic Accreditation
CALM	Career and Life Management
CAP	Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle (Professional Aptitude Certificate)
CBA	Competency-Based Approach
CBIT	Centros Bolivarianos de Informática y Telemática (Bolivarian Centers for Informatics and Telematics)
CCVE	Citizenship and Christian Values Education
CE2	Cours élémentaire 2
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CENACEP	Centro Nacional de Capacitación Educativa Preescolar (National Center for Preschool Educational Training)
CEPA	Common Educational Proficiency Assessment
CERD	Centre for Educational Research and Development
CERT	Centre of Excellence for Applied Research and Training
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers Education Trust
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CFG	Certificat de Formation Générale
CFGM	Ciclo Formativo de Grado Medio (Medium Level Vocational Education)
CHC	Curricula Higher Committee
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
CN	Currículo Nacional (National Curriculum)
CNB	Curriculo Nacional Base (National Base Curriculum)

CNE	Consejo Nacional de Educación (National Council for Education)
CNEB	Currículo Nacional de Educación Básica (National Curriculum for Basic Education)
COF	Curriculum Orientation Framework
CONAES	Comissão Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior (National Higher Education Assessment Commission)
CONALFA	Consejo Nacional de Alfabetización (National Literacy Council)
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
CP	Cours Préparatoire
CRE	Christian Religious Education
CSE	Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation
CSP	Conseil Supérieur des Programmes
CTS	Career and Technology Studies
CwSN	Children with special needs
DA	Descriptive Assessment
DCN	Diseño Curricular Nacional (National Curriculum Design)
DEC	Dubai Education Council
DGVTE	Directorate General of vocational and technical education
DiNIECE	Dirección Nacional de Información y Evaluación de la Calidad Educativa (National Directorate for Information and Assessment of Educational Quality)
DNB	Diplôme National du Brevet
DoE	Department of Education
DPE	Departamento de Projetos Especiais (Department of Special Projects)
DQR	Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen
DS	Dual System
DVD	Digital versatile disc
ECC	Early Child Care
ECCE	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EDUCOM	Educação e Comunicação (Education and Communication)
EFA	Education for All
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EHCY	Education for Homeless Children and Youth
EMC	Educación Moral, Social, Cultural
ENLACE	Examen Nacional para la Evaluación de los Aprendizajes (National Exam for the Evaluation of Learning)
ENRDE	Evaluación Nacional del Rendimiento Estudiantil (National Student Performance Assessment)
ENZ	Education New Zealand
EPI	Enseignements pratiques interdisciplinaires
EQAO	Education Quality and Accountability Office
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERO	Education Review Office
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESF	Education Strategic Framework
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESO	Educacion Secundaria Obligatoria (Compulsory Secondary Education)
ESSA	Every Student Succeed Act
ETCs	Entidades Territoriales Certificadas (Certified Territorial Entities)
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education
EU	European Union
EXANI-I	Examen Nacional de Ingreso al Nivel Medio Superior (National Upper Secondary Education Entrance Exam)

EXANI-II	Examen Nacional de Ingreso a la Educación Superior (National Entrance Exam for Higher Education)
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FALD	Foundation Areas of Learning and Development
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FBV	Fundamental British Values
FE	Further Education
FEG	Free Education Grant
FIC	Formação Inicial e Continuada (Initial and Continued Training)
FNAE	Finnish National Agency for Education
FNBE	Finnish National Board of Education
FODE	Flexible Open and Distance Education
FPM	Formation Professionnelle de Maîtris (Advanced vocational training diploma)
G-20	Group of Twenty
G-7	Group of Seven
GAT	General Aptitude Test
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GHI	Gross Happiness Index
GIE	Gonski Institute for Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualifications
HASS	Humanities and Social Science
HDI	Human Development Index
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HPE	Health and Physical Education
ICFES	Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educacion Superior (Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDANIS	Instrumento de Diagnóstico del Aprendizaje para el Ingreso a Secundaria (Instrument for Testing New Lower Secondary School Students)
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IDF	Israel Defence Force
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IEPs	Individualised Education Plans
ILE	Innovative learning environments
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEE	Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación (National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation)
INEP	Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira)
INN	Israel National News
iTAGe	independent Talking Across Generations on Education
ITEP	IT Education Project
IVET	Initial VET
JAD	Joint Academic Department
JVL	Jewish Virtual Library
K-12	Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade
KG	Kindergarten
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
KLAs	Key Learning Areas

KMK	Kultusministerkonferenz (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany)
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
LCPM	Ley de Carrera Pública Magisterial (Teachers' Career Law)
LDB	Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education)
LEN	Ley de Educación Nacional (National Education Law)
LET	Laptop for Every Teacher
LFE	Ley Federal de Educación (Federal Education Law)
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and additional sexual orientations or gender identities
LOE	Ley Orgánica de Educación (Organic Law of Education)
LOMCE	Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality)
LOMLOE	Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la Ley Orgánica de Educación (Organic Law for the Modification of the Organic Law on Education)
LT	Licence Technique
LVEP	Living Value Education Program
MAP	Measures of Academic Progress
MDC	Mobile Digital Classrooms
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MECEP	Programa de Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (Educational Quality Improvement Program)
MEHA	Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (Fiji)
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development
MENFP	Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle (Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training)
MiLEAP	Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential
MLOs	Major Learning Outcomes
MNE	Ministerio de Educación Nacional (Ministry of National Education)
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
N4L	Network for Learning
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NAGs	National Administration Guidelines
NAP	National Assessment Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NAPO	National Admissions and Placement Office
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCBE	Nuevo Currículo Básico de Educación (New National Curriculum for Basic Education)
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NEAP	National Education Action Plan
NEC	National Executive Council
NELP	National Education and Learning Priorities
NEM	Novo Ensino Médio (New High School)
NEP	Nuevo Modelo Pedagógico (New Pedagogical Model)
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations

NHTEP	National Higher and Technical Education Plan
NLSA	National Large-Scale Assessment
NPET	National Plan on Education and Training
NPET	National Plan on Education and Training
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
NSO	National Statistical Office
NSRP	National School Redevelopment Programme
NTP	National Transformation Program
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OBE	Outcome-based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OER	Open Educational Resources
ONE	Operativo Nacional de Evaluación (National Evaluation Operation)
PA	Physical Activity
PAGENF	Projet d'Amélioration de la Gouvernance du Système d'Éducation Sub-Non-Formelle (Project to Improve the Governance of the Sub-Non-Formal Education System)
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
PCAP	Pan-Canadian Assessment Program
PCN	Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (National Curriculum Parameters)
PDEF	Plan Décennal de l'Éducation et de la Formation 2020-2030 (Ten-Year Education and Training Plan 2020-2030)
PE	Physical Education
PELA	Programa de Educación para el Aprendizaje (Learning Education Program)
PEN 2020-2036	Plan Educativo Nacional 2020-2036 (National Educational Plan 2020-2036)
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PIA	Future Investment Programme
PIIE	Programa de Inclusión e Integración Educativa (Program for Educational Inclusion and Integration)
PILNA	Pacific Island Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLANCAD	Plan Nacional de Capacitación y Desarrollo (National Training and Development Plan)
PNE	Plano Nacional de Educação (National Education Plan)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PROFET	Proyecto de Formación de Mujeres y Jóvenes para el Empleo Sostenible (Project for the Training of Women and Youth in Sustainable Employment)
ProInfo	Programa Nacional de Informática na Educação (National Program for Informatics in Education)
PRONAFCAP	Programa Nacional de Formación y Capacitación de Docentes (National Program for Teacher Training and Capacity Building)
PRONINFE	Programa Nacional de Informática Educativa (National Program for Educational Informatics)
PRUs	pupil referral units
RAMA	National Authority for Assessment and Evaluation in Education
RAP	Registered Apprenticeship Program
REP+	Reinforced Priority Education Networks
RSHE	Relationships, Sex and Health Education
RTC	Rural Training Centres
RTO	Registered Training Organization
SAAT	Scholastic Achievement Admission Test

SAEB	Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica (National System for Evaluation of Elementary Education)
SBC	Standard Based Curriculum
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEB	Sistema Educativo Bolivariano (Bolivarian Education System)
SEK	Swedish Krona (official currency of Sweden)
SEL	Social-Emotional Learning
SENA	Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Learning Service)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretariat of Public Education)
SGP	Sistema General de Participaciones (General Participation System)
SHAPE	Society of Health and Physical Educators
SI	Solomon Island
SIAVRTC	Solomon Island Association of Vocational and Rural Training Centres
SINAE	Sistema Nacional de Acompañamiento Escolar (National System for Educational Advising and Capacity Building)
SINAES	Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior (National Higher Education Assessment System)
SINEC	Sistema Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad Educativa (National System for the Evaluation of Educational Quality)
SMSC	social, moral, spiritual, and cultural development
SPSM	Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools
SSa	Secretaría de Salud (Secretariat of Health)
STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections
TAFE	Teaching and Further Education
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEKS	Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills
TES	Tertiary Education Strategy
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TS	Techniciens Superior
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVTC	Technical and Vocational Training Corporation
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UMC	Unidad de Medición de la Calidad (Quality Measurement Unit)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO-UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UPF	Universal Peace Federation
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VFS	Violence Free Schools
VR	Virtual reality
VTC	Vocational Training Corporation
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WAVE	World Against Violence and Extremism
WFB	World Factbook
WHO	World Health Organization
WIDA	World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment

List of Contributors (Volume II)

Agarwal, (Late) Dr Tasha was a Consultant in NCERT; earlier, she was on the academic staff of ETMA. Her professional areas of interest were gender, migration, and educational governance.

Awasthi, Dr Kashyapi is an Assistant Professor in the Department of School & Non-Formal Education, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi. With 14 years of experience, her fundamental academic interests include School Leadership, Equity and Inclusion, and Teacher Education.

Bali, Dr Ana is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at the University of Jammu. Her area of specialisation is Educational Psychology. She has published several articles in national and international journals.

Basantia, Prof Tapan Kumar, is a Professor and Dean of the School of Education at Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi. He has also served in various academic capacities at the Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Assam University, Silchar, and Mizoram University, Aizawl.

Chakraborty Acharya, Dr. Shnaoli is an Assistant Professor at West Bengal State University, Barasat. She has 17 years of teaching experience. Her interests include Psychovariables in Education, Gender and Society, Techno-pedagogy, and Lifelong Learning.

Chander, Dr. Subhas is an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Delhi. He has over twenty years of experience and specialises in Inclusive Education, Science Education, and Educational Technology. His focus is on enhancing educational practices and policies.

Gantait, Dr Bidhan, is an Assistant Professor of Education at the School of Education, Lovely Professional University, Punjab. He earned a PhD in Education from the Central University of South Bihar, Gaya. His research interest is Geography Education.

Gupta, Dr. Rama is an Assistant Professor of Education at Jagat Taran Girls' Degree College, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj. Her areas of interest are Teacher Education, Educational Measurement and Evaluation, and Educational Technology.

Gupta, Shivangi is a PhD scholar at the Fertility and Social Demography Center, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai. She has a keen interest in Qualitative and Analytical Research.

Joneja, Dr Kanupriya is a Young Professional at the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi. She was previously a Research Associate at the School of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia. Her areas of interest are Teacher Education and Educational Administration.

Kaibarta, Dr. Mrityunjoy, a Guest Faculty, Department of Education, Biswa Bangla Biswabidyalay, Birbhum and Coordinator, The World of Learning Project, did his Ph. D. from Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan. He has 12 articles and two books to his credit. His areas of interest are Philosophy, Inclusive Education, Educational Technology, and Comparative Education.

Kaur, Dr Deepinder, with over nine years of experience in education research and leadership evaluation, has worked on critical projects for SCERT Punjab, Central Square Foundation and NIEPA, focusing on Educational Governance and Policy.

Kauts, Prof Deepa Sikand is the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (Punjab). She specialises in Psychology and Teacher Education and has thirty years of research and teaching experience and 85 research publications.

Khatun, Dr Reshma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Aliah University, Kolkata. She is an Editor of the UGC Care-listed Journal and the recipient of the Global Teacher Award 2023 from the AKS Education Awards, New Delhi. She has also written and edited nine books.

Mukherjee, Dr Mrinal is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University in Kolkata. His research interests and specialisations are Policy Studies, Innovative Pedagogy, and Curriculum Studies.

Mukhopadhyay, Prof Marmar is a Trustee and Chairman of ETMA and the Director of The World of Learning Project. He has published several books and specialises in Educational Policy, Planning and Management and Educational Technology.

Mukhopadhyay, Subhadip is a Ph.D. scholar in Teacher Education at the University of Calcutta. He is particularly interested in intellectually divergent discussions across disciplines and topics.

Nadeem, Prof Syedah Fawzia is a Professor of Education at Jamia Millia Islamia. She has participated in CPD programmes for teachers and teacher educators at her university and outside. She is keenly interested in Diversity, Multilingualism, and Elementary Education.

Nanda, Prof. Renu is the Head of the P.G. Department of Education at the University of Jammu and President of the Comparative Education Society of India (CESI). She has 30 years of research experience with 69 publications. She is also the coordinator of NEP 2020 and Vidyanjali.

Narula, Manju was an Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Administration, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, India. Several books, book chapters and articles are in her credits.

Nouskit, Dr Stanzin is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for HRD, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. Her area of specialisation is the Education of Marginalised and Socially Disadvantaged Groups.

Panja, Dr Suman Kalyan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Assam University, Silchar, India. His research interests include Educational Technology, Higher Education, Professional Development, and Science Education.

Rajeshwari, Dr. Sheela is an Assistant Professor at Miranda House College, University of Delhi. Her research interests include Inclusive Education, Science Education, and Child Development.

Sahoo, Prof Namita, is a Professor at K. P. Training College, University of Allahabad. Her area of specialisation is Media and Technology in Education. She has published over 30 papers in national and international journals and has authored two books.

Tabassum, Wajda is a doctoral student at NIEPA. She previously served on the academic faculty of ETMA. Her broader area of research is gender and intersectionality. Her current research interests are Power Culture and Education.

PREFACE

The French Scholar, Marc-Antoine Jullien (1775-1848) is considered the father of modern science of comparative education for his work, *Plan and Preliminary Views for Work in Comparative Education* (1816-17) published in 1964 by Columbia University, New York. Comparative education as a subject of serious study arrived at the modern generation between the two world wars. One of the important foundational books through which I had my introduction to the field in 1966 was Isaac Kendal's Comparative Education (1933). The second was Nicholas Hans' Comparative Education, published in 1949.

However, comparative education elements can be traced back to traveller's tales. Marco Polo's story is well known. Plato compared Greek and Spartan Education and recommended incorporating elements of Spartan physical education into Greek Education. Scholars have classified the developments in comparative education in several phases, from travellers' tales to the phase of heterogeneity in the 1990s. In the process of evolution of the discipline, the purpose of comparative education has also changed and evolved. The major purposes are description of education in different countries, interpretation, explanation and evaluation of the system, and application of knowledge in educational planning, constructing the fields of educational studies, and furthering philanthropic ideals, such as serving and improving the state of humanity (Wolhuter, 2021).

Our studies, The World of Learning and Education 5.0 for Global Peace and Harmony, are inspired by the larger concern of the 'philanthropic ideal' category. Two vital issues that triggered this study are the concern for the sustainability of life on earth and human civilisation due to the threat of slow poisoning through global warming, pollution, poverty, conflicts, migration and refugees, unabated population growth, discrimination against women and the deprived and proliferation nuclear and chemical weapons of mass destruction. What Jullien believed then, "ignorance led to the conflict and turmoil of his age (French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars) and he saw a solution in education", is still valid.

Countries are still the victims of the education of the colonisers and the colonised. The world must find freedom through the emancipated education for philanthropy to live in peace and harmony. At a time when we live in a connected world where vibrations of pandemics or scientific inventions in one corner of the world vibrate everywhere, where student and employee migration, cross-border education delivery, and education standards accords like

Washington Accord are the order of the day, national educational policies and systems without reference to the regional and global developments would be a utopia.

The challenge is to create a GLONAL education system where national education is inset into the regional and global contexts. An education system where every child has the right not only to education for literacy and fulfilling qualification frameworks for employment but to optimise full potential; where every child must develop as a national and global patriot and a global citizen; where every child must learn to live together in diversity with peace and harmony. The inspiration for this mega project by a tiny charitable trust like ETMA was to co-create a model of education for global peace and harmony.

A new educational paradigm designed to cultivate new generations and their leaders for global peace and harmony offers a beacon of hope in the face of these challenges. The world has ample resources, knowledge and good practices to stitch a model and bring it to life. By effectively utilising the science of comparative education and pushing the boundaries, we can construct a model that draws from the scattered evidence of good practices worldwide, offering a promising path forward.

The largely adopted comparative education format of studying a few countries would not have served our purpose. Our goals compelled us to select a large sample of 52 countries based on the limited population criteria (2020), HDI Value, and Literacy rate, representing every region of the six continents according to the UN Regional Block classification.

The World of Learning (WoL) chose to study school education reforms in fifty-two countries, selected from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, Eastern and South Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, Western and Middle East Asia, Latin America and The Caribbean, and Oceania. There are gaps and inadequacies. Fifty-two countries still look small for the purpose; for example, African countries are not adequately represented.

The study parameters in each country case include educational policies, structures, and an academic framework inclusive of curriculum, teaching-learning, learning assessment, health and physical education, prevocational and vocational skills education, hobby and life skills education, moral, social and cultural education, and peace and happiness education against the backdrop of the country's history, geography, demography, economy, and education. The case studies have been developed by scholars based on desktop research consulting authentic documents of the concerned country governments, publications by the UN and other international organisations and databases, and institutional and individual field research. The fifty-two case studies are preceded by an introductory chapter detailing the background, methodology, etc. Case studies are succeeded by a chapter on Lessons from 52 Countries – an overview of practices in different study domains.

This book contains well-documented case studies of each country instead of one scholarly analysis. This will facilitate policymakers' development of policies and curricula to match global trends, practitioners use these case studies to adapt and innovate from good practices in other countries, and researchers conduct comparative education research. It is, naturally, voluminous, and for the convenience of the readers, it is being published in two volumes.

Following this publication, ETMA will publish another volume containing serious comparative education research on education reform trends in each of the eight regions, global trends based on these case studies, and a co-constructed new GLONAL model, Education 5.0 for Global Peace and Harmony, authored by reputed experts from different countries.

It is a major study of great significance. A publication in print or online of such a large volume would have been expensive. For greater accessibility and utilisation, we decided to publish it online as an open-access resource, providing print copies only on demand.

To complete a project of the magnitude of the World of Learning, ETMA had to involve many scholars from India and other countries who authored the case studies. This project could not have been completed without their involvement and contribution. Thanking forty scholars individually, much though I would have liked to, is difficult. I thank them all and hope to continue to work together in our future endeavours.

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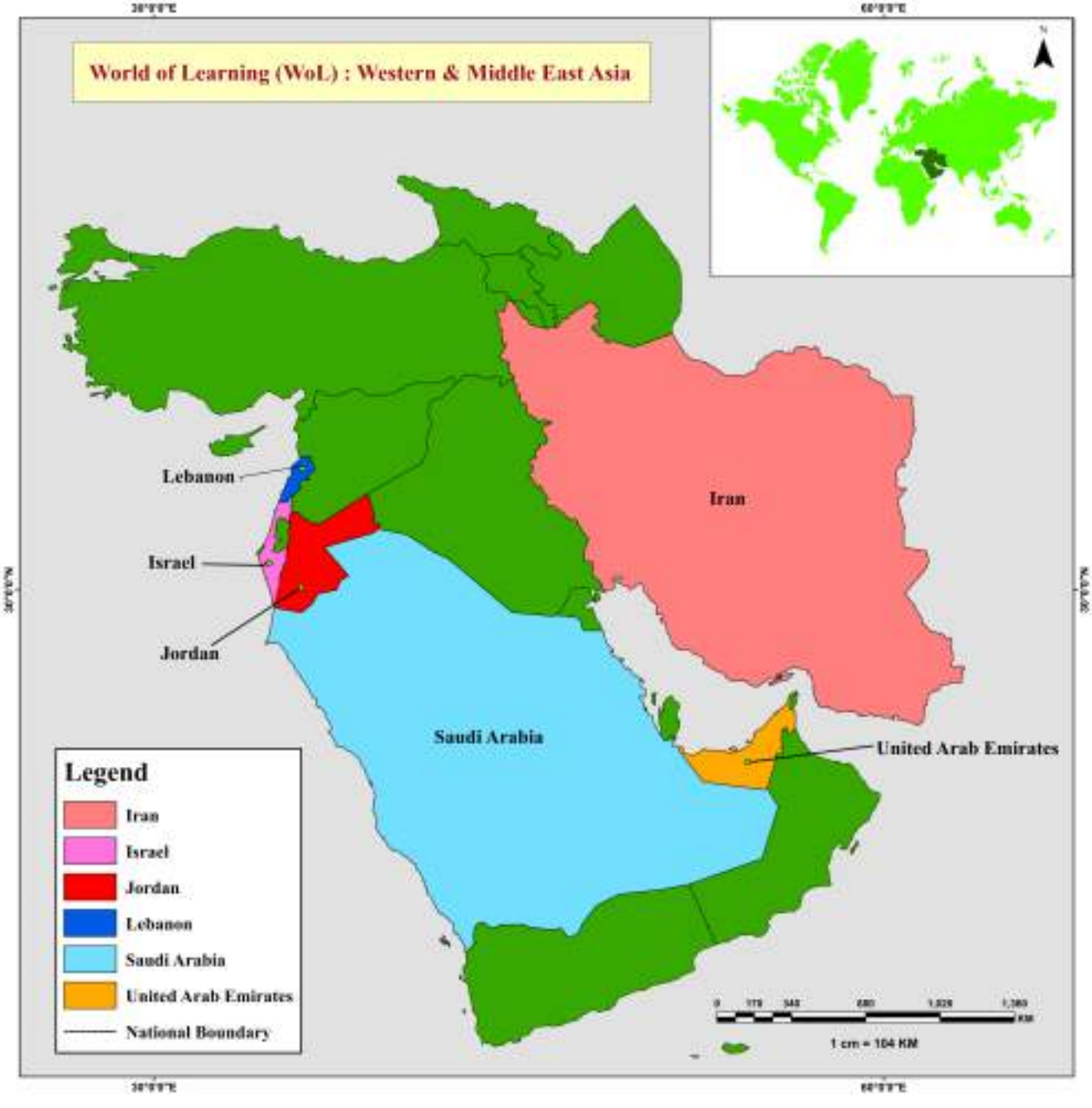
I hope educational policymakers, planners, researchers, teachers, and scholars find this work useful.

12 May 2025 Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay
ETMA, Gurugram


World of Learning (WoL) : Western & Middle East Asia
Lebanon
Israel
Jordan
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Legend
Iran
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United Arab Emirates
National Boundary
1 cm = 104 KM

26
Where Tradition Meets Modernity: Iran

Shivangi Gupta

Abstract

Iran desecularised education after the Islamic Revolution in 1079. It adopted the 6+3+3 structure of school education, consisting of free and compulsory elementary (including primary and lower secondary) education. It emphasises preparing students for the 'final test', the gateway for admission to higher education institutions. Although the emphasis is on rote learning, studies indicate that Iranian teachers occasionally practice play-based learning, hands-on activities, and exploration to stimulate children's curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking skills at the pre-primary level only. Physical and health education is taught at the elementary and high school levels as a subject. It also stresses life skills, ethics, and moral values education integrated into teaching natural sciences, social sciences, etc. Further, technical and vocational education is provided at the upper secondary level. The Iranian education system teaches Islamic beliefs, values, and teachings as a means of moral and ethical education. However, despite all these, there is an urgent need for improvement and reform to ensure the system meets the needs of the modern world.

Keywords: Iran, de-secularization, socio-emotional development, business and vocational education, health education, Islamic values, religious education

Introduction

Iran, strategically located in Southwest Asia (near the tropic of Cancer), is a key player within the dry belt of Asia. Its typical high mountain region is complemented by sandy deserts and salty coastlines (Noroozi et al., 2008). Iran's total area is 1,648,195 sq km, with a coastal line of 2440 km. It also has a 740 km border with the Caspian Sea (WFB, 2024). Iran shares its boundaries in the north with Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan; in the northwest with Turkey; in the

southwest with Iraq; in the east with Afghanistan and Pakistan; and the south. The Persian Gulf and Oman Sea coastline has covered its boundary. Iran is divided into 31 administrative provinces (ostanha, sing. ostan). Tehran, the capital and largest city, is a hub of global significance (WorldAtlas, 2021).

The total population of Iran is 88,550,570– 51% male and 49% female (2021), with a 0.70% annual growth rate (2019) (United Nations Population Fund, 2024; World Bank, 2022a). Most of Iran's population (77 per cent) lives in urban areas (World Bank, 2022b). Iran has many ethnic groups, including Persian, Azeri, Kurd, Lur, Baloch, Arab, Turkmen, and Turkic tribes. The majority of the population, about 98.5%, practices Islam, making it the country's official religion. However, religious communities also practise Christianity, Baha'i, Agnosticism, and Hinduism. While Persian (Farsi) is the official language, Azeri and other Turkic dialects, Kurdish, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Luri, Balochi, and Arabic are also spoken in Iran (WFB, 2024).

Iran's physiographical and geographical location has endowed it with immense economic potential. It has rich petroleum reserves, abundant minerals, diverse flora and fauna, and varied geography. Iran's economy has made significant strides, with a poverty headcount ratio of $1.90 daily (2011 PPP), only 1.10% of the total population (CEIC, 2021). The GDP per capita (US$) stands at 4,670 (for 2022) (Macrotrends, 2024). The total GDP of Iran is 1449 billion, with an annual growth rate of 3.8 per cent (2022) (World Bank, 2022c). The Happiness Index was 4.89 in 2021, ranking 101; the Peace Index was 2.89, ranking 147th; and the HDI score was 0.78, placing Iran in the 70th position (Knoema, 2021).

The literacy rate in Iran is 89 per cent (2022) (World Bank, 2022d). Among those above the age of 15, the literacy rate is 83.15 per cent (male literacy is 80.8 per cent while female literacy is 85.5 per cent) (2020) (Statista, 2022). According to USI-UNESCO, in 2020, the gross enrollment ratio for primary education is 104.48 (male - 101.87, female- 107.22); for secondary education, is 87.07 per cent (male- 87.94, female- 86.17), and for primary to tertiary education, the GER is 86.09 per cent (male- 85.59, female- 86.60) (UNESCO, 2024). There are approximately 92,500 public educational institutions at all levels, with a total enrollment of 17,488,000 students (K12 Academics, 2024).

Educational Policy

In Iran, "Education policies are approved and overseen by several bodies, including Iran's parliament and the cabinet of ministers. The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, a body appointed by and reporting to Iran's Supreme Leader, is the highest authority in educational affairs and wields far-reaching control over policies and regulations. At the local level, education is supervised through the provincial authorities and the district offices" (WENR, 2017, p. 3).

Several changes and reforms have occurred in the Iranian education system, mainly after the 1979 Islamic revolution. The centralised education system is more focused on the "de-secularization of the public school system in Iran" through "three-pronged programs: "purging courses and textbooks" that are believed to slander Islam, purging secular teachers (and substituting them with "those who understand the true meaning of Islam"), and "regulating the behaviour and dress of students" (Arani et al., 2012, p. 6).

Following are the policy reform periods that radically changed Iran's education system:

a) **Pre-1979 Islamic revolution**: Before 1979, the Iranian school education system had five years of primary education, three years of middle school/guidance cycle, and four years of upper secondary education (5+3+4) (ACEI-Global, 2019).

b) **Post-1979 Islamic Revolution**: From 1979 to 1995, the Iranian school education system mainly followed the previous structure [5+3+4] but with a transformed curricular framework, which mainly focused on the "de-secularization of education in Iran" and educating the children without conflicting with the laws of Islam.

c) **From 1996 to 2013:** The change in policy during this period was called education reform, as the goal of public education was changed. It changed the schooling structure. In this reform, the primary education and middle or lower secondary education structure followed the previous pattern (of five and three years each, respectively). However, the upper secondary education lasted three years (from grade 9 to 11). The last year was considered the pre-university year (grade 12), where students had to obtain the 'Pre-university certificate' (ACEI-Global, 2019).

   This education reform mainly focused on preparing the students for university education and the national university entrance examination. Further, in upper secondary education, students had to identify their interest track; they either had to choose the theoretical track (which led to university and higher education) or the technical and vocational tracks. Students who choose technical or vocational tracks obtain a diploma to start the vocational training (in the last year).

d) **In 2013**, the structure was further revised to six years of primary education, three years of lower secondary or middle school and three years of upper secondary education [6+3+3] (ACEI-Global, 2019). In this policy, the last year of the pre-university year was removed, and instead of a 'Pre-University certificate', students were given a certificate of completion of public education. With this certificate, they become eligible for the national entrance exam for universities and can continue higher education. Further, this education policy also allows

students to go into higher education or opt for vocational and technical education after upper secondary education (ACEI-Global, 2019).

e) Since 1988, permission was granted to establish Non-Governmental Schools. It was the first action of the government in operationalising the policy of privatisation of education

There are myths about Iran's education system that do not match with the reality. Liu (2022) pointed out a myth, "Iran's education system is of poor quality and focuses primarily on religious studies. Higher education in the country is noncompetitive and unpopular. Moreover, the educational system is discriminatory, with women receiving fewer years of school and a lower quality of education than men". And the fact is, "While Iran's education system requires improvement, Iranian schools provide quality education for both men and women in science and humanities that is comparable to other countries in the region" (Liu, 2022, p.1).

Structure of the Education System

The Iranian education structure comprises pre-primary, primary, lower, and upper-secondary education (Figure 26.1).

Pre-Primary Education*:* Pre-primary or kindergarten education is a two-year program for children aged 4-5 years (Bakhshalizadeh & Karimi, 2019). The meaning of kindergarten or pre-primary school education in Iran differs from the Western concept. Kindergarten education in Iran is formal education for children three months to four years old, under the supervision of the State Welfare Organization and the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (Sharifian, 2018). As pre-primary education is "official but not compulsory, it has become exclusively privatised" (Sharifian, 2018, p. 32). Since it is not included in the government's free and compulsory education program, it has become unaffordable for Iran's middle- and lower-income families. Nonetheless, the enrolment was 60 per cent of the concerned age group (World Bank, 2022e). The main goals of pre-primary education are

- "Contribute to the physical, mental, emotional, and social growth of children,
- Promote children's socio-emotional development, self-confidence, sense of environment,
- conditions and sense of aesthetics,
- Provide children with opportunities to enjoy and be interested in group activities,
- Strengthen religious and ethical values and national identity,
- Promote desired social and individual behaviour in children,
- Promote oral language development and communication skills" (Bakhshalizadeh & Karimi, 2019, p. 2).

Primary Education

Six years of primary education is divided into two parts: grades 1–3 (ages 6–8) and grades 4–6 (ages 9–11), which are free and compulsory, as provided by the Iranian government). Primary school, or Dabestan, starts at five and lasts six years (from grade 1 to 6). The main objectives of primary education are:

- "Create an atmosphere for moral development
- Develop literacy and numeracy skills
- Develop social skills
- Teach students about personal hygiene
- Develop students' talents, abilities, and physical strength" (Bakhshalizadeh & Karimi, 2019, p. 3).

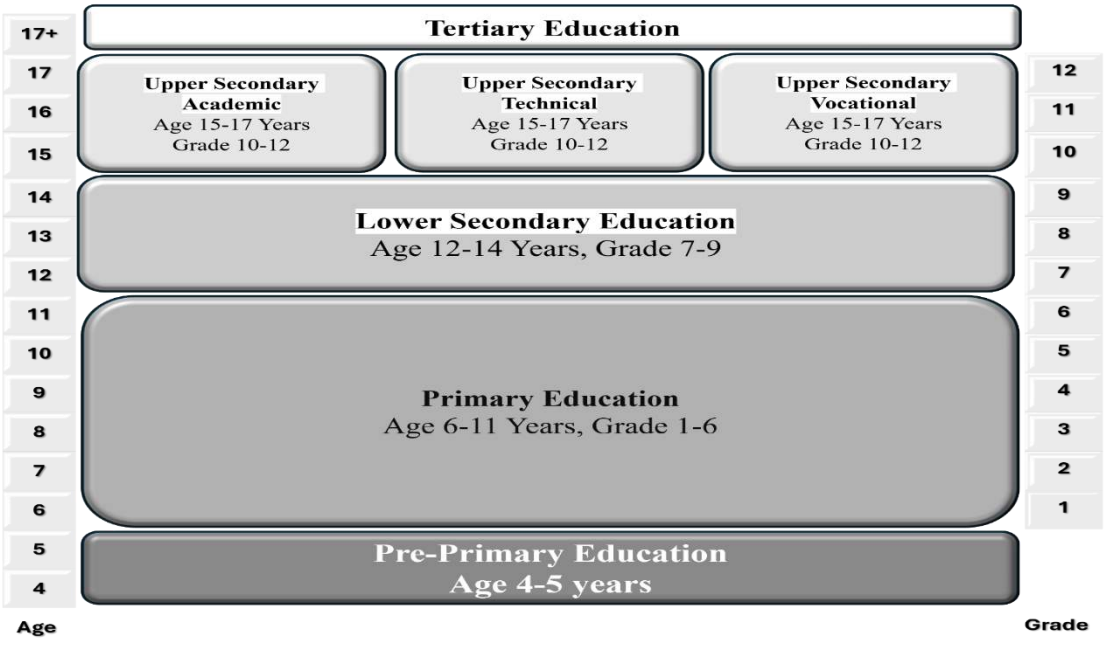

Figure 26.1 Structure of School Education System in Iran

Source: *WENR, 2017; Sharifian, 2018 & Nuffic, n.d. (adapted and redrawn by Author)*

Lower Secondary Education

Lower secondary education (doreh-e-rahnamaii), also known as the guidance cycle, is a three-year program that starts at 11 years of age. After completing primary school, students must pass the examination to enter the lower secondary or middle school, grades 7 to 9. In this stage, students have to discover an area of specialisation of any subject instead of the general knowledge (which was provided in the primary education stage). The aims of the lower secondary education are:

- "Develop moral and intellectual abilities
- Increase general knowledge
- Strengthen academic discipline and scientific imagination
- Identify individual preferences and talents to direct students toward suitable programs of study" (Bakhshalizadeh & Karimi, 2019, p. 3).

Curricular Framework

Pre-Primary Education: The curriculum emphasises play-based learning, hands-on activities, and exploration. It stimulates children's curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking skills.

Primary Education: The curriculum framework for the primary education comprises core and additional subjects (Table 26.1)

Table 26.1 Core and Additional Subjects in Primary Education

Core subjects	Additional subjects
• Persian Language • Mathematics • Religious Education • Science • Physical Education (health and hygiene) • Arts • Reading comprehension	• Social studies • History • Geography • Foreign languages (usually English) • Quranic studies.

Source**:** *Bakhshalizadeh, 2021*

The major primary school books also refer to religious education, social studies, technology-based education, and thought and research-based education (Table 26.2).

Table 26.2. Characteristics of School Textbooks on Social Education in Primary Education

Title of textbooks	Grade	No. of Book	No. of pages per book	Explanations
Gifts of Heaven	2-6	15	Between 50-100	Each grade has three books with different content based on the students' religion. A book for Shia students, a book for Sunni students, and a book for other religious minorities
Social Studies	3-6	4	Between 100-150	Common to all students across the country, regardless of their gender or religion
Work and Technology	6	1	104	Common to all students across the country, regardless of their gender or religion
Thought and Research	6	1	126	Common to all students across the country, regardless of their gender or religion

Source: *Rabiei et al, 2019*

Lower Secondary Education

In lower secondary or middle school, students become familiar with various other physical and social sciences, humanities and arts subjects. Students study history, geography, Arabic, vocational courses, foreign languages, and defence preparation, along with the subjects at the primary level. Mathematics and natural sciences are given more significant weightage in terms of allocation of periods, though the focus on the Persian language and literature continues (Table 26.3). Along with these subjects, thinking and inquiry, technology, and occupations are also taught in sixth grade (Bakhshalizadeh, 2021). Further, for the religious minority groups, there is a special subject of their religion in the religious training course/program.

Table 26.3 Weekly Lesson Timetable of Lower Secondary Schools

Subject matter	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade
1. Persian Language and Literature	5	5	5
2. Mathematic	5	5	5
3. Natural Sciences	4	5	5
4. Religious Education	2	2	2
5. History	1	1	1
6. Geography	1	1	1
7. Arabic Language	2	2	2
8. Social Sciences	1	1	1
9. Arts	2	1	1
10. Technical/vocational education	3	3	3
11. Foreign Language (English)	2	3	3
12. Military Service Preparation	1	1	1
13. Quran	2	2	2
14. Sport	2	2	2
Total	33	34	34

***Source**: Ministry of Education, 1993 (cited in Arani et al. (2012))*

Secondary (or Upper Secondary) Education

After getting the certificate of completion of middle or lower secondary school in Iran, students enter upper secondary education (if they pass the entrance examinations). Here, they have two choices: they can opt for theoretical or academic education or go for jobs directly through vocational and technical education. Both streams have a common core but different specialisation subjects (specialisation introduced in grades 11 and 12).

"There are three school types: the theoretical branch, the technical-vocational/professional branch, and the manual skills (or vocational) branch (Kar-Danesh). The latter two prepare students to enter the job market directly in the trading, agricultural, and industrial professions. The Kar-Danesh track develops semi-skilled and skilled workers, foremen, and supervisors" (K12 academics, 2024).

However, it was prepared based on the student's interests. "A student's stream depends primarily on their examination results at the end of the lower secondary cycle, and to a lesser extent on student preference. The academic stream has traditionally been the most popular" among students, and vocational studies are less popular and inferior (WENR, 2017).

The core and specialised subjects in upper secondary education for the theoretical and technical-vocational are as follows:

Theoretical Stream**:** The common core subjects include Persian literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, foreign language (usually English), history, geography, Islamic education, and physical education for grades 9th and 10th. In the 11th and 12th grades, students have to go for the specialisation, and in the theoretical stream, they can select from specialised courses in mathematics and physics, biology, or humanities. These specialised courses provide a deeper understanding of the chosen subjects and lead to further academic preparation (WENR, 2017).

Technical-Vocational Stream: The technical-vocational stream mainly focuses on the students' skilling, reskilling and upskilling and preparing them for the job market. Though for the 9th and 10th grades, this stream also has common subjects like the theoretical stream, in the last two years of specialisation, the main subjects for the technical and vocational streams are different. "Students in the technical stream follow one of three specialisations: Technical (industry), business and vocational (service industry), or agriculture. Sub-specializations include wood-working/carpentry, auto mechanics, building and construction, food industries, health services, and tailoring" (WENR, 2017).

The vocational stream is "more practice-oriented and leads to the award of a skills certificate in the trade/profession. Training for skilled or semi-skilled employment is provided in 400 areas of specialisation. Some vocational students at this level enrol in five-year integrated associate diploma programs at technical institutes. The degree awarded at the end of the five-year stream is the Kardani or Fogh Diplom" (WENR, 2017). The major specialisation courses of the vocational streams for the students are related to their chosen fields, such as electronics, mechanics, agriculture, or other technical disciplines.

After completing the theoretical stream, students who opt for the academic track must appear for the highly competitive national university entrance examination, named 'Konkur'; only successful candidates can attend university or higher education in Iran.

Before the recent educational reform, there used to be a 'pre-university year' (after the 11th grade), which was purely dedicated to the preparation for the highly competitive university entrance examination 'Konkur'. After the educational reform of 2013, the pre-university year was removed,

and the 12th grade was added as a specialisation year. However, the national university entrance exam is still being conducted to get admission to a higher-education university.

Teaching Learning

Iran followed a strict national curriculum and highly centralised teaching-learning process with a single uniform curriculum and textbook across the country. Textbooks are the major source of learning in Iranian school education (either in elementary or secondary schools). Teachers are the only medium of communicating the textbook material to the students (Tohidian et al., 2022). In Iran, various studies found that the primary emphasis is still on "memorisation rather than learning dialogue, collaboration, tolerance, and life expectation for today's globalised communities", as the whole education system emphasises success in different tests and assessment practices (Tohidian et al., 2022).

The teaching-learning method for pre-primary school education in Iran is determined by the use of two teaching manuals, namely, Content and Methods of Instruction in Pre-Primary Centers, Volumes I and II (Pre-primary and Primary education website), which focus towards the appropriate behavioural and pedagogical technique; and also towards the general curriculum "on basic life skills, natural sciences, hygiene, literacy, history, and religious history and practice" (State University, 2023).

However, in the pre-primary level of education, teachers follow play-based learning, hands-on activities, and exploration methods for children's learning. They also aim to stimulate children's curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking skills. However, with elementary education, all the learning would have been based on textbooks and the national curriculum framework. Several researchers found that, though teachers in the Iranian school education system support the "critical pedagogy" method as a teaching-learning method, there is an absence of the "critical pedagogy" method in the education system (Aliakbari & Allahmoradi, 2012).

Learning Assessment

Students take final exams at the end of grades 6 and 9 (previously grades 5 and 8). These exams assess if students are ready to enter one of three streams in high school: academic, technical, or vocational. If a student fails, they must repeat the year and retake the exam the next year. If they fail again, they must complete basic vocational training or find a job. The exams take place in June, and local education authorities oversee them. Students who pass receive a Certificate of General Education. Based on their grades, students can move on to either the academic or vocational/technical paths in high school (WENR, 2017).

Descriptive Assessment (DA) is an important educational assessment reform. Descriptive assessment reform implied a shift from exclusive summative assessment of assigning grades for promotion to the next grade to formative assessment with descriptive feedback for improving students' learning outcomes (Van Den Heuvel-Panhuizen et al., 2021). There is also one highly competitive, stringent, centralised national university entrance examination, named 'Konkur', for those students who want to go into academics or higher education.

Arani et al. (2012, p.9) conclude, "In Iranian schools, assessment of educational activities is the teacher's responsibility, undertaken during the active involvement of students in the teaching-learning process. Continuous and formative assessments are common. Continuous assessment is based on the pupil's participation in learning activities such as homework completion, class questions and out-of-class activities. Feedback is given through sending a report card to parents".

Health and Physical Education

Physical education is taught from the very beginning (from primary school as a joyful and fun subject) to higher education. Some universities have also proposed a doctorate in physical education. Iran's physical education or sports course exposed students to various indoor and outdoor sports equipment in their primary school.

Physical education aims to improve and strengthen social skills and the student's mental, intellectual, emotional and physical strength. In Iranian school education, physical education has been taught as a core and compulsory subject in primary school education (from grade 1 to grade 6). In lower secondary education (till grade 8), this physical education subject has been replaced by the 'Sports' subject as a compulsory subject. Moreover, "the most important contents of the physical education course were individual and social skills training, knowledge topics and sports training" (Hashemi et al., 2021, p. 11).

The health and physical education curriculum teaches and trains students in personal hygiene, nutrition, oral health prevention of high-risk behaviour, and other topics (Table 26.4) (Kazemian et al., 2014).

Table 26.4 Health Education Course in Iran

Grade/classes (3 to 5)	Topics in the health education course
Grade 3	Environmental health, Nutrition, Oral and dental health, Safety and accident prevention, Physical education, Personal Health, Prevention of high-risk behaviours, Introduction to diseases

Grade 4	physical education, personal health, environmental health, safety and accident prevention, nutrition
Grade 5	Environmental health, Nutrition, Oral and dental health, Personal Health, Prevention of high-risk behaviours, Introduction to diseases, Physical exercises

Source: *Kazemian et al., 2014*

In the high school or secondary school, the following topics are taught in the physical education subject (Table 26.5):

Table 26.5 Health Education Programme Themes

Content of P.E. in first secondary school	• health • nutrition • safety and sports injuries, • principles of movement and proper physical condition, • physical fitness, and • individual and group sports skills • Physical fitness is achieved through various games (volleyball, badminton, basketball, handball, futsal, table tennis, and local indigenous games).
Content of P.E. in second secondary school	• physical activity during illness • lifestyle, • physical activity and back care, • factors affecting physical activity and exercise, • sports nutrition (supplements and energy substances), • Individual and social behaviours in physical activity • Sports skills- basketball, futsal, badminton, volleyball, handball, and table tennis

Source: *Hashemi et al., 2021*

Though health and physical education are taught as one subject in Iran, the curriculum framework mainly focuses on health awareness among students (such as personal hygiene, oral and dental health, health-seeking behaviour, etc.) and physical education, which can include sports-related awareness among the students and various sports games (Kazemian et al., 2014; Hashemi et al., 2021).

Nazaria et al. (2017) concluded, based on their research, that "the current physical education curriculum in schools is not favourable in terms of the objectives, content, and curriculum, teaching-learning strategies, and evaluation methods of knowledge, skills and attitudes and does not entirely satisfy the expectations of the physical education professionals" (p. 1).

Hobby and Life-Skills Education

Generally, life skills are "a collection of abilities that cause some positive and adaptive behaviours which are essential for happiness and success in daily life" (Vajargah et al., 2009, p. 433). The WHO

identified ten basic life skills, which were also considered the basic skills by UNESCO and UNICEF (UNODC, 2006). These skills include the skills of-

- "self-awareness,
- empathy,
- effective communication skills,
- anger management,
- ability to establish and maintain effective interpersonal skills,
- daring behavior,
- problem solving,
- coping with stress,
- decision-making,
- creative thinking skills" (Ghabakhlou et al., 2021).

Although significant importance is attached to life skills education in Iran, no specific curriculum or course exists. Instead, life skills are developed through play-based and exploratory learning in pre-primary education. Also, teaching such skills is included in other curricula, such as social sciences, natural sciences, etc. (Vajargah et al., 2009). After the 2013 educational reform of Iran, no specific course on life skills has been introduced. Instead, the Iranian education system is relying on the following mentioned curricular objectives through different courses or subjects as means of life skills education (Khorasgani et al., 2023):

- "Developing individual, physical, intellectual, and emotional abilities
- Attention to human values and virtues
- Set tasks and strengthen responsibility
- Acquiring knowledge and social skills"

A specific life-skill education curriculum (Van Den Heuvel-Panhuizen et al., 2023). Ghombavani et al. (2012, p.168) found that "Education of Islamic life skills is a set of skills required for living in Islamic society. These skills are based on people can observe and respond to the values and norms of society and individual needs and being able to confront and solve their problems by using religious teachings". Thus, life skills education seems to take place more through Islamic life skills, religious beliefs, and values.

Skills Education

There is no specific provision, course or lesson for skills education in primary and middle school (elementary education) for the children; though, in grade 6, a book named "Work and Technology,"

which is common for all students across the country, is introduced. Also, in pre-primary education, students are taught through hands-on activities as a learning method.

In secondary education, the technical and vocational track has been introduced (in grades 11th and 12th) for those wanting to enter the job market. This particular course or stream provides skill-based education in more than 400 fields of vocational specialisation. The government of Iran also significantly invested in vocational education, which is 23.1% of the total education expenditure (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2021). "Based on Iran's Act of Comprehensive System of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (2019), National vocational qualification consists of 8 levels:

- Level 1- Unskilled workers;
- Level 2- Skilled workers;
- Level 3- Co- associate diploma, such as co technicians;
- Level 4- Professional associate diploma, such as technicians;
- Level 5- Senior professional associate diploma, such as co-engineers;
- Level 6- Professional bachelor, such as professional engineers;
- Level 7- Professional master, such as senior professional engineers; and
- Level 8- Professional PhD" (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2021).

Iran also provides its students with a complete vocational and skill education doctoral programme and a professional degree to prepare them for employment.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

In the Iranian education system, "moral education is one of the main goals in the Iranian Constitution and the country's National Vision Plan" (Hedayati et al., 2017 & 2019). Iran followed a "meta-curriculum" for moral education, which is embedded in all school life. Students are taught various moral education in their routine learning of the school education, such as "respecting the elderly, teachers and parents; praying regularly; and adhering to Islamic dress codes, indicating that women should wear the head covering known as the hijab" and separate teaching of boys and girls. The Iranian education system also teaches Islamic values and religious education as part of the national curriculum, which mainly focuses on teaching Islamic principles (Hedayati et al., 2019). Teachers are well trained in Islamic values before appointment.

Peace and Happiness Education

Peace education is steadily finding its way into the school education framework, though there has yet to be a specific course on peace education. 2013, President Hassan Rouhani created provisions to introduce peace education in Iran. He introduced a Charter on Citizenship Rights, which focuses

on fairness and gives young Iranians the right to join activities that support and promote peace in Iran and worldwide. He also suggested a "World Against Violence and Extremism" (WAVE) declaration at the UN General Assembly, which the UNGA accepted. This allows Iran to update policies and create a better environment for peace education, especially by revising textbooks and adding new courses (Eslami-Somea & Movassagh, 2014, p. 34).

Eslami-Somea & Movassagh (2014, p. 34) further mentioned that a review of textbooks used at primary and secondary levels for the scholastic year 2013– 2014 was undertaken, identifying subject matter relevant to peace (literature, religion, sociology, history, defence preparedness, logic, philosophy, psychology, and research and thinking).

Summary and Conclusion

Various educational policy reforms have occurred in Iran at different times, but two have changed Iran's educational structure. The first one is the reform after the Islamic revolution 1979, which mainly focused on the education system's de-secularisation, while the second one is the recent 2013 reform, which eliminated the pre-university year and added an extra year in primary education.

The structure of Iranian school education mainly consists of pre-primary (voluntary), elementary (free and mandatory primary and lower secondary education) and upper-secondary or high-school education (optional and voluntary). As per the recent educational policy reform, Iran followed the 6+3+3 structure of school education. The Iranian education system mostly focuses on textbook-based knowledge (rote learning). However, in pre-primary education, the Iranian teachers practised play-based learning, hands-on activities, and exploration to stimulate children's curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking. Iran followed the uniform and universal textbook-based education in elementary and secondary education.

For the teaching-learning method, more stress is placed on memorisation. The student's assessment is summative and conducted at the end of the semesters across the country at the same time. However, recent reforms introduced a formative assessment with descriptive feedback for improving learning outcomes. Tohidian et al. study (2022) says that “teachers have little or no power to manoeuvre in the classrooms concerning teaching courses based on student needs and current levels of knowledge and competencies. This also holds when students leave primary school and progress to other educational levels. At present, everything in the Iranian educational system is geared toward preparing students for a final test, the gateway for admission to universities and higher education institutions. Consequently, students are not prepared for life outside the classroom, but merely for success in academic tests” (p. 494).

In the Iranian education system, in elementary and high school, physical and health education is taught as one complete subject (including personal health and hygiene, nutrition knowledge, health awareness, indoor and outdoor games, sports equipment knowledge, etc.). In upper secondary education, technical and vocational stream/track education is also offered to the students (for those who want to go into the job market) and skills them in various fields.

Iranian education also stresses life skills, ethics, and moral values, which gives students a purposeful life for 21st-century living. Though there were no specific courses for life-skill education, Iran provides the training of life skills through curricula in natural sciences, social sciences, etc. (and even in their pre-primary education, the students are also taught by hand-based activities, play, curiosity, and imagination-based learning). Vocational education, which trains students in specific skills, is introduced to the students for their employment opportunities in upper secondary education. The Iranian education system mainly emphasises learning Islamic beliefs, values, and teachings through moral and ethical education.

Iran's history shows that the country has faced numerous threats over the centuries, resulting in a lack of compassion and hospitality among people. The current situation presents specific challenges for achieving peace. In 2013, various steps were taken to develop and implement peace education in Iran. Education policies and practices were amended to provide a favourable atmosphere for peace education, especially concerning revising textbooks and introducing new courses.

Iranian education has evolved, especially since the Islamic revolution. Education system – both structure and curriculum have been reformed. The emphasis on the cognitive domain is obvious. Though there is a provision for health and physical education, allocated time is two periods a week, whereas experts recommend 30 minutes daily in early grades and 45 minutes in upper grades. Nazaria et al. (2017) pointed out health and physical education inadequacies. Effectively, there is no direct provision for life skills education. Whatever students learn is, by default, an effect of regular schooling, like peer group interaction, instructional methodologies, and the like. Skill education has a marginal presence in the form of books, work and technology, and hands-on learning in primary grades. However, in grade 11, there is a dedicated track on vocational and technical education. Moral education finds a prominent place in Iranian education. Peace education is steadily finding its way into the school education framework, though there is no specific course on peace education yet. Given the trends of curriculum reforms and the current state, it is not easy to conclude that students get opportunities for all-round development.

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27
High-tech Integrated Quality Education: Israel

Subhadip Mukhopadhyay

Abstract

Israel is a multi-ethnic, multinational, and multicultural state that emerged in the late 19th century through significant political changes and was recognised as young in 1948. From the very next year, Israel made public education divided into Hebrew and Arab education compulsory and free run by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport. Israel persistently spent 6.7% of its GDP on education. Educational policies improved teachers' working conditions, training, and social equity. Israel's school curricula made physical education a core subject; hobbies and life skills education also find a due place. Although peace has been the most wanted, peace and happiness education has not found a place in the Israeli curriculum. Nonetheless, Israel achieved fifth ranking on the World Happiness Index in 2024. Israel has done very well in education. It has a high literacy rate of 97.8% and gifted thirteen Nobel laureates to the world.

Keywords: Israel, Hebrew education, LeTmura 2011, digital technologies, core subjects

Introduction

Israel is probably the most curious case of statehood in human history. “The nation of Israel is the world’s first Jewish state in two millennia. It represents for Jews the restoration of their homeland after the centuries-long Diaspora that followed the demise of the Herodian kingdom in the 1st century CE. As such, it remains the focus of widespread Jewish immigration” (Elath et al., 2024). Today’s State of Israel was part of the Ottoman Empire, which the British took over after World War I. It was then (1920) called British Palestine. Israel is called the daughter of the Mediterranean.

The total area of Israel is 21937 km^2 (CIA, 2024). It is situated on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (coastline 273 km) between Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan to the east, and Egypt to the southwest. Its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, with snow-capped

mountains in the north and deserts in the south, makes Israel a geographically diverse country (Metz, 1988). Israel has six districts—Central, Jerusalem, Haifa, Northern, Southern, and Tel Aviv—and 15 subdistricts (Elath et al., 2024).

As of 2024, the Total population of Israel is 9,311,652, with a growth rate of 1.47%. The percentage of the male population is 49.93%, compared to 50.07% of the female population (Statistics Times, 2024). The ethnic group includes Jewish 73.5%, Arab 21.1% and other 5.4%. In Israel, Hebrew is the official language. Arabic has a special status under Israeli law, and English is the most commonly used foreign language. 73.5% of the population follows the Jewish religion, 18.1% are Muslim, 1.9% are Christian, 1.6% are Druze, and 4.9% follow other religions. Life expectancy at birth for males is 81.1 years, and for females, 85.1 years overall, 83.1 years (CIA, 2024).

Israel's natural resources are very limited. Some minerals, including copper, phosphates, bromide, potash, clay, sand, sulfur, asphalt, and manganese, are available in the mines (CIA, 2024). According to the IIMF, Israel's GDP was 530.66 billion US dollars at current prices in 2024, with an annual growth rate of 1.6%. The GDP per capita was 53,370 US dollars, and the country's unemployment rate was 3.7% (IMF, 2024). “Despite five months of war with Hamas, Israel ranked fifth in the 2024 World Happiness Report” (Helliwell et al., 2024, p.15). Israel ranked 25th on HDI with a 0.915 HDI value (UNDP, 2024). In the 2024 Social Progress Index, Israel ranked 30 with a score of 81.68 (Green et al., 2024, p. 8).

Israel's literacy rate in 2011 was 97.8%. The male literacy rate was 98.7%, while the female rate was 96.8% (CIA, 2024). To date, this small country has 13 Nobel laureates. Israel's GER in 2021 for the primary was 96.25% and for Upper Secondary 97.49%, whereas NER for the primary was 96.37% and for Upper Secondary 95.47% (UIS-UNESCO, 2024).

In Israel, schools are divided into two main types: Hebrew and Arab education. Israel has a robust school education system ensuring access for all (Table 27.1).

In the 2020/21 school year, Israel had an estimated 91,500 teachers in primary education, over 55,500 in upper secondary education, and nearly 39,700 in lower secondary education (Lichter, 2024). “In Israel, 35% of the 15-19 age group are enrolled in general upper secondary education and 24% vocational upper secondary education. A further 3% are enrolled in lower secondary and 5% tertiary programmes” (OECD, 2023, p. 3).

Table 27.1 Number of Schools and Students Enrolled in Israel

Types		Primary education		Secondary education		
		No. of Schools	**No. of Students**		**No. of Schools**	**No. of Students**
Hebrew	Primary	1999	670,207	Lower	556	192,292
	Special	203	10,880	Upper	1,359	292,512
Arab	Primary	519	247,237	Lower	168	81,466
	Special	63	3,489	Upper	314	91,028
Total		2784	931,813	Total	2,397	657,298

Source: *JVL, n.d.a (Adapted by author).*

Educational Policy

Israel is a young state established in 1948. Its formation began in the late 19th century, and it has undergone significant political changes, evolving from separate, unorganised settlements to a single functioning state (Peled, 2020, p.111). Before Israel was created, foreign powers controlled and managed formal education in Palestine. Education was first provided in Turkish under Ottoman rule, even though the majority of the Palestinian population spoke Arabic. During British rule, starting in 1917, education was expanded to meet the increasing demand for civil servants for the British Empire (Ramahi, 2015, p. 2).

In 1949, the Knesset enacted the Compulsory Education Law, mandating that all children aged 3-14 be enrolled in the education system according to their age and place of residence. Apprenticeships could begin at age 15 and were included in compulsory education. The law required Arab, Jewish, secular, and religious schools to accept students and follow government guidelines. The education system was organised into eight years of elementary education and four years of high school (Peled, 2020, p. 113).

In 1953, the State Education Law was enacted to eliminate various forms of semi-private education and create a standardised, state-approved curriculum. The law required that 75% of the school curriculum be mandatory and determined by the state, while the remaining 25% could include unique content related to religion and ethnicity (Shwed et al., 2014, p. 326). The law was established to create a framework for the Israeli education system, emphasising Israeli culture, love for the land, loyalty to the state and people of Israel, and agricultural and artisan practices (Peled, 2020, p. 113). However, the curriculum did not align well with the Arab stream, favouring values and literary works more aligned with the dominant Jewish population than the Arab minority (Arar, 2012, p. 6).

The Ministry of Education started paying attention to the issue of student stratification in 1968. They reviewed the existing education policy and made changes based on the new political climate.

Instead of creating new laws, they implemented the findings of the Rimalt committee. The key changes included switching from a system 8+4 to a system (6+3+3), starting in 1966. They also required students to register for school based on where they lived rather than their parent's choice. Additionally, all students who completed elementary school were required to continue to middle school immediately, and classes were made up of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. (Peled, 2020, p. 115; Gazi'el, 1996, p. 4).

Various committees have guided the Israeli education system over the years. In 1978, the Rimalt committee was followed by another committee led by Judge Etzioni after a long teachers' strike, which recommended significant changes in teachers' working conditions. The Harari Committee 1992 addressed science-technology education, the Shenhar Committee in 1994 focused on Jewish studies in state schools, the Miriam Ben-Peretz-led committee in 1994 worked on matriculation exams, and the Adler Committee in 1996 addressed the issue of the long school day. The Kremnitzer Committee in 1996 focused on civics studies, the Margalit Committee in 2000 assessed special education, and in 2016, the Biton Committee worked on integrating the heritage of Middle Eastern Jews into the curriculum (Blass, 2016). According to Blass (2016), "the work of such committees or ministry-appointed task forces makes a real contribution to the public discourse, and sometimes even influences important decisions made by the heads of the education system, whether directly or indirectly" (p. 118).

"The National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel (the Dovrat Committee) was established by the Government of Israel in September 2003" (Weiss, 2016, p. 116). In January 2005, the head of the task force submitted the report. The aim was to revolutionise the education sector by enhancing teacher training, developing more effective learning methods, and promoting social equity. "Reforms in the education sector have focused on incorporating technology and innovation in response to current socioeconomic needs" (INN, 2024). Due to the implementation of recommendations, the most noteworthy change from 2005 to 2015 was the increase in the Ministry of Education's budget and the teachers' terms of employment and teachers' working conditions and training (Blass, 2016, p. 119).

In 2008, the Ofek Hadash (New Horizon) wage agreements were signed with the Teachers' Union (Histadrut Hamorim), significantly changing teachers' employment terms. These changes primarily affected primary education teachers and some middle school teachers, focusing on their working hours, professional development, appraisal, and registration (Blass, 2016). Another reform, Oz LeTmura (Courage to Change), was introduced in 2011 for high school teachers and the remaining middle school teachers. This reform was found to improve the quality of teaching, enhance teachers' professionalism, and elevate the perception and status of the teaching profession (Taub, 2015, p. 504).

Several steps have been taken to ensure equal access to education in Israel. For example, the Compulsory Education Law (1949) has been extended to cover ages 5 to 16, guaranteeing free education up to 12th grade and reducing the likelihood of students dropping out. Additional legislation, such as the Student Rights Law (2000), ensures equal treatment regardless of gender, race, or religion. In 2014, this law was updated to include protection based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Peled, 2020, p. 118). he education policies since 2011 have adapted to the changing situation to cope with several disruptions.

Structure of the Education System

The education system in Israel is controlled by national laws and run by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport. Public education has been mandatory and free for children between 3 and 15 years old (until 10th grade) since 1949. There was a change in the law to make education compulsory until the 12th grade (Maulana, n.d., p.1). So, education is compulsory for children aged 3 to 18 in Israel, covering preschool through secondary school (Israel National News, 2024). The education system accommodates Israel's diverse society through four main types of schools:

1. State Schools: Attended by most students, focusing on a general curriculum.
2. State Religious Schools: Emphasizing Jewish studies, tradition, and observance.
3. Arab and Druze Schools: Offering instruction in Arabic, focusing on Arab and Druze history, religion, and culture.
4. Private Schools: Operated by various religious and international organisations (JVL, n.d.b).

The Ministry of Education oversees school curricula, educational standards, and teacher training. Local authorities are responsible for maintaining schools, acquiring supplies, and managing equipment. Ministry employees teach at kindergarten and primary school levels, while upper-grade teachers are employed by local authorities, who receive funding based on school population size. The government provides 72% of education funding, with the remainder from local authorities and other sources (JVL, n.d.b).

State schools have no tuition fees, but parents must purchase textbooks and pay for field trips and other school activities in Israel. Parents also have to pay for accident and dental insurance in the community. Various discounts and reductions are offered to immigrant students, single-parent families, and low-income families. Field trips and cultural events are sometimes optional (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 6).

The national education system consists of 4 levels: kindergarten, primary, secondary (lower and upper secondary), and university. The education system in Israel is structured into three main stages:

1. Primary Education: 6 years, grades 1 to 6.
2. Lower Secondary Education: 3 years, grades 7 to 9.
3. Upper Secondary Education: 3 years, grades 10 to 12. (Maulana, n.d., p. 2; Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 9) refer to Figure 27.1.

Figure 27.1 Structure of the education system in Israel

Source: *Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 9 (Adapted by author)*

Curricular Framework

In 1963, Prof. Benjamin Bloom and Prof Smilansky were invited to Israel to submit a project establishing a Curriculum Institute. They submitted it in the next year. The curricula developed in Israel during the late 1960s and early 1970s were significantly influenced by the curricular approaches of Ralph Tyler and Benjamin Bloom from the US. The approach was based on inquiry, discovery and problem-solving. The Curriculum Centre is authorised to do several important activities: curriculum structure construction and strategy selection for lower secondary schools, constructing the trails of upper secondary education in comprehensive schools, and outlining the school zoning map for lower secondary education. (Resnik, 2012).

In Israel, the school year for state schools starts from September to June. All types of schools (K-12) begin at 8:00 a.m. and finish between approximately 12:45 p.m. and 3:30 p.m., depending on their age, grade level, and type of school (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, Pp. 8-9).

Kindergarten Curriculum

The kindergarten curriculum, developed by the Ministry of Education, focuses on fostering social skills, reading readiness, and math readiness. It includes activities and projects celebrating Jewish festivals and Israeli national days. Parents are generally expected to participate in some of these events, such as Hanukkah parties (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 15).

Primary Curriculum

In Israel, all state schools follow the same compulsory primary education curriculum. The school's educational committee chooses additional subjects, often funded by parents. Religious studies are emphasised in State Religious Schools. Elementary school subjects typically include Hebrew language, grammar and literature, arithmetic, history (Jewish and world), geography, science, English, the Bible, physical education, art, and music. Schools also offer various educational and social activities such as field trips, sports, clubs, choirs, films, and volunteering. These activities are an important part of the educational process but are usually not free.

Another notable aspect of Israeli education is the annual class trip, where each class explores the country through educational activities, camping, tours, and recreation. Parents may be asked to chaperone the trip and cover the expenses (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 16).

Junior High School Curriculum

In junior high schools, students are placed in diverse homerooms that include pupils from all levels within the grade. They study common subjects together and participate in social activities within their homeroom. The homeroom teacher is responsible for administrative tasks, discipline, evaluation, and communication with parents.

In addition to homeroom subjects, students take certain classes based on their achievement level. Compulsory subjects include Bible, Hebrew, mathematics, history, civics, geography, natural sciences, English literature, vocational subjects, physical education, and sometimes art and music. Elective courses may include a second foreign language, computer studies, and individualised subjects.

Like primary schools, most junior high schools offer a variety of extracurricular activities, many of which involve fees, such as music, folk dancing, drama, clubs, discussion groups, and cultural events (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 22).

Senior High School Curriculum

High schools in Israel include:

1. General Academic High Schools (Iyuni): Offer a broad academic curriculum.

2. Vocational/Technological High Schools (Miktzoi/Technologi): Focus on vocational and technological training.
3. Science Schools (Mada'i): Specialize in science and math.
4. Agricultural High Schools (Chakla'i): Emphasize agriculture.
5. Comprehensive Schools (Makif): Combine academic and technological studies.
6. Religious high schools, such as Yeshiva High Schools for boys and Ulpana Schools for girls, offer similar educational options.

The Ministry of Education oversees the curriculum and exams in Israeli high schools. The mandatory subjects for all students include history, Jewish studies, Hebrew, social sciences, English, natural sciences, math, and physical education. Students can also choose additional subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, or a second foreign language. High school offers different study tracks, and students can choose the one that suits them best. There are also elective courses such as literature, physics, and cinema. The atmosphere in Israeli high schools varies widely, with some schools having a more disciplined environment than others.

Students can take up to 15 subjects simultaneously, exposing them to various topics but possibly limiting their in-depth knowledge. High schools offer a variety of activities, including clubs, volunteer work, music, sports, and films. Each class elects a committee, and these committees choose representatives for a student council, which organises events and represents student interests (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, Pp. 26-27).

Teaching Learning

According to Shapira et al.'s (2023) research, teachers are usually knowledgeable about cultural competence and possess the related knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The Israeli Ministry of Education has introduced the "Education in the Age of Innovation" program to enhance innovative teaching practices. This initiative includes teacher professional development, funding for creative projects, and integration of digital technologies. The Ministry also leads the EdTech sector, supporting tech in education through programs like Digital Israel, which provides digital devices and internet access to students, and the Digital Leaders program, which trains teachers in educational technology. Additionally, design thinking is used both by educators and in classrooms. A notable success is the "Education for Excellence" program, which supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds with tutoring, mentoring, and summer camps to boost academic performance and leadership skills (Israeli, 2023, Pp. 127-129).

The three-year "Laptop for Every Teacher" (LET) program aimed to equip every Israeli teacher with a laptop and 120 hours of professional training by 2020. This initiative was designed to help teachers transition from mere sources of information to becoming effective mentors in the information age (Peled & Perzon, 2022). The research draws two main conclusions: “A top-down initiative forcing the school administration to participate in a long-term process aiming at changing the school’s culture cannot succeed without engaging the principals into the program and advancing them to technological leaders. Additionally, without the schools’ administration support, teachers are more likely to continue teaching in the method with which they are most familiar” (Peled & Perzon, 2022, Abstract).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel closed its schools and provided education through remote teaching. However, many families did not have the necessary equipment for online education, such as computers, internet access, or even electricity. Even those with access often could not afford multiple devices for all their children. “In addition, online teaching was problematic in the Haredi Jewish community also because they traditionally avoid using the internet, and although the number of internet users in the community is increasing, it is still not without obstacles for some children to participate in online education” (Farkas, 2022).

Learning Assessment

The National Authority for Assessment and Evaluation in Education (RAMA) operates independently within the Ministry of Education, overseeing national evaluation and assessment. RAMA employs internal and external evaluation tools and supervises annual large-scale standardised tests in primary and lower secondary schools. It also manages Israel’s involvement in international studies like PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS. The system evaluates matriculation, national test scores, and upper secondary and tertiary education completion rates. RAMA also reviews educational changes and projects, with schools conducting self-evaluations and regional inspectors performing external assessments of school leaders (OECD, 2016, p. 12).

In Israel, students are assessed against national standards using a comprehensive system. The system comprises national assessments, school-based, and teacher-based evaluations. Students take national tests in their native language (Hebrew or Arabic), mathematics, and English in Year 5 (Meitzav-primary), Year 8 (Meitzav-lower secondary), and Years 10-12 (upper secondary matriculation). In Year 8, students also undergo science assessments. The matriculation exams in Years 10-12 cover various subjects (OECD, 2016, p. 12). The matriculation exams are national standardised tests used to evaluate achievement in Israeli high schools. Students take exams in compulsory core subjects such as mathematics, literature, language, history, English, Bible, and

civil studies. University admissions in Israel require students to submit their matriculation exam grades and a Psychometric test score. Depending on their chosen study track, students may also take matriculation exams in other subjects, such as technology and music (Leshem & Markovits, 2012, p. 5).

Health and Physical Education

Physical education is a core subject taught from the first to 12th grade. “The subject has several goals: acquiring motor skills and experience in various sports, increasing physical activity, promoting the students' health, and education on moral-social behaviour. Besides these goals, there is a meaning to the enjoyment of activities and the challenges they pose. This kind of teaching deals with physical education for its diverse purposes in educational institutions during school hours, sports clubs, and other initiatives and programs at all age levels” (Shama/Daniel, 2022, p. 104). Schools implement initiatives such as Physical Education Week celebrations, sports classes, sports days, programs promoting active and healthy lifestyles, peak days, sports-focused class consolidation days, and transition programs related to physical education.

The Director General’s Circular in Physical Education outlines how to plan and adapt physical education pedagogy for the school population. It mandates that physical education teaching be based on pedagogical planning, incorporating all events and learning throughout the year according to the Department for Curriculum Planning and Development curricula. Teachers must assess students' achievements in teaching, learning, and evaluation. Each school will appoint a coordinator to oversee institutional planning, including goals, objectives, and evaluation methods for physical education. The principal will manage the teaching plan, and before every academic year, PE teachers must submit a proposal to the head of the school for adapting teaching to the school’s needs. This plan will cover annual goals, content, and periodic class planning. Physical education events follow the "Physical Education Events Regulations" available on the Chief Inspector and Commissioner of Physical Education's website. Teachers seeking information about events should contact the district inspector of physical education (Shama/Daniel, 2022, Pp. 105-6)

Under the National Health Insurance Law and Ministry of Health regulations, children in grades 1-9 can access healthcare services at school. As per requirement, these services are provided by a health professional or nurse. “In many schools, a nurse is on the premises to supervise children's health and hygiene, treat injuries, and determine whether to send a child home due to illness” (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 19).

Skills Education

In the Israeli school education curriculum, there is a focus on fostering students' skills through various means. While there is no dedicated course for skill development, extracurricular activities play a significant role in honing students' abilities. The curriculum from kindergarten to 12th grade places substantial emphasis on arts and physical education, which contribute to developing student's cognitive and motor skills. As students progress to senior high school, they can choose a specific track for further studies, allowing them to enhance their trade-based skills in their chosen field of interest.

A unique feature of the education and training system is the direct and indirect influence of the Israelis. In Israel, young Israeli teenagers are required to serve in the Defence Force for three years (for men) and two years (for women) when they turn 18, with exemptions for Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews. During this time, they learn skills that can be used in civilian life and have the opportunity to participate in advanced training programmes to prepare them both physically and mentally (Laurent, 2015). These skills are now being officially recognised and certified. After completing their military service, career guidance and a financial contribution for further training and education are provided to them. (Kuczera et al., 2018, p. 15). The Israel Defence Force (IDF) provides advanced training to its members and offers around 2500 qualifications. While most Israelis undergo military service and receive this training, its benefits in the civilian job market are not always well recognised (ETF, 2021, p. 13).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobby development and life skills education are not articulated agendas in Israeli school curricula. Both are nurtured in students through a wide range of extracurricular activities. The primary and junior high school curriculum includes various extracurricular activities, including music, folk dance, drama, clubs, discussion groups, and cultural events. These activities involve fees (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 15).

Israeli youth engage in a wide variety of activities in their free time. Israel's warm climate and diverse landscapes offer numerous opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, biking, and picnicking. Sports are popular among Israeli youth; soccer (football), basketball, and volleyball are particularly popular. Israeli youth attend concerts, music festivals, and dance performances. Many young Israelis participate in volunteer activities in their communities. Given Israel's reputation as a tech hub, many Israeli youth are interested in technology and gaming. They spend their free time coding, developing apps, and playing video games. In January 2024, Israel had 8.51 million internet users, with an internet penetration rate of 92.1% of the total population (Kemp, 2024). Israeli youth have access to a rich culture, including museums, theatres, art galleries, and cultural events. Many young Israelis enjoy exploring their country's history and heritage

through cultural activities. These are just a few examples of activities that Israeli youth engage in during their free time. The interests and preferences of young people in Israel, like in any other country, can vary widely based on individual tastes and hobbies.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The commitment to fostering Values-Oriented Education is central to the Israeli education system, as Section 2 of the State Education Law 5733-1953 outlines. This section specifies the goals of state education: "To instil the principles laid forth in the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel and the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and to develop respect for human rights, for fundamental freedoms, for democratic values, for upholding the law, for the culture and views of others, as well as to educate for the pursuit of peace and tolerance in relations between people and nations" (Center for Knowledge and Research in Education, 2021). The core curriculum of Israeli school education is structured as a three-tiered parallel model encompassing content clusters, learning skills, and social values. The content clusters are:

a) Humanities, Social Studies and Arts - Democracy, Tolerance, Understanding, Aesthetics
b) Languages - Equality, Social Respect
c) Mathematics and Science - Truth, Morality
d) School Culture - Ethics, Well-being

"These social values permeate Israeli society and allow it to weave an accepted values fabric that all societal sectors accept despite ideological, religious, ethnic and national differences. Thus, the values in the core curriculum promote cohesion in society and acceptance of others despite the multiculturalism inherent in Israeli society" (Katz, 2002, p. 9).

Despite differences in various political issues, the major religious groups attach great importance to a few core values, including family relationships, education, career success, and helping the needy (Pew Research Center, 2016, para 1).

The Ministry of Education has designed the kindergarten curriculum to help kids learn social skills, reading, and math. Students also participate in Jewish festivals and Israeli national days, and parents are encouraged to participate in activities like Hanukkah parties. The school hosts educational and social activities during and after school, such as field trips, sports, clubs, choirs, films, volunteering, and different parties. These activities are important to the learning process and can help children integrate into the school community.

In Israel, elementary school students do not have a separate subject for civics. Instead, some aspects of citizenship are covered in a subject called 'Homeland and Society' in grades 2 to 4. In junior high (grades 7 to 9), there is a curriculum for civics, but it is not mandatory, and principals decide whether to teach it. Consequently, many students enter high school without having studied civics. At the high school level, civics becomes compulsory, and all students must take a civics exam in either 11th or 12th grade. Students typically have three hours of civics instruction per week, with more focus on the subject in the year of the exam, especially in regular state schools compared to Arab and religious state schools (Ichilov et al., 2005, p. 41; Lemish, 2003, p. 61).

Peace and Happiness Education

Although peace education is not prominently featured in Israel's formal educational system, educators are encouraged to incorporate peace education throughout all learning activities. Despite being a key goal of state education and an important aspect of educational policy, there remains a considerable gap between the stated objectives and the actual implementation of peace education in Israel (Vered, 2015, p. 138). Vered (2015) assumes that "if peace is indeed a desirable goal to the State of Israel, the educational system should prepare people to enable its realisation" (p. 147).

Despite ongoing conflict with Hamas, Israel ranked 5th on the World Happiness Index in 2024, largely due to how Israelis cultivate happiness. Yuval Kutz, an Israeli and the president and co-founder of the Happiness Studies Academy notes that while there are many definitions of happiness, their approach emphasises a holistic view based on Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Relational, and Emotional well-being. In Israel, schools place a strong emphasis on fostering creativity and entrepreneurship. "Israel leads in health and happiness while ranking lower in income and education, and this is because there are techniques built into Israeli culture to keep Israelis focused on happiness regardless of other factors like salary or schooling" (ISRAEL21c, 2022).

Summary and Conclusion

Israel is a multi-ethnic, multinational, and multicultural state where issues of discrimination and ethnic conflict are prevalent. The education system reflects these challenges. The longstanding conflict between Jewish and Arab groups, exacerbated by the creation of Israel and several wars in the 20th century, has further complicated their relationship. Despite the religious conflict, this country boasts a high literacy rate of 97.8% and gifted 13 Nobel laureates to the world. Israel has a diverse education system, divided into Hebrew and Arab education.

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel's education policy has evolved considerably, guided by various committees such as the Rimalt and Dovrat Committees. The Rimalt Committee recommended major improvements to teachers' working conditions, while the Dovrat Committee,

established in 2003, aimed to transform the education sector by enhancing teacher training, developing effective learning methods, and promoting social equity. Recent reforms have emphasised technology and innovation to address current socioeconomic needs. The work of these committees often shapes public discourse and influences key decisions within the education system.

Several measures have been implemented to ensure equal access to education in Israel, including the Compulsory Education Law (1949), the State Education Law (1953), and the Student Rights Law (2000). Public education is mandatory and free for children between ages 3 and 15 (up to 10th grade). The effectiveness of the Israeli education system is evident from the fact that, despite compulsory education beginning at age 3, 47% of children were already enrolled in educational institutions before age 2 in 2017. Moreover, 99% of children aged 3 to 5 were enrolled in educational institutions in 2017 (OECD, 2019).

In Israel, the education system is governed by national laws and managed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport. Schools are categorised into five types: state schools, state religious schools, Arab and Druze schools, and private schools. The Ministry oversees curricula, educational standards, and teacher training, while local authorities handle school maintenance, supply acquisition, and equipment management.

The national education system has four levels: kindergarten, primary, secondary (lower and upper secondary), and university. Israel's primary and junior high education system follows a compulsory curriculum, with parents often funding additional subjects. State Religious schools emphasise religious studies. Students can choose elective courses such as a second foreign language, computer studies, and individualised subjects. High schools offer different study tracks and elective courses, with some having a more disciplined environment than others.

Israel's educational system is marked by multiple cultures and deep socio-cultural divides, with ethnically diverse schools and classrooms. The Ministry of Education has introduced the "Education in the Age of Innovation" program to advance innovative teaching methods. This includes initiatives like the Digital Israel program, the Digital Leaders program, design thinking, the "Education for Excellence" program, and the three-year 'Laptop for Every Teacher' (LET) program. However, top-down efforts to transform school culture may falter without actively involving principals and promoting their roles as technological leaders. Additionally, there are challenges for families with limited access to technology and the Internet.

The National Authority for Assessment and Evaluation in Education (RAMA) oversees Israel's national evaluation and assessment framework, including annual large-scale standardised tests in primary and lower secondary schools. RAMA also manages the country's involvement in

international studies such as PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS and evaluates students against national standards through a comprehensive assessment system.

Physical education is a core subject taught in Israel, from first to 12th grade. The Israeli school curriculum emphasises skill development through extracurricular activities, such as arts and physical education, contributing to cognitive and motor skills development. As students progress to senior high school, they choose a specific track for further studies, enhancing their trade-based skills in their chosen field of interest. Young Israeli teenagers must serve in the Defence Force for three years (for men) and two years (for women) when they turn 18, learning skills that can be used in civilian life and participating in advanced training programs. After completing military service, young adults receive career guidance and financial contributions for further training and education. “The IDF significantly contributes to developing a well-educated workforce and society” (INN, 2016).

Israel's school curricula emphasise hobby and life skills education, supported by various extracurricular activities such as music, folk dancing, drama, clubs, discussion groups, and cultural events. Israeli youth participate in outdoor activities, including sports, music, dance, volunteering, and technology. The core curriculum is organised into a three-tiered model featuring content clusters, learning skills, and social values. Schools offer various educational and social activities during and after school, including field trips, sports, clubs, choirs, films, and volunteering opportunities. Civics is integrated into the curriculum under the subject 'Homeland and Society' for grades 2 to 4 and is a mandatory subject at the high school level. Students take a civics exam in 11th or 12th grade, with typically three hours of weekly civics instruction, focusing intensively on the subject in the exam year.

Peace and happiness education is not central to Israel's formal educational system. Despite its stated commitment to promoting peace, Israel has struggled to establish a consistent framework for the ongoing implementation of peace education. Despite the persistent conflict with Hamas, Israel achieved a fifth-place ranking on the World Happiness Index in 2024, largely attributed to how Israelis practice happiness. Schools in Israel place a strong emphasis on fostering creativity and entrepreneurship.

Over the past 20 years, Israel has experienced significant advancements in its education system. By 2019, these improvements resulted in Israel becoming one of the highest spenders on primary, secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary education relative to its GDP among OECD countries, with spending at 6.7% compared to the OECD average of 4.9% (OECD, 2015). Additionally, over

half of the population aged 25 to 64 holds tertiary education credentials. Israel's rapid technological advancements have also earned it a spot among the world's top twenty innovative countries.

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Educational Reforms through Strategic Partnership: Jordan

Suman Kalyan Panja

Abstract

Jordan's education system has undergone significant transformations since its independence, with legislative acts and strategic initiatives aimed at improving access, quality, and relevance to citizens' needs. This chapter deals with education reforms in Jordan, focusing on policy, curricula, teaching-learning, learning assessment and co-curricular activities. The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2016-2022 and Jordan Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022 depict a vision of the Education 2030 Agenda. Jordan has made mandatory education in Grades 1 to 10 for students aged 6 to 16. Jordan's curriculum reforms aimed at transitioning from a content-focused curriculum to a competency-based one, fostering well-rounded citizens. Jordan established an ICT infrastructure to support educational and administrative functions. The NESP emphasises teamwork and values, calling for a revamp of curriculum and assessment methods to promote higher-order thinking skills. The system needs to have a balance of cognitive, social, physical and emotional domains.

Keywords: National Education Sector Plan, National Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022, Quality Education, Bas'ma Program, Competency-based Curriculum, Life Skills through Sports.

Introduction

Located in west Asia and the north of the Arabian Peninsula, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a Muslim Arab nation. The Kingdom has an overall area of 88794 km^2 (Britannica et al., 2020). "Jordan is bounded to the north by Syria, to the east by Iraq, to the southeast and south by Saudi Arabia, and the west by Israel and the West Bank… Jordan has 26 kilometres of coastline on the Gulf of Aqaba in the southwest, where Al-ʿAqabah, its only port, is located" (Irvine et al., 2024). The Jordan River, which runs along its western border and has Amman as its capital, gave Jordan its name. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has a heritable royal government. Majesty King

Abdullah II, who also acts as the supreme commander of the armed forces, is seated on the Kingdom's throne of the top three authorities. A constitutional monarchy governs the sovereign state, although the king has extensive executive and legislative authority. "Jordan is divided into (12) Governorates (Muhāfadha), each one includes many districts and sub-districts, (48) districts (Liwā') and (38) sub-districts (Qadā')" (Al Jaber, 2007, p. 2).

Jordan has a population of 11,174,024 (2024 est.), 52.30% male and 47.70% female. The country's population growth rate is 0.78%, and Life expectancy at birth is 76.5 years. Around 97.1% of the population is Sunni Muslim, with a minority of predominantly Christians (2.1%), Buddhists (0.4%), and Hindus (0.1%). In urban regions, 84.1% of the population resides (WFB, 2024). English is the first foreign language, while Arabic is the official language. Jordon's ethnic composition includes "Jordanian 69.3%, Syrian 13.3%, Palestinian 6.7%, Egyptian 6.7%, Iraqi 1.4%, other 2.6% (2015 est.)" (WFB, 2024).

Jordan's GDP is $53.57 billion, with a growth rate of 2.6%, and its GDP per capita is $4,635. The unemployment rate in Jordan is 22.9% (IMF, 2024). According to the United Nations' 2023 World Happiness Report, Jordan is the third least happy country in the Arab world. Jordan ranked 123 internationally in the 2023 World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2023). The HDI is 0.720 (UNDP, 2024). The quality-of-life index is 116.88.

In 2021, the overall adult literacy rate in Jordan was 98.42%, with a male-female rate of 98.71% and 98.13%, respectively (Statista, 2024). In 2015/16, at the KG2, basic, and secondary levels, the GER was 79.5%, 123.9%, and 98.5% (MoE, 2018). In 2017, the NER at primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary stages were 97.59%, 93.61%, and 78.69% respectively (UNICEF, 2020). Students' performance in reading, arithmetic, and science has improved since 2015, according to PISA 2018 findings, though still behind the OECD averages (OECD, 2024). As of 2019, the total number of schools, students, and teachers is 7,262, 20,51,840, and 1,32,882, respectively (UNICEF, 2020).

Educational Policy

In 1946, Jordan gained complete independence and established itself as a hereditary constitutional monarchy (Roy & William, 1992). Since its independence, Jordan's education system has undergone significant transformations through legislative acts and strategic initiatives.

By the mid-1980s, Jordan began a comprehensive review of its education system, driven by the belief that human resources are essential for economic and social development. The First National Conference for Educational Development in 1987 led to the Provisional Education Act No. 27 in 1988, later enacted as Education Act No. 3 in 1994. This Act introduced compulsory education,

extended it to nine years, and divided secondary education into academic and vocational streams. This legislation further regulated kindergarten, basic, and secondary education, outlining the educational philosophy, objectives, and roles of the Ministry of Education and educational boards (UNESCO-IBE, 2006).

The Educational Development Plan was initiated in 1989 and completed its first phase in 1995, focusing on infrastructure development and educational policy reform. The second phase, from 1996 to 2000, aimed at staff development, school innovations, and improving facilities. During this period, efforts were made to introduce regional and international educational models to enhance the quality of education. The third phase of the Educational Development Plan, launched in 2000, emphasised comprehensive education system reform, integrating public and private institutions and preparing for the demands of the 21st century. This phase was informed by the outcomes of the national conference held in September 1999. In 2002, the Vision Forum for the Future of Education in Jordan convened, generating priorities for educational change across all levels, from early childhood to higher education and vocational training (UNICEF, 2014). The Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) program was initiated in 2003 with the goal of curriculum development, teacher training, and the integration of technology in education with the demands of a knowledge-based economy (Al-Hassan et al., 2010; Almeqdadi & Al Zoubi, 2022).

Jordan's recent National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2016–2022 sets out clear objectives to increase the enrollment of Syrian refugee students (boys and girls) in public schools in formal and non-formal sectors, with the assistance of donors, civil society organisations, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (World Bank, n.d.).

The NESP 2018-2022 was introduced and extended to 2025 (MoE, 2024). This plan presents an ambitious vision for realising the Education 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2022). To fulfil the objectives of SDG-4 by 2030, Jordan is dedicated to its Education Strategic Plan (2018-2025) and the Inclusive Education Strategy (2020-2030) (MoE, 2022a). This plan aims to foster scientific, creative, and critical thinking skills among learners, emphasising teamwork and lifelong education to prepare active citizens who contribute positively to society (MoE, 2018).

The country has created a vision framework, 'Jordan 2025', to recapture its magnificent past in several areas, including academics (Government of Jordan, 2015). By 2025, numerous changes to the school educational system are anticipated. The following are the key operational elements of the policy documentation:

- *Infrastructural development of primary and secondary schools:* setting standards for primary and secondary school infrastructure, reviewing resource requirements, monitoring

schools, pursuing partnerships with private organisations, and involving parents and teachers in enacting infrastructural reforms.

- *Access and equity*: Merging schools with fewer than 100 pupils and offering transportation services for a small fee.
- *Inclusive education*: The development of infrastructure, non-formal education, special needs education, and refugee education are all related to this field.
- *Quality:* To be maintained through school meals, curriculum, ICT use, community participation, and school leadership.
- *Early childhood education*: Mandatory for enrollment in primary education.
- *Outcome analysis*: Basic education outcomes, creation of appropriate testing procedures, follow-up methods, and reading, writing, and math aptitude of kids between the ages of 6 and 10.
- *Technology integration*: Including cutting-edge technology like online or mobile learning into schools' curricula is possible.
- *Co-curricular activities*: Encouraging children to participate in extracurricular activities and sports outside the classroom.
- *Vocational education*: Early in the academic program, counselling services are provided for career education.

The previous discussion of the reform of educational policies, as egregiously stated in Jordan's 2025 vision framework, was, to some extent, in line with other studies (Chinnery, 2019; MoE, 2018; World Bank, 2017).

Structure of the Education System

Jordan's educational system comprises kindergarten, primary, secondary, and tertiary education (UNICEF, 2020). The three levels of preschool are nursery (below four years), KG1 (above four years), and KG2 (above five years). The kindergarten phase lasts two years and is non-compulsory. Most kindergartens are typically private institutions. The government is considering to make KG2 universal. The Ministry of Social Affairs oversees the first two levels of preschool education, while the MoE oversees KG2 (CES Chair of Education Systems, 2021).

Basic education of a ten-year cycle from Grades 1 to 10 for students 6 to 16 is compulsory and free in government schools. Students cannot be expelled before age 16 except for health reasons documented by a specialised committee (Ababneh et al., 2019). This cycle is the foundation for education, promoting national unity and personal development. It aims to instil knowledge of Islam, proficiency in Arabic and a foreign language, awareness of the environment, social values, patriotism, and basic technological skills (MoE, n.d.).

Secondary education in grades 11 and 12 for 17 to 18 years is optional. It aims to prepare students with specialised skills in cultural, scientific, and vocational areas that align with the needs of Jordanian society. This stage is divided into two main streams: comprehensive and applied. The comprehensive streams are divided into academic and vocational secondary education, and the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination evaluates them. Vocational training enables graduates to enter the workforce immediately upon completion (Ababneh et al., 2019). This cycle aims to cultivate well-rounded citizens who can effectively use Arabic, appreciate their cultural heritage, and engage with global civilisation. Additionally, it encourages teamwork, social responsibility, and awareness of international issues while promoting lifelong learning and artistic expression, ultimately preparing students for higher education or the workforce (Ababneh et al., 2019). The organisation of Jordan's educational system is shown in Figure 28.1.

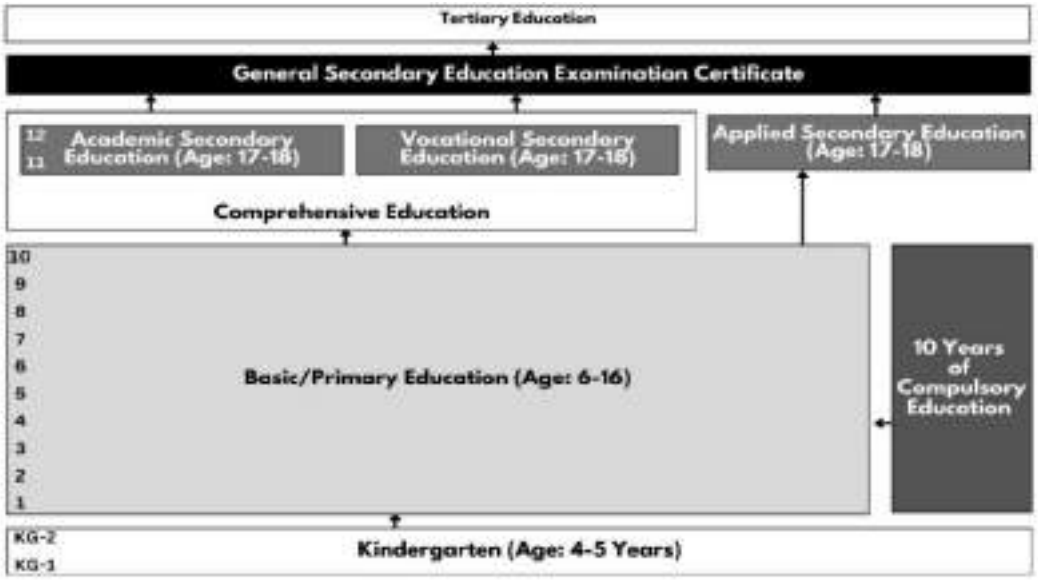

Figure 28.1 Structure of Jordan's School Education System

Source: *Author [Information curated from Ababneh et al., 2019; Bataineh & Montalbano, 2018; UNICEF, 2020]*

Curricular Framework

The recent curriculum reforms in Jordan aimed to transition from a content-focused to a competency-based curriculum, emphasising learning outcomes by the end of each grade level and educational cycle (MoE, 2012).

Kindergartens

Though not mandatory, two-year kindergarten and nursery education are provided to children aged 4 to 6 years. According to Article 8/A: Education Law, this stage aims to provide a suitable environment that prepares the child for a balanced upbringing, including physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional aspects. It helps the child to form healthy habits, develop social relationships, and enhance positive attitudes and love for school life. The duration of this stage is two years' (MoE, 2020a, p. 41). Both private and non-governmental organisations operate these kindergartens. The Ministry of Education establishes community kindergartens in remote areas to nurture children's holistic development and future success (Mullis et al., 2016).

Basic Education

Basic education in grades 1 to 10 for ages 6 to 16 is mandatory for all children in Jordan. This educational stage lays the groundwork for higher education and lifelong learning by equipping students with essential skills and knowledge, including basic numeracy, language, and science. According to Article 11/B: Education Law, this stage aims to achieve the general objectives of education and prepare the citizen for various aspects of his physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social personality. The duration of this stage is ten years' (MoE, 2020a, p. 41).

The curriculum includes the Arabic language, the history of Islamic and Arab countries, environmental studies, social skills, and artistic education. Subjects taught include mathematics, computer studies, Islamic education and culture, vocational education, music, physical education, art, English, various sciences (chemistry, physics, general science, and biology), civics (history, national education, social education, and geography), and optionally, French (Jordaneducation, 2024). Tables 28.1 and 28.2 summarise the weekly lessons taught by subjects from grades 1 to 10.

Table 28.1 Lessons Taught Per Week by Subject (Grades 1 – 3)

Subjects	Grade-1	Grade-2	Grade-3
Islamic Religion	2	2	2
Arabic	11	11	11
English	3	3	3
Math	7	7	7
Social Studies	1	1	1
Science	2	2	2
Art	1	1	1
PE	2	2	2
Music	1	1	1
Total	30	30	30

Source: *Directorate of Examinations and Testing, 2017*

Table 28.2 Lessons Taught Per Week by Subject (Grades 4 – 10)

Subjects	Grade-4	Grade-5	Grade-6	Grade-7 (d)	Grade-8 (d)	Grade-9	Grade-10
Islamic Religion	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Arabic	9	7	7	7	7	7	6
English	4	5	6	6	5	5	5
French	-	-	-	-	3(a)	3(a)	3(a)
Math	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Social Studies	2	3	3(b)	3(b)	3(b)	3(b)	3(b)
Science	4	4	4	4	5	7(c)	7(c)
Art	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PE	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Music	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Vocational	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Computer	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
Total	33	33	34	36	35	37	36

Note:
(a) French is optional and added for students who take it.
(b) One lesson per week is assigned to each of the following: History, Geography, and Civics Education.
(c) Two lessons are assigned to each of the following: Physics, Chemistry, Biology; 1 class for Geology.
(d) In 2015-2016, Grade 7 had an additional "Financial literacy" lesson. In 2016/2017, it was also added to Grade 8.

Source: *Directorate of Examinations and Testing, 2017*

Secondary Education

Secondary education that lasts two years and is available to students who have completed their basic education is optional. This level of education is designed to prepare students for either higher education or entry into the workforce. It is divided into two distinct streams: comprehensive secondary education and applied secondary education. Comprehensive and applied are two streams under secondary education (Future School, 2024). According to Article 11/A: Education Law, 'this stage aims to form the citizen, and the law adds specifications for the citizen such as the ability to communicate and interact with environmental changes, work in a team spirit, and adhere to rights and fulfil duties' (MoE, 2020a, p. 41).

Comprehensive Secondary Education

It comprises a broad spectrum of general and specialised vocational and academic training. This educational phase typically spans two years and is designed for students aged 16 to 18.

a. Academic Secondary Education**:** This segment focuses on literary, scientific, and Sharia/Islamic law studies, effectively preparing students for further education. The curriculum includes:

- *Common General Education* includes Civics, Arabic, Scientific Education, Islamic Education and Culture, and English.
- *Compulsory Subjects* are Mathematics, History, Arabic, Physics, English, and Chemistry.
- *Electives subjects:* Students can choose one from Biology, Environment, and Geology; one from Mathematics, Islamic Education and Culture, and Geography; one from Vocational or Literary Streams; and two subjects from Biology, Environment and Geology, Physics, and Chemistry (Jordaneducation, 2024).

b. Vocational Secondary Education**:** This branch provides training in various fields such as Home Economics, Agriculture, Industry, Hotel Management, Commerce, and Nursing. It aims to equip students for university, community college, or entry into the workforce. The curriculum is tailored to each vocational stream:

- Industrial Vocational Education: This includes scientific education, Islamic Education and Culture, Civics, English, Arabic, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Industrial Administration And Safety, Industrial Drawing, and Industrial Science.
- Agricultural Stream: Covers Scientific Education, Islamic Education and Culture, Civics, English, Arabic, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Soil and Irrigation, Farming Administration, and Agricultural Sciences.
- Commercial Stream: This stream focuses on Scientific Education, Islamic Education and Culture, Civics, English, Arabic, Mathematics, Computer Studies, Principles of Economics and Legislation, Accounting and Bookkeeping, and Office Work and Communications.
- Hotel Stream: This stream offers scientific education, Islamic Education and Culture, Civics, English, Arabic, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Food Production and Catering, Tourism, Hotel Accounts, and Hotel Management and Reception.
- Nursing Stream: Includes Scientific Education, Islamic Education and Culture, Civics, English, Arabic, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Nutrition, Pharmacology, and Anatomy.

- Home Economics Stream: This stream comprises Scientific Education, Islamic Education and Culture, Civics, English, Arabic, Biology, Chemistry, Vocational Drawing Arts, Administration, Vocational Safety, and Social Science (Jordaneducation, 2024).

Applied Secondary Education

This stream focuses on vocational education and training, including apprenticeship opportunities. The Vocational Training Corporation oversees this educational level, and students receive a certificate upon completing the program (Jordaneducation, 2024).

After secondary education, students must take the Tawjihi examination, essential for admission to higher education institutions in Jordan (Saraf, 2023).

Dakkak (2011) recommended rewarding students appropriately for their achievements, encouraging critical thinking and creativity in the classroom, using ICT resources, professional development for teachers, and more. Continuous efforts were also made to reform policies, using a bottom-up approach to bring about changes, building local bodies' capacity and promoting transparency. Though the educational policy recommended a student-centred pedagogy at the lower primary level, a group of scholars found a mix of integrated and collection codes and contradictory classroom framings (Sabella & Crossouard, 2018). They recommended a full review to achieve a student-centred approach. Students with learning impairments have a disorganised, unpredictable, and incomplete curricular field when learning with specific disabilities is contextualised within Jordanian school curricula. Instructors lack the skills necessary to operate in an inclusive environment and a dearth of content designed specifically for students with learning disabilities (Al-Zboon et al., 2022).

Teaching Learning

The General Framework for Curriculum and Assessment recommends implementing five instructional strategies: direct teaching, inquiry-based/problem-solving teaching, group-based learning, activity-based learning, and critical thinking strategies (Queen Rania Foundation, 2017).

The goal of the KG1 phase is to develop a pedagogical environment that fosters a child's character physically and cognitively and promotes their love of learning (Jordan National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, 2008). The teaching-learning process at the primary level attempts to fulfil the general goals of education and inspire a love of lifelong study. In secondary schools, competency-based instruction is supported. At this level, pupils specialise in cultural, scientific, and vocational training to prepare them for further higher education or entry into other professions

(MoE, 2020b). The policy framework includes provisions for bilingual education and the use of technology in teaching and learning.

Teacher efficacy has been a subject of discourse in classroom management. Abu-Tineh et al. (2011) show a positive correlation between personal teacher efficacy and each classroom management style.

Jordan creates a variety of educational resources and teaching aids that align with the national curriculum for basic and secondary education, vocational education, kindergarten, and literacy improvement programs (MoE, 2018). The Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022 proposed developing the capacity of curriculum and textbook authors and developers of assessment content to create gender-responsive materials (MoE, 2018).

ICT is being integrated into the teaching-learning process. Ajloni and O'Toole (2021) found that smartphones, laptops, and desktop computers were the most popular devices used in teaching. The midterm review report argues that during COVID-19, ICT infrastructure was established and maintained to support educational and administrative functions, create digital learning materials to enrich curricula, manage education management systems and electronic exams, and enhance human resource capabilities in ICT (MoE, 2022). Although instructors in Jordan's rural secondary schools used ICT sparingly for pedagogical purposes, there was a favourable attitude toward ICT, e.g. interactive whiteboards (Alshawareb & Abu Jaber, 2012). There was a strong positive association between instructors' views about technology and how much they used it. Further, effective E-learning extends students' perspectives and provides more opportunities for them to share knowledge with their peers. The use of e-learning platforms may be hampered by technological, technical, and teacher-related factors (Malkawi et al., 2023).

A recent review of the revised primary-stage curriculum and textbooks revealed that few hands-on and collaborative learning activities are included. However, the content must encourage critical thinking skills, as the subject matter gets outdated, and the textbook examples must align with current real-world practices (British Council, 2022).

Learning Assessment

Students' performance is measured on both international and national levels. Jordan engages in the TIMSS and PISA to enhance its students' performance in these evaluations.

Students in grades 4, 8, and 10 take national exams to monitor the quality of education. The results are analysed and utilised to offer recommendations to field directorates. These exams have been employed for over a decade to compare results and evaluate changes in the quality of the education system (MoE, 2018). Jordan has implemented a national evaluation strategy through a single

summative exam called 'the Tawjihi', which occurs after the secondary education cycle. As of mid-2017, the Ministry has initiated reforms to the Tawjihi process due to persistent low pass rates. The exam will no longer follow a pass/fail grading system; instead, students can achieve a minimum passing score of 40% out of 1,400 points, allowing them to apply to universities regardless of their score (MoE, 2018).

The Ministry conducts extensive diagnostic assessments to gauge the magnitude of learning losses, and support programs have been initiated to enhance student learning. These efforts aim to identify effective strategies and best practices nationally and globally (UNESCO, 2023).

Various assessment techniques and tools have been developed to track each student's development. These techniques and tools include performance-based assessment, observation, communication, reflection, checklists, rubrics, learning logs, and paper-and-pencil assessments. Students are given report cards that flag fundamental abilities and all-round learning characteristics. The teacher uses teacher-made tests and standardised tests as per requirement. Swaie and Algazo (2023) found that in EFL classrooms, teachers primarily employ teacher-made assessment methods to evaluate their students in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In contrast, standardised tests are used for listening assessments (Swaie & Algazo, 2023). It was found that tenth-grade EFL students' writing performance was more positively impacted by portfolio-based evaluation than the control group (Obeiah & Bataineh, 2016). Compared to static achievement tests, a case study of mathematically talented pupils in the fifth and sixth grades revealed more significant variation in the usefulness of the dynamic assessment technique of evaluation (Al-Hroub & Whitebread, 2019).

Health and Physical Education

Basic Education has a common core curriculum where physical education (PE) is mandatory. However, at the secondary level, PE is optional, allowing students to decide whether or not to participate in physical activities. Furthermore, physical education does not hold the same significance as other subjects in the general secondary education examination. As per guidelines, the amount of time designated for PE is limited compared to other subjects. Students aged 6 to 16 are required to participate in 90 minutes of PE each week, while those aged 17 to 18 can engage in 45 minutes of PE weekly. Participation in PE activities is elective for older students. PE does not hold the same status as other subjects in the general secondary education examination (Kanan, 2013).

The current Jordanian PE program includes diverse activities featuring team sports like football, basketball, volleyball, handball, and individual sports such as gymnastics, badminton, table tennis, and athletics (Kanan, 2013). However, PE teachers perceive a deficiency in implementing Jordanian PE curricula compared to the content outlined in international standards (Al-Atoom & Hussein,

2020). PE as a whole, as opposed to integrated health and fitness education, is included in the elementary to lower secondary level school curriculum. As a result, particular weekly class assignments are made (Queen Rania Foundation, 2017).

Obesity is the most common among Jordanian students (Tayyem et al., 2014; Kanan, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to have a national policy that promotes healthy eating and active living among students (Al-Domi et al., 2019). According to Al-Sheyab et al. (2019), the absence of infrastructure facilities was one of the social and personal barriers to exercise. Private school students had a higher rate of overweight and obesity (Tayyem et al., 2014).

In this context, the Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS) implemented community-based projects personalised to the specific needs of local populations after 2005, aligning these initiatives with national health priorities. One notable program is the Healthy Schools Program, which aims to enhance Jordanian schools' qualifications as accredited Healthy Schools by improving health, safety, and hygiene standards within these institutions. This approach ensures that the projects effectively address community concerns while promoting overall health and well-being in Jordan (Royal Health Awareness Society, 2024).

The Health Competent Project was another year-long initiative carried out in Jordan from 2010 to 2011, aimed at fostering a health-conscious culture through an educational "tool kit." This kit contains eight health topics designed for kindergarten to grade 7 students. To ensure effective implementation, school staff received training on utilising the project resources. The tool kits were crafted to tackle national health concerns, covering physical activity, nutrition, personal hygiene and dental care, health education regarding smoking prevention, psychological and social issues, adolescent health matters, and promoting future healthy lifestyle choices (Kanan, 2013).

The Ministry of Education outlined the PE guidelines for schools in 2009. They comprise objectives, curriculum content, teaching methodologies, student assessment, and guidance for extracurricular activities.

Skills Education

The NESP aims to equip current and future generations with the skills necessary for active citizenship and lifelong learning. Jordan implemented the "Bas'ma Program" in collaboration with various ministries and agencies to enhance students' abilities and refine their personalities during the academic year. Targeting 9th and 10th graders, the program offers skills and experiences that develop physical and mental capabilities (MoE, 2018).

According to reports from the Queen Rania Foundation (2017), prevocational skills education is included in Jordan's basic education curriculum. The component covers music, IT, financial literacy, and artefact manufacturing. As a result, a framework for education and assessment has been established. Summer studies programmes for non-formal education "deepen, strengthen or expand students' skills and develop their abilities and readiness for the general secondary certificate exam as well as their technical and cultural skills" (MoE, 2018, p. 9).

However, graduates face a challenging job market due to a mismatch between academic skills and employer expectations, leading to high unemployment rates (Spark, 2024). The Ministry wants to expedite Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs to close the skills gap. Developing social-emotional skills in personal life, complementing TVET, will increase employability (Persona, 2024).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

The Jordanian educational system does not expressly state an objective for hobby development. However, beginning at the most fundamental level of education, art and music are taught in schools. Lessons are distributed weekly on these subjects.

The Ministry provides a range of programs aimed at providing students with a range of life skills that help enhance the student's personality and help them discover their abilities, potential, talents and future directions, as well as be productive in the community. School counsellors also implement life skills programs. These programs include lessons on cooperation, teamwork, communication skills, negotiation skills, emotional skills (teaching sympathy and empathy), decision-making skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, dealing with others, self-management and anger management. Extracurricular activities, such as sports and field trips, and implementing the 'Life Skills through Sports' Program to help students learn basic life skills through team sports such as football, handball, basketball, and volleyball (Kanan, 2013).

Children and teens in Jordan participated in the UNICEF-funded Nashatati program, which supports twelve essential life skills across four basic skill domains (UNICEF, 2019a). Al Masri et al. (2016) found that life skills are dispersed randomly among the three English Action Pack textbooks; effective communication had a maximum (55.8%) frequency in the sixth-grade English book (55.8%). In the seventh grade, problem-solving life skills likewise received a 44% rating. The life skill of effective communication ranks second in the fifth grade, with 43.7%. Appropriate norms were recommended to be created to distribute life skills in the classroom.

Moral, Social, and Cultural Education

The educational policy on moral, social, and cultural education in Jordanian schools emphasises the importance of instilling Arab and Islamic values while fostering national unity. The curriculum aims to prepare students as responsible citizens who respect human rights and cultural diversity, although there is a noted lack of emphasis on multiculturalism within the educational framework. The National Education Strategy promotes a quality education system that aligns with social and economic development, encouraging creativity and critical thinking among students (McKeown, 2015; Toukan et al., 2006).

After examining the effectiveness of moral education in private schools in Jordan, Alzyoud and Issraa (2000) found that the goals of the education profession, the behaviour and assessment methods, and the extracurricular and classroom activities all contributed to a significant degree of effectiveness in moral education. The gender and experience levels of the teachers also showed statistically significant. The study recommended incorporating extracurricular and classroom activities to help students develop moral principles.

Alelaimat and Taha (2013) found that the Jordanian social studies book includes social and economic values worth growing. Based on the results, the study suggests integrating developmental values into social studies textbooks for primary school students, aligning them with sustainable development indicators, and including digital indicators of sustainable development in the social science curriculum for all grade levels. The English textbooks contained 2744 human and social interaction values. Human and social connections values were repeated least frequently in 2nd-grade and 6th-grade textbooks (Al-Maaitah, 2022).

The first three grades of the music education curriculum in Jordanian schools were examined to see how much moral principles were present. According to research, music and songs significantly influence how these good values are instilled in kids and manifest in their interactions with others (Sharqawi & Hammad, 2021).

Despite such evidence of moral and socio-cultural education, Jordanian educational policy does not mention moral education as a theme or subject.

Peace and Happiness Education

Given the increasing incidences of border conflicts, the importance of maintaining peace and harmony has significantly increased. However, peace and happiness education are not mentioned in Jordanian educational policies. As a result, education in peace and happiness is left to the individual.

An independent study projected the goals and philosophy of the Jordanian educational system toward the promotion of peace via ongoing reforms in education (McKeown, 2015). Opinions of instructors studying peace education in secondary schools in Jordan and England were compared. In organising events both within and outside the classroom on topics like Islam, citizenship, Arabic, English, literature, and history, Jordanian instructors provide students with a practical education in tolerance. Jordanian teachers teach students about human rights, encourage them to voice their opinions on any topic without feeling constrained and have them discuss with classmates and teachers inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, educators plan various events to advance cultures, faiths, and human rights (Alzyoud et al., 2013). More research was conducted to address school bullying in Jordanian schools and suggest educational needs for enacting a culture of peace education (Al-Aifan & Al-Abed, 2021).

Summary and Conclusion

Jordan's education system has undergone significant transformations since its independence through a series of legislative acts and strategic initiatives aimed at improving access, quality, and relevance to the needs of its citizens. The country's mission is to provide equal opportunities for a high-quality education. A particular focus was placed on the empowerment of women and girls (UNICEF, 2019b).

Jordan's educational system comprises non-compulsory kindergarten, ten years of compulsory primary/basic education, and optional secondary and tertiary education. Recent curriculum reforms shifted from a content-focused curriculum to a competency-based curriculum that emphasises students attaining specific learning outcomes by the end of each grade level and educational cycle.

Unique features of the curriculum include a shift from content-focused to competency-based education, ICT integration in education, "talented classes" for gifted students, and efforts to include students with disabilities and refugees through partnerships with organisations like UNESCO.

The General Framework for Curriculum and Assessment highlights implementing five instructional strategies: direct teaching, inquiry-based/problem-solving teaching, group-based learning, activity-based learning, and critical thinking-based strategies. Students' progress is measured through international standards tests like TIMSS and PISA and on national levels by summative and formative examinations.

Health education was prioritised after 2005 by the Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS). The Health Competent Project is another initiative in Jordanian school education. The current Jordanian PE program includes diverse activities featuring team sports. PE is a common core and compulsory subject in basic education; in secondary education, PE is optional. The NESP aims to equip current

and future generations with the skills necessary for active citizenship and lifelong learning. Queen Rania Foundation (2017) advocated that prevocational skills education be included in Jordan's basic education curriculum. The Jordanian educational system does not have an expressly stated objective for hobby development. The Ministry provides a range of programs to provide students with life skills that help enhance their personalities and help them discover their abilities, potential, talents, and future directions, as well as be productive in the community. The educational policy on Moral, Social, and Cultural Education in Jordanian schools emphasises the importance of instilling Arab and Islamic values while fostering national unity. Peace and happiness education are not mentioned in Jordanian educational policies. Education in peace and happiness is left to the individual.

Jordan's education system promotes all-round development, focusing on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. The National Education Strategy (2018-2025) emphasises quality education that meets the diverse needs of students, including those from vulnerable backgrounds, such as refugees and children with disabilities. Recent reforms, including the transition to a competency-based curriculum, aim to equip students with essential skills for the knowledge economy, promoting holistic development beyond mere academic achievement.

Jordan's education system emphasises cognitive development through academic subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages and overlooks the psychomotor and affective domains. It can be inferred from the current analysis and the criticism of past research (e.g., Alazzi, 2012) that the current system is overburdened with cognitive instruction. Despite promoting national unity and respect for diversity, there is limited focus on fostering peace-loving global citizenship. While civic responsibility and human rights awareness are encouraged, explicit education on global citizenship and peace needs attention. According to Alzyoud et al. (2016), the existing curriculum does not foster the learners' global citizenship qualities (peace-loving, cheerful).

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Educational Reforms through Strategic Partnership: Lebanon

Tasha Agarwal
Deepinder Kaur

Abstract

The World Economic Forum ranks Lebanon, the most densely populated country of the Mediterranean, as the 10th best country in the world for overall quality of education and the 4th best for math and science education. This chapter deals with education reforms in Lebanon that contributed to the country's unique educational achievement. It deals with educational policy and curriculum reforms, especially during the last few decades, including teaching-learning, learning assessment, co-curricular activities, and moral and peace education. Lebanon has a standard national curriculum overseen by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to ensure consistency across educational institutions. Initiatives like the Violence Free Schools adopted by Lebanon aim to foster peace, education and social stability. The education system faces several challenges, like dropout and grade repetition, teacher-centred pedagogy, absence of life skills education, weak inclusive education, and poor alignment between vocational and technical education and the labour market demands.

Keywords: Violence Free Schools, Vocational and technical education, National Education Strategy, General Education Plan, Learning Assessment Framework

Introduction

Lebanon gained independence from France in 1943. Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, and Syrians previously ruled it. Even after independence, Lebanon was affected by the civil war, which impacted the economy and the education of the people. The civil war ended Lebanon's Middle Eastern trading and banking hub position. Lebanon worked towards rebuilding its war-torn physical and financial infrastructure by borrowing from domestic banks. However, the Israeli-

Hezbollah conflict in 2006 caused an estimated $3.6 billion in infrastructural damage. This and the internal Lebanese political tension continue to hamper other economic activities, particularly in the tourism and retail sectors. Although Lebanese society is well-educated, the issue of unemployment still exists. Therefore, the Lebanese population has an increased orientation towards career prospects and employment.

Lebanon is a narrow strip of 10,450 km² land area with a coastline of 225 kilometres on the Mediterranean Sea to the west, a 375 kilometres border shared with Syria to the north and east, and a 79 kilometres border with Palestine to the south (Come to Lebanon, 2024). Lebanon can be divided into four central physiographic regions: a narrow coastal plain along the Mediterranean Sea, the Lebanon Mountains (Jabal Lubnān), the Al-Biqāʿ (Bekaa) valley, and the Anti-Lebanon and Hermon ranges running parallel to the Lebanese Mountains. Lebanon's administrative divisions consist of provinces/governorates, districts/cazas, and municipalities, with eight governorates (soon to be nine), 26 districts, and 1029 municipalities as of the 2016 municipal elections (LAI, 2024).

In 2023, Lebanon's total population was 5,331,203 (CIA, 2024) - 51.5% female and 48.5% male, with a population growth rate of 0.64%. The community of this country comprise Phoenician, Greek, Armenian, and Arab, with additional ethnic minorities such as Armenians and Kurds. Arabic is the official language, but some speak Armenian, Kurdish, French, and English. There are 18 recognised communities, including Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Druze, Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenians and Jews (U.S. Department of State, 2019). A significant population of Lebanon consists of refugees, including those from Palestine, who have been residing in Lebanon for the last 60 years. According to the World Bank (2021a), life expectancy at birth is 75 years (World Bank, 2021a).

Lebanon's GDP for 2022 is $21.78 billion, with a GDP per capita of $3,280 at current prices and a real GDP growth rate showing zero annual per cent change (IMF, 2024). Lebanese are the second unhappiest people in the world in 2024, after the Afghans (L'Orient Today, 2024). Lebanon ranked 112th out of 191 countries and territories in the HDI in 2021 (UNDP, 2024). In the 2024 Quality of Life Index by Country, Lebanon's quality of life index is 81.3, placing it 79th out of 85 countries (NUMBEO, 2024). Lebanon shares many of the cultural attributes of Arabs.

In 2023, the literacy rate was 95.30%, with males at 96.85% and females at 93.31%. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for primary education is 93% for both boys and girls. The net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary education is 86%, and the primary completion rate is 74%.

The duration of primary school is for six years, covering ages 6 to 11. Following that, lower secondary education spans three years for ages 12 to 14. Finally, upper secondary schooling lasts three years, covering ages 15 to 17. Lebanon has 2,796 schools, with 44% public and 56% private.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, 1,053,856 Lebanese and international students were enrolled in schools (ITA, 2022). There are 99,479 teachers across private, public, and semi-free private schools, with 51,215 in private schools, 40,796 in public schools, and 7,468 in semi-free private schools. As per the PISA, Lebanon is among the lowest-ranked countries, as more than 2/3rd students need to achieve basic education (OECD, 2019). In reading, only 1% of the students are performing well. Education in Lebanon is regulated under the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Due to political instability, Lebanon's education has undergone immense changes in policy, structure, curriculum, assessment, teaching-learning, etc.

Educational Policy

The foundation of education in Lebanon was laid down in the 1926 constitution, drafted during the French mandate. Article 10 mentions the freedom of the education service provider, including religious institutions and communities. As a result, the education system in Lebanon is dominated by private education, where 71% of the students are enrolled in private schools, compared to 29% in public schools (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020).

Many events of historical importance are instrumental in shaping the current education system – Lebanon's independence and post-independence reforms, the influx of Palestine refugees in 1948 and 1967, civil war, reconstruction of the civil war, the assassination of the former Prime Minister and the Syrian refugee crisis. The increase in the Syrian refugee population due to the civil war has been challenging for the government to address. After 2018, the number of non-Lebanese children has been almost equal to the number of Lebanese children (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020)

Given the country's challenges, several rounds of reforms have taken place. Education in Lebanon is compulsory up to the age of 15, including primary and lower secondary levels. Before the 2000s, the country used a bilingual approach, including Arabic as a compulsory language followed by French or English as the secondary language. The Lebanese civil war from 1975-1990 disrupted the education system (Shuayb, 2016). The early 2000s witnessed a reformation in educational infrastructure with the introduction of technology. There was an increased focus on the teacher's training program and professional development to enhance the quality of education.

In 2007, the government introduced the National Education Strategy, which focused on improving infrastructure, improving the quality of education and revising the curriculum. There was an increased effort to reduce the gap between public and private schools to reduce the educational disparity. In 2011, the 'Learning for All' initiative was launched by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which aimed to provide inclusive and equitable access to education. Due to the

influx of Syrian refugees in 2014, there was a shift in the focus to address the needs of refugee children and accommodate these children in the schools. "At the start of the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon, Syrian students were first permitted to enrol in public schools alongside Lebanese students" (Adelman et al., 2019, p-6).

Further, in 2019, Lebanon witnessed widespread demonstrations and protests demanding reform in the political and economic arena, including the education system. Therefore, the focus shifted towards revising the curriculum and introducing modern teaching methods. The economic crisis of 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic further challenged the country in managing the education system amidst the massive decline in funding.

The World Bank (2021b) has suggested a medium to long-term education reform for Lebanon. It has identified strategy and curriculum, governance and accountability, diagnostics, financing, etc., to be worked on (World Bank, 2021b).

The Lebanon five-year General Education Plan for 2021-2025 focuses on three main objectives/ pillars. The first pillar aims to increase equitable access by improving enrolment and retention of vulnerable groups, enhancing early childhood education, and upgrading physical and digital learning environments. The second pillar seeks to improve learning outcomes by enhancing the quality of teaching and workforce management, curriculum and assessments, and improving school management and leadership. Lastly, the third pillar aims to improve governance by implementing support programs for a positive and safe educational ecosystem (MEHE, 2021a). UNESCO (2023) extended a strategic partnership for improving the quality of education in Lebanon through modernising teaching and learning, renovating the destroyed infrastructure, and ICT education and integration in education.

Structure of the Education System

Before independence in 1943, the schools in Lebanon were established by missionaries. The state invested in education to a large extent, but after the Civil War, the private sector took a leading role due to decreased state investment in education. The education system consists of a 2-year cycle of preschool education, nine years of compulsory education, and three years of secondary academic

or vocational education; after that, students can go for a general certificate of secondary education – Baccalaureat (Figure 29.1).

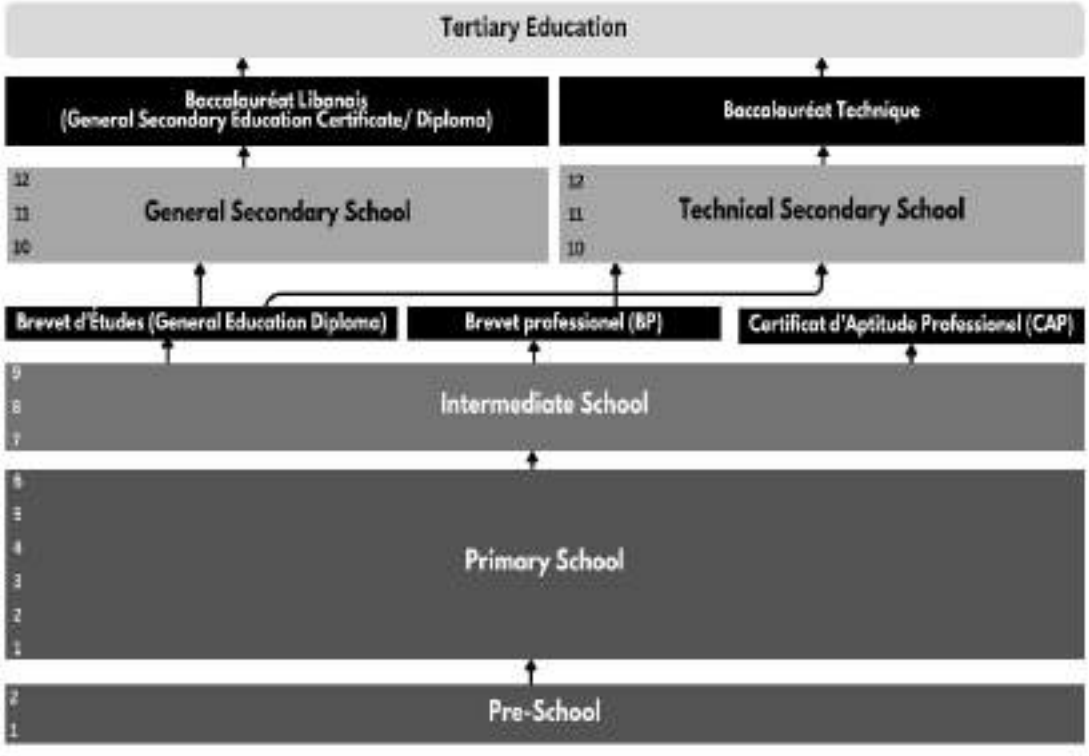

Figure 29.1 Structure of the School Education System in Lebanon

Source: *Adapted and redrawn by authors (Loo & Magaziner, 2017)*

Preschool education, often called Maternelle, focuses on developing social and cognitive skills. Most of the children widely attend it. A new project named "*Towards Early Childhood Education by 2030 for all Children in Lebanon*" has been initiated for 3 to 5-year-olds to promote equitable access to early childhood education for Syrian refugees (British Academy, 2022). Preschool education is divided into nursery schools (3-4 years) and kindergarten (4-5 years). The enrolment in Preschool education is one of the highest compared to other stages, with the inclination toward private schools. In contrast, the quality of education in public schools, especially at this stage, is negligible and uneven (Anis & Chlela, 2022).

Primary education in Lebanon starts at age six and lasts six years. After completing Primary education, students move to Intermediate education, which includes grades 7 to 9.

Lower and upper secondary education have nominal durations of three years. The two cycles of Secondary education are termed Brevet and Baccalaureate. After grade 9 and the end of cycle 3, filtration is introduced through examination, i.e., Brevet and Baccalaureate (Al-Hroub, 2022).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training are often the parallel options after cycle three and are included in formal education. According to the current regulations, after completing primary education, students have the opportunity to pursue vocational education, which offers two distinct pathways: a two-year course leading to the attainment of the CAP (vocational training certificate), and after CAP, students can further advance their vocational skills by enrolling in a two-year post-CAP program, to the BP (vocational certificate). A student who has completed two years of lower secondary education is also eligible to enter vocational education and attend a two-year course leading to the BP. After completing lower secondary education, students have the option to either move to general secondary education or pursue FPM (advanced vocational training diploma), now referred to as the Baccalauréat Professionnel (vocational baccalaureate diploma) (ETF, 1999). Table 29.1 presents the levels of school education, age bracket, cycle, etc.

Table 29.1 Structure of the Education System of Lebanon

School education level	Age bracket	Cycle and Grade	Compulsory/ Optional
Preschool Education	3-5 years	-	Not Compulsory
Basic Education Primary Education Intermediate Education	6-14 years	Cycle 1: Grades 1 to 3 Cycle 2: Grades 4 to 6 Cycle 3: Grades 7 to 9	Compulsory for all
Secondary education	15-18 years	Cycle 4: Grades 10-12	Optional
Vocation education: Technical Secondary Education	15-18 years	Grades 10-12	Optional

Source: *Compiled by authors (Mullis et al., 2016; Scholaro database, 2024)*

The language of instruction in primary and secondary education is Arabic. French and English are taught from primary school onwards. In compliance with the Lebanese Education Act, math and physics/chemistry subjects are taught in French or English (Nuffic, 2016).

Further, to create a sustainable and inclusive learning environment for children with special needs (CwSN), in 2023, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon, with support from the European Union and in collaboration with the Centre for Educational Research and

Development and UNICEF, launched the National Policy on Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs. The policy covers formal and informal education institutions and kindergarten to grade 12 across all regions. The policy ensures that all CwSN can attend, learn, and participate in their school. To ensure sustainable change and foster inclusivity, this policy focuses on four strategic goals, i.e., establish enabling environments for inclusive education implementation, increase public support for inclusive education, create and strengthen inclusive and accessible education services, and develop systems and structures to measure and monitor inclusive education implementation (MEHE et al., 2023).

Curricular Framework

The Lebanese national curriculum implies the education framework adopted in schools. Lebanon is known for its diverse and complicated education system, which often changes with the changing diversity and impacts the school education curriculum.

The Lebanese national curriculum is taught at both public and private schools. Arabic is the primary language, and French is taught in many schools, especially private schools. The education system offers many subjects, and private schools offer more subject options than public schools. Religious education has been an important part of the curriculum.

As per Lebanese law, the curriculum should be updated every four years, but it has not been updated due to disagreements over history and historical events (Fahd & Dahlia, 2023). However, a few steps have been undertaken under the Curriculum Development project.

The key goals of education in Lebanon are promoting academic excellence, proficiency in multiple languages, respect for religious and cultural understanding, and development of critical thinking, along with the emphasis on character development and values. Lebanese education is trapped in addressing political instability, lack of resources, and social disparities. The curriculum aims to develop individuals at the intellectual, social, and national levels to meet the goals and address the challenges. The subjects at different levels of schooling are given in Table 29.2.

At the Primary level, the curricular goals are developing foundational skills, language development, cultural awareness, and moral and ethical values. At the intermediate level, the curricular focus shifts to advanced skills, language proficiency, and an expanded curriculum. Finally, at the secondary level, curricular goals are preparation for higher education, deeper exploration, and vocational preparation.

Table 29.2 School Education Level and Focus Areas

School Education levels	Focus Areas/Subjects
Preschool	Focuses on developing basic social and cognitive skills
Primary	Arabic, English, French, Science, Math, Social studies, and Physical Education
Intermediate	Expansion of Primary education with a focus on specialised subjects
Secondary	Specialised subjects: science, economics, humanities

Source: *Compiled by authors (Mullis et al., 2016; Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2017)*

Pre-school education is the primary phase of compulsory education. It emphasises social interaction, play, and skill development. Students are given opportunities to develop, express themselves, and engage in collective activities in class and on the playground. Guided activities are planned to give a coherent experience, and free plays are conducted under the guidance of teachers and psycho-socialists.

Basic education: Grades 1 to 9 follow a common standard curriculum. The candidates are taught Arabic, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, civics, and history. The science subjects and maths are taught and examined in English or French, while the others are evaluated in Arabic (Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2017).

Secondary education: Grade 10 has a common curriculum, while grade 11 students are streamed into science-intensive and non-science-intensive curricula. 12^{th} class includes four tracks: general science, life science, sociology and economics, philosophy and literature (Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2017).

The combination of subjects changes with the level of education and school management. It changes with time, educational policies, school management, and regions. The students also get the opportunity to select varied subjects. However, generally, the subjects taught are:

- The **Core** subjects include Arabic language, Mathematics, Science, Social science, religious education, physical education, and French language. These are mandatory subjects that provide students with a foundational education.
- The **Elective** subjects include foreign languages (German, Spanish), additional sciences, humanities (sociology, psychology), economics, art and drama, technical courses, etc. Students can select these subjects based on their interests.

- **Optional** subjects include arts and music, physical education, advanced foreign languages, computer science, courses related to specific career paths, etc. These subjects are offered in secondary education in the upper grades.

Time allocation for different subjects varies with school, grade, programme type, etc. Pre-school education includes a few daily hours focusing on play, art, and other activities. The maximum number of periods is 30 per week and 6 per day. The duration of each period is a minimum of 45 minutes.

- Arabic language: 10-12 periods per week
- English Language, science, social studies, physical education: 2-3 periods per week
- French Language, Mathematics: 6-8 periods per week
- Art and Music: 1-2 periods per week

Certain schools also reserve periods for teaching religion.

Intermediate Education:

- Arabic language, Mathematics: 6-8 periods per week
- French language: 4-6 periods per week
- English language, Science, social sciences: 3-4 periods per week
- Arts and music, moral education: 1-2 periods per week

The objective is to introduce students to information technology, science knowledge, professional activities, etc.

Secondary Education: Students can follow one of the three tracks: Scientific Track, Literacy Track, or Vocational Track

However, the major emphasis is on the Arabic language, mathematics, science, and so on, though several others are also included.

The national curriculum for K-12 was formulated in 1997, wherein different subject levels and grade levels of educational objectives are defined. However, it failed to achieve its goal due to a lack of appropriate assessment and pedagogical approaches. The curriculum also guides the formulation of textbooks. The textbooks still need to be updated, and no recent reviews have been undertaken to update them since their original publications (MEHE, 2021b). The curriculum is often criticised because it focuses on rote learning and knowledge retention instead of skills and competencies. Creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving seem lost somewhere, and memorisation is stressed.

The Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) is responsible for curriculum development and reforms. In 2021, the Curricula Higher Committee (CHC) was constituted. The CHC approved the curriculum work plans, and SOPs were formulated. The entire purpose behind this reform is to promote 21st-century skills and provide learners with knowledge, skills, and values. It is comprehensive, including student learning outcomes and the scope for skills and content across subjects and grade levels. The change in curriculum is expected to address the implementation of societal values in pedagogical practices.

The CERD and Joint Academic Department (JAD) created a National Framework for Learner Assessment and a 21st-century competencies list. It has also undertaken literacy and numeracy programs and other learning support initiatives. One of the exciting aspects of the new curriculum is the inclusion of social and emotional learning at every stage of education (MEHE, 2021b). Under Priority Area No. 5-Curriculum reforms and learning assessment of Pillar 2 in Lebanon's five-year General Education Plan (2021-2025), two programs have been introduced focusing on:

- Curriculum reforms, along with revised assessments with a specific focus on student life skills and inclusive citizenship
- Through language proficiency, improvement in learning outcomes of students

The curricular reforms are introduced to equip learners with leadership, decision-making, collaborative, and cooperative planning competencies. They aim to prepare lifelong learners for the evolving world with 21st-century skills. The reforms also provide social, academic, and emotional competencies to help them advance the development ladder.

According to the World Bank report (2021), the need of the hour is to follow the reform approach with a commitment to a new curriculum framework, setting up ambitious reading targets, and supporting schools and students in meeting the goals. Cross-collaboration is a step to achieving such targets. There is a need to update the curriculum through the development of new textbooks and new teaching-learning materials to help achieve the desired proficiencies.

Teaching Learning

The teaching-learning process in Lebanon is teacher-centred traditional pedagogy. Emphasis is on conventional lectures, watering down constructivist learning and limiting the development of higher-order thinking (Abouchedid, 2020). The student-centred active learning and collaboration among students are rare (World Bank Group & MEHE, 2021).

Priority area-4 of piller-2 of Lebanon's five-year General Education Plan 2021-2025 emphasises improved teaching and workforce management to ensure that good instruction leads to effective learning.

Taking a step forward, LERSAP (2011) focussed on employing ICT tools in education to enhance learners' cognitive development, creativity, citizenship, etc. (Awada & Diab, 2016). It was also launched to provide teachers with expertise and competencies. However, more technology integration in schools is needed (Zgheib, 2013). Private schools were well funded and well equipped, and ICT was integrated into the curriculum, while public schools needed to be better equipped, staff trained and upgraded (Nasseer, 2008). Access to technology is better in urban than rural areas, creating the digital divide (Nassif & Zakharaia, 2017).

Awada & Diab (2016) asserted the positive effect of ICT and Wiki, Google Drive, Web Quest, etc., in improving teachers' pedagogical practices. However, after the COVID pandemic, technology integration has been a growing trend, and many efforts have been undertaken to integrate technologies in the classroom, such as the use of digital resources (E-books, online libraries), Smart classrooms (Interactive whiteboards, educational software), etc. Many schools also provide training to teachers as a professional development opportunity.

Learning Assessment

The education system uses a combination of assessment techniques in different forms. Continuous assessments are undertaken through quizzes, tests, projects, etc., to assess students' understanding of learning material. Mid-term and final examinations include study material taught during the semester or academic year. Students also undergo standardised tests for the Lebanese Baccalaureate and other external assessments. Formative and summative assessments are used throughout the year to help provide feedback to students and teachers. The formative assessment includes aims WEBPlus and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) (Mt. Lebanon school district, 2023)

In 2019, the National Student Learning Assessment Framework was implemented for private and public schools. Under this framework, students were assessed through tests, formative assessment, ongoing assessment, and end-of-year assessment (Cambridge, 2019).

During the pandemic, a variety of methods, such as quizzes, reports, and tests, were used for assessment, and grading was assigned accordingly at the Intermediate level (Ghabash, 2022)

Health and Physical Education

Physical education has been integrated into Lebanon's education system. The integration of physical education can be studied in two different time frames – 1934 to 1953 and 1953 to 1997 (Saad & Delsahut, 2021). The emphasis on physical education from 1934 to 1953 was instituted by the French protectorate primarily for hygiene. As was mandated in all the colonised countries, there was an attempt to integrate physical education into schools through games and exercises. With the principle of “a healthy mind in a healthy body”, the physical education curricula were designed as those of French curricula. They included simple walking, group exercise, gymnastics, breathing

exercises, and movements and posture-related exercises. However, due to the descriptive nature of its content, i.e., different ages, body built, stamina, etc., it was not integrated as a full-fledged teaching subject.

After Lebanon gained independence, the importance of physical education was acknowledged to shape healthy bodies, which may lead to a physically and morally healthy generation. The 1946 reform added two hours of physical education per week. However, the curriculum did not lay down any organised content other than the list of exercises. The reformed education system was modelled entirely on the French system, which inculcated physical education without the need for equipment, which also supported Lebanon's lack of adequate resources and infrastructure. Later, the development of the sports movement and its impact on the country's prestige called for the integration of formal sports curricula in the school education system.

As a result, the 1962 resolution redefined the role of teachers and their hierarchy in sports education, the teaching ways and means were set, and the human and physical environment were defined. Departing from the previous free-hand movement leading to a fit body, the resolution placed physical education as a means of engaging in sports. Over some time, due to the political turmoil based on religion and clan, the education system suffered severe setbacks, including sports education. Additionally, physical education teachers were often burdened with additional logistic and administrative work, highlighting the relatively less importance placed on physical education. Lebanon's physical education system is still struggling to establish an identity of its own as a formal teaching and research subject (Saad & Delsahut, 2021).

Skills Education

The first vocational school in Lebanon was established in 1863 by a Western religious mission (Karam, 2006). Since then, the Lebanese education system has adopted vocational and technical education (VTE) through reforms in different years – 1970s, 1993, and 1999 (Karam, 2006). The VTE is governed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) through the Directorate General of VTE (DGVTE). VTEs are carried by both the public and private sectors. The VTE was reframed in 2000, with the present structure consisting of three levels.

- The first level includes two phases leading to *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP) followed by a Brevet Professionnel (BP).
- The second level is for those who have completed their BP. It is a three-year vocational and technical secondary education program with two tracks: the Technical Baccalaureate (BT) and the Technical Secondary Diploma-Dual System (SD).

- Finally, the third level is vocational and technical higher education. It is a three-year framework that leads to a Techniciens Superior (TS) degree, followed by a two-year framework leading to the Licence Technique (LT) and the Licence d′Enseignement Technique (LET) (Mneimneh, 2010).

Despite its formal structure, the VTE has high dropout and repetition rates. In addition, like the GE, it lacks proper integration and procedures for students with special needs. One of the major drawbacks has been the weak linkage with the labour market and the need for more career guidance among students (Mneimneh, 2010).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Art education was integrated into the curriculum during the educational reform of 1997. The new curriculum focused on various fine arts classes, such as music, drawing, and theatre, from the kindergarten level to the final year of high school (Zeineddine, 2021). However, arts are often placed as low priority compared to science and foreign languages. Due to various non-academic reasons, art teachers are distributed according to living and housing conditions rather than the requirements of schools. Therefore, there is often an uneven distribution of arts teachers based on region.

The teachers recruited for music, theatre, and drawing are not specialists in their field but specialise in other education subjects. Different nomenclatures are used for arts subjects such as ‘art education’, ‘music education’, ‘theatre education’, ‘various arts and activities’, etc., leading to difficulty in managing art education in Lebanon.

Also, there is a vast difference in art education in private and public schools. Private schools are better than public schools in hiring an adequate number of art teachers, resulting in a better quality of arts education. The administration depends on the school's director rather than being governed by mandatory education rules. The official examination rules also include subjects like arts and sports from the formal assessment procedure. This reflects the secondary importance placed on such subjects in the school curriculum.

Standardisation is needed in the pedagogy of art education in schools. Some schools undertake only drawing and music; some include drawing, music, and theatre, while some add additional components of folklore, handicraft, and dance. Several schools consider art ‘rest periods’ and often replace them with science or foreign language classes.

There is no formal life skills education programme in the curriculum. The Lebanese educational system focuses solely on academic subjects, ignoring vital life skills necessary for personal growth, such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, leadership, goal-setting, and

presentation (Crossing Borders, 2019). Life skills programs have not been introduced in the educational system of any Arab country, including Lebanon (Maddah et al., 2021). Some schools incorporate such life skills in their teaching practices. However, such practices are informal and ad hoc and vary from school to school. There is no assessment for the same, nor are any credits allotted.

Peace and Happiness Education

The curriculum focuses on mathematics, science, literature, and languages, particularly academic achievement. Formal inclusion of subjects related to peace, happiness, and well-being is yet to find a place in the curriculum framework. Efforts have been made by civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and educators to introduce peace and conflict resolution education informally. These initiatives often occur through extracurricular activities, workshops, and programmes conducted in schools and communities. Since they are not formally included in the education system, no standard assessment pattern or credit is assigned to such subjects.

The Violence Free Schools (VFS) initiative was launched in 2014 as part of UNDP's Peacebuilding work. It aims to promote peace education and social stability through formal education. The initiative implements various activities, such as sensitisation, training, creating working groups, developing a code of conduct for nonviolence, and identifying soft and hard activities (Akar, 2021).

Moral, Social, and Cultural Education

Lebanese society emphasises the importance of moral values (Soussan, 2020). Several schools foster the idea of value systems and character building. There is, however, no comprehensive curriculum that addresses this aspect of human development. Although the new education curriculum of Lebanon mentions value and personality development, there is a lack of concrete policies defining the integration of value education within the curriculum and the specific activities through which values can be inculcated (Hassan & Kahil, 2005). However, different schools, organisations, and NGOs are working towards incorporating the Living Value Education Program (LVEP) from the KG2 level in schools (Kahil & Gabarra, 2017).

Summary and Conclusion

Formal education in Lebanon starts with preschool (ages 3-5), which is not compulsory. Primary and intermediate education is compulsory for all children between 6 and 14. Secondary education is widely available for students who wish to pursue further studies. The general education system serves vocational and technical education after intermediate education.

Lebanon has a standard national curriculum overseen by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which ensures consistency across educational institutions. This framework is carefully

developed and implemented to align with the country's educational objectives and global standards. The curriculum at primary and intermediate levels typically includes a range of subjects, including languages (Arabic, French, English), mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, civics, and history. At the secondary level, specialised streams like science, economics, and humanities are taught in the school. The medium of instruction at the primary and secondary levels is Arabic, except for science and mathematics subjects. However, education emphasises multilingualism, with French and English taught from primary school onwards to build proficiency in multiple languages.

Students-centred and innovative pedagogy is limitedly used to transact the curricular subject. Continuous assessment is a formative assessment, and mid-term and final examinations are summative assessments that assess the student's learning outcomes.

Health and physical education are integral components of the curriculum. However, physical education has encountered many challenges, such as teachers being overloaded with administrative tasks, school education being influenced by political turmoil rooted in religion and clan affiliations, etc. Vocational technical education provides the scope for skill development among young people through three distinctive degrees.

General education does not mention hobby education in school, but art education contributes to students' personal growth and interests. Lebanon encourages students to explore hobbies, artistic pursuits, and recreational activities by studying arts subjects like music, theatre, and drawing. The educational system focuses solely on academic subjects, ignoring life skills development among school children. There is no formal inclusion of peace, happiness, and well-being subjects.

Schools foster the idea of value systems and character building. However, no concrete policy defines such integration of value systems within the education curriculum.

The education system in Lebanon is characterised by a combination of public and private schools, providing options for students from diverse backgrounds. Private schools' education is better than public schools in terms of enrolment, integration of ICT in education, and life skill development.

Holistic development and the inclusion of essential skills are necessary in today's rapidly changing society. However, school curricula do not focus on student-centred pedagogies, life skill development, hobby development, or peace and happiness education. There is a need for a comprehensive curricular framework that prepares students academically, fosters their personal growth, and prepares them to be active, engaged, skilled, and peace-making citizens.

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Education for A Global Mindset: Saudi Arabia

Wajda Tabassum

Abstract

This chapter navigates the educational landscapes of Saudi Arabia through a systematic lens. The chapter discusses how the country's educational system evolved in the 21st century and is intricately woven with its traditional fabrics. Saudi Arabia is undergoing rapid economic development, catalysing a significant transformation of educational policy and practice. Through its Vision 2030, the country desires to develop a knowledgeable and skilled workforce to help nation-building and prosperity. This chapter analyses educational policy and structural and curricular reforms, including teaching learning and learning assessments and other associated issues. The Ministry of Education centrally designs textbooks, curricula, examinations, assessments, educational policies, and practices. The Saudi government's Vision 2030 is the guiding policy to reform education through modernising school curricula to encourage critical thinking, inspire scientific temperament, and invoke technological advancements. The focus here is to create a knowledge-based economy and ensure that Saudi youth are educationally equipped for the job market of the 21st century.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030, organisational structure, religious education, national curriculum, national assessment framework.

Introduction

The modern state of Saudi Arabia dates back to 1902, when young Abdulaziz, with few followers, led a night march into Riyadh to conquer the Masmak Fortress. He established Riyadh as his headquarters. Abdulaziz captured the entire Hijaz, including Makkah and Madinah, from 1924 to 1925. He thus united warring tribes into one nation. On September 23, 1932, the country was named the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an Islamic state with Arabic as its national language and the Holy Qur'an as its constitution.

The history of Saudi Arabia is one of the oldest in the world. Before the advent of Islam, numerous tribes and clans ruled over the Arabian land. It was an important international trade route and a remarkable site of cultural manifestations. Islam became the world's second-largest religion under the prophet Mohammed (pbuh) in 610 AD. The Islamic rule unified many of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, leading to a single Arab Muslim religious polity.

Saudi Arabia is the largest country in Arabia, bordering the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. It has a territory of over 2.15 million km. Its 4,415 km border is shared with "Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait to the north; by the Persian Gulf, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman to the east; by a portion of Oman to the southeast; by Yemen to the south and southwest; and by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west" (Teitelbaum et al., 2024, Land). It has a 2,640 km long coastline along the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea allows for efficient shipping, especially of crude oil, through the Persian Gulf and Suez Canal.

Saudi Arabia's geography is diverse, with forests, grasslands, mountain ranges and deserts. Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 administrative units. The population is mainly concentrated around central Hejaz, Asir, central Najd, and near the Persian Gulf. Riyadh is the country's capital and political headquarters. The two important cities- Macca and Madina- are religious and are considered the holiest places for Muslims worldwide. The total population of Saudi Arabia was 36.95 million (2023), with a population growth rate of 1.48%; there are 123 males for every 100 females. The ethnic composition is 90% Arabs and 10% Afro-Arabs. Besides Arabs and Afro-Arabs, there is a small percentage of expatriates and employees from other countries. Arabic is the official language, and Islam is the official religion.

The origin of modern-day Saudi Arabia dates back to 1932. The discovery of huge oil reserves in 1938 miraculously changed the country's fate. It not only brought economic prosperity to the region but also led to the domination of the state in international politics and policies. The discovery of oil accelerated the pace of development for the country in a very short time. The massive exports of oil reserves led to the development of multiple projects in the country. The new economic boom led to many technological advancements and drastic transportation, infrastructure, and communications improvements. It led to Saudi giving its citizens a lifestyle at par with any developed country in a substantially low time. Saudi Arabia has a robust economy with a GDP of USD1.11 trillion (World Bank, 2022) and a per capita GDP of USD30,447.9. The GDP growth rate is 8.7% annually. The unemployment rate is 4.4.%. The HDI value of Saudi Arabia is 0.875; on the Happiness Index, it stands at 28th rank with 6.38 points against the world average of 5.59 points. Its peace and quality of life indices are 119 and 155.1.

Saudi Arabia achieved universal literacy (99.38% literacy rate in 2021). The GER and NER are 118% (2019) and 95% (2018), respectively. It ranked 64th in the 2018 PISA ranking with a value of 387. The formal primary schooling system began in the 1930s by the nation's founder, King Abdulaziz. Saudi Arabia has 38,150 schools with about 6.4 million students in 2019 and 533,980 teachers.

Educational Policy

In a very short time, Saudi Arabia achieved a milestone in educational transformation. Within two decades, Saudi Arabia has more students attending every level, more female enrollment, and more students completing their education. “The first education system appeared in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the establishment of the Directorate of Knowledge in 1926, which is considered as laying the foundation stone for the education system in the Kingdom” (MoE, n.d.). Initially, the directorate intended to supervise educational matters in the areas of Hijaz only; however, with the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a modern state, the directorate got autonomy over educational policy in the entire kingdom. King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud established the Ministry of Education in 1952 to plan and supervise education at all levels- primary-intermediate-secondary. The ministry ensured free and compulsory education to all, irrespective of any differences (Al-Dossary, 2008). For policy implementation in higher education, the Ministry of Higher Education was constituted in 1975 to implement the Kingdom's policy in higher education. This ministry was tasked with establishing new universities, budgeting and financing higher education, and bringing scientific and technical innovation to the universities. Administrative reforms of educational administration improved drastically after 1978, with the first major curriculum reforms installed by 1982 (Roy, 1992). The budget allocation for higher education increased substantially over the years. The budget for higher education in 1971 stood at $18 million; by 1980, it was almost $2.5 billion. It rose to $38.8 billion, or 46% of the total educational budget in 1984 (Roy, 1992*)*.

Saudi Arabia issued a comprehensive educational policy document in 1969. It served as a reference source for all educational matters. Saudi Arabia’s broader educational policy revolves around two important goals - the state’s commitment to Islam and modernising Saudi society. Dissemination of Islamic knowledge is given the highest priority, and invoking scientific knowledge is highly encouraged. Arabic was chosen as the medium, and women were given equal rights to educate themselves, though in gender-segregated classrooms. The educational policies of the Kingdom, in general, aim to plan and disseminate knowledge in conformity with Islamic principles and provide basic religious education throughout the educational journey. The policy also entails that scientific teaching and learning will have an Islamic orientation and be within the dictates of Islam. Saudi Arabia, in its policy, makes it mandatory for the state to provide free and quality education to its citizens, irrespective of gender. The policy ensures that education strengthens the individual's

Islamic and Arabic identity. Education must help individuals in nation-building and developing the community.

Saudi Arabia's Vision of 2030 aims at a cross-sectoral reform agenda to create a dynamic, diverse and sustainable economy. It aims to produce a knowledge-based labour market to meet the demands of the 21st century. "In 2022, the Saudi Government allocated the equivalent of £37.5bn to education – more than any other sector" (Woodward, 2022, Para 3). Education is fundamental to transforming the country's economy from an over-reliance on oil revenues to a more balanced, investment-based model. The key objectives of the National Transformation Program (NTP) aimed at Vision 2030 are:

- "Improving recruitment, training, and development of teachers,
- Improving the learning environment to stimulate creativity and innovation,
- Improving curricula and teaching methods,
- Improving students' values and core skills,
- Development of financing methods and improvements in financial efficiency,
- Educating students to address national development requirements and labour market demands, and
- Increasing Private Sector Participation in the Education Sector" (Patalong, 2016, Para 7).

This vision holds the Ministry of Education accountable for executing the mentioned objectives and building an education system aligned with market needs and employment opportunities.

Structure of the Education System

The educational system in Saudi Arabia is managed by three organisations: the Ministry of Education, the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), and the Ministry of Higher Education. In 2015, King Salman bin Abdulaziz ordered to merge the Ministries of Education and Higher Education under the Ministry of Education. Several ministries and public entities control particular kinds of institutions, such as those run by the Ministry of Health and Defence (Al-Dossary, 2008). The Ministry of Education, as a primary educational body (Figure 30.1), is responsible for establishing new schools and maintaining old ones, providing and developing curricula, establishing in-service training programmes for teachers, and providing adult education literacy. The Ministry of Education manages 51.4% of schools in Saudi Arabia. Besides that, the ministry also manages 3.4% of the general presidency and 6% of other public institutions. The Supreme Committee for Educational Policy, founded in 1962, is the highest authority overseeing the country's education system.

Figure 30.1 Organisational Structure of the Education System in Saudi Arabia

Source: *Algraini (2017)*

"The general education in Saudi Arabia consists of kindergarten, six years of primary school, and three years of intermediate and high school. After elementary and intermediate school, students can choose whether to attend a high school with commerce, the arts and sciences programs, or a vocational school" (Embassy KSA, n.d., Education). Children aged 3-5 go to kindergarten. Attending a kindergarten is not compulsory throughout the kingdom or a prerequisite to attending a primary school. It is to facilitate students' smooth transition to primary school. Elementary education starts for children aged from 6-11 years. Elementary education lasts for six years. In this six-year course, thirty-four hours per week lasts five years and twenty-four hours per week the first year (Trial & Winder, 1950). After primary school, students enter intermediate (ages 13 – 15) school and then secondary (ages 16 – 18) school (Figure 30.2).

"Secondary education comprises a further three years of study (grades 10 to 12) and is offered in different specialised streams: general, religious, and technical-vocational" (AllahMorad & Zreik, 2020). The span for higher education is four years in the case of humanities and social sciences and five to six years in medical, engineering, or pharmacy.

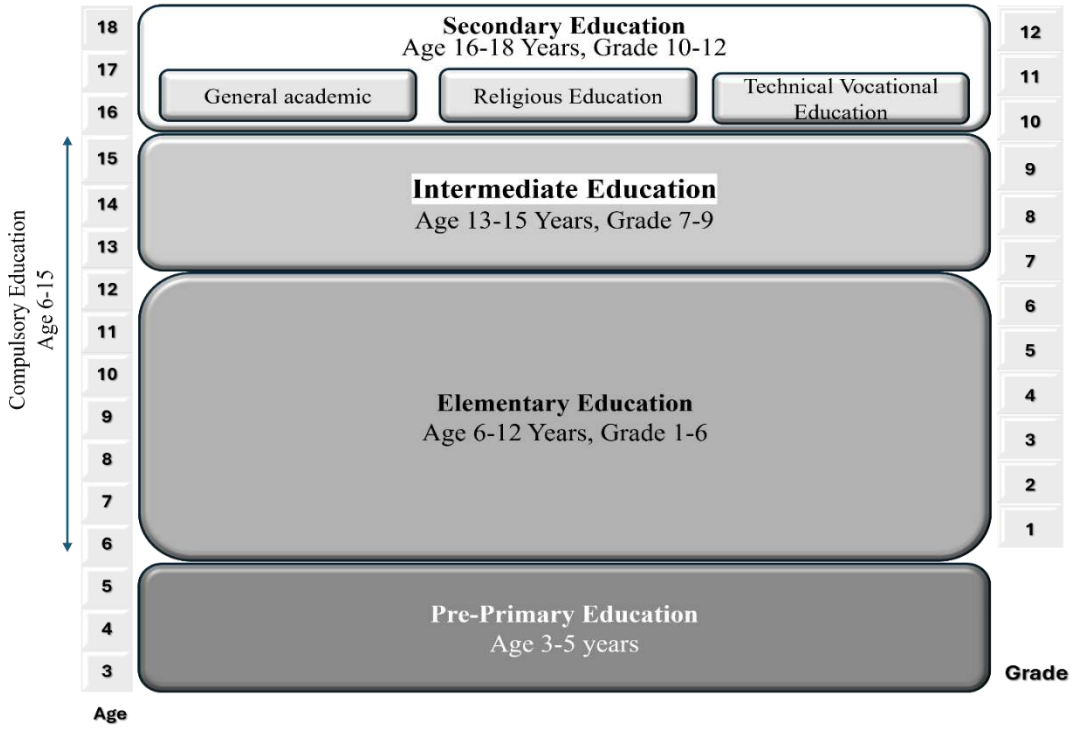
Curricular Framework

The curriculum's focus has shifted from rote memorisation of facts towards developing higher-order critical thinking and learning. The Ministry of Education has been the primary organisation for developing textbooks and other curriculum materials. In 2007, the Ministry of Education established Tatweer for Education as an executive arm of the ministry and tasked it with producing most textbooks and other resources. "Saudi Arabia's national curriculum remains strongly textbook-

centred but has been updated continuously to integrate modern learning concepts" (OECD, 2020, p. 123). Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 puts education as a priority in order to create a knowledge-based society that would serve 21st-century needs. This called for policy reforms to revise the curriculum to make it more relevant, encourage critical thinking and be based on scientific methods.

Figure 30.2 Structure of the Education System in Saudi Arabia

Source: *AllahMorad & Zreik, 2020 (Adapted by Author)*



The goal of the national curriculum in Saudi Arabia revolves around three basic principles: 1) Islamic education, 2) national identity, and 3) the international mindset (MoE, 2018). The idea is to translate concrete practices embedded in the early learning curriculum.

There are nursery schools for children aged one to three. Kindergarten schools enrol children three years before primary school. Private schools were the first to offer kindergarten education. In 1987, with the assistance of UNESCO and the General Presidency, a team of specialists developed a new curriculum for the kindergarten stage. Subsequently, the Presidency established four training institutions in four regions of the country to train workers in the field of kindergarten education

(Dakhiel, 2017, p. 73). The school curriculum in Saudi Arabia offers a variety of subjects like mathematics, science, literature, history, Arabic and Islam.

At the Primary level, subjects offered include Mathematics, history, Islamic education, fine arts, geography, science, Arabic language, home economics and physical education.

At the intermediate level, the curriculum includes Mathematics, Arabic, religious education, history, art education, science, English, home economics (for girls), geography, and physical education (for boys). Students leave with a certificate called *Shahadat Al-Kafa'at AlMutawassita*" (Dakhiel, 2017, p. 73).

There are three types of intermediate schools: i) General Intermediate, ii) Religious Intermediate Schools (*MutawassitaThafiz Quran*), iii) an Intermediate Education Institute (*Al-Maahed Al-Elmiya Al-Mutawassita*). At the secondary stage, three types of schools offer different courses to students. These are i) General Secondary Schools, ii) Religious Secondary Schools, and iii) Vocational and technical secondary education and training.

Generally, secondary schools' curriculum for "the first year, there is a single curriculum for all the students. Students focus on literary or scientific fields in the second and third years. First-year curriculum: Mathematics, Arabic studies, science, English, Islamic studies, home economics is for girls only, social studies and physical education are for boys only" (WEN, 2024). Students focus on literary or scientific fields in the second and third years. For religious secondary schools, the curriculum emphasises Arabic and Islamic education. Additional subjects taught to them are English, Arabic, literature, history, general culture, and geography.

Technical and Vocational Secondary Education offers three distinct streams – i) technical and vocational, ii) Agriculture Branch, and iii) Commercial Branch.

- In the Technical and Vocational specialisation, subjects offered are metal mechanics, architectural drawing, television and radio, auto mechanics, machine mechanics, and electricity. In addition to technical subjects, physical education, Arabic studies, physics, mathematics, religious education, chemistry, and English are also taught.
- For the Agriculture branch, subjects offered are applied mathematics, horticulture, agricultural economics, applied biology, Arabic, agronomy, applied physics, marketing, animal husbandry, religious education, applied chemistry, English, plant nutrition, applied physics, and farm management.
- In the Commercial branch, English, general mathematics, Arabic, economics, bookkeeping and accounting, geography, commercial correspondence, religious studies, management and secretarial, and financial mathematics are taught (WEN, 2024).

Private schools offer more subjects than these, such as higher levels of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), computer, physical education (for girls), and sometimes French; however, private schools are prohibited from issuing graduation certificates at any point in the educational process (Dakhiel, 2017). After the third year, the Ministry of Education conducts unified exams. These exams are major events for students as they decide future courses of action.

The school year is split into two semesters. The educational syllabus is allocated to these semesters, and two internal exams determine advancement from one grade to the next in each grade after each semester. The school administers the exams in every grade until the second semester of the final year of secondary school. The Ministry of Education administers the exam, which is uniform across all schools in Saudi Arabia. "Saudi Arabia does not have an upper secondary certification examination. Such an exam used to be administered but was discontinued to increase completion rates. Saudi Arabia has two national examinations, the General Aptitude Test (GAT) and the Scholastic Achievement Admission Test (SAAT). They are administered starting in Grade 11 and help select students to enter higher education institutions" (OECD, 2020, p. 130).

Since curriculum design and development is highly centralised in Saudi Arabia, it has major limitations. Al-Sadan (1997) pointed out a dearth of attractive textbooks and materials. The rigidity of the official curriculum and the system discourages the development of innovative teacher-made materials and using local resources. Also, teachers need training in materials development techniques (Al-Sadan, 1997, p. 239). In the last 20 years, national school textbooks have been continually updated to include more modern concepts and student-centred approaches. With each update, the aim has shifted education away from solely memorising facts and towards fostering higher-order thinking skills and practical knowledge. The Ministry of Education has previously been responsible for creating textbooks and other curriculum materials, such as teacher resources, student workbooks, sample tests, and quizzes. In 2007, Tatweer for Education (Tatweer), established as an executive arm of the MoE, assumed responsibility for producing textbooks and other resources (OECD, 2020, p. 123). Adopting open educational resources (OER) would be a great solution to the challenge of Saudi Arabia's education system.

Teaching Learning

Ministry of Education sets the national curriculum. National Education Policy (1969) directs that central learning system as the basis for developing and managing the country's learning methodologies. Despite efforts to modernise teaching and learning, classroom practices in Saudi Arabia remain very traditional (OECD, 2020). Many schools focus on memorising facts to pass tests instead of promoting deep learning (Alhareth & Dighrir, 2014). Classroom practice is primarily

teacher-led lectures with students taking notes and not encouraged to be critical, reflective learners (OECD, 2020, p. 125).

The 5th (1990–1995) and the 6th Saudi National Development Plan (1996–2000) made ICT integration more visible within the Saudi education system. The practice became visible with the introduction of computer science as an elective course in primary education and as a compulsory course in secondary education…, and the Tatweer project (2007–2023), which aimed to reform educational outcomes through greater integration of technology in public school contexts (Alghamdi & Holland, 2020). Computer science was introduced at the secondary level in 2000 (Embassy, KSA, n.d.).

Abdullah's (2020) study concluded that most participants followed a teacher-centred philosophy of education because that was the only philosophy to which they had been exposed. There was a modelling effect. Prophet Mohammed is the ideal model. As a result, most of the participants utilised traditional teaching methods. She further argued that for every education component being centralised, teachers are neither free nor adventurous enough to move out of the traditional teacher-centric approach. Teachers in Saudi Arabia are primarily seen as instructors whose job is to transfer knowledge documented in the textbook developed and prescribed by the government. "However, based on the goals the KSA has set for cultural and educational growth in the country, traditional teaching methods based on teacher-centred philosophies will not help to build a society ready to rise and enact the change outlined in the KSA's Vision 2030. Consequently, an explanation is given for why SRP would be a viable option for the KSA" (Abdullah, 2020, p.5).

The academic year should have at least 180 instructional days and eight weeks for summer vacation (Saudi Gazette report, 2024).

Learning Assessment

Summative assessment is prominently followed in Saudi Arabian education (OECD, 2020). Teachers record individual student's achievements in their classroom grade books and prepare report cards to be shared regularly. This practice of assessment is traditionally followed and well-monitored by school authorities.

Formative assessment has gained recent attention due to major drawbacks in summative assessment. "The lack of a national assessment framework in Saudi Arabia and the strong culture of testing has created a situation in which a great deal of predominantly summative assessment occurs without alignment or a clear sense of the educational purpose behind the assessments" (OECD, 2020, p. 141). Examination as a method of assessment is often questioned over its reliability. The approach to student examination is identical in secondary, intermediate and primary

schools (Alsadaawi, 2010). Teachers receive no exam guidance; exam details are not included in the textbooks. The primary and secondary education system consists of nine grades.

Each academic year is divided into two terms, with each term accounting for 50% of the final grade. The grading system for all assessments is as follows (Table 30.1):

Table 30.1 Grading and their Numerical Values

Grading	Numerical Value
Excellent	90 and above
Very Good	75 to 89
Good	60 to 74
Fair	50 to 59
Fail	49 and below

Source: *Alhareth & Dighrir, 2014*

The school's periodic assessments, which make up 30% of the total marks, are ongoing evaluations within the classroom; in the primary stage, which includes first and second grades, final exams are conducted verbally, except for science and mathematics, which are assessed through written exams. For fourth and fifth-grade students, evaluations are done through continuous assessments. Moving on to the secondary stage, a minimum pass mark of 40% is required for science and social subjects, while the pass mark is 50% for other subjects. At the intermediate level, students undergo internal school exams consisting of written and oral assessments. The written assessments encompass structured oral tests, essays, and multiple-choice questions (Linn, 2008).

In Saudi Arabia, there is a thorough setup for national evaluations, national tests, and classroom assessments. However, coordination among them is lacking. According to the OECD (2020), a clear National Assessment Framework that outlines the purpose, methods, and connection between classroom assessments, national assessments, and examinations is recommended. Saudi Arabia's first step should be to review the assessment principles within the national curriculum framework.

Health and Physical Education

In Saudi Arabia, the curriculum goes beyond simply including physical education as a standalone subject. Instead, it focuses on integrating health and fitness education into various aspects of the curriculum. This approach ensures that students learn about physical activity and sports and develop a holistic understanding of health and well-being.

The Ministry of Education recognised that the physical education curriculum needed to be changed and that a specialised physical education/activity policy was required to consider each student's or

child's level of development, health, and potential for good. The Saudi Ministry of Education has extended the Physical Education (PE) curriculum to all levels of education. This change impacts over 5 million students. While international and some private schools already offer PE, public schools, especially girls' schools, face deficits. Since most Saudi students attend public schools, ensuring effective PE programs is crucial to combat obesity.

Aljaaly (2017) asserts that about 71% of Saudi children and teens do not meet the minimum requirements for physical exercise. Girls do not do as many sports, exercises, and other physical tasks as boys do. To achieve this goal, Saudi universities should introduce PE/Physical Activity (PA) majors, equipping educators and specialists to address children's physical development across all age groups, focusing on ages 0–8. (Alharbi, 2021). Recognising the situation's urgency, the Ministry has also introduced immediate solutions to facilitate early PE integration. These include offering a one-year diploma course for educators, partnering with sports development and rehabilitation companies, and conducting regular workshops for early childhood teachers on effective PE instruction. As for credits, the health and fitness education program in Saudi Arabia is typically a non-credit program. However, the importance of health and fitness education is widely recognised, and its successful completion is acknowledged and appreciated during the overall evaluation of a student's performance.

Skills Education

The Saudi educational system is often criticised for not preparing students with marketable skills and a capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. “Saudi Arabia has a serious shortage of skilled and qualified Saudi nationals in the labour market, especially in the private sector” (Baqadir, 2013, p. 7). However, TVET has been mentioned in the Technical and Vocational Training (TVTC) Strategy in 2008, the National Transformation Programme 2020, and Vision 2030.

TVET is a system in Saudi Arabia that gives students the skills they need to help the country's economy grow and stay strong. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's government body oversees technical and vocational training. Its goal is to train and qualify the national workforce in technical and vocational areas to meet the job market's needs in terms of quantity and quality.

There are 52 Technical and Vocational Training Corporations for males and 36 for females offering TVET programmes at the upper secondary level (UNESCO-UNIVOC, 2019). The Technical and Vocational Training Corporation offers high school certificates and applied undergraduate programs to qualify students as technical engineers. Apart from these, they have International Technical Colleges and Strategic Partnerships Institutes. Saudi Arabia offers a three-year programme after junior secondary level. 8.4% of students are enrolled in TVET in school education. About meeting the needs of industry, UNESCO-UNIVOC reports: “Forecasting current and emerging skills

demands is a challenge. However, efforts are underway to ensure that the curricula developed meet the needs of the current and future labour markets. There is much emphasis on ensuring that the curricula consider new technologies. To further enhance the consistency of the training programmes offered to meet the industry's needs, TVTC is collaborating with various industrial partners. "These include training academies and leading Information and Communication Technology companies such as Cisco (56 academies), Oracle (18 academies), Microsoft (70 academies), Huawei (2 academies), SAP (20 academies) and Adobe (18 academies)" (UNESCO-UNIVOC, 2019, pp11-12).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Schools encourage students to find hidden skills by trying new hobbies. "The education policy states clearly that talented students should be provided with an environment conducive to developing their talents. King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology conducted the first scientific study on talented students at academic institutions in the 1990s. A few years later, the Ministry of Education set up the Department of Talented Students, which was tasked with discovering talented students and creating a proper environment for them to develop those talents" (Saudi Gazette report, 2018, Para 10).

Promoting lifelong learning opportunities is one of the strategic goals of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. Instead of stopping education at a certain age, people are now encouraged to keep learning throughout their lifetime. This can happen in adult education and continuing education classes or through self-directed learning. The Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) is responsible for developing and promoting Lifelong Learning throughout Saudi Arabia through its Lifelong Learning and Community Service Centres equipped with workshops and labs that can support lifelong learning in technical areas as well as classrooms and other facilities (AlMegren, 2011, p. 7). However, many of these efforts have failed because of a lack of qualified and motivated trainers. Most of these trainers are not properly trained or paid properly.

Though life skills education is not provided in Saudi Arabia's curriculum, the elements of life skills are found in the teaching subjects. The analysis of the English textbook for grades 4th to 6th found seventy life skills, about ten main and 25 sub-categories. However, these skills are unequal (Al Jar, 2021).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Students in Saudi Arabia are taught Islamic traditions that carry moral and social values. They receive education in a moral tradition based on clearly defined religious and cultural values (Jamjoom, 2010). The national curriculum is based on the teachings of the Quran and Islam, which

significantly emphasises moral education. “About two-thirds of school time is reserved for religion and Arabic. Religion includes learning, reading aloud and chanting suras from the Qur'an and studying tracts and traditions on prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage, belief, good morals and general conduct” (Simmons & Simmons, 1994, p. 4). Recently, Saudi Arabia announced the incorporation of arts and culture in Saudi educational curricula for all school levels. “According to Noha Qattan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture for National Partnerships, the integration of culture and arts into school and public education comes as part of a joint effort between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education. A comprehensive plan is being developed to include these subjects in all school stages, through teacher training, curriculum development, and infrastructure improvement” (Gulf News Report, 2023, para 2).

Peace and Happiness Education

Standish and Talahama (2016) examined the national curriculum of Saudi Arabia and “three elements found routinely in peace education: recognition of violence, addressing conflict nonviolently, and creating the conditions of positive peace”. In their study, they found out that “despite some content that refers to health and responsibility (Wellbeing), and love (Peace Bond), there are opportunities to strengthen the other facets identified as contributors to positive peace in future iterations of the National Curriculum of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with particular emphasis on Eco Mind, Link Mind, Social Justice, Resilience, and Prevention” (Standish & Tahama, 2016, p. 27). They also found that peace education-related content in the mandatory curriculum is minimal. The national social studies curriculum of Saudi Arabia includes the values of peace, disarmament, multiculturalism and international understanding (Almogbel, 2015).

Peace education in Saudi Arabia is indirect and muted. Mohammed (2019) elaborated on the challenges of implementing peace education programmes in Middle Eastern countries. The author flagged international initiatives in peace education but emphasised developing local knowledge and approaches that reflect Muslim culture.

Summary and Conclusion

Saudi Arabia started formal primary education in the 1930s. Since then, the kingdom has established an extensive nationwide network of schools and colleges. Education was initially limited to only affluent families; however, due to the government’s remarkable efforts, it is open to every Saudi national today. Education is compulsory for children from ages 6 to 14 (OECD, 2022). Early childhood and secondary education is optional. Education for children in the KSA includes elementary school (grade 1-6 /ages 6-12 yrs), preparatory school (grade 7-9 /ages 13-15 yrs), and secondary school (grade 10-12 /ages 16-18 yrs). Public and private universities provide higher education in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Higher Education accredits public and private universities. The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Technical and

Vocational Training Corporate (TVTC) are the major organisations that handle education in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education was set up in 1954, and in 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education was established.

Education in Saudi Arabia is highly standardised. The textbooks, curriculum, examinations, assessments, educational policies, and practices are all centrally designed by the Ministry of Education. This centrally designed educational practice is often criticised by educationists worldwide. The Ministry of Education founded Tatweer Education Holding Company to bring educational reforms to overcome this criticism. Tatweer has improved teacher training and developed the curriculum to help the Ministry of Education enhance the education system and achieve the country's development goals outlined by the Ministry of Economy and Planning. The Saudi government's 'Vision 2030' aims are reforming education. They are trying to modernise school curricula that can encourage critical thinking, inspire scientific temperament and invoke technological advancements. The focus here is to create a knowledge-based economy and ensure that Saudi youth are educationally equipped for the job market of the 21st century.

The Ministry of Education, in its goals and objectives, very clearly talks about lifelong learning, skill education, multiculturalism, physical health, and moral values, and it also discusses its efforts to bring these policies into practice. However, the pace at which these developments happen is debatable. Moreover, the efforts of the kingdom to modernise its educational system to par with global standards are highly commendable and inspiring. The kingdom is committed to working on all its educational shortcomings- gender issues, over-emphasis on Islamic studies, rote learning or a centrally designed educational system. It is now just a matter of time before Saudi Arabia will be able to establish an educational system of an international standard.

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Education for Moderate Religion and National Identity: UAE

Mrinal Mukherjee
Reshma Khatun

Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the third largest economy in the Middle East, with a GDP of US$415 billion. The Ministry of Education, with subsidiary bodies, address educational reforms. With a literacy rate of 98.13%, education in UAE follows the core values of Islam while respecting other religions. UAE has 115.83 GER in primary and 109.68 GER in lower secondary, while NERs are 99.00 and 72.70, respectively, with a praiseworthy completion rate. 'UAE Vision 2021 with aim PISA mission of National Agenda' is to develop a first-grade education system. According to the OECD, the UAE provides the most contemporary pedagogy and assessment framework for inclusive school education. The major curriculum focuses on hobbies, Life skills, Happiness, and Pre-vocational skills. UAE set a benchmark standard that aims to create 21st-century citizens.

Keywords: UAE, Dakar Framework, Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Elite Stream curriculum.

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a country in the Middle East and West Asia, is a union of seven Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, and Fujairah. Every Emirate is ruled by a different ruler, forming a Federal Supreme Council. Sheikh Mohamad bin Zayad Al Nahyan has been the President of this Supreme Council since 2023. The official religion is Islam, and the official language is Arabic.

UAE's total land area is 83,600 km^2. The cities and urban areas are mainly located along its coast. Abu Dhabi is the Capital city, and Dubai is the most populated metropolis, an epicentre of trade and

business. The UAE has three significant geographical variations: desert (almost 80% of the country), mountain (Only 2.6%), and the rest coastal and marine. It shares borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia and maritime borders in the Persian Gulf, Qatar, and Iran, consisting mostly of pebble plains and sand deserts.

The UAE's economy is the 3rd largest in the Middle East, with a GDP of US$415 billion in 2021-2023 and a GDP growth rate of 3.38% (2023). GDP per capita is $50,602 (nominal; 2023 est.) (IMF, 2023). The unemployment rate in the UAE in 2022 was 2.97%. On HDI, the UAE ranked first regionally in the 2023/2024 and 17th globally (UNDP, 2024). The UAE ranked 22nd globally in the World Happiness Report 2024, up from 26th place in 2023; it ranked second regionally. (Helliwell et al., 2024).

The population of the UAE is 9,579,487 (May 2024), with a growth rate of 0.81 per year (Worldmeter, 2024). There are 224 males per 100 females. The life expectancy in the UAE in 2023 was 78.46 years (Macrotrends, 2024a).

The Literacy rate is 98.13% (Macrotrends, 2024b). In 2020, the GER in primary education was 115.83, 109.68 GER in lower secondary, while NER was 99.00 in primary and 72.70 in secondary (UNESCO, 2024). The primary completion rate is 125, in lower Secondary, 103, while the secondary completion rate is 111.7, and the graduation completion rate is 76% (The World Bank, 2023).

ON PISA, the average performance of 15-year-olds was 432 points in science and 417 in reading. 51% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in mathematics, significantly less than on average across OECD countries (OECD average: 69%). Some 5% of UAE students were top mathematics performers; they attained Level 5 or 6 in the PISA mathematics test, about the OECD average of 9%. (OECD, 2022). The UAE had 514 schools in 2017-18 and 64,520 teachers teaching 210,000 students in preprimary and 1,027,500 in primary and secondary stages.

Educational Policy

In most Arab countries, the context and content of educational planning and policymaking have evolved over the decades (Litz et al., 2020). The Education for All initiatives and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) pushed countries to develop holistic educational plans and integrate them into national priorities (Bray & Varghese, 2011). Other more recent global initiatives include the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2030).

> “We want our nation’s schools to nurture well-rounded citizens who are confident in their inner abilities and fully equipped for adulthood. Our education will instil in young people

> the shared values of our moderate religion and national identity. Each new generation will emerge ready to play an active role in society as self-directed and responsible citizens" (UAE Vision 2021).

Moving from the global and regional to the national level, it is clear that the education sector of the UAE has experienced unparalleled growth over the past 20 years (Warner et al., 2017). Education as a whole is undergoing a period of remarkable reforms in the UAE in compliance with global education reforms as part of the OECD and UNESCO-sponsored initiatives to improve access and the quality of education. The World Bank (2014) documented several achievements, including increased universal access to education irrespective of gender, reduced illiteracy, and greater stakeholder investment.

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), and the UAE Ministry of Education are the primary entities addressing education reform in the UAE. Several other entities are responsible for governing education in the UAE.

To standardise the UAE's education system, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the national curriculum project in 1979 and implemented it in 1985. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) was established in 1992 to oversee higher secondary education and scientific research, later merging into a single ministry for all levels. Key policy initiatives over the decades include:

- 1976: Establishment of MOHESR and introduction of the National Admissions and Placement Office (NAPO) and the Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA). UAE University was founded in Al Ain.
- 1988: Founding of the Higher Colleges of Technology. The Centre of Excellence for Applied Research and Training (CERT) was established in 1996, and Zayed University in 1998.
- 2000: The Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) was established as the Federal Government's Quality Assurance Agency. The Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid IT Education Project (ITEP) and Vision 2020 focused on advanced education techniques and self-learning.
- 2001: Vision 2020 updated with nine new proposals, extending compulsory education to complete elementary education.
- 2002: The MOE advocated a shift from instruction-oriented education to self-education, introducing an enhanced mathematics and integrated science curriculum in the 2003/2004 academic year.

- 2005: Establishment of the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) and the Dubai Education Council (DEC) for educational governance.
- 2006: ADEC launched Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programmes with private primary schools. The Masdar Institute of Science and Technology was established in collaboration with MIT.
- 2006: Announcement of the Nationalization of Education plan to achieve 90% enrollment by 2020, maintaining Islamic principles and traditions. The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) was also established.
- 2007: Launch of Madares Al Ghad to provide a modern curriculum with English, Math, and Science textbooks in English.
- 2008: Launch of the Dhabi Educational Policy Agenda. The MOE established the Department of Special Education to ensure equal opportunities for students with special needs.
- 2009: Development of an accreditation process in collaboration with the Centre for British Teachers Education Trust (CfBT) to bring public and private schools up to international standards for the PISA framework.
- 2014: Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum launched an extension to achieve the UAE Vision 2021. The National Agenda's PISA mission aimed to transform all schools into smart learning environments.
- In 2014, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai launched the UAE National Agenda as an extension to achieve the UAE Vision 2021.

These initiatives reflect the UAE's commitment to developing a world-class education system aligned with global standards.

'UAE Vision 2021' is framed based on eight pillars that will lay the foundations for the future development of the UAE as follows:

a. To be among the top 20 countries with the highest performance in the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) test.
b. To be among the top 15 countries with the highest performance on Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).
c. To ensure that all schools (public and private) in the UAE have high-quality teachers.
d. To ensure that all schools (public and private) have highly effective leadership.

e. Ensure that 90 per cent of students in the ninth grade of public and private schools are proficient in Arabic.
f. To increase the high school graduation rate to 98 per cent among Emirati students.
g. To provide early years education to 95 per cent of children between ages 4 and 5 through public and private preschool provisions.
h. To eliminate the need for Emirati students to complete a foundation programme to qualify for university entry.

To achieve these ambitious goals, several key policy initiatives have been implemented in recent years:

- 2015: In compliance with UAE Vision 2021, the highest federal budget allocation (21%) aimed to (i) remove the foundation year at university, (ii) make teaching more attractive with career progression and incentives, and (iii) establish a licensing system similar to those in Western countries. The Abu Dhabi Education Council introduced the 'My Identity programme' to strengthen national identity and eliminate discrimination in curricula.
- 2016: The Ministries of Education and Higher Education were merged. A higher council of education and human resources was created, and the Emirates Foundation for Schools was established to manage public schools with authority and independence, accountable for achieving national education targets.
- 2017: In 2017, the UAE launched the 'National Policy for Empowering Persons with Disabilities' under the Ministry of Community Development to enhance social integration, emphasising six principles: health and rehabilitation, education vocational rehabilitation and employment, outreach, social protection and family empowerment and public life, culture and sports (Ministry of Community Development, 2017). MOE outline a new strategic plan to develop an innovative Education System for a knowledge and globally competitive society (MOE, 2017a).
- 2020: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education implemented a distance learning system for all K-12 students, investing in education and human development (MOE, 2020).

Recent education policies have demonstrated a more inclusive approach, and the UAE government has made significant efforts to include people of different denominations in mainstream education. In the last few decades. Robotics, STEM education, and wellness/mindfulness initiatives will further have an increasing role in UAE schools and universities (Assam, 2016). In the UAE and the

current reform agenda for education as set out in the UAE's National Agenda 2021. There are four main pillars associated with the plan: to improve students' experience and attainment at all levels, to improve the quality and professionalism among educators, to ensure higher standards at an international level, and to ensure greater accountability within the education sector. The UAE is constantly honing its educational policy to ensure that the programs developed in its schools comply with global standards.

Structure of the Education System

The education system in the UAE comprises the British, American, and Emirati systems, with public, private, and semi-government schools functioning in the country. A general trend in the UAE's K-12 system is that the private school sector is growing faster than the public sector.

Education is compulsory for all Emirati children aged five, including residents. State institutions provide free education for every UAE student up to 18. The regulation of public and private education differs widely. The UAE Ministry of Education (MOE) regulates and operates public schools. In contrast, private schools are operated by special regulatory bodies following the laws and regulations set by the MOE in each Emirate.

Stages of School Education

The school Education system comprises Kindergarten, elementary or basic, and lower and upper secondary education (Figure 31.1).

Kindergarten in the UAE is voluntary and accommodates children below the age of admission to the first grade. Kindergarten has two levels, where children attend two years of mixed-gender classes. This level prepares the children to be successful in the primary level or (Cycle 1) and beyond. KG students spend time developing social, language, physical, and academic skills.

School Cycles

In 2018, the Ministry of Education amended the number of school grades in each stage cycle, effective from the academic year 2018-2019. Each school stage will have four grades:

- *Basic Level: Primary or Elementary Level/Cycle 1:* Children complete Grades 1 to 5 at this level. This level provides a rich learning environment to inspire this age group as they begin their educational journey.

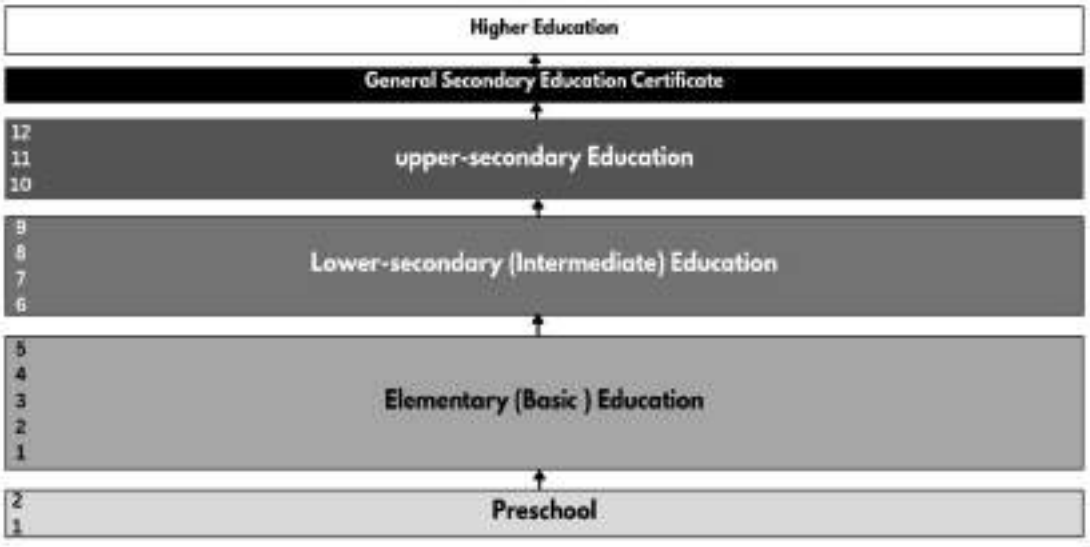

Figure 31.1 Structure of the Education System in the UAE.

Source: *WENR, 2018*

- *Intermediate Level/Cycle 2:* At this level, children complete Grades 6 to 8. This level aims to nurture young students for the future and help them become fully developed members of society.
- *Secondary Level/Cycle 3:* Students complete Grades 9 to 12 in this level, which prepares them for their careers and place in society. Upon completing this level, students are granted a high school certificate, which indicates passing 12 years of compulsory education. Technical secondary school students will be awarded the technical secondary diploma upon completing this level.

Notably, there are three parallel education systems with age and grade-wise differences. These differences in stages and streams of different systems can be summarised in Figure 31.1 (UAE, 2024). The purposes of the 2021 agenda are to attain a spirit of entrepreneurship, educational excellence, and a knowledge-based economy towards innovative work, research, science, and technology for national needs and international standards. Therefore, vocational education enjoys importance and relevance par with the general curriculum.

Curricular Framework

Throughout the whole process of the education reform, K to 12 programs, the education system has been seeking to ensure that UAE students are fully prepared to join worldwide universities and compete in the global marketplace (UKEssays, 2018). The programme and curriculum restructuring

exercise focused on having an independent learner and a global education to enable UAE secondary school graduate students to join international fraternities.

Preschool Education

The kindergarten stage in Abu Dhabi is primarily divided into pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten. Schools in Abu Dhabi often use the Montessori method, a child-centred educational approach that encourages self-motivation, self-discipline, and confidence. This method also strongly emphasises social values and cultural development, fostering cooperation and collaboration. The Tri-Lingual Education Curriculum also develops linguistic skills, promotes harmony, and encourages self-expression. In the Early Years of the Foundation Stage, children focus on personal, social, and emotional development, problem-solving, reasoning, numeracy, and physical development.

Elementary Education: In public and private schools, students in elementary grades have many subject combinations, such as mathematics, science, social studies, Islamic studies, and Arabic; in some schools, Arabic is taught as a first language. However, the medium of instruction differs from school to school in private institutions. Schools in Abu Dhabi following the American Curriculum follow U.S core State Standards for Mathematics, English Language, and next-generation science standards for science.

Secondary and Post-Secondary Education**:** At the secondary level, a preparatory education prepares students for either general or technical secondary education, which is three years from grade 6-9; the curriculum followed in the first year is English, Arabic, Islamic education, mathematics, geography, history, computer science, biology, geology, while family education was specially meant for Girls. In the second and third years, including basic subjects, additional subjects are also to be selected from Science, such as physics, chemistry, biology, and geology or Literary Streams, such as history, sociology, geography, and economics later, which is followed by General Secondary Education or the technical Secondary education.

Prior to 2015, students chose either the scientific or the literary stream. However, MoE abolished this system and introduced four streams: the General stream, the Professional stream, the Advanced stream, and the Elite stream (Advanced Science Program-ASP). All students begin from Grade One in the general stream of learning. Depending on each student's desire and performance, a student will be readmitted into a specific stream at a certain grade.

After finishing Grade 8, a student can join the Professional stream (Vocational stream), where she/he will continue studying Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 and obtain an applied high school certificate equivalent to a technical high school certificate. The professional (vocational track) follows a

practical education curriculum. Learning is based on applying knowledge and developing students' practical skills.

After finishing Grade 9, depending on their performance, students can choose either to remain in the general stream or to join the advanced stream. Students in the general and advanced streams continue in Grades 10, 11, and 12.

The key difference between the general and advanced streams is the range of scientific subjects. Students in the advanced track receive more in-depth instruction in mathematics and sciences than those in the general track. Meanwhile, the elite stream is designed for academically outstanding students. The stream admits students from Grade 6 until they finish Grade 12. The elite curriculum focuses on mathematics and science to enhance analysis, reasoning, and problem-solving skills.

Except for the Elite stream, the general distribution of subjects with credit is as follows (Table 31.1):

Table 31.1 Number of Weekly Periods for Different Subjects

Subjects	**Applied Stream**			
	Grade 9	**Grade 10**	**Grade 11**	**Grade 12**
	Number of Periods			
Moral Education	-	-	-	-
Arabic	4	4	4	4
Islamic Studies	1	1	1	1
Social Studies	1	1	1	1
English	4	4	4	4
Art	1	1	1	1
Applied Maths	4	4	4	4
Applied Sciences	4	4	4	4
Physical Education	2	2	2	2
Computer Sciences	1	1	-	-
Specialised Skills	8	8	9	9
Total	30	30	30	30

Source: *MoE.UAE, 2024*

The curriculum introduced in Elite Stream – Application for the Academic year 2021/22 covers (MoE, 2021):

1. The Elite Stream curriculum focuses on mathematics and science. It is supported by several exercises and laboratory experiments to enhance analytical and logical thinking skills and practical problem-solving.
2. Students in the Elite Stream study Maths, Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, DT, CS and CDI in English.

3. The curriculum for Math and Science subjects follows the internationally recognised program known as "Advanced Placement." This is an advanced academic curriculum that includes many high-level challenges. Therefore, students study these subjects extensively and in-depth to fulfil the program requirements and criteria.
4. Students in the Elite Stream must take the AP exams for Maths, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, which measure their mastery of the curricula under the "Advanced Placement" ceiling.
5. The Stream curriculum prepares national students for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, requiring them to pass the foundational year and achieve the highest scores among their peers.

Teaching Learning

Various educational policies and practices in the UAE focus on learner and context-centered teaching approaches, responding to the demands of learners, educators, and researchers. Effective classroom practices to develop students' global competencies include:

- Teaching in multicultural and multilingual classrooms
- Using ICT in the classroom
- Fostering cognitive activation
- Learning from formative assessments
- Project-based learning

Gamification in teaching is highly accepted by students and is supported by teachers to increase engagement. There are significant opportunities for professional growth for both new and experienced teachers, who can collaboratively expand their knowledge of subject matter and teaching methods.

The UAE government is committed to inclusive education for special children, running both special and inclusive systems simultaneously. In 2006, the UAE signed the protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Special Needs, shifting towards mainstreaming. Based on the OECD review (2020), Figure 31.3 represents the basic fabric of policy advocacy that guides learning and teaching in implementing the curriculum.

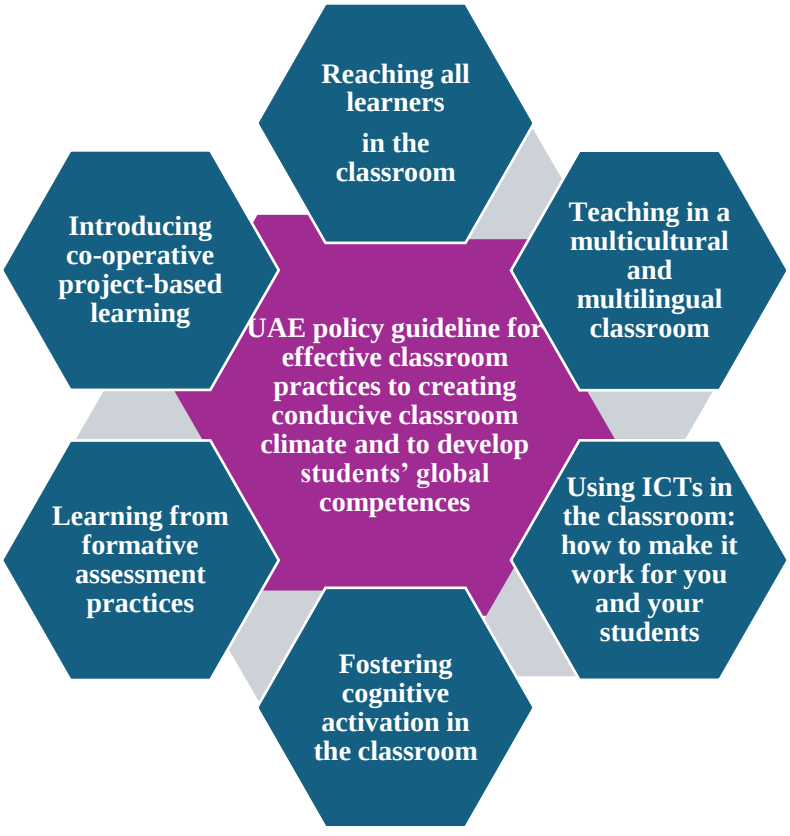

Figure 31.3 UAE Policy Guideline in Teaching Learning in School Education

Source: *Authors developed the model curating findings from the OECD (2020) survey*

To improve teaching systems to global competence levels, Qudwa 2019 created a framework (OECD, 2020) inviting teachers to explore techniques connecting students to their communities and the world. This aims to foster problem-solving, collaboration, and lifelong learning. The UAE has introduced policies to build a high-performing school system and a skilled workforce, prioritising teacher capacity building through licensing, a teaching career ladder, and reforms in teacher education.

Contemporary learning in the UAE engages resources inside and outside the classroom, preparing students for the job market and social world. Active learning, collaboration, and quality teaching are emphasised, with teachers adapting practical methods considering community concerns. Improved teacher quality is critical for achieving the UAE National Agenda (OECD, 2020).

Since 2012, the UAE has invested in intelligent learning projects, providing teachers and students with digital gadgets and educational platforms (Edarabia, 2020). Internet access was also available

to private school students upon request (Sebugwaawo, 2020). Schools and teachers must consider their diverse roles in education's broad and multidimensional purpose (Biesta, 2015). However, school quality leadership remains a challenge in actualising digitisation (Hefnawi, 2020). Across the level, students face different challenges from the uniqueness of their marginalities in UAE too (Sharma et al., 2017; Morgan, 2021), which has been addressed by adapting teaching-learning facilities with appropriate pedagogies that adhere to the policy to recognise the strengths of their determined peers (Ashman; 2018, Alzyoudi et al., 2021).

Learning Assessment

Like many other countries, the assessment system of the UAE also operates under formative and summative patterns. Formative assessment is an assessment for learning, while summative exams are meant to measure a learner's level of attainment against specific expected learning outcomes at a regional, national or international scale. In the research survey conducted by OECD (OECD, 2020), formative assessment gained prominence and was found effective in UAE in many ways; it had larger impacts on student achievement irrespective of subjects, and more interestingly, it was found effective for low-achieving students, contributing to closing the achievement gap with higher-achieving peers.

Despite its long and strong tradition of summative assessment, UAE is steadily progressing in adapting new curriculum practices that encourage a more 'balanced' approach to student assessments. According to the subjects and grades, 30% to 70% of assessments are formative (OECD, 2020).

The UAE(UAE) grading system for secondary education follows a standardised scale that closely aligns with international grading systems, allowing for straightforward comparison and understanding. However, there are certain variations in different schools, especially those following international curriculums like American, British, or International Baccalaureate (IB) (Table 31.2 (United-Arab-Emirates Grading System, 2023).

Table 31.2 Grading for School Education

UAE Grades	Comparable English Terms	Equivalent Percentage Range	GPA (4.0 Scale)
A+	Excellent	90-100%	4.0
A	Very Good	85-89%	3.7
B+	Good	80-84%	3.3
B	Above average	75-79%	3.0
C+	Average	70-74%	2.7
C	Satisfactory	65-69%	2.3
D+	Pass	60-64%	1.7
D	Barely Pass	50-59%	1.0
F	Fail	Below 50%	0.0

Source: *United-Arab-Emirates Grading System, 2023*

Not all schools use these variations, and the cutoffs for these grades can vary slightly between institutions. Grades for such assessments in UAE are not just report cards; they reflect a student's understanding, effort, and mastery of the subject matter.

Health and Physical Education

2015 the MOE adopted a new Physical and Health Education reform (MoE, 2017b). Subsequently, MoE, along with the Education and Knowledge Department (ADEK), launched a brand new Physical and Health Education curriculum to meet the individual needs of each student (MoE, 2019). The main objectives of this project, in compliance with the policy, were to mitigate diseases and reduce absenteeism through awareness building of a healthy lifestyle with all its aspects and to introduce life-long positive health habits among students (Chaudhary, 2016). Hence, in UAE, health education is integrated with physical education in curricular exercises.

Al Tenaiji (2015) observed that the UAE education system is not structured in such a way that it provides and facilitates students according to their needs. There is less flexibility for the teachers to alter the physical education curriculum, and they must achieve five objectives from the 15 fixed goals that the teacher evaluates at the end of the year. Physical education needs at least 50 minutes of weekly classes separately for males and females. The MoE of UAE promotes physical education, and the General Authority of Sports has promoted sports since 2008. The UAE 2021 vision allowed a federal law where students can participate in national sports competitions as full rights of citizenship.

Skills Education

Vocational education is relatively new in the UAE. The first technical school was established in Sharjah in 1958 to train people in mechanical, electrical and building trades. Vocational education found its rightful place in the 1980s. The introduction of technical education at the secondary levels and higher colleges of technology provided the impetus to vocational education (Al Hammadi, 2016). UAE policy is to produce ten vocationally skilled persons for every university graduate to achieve a sustainable and diversified knowledge-based economy (Owais et al., 2020).

UAE has shown its relevant modernity in adapting policy for pre-primary and primary education to promote pre-vocational skills that might help them to navigate future learning and vocational life. In its mandate, the UAE advocated that a broad range of skills must be prioritised in the pre-primary and primary education curriculum that can be transferred and adapted to different work needs and the changing social climate (National Qualification Authority. UAE. 2020). Pre-vocational and multi-sensory programmes have a prominent presence in the official curriculum and much more in praxis as embedded in the hidden curriculum in compliance with the mission of UAE Vision 2021. Some specific technical know-how of everyday life and vocations are also prioritised in teaching-learning. These are also included in the informal and formal assessment, mainly in formative

assessment; however, whether these pre-vocational skills are included in ascertaining final grades per summative assessment is unclear in policy documents.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobbies generally decrease stress and generate energy through creativity and innovation in search of their inner self. It also benefits happiness when doing work of liking and enhances performance by concentrating and practising. Hobbies provide a wider scope for learners to learn something joyfully by doing things they love and are passionate about. They can be instrumental in social and emotional well-being. Some schools in Dubai have discontinued homework, which involves them in creative activities after school hours. Music training, gymnastics, coding, racing, etc., are some hobbies that UAE students get involved in, which helps them develop their skills without home studies. Playing hockey, football, swimming, or guitar boosts self-confidence and self-esteem.

The UAE has a policy mandate for the key competencies or generic skills required for effective participation in the workplace, learning and daily life (National Qualification Authority, UAE. 2020). Such core life skills are emphatically included in the curriculum from class 1 to 10th Standard in compliance with the core life skills strategies and techniques identified by UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO. Critical thinking, decision-making, interpersonal communication, and coping and self-management skills are focal areas strategically linked with the hobbies of the learners in curricular adaptations. The assessment framework in all formats accommodates the performance of such skills of the learners with specific indicators.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The rationale behind the policy adaptation of Moral, Social and Cultural Studies (MSCS) is to provide students with in-depth knowledge, skills and understanding of UAE history, geography and civics. Such educational curriculum in school education at different grades is intended to emphasise the links and relationships between diverse groups, people, science and society. As responsible citizens and residents of the UAE, students contribute to building a cohesive, inclusive society while preserving the UAE culture, heritage and traditions (Safa British School, 2022). The MSCS curriculum incorporates Character and Morality, Individual and Community, History, Geography, Sociology, Economics, Information Literacy, Information processing, Heritage, and Civics. MSCS is taught at least twice weekly in all primary and secondary classes with some variations. The subjects are planned, and lessons are delivered with the same expectations as other core subjects across the curriculum. Apart from books, films and field trips are alternatives for such learning teaching.

Self-worth and identity. Celebrating own individuality and community awareness, respect for others, for example, people with disabilities, understanding the diverse international community in the UAE, self-worth and identity, conflict with friends and family, loss, divorce and seeking help have been incorporated grades and age-wise in higher classes. They protect the individual in society and explore social and cultural well-being as Emirates – understanding one's responsibilities as a student, a family member, and an Emirati. Involvement and participation in community life, adopting an effective approach to citizenship responsibilities, and awareness of volunteering opportunities were also options. Students are selected as 'Heritage Ambassadors' from each class and as Heritage Ambassadors to provide students with an enriched insight into Emirati culture. MSC Studies are assessed using both formative and summative methods.

Peace and Happiness Education

Education is the key to fostering the development of peaceful and tolerant societies in ongoing globalisation; it is gaining greater prominence. However, it can also be a tool for political and religious radicalisation if exploited by a negative political regime. UAE made serious efforts to make the Emirati curriculum exceptional, preparing learning resources with textbooks for the journey of peace in the Middle East, which traditionally practices radicalism.

In 2011, UAE leadership became aware of this pattern and cracked down on the radicalism that the Muslim Brotherhood had fomented in the country for many years. Through innovation and transformation, beginning in 2016, they took steps to ensure that national education would serve the new Emirati interests. After reviewing 220 Emirati school books for grades 1-12 during the 2021-2022 school year, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) has yet to see another curriculum that has transformed itself not only to comply with these standards but to prepare its population for a new era of peace and tolerance (Sheff, 2022). The curriculum also focused on feelings and experiences and published conducive content in the textbooks that give life meaning: it speaks about a healthy lifestyle, having a positive attitude, and experiencing and sharing happiness with others—including those outside their community—as crucial to a meaningful life that upheld interfaith relations with other religion other than Islam. The teaching-learning process was restructured to implement such a policy of mutual trust and faith-based social life. More importantly, what can be learned from the Emirati curriculum is that this kind of normalisation does not happen in a vacuum—it must be supported and fostered in the classroom. (Sheff, 2022).

Happiness is measured using various factors, including economic prosperity, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption. As a result of such policy intervention and programme resourcing, the country steadily agreed to the ladder

of peace scale. UAE ranked 25th out of 149 countries globally, with a 6.561 happiness score. School education is doing promising and benchmark practices.

Summary and Conclusion

The objectives set by the UAE's policy commitment to its education system align with the global trend and standard towards greater human capital development but are pragmatic and attainable. Furthermore, they are committed to ensuring that every child succeeds in education and life. By formulating policies, the government ensures compulsory education up to class XII standard and policy resourcing by befitting programmes and collaborations for effective implementation. The central and regional bodies of educational governance have been working in synergy with international institutions like UNICEF, UNESCO and, in some cases, WHO, and active collaboration with the World Bank for policy implementation for quality education. UAE is also adapting programmes to affirm the expectation to perform at the desired level and to reduce the gap in PISA standards (Marquez et al., 2022).

There are some effective classroom practices to develop students' global competencies, such as teaching in multicultural and multi-lingual classrooms, using ICT in the classroom, fostering cognitive activation, learning from formative learning assessment, project-based learning, etc. The students accept gamification in the classroom teaching-learning process and find it easy to comprehend. Also, teachers assist them so that they can apply it properly, which can increase student engagement in the teaching-learning process.

The UAE curriculum and teaching learning in alignment with policies have been able to strike a balance among cognitive, affective, social, and psychomotor development. In pedagogy and praxis, UAE adapted health education to protect the students' general health, which would motivate moral and ethical education. UAE, by its policy and programmes, have cracked down on radicalism to promote multi-religious and cultural co-existence using effective peace education to make a nation that would be happy in the real sense of terms.

This is evident in the UAE Vision 2021, where education and human capital development are given significance as the main driving forces toward a diversified knowledge-based economy. The vision is to prepare students to enter the world of work by ensuring the quality of the Ministry of Education's outputs and providing the best services for internal and external customers (Ministry of Education, UAE, 2017).

In the UAE, both the market and conservative forces are at work here. About market-related forces, the most obvious is the substantial increase in the private provision of schooling, which was greeted with some caution. While the private versus public school dichotomy is a well-known phenomenon

globally, this contrast is magnified regarding the UAE's number, investment, expenditure, and achievement (Warner & Burton, 2017, March). The positive and benchmark practices resulting from policy reforms in the private sector education need to be transferred to the public sector of the education system. Their rise in educational standards has, in turn, attracted students, faculty, and researchers, and they have contributed substantially in financial terms towards the national economy. Thus, public-private symbiotic synergy leaves no child behind in school education. As a state, the UAE has adopted and constantly adapted its policies to transmit society's values, knowledge, and beliefs. How UAE does such things reflects much about its power and the relative influence of other actors it encounters, whether they are social, political or economic (Apple, 2003; Kivinen & Rinne, 2000; Lawton & Gordon, 2002).

It was associated with a Western-oriented 'modernisation,' which inherently challenges and undermines the immediate local and indigenous paradigm of knowledge. It considers the role and purpose of education in the UAE and the current reform agenda for education as set out in the UAE's National Agenda 2021 (Warner & Burton, 2017). There was inadequacy in qualification and fragility in teacher's preparation, along with the retention of determined students, are challenges to UAE's vision of creating an integrated community without barriers (DeCarlo & Ammar, 2023).

Regarding policy, the UAE sets a benchmark standard to create future citizens who can navigate the 21st century and lead towards the 22nd century. However, in reality, the stagnation in mindscape and dogmatic practices regulating everyday life of society are posing the degree of effectiveness of accommodation and adaptation of the policies. By drafting, legitimising, and implementing the most relevant educational policies in the UAE, it is trying to boost social engineering towards a greater goal.

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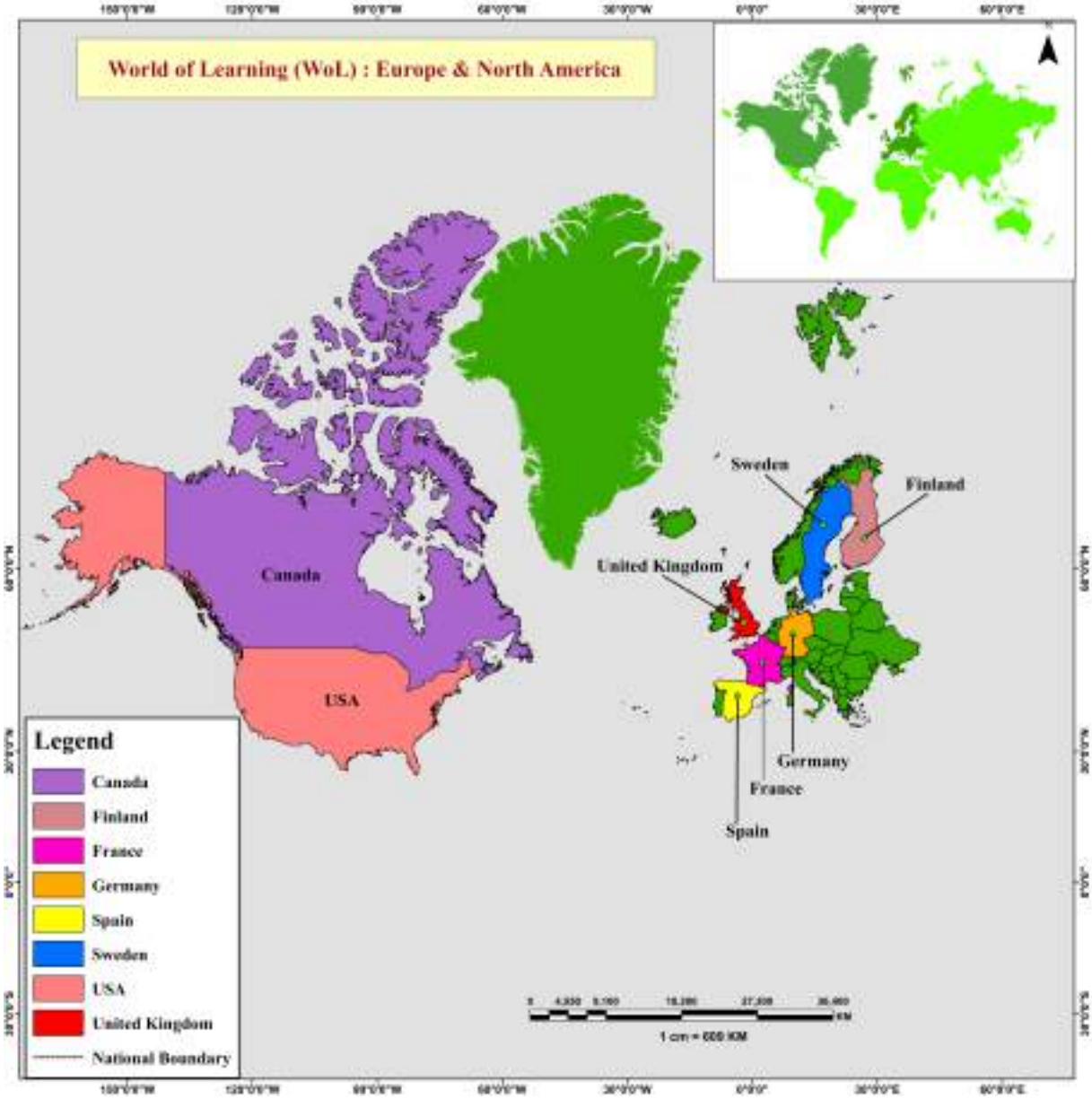
World of Learning (WoL) : Europe & North America
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National Boundary
1 cm = 600 KM

32

Tradition, Equity and Excellence in Education: France

Manju Narula

Abstract

The French education system is centrally governed, with the states responsible for developing pedagogical guidelines, curricula, and the recruitment and management of teaching staff in both public and private schools. This chapter deals with school education reforms in France, covering policy, curricula, examinations and other associated reforms. Education is structured into four levels: kindergarten (ages 3-5), primary (6-10), junior secondary (11-14), and senior secondary (15-18), with schooling being free and compulsory from ages 3 to 16. The government promotes learning through orthodox language teaching to give more weight to learning languages. France implemented standardised evaluations at key educational stages to enhance system management. A focus on social, moral, and cultural education at the primary level aims to instil essential values in early stages, while health, physical education, and life skills are also prioritised. France's robust economy, high HDI, low unemployment rates, high literacy rates, and a full NER for females at the primary education level reflect the effectiveness of its education system.

Keywords: France, orthodox language teaching, essential values, standardised evaluation, developed education system,

Introduction

The French Republic (France) is a northwestern European country. France is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, NATO, the G-7, the G-20, and the EU (WFB, 2024). Geographically, France borders Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the Mediterranean Sea, Spain, Andorra, the Bay of Biscay, and the English Channel. Monaco, an independent enclave on the south coast, and Corsica, an island in the Mediterranean, are integral parts of France (Shennan et al., 2024). France’s geography is mostly flat plains or gently rolling hills in the north and west and mountainous terrain in the south and the east. France’s total area is 643,801 sq km, with a coastline

of 4,853 km. “France is divided into 13 metropolitan regions (including the “collectivity” of Corse or Corsica) and five overseas regions (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, and Reunion) and is subdivided into 96 metropolitan departments and five overseas departments (which are the same as the overseas regions)” (WFB, 2024).

France is the second most populous country in Europe after Germany, with a total population of 68,374,591 comprising 49.08% male and 50.92% female (2024 est.) and a growth rate of 0.2%. By 2022, the migrant population constituted 10.3 per cent of the total population. The life expectancy is 82.6 years as of 2024. France mostly consists of Celtic and Latin people, with smaller groups of Teutonic, Slavic, North African (Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian), Indochinese, and Basque people. According to the WFB (2024), 47% of people in France are Roman Catholic, 4% Muslim, 2% Protestant, 2% Buddhist, 1% Orthodox, Jewish, and other, 33% are ‘none’, and 9% are ‘not sure’. Eighty-eight per cent of the people speak French. Minority languages are not officially recognised (BBC, 2014).

France is the seventh-largest economy in the world and the most visited destination, contributing to its thriving tourism industry. As of April 2024, France’s GDP at current prices is 3.13 trillion US dollars with a growth rate of 0.7%, and the GDP per capita is USD 47.36 thousand. The unemployment rate in 2024 was 7.4% (IMF, 2024). In the World Happiness Index 2023, France ranked 19th with a 6.796 average life evaluation point (Helliwell et al., 2023). On the UN’s Human Development Index, with an HDI value of 0.910, France ranked 28 out of 193 countries in 2022 (UNDP, 2023).

“Education is a priority in France, with 21 per cent of the annual national budget earmarked for education. The country boasts a 99 per cent literacy rate” (Magaziner, 2015, para 2). GER in France (2023) was 102.70% and for Secondary 104.28%, whereas NER for the primary is 99.97 and for Upper secondary 96.02% (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). As of 2022, almost 6.5 million pupils were studying in elementary school, approximately 6.81 million students attended primary schools (Statista), 3.33 million attended middle schools, and 2.26 million attended high schools. Eight hundred sixty-one thousand teachers are employed in 63,600 schools in France (The Local France, 2016). In PISA 2022, France ranked 24 in math, 27 in reading and 24 in science (OECD, 2023).

Educational Policy

The French education policy that aimed to alleviate the negative impact of socioeconomic inequities on students' learning outcomes in the 1980s underwent modifications in 2013. In 2013, France established the Priority Education Networks and Reinforced Priority Education Networks. Efforts were focused on pre-primary and primary education (OECD, 2020).

Two flagship critical policy shifts were lowering the compulsory education age from 6 to 3 and reducing the class sizes in the first two years of primary school to half in schools belonging to REP and REP+. "By making pre-primary education compulsory for 3-year-olds from 2019/20, France aims to provide a common educational framework that will give all children the same opportunity to succeed in school" (OECD, 2020, p. 11).

The Policy also emphasised improving classroom school climate by increasing differentiated teaching and personalised approaches to learning and enhancing teacher training and support. French policy allows homeschooling provided that families comply with the educational standards laid down in law and are monitored by the state. Schooling is free and compulsory in France from 3 to 16 (Eurydice, 2023a), after which the students take the high school final exam.

In 2003, all "education-related legislation (laws, decrees of the President of the Republic or the Prime Minister, ministerial orders and circulars) became part of the Education Code. A new framework law passed in 2005 states that education is a national priority. The system must guarantee that all will acquire common knowledge and skills that will give them equal opportunities in their professional lives" (law no. 2013-595 of 8 July 2013 and related decrees). The Policy also emphasised improving teacher preparation to strengthen professional teacher training schools and provide teachers with continuous professional development training (European Agency, 2020).

Structure of the Education System

The French School Education structure comprises Pre-primary, Primary, Secondary-Junior Secondary, and Senior secondary schools. Figure 32.1 depicts the school system in France. The state defines the curricular framework, including guidelines for pedagogical practices. The government recruits and trains school personnel (OECD, 2020, p. 3).

Pre-primary

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) responsibilities are split between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of National Education for children until age three. ECCE is compulsory for all children between three and six and aims to create school readiness for primary education by developing reading, writing, and numeracy skills (Dimitrijevic, 2024, Para 9). Though formal schooling starts at three, it is not mandatory.

Primary

Primary schooling is compulsory for all children. Accordingly, all children must be enrolled in school by age six. Primary school consists of five years of schooling, i.e., approximately 6 to 10 age group children.

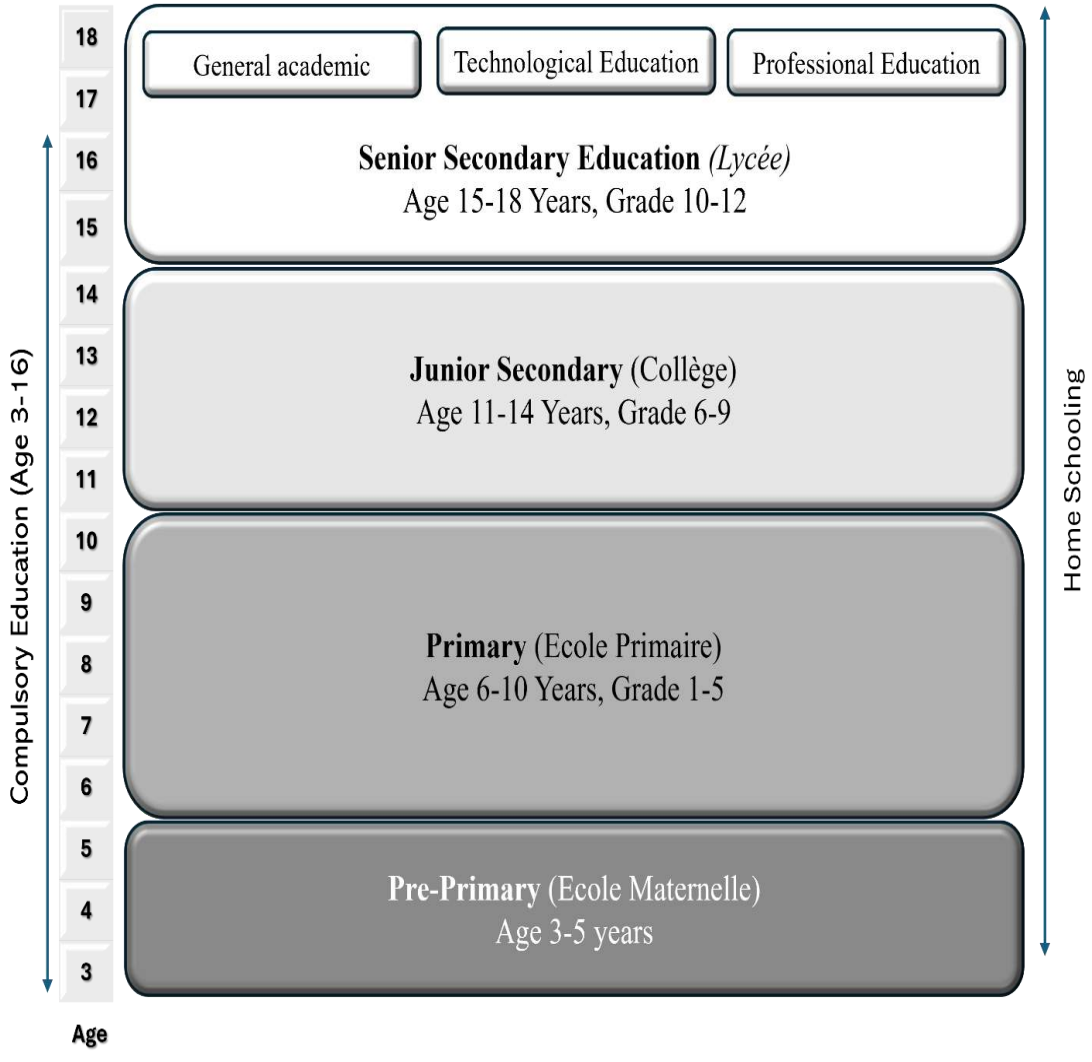

Figure 32.1 School Education Structure in France
Source: *Eurydice, 2023a (Adapted by author)*

Secondary

The seven-year secondary education caters to children aged 11 to 18. It is divided into Junior secondary schools for 11 to 14-year-olds and Senior secondary schools for 15 to 18-year-olds. Out of four years of Junior Secondary school Education, the first year is a consolidation cycle, and the next three years are a furthering cycle. The Senior Secondary school education is three years and

provides general, technical, and professional education. The transition from Junior Secondary school to Senior Secondary school is the first step in a pupil's path to specialisation. The students continue their schooling either in a general technological or professional education (Eurydice, 2023a).

The fee-paying private schools follow the State curriculum, and students study the same national curriculum. In addition, private and state schools have international sections collaborating with various countries and regions to provide bilingual and bicultural education. The students adhere to the French school system and receive specialised instruction from the French Ministry of Education.

Homeschooling has been a practice with legal sanction for a long time. To improve homeschooling practice, the government brought in a law in 2022-23 making it mandatory for parents to seek prior authorisation for homeschooling their children. The authorities set four reasons to justify homeschooling. These are the child's state of health or disability, the intensive practice of a sport or artistic activity, the family's itinerant nature, and a situation specific to the child that justifies homeschooling (Dimitrijevic, 2024). The International Baccalaureate (IB) programme curriculum is followed.

Curricular Framework

The development of the school education curriculum is the responsibility of the "Conseil Supérieur des Programmes" (CSP – 'Higher Council for Curricula') at the instance of the Minister of National Education. The CSP assembles a group of experts who discuss, debate and propose the curriculum framework. The proposed framework is then submitted to Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation" (CSE – Higher Council for Education) for its opinion. The Minister finally approved the framework (Eurydice, 2024a).

The five years of Primary education are divided into two main 'cycles of learning', namely the Fundamental Learning Cycle and the Consolidation Cycle. The first three years in primary school are called the Fundamental learning cycle, *where* the emphasis is on the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. The primary education curriculum in France is based on the common core of knowledge, skills and culture. It identifies five domains of knowledge and skills every student must demonstrate at the end of primary schooling. These are:

1. "Languages to think and communicate;
2. Methodologies and tools to learn;
3. The training of the individual and the citizen;
4. Natural and technical systems;
5. World representations and human activity" (Eurydice, 2024a, Para 5.2)

The subjects taught in the consolidation cycle are French, Foreign Language 1, Plastic Arts, Musical Education, Sports and Physical Education, History-Geography, Moral and Civic Education, Mathematics, and Sciences and Technology. Instructional Time allocated to different subjects is given in Table 32.1.

Table 32.1 Instruction Time in Primary Classes

Subjects	Fundamental Learning Cycle		Consolidation Cycle	
	Yearly in Hours	Weekly in Hours	Yearly in Hours	Weekly in Hours
French	360	10	288	8
Mathematics	180	5	180	5
Modern languages (foreign or regional)	54	1h 30m	54	1h30m
Physical education	108	3	108	3
Science and Technology	-	-	72	2
Art education	72	2	72	2
World: History-Geography, including Civic and Moral Education **	90	2h30m	90	2.30
Total	864	24	864	24*

* "10 hours are allocated in the weekly timetable to daily activities of oral expression, reading and writing, covering every domain

** Civic and moral education: 36 hours over the school year, meaning 1 hour per week, of which 30 minutes are dedicated to practices fostering oral expression."

Source: *Author (Data Source: Eurydice 2024a)*

The table indicates that the French language is given priority in primary classes. Teaching a second language is also part of the curriculum. The difference in the curriculum of the first three years and the fourth and fifth primary education classes is observable, e.g., the reduction of the number of weekly classes on the French language and the allocation of two periods of Science and Technology in the consolidation phase.

Education in Junior Secondary schools is structured into subjects that depend on the pupil's cycle. The subjects taught in the furthering cycles comprising grades 7, 8, and 9 are French, Foreign language 1, Foreign language 2, plastic arts, musical education, sports and physical education,

history-geography, moral and civic education, mathematics, life and earth sciences, physics-chemistry, and technology.

ICT is integrated into technology and mathematics courses in grades 6 to 9. However, ICT can be taught as part of any compulsory subject. Modern language curricula follow the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The second modern language starts in grade 7 (Eurydice, 2024b).

Also, schools have a set number of hours in their schedules that are not used for specific subjects but for teaching that goes along with the subject (3 hours in 5th, 4 hours in 6th, 7th, and 8th), and these hours depend on the grade level. In fifth grade, it only includes three hours of one-on-one help. This time is split between one-on-one help and hands-on lessons from different subjects in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

Schools might offer more classes. From the sixth grade, two languages can be taught in bilingual groups. In sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, students get an extra four hours of instruction, split between one to two hours of one-on-one help and two to three hours of mixed practical teaching (EPI) (Table 32.2). With at least two subjects, the EPI allows students to build on and deepen the skills and information taught in different classes (Eurydice, 2024b).

After completing lower secondary school, pupils advance to upper secondary school. Access is granted to students with the Brevet National Diploma (DNB) awarded at the end of 9th grade. The upper secondary school comprises three years: seconde (grade 10), première (grade 11), and terminal (grade 12). At grade 10, all students receive a general education. In grade 11, students can choose one of the three streams – general, technological and vocational. Students take the baccalaureate exam at the end of the 12th (MoNE, 2023).

Students choose between general and technological baccalaureate at Grade 10 for their final years of schooling to pursue further education and a career. “It combines core classes designed to strengthen shared, communal knowledge; optional classes: students may choose no more than two optional classes—one general optional class and one technological option class” (MoNE, 2023, para 2).

The core subjects, like French, History-Geography, Modern Languages A and B, Social and Economic Sciences, Mathematics, Physics/Chemistry, Life and Earth Sciences, Physical Education, Civic and Moral Education, Digital Sciences and Technology, are allocated 26.5 hours. In addition, students can opt for two additional subjects, like scientific and technological subjects (Engineering, Laboratory Sciences, etc.); literary subjects (Classics, ancient languages and cultures, a third modern language); and artistic subjects (Plastic Arts, Music, Performing Arts, etc.). These help

them explore new and emerging disciplines and career options to choose a programme for the final years of schooling. Additionally, a 54-hour orientation programme is offered to students to help them make their future choices informed (MoNE, 2023). The General course includes three courses: Science, Economics and Social Sciences, and Literature.

Table 32.2 Subject-wise Time Allotted in Junior Secondary Classes (in Hours)

Subject	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade
French	162 (4.30)	162 (4.30)	162 (4.30)	144 (4)
Mathematics	162 (4.30)	126 (3.30)	126 (3.30)	126 (3.30)
Plastic arts / Musical education	72 (2)	72 (2)	72 (2)	72 (2)
History, Geography, Civic and moral education	108 (3)	108 (3)	108 (3)	126 (3.30)
Foreign language 1	144 (4)	108 (3)	108 (3)	108 (3)
Foreign language 2	-	90 (2.30)	90 (2.30)	90 (2.30)
Sports and physical education	144 (4)	108 (3)	108 (3)	108 (3)
Life and earth sciences	144 (4)	54 (1.30)	54 (1.30)	54 (1.30)
Physics-chemistry		54 (130)	54 (1.30)	54 (1.30)
Technology		54 (1.30)	54 (1.30)	54 (1.30)
Complementary teachings	108 (3)	144h (4)	20h	20h

Note: "The instruction time during the whole academic year and between parentheses are the intended subject instruction time per week."

Source: *Eurydice, 2024b*

The technical stream includes eight courses:

1. Management Sciences and Technologies, Service Sciences and Technologies
2. Industrial Science and Technologies and Sustainable Development
3. Laboratory Science and Technologies
4. Health and Social Sciences
5. Food Science and Technologies
6. Agronomy and Environment Science and Technologies
7. Music and Dance Techniques
8. Hotel and restaurant management

Vocational training courses suit students more interested in a hands-on approach than academic schooling. Nearly a hundred courses include Leather crafts, Building Technician, Industrial Equipment Maintenance, Cooking, Road Freight Transport Driver, Butcher, etc. (WikiZer, n.d.).

Similar to general and technological courses, vocational students sit for the Vocational Baccalaureate examination. Part of the vocational course occurs in the workplace, where students gain hands-on experience and skills defined by each diploma's framework and assessed through exams (MoNE, 2023). Students can also prepare for a vocational diploma through an apprenticeship programme at an Apprentice Training Centre.

Teaching Learning

In recent years, the government has insisted on returning to the orthodox method of teaching language in primary schools. The same conditions apply to junior secondary schools. In homeschooling, pedagogical control is exercised over the education content, the child's acquisition of skills and knowledge, and the child's progress.

Law No. 2013-595, promulgated on 8 July 2013 and later amended until 2015, promoted innovative teaching methods, especially digital teaching and teaching digital science in primary schools. Later, this law was reinforced with the law of the School of Trust on 8 July 2019. The law recommended three tools for teachers and students in primary education:

- "A training tool for pupils in the Fundamental learning cycle (CP – CE2) updated regularly;
- Halved classes of CP in 'reinforced priority education networks' (REP+) starting with September 2019: a large-scale deployment of digital tools and applications for fundamental learnings and new evaluation approaches was included in the 'Future Investment Programme' (PIA).
- The PIA also included a call for projects for partnerships in artificial intelligence to learn French and mathematics during the Fundamental learning cycle (8M€ dotation). The partnership was launched in June 2018, with the first deployment in 2020" (Eurydice, 2024a).

The MNE has recommended a list of essential supplies each year to schools since 2007. Teachers can create their lists referring to the list recommended by the Ministry. The issue is that the school supplies list should be short and essential to not burden the family budget and foster inequality. Besides the school supplies made by the municipalities, the list of students' school equipment and materials should be handed over to the parents in advance. Further, single-student-use learning material must be provided by parents and is not available free from schools. This implied that

parents could purchase school books, though, in practice, all communes provided books free to students in public schools. Even if not common, the municipality may provide small school equipment necessary for each pupil, including stationery.

At the upper secondary level, textbooks are not necessary. Students can access digital textbooks. Regions are responsible for school equipment supplies. Many regions help families with free supply distribution to pupils, grants to schools, direct subsidies to pupils, etc. (Eurydice, 2024c). Also, there is no stipulation on homework.

The Ministry maintains a dedicated website, 'eduscol,' which offers teachers various educational resources. Teachers enjoy significant autonomy in innovating teaching methods and learning resources.

As a support to students, the MoNE (2023) initiated new pedagogical practices:

- "Co-teaching by teachers from the general and vocational curricula is being expanded. The objective is to give greater purpose to general subjects by making them more practical for students from a professional perspective;
- Throughout their studies at a vocational high school, the student will prepare (individually or collectively) a project known as their "Masterwork" that they will present to a jury at the end of their final year;
- Every high school student benefits from more time dedicated to consolidation, support, and preparing for their future plans (265 hours in the vocational baccalaureate and 192.5 hours in vocational qualification throughout the cycle)" (MoNE, 2023).

An OECD survey (TALIS 2018) revealed that 32% of teachers in France work in schools where at least 10% of the students have a migrant background (the OECD average is 17%); 14% of teachers report that they have never received feedback in their schools.

Learning Assessment

The French school year starts in September and ends in June. Exams are held in June, and there are additional exams in September for students who need to retake them. There are no regulations regarding the assessment of primary school students. The schools give homework, correct work individually, and receive teacher scores and assessments. The assessments are converted into scores and shared with the parents, along with a detailed note on the child's progress every three months. The communication also contains parent-teacher meeting dates (Eurydice, 2023b, 6.3).

Promotion from primary to junior secondary schools is automatic. In junior secondary schools, first- and second-year assessment reports reflect students' results and reveal students' progress towards

acquiring knowledge and skills. End-of-cycle reports provide an outlook at the pupil's mastery level of the common core of knowledge and skills, following a 4-level scale: Insufficient acquisition, Fragile, Sufficient, and Very Good. "At the end of lower secondary school, students take a national examination in one of three streams: academic, technological or vocational. Those who pass the examination earn the *Diplôme National du Brevet (DNB)*. Those who fail the examination earn a school-leaving certificate called *le Certificat de Formation Générale (CFG)*" (Magaziner, 2015, para 11).

The Senior Secondary General examination differs for all three streams, and subjects are weighted according to the course. The diploma awarded at the end of Senior secondary schooling is a sign of successful completion of secondary studies and access to higher studies. The students of professional courses are eligible for the Professional Aptitude Certificate (CAP), and the students of Vocational courses get the certificate from the Brevet d'Études Professionnelles (BEP). While the CAP is still a stream from which pupils can go directly into a profession, these two diplomas are now optional to pass the vocational degree. "In terms of assessment, all students must take written and oral examinations for French at the end of the penultimate year. In the final year, students take four examinations: Two written examinations for the relevant specialist subjects, one written assessment for philosophy, and a 20-minute oral examination, which is prepared throughout the final year of upper secondary education. Results in these examinations will constitute 60% of the student's final grade; the remaining 40% will be measured via continuous Assessment" (OECD, 2020, p. 14).

Health and Physical Education

France has a long history of physical education (Rathbone, 2024). It responds primarily to military needs and hygiene without referencing sports and games.

In contemporary France, Physical and Sports Education is compulsory for all students throughout the school years from the beginning of primary to the end of secondary education (Weichselbaum, 2012). "Since the 1970s, physical, sporting, and artistic practices are at the heart of PE teaching while integrating changes in lifestyles (sedentary lifestyle, stress, etc.) and new needs (health, social cohesion, development of leisure activities, democratic life, etc.). These social practices are not imported into the school context but adapted to its objectives. In school, it is not just about "discovering activities", "learning a sport", or reaching your highest level in one sport, nor simply relaxing or moving to fight against a sedentary lifestyle. The aim is to provide all students with critical access to a physical, sporting, or artistic culture that can be a tool for learning about oneself, others, and the world" (Pontais, 2021). All students must participate in physical and health

education activities like running, swimming, dancing, acting, playing team games and mastering risk-taking to develop physical, social, and emotional

Health and Physical Education in primary and secondary schools are taught for 3 hours and 2 hours per week, respectively. The teachers have a 3-hour "package" in their timetable to carry out this mission. For primary school, this is voluntary. Students are provided with common knowledge, skills and culture. Optional additional hours are often offered. Most children play Soccer (14%), Dance (10%), Swimming and basketball (9%)

France has a "school sport" for junior and secondary school. School sports associations are places of innovation where mixed practices are invented, forms of meeting that do not eliminate anyone, where everyone plays for a long time, and where everyone can access an emancipatory performance. Training young officials, referees, organisers, reporters, managers, etc., constitutes a concrete apprenticeship in citizenship and responsibility. A "bridging card" makes it possible to link school and club sports: any student with a school sports license has the right to go and try out different sports for free in a club to choose the sport that he or she is interested in and outside the school.

Emmanuelle et al. (2018) studied the instructional traditions in physical education in France, Sweden, and Switzerland. They found that sports techniques and physical culture are dominant themes in physical education teaching traditions in France, whereas health education is more prominent in Sweden.

Skills Education

The tradition of vocational education and training (VET) began in 1970. The Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports regulate the initial VET and Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Different government departments create vocational education and training (VET) credentials recognised nationwide (CEDEFOP, 2021).

The Ministry for National Education is responsible for initial vocational education at the secondary level. As per the law, its duties are: "To draw up frameworks for vocational diplomas in consultation with professional bodies, set exam rules, award diplomas, offer a range of courses to pupils and on-the-job apprentices, recruit, train and pay teachers, monitor the quality of training, and it is accountable for the results and the resources used" (MoNE, 2010, p3).

Students can choose one of the general, technological and vocational streams at the upper secondary (three years, learners aged 16-18) level. There are several levels in the vocational stream. CAP (Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle) is a short secondary-level vocational qualification. It covers

over 200 artisanal trades, production and services, such as plumbers or beauticians. This initial vocational education takes two years after the last year of college (lower secondary). After college, the study stream helps students prepare for specific careers by combining hands-on training and professional instruction into their high school education. Therefore, entering the workforce right after high school is the best way. Students get an initial level of employee qualification as skilled workers.

With this initial qualification, one can move to the next level, a Baccalaureat, after a few years. After completing three years of this specific kind of high school with a Baccalauréat Professionnel, students are still eligible to apply to university. However, the majority pursue vocational training.

There is a mismatch between skills education in schools and labour market demand. OECD (2017) pointed out that the educational attainment level matches the OECD average but not so in cases where information processing skills are considered essential for further participation in training. Participation in vocational education, especially apprenticeships, is low and declining. "In France, only 25% of upper secondary students were enrolled in combined school and work-based programmes in 2018 (i.e. between 25% and 90% of the curriculum is taught as work-based learning, while the remainder is organised within the school environment" (OECD, 2020, p. 15). Moreover, relatively few adults participate in education and training activities (OECD, 2017).

Hobbies and Life Skills Education

Hobby development is not an identifiable agenda of school education. However, there are plenty of opportunities for hobby development through health and physical education (sports and games, dance), music, literary and arts courses (e.g., performing arts), etc.

Similarly, life skills education is not mentioned in the school curriculum. Life skills development, however, happens by default through participation in classroom activities and outside activities, like sports and games, etc. The prescribed curriculum does not mention life skills like communication, decision-making, problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, working in teams, cooperation and sharing, empathy, etc.

"In addition, 54 hours per year (as an indication and according to the needs of the pupils) are dedicated to guidance in choosing a career. These hours are devoted to developing a project, leading to choosing a course of study and the specialised courses of the final cycle, and then to pursuing higher education. In addition to the common lessons, pupils can choose up to two optional lessons. These courses allow students to discover new fields of study and prepare them to choose a speciality in 'première'" (Eurydice, 2024b, 6.5).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The focus is on developing social, moral, and cultural education in France at the primary level so that children can imbibe habits throughout their lives. Artistic and cultural education has been made compulsory by Law since 2013. According to the Government, "developing the arts in schools and during after-school time falls under the requirement for Republican equality (YouthWiki, 2023)." "Its purpose is to help them acquire specific competencies in the artistic fields taught; it plays an essential role in understanding and appreciating the diversity of cultures and artistic forms (MNE, 2010)."

"To achieve these objectives, the Ministries of Culture and National Education and Youth have identified three practices to be developed as a priority in primary and secondary schools from 2019 onwards: musical practice, reading (books), the theatre" (YouthWiki, 2018, p. 187).

Moral education in French schools integrates philosophical, cultural, and civic dimensions to nurture responsible citizenship. Students engage with moral quandaries, ethical dilemmas, and values clarification exercises from primary to secondary levels, promoting critical thinking and empathy. The curriculum emphasises virtues such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, and integrity, aiming to cultivate all-round individuals who can navigate complex societal challenges. Through literature, history, and citizenship education, students explore moral principles in context, grounding abstract concepts in real-world relevance. Classroom instruction reinforces moral values through experiential learning.

The connection between moral education and language and literature education is particularly acknowledged in France. Studies in France have examined the relationship between moral and literary education. Boncourt (2003) says that the purpose of the study of poetry was to teach moral values when it was included in the school curriculum in 1923, but it is now on the opposite side.

Schools teach morality to children from the age of 5. Moral and Civic Education "is taught in all primary and secondary school classrooms. Its curriculum comprises four main themes: Sensitivity (understanding your feelings and those of others), Rules and Rights (understanding your legal rights and the rules of society), Critical Thinking (making rational decisions) and Social Responsibility (learning to become a responsible member of society). The main goal of the course is to teach children to become active and responsible members of society by the time they turn 16 when education is no longer compulsory in France" (ETUCE, 2019, p. 22).

Social education in France instils values of solidarity, democracy, and social responsibility. Civics, sociology, and ethics form the foundation of social education, fostering critical thinking and empathy. The curriculum emphasises understanding societal structures, promoting social justice, and advocating for human rights. Pedagogical methods prioritise experiential learning, encouraging students to actively participate in addressing social issues within their communities. Cross-curricular integration ensures that social education permeates various subjects, reinforcing its importance throughout students' academic journey. Social education in France strives to create inclusive learning environments that respect and celebrate differences.

Peace and Happiness Education

France ranks 20th on the Happiness Index. Based on PISA 2015 findings, students in France have a greater appreciation for learning than their counterparts in other OECD nations. As per PISA 2018 results, 69.6% of French students expressed contentment with their lives, a slightly higher proportion than the OECD average of 66.9%. The reasons stated were fewer working days in schools, less school work, less stress-related anxiety, and students are safer from bullies in the schoolyard, placing below average for exposure to all types of bullying. However, according to the OECD study, approximately 20% of students indicated that they had been bullied a few times per month, which is lower than the OECD average of 23% (OECD, 2020).

Peace education contributes to building a harmonious and inclusive society domestically and globally. It plays a vital role in fostering understanding and tolerance. It holds a significant place in the curriculum of French schools, aiming to cultivate a culture of peace, tolerance, and conflict resolution among students.

The Paris Conference on Education for Sustainable Peace in 2024 called upon teachers to unite to combat hate speech and encourage mutual understanding (UPF, 2024).

The recommendation emphasises that peace is not solely achieved through international negotiations but also within classrooms, sports fields, and communities. It provides concrete guidance to shape how individuals perceive the world and interact with others. Women also play an essential role in providing this critical education. By integrating peace education into curricula, France contributes to constructing lasting peace and fostering a more harmonious society. Peace education is integrated into various subjects such as history, civics, and ethics. Pedagogical approaches emphasise empathy, active listening, and non-violent communication, equipping students with essential skills for resolving conflicts peacefully. Cross-curricular integration ensures that peace education permeates different areas of study, reinforcing its principles throughout students' educational journeys. Community service projects and intercultural exchanges allow

students to practice peacebuilding and foster mutual understanding. Teachers play a central role as facilitators of peace education, guiding students in exploring peace-related issues and modelling peaceful behaviour in the classroom.

Summary and Conclusion

France's education system is centralised, with the State setting pedagogical guidelines and curricula and handling the recruitment, training, and management of school management and teaching staff in public and private schools under contract with the State. Since 2003, education-related legislation has become part of the Education Code. In 2005, a new framework of law was passed, education became the national priority, and students got the right to acquire a common set of knowledge and skills to get equal opportunities in professional life; it was reaffirmed in 2013.

School education in France comprises kindergarten/pre-primary (3-5 years), primary (6-10 years), Junior Secondary (11-14 years) and Senior Secondary education (15-18 years). Homeschooling is legal. Families can teach their children at home if they follow the rules set by the law and are supervised by the government. Schooling is free and compulsory for 3-16. One of the key challenges accepted by the French government in 2015 was to manage ECCE. Some administrative and pedagogical responsibilities were transferred from the central government to the local authorities.

The revision of school timetables in primary education started in 2013-14. The government changed the school week from four to five days, with nine half-days that add up to 24 hours of training, increasing the number of school days from 144 to 180 per year. France made co-curricular events easier to give each student more individualised help. Each school has a set number of hours in their schedule, depending upon the grade level (3 hours in 5th, 3 to 4 hours in 6th, 7th, and 8th), that are not set aside for specific teaching but for teaching that goes along with it. In fifth grade, it includes three hours of one-on-one help. In sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, this time is split between one-on-one help and hands-on lessons that combine at least two subjects. The lessons are planned around the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to teach current languages. The second modern language starts in 5th grade.

The government promotes learning through orthodox language teaching to give more weight to learning languages. The decision seems to have been prompted by the inadequate literacy skills of students completing primary school in French.

Standardised evaluations in the first years of each education level (CP, sixth grade, 10th grade) were introduced to improve the management of France's education system. The dual primary and secondary education system was bridged by extending compulsory school attendance to children up to 16. The Junior secondary schools were made accessible to all children starting at 11. There is no provision to provide a certificate after Elementary school.

For the development of social, moral and cultural education, more focus is given at the primary level so that children can imbibe those habits early in life. Health and Physical Education has a special place in the curriculum. The school curriculum contributes to developing physical, sporting and artistic culture. It is an exciting challenge for physical education teachers who have often fought throughout history to preserve their discipline, the organisation of which has no equivalent abroad and for which any country could envy.

In France, for the development of hobbies and life skill education, time is scheduled for students to opt for Literary courses or Artistic subjects according to their choice. The well-planned curriculum in school education helped the students with all-round development and helped make well-informed citizens. In the Happiness Index, the country ranks 20th. It is not because of high GDP, social support, and healthy life, but education helped the country to achieve it.

School days provide children with other activities. This relieves stress and anxiety, and children find more time to devote to physical and cultural activities. However, the OECD (2020b) study shows that just over half of students in France reported noise and disorder in most or all of their classes in PISA 2018, at 51.8%, which was well above the OECD average of 31.5%.

The highly developed economy, high Human Development Index, high average earning, lower unemployment rate, high literacy rates (99 per cent for both male and female population), and 100% Net Enrolment Rate, at the primary level for females, shows a well-developed and effectively functioning education system.

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Compulsory School Years

Despite the differing structures of educational systems, countries are increasingly moving towards twelve years of schooling, preceded by two to three years of preschool as part of a school readiness programme, with a few exceptions that offer 13 to 17 years of schooling, e.g. Latin American Countries. Another trend is the rise in the privatisation of school education, including compulsory years, which is likely to exacerbate the gaps between demand and access in developing and least developed countries and further widen the quality divide between the affluent and the disadvantaged. This growing denationalisation poses a significant threat to the achievement of SDG4.

33
Land of Happy and Free Learning: Finland

Manju Narula

Abstract

Finland, the happiest country for the seventh consecutive year, has achieved 100% literacy. Its centralised educational governance committed to continuous updates of national strategies and decentralised implementation by local providers has fostered a progressive and flexible system that caters to diverse learners. In 2009, the Finnish National Board of Education launched the Future of Learning 2030 Barometer to support core curriculum reforms and address future educational challenges. Finland's education system prioritises learner-centred, equality and quality pedagogy, minimising differences in outcomes across regions and schools. It promotes gender sensitivity and diversity, moving away from traditional gender roles. The emphasis on continuous assessment minimises achievement gaps between high and low-performing students. A safe and joyful learning environment has contributed to Finland's success in building a happy nation. Health, peace and happiness education have been prioritised. The structural barriers have been removed so that the educational structure can be more flexible to different learners and ensure equity.

Keywords: Finland, Happiest Nation, Universal Literacy, Centralised Educational Governance, 2030 Barometer, Structural Barriers

Introduction

Finland is a northern European country bordering Russia, Norway, and Sweden. Its capital, Helsinki, is home to the sea fortress Suomenlinna, which was built gradually from 1748 onwards on a group of islands in the Helsinki district. Finland has 2,563 km of land borders and 31,119 km coastline along the Baltic Sea stretches and features around 180,000 islands, covering approximately 337,030 km^2. The country is also called the “land of a thousand lakes” (Enander et al., 2023).

The population in 2023 was 5.6 million (Statistics Finland, 2024). Annual growth rate is 0.50% (World Bank Group, 2023). Life expectancy is 83.80. For males, it is 78.60, and for females, 84.79 (Statistics Finland, 2024). The gender ratio at birth is 97 males per 100 females (CIA, 2024). Finland has a 5.8% migrant population from the European Union (1.9%) and 3.9% third-country nationals (EC, 2024). The majority ethnicity in Finland is Finnish, with historic minorities including the Sámi, Roma, Russians, Estonians, Iraqis, and Somalis. Finnish and Swedish are the official languages, while some residents also speak Russian and Estonian (Buchet-Couzy et al., 2024). Finland is dominated by Christians, with 65.2% belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 32.0% unaffiliated, 1.1% Orthodox Christians, 0.9% other Christians, and 0.8% following other faiths such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism (Tilastokeskus, 2023).

Finland is a high-income country with a GDP of 308.06 billion USD and a 0.4% annual growth rate. The GDP per capita is USD 55,130 (IMF, 2024). The unemployment rate in 2022 was 6.72%, a 0.89% decline from 2021 (Macrotrends, 2024). Finland is the happiest country, holding the first position for the 7th year in a row (Fernandez, 2024). The country holds 12th out of 192 countries in the HDI with 0.942 (UNDP, 2024). It is ranked 3rd out of 169 countries in the Quality-of-Life Index (Finland Promotion Board, 2023), demonstrating its high level of development.

Finland's literacy rate is an impressive 100% as of 2023 (NUMBO, 2023). GER scores are primary level 98.62, lower secondary 102.26, and upper secondary 188.64. NER percentages are primary level 98.02, lower secondary 98.28, and upper secondary 95.66 (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). In 2023, Finland had 2,114 active comprehensive schools and 464 upper secondary schools (Clausnitzer, 2024), with a steadily declining student population. From pre-primary to higher education and beyond, education in Finland is free for all. In 1948, Finland was the first country to serve free hot meals to students daily (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Educational Policy

Several significant innovations stand out in Finland’s educational history, each contributing to the country’s current reputation. Finland decided to focus on public education in the 1960s to lift the country out of poverty and enhance its economic recovery. Thus, the Finnish Parliament chose public education to boost the economy in 1963 (Hancock, n.d.). The Teacher Education Reform of the 1980s aimed to improve teaching by focusing on tough training and continuous learning for teachers to ensure they were highly skilled.

After gaining independence from Russia in 1917, Finland embarked on a transformative journey in education. Over the next century, the country implemented sweeping reforms, including the 2016 National Curriculum, which catalysed systemic change and helped elevate Finland's education system to global prominence. The curriculum has enabled change to start emerging. The debate

about whether teachers' roles are changing from being teachers to guides and co-learners symbolises that convention is being challenged (Lähdemäk, 2018).

In 2001, Finland established a system of free preschool education, with planning starting in the 1960s and implementing a municipal daycare system in the 1970s. However, due to the economic depression in the early 1990s, free preschool was delayed until 2000. Early 21st-century policy initiatives aimed to integrate culture, political values, and education into a cohesive framework (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.).

There are a few private institutions in addition to municipal schools. Teachers play a crucial role in Finland's education system, making teaching a competitive and desirable profession. The minimum qualification for primary teachers was elevated to a postgraduate level, and teacher education was transitioned to universities from colleges (OECD, 2015).

The major policy initiatives in the 21st century, as per findings of the OECD (2015), can be summarised below:

- In 2013, Finland transferred early childhood education and care services from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture.
- The Education and Research plan (2011-2016) aimed to enhance the participation of immigrant students in preparatory education so that they could better access upper secondary education.
- In 2016, a curriculum reform from pre-primary to upper secondary education was initiated and implemented, focusing on new skills, interdisciplinary approaches, and digital resources.
- The Youth Guarantee was introduced in 2013 to support youth in completing qualifications and finding employment. Additionally, an Advisory Board was established in 2008 to address professional development for educators.
- The Osaava Programme (2010-2016) promoted continuous professional development, increasing participation from 30,000 in 2009 to nearly 70,000 in 2013.
- Quality Criteria for Basic Education were set in 2009, and municipal reforms began in 2013 to ensure equitable education services.
- Municipal reforms have been undertaken since 2013 to consolidate local governance and ensure equitable access to high-quality education services nationwide (OECD, 2015).

Finland's educational vision emphasises equity, well-being, quality, efficiency, and internationalisation, earning global recognition as a success story of the 21st century (Lähdemäki, 2018). In 2021, Finland launched the Action Plan to protect student well-being by preventing bullying, teasing, violence and harassment in schools. The plan, jointly developed by several ministries, aimed to equip learners with emotional intelligence and social skills while building teacher capacity to foster a bullying-free school climate. This intervention demonstrates Finland's commitment to promoting student well-being and creating safe, supportive learning environments through targeted policy initiatives.

In 2022, Finland introduced a policy reform extending compulsory education to address bullying and bridge learning and well-being gaps caused by COVID-19 disruptions. The reform utilised trained support staff to enhance student support and engagement. In August 2023, Finland launched the "engaging school community work model" aiming at:

- "Reducing and preventing school absenteeism in partnership with households
- supporting pupils' attachment to their school by strengthening positive school culture and well-being
- identifying and aiding pupils facing challenges in regular schooling
- strengthening basic skills attainment and learning outcomes" (Eurydice, 2023)

Additionally, a reform was implemented to assign responsibility for student welfare services to the county where the school is located, regardless of the student's home address.

Structure of the Education System

Finland's school system comprises non-compulsory early childhood education, one-year pre-primary education starting at age 6, nine-year basic comprehensive education from ages 7-16, and three-year upper secondary education, including vocational and general tracks for 17–19-year-olds. Education is compulsory from ages 6-18, covering pre-primary through upper secondary levels.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

All children of preschool age have a subjective right to ECEC, with municipalities responsible for providing and supervising these services. The National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC (2018) direct the content of these programs, which include ample playtime and outdoor activities. Children whose first language is not Finnish or Swedish receive language support, and open early childhood education opportunities, such as playground activities with a parent, are also available (InfoFinland,

2024). The Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE, 2024a) states that the programme uses a "learning through play" paradigm to support "balanced growth".

Pre-Primary Education

When a kid turns six, they must attend pre-primary school for a year before the start of compulsory schooling in Finland. Pre-primary education is provided free of cost to families by municipalities. During school hours, pre-primary education is typically scheduled for four hours per day, Monday to Friday (InfoFinland, 2024). Children learn skills to read from their pre-primary education rather than being taught.

Basic Comprehensive Education

In Finland, compulsory education starts the year after a child turns seven, covering nine grades from ages seven to sixteen, focusing on essential skills and moral development. There are no "gifted" programmes, and seniors are supposed to assist the younger ones who are slow learners. The kids receive several benefits, such as a health care programme, a daily free lunch to help with their nutrition, free textbooks, educational materials, field trips and potentially even lodging (Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023).

Upper Secondary Education

There are two types of upper secondary education: vocational upper secondary education and general upper secondary education. General upper secondary schools offer an all-round education, which does not lead to any specific profession (InfoFinland, 2024). Students typically take the matriculation exam at the end of their studies. Compared to normal upper secondary school education, wherein on-the-job training is crucial, vocational education and training are more practice-oriented (InfoFinland, 2024). Upper secondary education lasts three to four years, depending on the programme (Figure 33.1).

Curricular Framework

From 2012 to 2016, Finland undertook a major overhaul of its national core curricula. It established a common framework to guide education provision and teaching-learning in municipalities and schools, reflecting societal and global changes (Airaksinen et al., 2017). The national core curriculum was designed for all education levels, aiming to enhance the strengths of the Finnish education system while addressing the challenges posed by a rapidly changing and complex world (Halinen, 2018). The curriculum Reform of 2016 (FNAE, 2016) emphasised the value of multidisciplinary education, putting students at the centre of the learning process and encouraging innovation, critical thinking, and teamwork towards quality education (Niemi, 2021). They introduced phenomena-based learning. This approach dismantles subject-based silos, allowing

phenomenon-based classes to investigate topics that span multiple disciplines instead of concentrating on individual subjects like Mathematics or History (Silander, 2015).

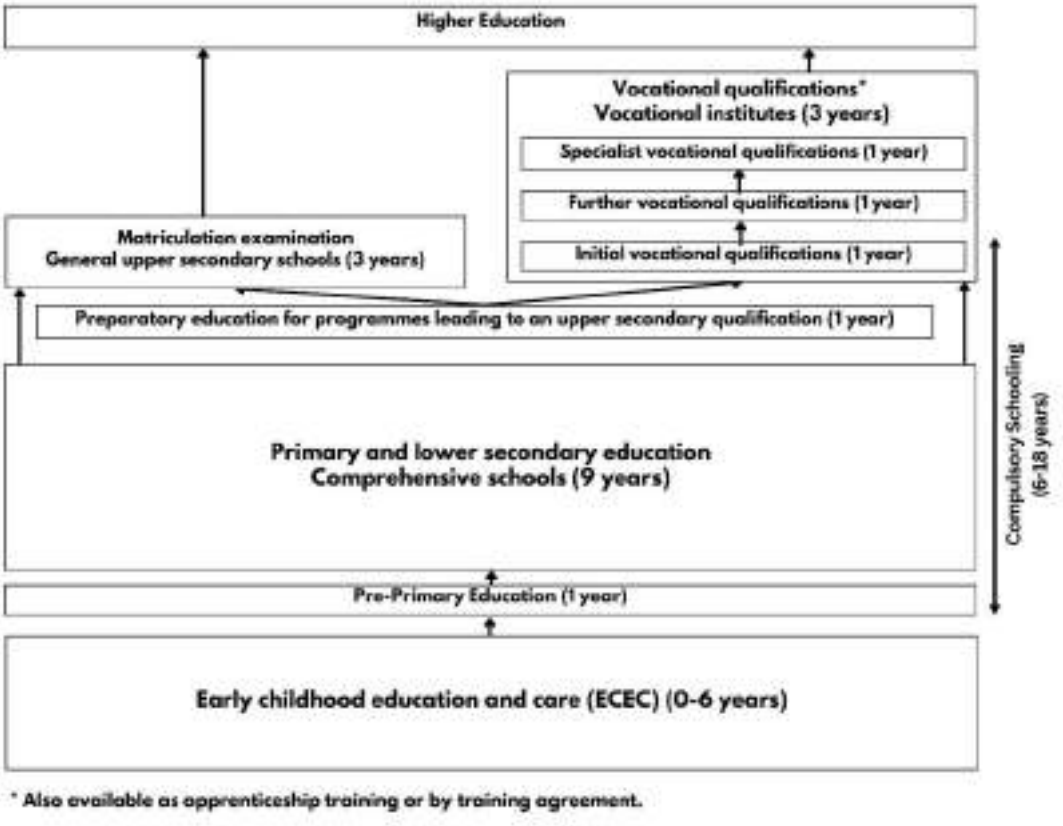

Figure 33.1 School Education Structure of Finland

Source: *FNAE, 2024b (Adapted by author)*

This reform fosters critical thinking and learning skills, enabling students to become active, responsible citizens, with "social studies/citizenship education" introduced as a mandatory subject (European Union Education Ministers, 2015). Core values of peace, equity, justice, environmental responsibility, and cultural diversity underpin the new curriculum (Halinen, 2018), promoting student engagement and fostering equality and partnership with teachers (Lähdemäki, 2018). The new curriculum defines seven transversal skills:

i. “Thinking and learning to learn
ii. Cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression
iii. Taking care of oneself and managing daily life
iv. Multi-literacy

v. Information and communications technology competence
vi. Working life competence and entrepreneurship
vii. Participation, involvement, and building a sustainable future" (Wilkins & Corrigan, 2019).

In first grade, students learn two languages alongside the school's primary language (typically Finnish or Swedish). From grades one to nine, they have four to eleven periods weekly for subjects like art, music, cooking, carpentry, metalwork, and textiles. The school environment is relaxed and informal, with minimal homework to allow for extracurricular activities, and outdoor activities continue even in cold weather.

"Further, all the schools providing basic education follow a national core curriculum which constitutes the objectives and core fundamentals of varied subjects, and the local authorities, such as municipalities and other education providers, maintain the Comprehensive Schools and often create their curricula as part of the national framework" (Leverage Edu., 2022).

The national core curriculum for basic education was enacted in 2016 and will be in effect for grades 1–9 from 2017 to 2019. Working groups developed the curriculum, focusing on its structure, objectives, learning concepts, support for learning, and the various subjects included.

Local education authorities and schools create their curricula based on the guidelines of the national core curriculum. The Basic Education Act outlines the subjects and student counselling included in the curriculum. The government determines the overall time allocation by setting minimum lesson requirements for core subjects. Starting in grade 1, students can choose more optional subjects, and the curriculum incorporates an introduction to working life. Typical subjects are included for all pupils in basic education (Table 33.1).

Table 33.1 Basic Education Syllabus

• Mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish)	• Chemistry
• Second national language (Swedish or Finnish)	• Biology
• Foreign languages	• Geography
• Environmental studies	• Physical education
• Health Education	• Music
• Religion or ethics	• Visual arts
• History	• Crafts
• Social studies	• Home economics
• Mathematics	• Guidance counseling
• Physics	• Chemistry

Source: *European Commission, 2024*

Optional subjects are offered based on decisions by schools or municipalities, while the government determines overall time allocation. Table 33.2 shows the distribution of lesson hours for general upper secondary Education.

Table 33.2 Distribution of Lesson Hours in General Upper Secondary Education

Subjects	Compulsory studies (credits)	National elective studies (credits)
Mother tongue and literature	12	6
A language	12	4
B1-language	10	4
B2- and B3-languages		16+16
Mathematics		
Common study unit	2	
Basic syllabus	10	4
Advanced syllabus	18	6
Environmental and natural sciences		
Biology	4	6
Geography	2	6
Physics	2	12
Chemistry	2	8
Humanities and Social Sciences		
Philosophy	4	4
Psychology	2	8
History	6	6
Social studies	6	1
Religion or ethics	4	8
Health education	2	4
Arts and physical education		
Physical education	4	6
Music	2 or 4	4
Visual arts	2 or 4	4
Guidance counselling	4	
Thematic studies		6
Compulsory studies depending on the choice of the basic or advanced syllabus of mathematics	94 or 102	
National elective studies		20
National elective or school-specific elective studies		28/36
Total number of credits (minimum)	**150**	

Source: *European Commission, 2024*

In basic education, subjects are organised into sections encompassing multiple grades, with a minimum number of lessons defined in annual weekly hours. Each school year consists of 38 weeks, meaning one weekly lesson totals 38 lessons annually. At least 45 minutes of each 60-minute lesson should focus on instruction. For instance, in mathematics, students must complete a minimum of

1,216 lessons over nine years, divided into three sections: grades 1-2 require at least 228 lessons, grades 3-6 need 570 lessons, and grades 7-9 must have 418 lessons. Local authorities or schools can determine the lesson distribution within each section.

Teachers can select their teaching methods and approaches to meet the curriculum's objectives, fostering a desire to learn and motivating students to work effectively while developing skills for acquiring, applying, and evaluating information. The national core curriculum emphasises the active involvement of students, with teachers guiding studies and designing learning environments. It highlights the importance of teaching methods that enhance students' readiness to learn, cognitive skills, and the ability to adapt information while also considering individual differences and the role of social interaction in learning.

Key aims of the reform include developing schools as learning communities that promote joy in learning, collaboration, and student autonomy in both studies and school life. There is a strong emphasis on transversal competencies and interdisciplinary work to address future challenges. The National Board of Education established the Majakka network to support curriculum implementation. This network compared 21st-century competencies with the transversal competencies introduced in Finland's National Core Curriculum, providing guidance to schools in preparing and enacting the new curriculum (Table 33.3).

“Local authorities and schools are encouraged to promote the development of these competencies and to consider their innovative ways of reaching the goals. The core curricula for subjects have been written so that their learning objectives include the competence goals which are most important for the said objectives. The competencies will also be assessed as a part of the subject assessment. In this way, every school subject enhances the development of all seven competence areas. This is a new way of combining competence-based and subject-based teaching and learning” (European Commission, 2023).

The reform emphasises collaborative classroom practices facilitating multidisciplinary, phenomenon-based, and project-oriented studies. Multiple teachers work with students on the same topic, and schools must provide at least one such study period annually for all students, focusing on phenomena or topics of interest to them. Students actively participate in planning these studies, which makes learning more engaging and meaningful. This approach encourages pupils to collaborate with teachers in designing their schoolwork, particularly the multidisciplinary projects, fostering a sense of ownership and relevance in their education.

Table 33.3 21st-Century and Transversal Competencies in Finnish National Curriculum

21st century competencies (DeSeCo)		Finnish transversal competencies introduced in the National Core Curriculum
Ways of Thinking	Critical thinking	Pupils are instructed to find how knowledge can be built, for example, by asking questions and looking for evidence in order to answer these questions … pupils are instructed an opportunity to analyse the issue from different perspectives critically
	Creative thinking	Finding innovative solutions that require students to learn to see alternatives and unite perspectives Exploratory and creative work, working together, and contributing to the development of thinking and learning to learn
	Learning to learn	Use information independently and interact with others for problem-solving, reasoning, and concluding. Practising appropriate behavioural and collaborative skills in working situations and noticing the importance of language skills and interaction skills
Ways of Working	Inquiring	Collaborative, inquiry and creative working
	Problem-solving	Use information independently and interact with others for problem-solving, reasoning, and concluding.
	Communication and Collaboration	Practising appropriate behavioural and collaborative skills in working life situations and noticing the importance of language skills and interaction skills
Tools for Working	Information literacy	Cultural literacy, interaction, and communication Multi-literacy refers to the skills of interpreting, producing, and valuing different texts, which help students understand diverse forms of cultural communication and build their own identity.
	Technological skills, media literacy	Develops skills in both traditional and multi-media environments that utilise technology in different ways ICT skills are developed in four major areas … and understand the use and operation of ICT …
Acting in the World	Global and local citizenship	Taking care of yourself, everyday life skills, and safety …students grow as active citizens who act according to democratic rights and responsibility…
	Cultural awareness and social responsibility	Working life skills and entrepreneurship … Participation and influence, responsibility for a sustainable future

Source: *Lavonen, 2020*

Teaching Learning

The education curriculum is known for its innovative and student-centred teaching and learning practices. The national core curricula prioritise students' active engagement and awareness of their learning as components of a superior, goal-oriented learning process (Halinen, 2018). Each school's distinctive curriculum greatly influences teaching-learning scenarios. Teachers have the freedom to choose their teaching strategies. Finland takes the idea of fairness in educational quality very seriously. There are not many variations in learning results between schools or regions of Finland (OECD, 2017).

Mukhopadhyay and Kundu (2023) identified the major pedagogical approaches to education that ensure equality and quality in school education (Figure 33.2).

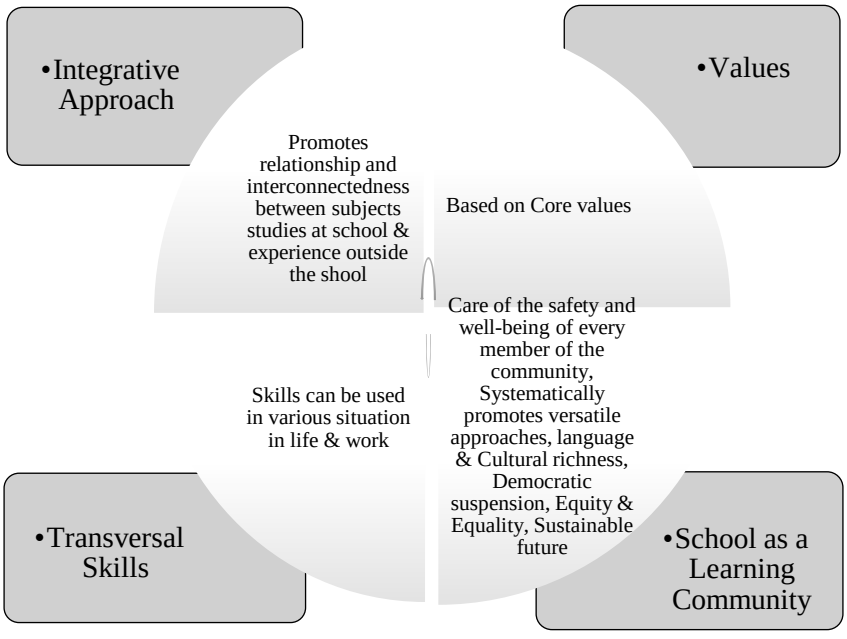

Figure 33.2 Pedagogical Approaches for Equality and Quality in School Education

Source: *Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023 (Adapted by author)*

Values: Finland bases its basic education on five guiding principles: each student's individuality, entitlement to quality education, need to become informed and engaged citizens, need for a sustainable way of life, and richness of cultural diversity. Establishing an educational institution as a community of learners.

Transversal Skills: Children's acquired skills can be applied in real-world and professional contexts. Every subject helps to nurture such skills.

School as a Learning Community: Ensuring the safety and well-being of all community members promotes diverse approaches, cultural richness, democracy, equity, and a sustainable future.

Constructivist Pedagogy: Students' views of learning guide their educational experiences, directions, and organisational controls. It emphasises the importance of students' activities and interactions with the teacher, other students, and the learning environment, ensuring that learners are fundamental.

The key points of teaching-learning include:

- Competence-Based Approach: The curriculum emphasises the development of 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills (Lavonen, 2020) through learning by doing.
- Teacher Autonomy: Teachers have significant autonomy in designing their lessons and choosing methods that best suit their students' needs (Lavonen, 2020). They are experts who develop school-based curricula, tailoring education to local contexts (Vitikka et al., 2016).
- Collaborative Learning: Finnish education promotes collaborative learning experiences, where teachers act as facilitators and coaches. Phenomenon-based learning is part of the curriculum, integrating various subjects around a single theme or concept (FNAE, 2020).
- Integrative Approach to Learning: This overarching concept describes integrating knowledge and skills from different subjects, creating a synthesis that genuinely requires an interdisciplinary perspective (Haapaniemi et al., 2020).

Use of Technology: Educators are advised to assist students in utilising new technologies. Digital solutions are frequently employed to improve learning, emphasising problem-based learning (FNAE, 2020). EDUFI produces limited-circulation learning materials that the government subsidises for minority groups. Teachers and providers can access the Edu.fi website, which EDUFI maintains. General upper secondary students receive free study materials, including books, tools, and devices. EDUFI develops and distributes these resources to support equitable access to education.

The teaching-learning process of schools has adopted the approach in compliance with policy directives, which gives learners ample freedom and flexibility. Such freedom-based learning was ensured by the provision of an adequate amount of work, play, and leisure time for the learners so that they could explore their interests and hobbies (Tirri, 2016). All the learning activities are designed to ensure that the stress, anxiety, or humiliation can be negated (Niemi et al., 2016). Good teaching relies on teachers improving their skills through training, and it is crucial for students to feel empowered in their learning journey, as this boosts their confidence, motivation, and academic performance.

Learning Assessment

Global attention has been focused on Finland for its consistently high performance in PISA. Finland scored first or second in mathematics on the past four administrations of the PISA, with the smallest variance across schools, indicating a low achievement gap. The large-scale assessments are

considered indicators of school effectiveness and mathematics in the instant case (Hendrickson, 2013). Several country representatives, including the USA, visited Finland to uncover the secret of success. Contrary to popular belief and practices, e.g. China, Japan, and Singapore, the absence of high-stakes testing has been attributed to Finland's performance (Kupianinen et al., 2009). There are no national high-stakes standardised tests. The assessment in Finland is to improve learning; it is "encouraging and supportive by nature" (FNAE, 2010, Encouraging Assessment and Evaluation, para. 1). There are a few specific attributes that distinguish Finnish school assessment practices:

- Since the focus is on improving learning, the emphasis is on the quality of the learning experience than on grades (Finland Education Hub, 2023)
- To improve the quality of the learning experience, there is a strong emphasis on Formative assessment and qualitative feedback. Finnish schools use several assessment techniques to gather information, such as observation, self-assessment, peer evaluation, and feedback-driven discussions.
- Teachers take time to provide individualised constructive feedback to help students identify their strengths, areas for improvement, and steps to enhance their learning. Further, students are involved in setting learning goals, reflecting on their progress, and taking ownership of their education; in other words, students are active designers of their learning pathways.

"The Finnish approach to assessment and grading in schools offers a refreshing and student-centred perspective on education. By prioritising individual growth, active participation, qualitative feedback, and holistic development, Finnish schools create an environment that fosters intrinsic motivation and overall well-being" (Finland Education Hub, 2023).

During the first years of Comprehensive school, grading is limited to verbal assessments. The medium of examination in matriculation examinations is Finnish and Swedish. After completing the general upper secondary school syllabus, a school leaving certificate is awarded, and those who cannot complete receive a certificate of resignation containing marks for the studies completed. The grading system from upper primary to matriculation follows (Table 33.4).

Table 33.4 The Grading System for Upper Primary to Matriculation

Grade	Abbreviation	Points	English explanation	Literal translation	Percentage of participants
Laudatur	L	7	Outstanding	Lauded (Praised)	Top 5%
Eximia Cum Laude Approbatur	E	6	Excellent	Approved with Exceptional Praise	15%
Magna Cum Laude Approbatur	M	5	Very Good	Approved with Great Praise	20%
Cum Laude Approbatur	C	4	Good	Approved with Praise	24%
Lubenter Approbator	B	3	Satisfactory	Gladly Approved	20%
Approbatur	A	2	Pass	Approved	11%
Improbatur	I	0	Fail/Unsatisfactory	Not Approved	Bottom 5%

Source: *Wayback Machine (2023)*

Health and Physical Education

In Finland, health education has always been a priority. The country's Health Care Index is relatively high (77.58). It became a separate subject in 2004, offering more room for physical activity and health teaching. In 2016, two additional weekly lessons were introduced in basic education for Physical Education of 90 minutes. The municipality officials added that the lessons for grades 3-6 and 7-9 are 45 minutes long (Salin & Huhtiniemi, 2018). Schools can schedule these additional sessions, but most commonly, they are placed for the 5th and 8th grades.

The education and healthcare systems are functioning very well in Finland schools. The main objective of Physical Education is "to guide the pupils in adopting a physically active lifestyle and to educate them through physical activities" (FNAE, 2016). The Finnish national core curriculum for physical education has relatively limited content (Yli-Piipari, 2014), engaging gymnastics, music, expression, and dance; ball games; orienteering; winter sports; and swimming and lifesaving skills. The assessment framework covers the degree of engagement and performance.

Skills Education

Finnish school education prioritises the Pre-Vocational and Multi-Sensory programmes, which are prominent in the official curriculum and effectively translated into pedagogy and praxis in compliance with its 21st-century educational policy.

Finnish education promotes skilled citizenship by developing students' abilities in traditional and multimedia environments, utilising technology in diverse ways. From an early age, students receive instruction in skill-oriented subjects like Art, Carpentry, Music, Metalwork, Cooking, and Textiles, emphasising foundational skills (Relander, 2023). Basic education focuses on literacy, numeracy, and transversal (21st-century) skills, ensuring a strong foundation for further learning and career mobility (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017). Vocational programs at the upper secondary level transform these foundational skills into practical working skills, facilitating smooth transitions from education to meaningful employment (European Commission, 2023).

Regular assessment using a variety of mechanisms and tools measures progress in these key areas (European Commission, 2023). By combining traditional skills with ICT competencies across four major domains, Finnish schooling equips students with the knowledge and abilities needed to thrive as skilled citizens in the 21st century.

Hobby and Life Skill Education

Finnish education focuses on developing students' knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, integrating them into learning. Teaching strategies are tailored to each student's unique interests, needs, and abilities, ensuring that individual preferences are addressed. Students are encouraged to explore, demonstrate understanding, and reflect on how to apply new knowledge in real-world contexts, including various vocational education pathways that prepare them for the labour market. Important 21st-century skills are taught through diverse methods. Teachers continually enhance their skills throughout their careers, which is crucial for long-term school development. The Finnish education system has received numerous awards for its emphasis on skill-based learning (Musset, 2015).

Curriculum reforms were introduced in 2014 to encourage hobbies and life skills from grade one. Students are motivated to participate in various state-subsidized courses, such as music and sports, for a small fee. Reading for pleasure is actively promoted, and television stations air foreign programs in original languages with subtitles, allowing children to read while watching (Couch, 2011). These elements are assessed through an integrated evaluation process.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education is grounded in values derived from philosophy, humanities, and social sciences (Suwalska, 2021). “Respecting the uniqueness of each student and guaranteeing the right to a good education; promoting each student’s growth as a civilised/educated human being and as an active citizen of a democratic society; valuing cultural diversity and regarding it as a source of richness; and understanding the necessity of living sustainably” are the four value pillars (FNAE, 2016)

The curriculum exposes Finnish students to diverse global cultures and religions, with religious education focused on knowledge and respect, potentially contributing to peace education (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). Finland's education system promotes gender sensitivity and diversity, moving away from traditional gender roles. The National Agency for Education provides guidelines to help schools and teachers incorporate gender diversity concepts across subjects and ensure teaching avoids reinforcing conventional gender notions. This approach fosters respect and tolerance, which are crucial for peace education (Yle, 2017). The value components are also covered in the rubrics of assessments.

Peace and Happiness Education

According to the Happiness Index, Finland ranks among the happiest, safest, and best-governed countries globally. It has low corruption, social progress, and justice (Statistics Finland, 2019). The Finnish welfare state contributes significantly to happiness and equality, supported by high taxes that fund effective education and healthcare systems (This is Finland, 2014).

Several factors have been attributed to contribute to this happy society. Finland provides a strong social safety net, including healthcare, unemployment benefits, and pensions, ensuring all citizens have access to essential services. It seriously practices gender equity. There is significant representation of women in political leadership and other sectors (Navarre, 2024). Another important factor is family-friendly policies characterised by generous parental leave and support for families that contribute to a balanced work-life environment. Finnish lifestyle connects with nature to enhance well-being. Further, high trust among citizens and institutions fosters a sense of security and community (Seppälä, 2024).

Community social life and education mutually contribute to happiness. Finns value the joy of learning, emphasising play and creativity in early childhood education. Music, arts, and physical education remain essential components of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools.

Finnish schools are happy schools (Crehan, 2016). The Finnish schools prioritise students' overall well-being, including mental health. This holistic approach ensures that children are happy and healthy, which is a prerequisite for effective learning (Poon, 2020). The system emphasises equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background. This reduces stress and competition, creating a more supportive learning environment, and teachers are highly respected and well-trained. They can tailor their teaching methods to suit individual students' needs (Colagrossi, 2018). Happy and intrinsically motivated teachers enhance student happiness and learning outcomes. Instead of frequent standardised tests, Finnish students are assessed through individualised evaluations by their teachers. This reduces pressure and provides a more personalised learning experience (Jackson, 2016). Finnish students have a balanced school life with shorter school days, less homework, and frequent breaks, which helps maintain a healthy balance between study and play (Crehan, 2016; Järvinen-Taubert, 2022). Without directly teaching peace education, Finland schools create a learning environment that nurtures peaceful, happy, performing students.

Summary and Conclusion

Since 2000, the Finnish educational system has been at the centre of global attention due to its strong performance in international PISA assessments (Välijärvi & Sulkunen, 2016). In 2009, the Finnish National Board of Education launched the Future of Learning 2030 Barometer to support core curriculum reforms and address future educational challenges (Airaksinen et al., 2017). The Barometer aims to explore the future of learning and identify potential opportunities and challenges that could impact the quality of school development, teaching, and learning.

The National Curriculum of Finland (FNAE, 2016) is a noble document that is liberal, contemporary and progressive. The policy has augmented the value base set for Finnish education towards holistic well-being to build a happy nation. The policy leads to the creation and implementation of the curriculum, with the provision of continuous adaptations to achieve the transversal competencies of the learners. The entire orchestrated effort was to understand the potential impact of globalisation, the relevant climate crisis, and the need to reshape the fundamentals of schooling towards a desired sustainability. The educational governance, programmes, and pedagogy were tuned to the rhythm so that the learners could lead meaningful lives by mastering the art of skills and competencies needed to succeed in society and the constantly changing professional world.

Finland's educational governance is centralised under a single ministry, with regularly updated national strategies guiding the decentralised system management. Local education providers are responsible for implementing policies and ensuring quality, with schools often managing budgets,

acquisitions, and recruitment. This decentralised approach empowers local authorities and schools to tailor education to their unique contexts while adhering to national objectives.

Finnish pedagogy is learner-centred, encouraging students to actively design learning activities and collaborate in interdisciplinary team projects that cut across traditional subject boundaries. This phenomena-based approach emphasises student self-assessment in a low-stress environment, fostering mutual respect and trust between teachers and learners. Finland prioritises equity in learning quality, minimising differences in outcomes across regions and schools (OECD, 2017). The achievement gap between high and low-performing students is remarkably small. Classrooms provide a safe space for students to voice concerns, make mistakes, and learn without fear of ridicule, promoting a joyful engagement with learning. This successful learner-centred model is underpinned by a constructivist epistemology that views knowledge as socially constructed, flexible, and student-driven, with teachers as facilitators of the learning process (Toom & Husu, 2016). The structural barriers have been removed so that the educational structure becomes more flexible to different learners to ensure equity. The synergies of stakeholders, policies and programmes at different levels of the educational system created efficient support systems for learning, assessment and progression (Niemi, 2021). Finnish teachers are selected through an effective framework, trusted as experts, and empowered with opportunities in a culture of trust, support, and collaboration, recognising their central role in the education system (Halinen et al., 2016).

Despite having the most liberal and effective system in place, the Finnish education system still faces challenges in neutralising and mitigating cross-cultural conflict in the context of a demographic change due to migration from other parts of the world. The migrant population in Finland is estimated to be 10.6 per cent of the Finnish population, of which approximately 5.9 per cent are migrants from outside Europe. Migrant integration is a major challenge. Teachers' liberal views and working capacity in cross-cultural climates ensure major progress for learners regardless of their cultural background. It is doubtless that the system left no stone unturned to ensure the all-round development of learners.

The Finnish curriculum holistically develops students' cognitive and non-cognitive skills through well-defined curricular and co-curricular activities, prioritising happiness and socio-emotional well. Audacious experimentation with the highest care has been fruitful from all aspects of the educational journey from the 21st to the 22nd century. The learners are tuned to the philosophy of participation meaningfully. They can face the ongoing and upcoming challenges not with stress and competitiveness but with social cohesion and a relaxed mindset. Finnish education might be a change-maker for the global partners.

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Early Childhood Care and Education

SDG4.2 states, "*By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so they are ready for primary education".* A large body of research indicates the benefits of preschool education, including performance in PISA and transition to college education. However, UNESCO's (2024) Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education does not paint a very encouraging picture. A few of the key findings are:

1. **"Only 63 countries (representing 34% of the countries in the analysis) have established at least one year of free pre-primary education in a national legal frame (p.30).**
2. **An estimated 37% of the world's children (more than 300 million) will not reach minimum proficiency levels in reading by 2030 (p.14)., resulting in a learning crisis unless immediate action is taken.**
3. **83% of children aged between 36 and 59 months in countries with free pre-primary education are developmentally on track, compared to 66.6% in countries without this provision (p.14). Hence, a legal imperative is necessary.**
4. **The enrolment rate for one year of organised learning before the start of primary school fell to 72% in 2022 from 75% in 2020. To meet SDG target 4.2, 1.4 million children would need to be enrolled in early childhood education every year until 2030 (p.15).**
5. **In 97 countries with data, only 4% of the poorest children live in households with children's books, and only 46% have playthings at home.**
6. **Children with disabilities are 25% less likely to attend early childhood education (p.16) (UNESCO, 2024).**

34
Resilient Education: Germany

Renu Nanda

Abstract

In Germany, education is compulsory for children starting at age six, with nine years of compulsory schooling. The system has differentiated schooling options, including Gymnasium, Hauptschule, and Realschule. Students can pursue academic or vocational paths based on their interests and abilities. The unique vocational education scheme combines practical and theoretical subjects, offering various choices for students not interested in traditional academics. German educational policy is responsive, helping maintain its status as a leading educational system. In policy, an in-built diagnostic mechanism identifies the challenges of now and the immediate future. The teaching approach emphasises student-centred learning, critical thinking, and social skills. The assessment process balances formative and summative methods. Life skills education and extracurricular activities that promote teamwork and creativity are integrated into the curriculum. Values education, peace education, global citizenship, and social responsibility are woven into the educational framework, fostering a sense of community and global awareness among students.

Keywords: Digital Pact for Schools, *Bonus programme,* Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work, Lehrer-Online, National Assessment Survey

Introduction

Following the defeat in World War II, Germany was divided into East (German Democratic Republic) and West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany). The Berlin Wall of 1961 symbolised the divide between East and West Germany. In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, East and West Germany reunited to form the modern Federal Republic of Germany

(WFB, 2024). Since the reunification, Germany has become Europe's leading economic and political power. It is known for its strong commitment to democracy, innovation, and social welfare.

Germany, located in Western Europe and neighbouring the North and Baltic Seas, has a total area of 357,580 square kilometres and a coastline measuring 2,389 kilometres. "Germany shares its 3,767-kilometre land border with Denmark to the north; the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France to the west; Switzerland and Austria to the south; and the Czech Republic and Poland to the east" (Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, 2024). It is characterised by low-lying coastal areas along the North and Baltic Seas, with several islands, including Rugen and Sylt. About 78% of people live in urban areas. Germany is divided regionally and administratively into 16 Landers (including three city-states), 19 administrative regions (Regierungsbezirke), 400 districts (Kreise) comprising 106 municipalities with the status of a district (kreisfreieStadte), 294 rural districts (Landkreise), and 10,789 municipalities (Gemeinden).

Germany's population is 83.90 million people - 97 males per 100 females (Global Data, 2021), with a 0.7% population growth rate. Life expectancy is 90.80 years. The ethnic composition of the population is: "German 85.4%, Turkish 1.8%, Ukrainian 1.4%, Syrian 1.1%, Romanian 1%, Polish 1%, other/stateless/unspecified 8.3% (2022 est.)" (WFB, 2024). "In 2023, according to initial results of the micro census, 24.9 million of the total 83.9 million inhabitants in Germany had a migration background (immigrants and their descendants) - this corresponds to a share of 29.7 per cent of the total population" (BPB, 2024, para 3). In 2021, the German population comprised 21.6 million Roman Catholics, 19.7 million Protestants, and 1,18,000 Jews. Other Christians belong to the Evangelical Free Churches and the Orthodox Churches. Between 4.4 and 4.7 million are Muslim migrants, mostly of Turkish origin.

German is the official language of the state. "Special provisions exist in Sachsen and Brandenburg for the use of the Sorbian and Lower Sorbian language, respectively, and in Schleswig-Holstein for the use of the Low German, Frisian and Danish languages" (EC, 2024). German is the standard medium of instruction in educational institutions.

Germany is the fourth largest economy globally and the largest in Europe. Its GDP was $4.59 trillion at the end of 2023, with a growth rate of 0.2%, and GDP per capita is $54,290 (IMF, 2024). As of 2020, the unemployment rate was around 4.5% on average. Germany's HDI is 0.942, ranking it 7th in the world. On the Happiness Index, Germany ranks 24th; Germany ranks 15th on the Peace Index.

The German education system is known for its emphasis on academic excellence and vocational training. The education system comprises kindergarten, primary, secondary, and higher education. Full-time schooling is compulsory at primary and secondary levels for all children aged six to 15.

In the 2022/2023 school year, there were 15,510 primary schools, 3,156 academic secondary schools, 2,795 schools for special needs children, and 2,210 integrated, comprehensive schools in Germany (Davies, 2024); approximately 3.5 to 4 million students; and there were 250,474 teachers at German primary schools. Germany has a huge teacher shortage; many teachers teach without the requisite qualifications (The Local, 2023). The NER in 2018 was 98.66%

Educational Policy

The German educational policy development has been divided into four phases (Beutner & Pechuel, 2017) – post World II in the late 1940s, 1950s and 60s that focused on education in times of reforms and economic development; the next phase witnessed much social change during 1970s and 80s. Developments in vocational and technical education marked the era of the 1990s. The policy development since the 2000s has been responsive to challenges and crises.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Germany experienced a massive student social movement, also called the Cultural Revolution, with a lasting impact. This led to decentralising education policy and establishing school councils, giving students, teachers, and parents a say in school governance (Mund, 2018).

A few of the important challenges have been inequities in learning outcomes, especially for disadvantaged students, poor reading competence of international students, an almost massive teacher shortage, an academic leadership gap in schools, and inadequate funding (OECD, 2020). OECD (2020) presented a comprehensive account of policy development in Germany (Table 34.1)

Table 34.1 Major Educational Policy Initiatives in German Education

Sl No.	Policy Initiatives
1.	*Stepping into Childcare* (Kita-Einstieg, 2017) for immigrant or disadvantaged families' access to childcare.
2.	Germany's Childcare Funding Act 2008 initiated four investment programmes to promote early childhood education and care (ECEC) growth. By 2018, the first three investment programmes had created 400,000 new places for children under three. From 2017 to 2020, the fourth investment programme aims to support establishing up to 100,000 additional ECEC places for children up to school age. • Recently, some Länder-level monitoring processes have been developed in ECEC. In 2010, Berlin introduced mandatory external evaluation for all ECEC settings on a five-year cycle. • The *Good Daycare Facilities Act* (Gute-KiTa-Gesetz, 2019) focus on raising quality in ECEC and the growing demand for highly skilled ECEC staff, improving pedagogy, staff qualifications, institutional management and networking, and lowering parental fees. • As a component, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) is conducting nationwide and Länderspecific quality monitoring processes.

	• The Act supports staggered parental contributions to ECEC, enabling Länder to invest federal funds as they see fit.
3.	In 2016, the federal government and the Länders agreed on a joint initiative to support high-achieving and potentially high-achieving students in primary and lower secondary education through "Leistung Macht Schule" from 2018 to 2027 through improved teaching methods. This school culture values academic achievement and enrichment activities.
4.	The Support Strategy for Low-Achieving Students (Förderstrategie für leistungsschwächere Schülerinnen und Schüler, 2010) aims to increase the percentage of students achieving minimum proficiency by the end of secondary education.
5.	The Länders formulated "Vocational Schools 4.0" in 2017 to equip vocational schools with innovations through international and employer collaboration, integrate all target groups in VET, and improve the quality of education and training by sharing good practices on quality management and professionalising VET staff.
6.	2019, the federal government and the Länder approved a joint initiative to support disadvantaged schools (Schule Macht stark, 2021-30). The initiative aims to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students through enhanced teaching, school development, school networking, and partnerships with local agencies.
7.	The *National Programme to Enhance The Quality Of Teacher Training* (Qualitätsoffensive Lehrerbildung, 2014-23) to strengthen initial teacher preparation.
8.	The *Qualification of Pedagogical Specialists for Inclusive Education* (2016) to prepare pedagogical specialists in all educational sectors for inclusive teaching and learning.
9.	Recognition Act of 2012 to readjust the regulation of recognition of foreign qualifications. The aim was to facilitate recognition and make Germany more attractive to qualified immigrants.
10.	Vocational Language Training Programme (2016) and the Network of Coordination Offices for Vocational Training and Migration.
11.	*Skilled Labour Initiative: Attracting New Talent, Retaining Professionals* (2019-2022) aims to enhance the skills of staff working in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The programme focuses on increasing the number of places for paid vocational training and practice-integrated apprenticeships, providing better professional guidance for student teachers, and improving the professional and financial prospects of ECEC staff.
12.	The *Bonus programme (2014)* in Berlin recommended additional funding for disadvantaged schools determined by students' socio-economic composition. Such schools must develop a performance agreement with the inspectorate.
13.	Digital Pact for Schools (DigitalPakt Schule, 2019) aimed to equip students with the digital skills required for success in the 21st century by establishing the necessary digital infrastructure in schools, developing pedagogical content and curricula, redesigning initial teacher preparation, and continuous professional development to strengthen teachers' digital competencies.

Source: *OECD, 2020 (Adapted by author)*

Besides these and other structured responses, some local initiatives helped "refugee teachers enter the education system. In 2015, the University of Potsdam's Refugee Teachers' Programme offered language instruction, theoretical seminars and practical school-based sessions over three semesters. On completion, participants received a one-year assistant teacher contract" (OECD, 2020, p. 15)

To overcome these challenges, Germany enacted several laws. Certain policy issues are also related to structures, roles, and responsibilities. "In Germany, education is jointly supervised by the federal government and the 16 States (*Landers*). The federal government provides a basic framework, while the education authority is constitutionally vested with the Landers. Landers can decide on schooling and education according to their needs and situational specificities. However, in case of conflicts, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*KMK*), founded in 1948, settles issues and differences between and among states within certain limits. States have the power to legislate except in matters of the *Basic Law* (*Grundgesetz* or Constitution). Therefore, educational design and terminologies in Germany vary in different Landers." (Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023, p. 136).

The responsibilities of the Federal Government in the field of education have been outlined in the German Basic Law across the following domains:

- "In-company vocational training and further vocational education.
- Admission to higher education institutions and higher education degrees (here, the Länder may enact laws at variance with the legislation of the Federation).
- Financial assistance for pupils and students.
- Promotion of scientific and academic research and technological development.
- Child and youth welfare (in particular, early childhood education and care in daycare centres and child-minding services).
- Legal protection of participants of correspondence courses.
- Regulations on entry to the legal profession.
- Regulations on entry to medical and paramedical professions.
- Employment promotion measures and occupational and labour market research" (KMK, 2015, p.23).

The German Constitution allows private schools to operate as long as they meet the same standards as public schools. A little over 9% of children in 2016–17 went to private schools (Isenson, 2018). Parents have more options when there are both public and private schools. There is also good competition between these schools, which leads to new ideas. Basic laws are very strict, so these private institutions do not make the gap between rich and poor parents bigger or turn into businesses that make money. Landers are very careful about how much these private schools cost and even decide if a school can charge tuition. Some states, like North Rhine-Westphalia, do not charge as much for these schools' payments (Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023).

In recent years, Germany has focused on improving its education system's quality and equity. Another special feature of educational policy in Germany is the dual education system, which includes classroom learning and hands-on training on the job, particularly in vocational education and training, where students alternate between attending school and working in a company. Academic tracking is emphasised in the German education system. Students are sorted into different types of schools based on their academic performance, which can have long-term consequences for their future educational and career opportunities. Germany has also promoted inclusive education, supporting students with special needs.

The main goals of elementary education are to prepare students for the next level of schooling and lifelong learning, enhance their language skills, help them grasp basic mathematical and scientific ideas, help them understand what is happening around them, and improve their psychomotor skills and social behaviour. The main objective of secondary education is "to help students become autonomous and independent learners. To bear their share of personal, social and political responsibility, to promote students' understanding of the connection between globalisation, economic development, consumption, environment pollution, population development, health and social conditions through sustainable development education. To equip students with constructive and critical skills to examine media" (Atmacasoy, 2017, pp.8-9).

Structure of the Education System

German education is a five-stage system comprising early childhood, preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary, adult, and lifelong education (EC, 2024). While early childhood care and preschool education are optional, though encouraged, nine years of education beginning at age 6 are compulsory. In Berlin and Brandenburg, compulsory education is until age 16 (Figure 34.1).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is up to the age of six. The ECCE is divided into two phases – 0-3 at Krippe and 3-6 at kindergarten**.** There have been some major shifts in policies emphasising this phase of education. The Child Care Funding Act of 2008, the expansion of childcare facilities, the Lander-level monitoring process, the Good Daycare Facilities Act, and the involvement of parents, senior citizens, women and youth (refer to Table 33.1) are some of the indicators. ECCE focuses on socialisation, play-based learning, and basic skills development.

As a rule, compulsory education begins when children reach the age of six. It involves nine years of primary and secondary education. "Those young people who do not attend a full-time general education school or vocational school at an upper secondary level once they have completed their period of compulsory general schooling must still attend part-time schooling (compulsory *Berufsschule* attendance – *Berufsschulpflicht*). This usually lasts three years" (EC, 2024).

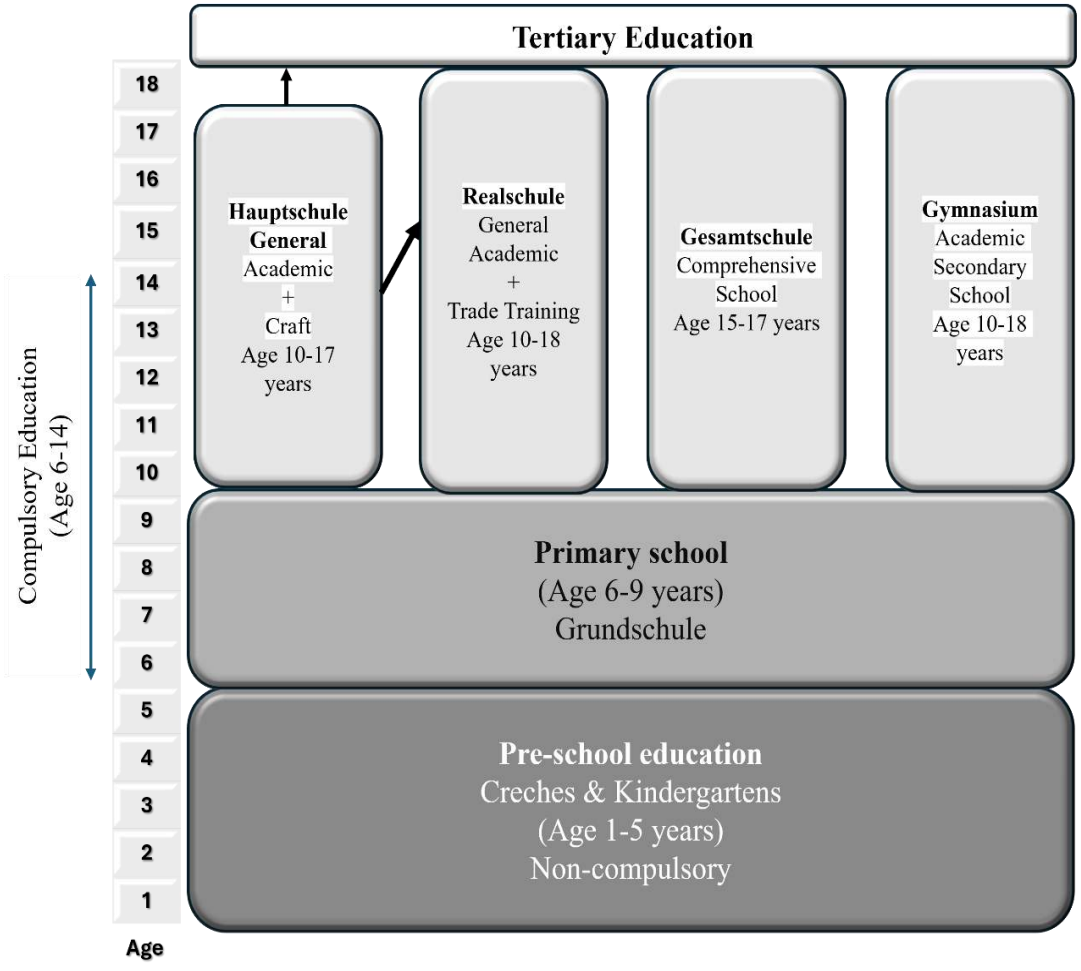

Figure 34.1 Structure of the Education System in Germany

Source: *Mukhopadhyay & Kundu (2023)*

Primary education from grades 1-4 for children aged 6 -10 is compulsory. It is provided in Grundschule. Primary education provides a broad foundation in mathematics, languages, natural sciences, and social studies. The local authorities, like municipalities and districts, maintain and monitor public primary schools. After Grundschule, students have choices, and teachers advise parents.

Secondary education is typically for students from 10 to 16 years old, for grades five to nine or ten. The first two years—grades 5 and 6—work as an orientation for secondary education. There is more than one form of secondary education (from age 12 to 16), namely Gymnasium for academic

education, Hauptschule (for vocational education), Realschule (intermediate trial), and *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive schools) (The German school system, 2020).

Gymnasium is a College Preparatory School in Germany from fifth to twelfth grade. On completion, students get a diploma, Abitur, a qualification recognised for entry into tertiary education in Germany and all other countries.

Realschule is a Technical Academic High School for fifth—to tenth-grade students. On completion, students get an intermediate certificate that entitles them to take learning and advanced professional courses or move to Gymnasium (only for those who secure 'good' to 'very good' grades).

Hauptschule is the Lower Secondary School from fifth to ninth grades. After graduation with (erster Schulabschluss) or ESA, students learn a trade and pursue an extended degree.

The Gesamtschule is a type of secondary school that teaches students without picking them based on how well they do in school or how smart they are. It is an alternative to the standard three-tier school system in some federal states, comprising Gymnasium, Realschule, and Hochschule. In the comprehensive school, students are not distributed to different schools based on their performance but are differentiated based on their performance level within the same school (Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023).

Students from the Gymnasium can attend the Oberstufe for 2-3 years to prepare for university or vocational education. Students choose specific subjects to specialise in, leading to the Abitur (university entrance qualification) examination.

Curricular Framework

In Germany, the curricular framework is known as the Bildungsplan, developed by each state and implemented in schools. The Bildungsplan defines what students should learn at each grade level and provides a framework for teachers to design their lessons.

The Bildungsplan emphasises a holistic approach to education, focusing on academic knowledge and developing social, emotional, and physical skills. It aims to foster critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork among students.

The curricular framework also includes guidelines for assessment and grading. Teachers use various methods, such as tests, projects, presentations, and class participation, to evaluate students' progress and assign grades. In addition to the national curricular framework, individual schools and teachers have some flexibility in delivering the curriculum. They can adapt and supplement the framework.

The KMK sets the curricular goals in Germany. These goals define the knowledge, skills, and competencies students should acquire at each level of education.

The curricular framework in Germany is divided into different subjects, with a learner-centred approach (Ahrbeck et al., 2018) and provision for teaching cross-curricular topics.[1] An innovative feature of the German Curriculum Framework is pedagogical responsibility, which empowers teachers to decide on content teaching methods and assessments based on prescribed national standards (KMK, 2015).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

ECCE is divided into two phases: early childhood care for three years from birth, followed by preschool till age six when children must attend primary schools. The under-three children are cared for at daycare centres and homes, supported by qualified and trained child-minders. "The specific needs of children are …. loving attention; sensitive care based on stable relationships; sympathetic support appropriate for the development stage; empathy and support in stressful situations; unconditional acceptance; safety and security. Educational support at this stage in life is primarily understood as shaping relationships with the child and as holistic support complementing development. The accompanying educational partnership with parents is essential" (Kolumbán, 2022, p. 3). The focus is on developing communication, language, and motor skills through social interaction, communication, and play.

The preschool years aim to develop intellectual, physical, emotional, and social abilities. "According to the Joint Framework of the Länder for Early Education in Daycare Centres, educational areas are:

- Everyday integrated language education and communication
- Personal and social-emotional development, value orientation and religiosity, culturally sensitive competencies
- MINT – Mathematics, Informatics, Natural Science and Technology
- Media and digital education
- Aesthetic education

[1] A few of the cross-curricular topics are: "Antisemitism, Vocational Orientation, Sustainable development education, Formal language competences, Democracy education, Digital education, Educating about Europe, Gender-sensitive education, Health education, National Socialism and the Holocaust, Intercultural education, Jewish history, religion and culture, Cultural education, Media education, Human rights education, Sinti and Roma, Road safety education, Economic education and consumer education" (EC, 2024)

- Body, movement, health, prevention
- Environmental education and education for sustainable development

These educational areas are not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive. In the educational plans of the Länder, different boundaries may be drawn between the individual areas. The decisive factor is that the contents presented are reflected in the concrete pedagogical work" (EC, 2024).

Primary Education

Primary education aims to help students move from play-oriented learning to subject learning. The focus is on language and mathematics as a foundation for all school subjects and lifelong learning. "The primary school curriculum covers German, mathematics, general studies, a foreign language, art, handicrafts/textile design, music, sports, religion, ethics, or a comparable subject. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work is the driving force in the context of all subjects. German, mathematics and general studies form the core subjects in primary school" (Eckhardt, 2021, p. 115).

Lower Secondary Education

The goals of lower secondary education are:

- "furthering the overall intellectual, emotional and physical development of pupils, teaching them to be independent, make decisions and bear their share of personal, social and political responsibility;
- Provide instruction based on the state of academic knowledge that takes the pupils' age-related conceptual faculties into account in its organisation and the most and made on them and provides a basis for successful further education in the sense of lifelong learning;
- gradually increasing the degree of specialisation in line with each pupil's abilities and inclinations and
- maintaining an open system allowing transfer from one type of school to another after an orientation stage" (EC, 2024 Page Number).

The courses in lower secondary education are German, mathematics, the first Foreign Language, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. Compulsory or optional subjects are Music, Art, and Sport. The timetable lists the time allocated to each subject for grades 5 to 9/10 (Table 33.2).

Upper Secondary: General Education Schools

The main objectives of secondary schooling are:

- "to help students become autonomous and independent learners;
- to bear their share of personal, social and political responsibility;
- to promote students' understanding of the connection between globalisation, economic development, consumption, environment pollution, population development, health and social conditions through sustainable development education; and
- to equip students with constructive and critical skills to examine media" (Atmacasoy, 2017, pp. 8-9).

Table 34.2 Time Allocation to Different Subjects

Subjects and subject groups	First School Leaving Certificate	Intermediate School Leaving Certificate
German	19	22
Mathematics	19	22
First foreign language	16	22
Natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics)	13	16
Social sciences (History, Geography, Political Science/Social Science or/and a comparable subject	13	16
Artistic subjects (Music, Art and possibly other subjects)	6	7
Sports	10	12
Religion, Ethics or a comparable subject	according to the regulations of the Länder	

Source: *EC, 2024*

The aim of education at the upper secondary level is to obtain the *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* necessary to enter an institution of higher education.

At this stage, subject learning based on the foundations of junior secondary level continues with the new opportunity for individual specialisation. Subjects are grouped at this stage:

- "Languages, Literature and the Arts (e.g., German, Foreign Languages, Fine Art, Music)
- Social Sciences (e.g., History, Geography, Philosophy, Social Studies/Politics, Economics)
- Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology (e.g., Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Information Technology)"

All three areas must continue until the gymnasiale Oberstufe and the Abitur examination. Religion, as per the provisions of the Land, and sport are also compulsory.

Gymnasium curricula include German, Mathematics, Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Art (including Crafts and Design), Music, History, Philosophy, Civics, Social Studies, and Foreign Languages (How to Germany, 2022). Realschule, grades 5-10, are part-time vocational and higher vocational schools. Students with high academic scores can switch to Gymnasium. Gymnasium education leads to Abitur, a diploma preparatory to university education.

Hauptschule (grades 5-9) teaches the same subjects as the Gymnasium and Realschule with vocational courses. It combines part-time enrolment in vocational school and apprenticeship training until 18. Gesamtschule, a comprehensive school from 5th to 10th available only in certain states, combines the Hauptschule and Realschule and enrols students of all ability levels. Berufliche Gymnasien offers professional courses like Business, Technology, Professional Computer Science, Biotechnology, Nutrition, Agronomy, and Health and Social Studies, among other subjects taught in the Gymnasium. Berufsschule combines part-time academic study with an apprenticeship specialising in a particular trade or field.

One notable feature of the German education system is the emphasis on differentiation based on students' abilities and career aspirations. This is evident in the multiple tracks available after primary school (Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium) to cater to different learning styles and future goals. One common feature is that every student must complete nine years of schooling. Students dropping out of Gymnasium must enrol in Realschule or Haupschule to complete nine years of schooling (How to Germany, 2022).

Additionally, the German education system significantly emphasises vocational education and training opportunities. This includes dual vocational training programmes, where students combine classroom learning with practical training in the workplace, as mentioned above. Furthermore, many Landers have introduced Inklusion, an inclusive education approach that aims to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms to the greatest extent possible.

Teaching Learning

The German teaching-learning process is student-centric, emphasising heuristic/responsive teaching and helping students identify problems and projects. Teachers guide the process of thinking through the problems (Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994). The emphasis is on developing independent learners with critical thinking skills, students taking ownership of their learning process, and the development of creative problem-solving skills (The German Approach, n.d.). Germany uses group learning. The notable feature of group learning is that students stay in the same group as they move from one grade to another. This creates a sense of belongingness and a learning community (Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994).

Some pedagogical approaches used in German schools are holistic learning, which includes cognitive, social, emotional, and practical skills; inquiry-based learning; project-based learning; collaborative learning; differentiated instruction; and technology integration. Germany launched, in 2019, a digital pact for schools (DigitalPakt Schule) whereby the federal government and the Länder are equipping schools with high-quality digital technology (EC, 2023). Teachers use digital resources to enhance learning, including online modules, video lectures, interactive exercises, and blended learning with traditional classroom teaching. Online Educational Platforms and learning management systems are used to share materials and assignments and provide a central hub for communication. There is a focus on teaching students digital literacy skills, enabling them to evaluate online information and use technology effectively and critically. Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and simulations are being explored to create immersive and engaging learning experiences.

Professional development programmes for teachers aim to help them integrate technology effectively into their teaching methods. Private enterprise launched the Teachers Online (Lehrer-Online) website, which houses around 20,000 quality-assured teaching materials, such as lesson plans, proposed methods, downloadable worksheets, and so on, for teachers and trainee teachers (EC, 2023).

Research in Germany emphasises the effectiveness of technology integration when aligned with pedagogical goals (Consoli et al., 2023). Studies assess how technology supports personalised learning, engagement, and collaboration (Holmes et al., 2018). Additionally, the concept of "Bildung" in Germany emphasises education as a comprehensive, lifelong process that goes beyond mere knowledge acquisition, which impacts both teaching methods and technology integration.

Learning Assessment

ECCE does not have formal lessons or assessments. Students' developments and abilities are recorded based on observations and shared with parents. In primary grades, performance is continuously monitored to ensure progress. There is no written examination; children automatically move from grade 1 to grade 2. Observation of class participation, social interaction and conduct forms the basis for assessment and learning progress. The assessment is competence-based against the target competence set on transparent criteria. Children take written tests for the first time in grade 3.

The assessment, in general, for lower secondary grades is based on written, oral, and practicals spread all over the school year. The oral assessment is based on in-class oral contributions and practicals, especially for sports, music, arts and crafts. Performance is rated on a six-point scale from Very Good (1) to Very poor (6) through good (2), satisfactory (3), adequate (4), and poor (5). The Lander can use other assessment forms except leaving certificates (EC, 2023). Students'

progress reports are done twice a year – in the middle and at the end of the year. In addition to the marks, the reports may contain teachers' comments on class participation and social conduct at school (Eurydice, 2024). Learning assessment is based on pedagogical and administrative regulations, which provide space for teachers' discretion in learning assessment (EC, 2023).

At the upper secondary level, *gymnasiale Oberstufe*, assessment continues to be on a six-point scale, but with a difference. Each point has three subpoints, e.g. Mark 1 is assigned at performance levels 13, 14, and 15, assessing on a 15-point scale. One of the important examinations is the Abitur, the university entrance qualification obtained after completing the Gymnasium's upper secondary education. This examination is standardised and administered across the country.

Germany has established the Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen (DQR), the national qualification framework. It provides a common reference framework for qualifications, making it easier to compare qualifications and facilitate lifelong learning. The DQR includes levels ranging from 1 (basic) to 8 (doctoral) and covers various qualifications, including academic and vocational ones.

The National Assessment Study (Nationale Bildungsberichterstattung) is a comprehensive survey conducted periodically to assess students' educational achievements and outcomes. It provides data on various aspects of education, including learning outcomes, educational attainment, and disparities among different groups.

Actual assessment practices in Germany balance formative and summative assessments. There is an emphasis on comprehensive evaluation, considering academic achievement and other aspects of student development. Additionally, ongoing research focuses on improving assessment methodologies, addressing equity concerns, and aligning assessments with curricular goals.

The international testing, PISA 2018, raises several questions about German students' declining performance standards. "The average 2022 results in mathematics, reading, and science were down compared to 2018. Overall, 2022 results are the lowest ever measured by PISA in all three subjects" (OECD, 2023). Further, there is a significant gap between the performance of immigrant and native German students in Mathematics (Lewalter et al., 2023). This is especially significant as Germany has a 19% immigrant population and welcomes immigrants.

Health and Physical Education

In Germany, health and physical education is a credit course for assessment. There are four different models of health and physical education:

1. "Brain Breaks with physical activities in regular school lessons with active learning (e.g., language and math);

2. Physical activities and games during recess times;
3. Games/sports in after-school programmes, mainly organised in schoolyards;
4. Extension of weekly PE lessons up to four and five times at school" (Naul et al., 2014, pp.195-196).

The emphasis on the number of periods allocated to the subject varies from one level to another. At the primary level, it is taught between 2 periods or 90 minutes and four periods or 180 minutes per week (Naul et al., 2014). Three 45-minute weekly lessons are generally assigned to physical education at the secondary level (Merrem & Curtner-Smith, 2019).

Health and physical education promote physical activity, health awareness, and overall well-being among students. The curriculum includes a combination of health-related topics and physical activities. The topics include nutrition, hygiene, sportsmanship, teamwork, body awareness, and overall fitness (Dreiskämper & Hoffman, 2014).

Physical education classes in Germany include a mix of traditional sports, fitness exercises, and team-based activities. Students are encouraged to participate in various physical activities to develop their motor skills, teamwork, and general fitness. Additionally, health education might cover mental health, nutrition, and personal well-being topics.

Primary school students learn dance, gymnastics, games, swimming, athletics, and hygiene (Gebken, 2004), and secondary school students' curriculum includes games like soccer, volleyball, basketball, and handball, gymnastics, swimming, dance, water sports, winter sports, martial arts, and track and field (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2017).

Student health and physical education performance is usually evaluated through practical participation, skill demonstrations, teamwork, and sometimes written assignments or tests. The evaluation criteria vary by school and specific curriculum.

Skills Education

One of the distinguishing features of the German School Education System is vocational education at the school level. Vocational education is imparted in Hauptschule and Realschule. Arts and crafts are taught in the Gymnasium. "In the Recommendation on Vocational Orientation at schools (*Empfehlung zur Beruflichen Orientierung a Schulen*) from December 2017, the States advocate a curricular anchoring of individual vocational orientation in all lower and upper secondary education programmes to set the course for a viable career choice decision at an early stage and thus for a successful transition to training, study, and occupation" (Eckhardt ed., 2021, p.133).

Prevocational training provides students with practical skills to prepare them for various careers. It allows students to engage in activities related to trades, craftsmanship, and technical skills. Students work on constructing artefacts, using hand tools, and gaining practical experience in various fields. Students in the vocational education track can learn specific trades, industries, or professions. This includes apprenticeships, where students combine classroom learning with practical workplace training.

Instructional strategies emphasise hands-on learning, practical exercises, workshops, and real-world projects. The goal is to equip students with tangible skills they can apply in the workplace. Assessment in skill education involves both practical evaluations and theoretical components. Students' ability to apply skills, create artefacts, and solve real-world problems is assessed. Depending on the specific programme and curriculum, students might earn certifications, diplomas, or qualifications recognised by industries.

Skill education is taken seriously for performance assessment. The skills acquired through vocational training and hands-on activities contribute to a student's overall development and readiness for the workforce.

A special feature of the German skill education system is the dual system of apprenticeships, where students alternate between practical training in a workplace and theoretical instruction in a vocational school (Eckhradt, 2021, p. 279). This approach helps students gain hands-on experience and relevant theoretical knowledge, preparing them for their chosen trades.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

The formal education system in Germany generally focuses on academic and vocational training. Though there is no articulated agenda for hobby development within the curriculum, students can pursue hobbies and interests outside school hours. These hobbies can range from sports and arts to various leisure activities. Students also participate in extracurricular activities, clubs, or community programmes that allow them to explore and develop their hobbies and interests. Visual and performing arts are part of the curriculum, particularly in secondary education. Students might be able to learn music, visual arts, theatre, or dance, which contributes to their creative development and personal growth.

Life skills education is included in the curricular framework in Germany. Germany issued a Strategy for Lifelong Learning (STRATEGIE FÜR LEBENSLANGES LERNEN) in 2004 (UNESCO, 2023). Life skills education aims to equip students with essential skills for personal development, well-being, and future success. It covers communication, problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, financial literacy, health, and relationships. The focus is on

helping students navigate real-world challenges and become well-rounded individuals. Life skills education is not a credit programme but is usually integrated into the broader curriculum.

A special feature of the German education system is its emphasis on holistic education. While academic and vocational training is important, the system also recognises the importance of providing students with a wide range of skills and competencies that prepare them for life beyond the classroom.

Moral, Social, and Cultural Education

"All schools are involved in moral education. The teacher is constantly and unavoidably moralising the children about school rules and values and his student's behaviour toward one another" (Kohlberg, 1967). Moral, social, and cultural education (referred to as "Ethik" or "Werteerziehung" in German) is an important aspect of the German education system. Moral education has a strong foundation in family education and values. It aims to foster students' understanding of ethical principles, social responsibilities, cultural diversity, and values.

Germany is known as a country of migrants (Clauss & Nauck, 2009). About 17-19% of the German population are immigrants. Responding to the migrant crisis, mainly from Syria and Iraq, Germany chanted, "*Say it loud. Say it clear. Refugees are welcome here*" (Hewitt, 2015). Future citizens will be equipped with critical skills of collaboration, compassion, religious morality, and worldwide awareness through the German education system. Through enculturation, German education continuously endeavours to integrate them into German society and culture. Further, foreign languages are taught in schools right from the beginning, opening up the children's cultural horizons.

Moral, social, and cultural education is usually integrated into the curriculum and taught separately in some places. It aims to help students develop empathy, ethics, and an understanding of their roles within society.

A special feature of moral, social, and cultural education in Germany is its role in promoting democratic values, critical thinking, and social responsibility. It prepares students to be active and informed citizens with skills of cooperation, empathy, religious ethics, and global citizenship who can contribute positively to society.

Peace and Happiness Education

Germany learned how to make peace. The Berlin Wall was pulled down by Germans in 1990 and completed in 1992. Numerous efforts have been made to spread and strengthen peace education in German classrooms. The Berghof Foundation conducted a project, StArt Peace Education, to create state-of-the-art peace education in German and German-speaking countries. The Protestant Church

significantly contributed to the peace movement in Germany through the Peace Memorandum in 2007.

"The government's response clarified that about 270 youth officers are prepared for German foreign and security policy instructions in school classes. The Ministry of Defense's annual report notifies that the officers contact about 250.000 – 300.000 pupils, teachers, and student teachers. This was an alarming signal against the background that the German Army "Bundeswehr" claims to be the biggest part of the German peace movement" (Becker, 2013, para 1).

Peace and happiness education is not a credit programme in the German education system. However, the values and skills associated with peace, empathy, and well-being might contribute to students' overall development and character.

The emphasis on values, empathy, and well-being in the education system aligns with Germany's holistic approach to education. While peace and happiness education may not be a standalone subject, the values and skills related to it are integrated into the broader educational goals. Nonetheless, emotional learning and competence need special attention as they are still missing.

Germany ranked 15th on the Global Peace Index (IEP, 2020). Germany ranks 24th on the Happiness Index. In terms of both peace and happiness, Germany ranks quite high in terms of ranking. Nonetheless, peace and happiness education must be considered for integration in school education.

Summary and Conclusion

Children must attend school as soon as they reach the age of six. Nine years of school education is compulsory for all children, but every child does not have to go through the same mill. Education for all finds a new expression in the German school education system, with differentiated schooling provisions through Gymnasium, Hauptschule, and Realschule for students with different interests and potentialities. Students who do not want to pursue academic education can choose vocational education with various choices.

German schooling is child-centric, inclusive and equitable. Nonetheless, the private tuition has increased over the years. An estimated 20% of secondary school students receive private tuition (Hille et al., 2016).

One important feature of German educational policy is its responsiveness. Instead of policies made for long periods of implementation, policies are responses to crises and challenges primarily to maintain their lead as one of the most developed educational systems. An in-built diagnostic mechanism identifies the challenges of now and the immediate future.

The German vocational education scheme is unique, especially its combination of vocational and conventional subjects. Students can pursue apprenticeships and gain practical skills alongside

theoretical knowledge. This provision makes every student skilled while keeping multiple options open to get into and pursue higher academic education. However, there are challenges in switching tracks to pursue higher education without the necessary foundations (OECD/EU, 2018).

Learning outcomes also vary depending on students' socio-economic conditions, especially those of migrants (OECD, 2020). As mentioned earlier, major challenges include teacher shortages, ineffective academic leadership, and inadequate funding.

German education emphasises holistic development, including academic excellence, personal growth, critical thinking, and social skills. Extracurricular activities and group projects have been incorporated into the curriculum to foster teamwork and creativity. The education system promotes values associated with peace, global citizenship, and social responsibility. These attributes are integrated into the curriculum to foster a sense of responsibility towards the community, society, and the world. Its curricular framework has several special and unique features that set it apart from other systems.

Germany has a Dual Education System, a Tracking System, Rigorous Academic Focus, comprehensive education, strong Vocational Education and Training (VET) Programmes, and integration of sustainability.

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Education for Holistic Development: Spain

Stanzin Nouskit

Abstract

The 1978 Spanish constitution guaranteed education as a fundamental right and allowed regions autonomy on educational matters. The Organic Law now guides Spanish education, propounded initially in 2006 and replaced by Organic Law 2020. This chapter deals with educational reforms in Spain, focusing on policy, structure, curricular reforms, and teaching-learning and assessment practices in schools. Spanish school education comprises six years of preprimary and primary education, four years of secondary education, and two years of upper secondary education, which includes medium-grade vocational education. Six to 16 years of education is compulsory. Health and physical education is integral to the curriculum, emphasising fitness and healthy lifestyle choices rather than excellence in competitions. Skills education is greatly emphasised throughout the schooling years with relevant changes in goals and contents of learning. Peace education is not a teaching subject; students learn peace and happiness through the experience of schooling. On 30th January, Mahatma Gandhi's death date is celebrated as The School Day of Non-Violence and Peace.

Keywords: Spain, Organic Law of Education, Medium Grade Vocational Education and Training, Higher Grade Vocational Education and Training, Royal Decree 157/2022, Physical Education**,** School Day of Non-Violence and Peace

Introduction

Spain was a powerful coloniser. It colonised more than 30 countries for nearly four centuries, from 1492 to the mid1900s. The Spanish Civil War in the 1930s resulted in over 500,000 casualties. General Francisco Franco ruled as a dictator until he died in 1975, after which Spain transitioned towards democracy and modernisation (National Geographic, 2024). Spain adopted a new

constitution in October 1978, establishing a constitutional monarchy (Carr et al., 2024). Spain has since become a member of the European Union and NATO, experiencing significant economic growth and social change.

Spain is a relatively large country in southwestern Europe. The total land area of Spain is approximately 505,990 km^2. Spain shares land borders to the north with France, to the west with Portugal, to the northeast with Andorra, and to the south, two British Overseas Territories, Gibraltar (a narrow peninsula) and the British Sovereign Base Area of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus. Spain has a coastline of 4,964 kilometres (Nations Encyclopedia, 2024a). There are two autonomous cities and seventeen autonomous communities (ciudades autónomas) in Spain (Turespaña, 2024) and is divided into five topographic regions (Nations Encyclopedia, 2024b). Spain is also famous for its diverse landscapes, from the beautiful beaches of its coastline to historic cities like Madrid and Barcelona, as well as the picturesque countryside.

Spain had approximately 47,280,433 people, including 23,069,327 males and 24,211,106 females (CIA, 2024). The migrant or foreign-born population in Spain accounts for 18% of the total population. However, for the active age of 25 to 49 years, 38 migrants out of 100 native-born Spaniards (Enríquez (2024). Most of the population is of Spanish ethnicity, but there are also sizable other communities. Spanish, also known as Castilian, is the official and most widely spoken language. Several co-official languages include Catalan, Valencian, Galician, and Euskera (O'Callaghan et al., 2024). Historically, Catholicism has significantly influenced its culture and society. Other religions, such as Islam and Protestantism, also have minority followings. As of 2022, the average life expectancy in Spain was around 83 years (Statista, 2023). The population growth rate in Spain is 0.76%, the highest value during 2012-2022 (O'Neill, 2024).

Spain is a developed country. The GDP of Spain was $2.25 trillion (2023: World Economics), and the GDP per capita was $29,675 in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). Spain's unemployment rate for 2022 was 12.92%, a 1.86% decline from 2021 (Macrotrends, 2024). With 0.905 points in 2021, Spain ranked 27th place in HDI among 191 countries. The happiness index of Spain is 6.421 and at the 27th place (Helliwell et al., 2024). The quality-of-life index of Spain is 176.5. It stood in the 13th place (NUMBEO, 2024).

2020, the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and above was 98.59%, with males at 99.03% and females at 98.19% (O'Neill, 2020). The GER for primary education in 2021 was 102.90%; for lower secondary education, it was 111.54%; for upper secondary education, it was 127.01%; and for secondary education, it stood at 119.11% (UNESCO, 2024). Total NER, primary, was reported at 96.69% for boys and 97.17% for girls in 2018, according to the World Bank (Trading Economics, 2024). Spain ranked 31st in the 2022 PISA ranking. In the academic year 2021-22, there were 1,622,919 students in early childhood education, 2,795,572 in primary education, 39,567 in special

education, 2,050,577 in compulsory secondary education, and 691,437 in baccalaureate programs. There are 255,777 primary and 220,988 secondary school teachers. Additionally, there are 210,044 teachers in private schools (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2022).

Educational Policy

During the 19th century, education was primarily controlled by the Catholic Church, with monastic and cathedral schools providing education for the clergy and the aristocracy. Manuel José Quintana reported in 1814 that it would become the basis for public education in Spain for the next few hundred years (Hontangas, 2013). It was passed into law in 1821 and set some basic rules for public education, including the idea that it should be free, public, equal, universal, and standard. The General Regulation of Public Education established a new way of running schools in 1821. The rule was made official, and a new education system was set up, with basic, secondary, and tertiary education. The reign of Maria Cristina began in 1833, and the General Public Education Plan, also known as the Plan del Duque de Rivas, was made law by liberal reformers in 1836 (Espinosa, 2022).

The Royal Order of 1836 attempted to centralise education but was resisted and did not fully succeed. The First Spanish Republic (1873) and the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) both attempted significant educational reforms, including secularisation and efforts to improve access to education (Espinosa, 2022). The 1953 Ley General de Educación (General Law of Education) codified these principles. After Franco died in 1975 and the transition to democracy, Spain began a process of educational reform. The 1978 Spanish Constitution recognised education as a fundamental right and allowed regional autonomy in education matters. Article 27 of the Spanish Constitution, ratified in 1978, enshrines fundamental principles regarding education. It affirms the right to education for all and freedom of teaching. Education is mandated to foster the holistic development of individuals while upholding democratic values and respecting basic rights and freedoms. Additionally, it ensures parents' authority in choosing religious and moral instruction aligned with their beliefs. Moreover, the constitution mandates compulsory and free elementary education (La Moncloa, n.d.). In 1980, Ley Orgánica de Educación (Organic Law of Education) introduced significant changes to the educational system (Espinosa, 2022).

Notable reforms include the 2006 LOE (Organic Law of Education) and the 2013 LOMCE (Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality), which introduced curriculum standards and changes in evaluation methods. The LOMCE, 2013 "(Ley Orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa) aimed to introduce external, standardised evaluations of student competencies at years three and six of primary schooling and in the last year of each of compulsory (lower) secondary schooling and upper secondary" (OECDa, 2018, p. 17). Spain is also one of ten countries participating in the PISA-based Test for Schools Programme in collaboration with the OECD (OECD, 2018b).

Further, Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE) was modified and passed in 2020. The new law aims to replace the previous legislation and restore the Educational Organic Law (LOE) of 2006, passed during the Zapatero government. The law brought significant changes to the education system; for example, Spanish was no longer the primary language, charter school expansion was halted, and public-funded schools had to integrate students without separating them by gender. Religious education became optional, and students would not be penalised for not choosing an alternative course. Limits on repeating grades are set, and failing a course in baccalaureate will not prevent progression. The law emphasises inclusivity by integrating students with special needs into mainstream schools (Sandoval Mena et al., 2019).

The rules will be used during the school year 2022–2023, one year after the law was made official (Espinosa, 2022). This change considers what is best for the child and makes children's rights one of the system's guiding concepts. It supports equal rights for men and women, wants schools to keep improving, lets students learn at their own pace, is vital to building digital skills, and knows that education is important for long-term growth (European Commission, 2024a).

Structure of the Education System

The Spanish education system includes preschool education for children aged 0 to 6, primary education for 6 to 12-year-olds, compulsory secondary education for 12 to 16-year-olds, upper secondary and vocational training from 16 to 18 years, and followed by tertiary education, including higher vocational training, from 18 years onwards (Figure 35.1).

Preschool Education

ECC and preschool education are optional. The state typically does not fund ECC (Guarderia); parents/guardians pay fees. Children attend nursery school up to three, whereas preschool is free up to age six. “During this time, children develop their physical and mental skills, learn reading, writing, and the alphabet. This stage is not academic as much as it teaches children numerous real-life skills” (Study in Spain, 2024).

Primary Education

Primary education is free and compulsory in Spain. It begins at age six and ends at age 12. It is divided into three cycles, each lasting two years. In elementary school, students can acquire subject-specific interests (European Commission, 2024a).

Secondary Education

Secondary education (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria) is the next stage of the compulsory education system. It includes students between 12 and 16 years old. This stage comprises state schools, private schools, or state-funded private institutions. Secondary education comprises two

cycles: the first cycle (3 years after primary education) and the second cycle (1 year after the first cycle) (European Commission, 2024a).

Upper Secondary Education

Upper secondary education is not compulsory. However, after completing compulsory schooling, students can pursue a two-year upper secondary education for the Bachillerato certificate. The Bachillerato certificate makes them eligible for university education or vocational training to enter the skilled job market (Study in Spain, 2024). Upper secondary education in Spain includes two years of Bachillerato certificate (Spanish Baccalaureate) and two to four years of Vocational training (Ciclos Formativos).

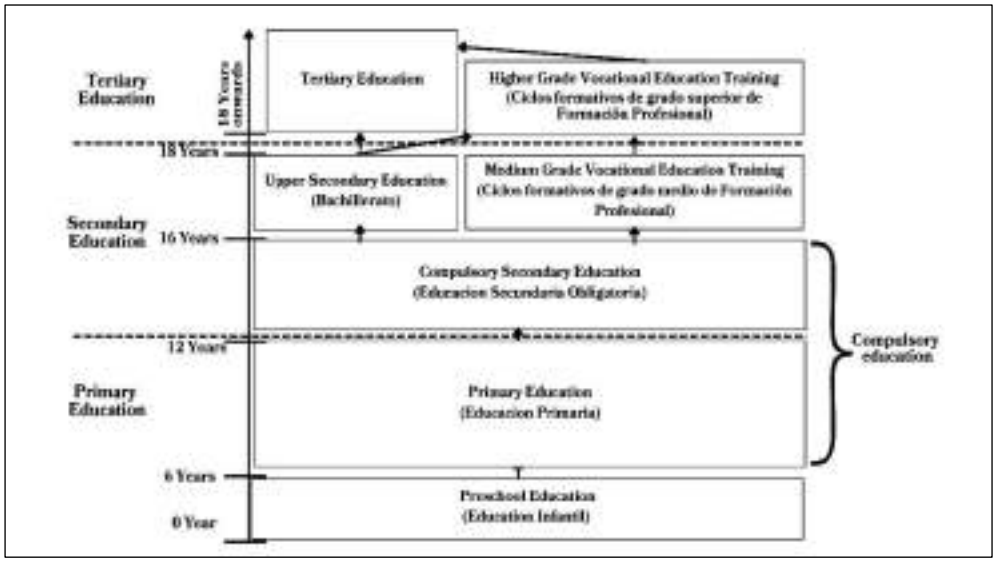

Figure 35.1 Structure of the School Education System in Spain
Source: *Author (Data curated from Pérez, 2019; Simeon, 2014; Education in Spain, n.d.)*

Curricular Framework

One notable feature of Spain's educational system is the regional autonomy of the community, which may have its educational regulations, including curriculum variations and language policies. This allows for customisation to address regional needs and cultural diversity.

"In primary school, the curriculum focuses on natural and social sciences, Spanish language and literature, a minority language if they are in certain communities, math, physical education, art, and the options of foreign languages or Catholic religion classes. In secondary school, the curriculum

has the same subjects but includes music, technology, and more foreign languages" (Education in Spain, n.d.).

Preschool Education (Education Infantil)

The curricular goals of Preschool education are early childhood development, socialisation, and the acquisition of basic skills, including language and numeracy. At this stage, formal subjects are not introduced; holistic development is emphasised. "The educational content in early childhood education includes harmonious growth, discovery and exploration of the environment, communication and representation of reality" (Zhang, 2024, p-9). Furthermore, communication skills, multilingual proficiency, personal, social, and learning skills, civic competencies, creative abilities, cultural awareness, expressive skills, mathematical abilities, and science, technology, digital literacy, and engineering competencies also find significant emphasis in preschool education (Zhang, 2024).

Primary Education (Educacion Primaria)

Primary education aims to provide a well-rounded foundation in key subjects such as Mathematics, Language (including Spanish and, where applicable, regional languages), Science, Social Studies, Arts, and Physical Education. It also promotes values and social skills. Core subjects include Mathematics, Spanish Language and Literature, Natural Sciences, Social Studies, Physical Education, Arts, and a foreign language (usually English) (European Commission, 2024b). Elective subjects may be introduced depending on regional policies and school offerings. Core subjects typically receive more hours of instruction per week, with varying allocations based on regional policies.

Compulsory Secondary Education (Educacion Secundaria Obligatoria, ESO)

ESO builds on the foundation of primary education and includes a more comprehensive curriculum. It aims to prepare students for upper secondary education or vocational training. Core subjects include Mathematics, Spanish Language and Literature, Natural Sciences, Social Studies, Physical Education, Foreign Languages, and Technology. The core subjects remain the same after two years (12–14). However, students must choose optional classes from a list that includes Music, Technology, Visual Arts, Religious Education, and Natural and Social Sciences (Lifestyle, 2024). ESO may include elective subjects, and students may choose between academic or applied tracks. Core subjects receive more instructional hours, with variations among regions.

The new curriculum is structured so that all students may achieve mastery in key competencies. Accordingly, the curriculum must be grouped into fields and projects with greater flexibility (GRUPO ANAYA & Pearson, n.d., p-3). The curriculum has a special program for learning English,

which is included in the weekly schedule for all grades. “The curriculum also follows a problem-solving approach and tries to address and avoid gender discrimination” (Pamies et al., 2015, p. 65).

Upper Secondary Education (Bachillerato)

Bachillerato is a pre-university program that aims to provide students with a well-rounded education and prepare them for university or higher education. The program comprises several core subjects, including Spanish grammar (Lengua) and Maths. The students take a foreign language, History and an area such as Natural and Health Sciences, Sciences and Engineering, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts to specialise in. In all, students study nine subjects. Students are given an overall mark out of 10, aggregating each subject (Lifestyle, 2024).

Medium Grade Vocational Education and Training (Ciclos formativos de grado medio de Formaciön Profesional)

This program provides specialised vocational training, focusing on practical skills and preparing students for specific careers. It offers a range of vocational programs across many industries, including healthcare, IT, hospitality, and engineering. Subjects vary significantly depending on the program and field of study (Ministry of Education, n.d.a). Programs may include both core and elective subjects tailored to the chosen profession.

Higher Grade Vocational Education and Training (Ciclos formativos de grado superior de Formaciön Profesional)

This vocational training comes under tertiary education. This programme focuses on advanced vocational training, specialised skills for professions or technical fields, and social and personal skill development (Ministry of Education, n.d.b). Subjects are specific to the chosen program or specialisation. The curriculum is highly specialised, with limited elective options. This two-year programme includes 2000 hours of theoretical and practical training with a minimum of 400 hours of workplace training.

Schools in Spain work from Monday to Friday—seven hours a day. The academic year is organised in three semesters of approximately eleven weeks each, from mid-September to mid-June, resulting in 175 to 200 working days a year. The weekly timetable comprises 30 to 32 lessons of 55 minutes each, i.e., 6 or 7 daily lessons. Also, a 30- to 40-minute break is split into two parts, either after every two or three lessons or all at once in the middle of the morning (European Commission, 2024c).

Besides the daily schedule, there are provisions for remedial courses on school subjects and cocurricular activities in languages, ICT, sports, fine arts, reading and writing, directed study

activities, etc. Families typically have access to these services for a fee, while pupils can avail of them voluntarily at no cost (European Commission, 2024c).

Teaching Learning

The teaching-learning process is guided by Article 6 of Royal Decree 157/2022. In primary education, guidelines for the teaching-learning process focus on "reading comprehension, oral and written expression, audiovisual communication, digital competence, the promotion of creativity and the scientific and entrepreneurial spirit, gender equality, education for peace, education for responsible consumption and sustainable development and education for health, including affective and sexual health." Further focused on the "devotion of daily time to reading in class as a means of promoting the habit and mastery of reading amongst pupils; the use of teaching time for meaningful projects and collaborative problem solving, reinforcing self-esteem, autonomy, reflective thinking and responsibility, in order to promote the integration of skills" (European Commission, 2024b).

The teaching-learning process in secondary education is guided by the Royal Decree 243/2022. Pedagogical principles at this level are that learning should be contextualised, Universal Design for Learning should be aligned, special attention must be paid to students with specific educational support needs, and learning should develop students' reading and expression skills (European Commission, 2024d).

Teaching methods used in Spanish schools include symbolic or verbalist, individual, collective, discussion, project-based, collaborative, and inquiry-based learning (Antigueöa Spanish Academy, 2023). However, it is believed by students that their teachers do not use enough active methods or a variety of teaching-learning techniques (Fernández-García et al., 2019). Students are expected to use more innovative methodologies and greater use of ICT (Fernández-García et al., 2023). Therefore, local education authorities support different ways of setting up learning areas and urge active methods, such as using ICT in flexible learning spaces (Educastur, 2021).

Martín-Sánchez (2021) emphasised the transition of Spanish education from traditional directive and authoritarian methods to democratic models encouraging critical thinking, challenge-seeking, and autonomy among students, which help them to confront and solve problems independently. In the evolving educational environment in Spain, educators require increased assistance from the governing bodies to enhance the precision of teaching, interactive instruction, instructional strategies, and individualised learning (Martín-Sánchez, 2021). The 'remedial' approach is the most common support model for specific groups or individual students, which involves integrating special education practices into regular schools. Further, in inclusive school education, to improve the teaching-learning process, teachers are supported by three types of teachers: special education needs teachers, hearing and language specialists, and remedial teachers (Sandoval, 2021). There are

no guidelines for co-teaching; as a result, teachers have no clear idea of what they should be doing when sharing a common space. There are also discrepancies among professionals, especially regarding the need for support within the reference classroom (Mena et al., 2018). According to the OECD's 2018 report on primary and secondary education in Spain, teaching emerged as the preferred career path for 62% of teachers, 11% reported experiencing significant stress in their work, and only 21% engaged in collaborative professional learning every month (OECD, 2018).

Learning Assessment

The primary education assessment process is divided into two broad heads, i.e., formative assessment and summative assessment. In formative assessment, the education authorities establish three moments throughout the process: initial assessment, continuous assessment, and final assessment. Summative assessment is conducted through a diagnostic evaluation at the end of the 4th year and a General Assessment at the end of the stage. Diagnostic assessments are a census-style way for teachers to determine what skills their students have learned, like how well they can communicate and do math. In contrast, General Assessments are expected to assess competencies like linguistic communication, STEM, digital, and multilingual competencies (European Commission, 2024e).

The assessment of compulsory secondary education students is continuous, formative, and integrative. In a continuous assessment process, educational support measures are provided when any student's progress is not adequate. "The results of the assessment are expressed in the terms Fail (IN-insuficiente) for negative marks and Pass (SU-suficiente), Good (BI-bien), Very Good (NT-notable), or Excellent (SB-sobresaliente) for positive marks. These terms are accompanied by a numerical grade, without using decimals, on a scale of one to ten" (European Commission, 2024f), such as 1 to 4 grades for Fail, 5 for Pass, 6 for Good, 7 and 8 for Very Good, and 9 or 10 for Excellent—the result of the students is regularly communicated with the families. Education system Evaluation consists of two assessments, i.e., a diagnostic evaluation at the end of the 2nd year and a general assessment of the education system at the end of the stage (European Commission, 2024f).

Pupils' assessment is continuous and differentiated according to the subjects at the upper primary level. At the end of the course, the teachers of each subject determine whether each student has met the goals and hit the right level of skill development for those goals. The assessment results are expressed in numerical grades from zero to ten without decimals, and grades lower than five are considered negative. Students not attending the extraordinary tests will be marked as Not Attended (NP). In addition, a standardised average mark will also be included, calculated without considering the grade for the Religion subject (European Commission, 2024g).

Students and teachers listed frequently employed assessment practices, which include written tests with open-ended questions, activity rubrics, project work, and oral presentations (Valle et al., 2017). Teachers incorporated the six elements into regular assessment practice, i.e.

1. "Establishment of a classroom culture that encourages interaction and the use of assessment tools.
2. Establish learning goals and track individual student progress toward those goals.
3. Use of varied instruction methods to meet diverse student needs.
4. Use of varied approaches to assessing student understanding.
5. Feedback on student performance and adaptation of instruction to meet identified needs.
6. Active involvement of students in the learning process" (CERI, 2008, p. 44).

Health and Physical Education

Physical education is integrated into the national curriculum for primary and secondary education. Organic Law 3/2020 mentioned that physical education is one of the subject areas of each stage of school education. Further, it was mentioned that school education should use sports and physical education to support social and personal growth. Develop a stronger habit of participating in physical sports to promote mental and physical health and social and personal growth. Additional provisions have been added to promote physical activity and healthy eating. In Physical Education, policy prioritises integrating daily physical activity into students' routines to instil a lifelong commitment to fitness. By emphasising healthy lifestyle choices and encouraging active participation, empower students to lead fulfilling, autonomous lives grounded in wellness (Jefatura del Estado, 2022).

Physical education and training are allocated one hour every week. The focus is on fitness and motor skill development rather than competition excellence. Physical education is allocated one hour per week when students participate in sports like track and field and games like soccer, basketball, handball, tennis, badminton, and outdoor activities like hiking and camping. Students also learn about healthy eating, nutrition and healthy living choices (Sherseo, 2022, para 3). Physical education provides opportunities for the daily practice of sports, for example, in supplementary activities linked to movement that can be developed during recess time, in the classroom or on the way between home and school and extracurricular activities (European Commission, 2023).

Health education is also an integral part of the curriculum. It covers topics such as nutrition, hygiene, sexual health, and substance abuse prevention. Health education activities include classroom discussions, presentations, and assignments related to health topics. All stages of

education deal with "important aspects of health education in the area of knowledge of the environment, natural sciences, physical education, and citizenship education" (Pedrero-García, 2017, p. 3).

Health education is included in the curriculum as a transverse matter, as teaching does not belong to a particular area of curriculum development but must be present across the different areas. Teaching students about the development of their integral health and providing the necessary formation to ensure that they have a healthy, vibrant development from a physical standpoint are two of the educational system's goals (Pedrero-García, 2017). The overall goal of HPE in Spain is to promote physical activity, health awareness, and a lifelong commitment to well-being among students. Section 4 of Article 63 mentioned that health education would be promoted transversely, including affective-sexual, equality between men and women, aesthetic training and mutual respect and cooperation (Jefatura del Estado, 2022).

Most teachers preferred using tests, such as personally made tests and pre-existing batteries of tests (e.g., the Eurofit Fitness Testing Battery). Homework was hardly ever used. Overall, attitudes were checked more often than physical, thinking, technical, or tactical abilities (González-Rivera, 2023).

Skills Education

Based on the recommendation of the Council of the European Union 2018, the Royal Decree 2022 set guidelines for acquiring skills and competencies at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary stages. During the early childhood education stage, the primary and secondary stages, learners develop various skills, including "linguistic communication skills, multilingual skills, mathematical competence and scientific, technological and engineering skills; digital skills; personal, social and learning-to-learn skills; citizenship skills, entrepreneurial skills, and cultural awareness and expression skills" (European Commission, 2024h; 2024b; 2024i). The skills are reflected in the different curricular elements and the pedagogical principles of the respective stages.

Vocational Education and Training offered training to develop skills along with specific grades. Medium Grade Vocational Education and Training offers Healthcare, IT, Hospitality, and Engineering-related programs. Subjects vary significantly depending on the program and field of study (Ministry of Education, n.d.a). Higher Grade Vocational Education Training courses are subjects specific with limited elective options. Planas (2005) pointed out that social guarantee programmes for skill development are not included in the vocational training cycles. However, "only a third of the teenagers that fail in compulsory education finally access these Programmes of Social Guarantee, and only a tenth of those that access these programmes continue their professional training in the Lower-Level of Initial Vocational Training Cycles (CFGM), overcoming their failure in their initial training" (Planas, 2005, p. 7).

Hobby and Life Skill Education

Schools in Spain offer a wide range of extracurricular activities that cater to students' hobbies and interests. These include sports, drama, chess clubs, and music and arts programs. Travelling and reading are the most popular hobbies among Spanish students. Apart from these, outdoor activities, Cooking, Baking, Socialising, Sports and Fitness, Shopping, Pets, Technology or Computers, Video Gaming, Photography, Cars or Vehicles, DIY and Arts and crafts, Board Games or Card Games, Gardening and Plants, Meditation/Wellness, Writing, Making Music are the popular hobbies and activities in Spain (Bashir, 2024).

Spain has a rich cultural heritage; students engage in creative arts and music education. This includes learning to play musical instruments, participating in choirs or orchestras, and attending art classes.

Spain has various youth organisations, including Scouts, which offer outdoor and life skills education. Participants learn camping, survival skills, leadership, and teamwork. Some schools offer cooking and home economics classes to teach students essential life skills, such as cooking, budgeting, sewing, and basic household management. With the increasing importance of technology skills, some schools provide coding clubs and technology-related activities to introduce students to programming and digital literacy.

Language clubs allow students to learn and practice foreign languages or regional languages spoken in Spain, such as Catalan or Galician. Gardening and agriculture clubs promote an understanding of plant life, agriculture, and sustainable farming practices.

Skill education programmes in schools develop relevant skills in compulsory education. Spain also focuses on improving basic skills among adults and skills beyond school. However, there is little or no intervention for developing life skills through school education. Therefore, Sánchez-Hernando et al. (2021) suggest that "interventions and activities aimed at improving the life skills of children and adolescents should be integrated into school curricula to increase their personal satisfaction and wellbeing and support academic success. In addition, it is possible that these interventions and activities also contribute to improving health outcomes in this population both in the short- and long-term" (Sánchez-Hernando et al., 2021, p-9).

Further, Hellison (2011) pointed out that "more specifically, personal and social responsibility development has been considered as a desired outcome of PYD programming, implying that PE teachers deliberately focus on developing life skills such as respect, perseverance, self-direction, and leadership" (Santos et al., 2020, p. 802). The development of Soft skills is marginalised at the school level. Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al. (2021) remarked that "it has paid little attention to the role

of the so-called soft (non-cognitive) skills in the educational process, especially in countries like Spain, despite their relevance for individuals' development, socio-economic growth and as a mechanism for promoting equity. The latter is particularly relevant in a context of increasing inequality, which has been boosted by the pandemic resulting from the expansion of COVID-19" (p. 29).

Moral, Social, and Cultural Education

In Spain, moral, social, and cultural education (Educación Moral, Social, Cultural or EMC) is integral to the education system, and educational laws mandate its inclusion. "The sphere of social, personal, and moral development has always been present at school as an educational objective" (Cubero & Perez, 2013, p. 66). EMC aims to promote values, ethics, and responsible citizenship among students. EMC is typically integrated into the curriculum across various subjects and grade levels. It is not a separate subject but rather a cross-curricular approach to education. The pre-primary level promotes children's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development (La Moncloa, n.d.). While EMC is not typically a separate credit course with grades, it is integral to the educational experience. Students' performance in EMC is not typically counted as a separate grade but may be considered in the broader context of their personal development and ethical growth.

Peace and Happiness Education

The Spanish curriculum has no dedicated Peace Education program but integrates certain field elements. Grujanac (2019) recommended that rather than presenting peace in a broad sense, curricula should clearly define issues and provide peace-building strategies to ensure students fully grasp the concepts. The curriculum underscores the protection of human rights, mentioning it eight times in the primary curriculum and thirty-one times in the Secondary and Bachillerato levels. It also highlights that, according to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, factors like race, religion, and national or social origin should not impact the freedoms we afford one another. Although the curriculum addresses some aspects of peace education, it falls short in tackling critical topics such as immigration and racism. While the curriculum satisfies some requirements for peace education, it falls short in addressing important issues like immigration and racism (Grujanac, 2019).

Education for peace is one of the pedagogical tenets of the new primary education curriculum the Spanish government is developing for the 2022/21 school year (Global Campaign for Peace Education, 2021). "The School Day of Non-Violence and Peace is celebrated every 30th January in Spanish schools. The creation of said Day was initiated by the poet, educator and pacifist Majorca Llorenç Vidal in 1964, on the anniversary of the death of Mahatma Gandhi" (Peace and Cooperation, 2022, para 1).

Happiness education is significantly affected by school satisfaction. Indicators of school satisfaction include "satisfaction with other children in the class; school marks; school life experience as a student; things they have learned; and relationships with teachers" positively affect school happiness and well-being levels among Spanish students (Gómez-Baya et al., 2021, p.1).

Summary and Conclusion

Spain's education system has evolved since the 19th century and is now guided by Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), a revised version of the 2006 Educational Organic Law (LOE). Implemented in the 2022-2023 academic year, it encompasses preschool (0-6 years), primary (6-12 years), compulsory secondary (12-16 years), and upper secondary and vocational training (16-18 years). Regional autonomy allows communities to modify educational regulations, including curriculum and language policies. Teaching methods include symbolic, individual, collective, discussion, project-based, collaborative, and inquiry-based learning. Assessments consist of continuous, periodic, and end-of-year exams, with physical education integrated from primary to secondary levels. The Council of the European Union and Royal Decree 2022 outline skill acquisition guidelines covering linguistic, mathematical, scientific, digital, personal, social, citizenship, entrepreneurial, and cultural skills. Vocational Education and Training emphasise skill development alongside specific grades. Schools offer diverse cocurricular activities, fostering student interests. Promoting moral, social, and cultural education remains a key objective throughout all school stages.

The education system in Spain provides students with a comprehensive academic curriculum that covers various subjects and disciplines, fostering cognitive growth and critical thinking. Assessments and examinations gauge students' academic progress and achievement. Efforts are made to create a positive school climate that supports students' emotional well-being. Vocational education and training programs prepare students for specific careers and provide practical skills for future employment.

Physical education is a mandatory part of the curriculum, promoting physical fitness and well-being. Values education and character development are embedded in the curriculum to instil ethical values and responsible citizenship. Spanish schools often offer a wide range of extracurricular activities, including sports, arts, music, and cultural clubs, providing students with opportunities for personal growth outside the classroom. Peace and happiness education is not in their curriculum. However, Spain includes social and emotional learning (SEL) elements, values education, and character development in its broader educational framework.

The emphasis on all-round development is a fundamental aspect of education in Spain. In the Spanish education system, there is a recognition of the importance of balancing cognitive, affective,

social, and psychomotor education to support the holistic development of students. While cognitive education, which focuses on intellectual and academic development, remains a significant aspect of the curriculum, efforts are made to ensure a well-rounded educational experience encompassing other dimensions of development. However, the overarching goal is to provide students with a well-rounded education fostering cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.

Like many other countries, the education system in Spain aims to instil values and attributes that contribute to the development of peace-loving and globally conscious citizens. Ultimately, while the education system in Spain plays a role in nurturing peace-loving and globally conscious attributes, it is part of a broader societal effort to instil these values and qualities in individuals, contributing to a more peaceful and harmonious world. Spain has a unique and distinctive feature in its education system known as "Bachillerato." Bachillerato is the stage of education that serves as the preparation for higher education or vocational training.

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36
Education is the Key Driver of Innovation: Sweden

Manju Narula

Abstract

The Swedish education system is characterised by decentralisation, guided by centrally defined goals and learning outcomes. The Government establishes a comprehensive educational framework, ensuring equal access and opportunities for all children aged 7 to 16 to receive free compulsory education. Municipalities operate compulsory schools under a national legal framework that applies to public and private institutions. The revised national curriculum, implemented in 2011, emphasised national identity within a multicultural context and incorporated elements of positive peace, such as wellbeing, social justice, gender mind, peace bond, link mind, resilience, peace zone, prevention, and eco mind. Student assessments are conducted in grades 3, 6, and 9. The school conducts internal assessments, and the School Inspectorate conducts external assessments. Vocational education is highly regarded in upper secondary schools, effectively preparing students for the labour market. Sweden promotes lifelong learning through various adult education options, reinforcing education as a life-long process.

Keywords: Sweden**,** Decentralised Education, National Identity, Positive Peace, Schools Inspectorate, Lifelong Learning

Introduction

Sweden, located on the Scandinavian Peninsula in Northern Europe, is traditionally divided into three main regions: Norrland in the north, Svealand in the centre, and Götaland in the south. Lappland's northernmost area overlaps with Norrland and northern Finland (Weibull et al., 2024). Sweden has a 3,218 km long coastline along its eastern border, facing the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Bothnia. To the west, the Scandinavian Mountains separate it from Norway. Sweden shares maritime borders with several Baltic countries. Its bordering states are Norway and Finland, and it

is connected with Denmark via a bridge-tunnel, Öresund Strait. The total area of the country is 447,430 km^2. The mountainous regions and the country's north are sparsely populated. Sweden has rich natural resource sources (World Atlas, 2024; Maps Sweden, 2024; World Data.info, 2024). Sweden has 21 counties and 290 municipalities, each with an elected council. Gotland is unique, as its municipalities also handle regional responsibilities (Kullander, 2024). The Local Government Act of 1991 outlines various municipal duties, including providing education and health services, and this act became effective on January 1, 1992 (Government.se, 2004).

Sweden's population is 10.55 million (2023), with an annual growth rate of 0.51% (The World Factbook, n.d.). The life expectancy of people is 78.8 years for men and 83.5 years for women. The sex ratio at birth is 0.993, i.e. 993 males to 1000 females (Countrymeters, 2024). As of 2022, Sweden is a diverse country with ethnic groups, including 79.6% Swedish, 1.9% Syrian, 1.4% Iraqi, 1.3% Finnish, and the remaining 15.8% from other nationalities (CIA, 2024). About 20 per cent of the population is foreign-born (Dyvik, 2024). Over a third of the population resides in Stockholm, Goteborg, and Malmo. The indigenous Sami people are estimated to number between 20,000 and 40,000, adding to the country's diversity. Around 57.6 per cent of people follow the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), others (including Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist), 8.9 per cent, and 33.5 per cent are unspecified religions (Indexmundi, 2021).

Sweden is one of the most highly developed economies, with an HDI value of 0.947, a GDP of USD 591.19 billion, and a per capita GDP of USD 55,985.97 in 2022 (Trading Economics, 2024). Sweden's literacy rate is 99 per cent. Sweden's happiness index is 7.4 (2022), ranking sixth (World Population Review, 2024).

The literacy rate for both males and females in Sweden is 99% (Countrymeters, 2024). In Sweden, there were 4,719 primary schools and 1295 upper secondary schools in 2022-23. The total number of students enrolled at the primary level is 1.1 million, and at the upper secondary level, 364,000 in 2022-23 (Statista, 2023). GER is 116.43% for primary grades and 139.41% for secondary grades. NER is 99.43% for primary and 97.37% for upper secondary grades (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). In 2022, Sweden held the 19th position among 81 countries in the PISA ranking (Data Panda, 2022).

Educational Policy

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the most basic schooling was provided by the folks plan (the People's School), which was paid for by the municipalities and directed by a school board with the vicar as chairman (Worldview, 2018). The name of the Ministry was changed in 1967 to the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs.

The Ministry of Education and Research was created in 1968 to oversee matters relating to schools, universities, colleges, and research. The Ministry primarily engages in planning and policymaking related to education and research.

Compulsory education in Sweden began in 1842, evolving into a co-educational system with nine years of compulsory schooling introduced in 1952. The school system, named Grundskola, was established in 1962 alongside the first national curriculum. In 1966, the Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for preschools, and by 1968, a Special Service Act ensured educational access for all children, including those with learning disabilities. The 1997 Swedish Education Act mandated free lunches for students in compulsory education. Preschools received a national curriculum in 1998, which all schools were required to follow. In 2006, the New Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children was enacted to protect students from discrimination (Equal Rights Trust, n.d.).

Reforms in 2011 introduced a new teacher education system and earlier grading, while in 2013, professional certification was made mandatory for teachers in schools and nurseries (Swedeneducation.info, 2024). Sweden's school system includes publicly funded independent municipal schools. Since the 1990s, parents have been able to choose tuition-free municipal or independent schools, unlike the few remaining private schools that charge fees (Swedish Institute, 2024).

Sweden's decentralised education system is guided by centrally defined goals and learning outcomes, with the Government responsible for establishing the educational framework across all levels (Eurydice, 2024a). The education policy in Sweden stresses a comprehensive school system by addressing inclusion and equity to shape the country better. Sweden's education system empowers individuals and society by providing equal learning opportunities that foster economic and social well-being. It has a history of supporting disadvantaged students and mainstreaming those with special needs into regular schools and classrooms. The policy further states that free and compulsory schools should be made available, and the same standard of education should be offered throughout the country, as well as a platform for further studies. After completing compulsory education, students can pursue upper secondary education (OECD, 2015).

The Swedish School Commission emphasises that the country's education policy aims to enhance learning outcomes and teaching quality, particularly for immigrant students, while facilitating their integration (Sahlberg, 2015). Additionally, it seeks to establish a national framework for evaluating schools and teachers, ensuring consistent assessment results and effective resource allocation across the education system (OECD, 2017). The Swedish school education policy also acknowledges independent schools with public funding, with the condition that private school owners must follow

Government rules. The policy recommends that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, established in 2008, enforce sanctions and impose fines on non-compliant schools, following a strengthened role from the 2011 Education Act. The Inspectorate prioritises support for schools in greatest need under the new model introduced in 2011 (OECD, 2017).

The policy outlines that inspection reports must be publicly accessible online (OECD, 2015). It proposes a new national knowledge assessment system comprising national tests, assessment support materials, and evaluations. The Swedish National Agency for Education will develop these components, disseminate information, and provide training. In June 2022, the Swedish parliament amended the Education Act to align education with labour market needs (Alm, 2023).

The Swedish National Agency for Education regularly collaborates with the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) to ensure that all individuals, regardless of functional ability, have the necessary support to achieve their educational goals. SPSM plays a crucial role in the Swedish education system (SPSM, 2019).

Structure of the Education System

The Swedish school system consists of

- Preschool (förskola): It starts at about the age of one and is heavily subsidised. More than 90 per cent of children attend preschool.
- Preschool class (förskoleklass): Preschool classes have been compulsory since 2018, when children turn six.
- Compulsory school (grundskola): Compulsory schooling lasts nine years for children aged 7 to 16, with flexible starting ages between six and eight based on parental choice. Although most children begin school at seven, attendance is compulsory for nine years, regardless of when they start (Eurydice, 2024b).
- Upper secondary school (gymnasieskola): After compulsory schooling, all Swedish youth have the right to a three-year upper secondary education, typically graduating at age 18 from either general or vocational programmes. The 'Upper secondary school consists of 18 national and five introductory programmes for students who are not eligible for a national programme. Among the national programmes are 12 vocational programmes and six higher education preparatory programmes. Students usually start upper secondary school at the age of 16 and complete it at the age of 19' (Eurydice, 2024a). This differs from most OECD countries, where vocational upper secondary graduates have a more comprehensive age range due to more diverse pathways into these programmes than

general ones (OECD, 2023a). Students who complete upper secondary school can apply for universities.

- Municipal adult education (communal vuxenutbildning, Komvux): Students who have not completed upper secondary school can attend municipal adult education or folk high schools. The programme includes education for adults with intellectual impairments and Swedish for immigrants.
- Swedish tuition for immigrants (svenskaundervisning för invandrare, sfi): This is advanced language instruction for adult immigrants to learn Swedish. Students with a mother tongue other than Swedish should learn and develop a functioning second language in this education.
- Leisure-time centres (fritidshem): Leisure-time centres provide pedagogical group activities for children enrolled in the centres up to twelve years of age. Activities are integrated with preschool and compulsory education, though they can also be free-standing group activities (Lindström, 2013).

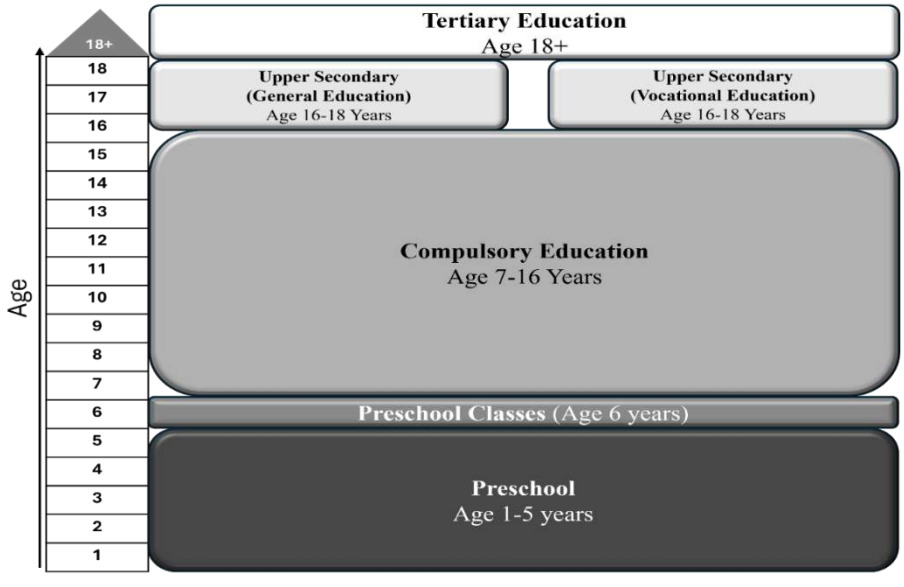

Figure 36.1 School Education Structure in Sweden

Source: *Skolverket, n.d. (Adapted by author)*

Curricular Framework

The curriculum defines the school's responsibilities and the foundational values of teaching. It outlines "the goals to strive towards" and "the goals to attain," guiding the quality of education and

specifying what students should achieve by graduation. The school and principal organiser must ensure that students meet these goals (Eurydice, 2024b).

Sweden's revised national curriculum was implemented in 2011, applying to all forms of compulsory education in the country. This curriculum introduced new general goals, guidelines, and syllabuses (Swedish Institute, 2024). In Swedish compulsory schools, students take 16 compulsory subjects across three stages: lower (grades 1-3), middle (grades 4-6), and upper (grades 7-9) (Table 36.1). In sixth grade, students can optionally study a foreign language like Spanish, French, or German in addition to the compulsory curriculum (Eurydice, 2024b).

Table 36.1 List of Compulsory Subjects in Sweden

Swedish	Physics
Mathematics	Chemistry
Physical education	Biology
English	History
Handicrafts	Social studies
Music	Religion
Visual arts	Geography
Technology	Home economics

Source: *Eurydice, 2024b.*

Previously, most students' school days in Sweden were 8 hours and 6 hours for the lowest grades. Since the 2018-19 school year, instruction time has been organised into three stages: lower (grades 1-3), middle (grades 4-6), and upper (grades 7-9). Schools independently determine how to allocate hours during the nine years of compulsory education, with all schools operating for 178 days annually. Preschool instruction is capped at 525 hours per year, while the total hours for compulsory education is 6,890 (OECD, 2022; Eurydice, 2024b) (Table 36.2).

Students take national tests in years three, six, and nine. In year three, tests are conducted in Swedish/Swedish as a second language and Mathematics. Year six students take tests in Swedish/Swedish as a second language, Mathematics, and English. In Year nine, students take national tests in Swedish/Swedish as a second language, mathematics, English, one social science subject (Geography, History, Religious Studies, or Social Science), and one natural science subject (Physics, Chemistry, or Biology) (Eurydice, 2023).

The upper secondary curriculum in Sweden consists of eighteen national programmes, including six that prepare students for higher education and twelve vocational programmes (Table 36.3) (Skolverket, n.d.). Five introductory programmes are also tailored to individual student needs (Eurydice, 2024b).

Table 36.2 Subjects and Subject Group wise Teaching Hours

Subjects and Subject group	Teaching Hours
Art	230
Crafts	330
English	480
Home and Consumer studies	118
Language options	320
Mathematics	1230
Music	230
Physical Education and Health	600
Swedish/Swedish as a second language	1490
Geography, History, Religion, and social studies together	885
Biology, Chemistry, Technology, and Physics together	800
Pupil's option	177
Total guaranteed hours	6890

Source: *Eurydice, 2024b*

Table 36.3 The 18 Programmes

Vocational Programmes	Higher Education Preparatory Programmes
• Child and Recreation Programme • Building and Construction Programme • Electricity and Energy Programme • Vehicle and Transport Programme • Business and Administration Programme • Handicraft Programme • Hotel and Tourism Programme • Industrial Technology Programme • Natural Resource Use Programme • Restaurant Management and Food Programme • HVAC and Property Maintenance Programme • Health and Social Care Programme	• Business Management and Economics Programme • Arts Programme • Humanities Programme • Natural Science Programme • Social Science Programme • Technology Programme

Source: *Skolverket, n.d.*

In upper secondary schools, each subject comprises one or more courses, with credits assigned at 50, 100, 150, or 200. These credits reflect the course's scope and the expected workload, correlating to the teaching hours over the three years of education. According to the Education Act of 2010, the required credits for completing upper secondary education are specified, detailing their distribution between programme-specific subjects and individual options (Table 36.4). Additionally, specially designed and individualised programmes include eight compulsory foundation subjects, and students must complete a diploma project (Eurydice, 2024b).

Students in higher education preparatory programmes are entitled to a minimum of 2,180 teaching hours of 60 minutes each, while vocational programme students receive at least 2,430 teacher-led lessons of the same duration. All students study programme-specific subjects and complete a diploma project. To earn a Diploma, students must accumulate the total number of school credits required for their chosen programme. Although the standard study period is three years, the course and credit system allows students to complete upper secondary schooling in a shorter or longer timeframe. Each subject consists of one or more courses.

Table 36.4 Subject-wise Credits in Specially Designed and Individual Programmes

Subject	Credits
Vocational programmes	
Swedish/ Swedish as a Second Language	100
English	100
Mathematics	100
Physical Education	100
History	50
Social Science	50
Religious Studies	50
Natural Sciences	50
Higher Education Preparatory Programmes	
Swedish or Swedish as a second language	300
English	200
Mathematics	100/200/300 *
Physical Education	100
History	50/100/200 **
Social Science	100/200 ***
Religious Studies	50
Natural Sciences	100 ****
Subjects through which the programme gets its character	
Vocational programmes	1,600
Higher Education Preparatory Programmes	950/1,050/1,100 *****
Individual choice	200
Diploma project	100
Total upper secondary school points	2,500

Note:

* Arts and Humanities programmes are 100, Economics and Social Sciences programmes are 200, and Science and Technology programmes are 300.

** The Technology programme is 50, the Economics, Social Science, and Natural Sciences programme is 100, and the Aesthetic and Humanities programmes are 200.

*** Economics programme 200, other programmes 100.

**** The Natural Sciences programme replaces Science with the programme-specific subjects Biology, Physics and Chemistry, and the Technology programme replaces it with character subjects Physics and Chemistry.

***** The Economics Programme 950, the Technology Programme 1100, and the Aesthetic, Humanities, Social Science and Natural Sciences programmes 1,050.

Source: *Eurydice, 2024b*

Each Swedish programme features subjects specific to its focus, which the government determines. These subjects include Child Study, Energy Technology, and modern languages. Schools can create variations of national programmes and seek national recruitment if there is a demand for their skills. Schools must meet several government requirements to implement a specific variation, including demonstrating local or regional demand for the education provided.

In Sweden, there are 60 national specialisations in schools, along with the option for schools to offer 200 points for students 'individual choices'. Schools can influence their programmes through courses approved by the National Agency for Education. Specially designed programmes can be created for students with special study needs, allowing for personalised education plans. Additionally, five introductory programmes are tailored for students not qualifying for national programmes. While these introductory programmes do not lead to upper secondary education, they aim to prepare students for a national programme or the workforce. Schools can also establish unique profiles, such as focusing on English or cultural and sports education (Eurydice, 2024b; Skolverket, n.d.).

Teaching Learning

A primary goal of Sweden's education system is to enhance students' foundations for lifelong learning, as reflected in the curricula for compulsory and upper-secondary schools. A fundamental aspect of Swedish education is its focus on the students rather than solely on outcomes (Oana, 2021).

There are no mandated teaching methods, but curricula encourage discovery-based and pupil-centred approaches and interdisciplinary and topic-based teaching. The curriculum promotes teaching methods that foster collaboration, independence, and critical thinking. Some schools adopt alternative methods like Montessori and Waldorf. Teachers at the compulsory level can select their teaching materials without a prescribed list of required readings. There are no national regulations concerning homework (Eurydice, 2023).

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools develops specialised teaching materials for students with disabilities and special educational needs. It adapts products from regular publishers to accommodate different reading disabilities, coordinating state support for these materials (Eurydice, 2024b). The 'diploma goals' at the upper secondary level serve as the foundation for teaching and learning, with the Government establishing them based on recommendations from Skolverket, the National Agency for Education (O'Donnel & Burgess, n.d.).

Sweden's education system follows an objectives-based management approach, where national curriculum goals are adapted into local work plans for each school and individual student

development plans. This structured framework ensures that educational activities align with overarching objectives at all levels, from national guidelines to personalised student goals (Wilson & Shaari, 2023). In Sweden, pupils are set to gain guaranteed access to physical textbooks and other course materials following the Riksdag's approval of the Government Bill Enhanced Access to Course Material, which would enter into force on July 1, 2024. This initiative includes investments for schools and preschools to acquire more literature and enhance skills in language, reading, writing, and mathematics (Ministry of Education and Research, 2024).

The use of technology in instructional activities varies from school to school and teacher to teacher. Teachers do not use one technology in the classrooms, but they plan and design their instructional activities relevant to the topic. The classrooms are generally equipped with projectors and desktops; however, it depends upon the teachers how much they integrate technology into the teaching-learning process.

The Swedish National Agency for Education has previously recommended providing all students from first grade onwards with personal laptops or tablets (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). The Swedish Government has also emphasised the importance of ensuring good ICT access for all students (Swedish Government, 2017). However, in 2023, the Swedish Ministry of Education announced plans to gradually reduce the digitalisation of Swedish schools (Elsawi, 2023; Vinterek et al., 2022). The government emphasises scientific evidence for screen-free environments and advocates for the careful introduction of digital learning aids, ensuring they support rather than hinder learning. National Agency for Education will also propose removing the mandatory use of digital tools in preschools, allowing their use only when supported by clear educational benefits (Ministry of Education and Research, 2024).

Learning Assessment

Sweden's student assessment system prioritises formative assessment in the early stages of education. Students actively participate in setting learning goals through individual development plans, self-assessment, and peer assessment. The system strongly emphasises classroom-based assessments, where teachers gather diverse evidence of student progress and provide regular student feedback (OECD, 2017). In 2011, the national curriculum was revised, and in the assessment process, some amendments were made. Earlier assessments of students in compulsory education were carried out in classes 3 and 9, and an assessment for class 6 has been added. The Swedish National Board of Education is responsible for preparing and standardising the tests at the school level. The second amendment required both formative and national-level evaluation processes to be considered. 'A new system of six grades for students' evaluations of A to F in lower secondary was introduced. Grades A to E are approved (pass) grades, and grade F means the results are not approved (non-pass) (Swedish Institute, 2024).

The upper secondary school has a six-level grading scale from A to F, with five pass grades and a non-pass grade. Grades are awarded based on the goals and knowledge requirements prescribed in the syllabuses, and once set, the grades cannot be appealed. The teacher awarding the grade should also be able to inform the student of the reasoning behind the grade assessment. Teachers need to consult the national tests for each subject, such as Swedish/Swedish as a second language, English, or Mathematics, which the Swedish National Agency provides for education. Students who fail to achieve a passing grade have the right to retake the course. Even after retaking twice and failing to achieve a passing grade, the school principal can decide to allow the student to attempt a third attempt. With the consent of the school principal, teachers, students, and parents/guardians, it is also possible for the student to repeat the class. Pupils are entitled to reset tests free of charge if they have failed a course and can also re-sit to improve their grades at a maximum fee of SEK 500 for one examination (Eurydice, 2024b).

The schools carry out the internal school evaluation processes, and external evaluations are conducted by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, whose objective is to monitor education quality and compliance with regulations. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate creates a channel between the local school environment and national policy. Also, it establishes a system of monitoring and accountability (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2024).

The internal school evaluation is usually done by the student's teachers, who generally evaluate liberally. This resulted in uneven teacher grading across schools. Therefore, discrepancies are found in national and international assessment comparisons. The national test results show increasing performance over the same period, and performance in international assessments shows a declining trend. This has raised concerns about the adequacy of national tests and the need to balance high levels of trust and decentralisation of responsibility for assessments, ensuring capacity for effective assessment throughout the system (Nusche et al., 2011).

Health and Physical Education

Sweden spends 6,438 USD on health per capita, more than the OECD average of 4,986 USD (OECD, 2023b). In Sweden, physical education (PE) is "influenced by different traditions. Ever since 1842, when PE became a compulsory subject in elementary school, Ling-gymnastics, focusing on good posture, strict self-discipline and moral development, has dominated the content" (Quennerstedt et al., 2008, p. 2). From the beginning of the 20th century, the field increasingly drew on physiological insights, and during the period from 1950 to 1970, discussions surrounding Primary Education were largely shaped by physiological perspective (Annerstedt, 2005; Lundvall & Meckbach, 2004). In 1980, when the subject was renamed 'Sports', its content began incorporating physiological aspects and elements related to sports performance and social

development (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2004; Quennerstedt, 2006). In primary education, it is referred to as Physical Education and Health. Annerstedt (2005) notes that the renaming from "Sports" to 'Physical Education and Health', along with the new curricula introduced in 1994, signifies a shift in focus towards health as the primary concern in Primary Education. This represents a paradigm shift in Swedish PE, moving from a narrow emphasis on sports or physiology to a broader health concept that includes exercise, various forms of bodily movement, nutrition, aesthetics, outdoor activities, and social and psychological well-being. There is also a strong emphasis on mental and social health (Sandahl, 2005).

In Sweden, primary schools focus on safeguarding and promoting the health development of students. Physical education has been crucial in achieving this objective, and since 1994, the subject has been officially titled Physical Education and Health. The curriculum for Swedish Physical Education has aimed to enhance students' physical, psychological, and social skills while educating them about the significance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2008). The emphasis on health in PE is not exclusive to Sweden. Over the past few decades, health has become a core component of PE curricula in many countries. This shift has often been driven by concerns over a perceived 'obesity epidemic'. However, it also reflects a broader move towards a more 'holistic' approach in PE during the 1980s and 1990s (Lynch & Soukup, 2017). This holistic perspective promotes a more comprehensive understanding of health, positioning PE as an essential and valuable means for reflecting on and gaining insights from various physical activity experiences (Quennerstedt, 2019). A distinctive aspect of the Swedish school system is the mandatory establishment of a Pupil Health Team in every school. This team includes a nurse, school physician, psychologist, counsellor, and staff with expertise in special education. From preschool through to year 9, students receive health check-ups three times. While the school nurse can provide basic medical assistance during school hours, any illness or additional care must be referred to external healthcare services (Utbildningsguiden, n.d.).

Skills Education

The vocational education and training (VET) system is provided in upper-secondary, post-secondary, and higher education programs. Three-year upper secondary VET programs can be pursued through school-based and apprenticeship. Both pathways include mandatory workplace training, culminating in a diploma recognised at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 4. Post-secondary programs lasting one to two years and higher VET programs spanning two to three years lead to diplomas at EQF levels 5 or 6. In 2020, the proportion of initial VET (IVET) learners among all upper secondary students was relatively low, at 35.6%, while the employment rate for VET graduates was favourable, reaching 89.5% in 2021. Sweden is committed to enhancing the appeal of VET. It has implemented various initiatives, such as increasing the availability of

higher VET programs and easing the transition to higher education for those completing an IVET program (CEDEFOP, 2023).

The VET system faces a significant risk of a skills mismatch between graduates' qualifications and the labour market's needs. This issue is exacerbated by the decentralised nature of the system, which consists of numerous small VET schools, public funding structures, and the choices made by learners, all of which contribute to this mismatch. In mid-2022, the Swedish Parliament enacted amendments to the Education Act, requiring stakeholders to consider labour market demands more seriously when planning, structuring, and offering educational programs. Additionally, in 2018, the Government launched a National approach to artificial intelligence to become a leader in leveraging the opportunities presented by AI (CEDEFOP, 2023).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

In the Swedish preschool curriculum, education emphasises the development of hobbies and life skills through collaborative play, tolerance, self-confidence, and verbal and nonverbal presentation skills, encouraging children to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. Independence and respect for others are also key components. As students progress to compulsory and upper secondary schools, various subjects related to hobbies and life skills are compulsory. Education for children and young people is viewed as part of a lifelong learning journey supported by various adult education options. The upper secondary curricula include citizenship education and aim to foster critical thinking across all academic or vocational subjects. These curricula ensure young people gain the knowledge and skills to shape their lives and become active citizens.

The Health and Social Care programs are designed to help students develop critical thinking skills, evaluate established practices and suggest improvements that enhance quality in the field.

Social partners play a significant role in the Swedish education system, ensuring a strong connection between education and the labour market. They participate in various councils, including national program councils for each vocational program. In the municipal adult education system, students have the right to receive education that provides at least the qualifications of compulsory basic schooling. Adults can study theoretical and vocational subjects at the upper secondary level through national program syllabuses.

Adults with developmental disabilities can attend special adult upper secondary schools, as noted by the Swedish National Agency for Education (2011). Municipal adult education also offers supplementary vocational courses. Upper secondary education is also available at National Schools for Adults, with courses organised by folk high schools, adult educational associations, county councils, labour market organisations, and private education and training companies (Skolverket,

n.d.). Rönnlund et al. (2019) emphasise that empowering and emancipatory knowledge is crucial for developing critical thinking skills, rather than traditional teaching methods. Their study found that critical questions about students' roles in social hierarchies as learners and future workers were rarely addressed.

Social, Moral and Cultural Education

Swedish society strongly emphasises equality and individualism, with citizens taking pride in their nation's achievements. The concept of "lagom," which translates to "not too much, not too little... just right," is commonly used in Sweden (AFS-USA, 2024). There is also a deep respect for personal integrity. Education has historically instilled values in future generations, with Swedish schools promoting social, moral, and cultural principles. Despite social transformations brought about by globalisation, information technology, and the decline of national capital, schools continue to foster civic identity.

The challenge lies in promoting foundational values without marginalising citizens in a multicultural context. The Swedish curriculum highlights educational values by emphasising principles such as democracy, solidarity, and equality, which are rooted in ethics associated with Western Christian humanism. Additionally, these values must be interpreted and applied within local contexts (Norberg, 2006).

Peace and Happiness Education

In peace and happiness, Sweden ranks 6th out of the ten happiest countries in the world (World Population Review, 2024). There is limited emphasis on happiness education within the Swedish school curriculum, while higher education institutions are beginning to focus more on this area. The Stockholm School of Economics (SSE) is making a significant commitment to enhancing student wellbeing by introducing a crash course in happiness and wellbeing for all new bachelor students starting in August 2024. This initiative marks SSE as the first institution globally to implement such a course, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of well-being in academic environments (Stockholm School of Economics, 2024).

The compulsory education curriculum includes various elements of positive peace, like well-being, social justice, gender mind, peace bond, link mind, resilience, peace zone, prevention, and eco mind. Sweden's identity as a "peace-loving" nation is reflected in its curriculum, which integrates peace education into the fundamental values and goals across all subjects. Civics plays a central role, featuring more references to peace than other curriculum areas. While the historical emphasis on peace remains evident, language syllabi lack similar content. Overall, various aspects of positive peace are present, though there are gaps in addressing non-violent conflict resolution (Standish & Nygren, 2018).

Summary and Conclusion

The Swedish Government believes in education for all, making it an integral part of the system. Equal access and equal opportunities in education are emphasised. Free compulsory education is provided to all children aged 7-16. The nine years of schooling are divided into primary (1-6 grade) and lower secondary (7–9 grade). In addition, there are preschools, schools for special needs children, Sami children, those who missed the opportunity to complete compulsory education (adult education schools), and private schools. Municipalities are responsible for operating compulsory schools; however, the national legal framework applies to all public and private schools.

The upper secondary school curriculum is organised so students can choose a field according to their interests. Six national programmes are designed for higher education preparation, while twelve are vocational programmes.

The students for higher preparatory or vocational programmes have the right to have minimum required teaching hours (2180 and 2430, respectively, of 60 minutes). Students must acquire the required credits by submitting a diploma project to receive a diploma. Although the standard study period for upper secondary education is three years, the course and credit system allow students to complete their secondary schooling in a shorter or longer timeframe.

In Sweden, a high emphasis has been placed on upper secondary schools for vocational education to effectively develop skills in the labour market. There are two ways to study vocational programmes: school-based education or apprenticeship education. Apprenticeship training in Sweden aligns with school-based programmes regarding jurisdiction and examination goals. Students in apprenticeship programs must spend half their study time at one or more workplaces. These apprenticeship programs utilise the same syllabi as school-based vocational training and can commence in the first, second, or third year of upper secondary education. Importantly, students enrolled in apprenticeship programs can still obtain basic eligibility for higher education.

Student assessment in compulsory schools is done for grades 3, 6 and 9 with a new grading system. Students are assessed using a six-grade scale, ranging from A to F, where grades A to E indicate passing, and F signifies a failing grade. Grading occurs after completing each course and diploma project at the upper secondary level. A diploma is awarded to students who achieve the necessary grades. After completing upper primary, there are three options: one year's Introductory Programme, three years General Programme and three years vocational programme.

In addition to the above programmes, Folk Secondary Schools in Sweden cater to students who want to learn about society in general and help people in various aspects of human relations and society.

In Sweden, a multicultural society, the curriculum promotes national identity rather than religious values. A school is where different cultures come together, and values are transferred. Globalisation has impacted values. To transfer these values to future generations, social values are promoted in the school curriculum, and religious values no longer dominate, which promotes national identity.

Also, in the curriculum, care is taken for the all-round development of students. Swedish children are prepared for better employment opportunities. Not only does education help them become smart and informed citizens, but they also stand sixth place in the Happiness Index in the world rank, out of the six important criteria (social support, income, health, independence, generosity, and lack of corruption) that are taken into account by the World Population Review, 2024. The main cause of happiness for the citizens is not the high GDP per capita, but the education they get does not make them set unrealistic goals for themselves. They do not overwork and spend time with their families and friends. It allows people to live a healthy and quality lifestyle with a high standard of living.

While Sweden is dedicated to an educational system fostering development and lifelong learning for all students, several challenges must be addressed. Overall performance in the Swedish school system raises concerns, as it lags behind many OECD countries and has declined over the past decade, with a predominance of low performers and a scarcity of high achievers across all PISA domains (OECD, 2017). Despite its well-meaning goals, the Swedish education system is overly market-oriented, resulting in segregation and inequity. The proliferation of free schools has heightened segregation among schools and students, exacerbating existing disparities and inequalities. Consequently, schools have become more homogeneous regarding family income, parental social class, and ethnocultural backgrounds (Trumberg, 2011).

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Technology-integrated Education

Most countries have adopted a technology integration policy in education, and several have implemented policies regarding AI in education. However, developing nations struggle with financial constraints, insufficient technological facilities, unreliable broadband internet connectivity, limited internet penetration, and a lack of teachers' digital skills. Furthermore, teachers' attitudes toward technology-integrated learning present a considerable challenge. Many still favour the educational methods of the baby-boomer era, a profound and detrimental legacy of colonial times.

37
Learning through Key Stages: United Kingdom

Ana Bali

Abstract

The United Kingdom's education system is highly regarded for its quality and standards, with compulsory schooling from ages 5 to 18. This chapter deals with educational policy reforms, education through the key stages, and the Education Act of 2011, which emphasised teacher authority and reduced bureaucratic intervention, fostering parental involvement in education. While skill education is not a core component, it is integrated through various academic and extracurricular activities, emphasising life skills and employability. Since September 2020, secondary schools have offered health and daily physical education. The curriculum encourages holistic development, incorporating character education and values such as social responsibility. Although peace education is not formally included, it appears in extracurricular activities. Overall, the UK education system prioritises the development of well-rounded, globally conscious citizens, equipping students with essential knowledge and skills for adult success.

Keywords: Key Stages of Education, Education Act-2011, Curriculum for Excellence, Technology in the Classroom, Religion and Worldview, Global Citizenship, Involvement of Parents,

Introduction

The United Kingdom comprises England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. It is an island country off mainland Europe's northwestern coast (Morrill et al., 2024). In response to a question, the Britannica Chatbot responded, "The United Kingdom was officially formed on January 1, 1801, through the Act of Union, which united Great Britain (comprising England, Scotland, and Wales) and Ireland under the name of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This legislative agreement was motivated by strategic security concerns and aimed to strengthen the connection between the two countries and provide Ireland with opportunities for economic development. However, the union faced resistance, particularly in Ireland, where it was seen as a means of

consolidating British control. The union remained until the recognition of the Irish Free State in 1922, which excluded six counties in Northern Ireland that remained part of the United Kingdom, leading to the current name, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" (Kishlansky et al., 2024). London, the capital of England, is among the world's leading commercial, financial, and cultural centres (Frere et al., 2024). Ireland is the only country with a land border with the United Kingdom. The UK has a land area of 243,610 km^2 and a coastline of 12,429 km (World Data.info, 2024). Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Yorkshire and the Humber, South West, East Midlands, North West, East of England, South East, London, West Midlands, and North East are the 12 regions that make up the UK (Regions-United Kingdom, 2022).

2024, the population of the United Kingdom is 67.6 million (mid-2022: ONS, 2024c), with a population growth rate of 0.33%; 50.55% of the population is female, and 49.45% is male. 85% of the UK's population lives in urban areas (Statistics Times, 2024). Life expectancy at birth in the UK from 2020 to 2022 was 78.6 years for males and 82.6 years for females (ONS, 2024a). According to the 2021 Census, 81.7% of the population of England and Wales was white; Asian ethnic groups constituted the second largest segment at 9.3%, followed by black ethnic groups at 4.0%, mixed ethnic groups at 2.9%, and other ethnic groups at 2.1% (Gov.UK, 2023). By the end of June 2022, approximately 14.8 per cent of people in England and Wales were not born in the UK.

Christianity is the official religion of the UK, and it is a religion of various denominations such as Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, and Methodist. Other religions practised are Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism. While English is the predominant language spoken across the UK, it is not the only native official language. Others are spoken and taught as a second language in the UK, like Welsh in Wales, Gaelic and Scots in Scotland, Irish and Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland and Cornish in Cornwall, England (British Council, n.d.).

The UK's GDP is 3.5 billion US dollars, with a growth rate of 0.5%, and GDP per capita is 51.07 thousand US dollars. The UK's current unemployment rate is 3.8% (ONSb, 2024). In the World Happiness Index 2023, the UK ranks 19th with a 6.796 average life evaluation point (Helliwell et al., 2023). On the UN's Human Development Index, with an HDI value of 0.940, the UK ranked 15 out of 193 countries in 2022 (UNDP, 2023).

The education system in the UK enjoys a reputation for its quality and high standards. Schooling in the UK is mandatory between the ages of five and 18. The literacy rate in the UK is 99%. GER of the UK as of 2022 for the primary is 98.52% and for Secondary 111.91%, whereas NER for the primary is 96.91 and for Upper secondary 94.85% (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). The UK currently has a total of 32,163 schools. This includes 3,079 nurseries or early-learning centres, 20,806 primary schools, 23 middle schools, and 4,190 secondary schools. Additionally, there are 2,461 independent

schools, 1,546 special schools, 57 non-maintained special schools, and 348 pupil referral units (PRUs). The total number of students enrolled in schools across the UK is 10,320,811, while there are 624,520 full-time teachers. Among these teachers, 264,804 are employed in primary schools, 247,378 in secondary schools, 76,442 in independent schools, and 27,883 in special schools (BESA, n.d.). In PISA 2022, the UK ranked 12 in math, 13 in reading and 14 in science (OECD, 2023).

Educational Policy

UK education policies have evolved since the sixth century and continue to change today. The Romans introduced education in Britain during this period, bringing Latin and Christianity with the arrival of St. Augustine. In the late 19th century, the British government established school boards to ensure that elementary education was accessible to local communities.

In 1980, the Thatcher government implemented the Assisted Places Scheme to help students whose families could not afford the high fees of public and independent schools. This initiative was beneficial as it provided educational opportunities for children from lower-income households (IvyPanda, 2023).

In the early 20th century, the Balfour Education Act was enacted, leading to the government's establishment and funding of elementary schools. Following World War II, the Butler Act was introduced in 1944, influenced by the post-war education system bill passed by Parliament. As a result, the 1944 Education Act is often called the Butler Act (Ainley & Allen, 2010, p.20). The Act provided a framework for the Ministry of Education, guiding the Minister for Education and the Central Advisory Councils for Education in managing the educational systems in England. The Education Act of 1944 was instrumental in transforming the lives of British citizens by making state education free for all children. It established distinct educational stages, creating separate primary (ages 5-11) and secondary (ages 11-15) systems. In 1951, national examinations were introduced, along with GCSEs (then known as "O" levels) and "A" levels. By the 1960s, the comprehensive school system began to replace the tripartite system. The Baker Act of 1988 further changed the landscape by mandating a curriculum of 14 subjects, transferring control of the curriculum from teachers to the state.

The Education and Skills Act of 2008 mandated that all students continue their education or training until age 18. Subsequently, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government introduced the Education Act of 2011, highlighting the significance of teaching and granting teachers greater authority over school discipline while minimising bureaucratic interference (SPLASH.db, 2014). In 2015, a new AS and A-level system was implemented, which involved decoupling AS levels so that AS results no longer contributed to an A-level grade. GCSEs were also reformed, with the British government determining that student needed more significant differentiation in their

assessments. As a result, a new grading system ranging from 9 to 1 replaced the traditional A-E grading scale. Additionally, courses will now require two years of study and will be primarily assessed through exams rather than coursework (Gillard, 2018).

Since education is a devolved policy area in the UK, curriculum varies between England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was introduced in Scotland in 2010 and covers kindergarten through secondary education. Its goal is to equip youth with the necessary knowledge, skills, and qualities for 21st-century learning, life, and employment. It seeks to give every child and adolescent the tools they need to learn successfully. The 2007 introduction of the Northern Ireland Curriculum provides flexibility while establishing a minimum standard for every student. A new curriculum outlining what has been taught and how it has been taught in Wales will be implemented, starting with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021[2]. The Education Recovery Plan, implemented in September 2021 in response to the educational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, was the latest education policy adopted in the UK. It proposed measures to address the learning losses and mental health challenges students face due to extended school closures and the socio-psychological effects of the pandemic.

Structure of the Education System

Education in the UK varies across its four constituent countries: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. There are five educational stages across the UK and British schools: Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Further Education (FE), and Higher Education (HE). Education is compulsory from ages 5 to 16, except in Northern Ireland, where it begins at age 4 (Department for Education, n.d.a). The schooling years are divided into four key stages (Table 37.1). The fifth stage of higher education is beyond the GCE A level offered in universities and higher education institutions.

In the UK, schools must teach the National Curriculum, which sets out what should be taught in each year group. The core subjects of the National Curriculum are English, Maths, and Science. In addition to this, schools must offer a broad and balanced curriculum that includes technology, humanities, languages, arts, and physical education.

Since September 2010, Early Years of Education has been available to all three- and four-year-olds; it offers free nursery education for 15 hours for 38 weeks of the year in state nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes within primary schools, voluntary pre-schools, privately run nurseries or childminders. There are variations among the constituent countries of the UK (Education System in the UK, 2021).

[2] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2021/4/contents

Table 37.1 Four Stages of Mandatory Education

Key Stage	Age
Early years	3 and 4 year old
1	5 to 7 years of age
2	7 to 11 years of age
3	11 to 14 years of age
4	14 to16 years of age

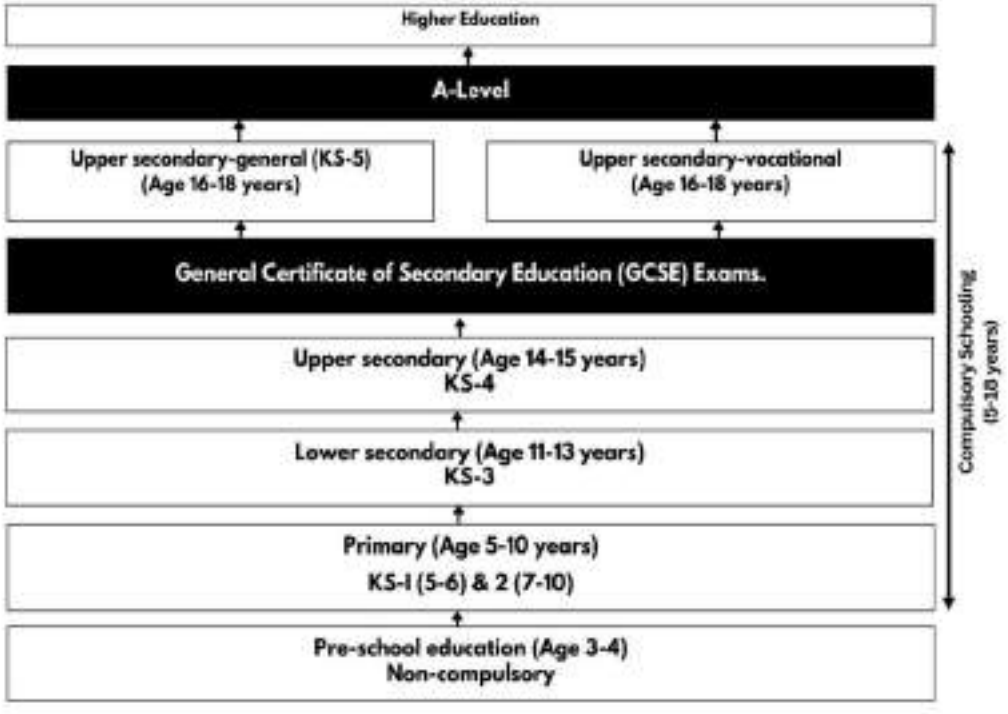

Figure 37.1 Structure of the School Education System in the UK

Source: *Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023 (Adapted by author)*

The first key stage in compulsory education in the UK includes children from 5 to 7 years old, otherwise known as a primary school, comprising the first two years. During the first year of this stage, the curriculum structure contains the Phonic screening, a short assessment of kids' ability to decode and understand phonics properly. Typically, the teacher will ask the students to repeat a list of around 40 words out loud. At the end of this stage (the same in all stages), these pupils will sit for an examination to measure their English, Maths, and Science knowledge development.

Pupils in the second key stage of compulsory education, which includes years 3 to 6, are between 7 and 11 years old. At this level, the curriculum is designed to give students a more advanced

understanding of the previously gained knowledge of the core subjects. In English and Mathematics, the testing is done through national assessment tests, while the teacher will independently assess the level of improvement of each student in science.

Pupils aged 11 to 14 belong to the third stage of compulsory education or years 7 to 9. This education level is essential to a certain degree because only a few years later, they will sit for the GCSE national qualification. The curriculum during this stage of education contains new subjects, at which students are supposed to get some basic knowledge before moving any further in the upcoming stages of education. Some students may take their GCSE or other national qualifications at the end of the third Key Stage.

The final stage of compulsory education, key stage 4, lasts from 14 to 16 and includes years 10 to 12. The fourth key stage is the most common period for students to undertake the national assessment tests that will lead them to take a GCSE or other national qualifications. The compulsory national curriculum at this stage contains the "core" and "foundation" subjects.

Students typically complete their initial key stages—Key Stage 1 and 2—while in primary school. Upon reaching 11, they transition to secondary school, where they will complete Key Stage 3 and 4. After finishing their secondary education, students undertake the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams. After secondary education, students can pursue further education, including A-Levels, BTECs, GNVQs, and other similar qualifications. Further education is essential for those intending to enrol in college or university (Study Abroad, 2021).

Curricular Framework

The aims of the National Curriculum in England are

- "The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.
- The national curriculum is just one element in every child's education. There is time and space in the school day and each week, term, and year to exceed national curriculum specifications. The national curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop stimulating and exciting lessons to promote the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as part of the wider school curriculum" (Department for Education, 2013, p. 6).

The Statutory Guidance by the Department of Education, Government of UK (2014) stated (article 1.1): "Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which:

- Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of the school and society pupils.
- Prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life" (Department for Education, 2013, p. 5).

Preschool Curriculum

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets standards for children's learning, development, and care from birth to age 5. All schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers in England, such as childminders, preschools, nurseries, and reception classes in schools, must follow the EYFS. It is crucial to recognise that the EYFS applies exclusively to schools and early years providers in England, while Scotland and Wales have distinct standards.

The Preschool curriculum is not subject-based but centred on early learning goals in seven areas: communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, physical development, literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design. The assessment is based mainly on classroom observation. While class teachers conduct formal assessments at the end of the school year when students reach the age of five, practitioners or health visitors regularly monitor the progress of children between the ages of 2 and 3 years (Gov.UK, n.d.).

Primary School Curriculum

Primary schools follow a defined curriculum for Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2) and Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6). The National Curriculum emphasises three core subjects: English, Maths, Science, and nine foundation subjects (Table 37.2). Beginning in September 2020, all schools are also required to offer religious education and relationship education. While sex education is not compulsory in primary schools, institutions can include it in their teaching.

Secondary School Curriculum

In the secondary stage, all pupils study English, Maths, Science, Humanities, and Modern Languages. Schools provide a wide range of elective courses, including Latin, Art, Music, Drama, Sport Science, Design Technology, and Computer Science, in addition to the required courses. A few courses that correspond with the student's interests can be chosen. At secondary schools, English, Math, Science, History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages, Design, and Technology are required courses under the national curriculum at key stage 3. Secondary schools must provide religious education (RE) and sex education starting from Key Stage 3. However, parents have the right to request that their children be excused from the entire lesson or a portion of it.

Table 37.2 List of Subjects in Key Stages

Stages	**Key Stage 1**	**Key Stage 2**	**Key Stage 3**	**Key Stage 4**
Age	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-16
Year groups	1-2	3-6	7-9	10-11
Core subjects				
English	✔	✔	✔	✔
Mathematics	✔	✔	✔	✔
Science	✔	✔	✔	✔
Foundation subjects				
Art and design	✔	✔	✔	
Citizenship			✔	✔
Computing	✔	✔	✔	✔
Design and technology	✔	✔	✔	
Languages		✔	✔	
Geography	✔	✔	✔	
History	✔	✔	✔	
Music	✔	✔	✔	
Physical education	✔	✔	✔	✔
For statutory teaching				
Religious education	✔	✔	✔	✔
Sex and relationship education	✔	✔	✔	✔

Source: *Department for Education, 2013 & Department for Education, 2014 (Adapted by author)*

During Key Stage 4, most students work towards achieving national qualifications, typically GCSEs. The compulsory national curriculum subjects are divided into 'core' and 'foundation' subjects:

- Core subjects: English, Maths, and Science
- Foundation subjects: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Physical Education, and Citizenship

At key stage 4, schools must offer at least one of the arts, design and technology, humanities, modern foreign languages, or religious and sex education.

Teaching Learning

The UK has a long history of developing innovative teaching strategies that go beyond and enhance the conventional, enabling students to gain significantly more from their education and themselves. One of these cutting-edge methods is inquiry-based learning, also called problem-based learning. This type of instruction often combines field trips and other experiential learning opportunities that immerse students in simulated or real-world environments. Traditional theory-based lectures are blended with individualised tutorials and group seminars to enhance problem-based learning and strengthen students' analytical and communication skills through discussion (British Council, 2024). Hamilton and Murphy (2023) reported that collaborative learning or group work is common in UK schools.

The national curriculum in England's primary (2013) and secondary (2014) mandate teachers with few everyday duties and responsibilities:

- "Teachers should set high expectations for every pupil.
- They should use appropriate assessment to set deliberately ambitious targets.
- Teachers should take account of their duties under equal opportunities legislation that covers race, disability, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment.
- Teachers should use every relevant subject to develop pupils' mathematical fluency.
- Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language skills, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of teaching every subject.
- Teachers should develop pupils' reading and writing in all subjects to support their knowledge acquisition. Pupils should be taught to read fluently, understand extended prose (fiction and non-fiction), and be encouraged to read for pleasure. Schools should promote more extensive reading" (Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023, p. 199).

In England, parents are expected to be actively involved in all phases of their children's education. Parents regularly receive school information letters and bulletins about school events, including concerts, parent nights, field trips, and guest lecturers. It is recommended that parents participate fully in these activities (UKG, 2017).

The UK education system has emerged as a global leader in embracing and implementing technology in the classroom, with parents, students, and teachers actively utilising devices for teaching and learning purposes. A significant portion of UK schools, approximately 64%, have incorporated technology into their regular classroom activities. Furthermore, around 55% of parents support using educational technology (EdTech) in the classroom and remote or hybrid learning models. Additionally, in over half of UK schools, 57% to be precise, students are actively involved in planning and implementing classroom technology use (Remon, 2022). A survey revealed that nearly 83% of primary and 94% of secondary school headteachers plan to use online platforms to provide work for pupils (Clark, 2024).

One of the standout features of education in the UK is its emphasis on more than just textbook learning. Students engage in enriching activities like tutorials, seminars, workshops, and conferences. Teachers in the UK adopt an interactive approach in the classroom, frequently incorporating quizzes, debates, and group discussions into their lessons. Additionally, students are encouraged to develop independent working styles while enhancing their communication skills and fostering critical thinking, analytical abilities, and creativity (Singh, 2024).

Learning Assessment

The learning assessment framework is linked to curricular organisation into four key stages of learning (Table 37.3). Students are constantly tested on how well they do in elementary and high school. This is done with tests and homework, requiring more tests at each step. In the early years and primary school, tests are generally informal and based on teachers' observations. The only tests that are not formal are the SATs in years 2 and 6. As kids move into secondary school, around 11, they start taking formal tests. These tests are called GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education). Students can choose which courses to take but must choose the ones the school offers. There is an assumption that GCSEs are when students start thinking about what kind of job they want (Gurnett, 2023).

Table 37.3 Assessment Framework in the UK

Key Stage	Year Groups	Age Groups	Assessment
Early years	Pre-primary	3-5	No test (individual schools may set the year-end test)
KS1	1 & 2	5-7	Phonic screening check and KS1 SATs (National tests in English reading and maths. Teacher assessments in maths, science, and English reading and writing.
KS2	3 to 6	7-11	KS2 SATs (National tests in English reading, maths, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Teacher assessments in English writing and science)
KS3	7 to 9	11-14	No test (individual schools may set the year-end test)
KS4	10 & 11	14-16	GCSE
KS5	12 & 13	16-18	AS/A-Level test and Advanced subsidiary level or school-set year-end tests.

Source: *Gurnett, 2023 & Gov.UK, 2016 (Adapted by author)*

In the first year of Key Stage 1, the curriculum includes a Phonics screening check and a brief assessment of children's ability to decode and understand phonics. Typically, teachers ask students to read aloud a list of about 40 words. After this stage, students undergo an examination to evaluate their English, Maths, and Science development.

During Key Stage 2, national assessment tests are conducted for English and Mathematics, while teachers independently assess each student's progress in science. Some students may take their GCSEs or other national qualifications at the end of Key Stage 3.

Key Stage 4 marks the final stage of compulsory education, where students commonly take national assessment tests that lead to GCSEs or other national qualifications.

Health and Physical Education

Under the updated National Curriculum implemented in September 2014, Physical Education remains mandatory across all key stages. Local authority-maintained schools are obliged to adhere to the National Curriculum. Although academies and free schools are not required to teach it, they must still offer a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes students' spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development. The stated aims of the National Curriculum for PE are to ensure that pupils:

- "Develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities.
- Are physically active for sustained periods.
- Engage in competitive sports and activities.
- Lead healthy, active lives" (Department for Education, 2013, p.198).

The National Curriculum programs of study for Physical Education specify a range of activities to be taught at each key stage. These activities encompass fundamental movements like running, jumping, throwing, and catching, as well as the development of balance, agility, and coordination, which are applied across different activities. The curriculum also includes participation in team games, competitive sports, the development of basic tactics for both attacking and defending, and swimming (Department for Education, 2013).

Physical education is a compulsory subject in UK school education, but it was not included in health education. As of September 2020, all primary school students are now taught Relationships and Health Education, while Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) has become mandatory for secondary schools. These subjects aim to provide children with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about their well-being, health, and relationships, ultimately preparing them for a successful transition into adulthood (Media Officer, 2023). "In Health education, people are taught

- mental well-being,
- Internet safety and harms,
- physical health and fitness,
- healthy eating,
- facts and risks associated with drugs, alcohol and tobacco.
- health and prevention
- basic first aid.
- Changing adolescent body" (Department for Education, n.d.b).

Skills Education

There is no specific topic or course on skill development offered in UK elementary and secondary education. The UK school curriculum still incorporates core and elective subjects that support skill development. Students' fine and gross motor abilities are developed in computer science, music, art and design, and physical education. Subjects like sex and relationship education, citizenship education, and religion education help to develop soft skills. In the UK, basic skills, employability skills, and some vocational courses are taught in schools, especially to students between the ages of 14 and 18. The government suggested graded skill training for several Key stages (Table 37.4).

Table 37.4 Core and Employability Skill Developments at Different Key Stages

Key Stage	Core skill	Employability skills
KS1 (age 5-7)	Numeracy, Literacy, Citizenship, Art, Computing, Music, and Physical promptness.	Communication, Tolerance, Teambuilding.
KS 2 (age 7-11)	Numeracy, Literacy, Citizenship, Art, Computing, Music, and Physical promptness.	Communication, Tolerance, Teambuilding.
KS 3 (ages 11-14)	Numeracy, Literacy, Citizenship, Art, ICT, Music, and Physical promptness.	Communication, Tolerance, Designing, Team-building.
KS 4 (ages 14-16)	Numeracy, Literacy, Citizenship, Art, ICT, Music, and Physical promptness.	Communication, Tolerance, Designing, Team-building.

Source: *Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023 (Adapted by author)*

The school curriculum does not include vocational and technical skills that require using hands, hand tools and materials, or digital abilities. The UK's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) begins with upper secondary education. These are the technical and occupational abilities that are acquired from practical experience. Students can enhance their employment abilities and academic endeavours by enrolling in BTEC programmes. The UK is reforming technical and postsecondary education to raise the calibre of apprenticeships.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

UK schools emphasise the significance of life skills, maintaining high academic standards, and providing a well-rounded boarding experience. The National Curriculum framework document for Key Stages 1 and 2 (2013) stipulates that every state-funded school must deliver a curriculum that is balanced and broadly based, promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of pupils and preparing them for future opportunities, responsibilities, and

experiences. While "hobby development" is not explicitly mentioned, the focus on holistic development is clear. Schools are encouraged to offer extracurricular activities that may include hobbies such as music, sports, drama, and various clubs, enhancing students' overall educational experience.

Two important and innovative themes in life skills education in the UK are citizenship education and financial literacy. Both issues have been highly debated in the British Parliament in recent years. Financial literacy is part of Personal, Social, Health, and economic (PSHE) education, broadly explaining life skills education.

PSHE is a non-statutory component of the national curriculum. However, the Department for Education emphasised its importance and recommended that all schools teach PSHE as it is an important and necessary part of all pupils' education. There has been a controversy between the Parliamentary Committee and the Department for Education regarding its implementation. To quote the Parliamentary Committee, "It is no exaggeration to say that Ofsted rejected the lot. It persistently mixes up citizenship education with PSHE—personal, social, health and economic education. In truth, they are completely different […] PSHE is about "me" and how I am developing as a person, and a very important issue that is, but citizenship education is about "we"—how our society works, how we all benefit from it and how we must contribute to it—and therefore has a completely different focus. Ofsted's disregard for citizenship education is further evidenced by the fact that it does not undertake any deep dives in this subject, as it does with other policy areas.".

In 2021, the All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Financial Education for Young People reported that "only one in three children currently receive any form of financial education at primary school." The APPG claimed that this contributed to young people's lack of confidence in planning for their financial future when they get older.

"There is little doubt among teachers and parents that financial capability can be a highly effective tool in helping young people navigate key life transitions and support good decision-making. Moreover, navigating that terrain is likely to become ever more complex in a digital age. In this context, the benefits of financial capability extend beyond the ability to deal with day-to-day financial matters to employment prospects, mental health and self-confidence" (Sandy & Hebden, 2023, p.9).

The government has not committed to making financial education or other elements of PSHE statutory parts of the primary school curriculum or specifying what skills should be taught in secondary schools beyond the existing national curriculum guidelines.

Citizenship education is taught at all four key stages; it is limited to broader concepts such as learning right from wrong and articulating opinions. The national curriculum for citizenship aims to ensure that all pupils:

- "Acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of how the United Kingdom is governed, its political system and how citizens participate actively in its democratic systems of government
- develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system in our society and how laws are shaped and enforced
- develop an interest in and commitment to participation in volunteering as well as other forms of responsible activity that they will take with them into adulthood
- are equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions, to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs" (Department of Education, 2013, p.1)

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The core of the curriculum in UK schools is moral, social, and cultural education. Subjects like citizenship, religion, and sex and relationship education focus on students' moral, social, and cultural growth. The UK saw several changes to its Moral, Social, and Cultural Education policies, including Religion and Worldviews, Character Education, and Fundamental British Values (FBV).

The revised Teachers' Standards document, which went into effect in 2012, introduced the concept of Fundamental British Values (FBV) into education policy. These values are "democracy, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs". They are considered values educators "must not undermine" (Department for Education, 2011). The government requested that schools "actively promote" FBV throughout the curriculum in 2014 (Department for Education, 2014). Ofsted inspects schools to assess how successfully they support FBV as part of their overall plan for students' social, moral, spiritual, and cultural development (SMSC).

Character education aims to instil certain qualities, values, and characteristics like tenacity, grit, and neighbourliness in students. The government has encouraged character education in schools through several volunteer programmes since 2015. 2019 the government released a non-statutory Character Education Framework for Schools (Department for Education, 2019). This framework describes six standards for character education and methods for teaching curriculum, extracurricular activities, and leadership in schools to foster character.

The suggested new terminology for Religious Education in schools is Religion and Worldviews. One of the suggestions made in the Commission on Religious Education (Commission on Religious Education, 2018) report is this change, which lays out a new framework for religious education in schools and offers a strategy for a national entitlement programme for all students. This concept is based on the idea that all kids should be exposed to various worldviews, including religious and

nonreligious ones, to help them comprehend how the world works and how others make sense of it (McDonnell et al., 2020).

Peace and Happiness Education

According to Quakers in Britain (2022), most UK schools do not teach peace education. Since peace education is rarely included in the official, assessed portions of the academic curriculum in the United Kingdom, it is frequently seen as extracurricular (McKeown et al., 2017). Students receive instruction in religion, citizenship, sex and relationships and peace education. A study conducted in 2024 by Otilia Rose-Marie Meden revealed that young people in Argentina, Denmark, and the United Kingdom said they had primarily studied peace concerning war and violence. Additionally, about 75% of British adolescents desire to learn more constructive approaches to peace and develop inner peace inside and outside educational environments (Meden, 2024).

Summary and Conclusion

England, Wales, Scotland, and the northern part of Ireland make up the island nation of the United Kingdom. With a score of 68.6 on the 2024 Index of Economic Freedom, the UK is ranked 30th most free. The UK has 624,520 full-time teachers, 32,163 schools, and a high percentage of literacy rate of 99%. Since the Romans introduced education in the sixth century, education policy in the United Kingdom has changed. The Baker Act of 1988 instituted a mandatory curriculum that included fourteen disciplines.

According to the Education and Skills Act of 2008, all students must now finish their 18 years of education or training to graduate from high school. The Education Act of 2011 reduced bureaucratic intervention, strengthened teacher authority over school discipline and underlined the value of education.

The five phases of the UK education system are the Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Further Education (FE), and Higher Education (HE). Except for Northern Ireland, where compulsory schooling starts at age 4, education is mandated from five to sixteen. England's National Curriculum seeks to instil fundamental information in students while fostering their mental, physical, spiritual, and ethical growth. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets forth guidelines for the upbringing, education, and care of children from birth to age five.

English, Maths and Science are the three main disciplines included in the National Curriculum, which is implemented in primary schools in the United Kingdom. Religious education and relational education are two of the nine basic subjects. Although it is not required, elementary schools are free to choose to offer sex education. Secondary school students study English, Maths, Science, Humanities, and Modern Languages. Elective courses are also offered. At the beginning of key

stage 3, schools must offer religion and sex education, while parents are free to choose not to enrol their children in the class. Most students in key stage 4 strive for national certifications, often GCSEs. The core and foundation subjects—inquiry-based and problem-based learning—are required under the national curriculum. High standards must be set, adequate assessment must be used, and equal opportunity laws must be taken into account by teachers.

Parents are expected to take an active role in their children's education, as technology is used in 64% of UK schools for regular teaching and learning activities. With parents, students, and teachers actively using technology in the classroom, the UK education system is a global leader in adopting and deploying this learning environment. The educational system in the UK provides students with a broad and varied environment that includes seminars, workshops, conferences, and tutorials. Teachers foster critical thinking and communication abilities by encouraging autonomous work styles and being interactive. Tests and assignments are combined for assessment, with further tests needed for each level. Students are evaluated in the first year of the First Key Stage via SATs and phonics screening. National assessments are used to gauge the progress of science, maths and English knowledge in the Second Key Stage. Some students may sit for their GCSE or other national qualifications after the third Key Stage. The fourth Key Stage is the most popular time for students to take national assessment exams that lead to a GCSE or other national credentials.

All key stages require health and physical education (PE). Students must engage in at least 60 minutes of physical education daily, split between in-school and out-of-school activities. This is a credit course that is formally assessed. Physical education was not, however, a part of health education; starting in September 2020, secondary schools were required to offer Relationships and Health Education (RSHE) and Sex and Health Education (RSHE). These topics give kids the information they need to make wise decisions about their relationships, health, and general well-being, setting them up for adult success.

Although skill education is not a core curriculum component, it is provided through various academic and extracurricular activities. The curriculum in UK schools emphasises life skills, hobbies, and employability skills in addition to skill development. Along with topics like sex and relationship education, citizenship education, financial literacy and religion education, it also covers computer technology, music, art and design, and physical education. Practical experience-based vocational skills are part of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system.

Hobby and life skill education are not directly mentioned in the curriculum but are incorporated through extracurricular activities. Additionally, life skills, including self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, handling emotions, and stress management, are emphasised in the UK curriculum.

Institutions, particularly boarding institutions, understand the value of these abilities in attaining academic and personal success. In England, extracurricular activities, including clubs, sports, music, and theatre, are encouraged, and holistic development is emphasised in the national curriculum.

Similarly, social, moral, and cultural education are not explicitly part of the curriculum but are integrated into various courses and activities that emphasise pupils' moral, social, and cultural development. The education strategy has included the notion of Fundamental British Values (FBV), which are characterised as tolerance for individuals with diverse religions and views, democracy, the rule of law, and mutual respect. Since 2015, the government has promoted character education in schools through several volunteer initiatives. There is a new framework for religious teaching in schools, currently known as Religion and Worldviews. Most UK schools do not provide peace education, frequently considered an extracurricular activity.

Overall, pupils' holistic development is prioritised in UK schooling. The school curriculum incorporates all verticals of 21st-century knowledge and abilities. Physical education is given much attention. Education on happiness and peace must be a part of the school curriculum.

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Multicultural Quality Education: Canada

Deepa Kauts
Mrityunjoy Kaibarta
Bidhan Gantait

Abstract

Canada's education system is decentralised, with 13 jurisdictions managing educational policies and practices. In the 2022 PISA assessment, Canada ranked 7th in math and reading and 6th in science, reflecting its strong educational performance. This chapter covers all major provinces of Canada, with a special focus on Alberta. Alberta's education framework includes elementary, junior, and senior high levels. The curriculum focuses on student-centred learning, implementing foundational principles such as mastery learning, rigour and relevance, personalisation, flexible learning environments, etc. Life skill education is introduced from kindergarten through high school. Alberta's Physical and Health Education curriculum for K-12 sets up four general outcomes that can be achieved at the school level. Alberta prioritises citizenship education, fostering respect for diversity and democratic values. While peace education is not formally included, social and emotional learning elements are present throughout Albert's curriculum. Overall, Alberta's approach aims to develop well-rounded individuals equipped for future challenges, contributing to Canada's reputation as a leader in global education.

Keywords: Decentralised Education System, Out Performed in PISA, Alberta's Education System, Compulsory Life Skill Education, Citizenship Education

Introduction

With an area of 9,984,670 square kilometres, Canada is the second-largest nation in the world by land area (Statistics Canada, 2018b), trailing only behind Russia. Its vast territory covers two-fifths of North America, a unique geographical feature that sets it apart. However, Canada is one of the most sparsely populated countries, underscoring its unique geography. The Arctic Ocean borders Canada to the north, Greenland to the northeast, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, 12 states of the

United States to the south, and the Pacific Ocean and the U.S. state of Alaska to the west (Morton et al., 2024). Canada's coastline is the longest in the world, measuring 243,042 km, including the mainland coast and the coasts of offshore islands (Statistics Canada, 2016). Canadian geography unfolds west to east and north to south. The north is colder, rockier, and snowier, making it less suitable for living. The southeast to southwest is more livable with diverse geography, from lush valleys to deserts. Canada has ten provinces and three territories (Canadian Geography, n.d.), with the capital in Ottawa.

The current population of Canada is 39,066,924 as of May 17, 2024, with 49.71% male and 50.29% female (Statistics Times, 2024). Canada's population growth rate is projected to be 0.84% from 2023 to 2024, and the current life expectancy for Canada in 2024 is 83.11 years (Macrotrends, 2024). Census 2021 revealed that 23 per cent of the Canadian population is migrants. Further, Canada is home to more than 450 ethnic and cultural origins, 100 religions, and 450 languages. The top reported origins by Canada's population, either alone or with other origins, were "Canadian" (5.7 million people), "English" (5.3 million), "Irish" (4.4 million), "Scottish" (4.4 million), and "French" (4.0 million). 53.3% of the Canadian population follows the Christian religion, 34.6% have no religious belief, 4.9% are Muslim, 2.3% are Hindu, and 2.1% follow Sikh religions (Statistics Canada, 2022). Canada has a rich linguistic diversity, with over 200 reported mother tongues. French and English are the official languages (Statistics Canada, 2018a).

Canada is one of the world's largest trading nations with a highly developed mixed economy. Its current GDP is $2.24 trillion, with a growth rate of 1.2%, and its GDP per capita is $54.87 thousand. Canada's Unemployment rate is 6.3% as of 2024 (IMF, 2024). In the World Happiness Report 2024, Canada ranked 15 with 6.900 scores (Helliwell et al., 2024, p. 15). In the Human Development Index 2022, Canada ranked 14 with a 0.935 HDI score (UNDP, 2022).

Canada has maintained a literacy rate of over 99%, indicating that nearly everyone can read and write (Canada Maps, 2023). GER of Canada as of 2021 for the primary is 96.29% and for secondary 109.33%, whereas NER for the primary is 96.29% and for upper secondary 86.69% (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). In 2020, Canada had about 14,600 public schools, comprising 10,100 elementary schools, 2,600 secondary schools, and 2,100 mixed elementary and secondary schools. During the 2018–19 school year, nearly 5.7 million students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, with an average of 390 students per school (CMEC, n.d.). There were 408810 teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in Canada in the 2016-17 school year (Statics Canada, 2018c).

Since Canada does not have one educational policy, structure, or curricular framework, this paper will occasionally refer to practices in different provinces and territories, with Alberta as the focus of the discussion.

Educational Policy

Hough (1990) made a significant point by stating that referring to "Education Policy in Canada" rather than "Canadian Education Policy" is more accurate due to the country's constitutional position. Canada does not have a federal education department or a unified national education system. According to the Constitution Act of 1867, each province has the exclusive authority to create education-related laws. In Canada, the responsibility for organising, delivering, and assessing education at the elementary and secondary levels, technical and vocational education, and postsecondary education lies with the 13 jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions have separate departments or ministries for elementary, secondary and postsecondary education and skills training (CMEC, 2008a).

Canada has The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). This organisation was established in 1967 by the provincial and territorial ministers responsible for education. Its purpose is to provide a platform for these ministers to discuss mutual interests, collaborate on educational initiatives, and advocate for the provinces and territories in dealings with national educational organisations, the federal government, foreign governments, and international organisations. CMEC serves as a unified voice for education in Canada, allowing the provinces and territories to work together on common objectives across elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education levels (CMEC, n.d.).

Each jurisdiction is guided by its own Education Act, which is a detailed legal document that outlines how education will be organised and delivered, along with student eligibility criteria, duties of employees (teachers, principals, superintendents, and support staff), accountability measures, and different types of programs available (Robson, 2019, p. 84). Controversies over separate schools in several provinces have marked Canadian education history. These include New Brunswick in 1871, Manitoba from 1891 to 1896, Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, Ontario in 1912, Quebec in 1969, and, more recently, Ontario and Newfoundland. In most of these cases, the constitutionally enshrined education rights have been ineffective in protecting minorities who are increasingly concerned with questions of language and religion (Peters & Leslie, 2015).

In 2008, provincial and territorial education ministers declared that Learn Canada 2020 would address 21st-century socioeconomic changes. Learn Canada 2020 aims to create a well-educated population that can contribute to (1) a vibrant knowledge-based economy in the 21st Century, (2) a socially progressive, sustainable society, and (3) enhanced personal growth opportunities for all Canadians. The goals comprise four pillars of lifelong learning: early childhood learning and development, elementary to secondary school systems, postsecondary education, and adult learning

and skills development. Within these four pillars, ministers have identified eight specific activity areas and accompanying objectives: Literacy, Aboriginal Education, Postsecondary Capacity, Education for Sustainable Development, International and National Representation, Official Languages, Learning Assessment Programs and Performance Indicators, and Education Data and Research Strategy (CMEC, 2008b).

Besides the federal goals, every state has its education policy. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) was implemented in three cycles over nine years:

- "Cycle 1 (2000-03) focused on creating a model for collaboration based on measures and criteria for accountability to ensure that the programme was working in an environment of continuous improvement.
- Cycle 2 (2003-06) incorporated successful practices for instructional interventions, professional development, accountability, and administration.
- Cycle 3 (2006-09) stressed the importance of innovation and research, analysis of project outcomes, focusing on professional development, and expanding knowledge and information sharing" (Anderson, 2016, p.567).

Alberta Education has the following policies regarding K-12 education:

- Daily Physical Activity Policy
- English as a Second Language Policy
- Human Sexuality Education Policy
- Inclusive Education Policy
- Learning Commons Policy
- Locally Developed Courses Policy
- Student Evaluation Policy
- Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy
- Use and Reporting of Results on Provincial Assessment Policy" (Government of Alberta, n.d.).

British Columbia's Education Plan "To help guide the transformation, the plan focuses on five key elements and innovations: personalised learning for every student, quality teaching, flexibility and choice, high standards, and learning empowered by technology" (McRae, 2013, p.1) is the cornerstone of the educational development plan.

The Manitoba Government launched Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan in April 2022 and updated it in May 2023. This five-year action plan focuses on four pillars: high-quality learning, student engagement and well-being, excellence in teaching and leadership, and responsive systems (Keele, 2022).

Structure of the Education System

The education systems across Canada are similar, but there are also significant differences in curriculum, assessment, and accountability policies among provinces and territories. The education systems in Canada are comprehensive, diversified, and widely accessible, reflecting the societal belief in the importance of education (CMEC, n.d.). The structure of the education system in Canada varies among jurisdictions (Volante & Jaafar, 2008). Alberta follows a three-tier system preceded by preschooling (Figure 38.1).

Pre-Elementary Programs

Public pre-elementary programs (pre-grade 1) are available in all jurisdictions in Canada, although their length varies. Pre-elementary programs, often called kindergarten, are offered to 4 to 5-year-olds. Most pre-elementary programs are not mandatory, except in some provinces, e.g., Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador. The intensity of pre-elementary programs also varies by jurisdiction. Kindergarten is a half-day program in many areas; in others, it is a full day. Ontario, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island have implemented full-day kindergarten (Robson, 2019, p. 85). As of June 2021, eight provinces and territories have included early childhood learning and development in their education systems (CMEC, n.d.).

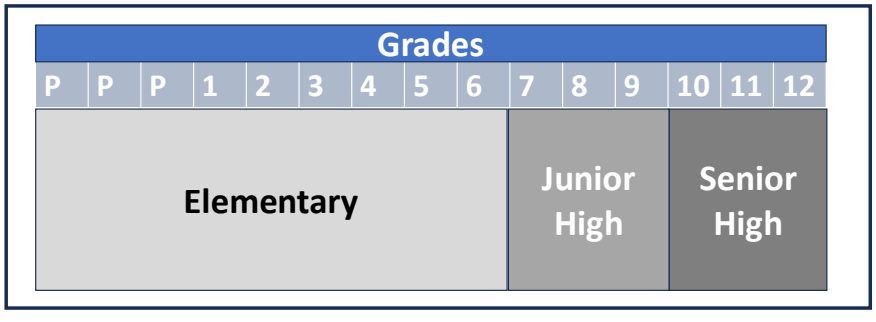

Figure 38.1 Structure of the School Education System in Alberta

Source: *Author*

Elementary and Secondary Programs

All Canadian jurisdictions require mandatory attendance for children and youth between certain ages, although this varies by area. In most jurisdictions, compulsory education starts at age 6 or 7 and ends at age 16. Compulsory education ages are lower for jurisdictions where pre-elementary education is mandatory, like New Brunswick. In recent years, compulsory education has increased up to 18. New Brunswick increased its age of compulsory education from 16 to 18 in 1999, as did Ontario in 2007.

"The division between elementary and secondary school also varies by jurisdiction, but in general, the length of the program is 12 years (or 13 if kindergarten is included). Depending on the jurisdiction, the particular grades encompassed by "elementary" and "high school" vary, with some jurisdictions denoting grades in the middle of "elementary" and "high school" as "middle school" or "junior high." Elementary education is typically the first six to eight years of education, while high school (secondary school) begins at Grade 9 or 10. Sometimes, "middle school" or "junior high" covers Grades 6 or 7 to Grades 8 or 9" (Robson, 2019, p. 85). Table 38.1 illustrates the typical pre-elementary to secondary trajectories by jurisdiction.

As given in the table, public education in Alberta comprises three levels: elementary, junior high, and senior high. Elementary Grade schools operate from kindergarten through to Grade 6. Children can enrol in full-day kindergarten in the year they turn five, but it is not mandatory. Typically, students graduate from grade school at 11-12. Junior High School (or "middle school") operates in Alberta from Grades 7 to 9. Students generally start at the age of 12-13 and finish at the age of 14-15. Senior High School operates from Grades 10 to 12. Students begin at the age of 15-16 and graduate at the age of 17-18 (Arrive, 2021).

Table 38.1 Structure of School Education System in Different Canadian Jurisdiction

Province or Territory	Pre-elementary	Elementary /Primary	Junior High School/Middle	Senior High	Secondary
Newfoundland and Labrador	Yes	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
Prince Edward Island	Yes	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
Nova Scotia	Yes	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
New Brunswick (English)	Yes	Grades 1-5	Grades 6-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
Quebec (General)	Yes	Grades 1-6	N/A	N/A	Grades 7-11
Ontario	Yes	Grades 1-8	N/A	N/A	Grades 9-12
Manitoba	Yes	Grades 1-4	Grades 5-8	Grades 9-12	N/A
Saskatchewan	Yes	Grades 1-5	Grades 6-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
Alberta	Yes	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
British Columbia	Yes	Grades 1-7	N/A	N/A	Grades 8-12
Yukon	Yes	Grades 1-7	N/A	N/A	Grades 8-12
Northwest Territories	Yes	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	N/A
Nunavut	Yes	Grades 1-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12	N/A

Source: *Table redrawn by Authors; data curated from (Robson, 2019, p. 86).*

Curricular Framework

The curriculum varies across provinces. Some provinces have specific curriculum documents that outline topics, activities, assignments, and learning outcomes. In most provinces, the documents are

more like guidelines, providing topics to be covered and ideas about classroom activities but leaving the teachers' decisions about time, effort, and material required. School districts may also have their curriculum development processes, where local teams of teachers develop curriculum units. These units may be more or less prescriptive. In some schools, teams of teachers may make further modifications or develop school-based curricula in a particular area (Wallin et al., 2021, p. 404).

Alberta Education, for example, determines the Curriculum or Programs of Study. These programs outline the expected learning outcomes and activities for students in all subjects from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The new K–6 Curriculum and the existing Grade 7–12 Programs of Study can be accessible on the Alberta Education website.

K–6 Curriculum

The K-6 curriculum includes English Language Arts and Literature, Fine Arts, French First Language and Literature, French Immersion Language Arts and Literature, Mathematics, Physical Education and Wellness, Science and Social Studies. This curriculum also emphasises developing three features: Literacy, Numeracy and Competency Progression. K-6 curricula also develop eight competencies: Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Research and Managing Information, Creativity and Innovation, Communication, Collaboration, Citizenship and Personal Growth and Well-being (*Alberta's Kindergarten to Grade 6 Curriculum*, n.d.).

Aukerman (2024) criticises new curriculum documents, especially the K-6 social studies curriculum. He raises questions about authorship and the process of developing the curriculum. He is also concerned about lacking a solid research basis, expertise, and critical perspectives on resource extraction.

7 to 9 Curriculum

The Grade 7 to 9 curriculum includes English Language Arts, Français, French Language Arts (Immersion), Health and Life Skills, Mathematics, Physical Education, Science, and Social Studies as required subjects. The curriculum also offers some optional subjects, like Art, Career and Technology Foundations, Drama, Environmental and Outdoor Education, Ethics, First Nations Languages, French as a Second Language, International Languages, Locally Developed Courses and Music (*What Your Child Is Learning in Each Grade,* n.d.). Optional subjects can vary from school to school. Students are encouraged to continue in Grade 8 and Grade 9 with at least one of the optional subjects selected in Grade 7. Optional subjects are Art, Career and Technology Foundations, Drama, Environmental and Outdoor Education, Ethics, First Nations Languages, French as a Second Language, International Languages, Locally Developed Courses, and Music (Government of Alberta, 2024).

10 to 12 or Senior High School Curriculum

On completing Grade 12, a student can earn an Alberta High School Diploma (100 credits) or Certificate of High School Achievement (80 credits). The requirements for entry into postsecondary institutions and workplaces may require additional and/or specific courses. Alberta's Senior High School Curriculum includes many subjects (Table 38.2). Few are compulsory, and others are optional but credit subjects. Students can choose a subject or group of subjects to complete their diploma or certificate and fulfil their required credits. The diploma credit structure is given below.

Table 38.2 Subjects offered in Senior High School in Alberta.

1. Humanities	2. Mathematics and Sciences	3. Wellness
• Aboriginal Studies • English Language Arts • Français • French Language Arts (Immersion) • Social Sciences • Social Studies	• Biology • Chemistry • Mathematics • Physics • Science	• Career and Life Management • Physical Education
4. Fine Arts	**5. Additional Languages**	**6. Career Education**
• Art • Choral Music • Drama • General Music • Instrumental Music	• English as an Additional Language • First Nations Languages • French as a Second Language • International Languages	• Career and Technology Studies • Career Internship • Dual Credit • External Learning • Green Certificate Program • Locally Developed Courses • Registered Apprenticeship Program • Work Experience • Work Study

Source: *What Your Child Is Learning in Each Grade, n.d.*

To graduate with an Alberta High School Diploma, a student must earn at least 100 credits to graduate from high school. "Diploma exams are required in English 30-1 and 30-2, Social Studies 30-1 and 30-2, Mathematics 30-1 and 30-2, Biology 30, Chemistry 30, Physics 30, Science 30, Français 30-1 and French Language Arts 30-1. Final marks in these courses represent a blend of school and provincial exam marks" (*Alberta High School Diploma*, n.d.). Students should earn at least 100 credits by taking required courses, plus other courses that interest them and help them achieve their goals.

Required courses:

- English 30-1 or 30-2
- Social Studies 30-1 or 30-2

- Mathematics 20-1 or 20-2 or 20-3
- Science 20 or 24 or Biology 20 or Chemistry 20 or Physics 20
- Physical Education 10
- Career and Life Management (CALM)

Earn ten credits, in any combination, from:

- Career and Technology Studies (CTS)
- Fine arts
- Second languages
- Physical Education 20 and/or 30
- Knowledge and Employability courses
- Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) courses
- Locally developed courses in CTS, fine arts, second languages or Knowledge and Employability

Earn ten credits in any 30-level course (in addition to English and Social Studies), in any combination, from:

- 30-level locally developed course
- Advanced level (3000 series) in CTS courses
- 30-level Work Experience
- 30-level Knowledge and Employability courses
- 30-level Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)
- 30-level Green Certificate Specialisation courses
- Special Projects 30 (Alberta High School Diploma*: Graduation requirements,* 2023)

"Curriculum development in Canada is a dynamic process. Curriculum documents are constantly updated to incorporate current theory and tested best practices (Manitoba Education Curriculum Development Process). The Canadian curriculum employs a variety of strategies and models for teaching" (Glade, 2015, p.16). Glade (2015) further adds that the Canadian curriculum is based on making connections, constructing knowledge by building on prior knowledge, and involving students in meaningful tasks that relate to real life. It adopts strategies for nurturing higher-level thinking skills such as 'inference, prediction, analysis and critical thinking, and problem-solving.' Also, Canadian teachers adopt differentiated instruction to respond to the learning needs of all students (Glade, 2015, p. 16).

Teaching Learning

The school year in Canada lasts from early September until late June, for about ten months. It is usually divided into two semesters, though it is based on quarters or trimesters in some regions. Though it is less common, some schools run year-round and follow an adjusted term schedule that starts in August and ends in May. Regardless of the type of school, the administration notifies parents well ahead of time about term dates, vacations and holidays. The school day for elementary school students typically starts around 8:30 a.m. and runs until 3-3:30 p.m. Children get lunch and recess during school (Wise, 2017). Students in junior high school and high school usually have slightly shorter school days, from 8:30 to 2:30, which allows them to participate in after-school activities like sports, extracurriculars, and part-time jobs. Most classes are held Monday to Friday, and students are given weekends off (Wise, 2017).

In Canada, several provinces take different teaching-learning approaches to achieving learning goals. Ontario is engaged in the 'Next generation learning' model, which is a competencies-based curriculum focussing on developing six competencies—6C: Critical Thinking, Creativity (Innovation and), Character (Self-Directed Learning), Collaboration, Communication, and Citizenship (Educircles, 2018).

British Columbia developed the 'Know-Do-Understand' model to support a concept-based competency-driven approach to learning. It comprises three elements: Know (the content learning), Do (developing competencies and skills through experiential learning), and Understand (higher cognitive understanding and generalisations, principles, and key concepts after each grade). All three domains are futuristic, having an overtone for deep learning (Mukhopadhyay& Kundu, 2023).

Saskatchewan is focused on putting students first. In July 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced the Student First approach to the centre and re-engaged the provincial education system around the most important aspect—the student. This approach is based on four themes: relationships, engaging the student/learner, the learning environment, student/teacher support, and shared responsibility (Malatest & Associates, 2014).

The Alberta government focused on student-centred learning. To meet this goal, the government suggested a few foundational principles: mastery learning, rigour and relevance, personalisation, flexible learning environments, educator roles and professional development, meaningful relationships, home and community involvement, and fostering a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment (Alberta.ca., 2024).

As per ministerial order (#001/2020), all Alberta teachers must meet the Teaching Quality Standard throughout their careers. According to the Teaching Quality Standard, a teacher should have the

competencies of a) Fostering Effective Relationships, b) Engaging in Career-Long Learning, c) Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge, d) Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments, e) Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit and f) Adhering to Legal Frameworks and Policies (Alberta Education, 2020).

The Alberta ICT program focuses on technology as a 'way of doing things'—the processes, tools, and techniques that change human activity. The curriculum outlines what Kindergarten to grade 12 students should know, be able to do, and be like in relation to technology (Alberta Education, 2016a)

Learning Assessment

In Canada, most provinces and territories conduct large-scale assessments. Some provinces, like Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta, participate in international testing programs such as PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS. The School Achievement Indicators Programme (SAIP) is conducted in all Canadian provinces (Volante & Jaafar, 2008, p. 203). It was replaced by the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) in 2007, coordinated by CMEC. PCAP assesses reading, mathematics, and science to help education ministers understand how well their education systems meet students' needs (CMEC, 2016, p. 6).

In the 1980s and 90s, assessments were valued differently across Canada, depending on the province's curriculum and testing program. Canadian public schools implement policies and provide professional development opportunities to support teachers in Assessment for Learning. Several provincial policies specifically emphasise the connections between assessment *for*, *of*, and *as* learning and provincial curriculum expectations (Earl et al., 2015).

A study conducted by Volante and Jaafar (2008, p. 204) found a great variety of assessment programs for different provinces and territories across Canada. Table 38.3 summarises these differences, focusing on the grades and assessed subject areas.

Table 38.3 Provincial and Territorial Assessment Programme

Province/Territory	Assessment programme	Grade level/Description
Alberta	Achievement Testing Programme	• Grade 3 (language arts and mathematics). • Grades 6 and 9 (language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). • Grade 12 (diploma examinations in core academic courses).
British Columbia	Foundational Skills and Provincial Learning Assessment.	• Grades 4 and 7 (cross-curricular subjects, mathematics, reading comprehension, and writing). • Grade 10 (language arts, mathematics, and science).

		• Grade 11 and 12 (social studies). • Grade 12 (provincial examinations in every subject).
Manitoba	Provincial Standard Tests	• Grade 3 (numeracy and reading). Secondary (English and mathematics). • Optional Grade 6 and Senior 1 (mathematics).
New Brunswick	Provincial Assessments	• Grades 2, 5, and 12 (literacy). • Grades 5 and 8 (mathematics). • Grade 9 (English proficiency).
Newfoundland and Labrador	Provincial Assessments	• Periodic testing in Grades 3 and 6. • Grade 12 (public examinations in every subject).
Northwest Territories	Achievement Testing Programme	• Grade 3 (language arts, mathematics). • Grades 6 and 9 (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies).
Nova Scotia	Programme of Learning Assessment (PLANS)	• Grades 5 and 8 (mathematics). • Grades 6 and 9 (language arts). • Grade 12 (chemistry, English, mathematics, and physics).
Ontario	Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)	• Grades 3 and 6 (reading, writing, and mathematics). • Grade 9 (mathematics). • Grade 10 (literacy).
Prince Edward Island	Common Assessments	• Grade 3 (literacy). • Grade 9 (mathematics).
Quebec	Provincial Assessments and Uniform Ministry Examination	• Grades 6, 9, and 11 (French and mathematics). • Grades 10 and 11 (selected uniform examinations).
Saskatchewan	Provincial Learning Assessment Programme	• Grades 5, 8, and 11 (critical thinking, language arts, and mathematics).
Yukon	Student Assessment Programme	• Grades 3, 6, and 9 (mathematics and language arts). • Grade 12 (British Columbia provincial examinations in every subject).

Source: *Volante & Jaafar, 2008, p. 204*

Health and Physical Education

Physical and Health Education (PHE) in Canada is an essential part of school education from K-12, with minor differences across the provinces. PHE ensures every child has the knowledge, skills, and understanding to lead safe, active, healthy lives. "Canada's PHE curriculum is a shared responsibility, with each province and territory taking leadership to develop its own in response to local and contextual differences" (PHE Canada, n.d.). PHE is a combination of physical education and daily physical activity. Alberta's PHE curriculum of K-12 sets up four general outcomes that can be achieved at the school level. Each general outcome includes specific outcomes by grade and

course name at the senior high school level. Here is an overview of each general and specific outcome of different grades:

(a) Students will acquire basic skills like locomotion, non-locomotion, and manipulation through diverse and age-appropriate movement activities such as dance, games, gymnastics, and outdoor pursuits like aquatics.

(b) Students will engage with and value the health advantages derived from physical activity, with a primary emphasis on functional fitness, body image, and overall well-being.

(c) Students will learn to engage positively with others through communication, fair play, leadership, and teamwork.

(d) (Students will take on the responsibility to lead an active lifestyle, focusing on effort and safety, setting personal goals, embracing challenges, and living actively within their communities (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 5).

However, only five provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario) of Canada have province-wide daily physical activity policies and represent 72% of Canadian children aged 5–19 years (Olstad et al., 2015). There is a provincial difference in mandated duration and guidelines for PHE activities in Canadian schools (Table 38.4).

Table 38.4 State-wise Daily Physical Activities

Province or Territory	Physical Education (PE)	Daily Physical Activity (DPA)
British Columbia And Yukon	There are no longer specific time recommendations for K-9/10.	30 Minutes/Day
Alberta And Northwest Territories		30 Minutes/Day for Grades 1-9
Saskatchewan	120-150 Minutes/Week for Grades 1-8 (Still Dependent on School Division)	150 Minutes/Per Week for Grades 9-10
Manitoba And Nunavut	30 Minutes/Day for Grades K-10	
Ontario	150 Minutes/Week	20 Minutes/Day for Grades K-8
Quebec	120 Minutes/Week for Grades 1-6 100 Minutes/Six-Day Or 150 Minutes/Nine-Day for Secondary Students	
New Brunswick	90 Minutes/Week for Grades K-5 150 Minutes/Week for Grades 6-8 45 Hours Over Two Years for Grades 9-10	
Nova Scotia	20 Minutes/Day for Grades K-2 30 Minutes/Day for Grade 3 20 Minutes/Day for Grades 4-6	
Prince Edward Island	75 Minutes/Week Or 90 Minutes/6-Day for Grades K-6 60-90 Minutes/Week Or 72-108 Minutes/6-Day for Grades 7-9	
Newfoundland & Labrador	30% Of Instruction Time for Grades K-3 6% Instructional Time for Grades 4-6 & 7-9	
	High School Requires Two Credits (i.e., One Year)	

Source: PHE Canada, n.d.

Skills Education

The curriculum offered in every high school in Canada is designed to equip them with the necessary skills to be successful in their careers when they finish their education (University Kart, 2022). The new high school curriculum emphasised career-related skills (e.g., skills in technology and communication) and academic study to prepare students to be productive future citizens with various skill sets. The CMEC mandates include representing all the provinces and territories on educational matters and monitoring the skills of Canadian students (Robson, 2019). Skills education refers to developing manual, trade, and pre-vocational skills. It is integrated into the curriculum as applied skills. For instance, Technology Education, Home Economics, and Business Education are included in the high school curriculum. In some states, secondary schools provide education in trades and technology, offering hands-on training and practical experience opportunities.

Students are prepared for the real world by strengthening critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills and practising self-reflection for personal growth (Government of Alberta, n.d.a.). Competency progression is one of the Features of Alberta's Provincial Curriculum, which includes critical thinking, problem-solving, research and managing information, creativity and innovation, communication, collaboration, citizenship, and personal growth and well-being (Alberta Education, 2016b). K-12 curriculum achieves competencies through Arts education, English language arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social studies. In addition, the K-9 curriculum included competencies in Health and Life Skills and High School Career and Life Management (Alberta Education, n.d.).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Different activities, such as creative arts and social activities at the preprimary level, physical and health education, arts education, career education, applied design, skills, and technologies at the primary level, and physical education, fine arts, applied skills, and personal planning at the secondary level, provide adequate opportunities for hobby development.

Students learn foundational life skills that enable them to develop healthy behaviours and relationships, manage and resolve conflicts, manage personal finances, build confidence, deal with failure, and be prepared for everyday life (Government of Alberta, n.d.a). In Alberta, life skills education is introduced from the kindergarten. Life skills education is integrated with health and life skills for K-9 grades and career and life management (CALM) for senior high school (10-12 grades). Three general outcomes serve as the foundation for the health and life skills of the K-9

programme of studies, i.e., wellness choices, relationship choices, and life learning choices (Alberta Learning, 2002a). CALM builds on learning outcomes developed in the Health and Life Skills of K-9 programme. Health and Life Skills and CALM aim to enable students to make well-informed, healthy choices and develop behaviours that contribute to the well-being of self and others (Alberta Learning, 2002b). Three general outcomes serve as the foundation for the health and life skills of the K-9 programme of studies, i.e., personal choice, resource choice, and career and life choice. The general outcomes of CALM build on the general outcomes of Health and Life Skills of K-9 (Figure 38.2).

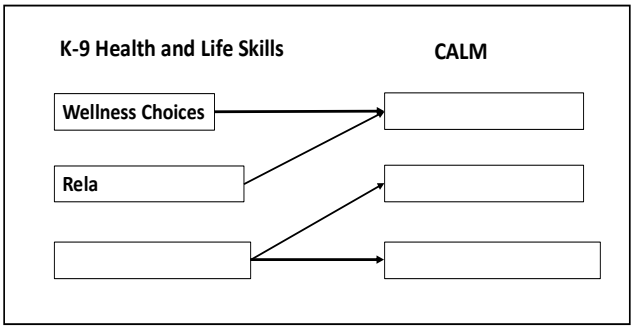

Figure 38.2 Life Skills and CALM Choices
Source: *Authors*

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Schools in Canada help students develop character and citizenship skills, civic responsibility, and commitment to lifelong learning. "Active, engaged citizenship, attentive to multicultural diversity, is a prominent goal in recent Canadian citizenship education policy and programming in practice; Canadian students (especially those from less privileged backgrounds) have few opportunities to practice democratically relevant citizenship learning in school" (Bickmore, 2014, p. 1). Alberta's citizenship education focuses on moral formation, social skills, respect for cultural diversity and multiculturalism, cross-cultural skills, democratic values, rights and responsibilities, etc. Alberta's guide to education highlights key skills, knowledge and attitudes related to character and citizenship education. Character and citizenship education is an inclusive concept woven throughout the school day for all students, and it is integrated into the curriculum, discipline policies, and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (Alberta Education, 2005). Logan (2015) mentioned that we must inspire all students to reach their full potential through ethical citizens, engaged thinkers, and entrepreneurial spirit. Ethical citizens who demonstrate respect, empathy and compassion for all people (Logan, 2015).

Peace and Happiness Education

Peace education is often integrated into various aspects of the school curriculum. While it may not always be explicitly labelled as "peace education," concepts related to conflict resolution, social justice, human rights, and understanding diverse perspectives are included in subjects like Social Studies, History, Civics, and sometimes even in language arts and other courses. Additionally, many schools promote values such as empathy, cooperation, and respect for others through various programs, assemblies, and extracurricular activities, contributing to a broader culture of peace within the educational system.

According to Albarta's K-12 Social Studies Program Rationale and Philosophy, "Social studies fosters students' understanding of and involvement in practical and ethical issues that face their communities and humankind. Social studies are integral to enabling students to understand who they are, what they want to become and the society in which they want to live. …..It fosters the building of a society that is pluralistic, bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and democratic. The program emphasises the importance of diversity, respect for differences, and the need for social cohesion and the effective functioning of society. It promotes students' sense of belonging and acceptance as they engage in active and responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level" (Alberta Government, 2005a).

Summary and Conclusion

Canada, a country with universal literacy (99%), does not have a federal education department or a unified national education system. The responsibility for organising, delivering, and assessing education at every level lies with the 13 jurisdictions. The CMEC, which serves as a unified voice for education in Canada, guides Canada's education policy and is a knowledge-sharing platform for the province's education ministry. Learn Canada 2020 aims to create a well-educated population that can contribute to a vibrant knowledge-based economy, a socially progressive, sustainable society, and enhanced personal growth opportunities for all Canadians. The goals comprise four pillars of lifelong learning: early childhood learning and development, elementary to secondary school systems, postsecondary education, and adult learning and skills development (CMEC, 2008b).

The education system in Canada is comprehensive, diversified, and widely accessible, reflecting the societal belief in the importance of education. It can be split into four programs: pre-elementary, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary. Pre-elementary programs, often called kindergarten, are available in all jurisdictions, but their length and intensity vary. Canada's public education system is free for all citizens, with mandatory attendance for children and youth between certain ages. In most jurisdictions, compulsory education starts at age 6 or 7 and ends at age 16. The division

between elementary and secondary school varies by jurisdiction, but in general, the length of the program is 12 years. In Alberta, public education is divided into elementary, junior, and senior high.

The curriculum varies across provinces. Some provinces have specific curriculum documents outlining the topics, activities, assignments, and learning outcomes. School districts may also have their curriculum development processes, where local teams of teachers develop curriculum units. The K-6 curriculum includes English Language Arts and Literature, Fine Arts, French First Language and Literature, French Immersion Language Arts and Literature, Mathematics, Physical Education and Wellness, Science and Social Studies, and eight competencies: Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Research and Managing Information, Creativity and Innovation, Communication, Collaboration, Citizenship and Personal Growth and Well-being. However, critics like Aukerman (2024) raise questions about authorship, the curriculum development process, and the lack of research basis, expertise, and critical perspectives on resource extraction.

The Alberta High School Curriculum offers a wide range of subjects, including Humanities, Mathematics and Sciences, Wellness, Aboriginal Studies, English Language Arts, French Language Arts (Immersion), Social Sciences, Social Studies, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physical Education, Fine Arts, Additional Languages, Career Education, Art, Choral Music, Drama, General Music, Instrumental Music, English as an Additional Language, First Nations Languages, French as a Second Language, International Languages, Career and Technology Studies, Career Internship, Locally Developed Courses and Work Study. To graduate with an Alberta High School Diploma, students must earn at least 100 credits by taking required courses and other courses that interest them and help them achieve their goals. The school year in Canada lasts from early September to late June and lasts for about ten months. The school day for elementary school students typically starts around 8:30 a.m. and runs until 3-3:30 p.m. In contrast, junior high and high school students usually have slightly shorter school days, from 8:30 to 2:30, which allows them to participate in after-school activities like sports, extracurriculars, and part-time jobs.

The Canadian government focuses on student-centred learning, implementing foundational principles such as mastery learning, rigour and relevance, personalisation, flexible learning environments, educator roles and professional development, meaningful relationships, home and community involvement, and fostering a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment.

Curriculum development in Canada is dynamic; curriculum documents are periodically updated to incorporate current theory and tested best practices. The Canadian curriculum employs various teaching strategies and models, focusing on making connections, constructing knowledge, and involving students in meaningful tasks related to real life. Organisations such as the Council of

Ministers, the Canadian Education Association, and the Canadian School Boards Association regularly share information, conduct research, and establish best practices and priorities in education (Glade, 2015, p. 16).

Canada's provinces and territories conduct large-scale assessments, with some participating in international testing programs like PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS. The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is conducted in all Canadian provinces. Provincial and territorial assessment programs vary in terms of grades and assessed subject areas.

Physical and Health Education (PHE) is an essential part of school education from K-12, with minor differences across provinces. PHE ensures every child has the knowledge, skills, and understanding to lead safe, active, healthy lives. Only five provinces (38.5%) have province-wide daily physical activity policies, representing 72% of Canadian children aged 5-19.

Canada's high school curriculum focuses on equipping students with the necessary skills for success in their careers and academic study. Skills education includes developing manual and trade skills and pre-vocational skills like technology and communication. The CMEC mandates that all provinces and territories be represented on educational matters and that the skills of Canadian students be monitored.

Students are prepared for the real world by strengthening critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills and practising self-reflection for personal growth. Alberta's Provincial Curriculum includes competencies in arts education, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, as well as in Health and Life Skills and High School Career and Life Management.

Hobby and life skills education are introduced from kindergarten through creative arts, social, and sports activities. Life skills education is integrated with health and life skills for K-9 grades and career and life management (CALM) for senior high school (10-12 grades). CALM builds on learning outcomes developed in the Health and Life Skills of K-9 program, aiming to enable students to make well-informed, healthy choices and develop behaviours that contribute to their well-being.

Canada's citizenship education focuses on moral formation, social skills, respect for cultural diversity, cross-cultural skills, democratic values, rights, and responsibilities. Character and citizenship education is an inclusive concept woven throughout the school day for all students and integrated into the curriculum, discipline policies, and co-curricular and extracurricular activities (Alberta Government, 2005b).

Peace and happiness education is often integrated into various aspects of the school curriculum, fostering students' understanding of practical and ethical issues and promoting a culture of peace within the educational system.

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Towards A Holistic Approach to Education Reform: The USA

Mrityunjoy Kaibarta

Abstract

The United States is one of the most attractive destinations in education. Its policies are made at both federal and state levels. Federal policies like ESEA in 1965, NCLB in 2001, and ESSA in 2015 set achievement targets for the nation. State policies specify the details of frameworks. The system comprises preschool, elementary, middle, and high schools. This chapter deals with educational reforms in the USA, specifically regarding educational policies, structures and curricular reforms. The curriculum varies among states. Many states adopt academic standards to outline what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Assessments are conducted to measure student achievement and ensure compliance with federal education laws. The US education system also focuses on practical skills relevant to the job market, including fine and gross motor skills and health, physical, and art education. Multicultural education programs help children understand and appreciate differences, while character education programs instil virtues and promote civic engagement. Overall, the US educational system is diverse and decentralised, focusing on providing quality education and addressing the needs of students at different levels.

***Keywords*:** NCLB, ESSA, Education for Homeless Children and Youth, WOKE Act, SHAPE America, NAEP.

Introduction

The United States of America (USA), with unique geographical features, is located between North America's Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It boasts a land area of 9,831,510 square kilometres and a coastline of 19,924 kilometres, making it the third-largest country in the world (Worlddata.info, n.d.). The USA shares an 8,891-kilometre land border with Canada in the north (including the Alaska border of 2,475 kilometres) and 3,155 kilometres with Mexico in the south. The U.S. is

comprised of 50 states and a federal district in Washington, D.C. It has a diverse landscape. It offers everything from tropical beaches in Florida to the majestic peaks of the Rocky Mountains, from vast rolling prairies and barren deserts in the West to dense wilderness areas in the Northeast and Northwest (National Geographic, n. d.).

The USA, with a population of 333,287,557, is the third most populous country in the world, with women constituting 50.4% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The USA has a diverse ethnic makeup, comprising approximately 75.5% White, 13.6% Black or African American, 1.3% American Indian and Alaska Native, 6.3% Asian, 0.3% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 3.0% identifying as two or more races, and 19.1% Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The population growth rate is 0.4% (2022). The proportion of immigrants in 2022 was 13.8% of the U.S. population (Moslimani & Passel, 2024). Notably, "Immigrants and their U.S.-born children number approximately 90.8 million people, or 27 per cent of the total civilian noninstitutionalised U.S. population in 2023" (Batalova, 2024).

The current life expectancy for the U.S. in 2023 is 79.11 years (Macrotrends, n.d.a). The USA is a cultural melting pot, with 70% of Americans identifying as Christians, with more than 40% white and more than 25% of colour. Around 23% of Americans have no religious affiliation, while 5% identify with non-Christian religions (PRRI, 2021). The USA is a linguistic kaleidoscope, with over 350 languages spoken in households nationwide. English is the most widely spoken language in the U.S., with 78% of the population speaking it at home (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). Spanish comes in second as the most common language, followed by German, Chinese, French, and others.

The U.S. is one of the largest economies in the world, with a nominal GDP of $2.878 trillion and a growth rate of 2.70% as of 2024 (IMF, 2024). Additionally, the U.S. has a relatively high GDP per capita of $85,37. On the HDI (2021), the U.S. ranks 20th, with a 0.927 score (UNDP, 2024); the country ranks 15th on the Happiness Index, with a value of 6.894 (Helliwell et al., 2023). In November 2023, the unemployment rate in the USA was 3.7% for adult men, 3.1% for adult women, 3.3% for Whites, 5.8% for Blacks, 3.5% for Asians, and 4.6% for Hispanics. (BLS, 2023).

In North America, including the USA, the Literacy Rate in 2022 was 98.73% (Macrotrends, n.d.b). The U.S. education system consists of 98,577 Public schools (2020-21) and 30,492 Private schools in the 2019-20 session, categorised as pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle, secondary high and other undergraduate schools (NCES, 2022). The GER and NER for primary education were 98.31% and 95.90% for both sexes in 2021 (UIS-UNESCO, 2023). In 2021, approximately 49.5 million students attended public schools from pre-kindergarten to grade 12. The U.S. ranked 23rd globally in the 2018 PISA assessment (OECD, 2019).

Educational Policy

Educational policy-making in the USA occurs at both federal and state levels. The Department of Education enacts federal policies, while the states enact the specific details of the structures, curriculum frameworks, teaching and learning methods, assessment methods, management, and funding. This division of responsibility allows for a more comprehensive and tailored approach to education policy that considers each state's unique needs and circumstances. There are three significant federal laws related to education in the U.S. These are the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 (US Congress, 1965), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Lee, 2021) in 2001, and the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) in 2015 (US Department of Education, 2015).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, aimed to provide all U.S. students with quality education, irrespective of socioeconomic status and served as a civil rights law promoting equal educational opportunities. "ESEA offered new grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, funding for special education centres, and scholarships for low-income college students. Additionally, the law provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para 5).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed by President George W. Bush, aimed to enhance educational opportunities for K-12 public school students. It addressed the neglect of disadvantaged students, including those in special education, by focusing on four groups: students in poverty, students of colour, students receiving special education services, and those with limited or no English proficiency (Lee, n.d.).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) introduced accountability measures for student learning and achievement, including annual testing, reporting, and improvement goals, with consequences for schools that failed to meet these standards, a significant departure from previous iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Lee, n.d.). Despite its controversies, the NCLB compelled schools to prioritise advancing disadvantaged students (Lee, n.d.). In 2015, NCLB was succeeded by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which aimed to address its criticisms and further enhance the education system.

In December 2015, President Obama signed the ESSA. This act builds on the progress made by the implementation of NCLB, particularly in increasing high school graduation rates, reducing dropout rates, and improving students' transition from high school to college. "ESSA includes provisions that will help ensure student and school success. Below are just a few. The law:

- Advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.

  It requires—for the first time—that all students in America be taught high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and their careers.

- Ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards.
- Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators.
- Sustains and expands this administration's historic investments in increasing access to high-quality preschool.
- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, authorised under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, aims to ensure that homeless children and youth have equal access to free public education. Initially established in 1987 and re-authorised in December 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), with updates in 2018, the program addresses barriers to enrollment, attendance, and academic success for these students, mandating that state educational agencies provide the necessary support to facilitate their education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Federal laws provide the guiding vision to the states, and these laws must be read in conjunction with state laws. All states have their Laws. A few exemplar laws are:

Commonwealth of Massachusetts declared their policy goal as "to provide a public education system of sufficient quality to extend to all children including English learners, and also, including a school-age child with a disability the opportunity to reach their full potential and to lead lives as participants in the political and social life of the Commonwealth and as contributors to its economy. The policy intends to ensure: (1) that each public school classroom provides the conditions for all pupils to engage fully in learning as an inherently meaningful and enjoyable activity without threats to their sense of security or self-esteem, (2) a consistent commitment of resources sufficient to provide a high-quality public education to every child, (3) a deliberate process for establishing and achieving specific educational performance goals for every child, and (4) an effective mechanism for monitoring progress toward those goals and for holding educators accountable for their achievement" (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

The Michigan State Board of Education recognises that "schools cannot achieve their primary mission of education if students and staff are not physically, mentally and socially healthy" (MSBE,

2017, p. 1). The Board advocates for schools to create an environment that teaches students about healthy eating and physical activity while offering daily opportunities to practice these skills (MSBE, 2017).

On July 11, 2023, Governor Whitmer signed Executive Order 2023-6, establishing the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP). This department aims to create a comprehensive education system from preschool to postsecondary, supporting families and the economy. MiLEAP's responsibilities include promoting equitable access to quality, affordable educational programs and improving outcomes for all Michiganders in early learning, care, and higher education, fostering lifelong educational opportunities for everyone in Michigan (Michigan Department of Education, 2023).

Florida's WOKE Act (2022) stipulated that:

(a) "No person is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously, solely by their race or sex.

(b) No race is inherently superior to another race.

(c) No person should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly based on race, colour, national origin, religion, disability, or sex.

(d) Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are not racist but fundamental to the right to pursue happiness and be rewarded for industry.

(e) A person, by race or sex, does not bear responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex.

(f) A person should not be instructed that they must feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress for actions in which they played no part, committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex*"* (Russell-Brown, 2023, p.21).

The unique feature of U.S. educational policy-making is respecting its federative structure. The Federal Government sets only broad national policy goals, allowing every province to respond to the national policy goal in its way and enact policies that are relevant and responsive to the province's socio-cultural and educational needs.

Structure of the Education System

The U.S. has no national education system, curriculum or governing law. Instead, the 50 state governments and over 14,000 local school districts determine and enforce all laws and policies. The age at which education becomes compulsory varies by state, ranging between 5 and 7 years old, with six being the most common. The age at which education is completed also varies between states, with the most common being 16 years old. All states and school districts have set the completion of 12th grade as the required level for secondary school graduation. The most common qualification for secondary graduation is the High School Diploma (Usaeducation.info, n.d.).

The U.S. education system is decentralised, with varying K-12 structures across states and communities. There are at least five structures of 12-year schooling. However, the national picture broadly encompasses four levels: preschool or early childhood education or pre-kindergarten (ages 2-5), elementary school (ages 5-10, including one year of kindergarten), middle school (ages 11-13), and high school (ages 14-18) (Figure 39.1).

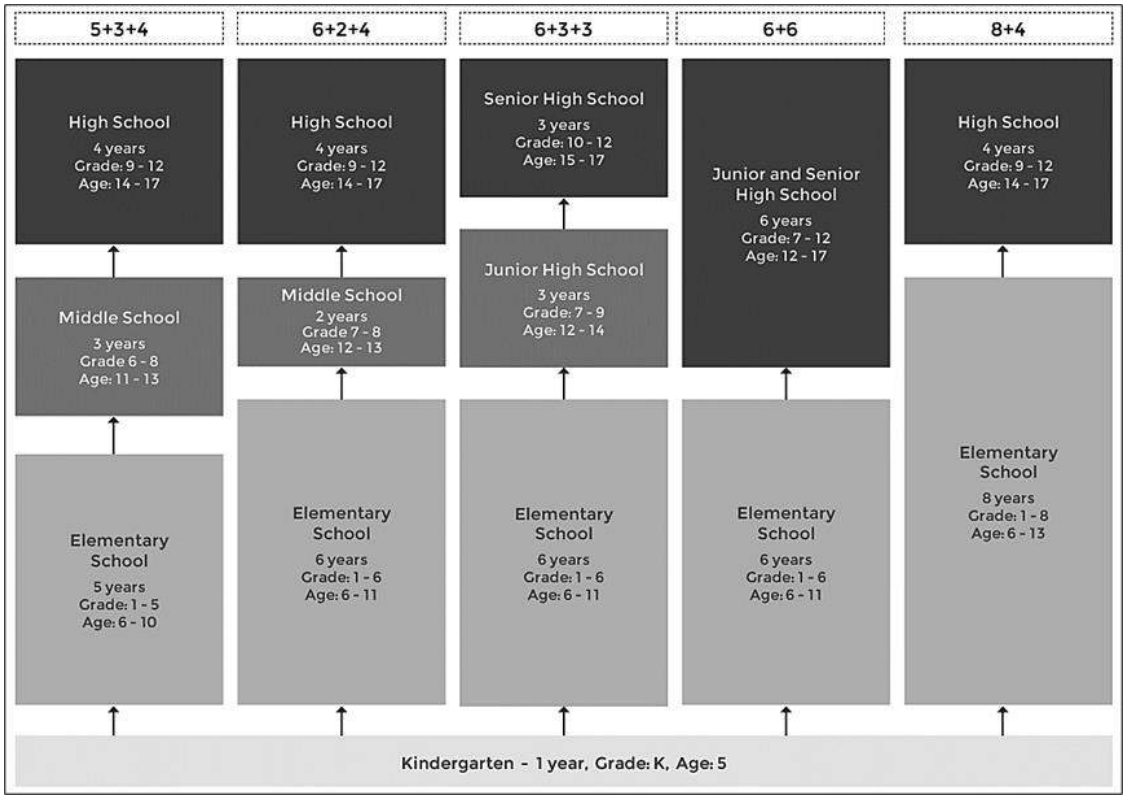

Figure 39.1 Structure of the Education System in the USA

Source: *Loo, 2018 (Adapted by author)*

Preschool Education

Preschool education or Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is not mandatory in the USA. ECEC policies usually cater to children from birth to the compulsory school-going age designated by the state. While primary school enrollment is compulsory for every child, it is up to the state to decide whether or not kindergarten enrollment is mandatory (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). However, families have several options to enrol their children in preschool education, including public and private institutions. In the U.S., 17 states and the District of Columbia have a mandatory requirement for children to attend kindergarten. Out of these, 16 states and the District of Columbia require full-day kindergarten, while 44 states mandate districts to offer at least half-day kindergarten (Fischer et al., 2023).

Elementary Education

Depending on state policies, elementary schools educate students from kindergarten through grade five or six. Typically, students complete elementary school around the age of 10. Students receive full-time academic instruction beginning in the first grade. Generally, students receive instruction in core subjects from the same teacher throughout the year. Still, they may also receive instruction from specialist teachers in subjects like Art, Music, Physical Education, and Computer Science (Loo, 2018).

Middle School

This stage serves students between 11 and 13, grades 6 through 8 (in some provinces, seventh through ninth grades). Unlike elementary school, middle school students usually switch classrooms throughout the day and may have different teachers for each subject. However, in some communities, middle school is housed within the same building as elementary school, allowing students to remain in the same school for their entire primary education (USA Hello, n.d.).

High School

It covers 9th to 12th grades; some may cover 10th to 12th grade. Some schools combine middle and high school into one institution, including grades from 6th or 7th to 12th (Loo, 2018). High school classes are organised by subject, with students having different teachers throughout the day. Students can take advanced classes to prepare for college or work.

Secondary School

It is an alternative to high school, covering grades 9th to 12th. It provides technical and vocational training in areas like carpentry and automotive technology (USA Hello, n.d.).

Curricular Framework

In the U.S., the states have the responsibility and autonomy to design and implement educational policies. There is no standardised curriculum framework across the country, and curriculum content and delivery can vary significantly from one state to another. This decentralisation of educational policy-making allows states to tailor their educational systems to meet the needs and demands of their unique student populations and local communities.

Preschool Education

ECEC comprises a diverse range of programs that operate on part-day and full-day schedules. These programs are administered under various educational, social welfare, and commercial auspices and are funded and delivered through multiple channels in both the public and private sectors. Preschool is a voluntary educational stage that fosters children's development through structured programs. For example, the Texas Pre-kindergarten Guidelines are organised into four categories: Domains, Skills, Outcomes and Child Behaviors.

Each domain comprises a range of skills referring to the broad areas of learning and development that are crucial for young children from birth to 5 years old and essential for their success in school and later life. "The Texas Pre-kindergarten Guidelines are organised into ten domains:

i. Social and Emotional Development
ii. Emergent Literacy: Language and Communication
iii. Emergent Literacy: Reading
iv. Emergent Literacy: Writing
v. Mathematics
vi. Science
vii. Social Studies
viii. Fine Arts
ix. Physical Development
x. Technology

The Texas Pre-kindergarten Guidelines are not a curriculum, assessment tool, or checklist. They are designed as a resource for families, educators, and administrators to offer developmentally appropriate guidance and practices for young children's development and learning in pre-kindergarten (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Elementary Education

The elementary school curriculum in the U.S. varies depending on the organisation and educational aims of individual schools, local communities, and states. Generally, children start school at age five and learn the concepts of print, letters, and basic numeracy in kindergarten while also getting socialised in the school environment. As they progress through elementary school, the primary focus of the curriculum shifts to reading, basic math, and developing foundational concepts in other subjects. The upper elementary curriculum introduces more complex topics such as Economics, U.S. History, and Sciences (Education Advanced, 2022).

Illinois School District 64's elementary school curriculum is designed according to The Illinois Learning Standards (ILS). Kindergarten to Grade 8 students learn seven core subjects: English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, Art and Music, Physical and Health Education and Socio-Emotional Learning. In Grade 2, Foreign Languages are introduced, and in Grade 6, Family and Consumer Science and Industrial Technology are added to the curriculum. For Grades 7 and 8, schools offer Elective programs in various forms of Art, Family and Consumer Science, Industrial Technology, English Language Arts, Math, Music, Science, Social Studies, Technology and World Language (Park Ride-Niles, n.d.).

Middle School

As mentioned earlier, Curriculum framework varies among states and School Districts, but the general picture remains the same with few minimal differences. Illinois School District U-46 offers a standards-based education for all middle school students that clearly describes expected learning outcomes. Accordingly, curriculum, instruction, and assessments are aligned to help students meet or exceed expectations on the Illinois Learning Standards and offer supplemental support to assist students with their academic progress (School District U46, 2022).

In 7th grade, students learn language arts or English as a second language (ELA/ESL), Math, Science, Social Studies or History, and Physical Education (PE). The PE course is split into two semesters, one for PE and Health Education in the 8th grade.

Elective courses are selected by the students for each grade in middle school. Specialised courses in Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies/History are available for students identified for the gifted program. Students enrolled in the Dual Language program receive instruction in Spanish for Spanish Language Arts and Social Studies/History.

"According to World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards and Illinois ACCESS scores, students identified for English language support will receive language arts in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Students with active Individualised Education Plans

(IEPs) will receive support in courses identified in their plans. Specific questions about course content or the curriculum can be directed to your child's teacher, the school counsellor, or school administration" (School District U46, 2022).

High School

High school curricula in the USA are designed to align with the elementary and middle school curricula. To ensure consistent education for all students, Texas has implemented a set of curriculum standards known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which are used in all public schools in the state. The TEKS outline what students are expected to learn in each course or grade (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

In Texas, high school curricula (Grades 9-12) typically include English language arts (English and at least one additional advanced English course), Mathematics (algebra, Geometry, Precalculus, and Mathematical Models with Applications), science (Integrated Physics and Chemistry), Biology, Chemistry, and Physics.

Students must take at least two additional courses each from science, Social Studies, Physical Education, Fine arts, Languages other than English I, II, and III or higher of the same language courses, One Computer Science course, Speech-Communication Applications, and three or more career and technical education courses. For each additional course domain, there is a large variety of options to choose from. For example,

- *Science:* Aquatic Science, Astronomy, Earth and Space Science, Environmental Systems, Advanced Animal Science, Advanced Biotechnology, Advanced Plant and Soil Science, Anatomy and Physiology, Engineering Design and Problem Solving, Food Science, Forensic Science, Medical Microbiology, Pathophysiology, scientific research and Design, and Engineering Science.
- *Social Studies:* United States History Studies Since 1877, World History Studies, United States Government, World Geography Studies, Personal Financial Literacy, Economics with Emphasis on the Free Enterprise System and Its Benefits, and Personal Financial Literacy and Economics.
- *Physical education:* Lifetime Fitness and Wellness Pursuits, Lifetime Recreation and Outdoor Pursuits, or Skill-Based Lifetime Activities.
- *Fine arts:* Art, Music, Theatre, and Dance.
- *Computer Science:* Fundamentals of Computer Science and Advanced Placement (A.P.) Computer Science Principles (Texas Education Agency, 2023).

During the 2018-2019 academic year, grade 3-5 students received an average of 169 days of instruction. During the same academic year, grade 3-5 students received approximately 14,857 minutes of reading/language arts instruction and 10,260 minutes for Mathematics. Social Studies and Science Instructional time was similar, averaging around 4,337 and 4,315 minutes, respectively. Fine Arts instruction was on an average of 3,371 minutes for Music and 2,989 minutes for Art. Physical Education instruction averaged 3,212 minutes (Lewis, 2022).

Teaching Learning

More and more schools in the U.S., serving students from pre-K through 12th grade, are adopting evidence-based approaches to meet their students' social, emotional, academic, and mental health needs. The U.S. Department of Education (2023) published Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates, which offers guidance on how to maintain a learning environment that is safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair for both students and educators. This resource outlines five guiding principles and recommends specific evidence-based practices that schools and districts can implement to provide students with what they need to learn and grow. Additionally, the resource provides a list of federal resources that can support these efforts. "The five guiding principles are:

1. "Foster a sense of belonging through a positive, safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environment.
2. Support the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of all students through evidence-based strategies;
3. Adequately support high-quality teaching and learning by increasing educator capacity;
4. Recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce; and
5. Ensure the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect (including through systemwide policy and staff development and monitoring strategies)" (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Teaching and learning practices in the U.S. school education system have evolved and vary across states and districts. However, there are some common practices and trends, namely,

- Standards-Based Education: Many U.S. states have adopted academic standards that outline what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. For example, the Texas Education Agency (2001) set the following "Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (8-12) standards.

    a) The teacher designs instruction that is appropriate for all students, reflecting an understanding of relevant content based on continuous and appropriate assessment.

b) The teacher creates a classroom environment of respect and rapport that fosters positive learning, equity, and excellence.

c) The teacher promotes student learning by providing responsive instruction that uses effective communication techniques, instructional strategies that actively engage students in the learning process and timely, high-quality feedback.

d) The teacher fulfils professional roles and responsibilities and adheres to legal and ethical requirements of the profession" (Texas Education Agency, 2001, p.1).

Homeschooling is legally recognised and state-regulated across the U.S. Parents typically teach their wards, but tutors may be hired often. Homeschooling is popular among parents because they are concerned about public school quality, safety, and religious instruction (Loo, 2018). It is important to note that practices vary based on societal needs and educational policies. Additionally, individual teachers may modify teaching-learning practices based on their teaching philosophy and students' needs.

Pedagogical practices can be categorised as Student-Centred and Teacher-centred. Similarly, technology integration can be classified as high-tech and low-tech integration. The student—or teacher-centricity and high or low technology integration give a 2x2 matrix (Figure 39.2).

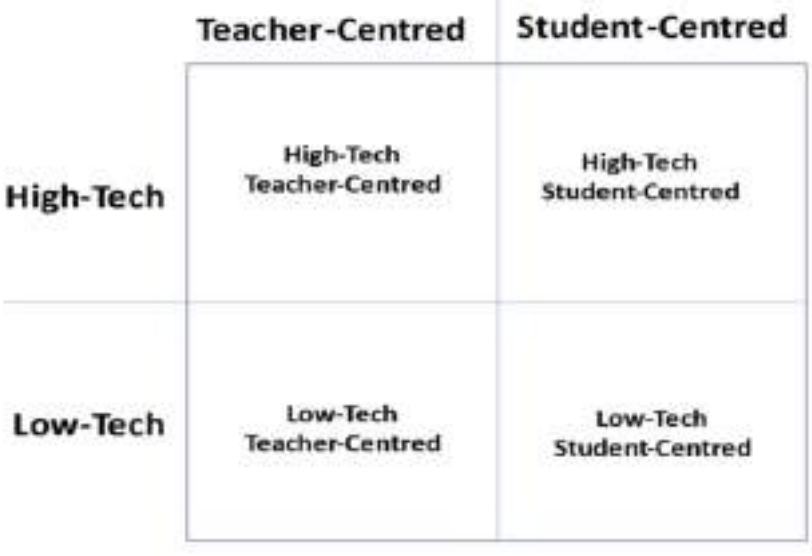

Figure 39.2 Teaching Methods in US Schools

Source: *Mukhopadhyay and Kundu (2023)*

Learning Assessment

Preschool students are tested on reading, writing, language, literacy, and numeracy skills. Teachers also keep track of student's development in other skills through observation and checklists. In the U.S., students in elementary and secondary schools undergo various types of assessments. Title I-A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), requires annual testing of students in grades 3-8 and once in high school in Reading, Math, and Science. States must also participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to receive Title I funding, which has tested students in grades 4, 8, and 12 since 1969 in subjects like reading, math, science, and writing. Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates using assessments to identify students with disabilities and monitor their progress based on individualised learning objectives. These assessments can be formative or summative, depending on their purpose and administration. These evaluations aim to measure student achievement, identify areas for improvement, and ensure compliance with federal education laws (Caffrey, 2009).

In addition to federal requirements, U.S. elementary and secondary students participate in various state-level assessments, including exit exams, which have taken different forms, such as minimum competency exams, comprehensive exams, and end-of-course exams. While comprehensive exams were once the most common type of state exit exam, there has been a shift towards using more end-of-course exams.

Standardised tests such as the California Achievement Test, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford Achievement Test are used extensively for diagnostic and remedial learning at the middle and high school levels. In addition to the standardised tests used once or twice a year, in-class tests are used frequently at the end of every unit.

Additionally, U.S. students have participated in international assessments like PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS (Caffrey, 2009).

Health and Physical Education

In the U.S., nearly every state has physical education guidelines, with requirements varying by state and grade level. While some states integrate health education into physical education, others treat it as a separate subject. The 2016 Shape of the Nation Report surveyed 50 states and D.C. and found that 39 states require physical education in elementary school, 37 in junior high, and 44 in high school. Notably, 50 out of 51 states have adopted physical education standards, with 81.6% (40 out of 49 states) mandating compliance across all school districts.

The Society of Health and Physical Educators America (SHAPE America), the national health and physical education organisation, sets the standards and learning outcomes for physical education in

the United States (Landi et al., 2021). These national standards are often incorporated into state-level guidelines. The five key standards focus on developing various skills and knowledge related to physical activity.

- Standard one emphasises acquiring competency in diverse motor skills and movement patterns.
- Standard two highlights the importance of understanding concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics related to movement and performance.
- Standards 3 and 4 concentrate on developing the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness and promote responsible personal and social behaviour that respects self and others.
- Standard 5, recognised by all 48 states, underscores the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction.

These standards are acknowledged by nearly all states (47 out of 48). Approximately 25% of states (13 out of 49) mandate student physical fitness assessments, with nine requiring specific tests like Fitness Gram. Around half of the states (24) also include physical education grades in students' grade point averages (SHAPE America, 2016).

Skills Education

The school curriculum in the U.S. aims to equip students with practical skills relevant to the job market. Skills education is not offered as a separate subject. Still, fine and gross motor skills are developed through teaching, learning, and subjects like health, physical, and art education. In the U.S., the K-12 school education curriculum for all states and the District of Columbia includes health and physical education and art education, encompassing fine and performing arts. In Illinois School District 64, the Kindergarten school Art curriculum includes various activities to help children develop their skills.

- "Make lines and use lines to make shapes.
- Make objects from drawn, torn or cut shapes.
- Make a pattern, identify textures, and mix colours.
- Fill a space.
- Roll and pinch to create a clay form.
- Demonstrate a running stitch.
- Stamp with found objects.
- Develop an idea with attention to the artistic habits that allow art creation" (Park Ride-Niles, n.d.).

In middle school, students can select elective courses in Art, Family and Consumer Science, Industrial Technology, Music, and Technology. These courses are designed to help students develop their skills for future life.

Vocational education is not a preferred choice among the US students. Also, the employment market is changing. The US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2024) projected, "Total employment is projected to grow by 6.7 million jobs from 2023 to 2033. Growth is driven mainly by the healthcare and social assistance sector".

Hobby and Life Skills Education

In the U.S., education in hobby development and life skills are not taught as standalone subjects. Instead, life skills education is incorporated into the teaching and learning process through collaborative learning, project-based learning, extracurricular activities, technology integration, cultural sensitivity, and diversity. Some states, such as Illinois School District 64, have integrated socio-emotional learning into their K-8 curriculum. This curriculum focuses on developing students' skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, problem-solving, and bullying prevention (Park Ride-Niles, n.d.).

In the USA, all state curricula include art education throughout K-12 grade. The art curriculum includes Fine and performing arts. In middle school, students can select elective courses in Art, Family and Consumer Science, Industrial Technology, Music and Technology. These courses are designed to help students to hone their creative skills and explore their artistic interests. Some art electives available to students include art materials and printmaking, painting and drawing, sculpture and ceramics, classical darkroom photography, and many others. By taking these courses, students can develop their artistic abilities while learning new techniques and approaches to creating art. These Art electives are an excellent way for students to express themselves creatively, find their unique style and develop their hobbies.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Moral, social, and cultural education is a crucial and multifaceted aspect of the U.S. educational system. It addresses these dimensions through various subjects, extracurricular activities, and school policies.

Many schools in the U.S. have character education programs that aim to instil virtues such as responsibility, respect, fairness, and citizenship. Some schools include discussions on ethics and moral reasoning in their curriculum. The social studies curriculum is a key component of education in the U.S., encompassing history, geography, civics, and economics. These subjects are designed to help students understand society, its structures, and their roles as citizens. There is a growing

emphasis on civics education to promote civic engagement and an understanding of democratic principles. This includes knowledge about the U.S. Constitution, government structures, and the importance of active participation in the democratic process.

America's public schools are a prime example of multiculturalism. Most of these schools share a common educational culture. Educators have introduced multicultural education programs to help children understand and appreciate the differences that make them unique. These programs aim to develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills required to function in different cultures and ultimately join a global workforce. The differences may include race, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, and other personal characteristics (Ordway, 2021).

Schools often have clubs and organisations focusing on moral, social, and cultural aspects. For example, clubs promote community service, cultural exchange, or discussions on ethical issues. Many schools encourage or require students to participate in community service, fostering a sense of social responsibility and empathy. Schools typically have policies to address bullying, discrimination, and harassment. These policies aim to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

Global citizenship is not a mandated subject in the USA. Nonetheless, elements of global citizenship are incorporated into various themes and subjects of the curriculum, especially in Social Studies and History.

Peace and Happiness Education

There may not be a specific curriculum dedicated solely to "Peace and Happiness Education," but schools often aim to foster positive social and emotional development in students. The approach to promoting peace, happiness, and well-being varies across schools and districts. Peace and Happiness Education is fostered in U.S. schools through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Character Education, Anti-Bullying Programs, Counseling Services, Community Service, Civic Engagement and Wellness Programs. Some schools incorporate wellness programs that address students' physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This may include activities such as mindfulness exercises, yoga, or discussions on stress management.

According to the Happiness Index of 2022, America ranked 16th. As per the PISA-2018 results, approximately 61% of U.S. students reported being content with their lives, slightly lower than the OECD average of 67%. However, a significant majority of 93% of students reported sometimes or always feeling happy, and only about 11% reported consistently feeling sad. Moreover, 88% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they can usually find a way out of difficult situations, which

is more than the OECD average of 84%. It is worth mentioning that 68% of students in the U.S. hold a growth mindset (OECD, 2019).

According to Zauderer (2023), the U.S. has the highest number of stressed students. While some reasons are apparent, others are unrelated to their education, such as bullying and crime.

Summary and Conclusion

The USA is the third largest country in the world by population, with a diverse population on a varied landscape. It is the largest economy globally and is known for its linguistic diversity and exceptional educational system, with public and private schools categorised from pre-kindergarten to undergraduate levels. Due to the top-level universities in the U.S., it is the most attractive destination for international students to pursue higher education.

The U.S. educational policy-making occurs at both federal and state levels. The Department of Education establishes federal policies, while the states enact the specific details of the structures, curriculum frameworks, teaching and learning methods, assessment methods, management, and funding. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 aimed to ensure that all students in the U.S. had access to quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 sought to improve education opportunities for K-12 public schools across the U.S., focusing on disadvantaged students. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 builds on the progress made by the implementation of NCLB and aims to improve the education system further.

The education system in the U.S. is not centralised. Instead, each state and local school district determines and enforces its laws and policies. Education becomes compulsory at different ages depending on the state, ranging between 5 and 7 years old. The age of education completion also varies between states, with 16 years old being the most common. The national K-12 structure has four levels: preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school. Secondary graduation requires the completion of 12th grade, and the High School Diploma is the most common qualification.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs are offered under different auspices and funded through various public and private channels. While not mandatory, these programs provide young children with valuable learning experiences through play, music, conversation, and other activities. Preschool also helps children develop independence, build relationships with peers, and learn important problem-solving skills, all contributing to their readiness for school. Generally, children start elementary school at age five and learn the concepts of print, letters, and basic numeracy in kindergarten while socialising in the school environment. The curriculum's primary

focus is reading, basic math, and developing foundational concepts in other subjects. The middle and high school curriculum includes English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, Art and Music, Physical and Health Education and Foreign Languages. With 2-4 elective subjects.

The U.S. education system's teaching and learning practices vary across states and school districts. However, some common practices include Standard-Based Education, Project-based learning, Technology integration, differentiated instruction, and others. Elementary and secondary students are assessed through various tests in the United States, with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) being the most prominent. Additionally, students undergo numerous state-level assessments, and many states now require passing exit exams for high school graduation. U.S. students also participate in international assessments like PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS. It is a growing concern that exam pressure on students is increasing in the U.S.

Physical education is a required course and an important part of the curriculum in schools across the U.S. It is usually combined with health education but is a separate subject in some states. Schools also emphasise art education, with classes in music, painting, and other creative activities. While schools do not typically offer classes specifically focused on practical skills, students can learn skills through extracurricular activities like sports or clubs. Hobbies and life skills are not directly taught in the curriculum but can be learned through music, art education, and other activities outside of class. Schools also help students learn about social, moral, and cultural issues through classes like civic education, safety education, and school activities. Peace and happiness education is not separate from the U.S. school core curriculum. Instead, it is fostered through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Character Education, Anti-Bullying Programs, Counseling Services, Community Service, Civic Engagement, and Wellness Programs. The all-round development and holistic education is not necessarily a specific agenda as NCLB or ESSA are. Non-cognitive development is left to be developed by default through other activities. The emphasis is usually placed on academic education, with less attention given to the development of the affective domain, which involves the emotional and social aspects of learning.

Moreover, equity is a matter of concern in the U.S. education system. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was established to address equity issues in education. The 1966 Report on Equality of Educational Opportunity by James S Coleman and others empirically confirmed the need for such an act. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was passed in 2001, highlighting the need for equitable education. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was enacted to address the same issue, emphasising the importance of providing equal opportunities for all students to succeed. It is important to note that while these laws have been enacted to address equity issues in education, there is still much work to be done to ensure that every student has equal

access to quality education and opportunities for success, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.

The US school system has also been questioned by several critiques in various scholarly works, like *The Death and Life of the Great American School System by* Diane Ravitch (2010).

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Lessons from the Tango: Argentina

Tapan Kumar Basantia

Abstract

Argentina's education system is largely centralised and organised at national, provincial, and district levels. The 13 years of compulsory education, including pre-primary, primary, and secondary education, where primary and secondary education is free. The curriculum is developed at three federal, provincial, and school levels. Argentina guarantees access to education for all individuals, regardless of sex, age, race, or disability, focusing on vulnerable populations, including migrants and indigenous peoples. Classroom practices employ traditional and modern teaching methods and emphasise individual and group learning pathways. Norm-referenced assessment is a key feature of the evaluation system. The curriculum covers health and physical education, skills education, moral, social, and cultural education, while life skills education and education for peace and happiness are underdeveloped and require more attention. The policy framework promotes holistic development, creating inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Keywords: Federal Education Law, General basic education, Dual Structure, Curriculum, Norm-referenced Assessment

Introduction

Argentina got its independence from Spain in 1816 and became a republic in 1853 with the adoption of the Argentine Constitution. In 1983, effective democratic governance was reinstituted in Argentina.

Argentina, a Latin American country sharing borders with Chile to the south and west, Bolivia and Paraguay to the north, and Brazil, Uruguay, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, is the eighth-largest country in the world. The country's total area is 2,780,400 km^2, and its undulating Atlantic coastline stretches 2,900 miles (4,700 km) (Donghi et al., 2024). Argentina is a federal republic country with 23 states and one self-governing autonomous city, i.e., Buenos Aires. The major landscapes of the country comprise the Pampas plain, Mountain region forest, grassland and rugged landscapes.

In 2023, the Argentine population was estimated at 45.78 million - 50.5% female and 49.5% male, with a population growth rate of 0.95 (The World Bank, 2024). The average life expectancy is 78.3 years. Most people are catholic and of European origin (Spanish and Italian); others (2.4%) are Amerindians and African descent. The church plays a major role in shaping the country's policies (Simon & Banks, 2003). Spanish is the official language, along with other mainstream and vernacular languages.

Argentina is an upper-middle-income country with a GDP of $604.26 billion. Its GDP per capita is $13,650.60 (2020L World Bank), and its GDP growth rate is -2.8%. Argentina's current unemployment rate is 8% (IMF, 2024). With an HDI of 0.842 in 2021, Argentina ranked 47th out of 189 countries) (UNICEF, 2022). In the World Happiness Report 2024, Argentina ranked 48 (Helliwell et al., 2024).

With a 99% literacy rate, primary and secondary education is free and compulsory. According to UIS-UNESCO (2024), as of 2021, Argentina's GER and NER were 110.16% and 99.21% at the primary level and 105.79% and 96.01% at the upper secondary level, respectively. "In Argentina, over 11 million students enrolled in grades equivalent to pre-kindergarten to grade 12" (Winthrop & Ershadi, 2021, p. 2). In PISA, Argentina ranked 66th out of the 81 participating countries. Buenos Aires Times (6 December 2023) reported, "Five out of every ten pupils in Argentina not meeting minimal levels in language and science; seven out of every ten students do not reach basic levels in maths." Argentina has a high NER in secondary education, including vocational (WDI, 2019).

Educational Policy

Argentina's education is largely centralised. Though the country had achieved good social and educational attainment in the twentieth century, its social and educational scenarios were severely affected by its military dictatorship (1976-1983) and the economic crisis (1980s). However, during the last two decades, its educational situation has been reconfigured (Gorostiaga & Ferreira, 2012).

The Argentine education system is managed at the national, provincial, and district levels. The Ministry of Education (formerly the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) administers and supervises all education-related matters.

Argentina's first national law for compulsory, free, and secular primary education was sanctioned in 1884 (Law 1420 of Common Education). Law 1420 (1984) mandated that primary school education be free, obligatory, secular, and universal (Porto, 2016).

In the late 1980s, a period marked by economic stagnation and the resurgence of liberal democracy in Latin America, a new approach to education reform emerged in the region. This approach was centred around three fundamental principles: quality, equity, and efficiency (Braslavsky, 1999). The restoration of democratic political institutions in Argentina in 1983 facilitated a more inclusive and extensive discourse about the organisation and substance of education (Gorostiaga & Ferreira, 2012). “The first step in the restructuring of the education system was the decentralisation of secondary schools and teacher training institutes from the national to the provincial levels, which was followed by the enactment of the Federal Law of Education (1993) and the Law of Higher Education (1995)” (Gorostiaga et al., 2006, p. 121).

The country's Federal Education Law (LFE) emerged in 1993 (Law No. 24,195). The Federal Law ‘provides for improving the quality of education through curriculum updating, teacher training and creation of National Quality Assessment System’ Because teacher requirements had to be accepted and restructured to meet new qualification levels, professional cycles, and teaching methods, the uneven application of Federal Education Law made differences between education workers even bigger (Pagano et al., 2007).

The new government made the National Education Law (Law 26, 206) and the Education Financing Law (Law 26, 075) in 2003. They brought together many different education programs, projects, and measures. Different parts of civil society were consulted when both rules were being made (Belski, 2009). According to the new Law, “the aims of the national education policy are:

1. to ensure that education is inclusive through universal policies and pedagogical and resource allocation strategies that give priority to the most disadvantaged sectors of society;
2. to ensure equality, with respect for diversity and prevention of gender or any other type of discrimination;
3. to ensure high-quality education with equal opportunities and possibilities, without regional or social disparities” (UNESCO, 2021).

The significant initiative in the field of education in Argentina was the enactment of the National Education Law (LEN) on December 28, 2006 (Law 26, 206), which replaced the Federal Law of Education 1993. The new law states that

> *"Only education of excellent quality for all the population will allow reaching the objectives of social justice, economic growth and democratic citizenship, which guide the strategy of sustainable development… Argentineans are recovering the conviction that the State must guarantee that these values reach the whole society without exclusions"* (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2006, pp. 11-12).

Because of the demand of the social sector, the Education Financing Law (Law 26, 075) was formulated on January 9, 2006. The law increased national and provincial budgets to reach 6% of the GDP by 2010 (Monroy, 2018); 60% of this budgetary increase is to be the responsibility of the provincial government and the City of Buenos Aires government, leaving the other 40% for the national government (Belski, 2009). Universalisation of pre-primary and primary education, special education facilities in primary education to the most disadvantaged and geographical zones, eradication of illiteracy, and increase in teacher salaries were some of the important areas of focus of the Education Financing Law (Belski, 2009). The Education Funding Law is widely regarded as a significant and influential piece of law. For the first time, the national and provincial governments have pledged to augment funding in education and have taken steps towards achieving this objective (UNESCO, 2017). Osiobe (2021), however, pointed out that despite the NEF bill's commitment of 6% of GDP for education, Argentina's educational spending has been ranging from 4.1% in 2006 to 5.6% in 2016 (Monroy, 2018).

Many other laws relating to the education system were formulated from time to time. The following are some of the important laws formulated between 2004 and 2006:

- 'Teacher Salary Payment Guarantee and 180 class days (NO 25.864) — January 8, 2004
- National Fund for Teacher Incentive Law (NO 25.919) — August 31, 2004
- Technical Professional Education Law (NO 26.058) — September 8, 2005
- Education Financing Law (NO 26.075) — January 9, 2006
- Reproductive Health Education Law (NO 26.150) — October 23, 2006
- National Education Law (NO 26.206) — December 28, 2006" (Ministry of Education, 2008 P. 7)

Some of the programmes launched in Argentina from time to time to promote education are:

- The FinEs Program, implemented at the national level, operates in every province to promote the completion of basic and secondary education among young people and adults.
- 'National Literacy Program' for illiterate adults and adolescents, including imprisoned people, to promote their literacy.

- 'National Plan 700 schools' to enhance basic education and secondary school infrastructure.
- 'Support Programme for the Improvement of Equal Education Policy' (2009) aims to improve equal education at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels and reduce the gap in educational opportunity for children with different socio-economic situations.
- The Ministry of Education's 2016–2021 National Strategic Plan: Argentina Teaches and Learns "promotes high-quality education focused on learning so that conditions of equality and respect for diversity can be fully developed. It includes the organisation of a joint work agenda between national and provincial authorities and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires to facilitate the development of a comprehensive, inclusive and high-quality public education policy covering all levels and modalities of the education system" (UNESCO, 2021).

The programme refocuses on improving learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy through a National Learning Improvement Network. To address this challenge, the country focused the budget and agenda of the 'National Institute for Teacher Training' towards improving teachers' practices in the classroom. Another important programme adopted at the national level, 'Lighthouse Schools,' focused on 3,000 highly vulnerable and low-performing schools nationwide. The National School of Government for Education Policies was established in collaboration with other schools to achieve the target. National School created a network at the federal level of all those writing, planning, assessing, and implementing budget and public policies among the 24 provinces (PFPE, 2020). "Since 2003, there has been greater stress on 'educational inclusion' for particular groups (drop-outs, over-age students, etc.), in which one of the main strategies is the 'joint management' of programmes between the state and civil society organisations" (Gorostiaga & Ferreira, 2012, p. 370).

Feldfeber (2021) pointed out the national policies promoted by governments of different political orientations, namely ('so-called') post-neoliberalism of the Kirchnerist governments from 2003 to 2015 and Alianza Cambiemos' government 2015–2019 championing the conservative restorations in education. She argued further that the 'policies based on a conception of education as a social right are confronted with those old and new trends towards privatisation and mercantilisation of education, whose goal is to have education satisfy market demands'.

Structure of the Education System

The Federal Education Act of 1993 transformed the old structure of seven primary and five secondary school grades into a new one. The Federal Education Law (Law 24, 195) 1993

recommended a four-level education system:

i. Pre-primary education (for children from three to five years old, with the final year as obligatory)
ii. General basic education for nine years from the age of six years, organised in three cycles (of three years each)
    - Basic General Education (EGB) I: 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades
    - Basic General Education (EGB) II: 4th, 5th and 6th grades
    - Basic General Education (EGB) III: 7th, 8th and 9th grades
iii. Secondary education for three years
iv. Higher education, including graduate and post-graduate studies.

Table 40.1 gives the comparative structure of the Argentine School Educational System before and after the enactment of the Federal Law of Education (LFE) in 1993.

Table 40.1 Argentine Educational System pre- and post-LFE 1993

Education Levels before the LFE		**Education Levels after the LFE**	
Kindergarten	Three non-mandatory Years	Kindergarten	Three years, the last one being mandatory
Primary School	Seven mandatory years	General Basic Education (E.G.B.)	Nine mandatory years
Secondary School	Five non-mandatory Years	Polimodal	non-mandatory years

Source: *Gvirtz & Narodowski, 2000*

The New Education Law (2006) modified the old structure of the education system and suggested the following levels of education:

I. Early or pre-primary education (The law recognises pre-primary education as a legitimate and important pedagogical unit for children from forty-five days old to five years old),
II. Primary education (which starts from the age of six years),
III. Secondary education, and
IV. Higher education

"Since 2015, all Argentinian children are required to attend two years of early childhood education (Educación Inicial) at the age of four – an increase from previous years when children only had to

complete one year of compulsory pre-school education" (Monroy, 2018). The law allowed the provinces to choose between two different structural variations (Figure 40.1): seven years of primary (*educación primaria*) and five years of secondary education (*educación secundaria*) (7+5) or six years of primary education and six years of secondary education (6+6). About half of the provinces have adopted a 7+5 school system. The law ensures free and compulsory primary education for all. Education is compulsory for all the twelve years of schooling (Monroy, 2018). The law emphasises comprehensive education for all by making secondary education obligatory. The enactment of National Education Law No. 26206 (2006) made secondary education compulsory.

In Argentina, higher education institutions can be classified into two primary types. The first category comprises universities and university-level institutions (Educación Universitaria). The second category is post-secondary institutions exclusively focused on technical/vocational education, teacher training, and art schools (Educación No-Universitaria / Educación Terciaria) (Monroy, 2018).

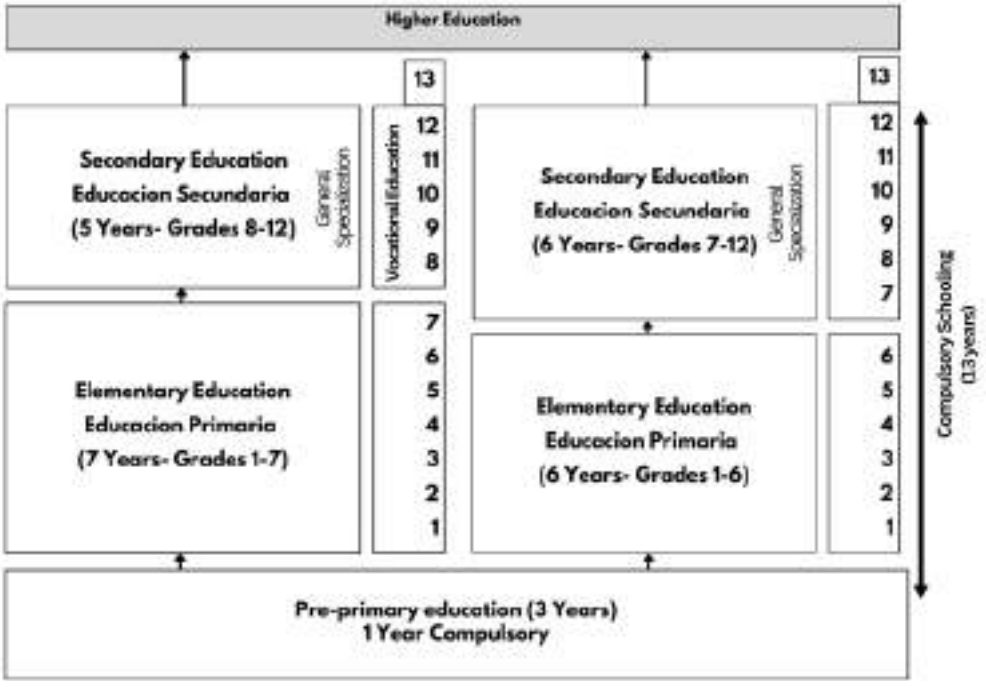

Figure 40.1 Dual Structure of the Education System in Argentina

Source: *Monroy, 2018 (Adapted by author)*

Curricular Framework

The curriculum overhaul commenced in the late twentieth century. Argentina's centralised curricular regulation model was abandoned and replaced by the decentralised model in the 1990s. This change resulted from the comprehensive reforms conducted in Argentina and most other Latin American countries (Gvirtz & Beech, 2004). The new curriculum was designed at three levels: (a) general level (the federal council of education sets the general objectives and guidelines); (b) provincial level including the city of Buenos Aires (the objectives and guidelines were more situated considering the reality of each province); and (c) school level (each school had to decide on contents and instructions). The competency-based curriculum was considered part of the neo-liberal discourse, which encouraged a social Darwinist Model (Frigerio, 1995).

The National Council of Education lays down the standards and guidelines of curriculum that are followed in the country. The subjects of study under the curriculum of different stages of education are as follows.

Pre-primary Education: This stage of education is optional for students. The children are introduced to basic language skills, mathematics, reading, and writing.

Elementary Education: The subjects of study at the elementary school level include Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies (History, Geography), Spanish, English, Art and Music, Belief systems, Technology and Physical education.

Secondary Education: As per LEN 2006, the secondary education is divided into two cycles-

a) Basic cycle (common to all orientations) and

b) Cycle-oriented (diversified according to the areas of knowledge, the social world and work)

The initial phase, known as the Ciclo Básico, typically spans until the ninth grade, but the subsequent phase, known as the Ciclo Orientado, concludes with the twelfth grade. All students are required to take the core curriculum in the Ciclo Básico. The curriculum comprises Spanish, English, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Sciences, Physical education, Technical education, and Arts. However, Ciclo Orientado is segmented into various academic pathways within each province. Each student in this cycle studies subjects specific to their specialisation and the shared courses (Monroy, 2018).

Argentina's higher education institutions include both private and public institutions. They award undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, including Master’s and PhD degrees. There are mainly two types of Master’s programmes: academic and professional. The institutes of higher education remain under national jurisdiction.

There are large numbers of specialised streams offered in the Argentine education system. However, current reform seeks to standardise the available streams into ten nationally approved streams.

Additional streams may be added to a province if the Federal Education Council approves them. For example, per the reformation policy, 150 available streams in 2012 have been consolidated to 13 streams in 2017 in the autonomous city of Buenos Aires. The ten nationally approved streams are Physical Education, Arts, Agriculture and Environment, Social Sciences and Humanities, Natural Sciences, Economics and Administration, Tourism, Information Technology, Language and Communication (Monroy, 2018).

Argentina follows a forward-thinking curriculum framework combining the content that should be learnt (focus on learning) with the methods through which learning should occur (focus on organising learning). The framework moves from the past conception and practice of more rigid methods and disciplinary boundaries to a more integrated approach to learning and teaching. The model of Argentina's futuristic-oriented curriculum framework is presented in Figure 40.2.

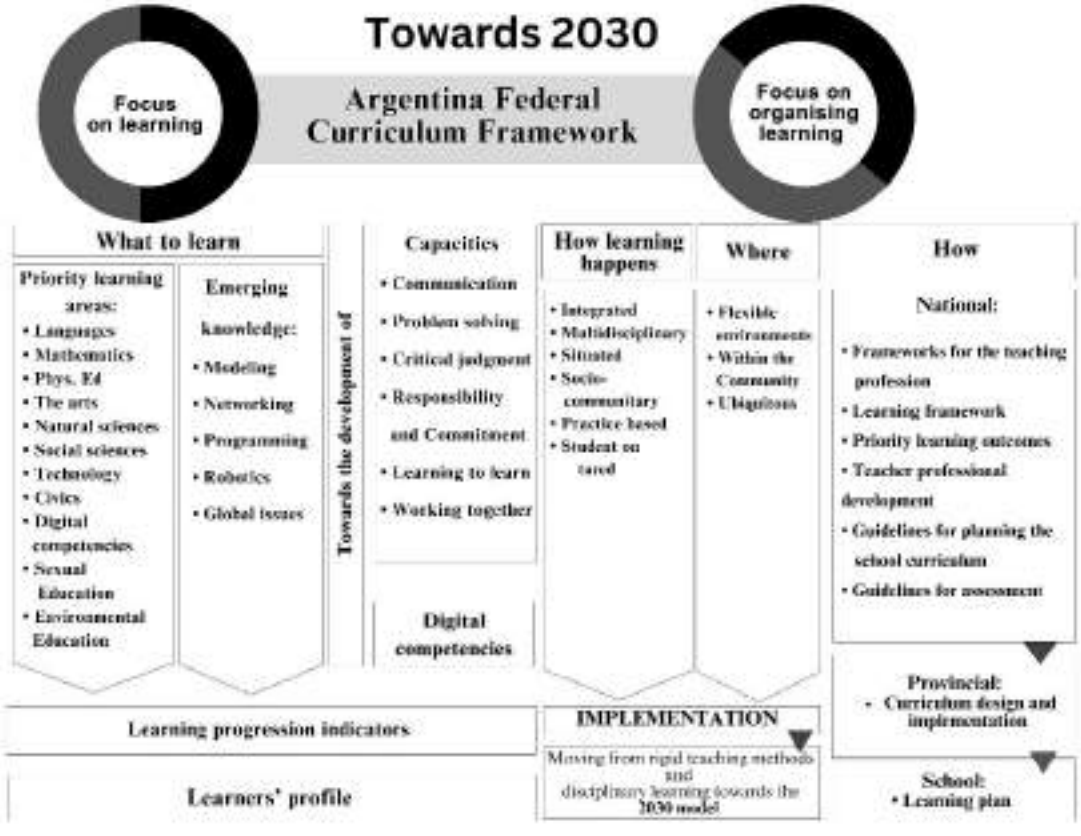

Figure 40.2 Curriculum Framework of Argentina

Source: *OECD, 2020*

Teaching Learning

Argentina faces two challenges at the secondary school level: Compulsory education (as mandated under National Education Law 26, 206 of 2006) and implementation of effective pedagogical policies for improving students' learning achievement in terms of quality. Here, inclusion and quality are two important dimensions of schooling that require improvement in the Argentine school education system.

Argentina's classroom practices use both traditional and modern teaching-learning techniques. Individual learning and group learning pathways are emphasised. New emerging ones, including ICT-integrated teaching-learning strategies, are slowly replacing some older ones.

The Argentine government has taken several steps for pedagogical change and reformation. Including ICT in the pedagogic delivery process is a significant step in this context. For example, PROMISE- Programa de Mejoramiento del Sistema Educativo (Programme for Educational System Enhancement) was a comprehensive programme developed for ICT integration in school practices. This programme was developed between December 2004 and May 2009. The programme presented "the following guidelines for secondary school:

- Technical and pedagogical training for teachers and school authorities.
- Create technical and pedagogical teams to provide training and support.
- Generation of offline materials and resources for the incorporation of ICTs.
- Infrastructure for connectivity in school.
- Provision of computers and other necessary equipment" (UNICEF, 2016, p. 15).

Plan de Inclusión Digital Educativa (Plan for Educational Digital Inclusion) was a national-level plan created in 2006. The plan had "the following premises:

- Strengthen access to technology.
- Collaborate with the social distribution of knowledge.
- Improve students' educational quality and opportunities regarding job placement" (UNICEF, 2016, p. 15).

Primaria Digital (Digital Primary Schools) programme was coined to incorporate ICTs in the pedagogic process at the primary level. It was implemented in three main areas (National Ministry of Education, 2015):

- "Equipment: Mobile Digital Classrooms (MDC), with 30 netbooks, one pedagogical server, one router, a photographic camera, flash drives and a projector, and a cart for storage, transport and load.

- Multimedia environment and materials: A hypertextual environment was created to reinforce the pedagogical goals of the primary level and uploaded to the notebooks and servers of MDCs.
- Training for teachers and technical teams: 10 national events with the attendance of more than 5,000 teachers, school authorities, facilitators and supervisors of the PIIE program all over the country. "*Capacitación TIC en escuelas primarias: Primaria Digital*" ("ICT training in primary schools: Digital Primary School") was addressed to the 3,900 schools covered by the PIIE program.

Between 2013 and 2014, around 7,020 MDCs were distributed among public primary schools, bilingual schools covered by the PIIE program, and institutions with extended school hours" (UNICEF, 2016, pp. 17-18).

Many other programmes have been launched in Argentine education from time to time to bring pedagogical transformation in educational institutions by integrating ICT into the learning process. It has been observed that even in technology-based rural secondary schools, the teachers propose certain activities more frequently for pedagogical transformations: reading texts individually (91%), answering questions in writing (78%), answering a question paper (76%), team working (76%), writing assignment (72%), solving problems (63%), researching information (57%), creating glossaries (50%), participating in forums and debate (35%), participating in learning games (30%), role-playing (26%), simulations (17%) and building wikis (4%) (UNICEF, 2016). The copybook in Latin American schools comprises a combination of handwritten textbooks, workbooks, study guides, and notebooks in the absence of other resources. It also includes a student work portfolio so parents and teachers can keep track of each student's development (Tenutto, 2000; Almeida Costa e Santos & Proença Rebello de Souza, 2005; Chartier, 2007).

"Ubiquitous computers and internet access facilitated changes in five strategies or classroom practices which make the teacher's job easier and more effective and could lead to substantial improvement in student learning: increased efficiency in classroom management, increased access to educational resources, creating more time on task, increased student ownership of the learning process, more frequent feedback to students through interactive resources, and more fluid communication between teachers, students and parents" (Light & Pierson, 2012, pp. v-vi). As a result, Argentina effectively navigated during the pandemic in remote teaching-learning by adapting technology, but the efforts taken to consolidate such skills and experience are adequate (OECD, 2021).

In the context of gifted education, the parents showed higher efficiency than teachers in identifying academic talent than practising teachers. Due to a lack of training, teachers intuitively applied moderate strategies. There is no specific legal instrument to provide appropriate programmes for gifted learners (Irueste, 2017). A shortage of competent teachers hinders the delivery of quality instruction in the schools to teach students with special needs (OECD, 2021).

Learning Assessment

The Federal Law of Education (1993) emphasised the quality of the evaluation system in education. In 1993, the Ministry of Education established Argentina's National System for the Evaluation of Quality (SINEC). "The main objective of SINEC is to produce information about the educational results of each province. The idea is to use this information as a key resource for designing management policies and improving the educational system.

In order to fulfil these goals, SINEC takes the following fundamental actions:

1. updating, on an annual basis, information on students' academic achievements. This task is carried out by the National Evaluation Actions (ONE);
2. updating (though not regularly) information on the factors affecting school performance;
3. processing and analysing the data obtained by each ONE;
4. communicating information to multiple audiences. The results gathered by the ONE are directed to: `schools, authorities and offices of national and territorial planning, supervisors and principals of educational institutions, their teachers and organisations, universities and research centres, students' families and the community at large" (Gvirtz & Larripa, 2010, p. 355)

In 1993, the government started administering standardised examinations to a sample of primary and secondary students in Spanish, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies to undertake annual national assessments of learning results (Nores, 2002). Though the contents and items of the test were prepared in consultation with provincial governments, the assessment system was treated as a tool for the federal government to reassume centralised control over the educational system (Benveniste, 2002).

"Argentina's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has assessed educational quality since 1993. Until 2001, its assessment agency was the National System for the Assessment of Educational Quality. It relied on input from the Secretariat for Educational Planning and Management and the Subsecretariat for the Assessment of Educational Quality. In 2000, the government established the Institute for Educational Quality, a semiautonomous agency of the Ministry of Education. The

institute was dissolved shortly after that and has been replaced by the National Directorate for Information and Assessment of Educational Quality (DiNIECE), a line agency of the Ministry of Education" (Ferrer, 2006, p. 56).

In addition to the national education assessment system, almost all provinces carry out independent assessments. The coverage and methodology of education assessment vary from province to province.

"The primary aims of Argentina's Educational Quality Assessment Plan 2003–2007, which the Federal Education Council recently approved, are to develop new quantitative and qualitative technologies, undertake further analysis and interpretation of national assessment results, offer support to strengthen provincial assessment systems and forge stronger links with the Ministry's other programs and directorates to develop more effective plans for improving educational quality. Assessment information needs to be better used to devise policies that enhance equity in access to knowledge; also, different kinds of reports need to be developed for different audiences. The country will continue participating in international tests" (Ferrer, 2006, p.59). Argentina takes part in many international tests, including PIRLS and PISA.

Norm-referenced assessment is a basic feature of the Argentine school evaluation system. However, criterion-referenced assessment is also used because of a change in assessment practices. In the Argentine educational system, advancement from one grade to the next is determined by the results of an end-of-year exam and ongoing teacher evaluation (Byker & Vainer, 2020). The grading system is common for performance assessment. The grading of performance formats is given in Tables 40.2 and 40.3 below.

Table 40.2 Grading in Secondary Schools

Grade	Description	Meaning
10	Sobresaliente	Outstanding
9	Distinguido	Excellent
8	Muy Bueno	Very good
7	Bueno	Good
6	Suficiente	Sufficient
1-5	Insuficiente	Fail

Source: *Nuffic, 2023*

Table 40.3 Grading in Higher Education Institutions

Grade	Description	Meaning
9-10	Sobresaliente	Outstanding
7-8	Distinguido	Excellent
5-6	Bueno	Good
4-4.9	Aprobado	Sufficient
2-3	Insuficiente	Insufficient (Fail)
0-1	Reprobado	Fail

Source: *Nuffic, 2023*

Upon completing a secondary or higher education study programme, the concerned candidate is issued a diploma and the corresponding transcript.

Health and Physical Education

Health and physical education have been important in the Argentine education system for a long time. Aisenstein (2007) mentioned that by the end of nineteenth century, games, sports, gymnastics, outdoor excursions and other physical activities had important place in Argentine education system. In 1901, the first temporary course relating to physical education and/or training, i.e., 'Physical Exercises of Argentina' was offered in Argentina. The course included the topics, subjects, contents and references which later helped establish the Argentinian physical education system. Compulsory military training was introduced in Argentina in 1902. Games, sports, gymnastics, exercises (locomotor exercises), and subjects of medical discourse are dealt with in Argentina's health and physical education system. Tennis and football are quite popular games.

As a subject of study, health and/or physical education is common in Argentine schools. For example, physical education is a core subject of study, like other subjects in the Argentine elementary school system. Physical education is a core subject in the curriculum of the first cycle of secondary education (Ciclo Básico), as well as other core subjects such as languages (Spanish, English), social sciences, mathematics, sciences, technical education, and arts. In the second cycle of secondary education (Ciclo Orientado), the students study physical education as a specialised subject in addition to the common courses of study in the cycle. 'Physical educator' as a specialised teacher is common in Argentina's education system (Scharagrodsky & Varea, 2016).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobbies allow people to do something they love and are passionate about. Engaging students with hobbies can be a mental escape, help students hone a skill, and provide socio-emotional immunity.

Recreation and hobbies differ from region to region, depending on geographical location, racial features, environmental characteristics, and many other factors. However, there are no specific policy directives on hobby development.

A survey conducted on the most popular hobbies and activities in Argentina in 2023 (Kunst, 2023) indicated that travelling (54%), reading (46%), outdoor activities (43%), doing sports and fitness (42%), pets (41%), tech/computers (41%), socialising (40%), cooking/baking (39%), video gaming (35%), cars/vehicles (24%), medication and wellness (24%), photography (24%), board games/card games (22%), gardening/plants (22%), writing (18%), DIY and art and craft (17%), making music (15%), other (3%), and do not know (1%) are found to be popular and that order. Horse riding and horse racing are very popular in Argentina. Yachting or power boating is the recreation of middle

and upper-middle-class families. Though soccer does not find a place in this survey, Argentina is the land of Maradona, Messi, De Stefano, and other greats, and three times FIFA World Cup champion and three times runners up. Many others took Argentina to the World Cup football championship.

Life skill education does not fit into the Argentine scheme of school education. Belski (2009) mentioned that despite progress in EFA goals, the country lacks advancement in promoting learning and life skills in the education system.

Skills Education

Skill-oriented tasks are studied inclusively along with many other subjects at different levels of school education. For example, elementary school learners learn art, music, and technology with skill components. In the first cycle (Ciclo Básico) of secondary education, the learners learn technical education and art as core subjects. These subjects, in one way or another, promote skill learning. In secondary education's second cycle (Ciclo Orientado), specialised streams like agriculture and environment, tourism, information technology, etc., are skill-oriented and learned differently.

Vocational education occupies a significant place in the Argentine education system. Many vocational subjects are offered, especially in the country's higher education institutions. Some important ones are farming, electro-mechanics, computer science, electronics, process industries, nursing, construction, etc. These subjects promote the vocational skills of the learners. The Argentine government strengthened ‘technical education and professional training’ by promoting their modernisation, linking them with production and work, and increasing investment in the infrastructure and equipment of schools and vocational training centres.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The Ministry of Education's curriculum policies are based on the conviction that education should provide the necessary opportunities to promote the ability to define a learner’s life project based on the values of freedom, peace, solidarity, equality, respect for diversity, justice, responsibility, and the common good (UNESCO, 2010). Rivas (2005) argued that four pillars support the mission of education in Argentina (Table 40.4).

Argentina's government established the education system for linguistic and cultural unification (Puiggros, 2003). The Bilingual Intercultural Programme was started in 2004 to strengthen the teaching-learning process from a bilingual perspective. The Nation School Coexistence Programme

was created in 2004 to strengthen schools' socialising role as institutions teaching democratic culture (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Table 40.4 Rivas' (2005) Four Pillars of Education in Argentina

Pillar Name	Goal	Purpose related to schooling
Citizenship	Adopt the civic values of Argentina's society	Preparing students with tools to participate in Argentina's democracy
Economic wellbeing	Contribute to the economy of Argentina	Preparing students to be productive contributors to the Argentine economy
Social life	Assimilate and integrate into Argentina's society	Process of social inclusion whereby students identify as Argentineans
Cultural development	Foster a strong cultural understanding of Argentina	Nurturing the cultural development of students in a linguistically and ethnically diverse country,

Source: *Byker & Vainer, 2020*

Peace and Happiness Education

The Argentine Nation Law of Education emphasises education as a social right, highlighting its contribution to creating a more just society and overcoming inequalities and various forms of discrimination (Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). Global education, on the other hand, aims to create participating as happy, informed, and engaged citizens to promote public happiness and global peace. Nearly every aspect of Argentina's government has been impacted by the country's dedication to a fairer society, including the educational system (Míguez & Hernández, 2018; Porto, 2016). Students aged 6 and 14 relate their happiness to doing different kinds of activities, such as school activities, as primary engagement and friendship, with a few other engagements like leisure activities, playing with pets, etc. (Greco & Ison, 2014).

The country reaffirmed its commitment to peace and happiness in the post-COVID situation. However, structurally, the curriculum is inadequate in emphasising peace and happiness; through language, literature, and social studies, teachers deliberate on the issues of conflict, violence, and happiness.

Summary and Conclusion

During its presidency of the G20 (2018), Argentina focused on education, skills, and lifelong learning as the main drivers for inclusive growth, emphasising innovation and frontier technologies. Argentina guarantees access to education for all, irrespective of sex, age, race or ethnicity: persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, children, especially those in vulnerable situations, including persons who were forced to leave their countries. The nation gained knowledge from the enormous benefits of exchanging procedures, successes, and, most importantly, setbacks. The improvement of competency-based learning outcomes and digital education transformation was

spearheaded by the National School of Government for Education Policies aimed at enhancing human capacity at the province level. The role of human capital in the country's economic prosperity has been ensured by educational growth policies, as revealed by major research policies (Osiobe, 2021).

The policy is conducive to promoting all-round development. To some extent, the components of health and physical education, skills education, and moral, social and cultural education have been covered in the school education curriculum. Life skills education and education for peace and happiness are unstructured and demand more attention.

The belief system is included in Argentina's elementary school curriculum to orient the children towards building moral values and character development, which are also essential for world peace and happiness. Four pillars, i.e., citizenship, economic well-being, social life, and cultural development, support the mission of education in Argentina (Rivas, 2005), and all these pillars promote moral, social and cultural values. Including art and music in the curriculum helps the children admire the great heights of art and culture of the country and educates them to honour diversity. Physical education is studied in the Argentine education system, starting from the basic school level to maintain a healthy life and live among people of the country.

The nation continues to struggle with inclusiveness and quality issues. The administration has embraced a rhetoric that places a premium on social rights and state action. However, it has also put policies into place that have perpetuated social inequality and the economic ‘productivist model’ (Svampa, 2008). Nonetheless, a universal stipend per kid that has been in place since 2010 seems to be a successful strategy for lowering poverty rates (Gorostiaga & Ferreira, 2012). A discourse on "diversity" was developed, emphasising the necessity of modifying teaching methods to better suit the needs of low-income social groups. According to Acedo et al. (2007), this adaptation frequently led to less material teaching, which caused learning outcomes that fell short of expectations. The political rationale was to keep low-income students enrolled and give them access to focused social policies while maintaining the educational system's division. Provincial officials understood that this approach would inevitably result in a poorer standard product (Acedo et al., 2007). Infrastructure and teacher training issues still exist, even with a notable increase in funding for education.

The educational systems of the nation's rural and metropolitan areas differ significantly. Due to their remote locations, the provinces have a population density of roughly 50% in the capital (OECD, 2019). Due to this demographic distribution, rural schools have little or no influence on national education laws and policies that would benefit local communities and school districts. Rural communities have poor academic attainment rates due to this conundrum. The country's obligatory

free basic education program has increased low-income families' access to education and raised the Human Development Index overall. However, it has also resulted in the richer citizens' ability to pay for basic education being subsidised (González-Rozada & Menedez, 2002).

The "perspectives and pedagogies are multifaceted, polysemic, locally situated, and tied to each specific territory" (Porto & Crookes, 2022, p.1). Therefore, need-based pedagogy would be effective instead of any centralised pedagogical model. However, there is a need for a mechanism and framework of dialogue for central and provincial agencies, which are unique and diversified considering diversified demography.

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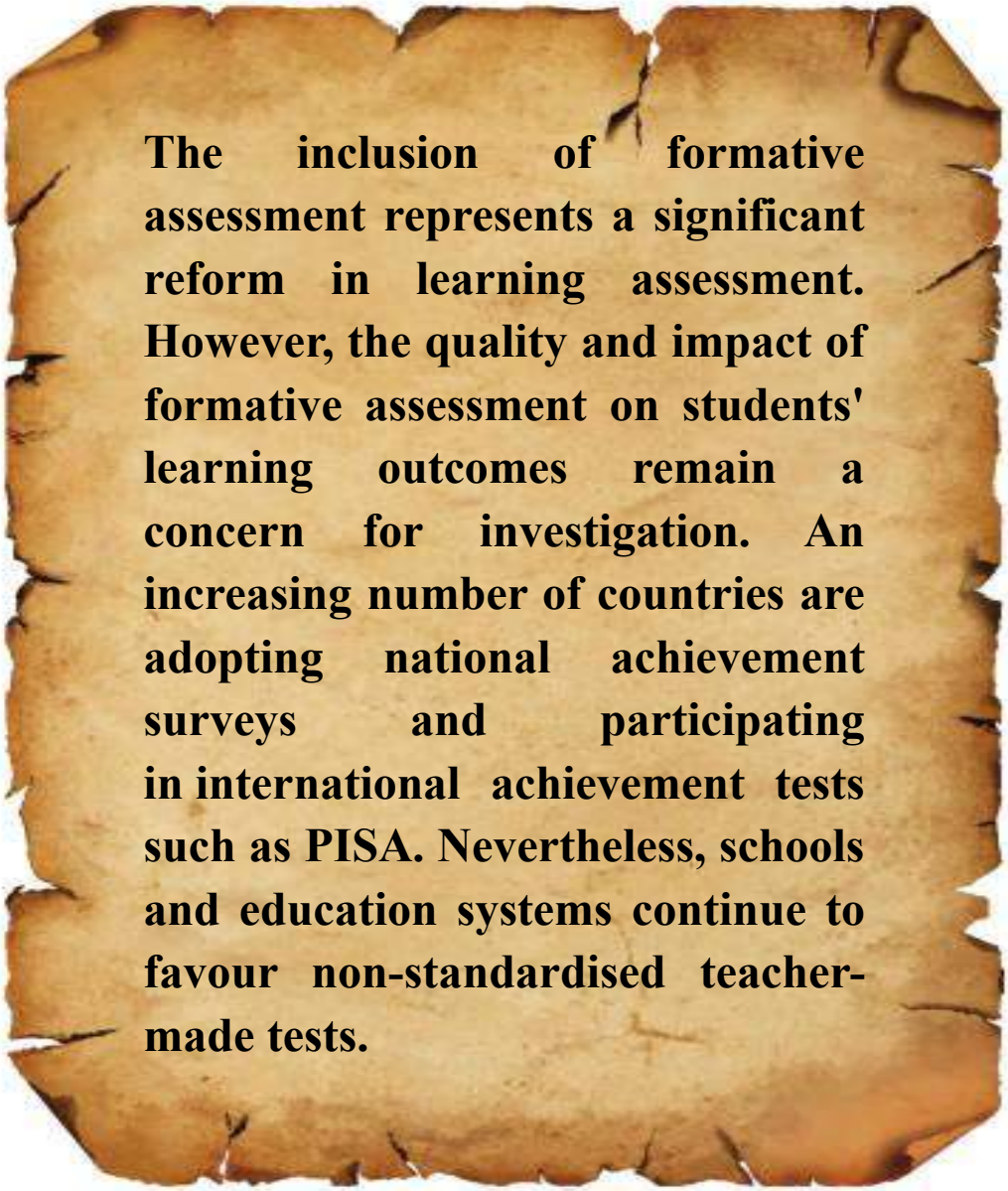

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41

Monitored Performance against Pandemic Odds: Brazil

Shnaoli Chakrabarty Acharya

Abstract

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil's economic growth had slowed, reversing years of progress and increasing inequality. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges, disproportionately affecting those least equipped to cope and deepening Brazil's status as one of the world's more unequal nations. Education plays a crucial role in Brazil's development and recovery. This chapter reviews the evolution of Brazil's education system, examining its structure at federal, state, and municipal levels. It highlights distinctive primary and higher education features, supported by recent data from the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP). Furthermore, it analyses recent initiatives, such as a monitoring system aimed at achieving the goals set out in the National Education Plan (2014-2024). A significant ongoing challenge is improving access to education while addressing systemic inequalities, ensuring all students receive a comprehensive education that includes human, cultural, and scientific knowledge.

Keywords: Mandatory Education, Educational levels, Preschool Education, Basic Education, National Education Plan, Curriculum, Educational Reforms,

Introduction

Brazil, a country of unparalleled geographical diversity, spans half of South America's landmass. Its 7,491 km Atlantic coastline and borders with all South American countries except Chile and Ecuador make it a destination, with a total area of 8,511,965 km^2 (National Geographic, n.d.). Brazil has a coastline of about 7,400 km along the Atlantic Ocean and shares over 15,700 km of inland borders with Uruguay to the south; Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia to the southwest; Peru to the west; Colombia to the northwest; and Venezuela and Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana to the north (Burns et al., 2024a). The country is divided into 27 federative units, which include 26 states

and one federal district (Martins-Melo et al., 2012). Brasilia is the capital, while Sao Paulo is the most populous city. Brazil's six main ecosystems, the Amazon rainforest, Pantanal wetlands, Cerrado savanna, Caatinga scrubland, Atlantic Forest, and Pampas plains, are a testament to its rich biodiversity and support agriculture and livestock production (Stephanes, 2009).

Brazil is the most populous Latin American country and the fifth most populous globally. As of 2024, Brazil had a total population of 217,637,297, with 50.93% women and 49.07% men and an annual 0.55% population growth rate (Statistics Times, 2024). In 2024, the average life expectancy is 76 years (Worldometers, 2024). According to the 2010 census, 64.60% of the population identified as Catholic, 22.20% as Protestant, 9.90% as non-religious, 2.2% as Spiritist, and 1.1% as other Christians. Numerous languages are spoken, with Portuguese being the primary language (Burns et al., 2024b).

Brazil, one of the BRIC nations, experienced rapid economic growth in the 21st century. It is an upper-middle-income country on the brink of becoming an industrialised economy. As of 2024, Brazil's GDP is USD 5.295 trillion (World Economics), with a GDP per capita of USD11,350 and an annual GDP growth rate of 2.2% (IMF, 2024). Brazil's unemployment rate (as a percentage of the total labour force) is 9.2% (The World Bank, 2023). Brazil ranked 38th on the World Happiness Index with a score of 6.29 points (Helliwell et al., 2022) and 87th on the 2021 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2022). Brazilians rated their general satisfaction with life as 6.1 out of 10, lower than the OECD average of 6.7 (OECD, n.d.).

Brazil has made significant progress in improving its literacy rate. As of 2021, the adult literacy rate is 94.3%, with male and female literacy rates at 94.1% and 94.5%, respectively (O'Neill, 2023). According to EPDC (2018), the country has a large student population, with 39,660,000 pupils enrolled in primary and secondary education. Among them, 41% are enrolled in primary education. The gross enrollment rate in primary education is 114%, lower secondary is 109%, and secondary is 95% for girls and boys combined. Moreover, Brazil boasts a primary net enrollment rate of 95% and a primary completion rate of 101%, which are impressive figures (EPDC, 2018). Brazil holds 61st rank in PISA out of 81 countries with 397 overall scores (World Population Review, 2024). According to Gomes et al. (2020) study, "there was an artificial improvement in the country's average performance as shown by the original test scores disclosed by OECD." There are almost 184,000 schools in Brazil, providing basic education to about 48 million students and employing over two million teachers (Weller & Horta Neto, 2020).

Educational Policy

Brazil has undergone various educational reforms in response to its political and social changes throughout its history. The country gained independence from Portugal in 1822. From then until 1889, there was no significant change in the education system except for providing free primary education to all residents under the 1824 Constitution. Despite being free, education was not accessible to the poorer strata of the population (Weller & Horta Neto, 2020). In the period between the Empire and the First Republic (1889-1930), the foundations for a national education policy were laid, paving the way for future developments. However, no significant reforms were implemented during this time, even though the constitution enacted in 1891 made few references to the topic of education (Weller & Horta Neto, 2020).

President Vargas' government, from 1930 to 1945, was a dictatorship with a strong sense of nationalism and projects for education that included censorship and persecution of intellectuals (Augusto, 2012). Brazil had major changes during this period, especially in the education sector. The Ministry of Education and Public Health was established to oversee and centralise the educational system. 1934, a new constitution was approved, making primary education mandatory and free. The new constitution recognises education as a right that must be provided by both the family and the government (Edubilla, n.d d.). The reforms significantly increased public education, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels.

The military administration that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 implemented the "Military Reform". The education system was divided into two cycles as part of the reform: primary education (8 years) and secondary education (3 years). In the first cycles, primary and secondary education, the military removed foundational subjects such as philosophy from the curriculum and carried out a massive process of expanding the number of schools: the rule here is that the popular class should be oriented towards work and not for thought (Kang, 2019). Additionally, the reform strengthened private-sector involvement in education and introduced standardised assessments and curricula. Under military government, much of the work undertaken was to change the philosophy of the education system, or at least its introjection. The quality of higher education was reduced due to 'Military reform' (Nery, 2018).

After the military rule was overthrown and democracy restored in 1985, it significantly changed all sectors of society. The reform attempted to increase the participation and autonomy of students, teachers, parents, and communities through democratising and decentralising education. The reform also brought a new Constitution in 1988 that acknowledged education as a governmental and social obligation. The reform also saw the adoption of various laws and programmes to enhance education quality and equity. In 1996, a law consolidated a new structure for school education with two levels: basic education and higher education. The first National Education Plan (PNE) was approved in

2001 from 2001 to 2010. A second plan was submitted in late 2010 and approved in 2014 for 2014 to 2024 (Weller & Horta Neto, 2020). The National Education Plan (2014–2024) outlines educational objectives and plans at all levels and modalities. Brazil has been following the same policy until now.

Structure of the Education System

The Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação) in Brazil oversees the planning and coordination of educational programs on behalf of the federal government. While local governments are tasked with implementing state and educational programs, they must comply with federal funding regulations. Education in Brazil is a collaborative effort involving municipal, state, and federal authorities, ensuring support across all public education levels. Primary education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 14 and is provided free of charge in public institutions. Although pre-primary and secondary education are not mandatory, they are free through public entities. Private educational institutions operate at all levels and must be evaluated and authorised by the Ministry of Education. The Brazilian education system is divided into Basic Education (Educação Básica) and Higher Education (Ensino Superior) (Brazileducation, n.d.).

Basic education (Educação Básica) establishes the essential foundation for student development and includes various educational activities in both formal and informal contexts to address individual learning needs. It consists of several educational levels:

- Pre-school
- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
- Vocational Secondary Education
- Adult Education (Brazileducation, n.d.).

In 1971, the Brazilian government enacted a law that initiated significant primary and secondary education system reforms, resulting in a 9+3 structure (Figure 41.1).

Pre-school education (Educação Infantil) is optional, and it includes

- Day Care Nurseries: For children aged under two years
- Kindergartens: For children aged 2-3 years
- Pre-Schools: For Children aged 4-5 years (Brazileducation, n.d.).

Primary Education (Ensino Fundamental)

Primary education in Brazil is compulsory for children between 6 and 14 and lasts for nine years. It is divided into two stages-

- Fundamental Education I (Ensino Fundamental – Anos Iniciais): For ages 6-10
- Fundamental Education II (Ensino Fundamental – Anos Finais): For ages 11-14 (Brazileducation, n.d.).

After completing primary education, students will be awarded the certificate 'Certificado de Ensino Fundamental'.

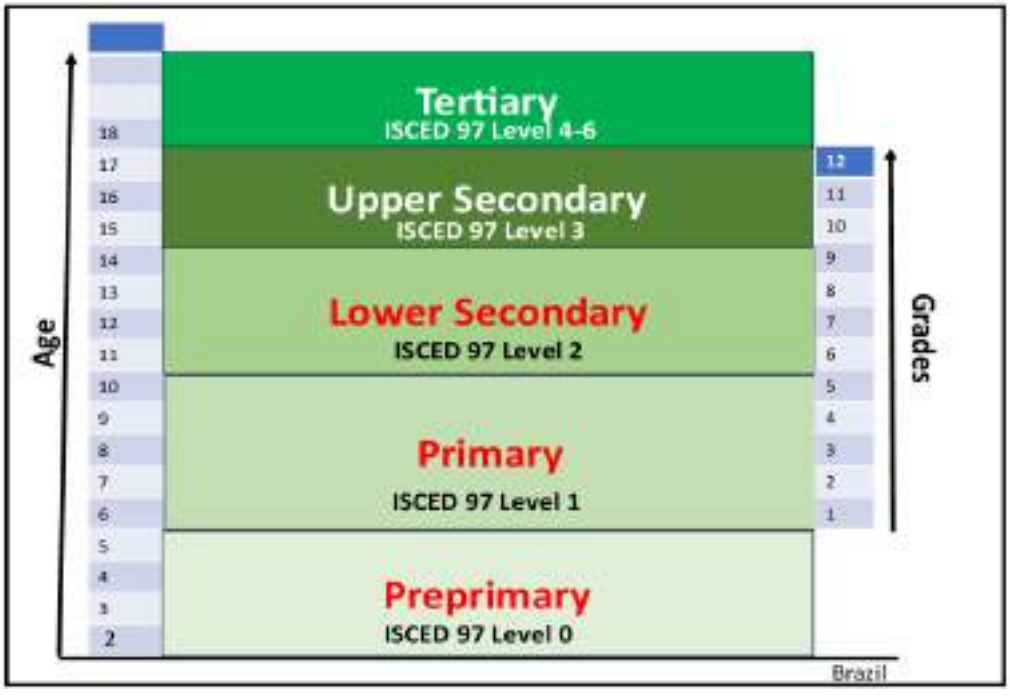

Figure 41.1 Structure of the Basic Education System of Brazil

Source: *Author*

Secondary Education (Ensino Medio)

The final stage of basic education is Secondary education, which spans three years. Enrollment in Ensino Medio, or Secondary education, is contingent upon completing fundamental education. It caters to students aged 15-17 and culminates in the award of the 'Certificado de Ensino Médio', or Secondary Education Certificate.

Vocational Secondary Education (Educação Profissional Técnica de Nível Médio)

After obtaining the 'Certificado de Ensino Fundamental,' students can enrol in a vocational secondary school. The core curriculum focuses on specialised vocational subjects, and upon completion, students will receive the 'Técnico de Nível Médio' certificate.

Adult Education

Additionally, Brazil provides an adult education diploma for non-traditional learners. Those who obtain the Adult Education Certificate, the 'Certificado de Conclusão de Ensino Médio Supletivo', are eligible to take university entrance exams.

Curricular Framework

In 2017, the Brazilian National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) was approved after a lengthy process. This curriculum is considered a significant milestone for Brazilian education and is aligned with the most advanced and successful educational systems worldwide. The Brazilian government has reiterated its commitment to promoting educational systems and implementing educational policies that foster the complete development of all students while respecting their individuality and preventing prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, the statement acknowledges teachers' and civic society's critical and propositional participation in developing the BNCC (Opertti et al., 2018).

The Introduction to the curriculum framework states that its goals are "to overcome the fragmentation of education policies, to strengthen the cooperation among the three government spheres (National, State, and Municipal), and to be the basis for a quality education" (MoE, 2017, p. 8, as cited in Opertti et al., 2018, p. 14). The BNCC is a crucial national standard that outlines the fundamental lessons that must be taught to every public and private educational institution student. This curricular framework is modern and pluralistic and plays a significant role in developing and modifying the curriculum. It applies to students of all ages. While the curricula are free to choose their paths to achieve the objectives outlined in the BNCC, it serves as a guiding document for educational institutions across Brazil.

The BNCC has a vision for comprehensive education that aims to develop individuals holistically, recognising the complexity and non-linearity of their growth. This approach moves away from reductionist perspectives that prioritise cognitive or emotional aspects and instead view students as active learners. The goal is to provide an education that embraces and develops individual differences while respecting unique backgrounds. The BNCC seeks to overcome fragmented subject knowledge, stimulate the practical application of what is learned, contextualise education, and empower students to participate actively in their learning and life goals. There is much criticism currently surrounding the BNCC. A main point, by way of example, became specifically the training

of future teachers, where the last administration of President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), unfortunately, envisaged the replacement of important subjects for teacher training, such as Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology, to start incorporating more technical disciplines. The military dictatorship used the same strategy (Nery, personal communication, January 13, 2024).

Basic Education

The BNCC document defines competence as "the mobilisation of knowledge (concepts and procedures), skills (practical, cognitive and socioemotional), attitudes and values to solve complex issues in everyday life, in fully exercising citizenship and in the labour market" (MoE, 2017, p. 8).

Basic Education, which includes Early Childhood and Primary Education, is structured around developing ten general competencies. These competencies are designed to promote the following skills and values:

1. To exercise intellectual curiosity and originality in sciences through research, reflection, critical analysis, imagination, and creativity.
2. To value and use knowledge about the physical, social, cultural and digital world to understand and explain reality and contribute to constructing a fair, democratic and inclusive society.
3. To value and experience diverse local and international artistic and cultural expressions and participate in artistic-cultural practices.
4. To exercise intellectual curiosity to investigate causes, elaborate and test hypotheses, formulate and solve problems and create solutions (including technological ones) based on the knowledge from different areas.
5. To use verbal, nonverbal and Brazilian Sign languages to express and share information, experiences, ideas, and feelings in diverse contexts and create mutual understandings.
6. To understand, use and create digital ICTs meaningfully and ethically to access and disseminate information, produce knowledge, and solve problems.
7. To value the diversity of knowledge, cultural experiences, and experience to make career choices that align with citizenship values and life projects.
8. To appreciate and care for physical and emotional health.
9. To exercise empathy, dialogue, and cooperation, promoting respect for diversity.
10. To act with autonomy, responsibility, and ethical principles. (for original statements, please see MEC, 2017, pp. 9-10, as cited by Opertti et al., 2018, pp. 16-17).

Pre-school Education (Educação Infantil)

Early Childhood Education is the first stage of Basic Education and serves as the foundation of the educational process. When children enter daycare or pre-school, it marks the first time they are separated from their family's emotional ties and introduced to a structured socialisation situation. Fostering children's learning and development requires the practice of dialogue and shared responsibilities between Early Childhood Education institutions and families (Moraes et al., 2021). The Early Childhood Education curriculum at BNCC is structured into five fields of experience, each defining learning and development objectives-

- The self, the other and the us
- Body, gestures and movements
- Strokes, sounds, colours and shapes
- Listening, speaking, thinking and imagination
- Spaces, times, quantities, relations and transformations (MoE, 2017, pp. 40-43).

Primary Education (Ensino Fundamental)

Nine years of Elementary education are divided into Initial and Final Years. Elementary education encourages creative, logical, and critical thinking by fostering the skills to ask questions, assess answers, engage in arguments, interact with various cultural productions, and utilise information and communication technologies. This educational approach aids students in expanding their understanding of themselves, the natural and social worlds, and the connections between humans and nature (MoE, 2018). The core curriculum includes Portuguese Language, Art, Physical Education, English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Science, Human Sciences: Geography, History and Religious Education. This core curriculum may be extended to meet individual students' local needs and abilities (Scholaro database, n.d.).

The cross-cutting issues are children's and youth rights, Traffic Education, food and nutrition education, the ageing process, respect for and value of elderly persons, human rights education, ethical racial relations education, and Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

Secondary Education (Ensino Médio)

The BNCC for Secondary Education is designed to build on what was proposed for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education. It focuses on developing skills and is guided by the principle of comprehensive education. As a result, the general competencies of Basic Education also guide the learning at this stage. The secondary education core curriculum comprises languages and their technologies: Portuguese, foreign languages (mostly English); mathematics and its technologies; applied human and social sciences; natural sciences and their technologies. Brazilian high schools typically offer a standardised curriculum that includes core academic subjects like math, science,

history, geography, and languages, along with elective courses such as music, art, and physical education. In addition, there is often a focus on cultural education, with classes on Brazilian history and culture, including music, dance, and folklore.

Teaching Learning

The BNCC offers a fresh approach to teaching philosophy that prioritises the development of competencies in pedagogical decisions. Teachers must focus on what students need to learn and develop practical skills. Furthermore, the document suggests using various teaching methods and strategies, including adjusting the pace and adding supplementary content to cater to the diverse needs of learners.

The document emphasises the importance of competencies and guidelines but allows for a diverse curriculum. It does not prescribe specific teaching methods or strategies. Instead, students are expected to learn through thematic units involving various knowledge objects to help them acquire specific skills and build competencies. However, the curriculum framework does not dictate which approaches or methodologies teachers should use or specify expected behaviours or actions.

Brazil is among the TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey, 2013) countries where teachers spend the most hours teaching per week.

- "Teachers in Brazil, on average, report spending 25 hours teaching per week, 6 hours more than the TALIS average.
- They also report spending from 10% to 22% more time than the TALIS average on most other activities, such as correcting student homework and student counselling.
- Compared with the TALIS average, teachers in Brazil report on average spending similar amounts of time per week on preparing lessons but less time on administrative tasks" (OECD, 2013, p. 1).

According to the TALIS 2018 report, Brazilian primary classes have an average of 23 students, while lower secondary classes have an average of 27 students. Despite an increased teaching load, teachers in Brazil are becoming more satisfied with their career choices. Under Brazilian law, teachers must allocate one-third of their working hours to non-teaching activities. Interestingly, the TALIS 2018 report revealed that lower secondary teachers in Brazil reported spending 75% of their time on teaching (OECD, 2021).

Teachers reported working hours per week, and Figure 41.2 shows the distribution of time spent in the classroom during an average lesson.

Several initiatives have been taken to integrate technology into the Brazilian education system, such as the Action Program for Informatics in Education, which enabled the EDUCOM Project, the National Program for Educational Informatics (Programa Nacional de Informática Educativa—PRONINFE), and the National Program for Informatics in Education (Programa Nacional de Informática na Educação —ProInfo) (Valente & Almeida, 2020).

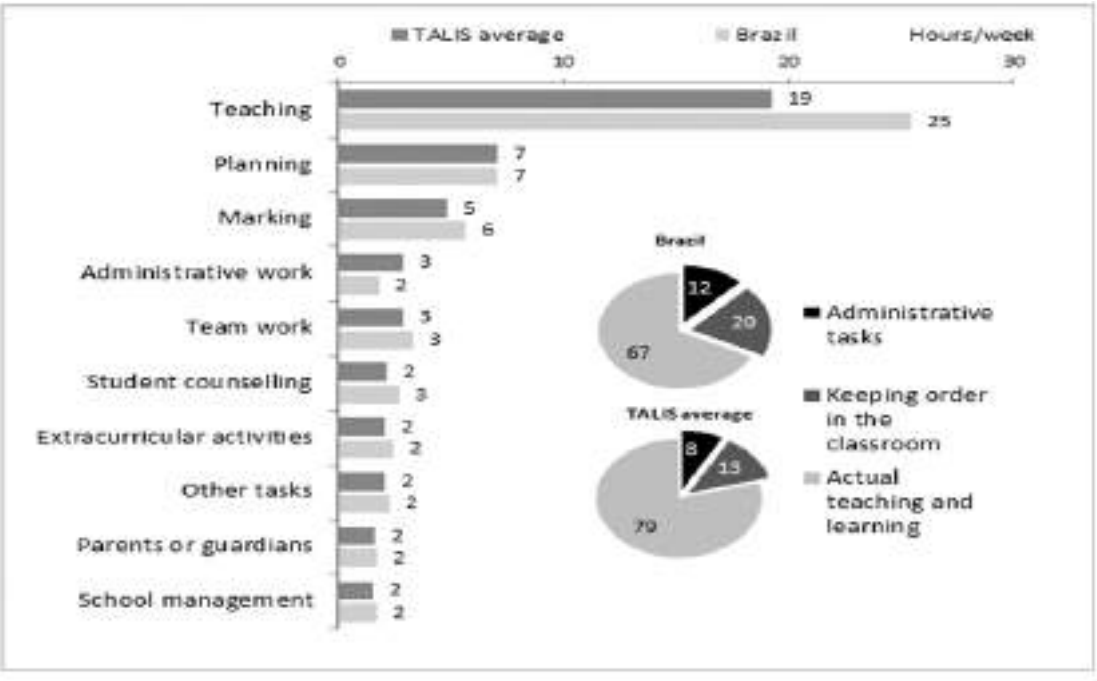

Figure 41.2 Average Working Hours Per Week in the Brazilian Classroom

Source: *OECD, 2013*

ProInfo (1997-2007) and ProInfo Integrado (2007-2017) established long-term digital education policies in Brazil. Recently, the country has implemented more strategic initiatives, with the National Education Plan (PNE) outlining goals for enhancing digital skills and utilising ICT for improved educational outcomes. The Brazilian Digital Transformation Strategy 2018-2021 (E-Digital) is an inter-ministerial effort consolidating government programs under a unified framework, with education and training as one of its five focus areas. Key objectives include developing a national education technology policy, expanding school broadband, improving teacher training, and enhancing digital skills through the NEM and BNCC. ProInfo Integrado also contributed to teacher training through Educational Technology Hubs and partnerships with higher education institutions (OECD, 2021).

Learning Assessment

The BNCC lacks specific details on assessment and evaluation methods, stating that these should only be developed considering local contexts and learning conditions. It emphasises a formative approach to assessment, where results are utilised to enhance the performance of schools, teachers, and students (Opertti et al., 2018).

In Brazil, both formative and summative assessments are commonly used in schools. According to a study conducted by Almeida et al. (2022), the practices adopted by teachers varied based on their preconceptions and the presence of Bimonthly Exams, which were central to their work. Although the teachers favoured the Bimonthly Exams, they had some reservations about them. For instance, they believed that the exams had some limitations in verifying students' learning and that students could get lucky and guess the right answers in multiple-choice questions. The teachers also emphasised the importance of other assessment instruments requiring students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. External school evaluations are more prevalent in Brazil than the global average and are often mandatory (OECD, 2021). Students are tested at the end of each year to determine whether they can progress to the next grade, and those who fail are held back.

In Brazil, there are two systems for evaluating education. "At the federal level, system evaluation consists of the National System for Evaluation of Elementary Education (SAEB) and the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES). They are overseen by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP) and the National Higher Education Assessment Commission (CONAES). INEP also conducts annual censuses of basic and higher education and produces other evidence to support policy processes. Many states and municipalities also administer their standardised assessments of student learning" (OECD, 2021, p. 17). Brazil has participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) since 2000.

Health and Physical Education

Physical Education classes are guaranteed by law in Brazil, but there are no specific guidelines regarding the number or duration of lessons. The frequency of these classes varies depending on the region and education system, but typically, they are offered twice a week in a traditional setting. (Constantino et al., 2018). Most schools, however, lack student participation in physical education programs (Alves et al., 2020).

The main goal is to help students develop a critical approach to decision-making processes affecting their daily lives. Physical Education syllabi include games, sports, gymnastics, martial arts, and rhythmic exercises. They also focus on themes such as Human Organism, Movement and Health, Body, Health and Aesthetics, Contemporariness, Media, and Leisure and Work (Betti et al., 2015).

Access to quality education is crucial for promoting health and well-being and reducing social inequalities. Individuals can lead productive and healthy lives by understanding how to prevent disease. UNESCO has found that higher levels of education for mothers can lead to improved child nutrition and immunisation rates and a decrease in preventable child deaths, maternal mortality, and HIV infection. Children and adolescents must have good health and nutrition to excel in their studies. This is especially important during pandemics, which can exacerbate existing inequalities. Education plays a vital role in addressing these challenges and promoting inclusion. UNESCO aims to assist the education sector in responding to HIV and promote access to quality healthcare, inclusion, and well-being, particularly for children and youth. UNESCO is dedicated to enhancing the connection between education and health. This demonstrates the increasing global acknowledgement of the necessity for a more all-encompassing approach to school health and coordinated efforts across various sectors (UNESCO, n.d.).

UNESCO has developed strong partnerships to carry out a range of actions in Brazil related to various important subjects, including:

- Health Education
- Health Promotion
- Encouraging healthy eating habits
- Increasing physical activity in schools
- Preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Reducing vulnerabilities among students, especially Indigenous populations and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Skills Education

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a vital role in developing workforce skills. VET programs facilitate school-to-work transition, increase productivity, and meet market demand for specific skilled labour. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is crucial for developing workforce skills, aiding the transition from school to work, enhancing productivity, and addressing market demands for specific skilled labour (OECD, 2022 & Souza et al., 2015). The current structure of VET is divided into three different groups.

FIC Courses

Initial and Continued Courses (FIC) are the formation courses aimed at many people. There are no age or educational degree requirements to enrol in these programs, which are designed to provide fundamental qualifications to individuals with low academic achievement or no practical training or experience. The system is responsible for 89.5% of FIC courses, while federal and state technical

networks are responsible for the remaining 10.15%. When tailored to the needs of a specific region's job market, FIC courses can increase opportunities for employment or re-employment. These courses are generally short-term and do not lead to secondary or tertiary education degrees; instead, they focus on practical knowledge for specific careers such as butcher, hairdresser, waitress, and receptionist.

Technical Courses

Technical Courses provide professional training to secondary school and secondary school graduates. Brazil has three secondary education courses: Integrated, Concomitant, and Sequential.

- Integrated courses are for students who want to attend both Vocational and General Education courses at the same institution.
- Concomitant courses are for students enrolled in a General Education course elsewhere but want to enrol in a technical course at another institution.
- Sequential courses are only offered to those who have completed secondary school.

In 2013, approximately 6.8 million students were enrolled in general education, while 1.4 million were in technical education. There has been a noticeable shift in the preference for technical education, with a 45% increase in technical secondary students between 2007 and 2013, while the number of general secondary students decreased by 9.4% during the same period. More than half of the registrations in technical secondary education are for sequential courses, indicating that many students pursue technical education after completing their general secondary education (Souza et al., 2015).

These courses still represent a small portion of total secondary education in Brazil. In 2013, the number of students enrolled in general education exclusively was around 6.8 million, whereas the number of students enrolled in Technical education was 1.4 million. However, compared to general education courses, the path is clear: technical courses are gaining momentum, attracting more students who would otherwise follow a general track. While general secondary students dropped by 9.4% from 2007 to 2013, technical secondary students increased by 45% between 2007 and 2013.

Technological Courses

The technological courses are at the same level as tertiary-level courses and are only open to secondary school graduates. Those who complete the program receive a diploma equivalent to a university degree. To be eligible for a technological course, students must have finished high school, but it is not necessary to have attended a Technical High School. These courses last three years, one year shorter than the average tertiary degree (Souza et al., 2015).

After obtaining the 'Certificado de Ensino Fundamental,' students can opt to enrol in a vocational secondary school, where the core curriculum focuses on specialised vocational subjects. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is crucial for developing workforce skills, aiding the transition from school to work, enhancing productivity, and addressing market demands for specific skilled labour (OECD, 2022 & Souza et al., 2015).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

The primary aim of education in Brazil has expanded beyond academic skills to focus on developing twenty-first-century skills essential for preparing the next generations for the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution. These skills are critical for students to succeed in the modern world and include creativity, innovation, problem-solving, collaboration, adaptability, and resilience. Including life skills education and developing essential competencies in the Brazilian curriculum is a significant step towards equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed personally and professionally. By emphasising the importance of these skills, Brazil is taking a proactive approach to education and ensuring that its students are well-prepared for the future. (Costin & Pontual, 2020).

In Brazil, hobby development is not important in the core curriculum. However, it is worth mentioning that hobby development can be facilitated through art education. The Brazilian National Curricular Common Base (BNCC) suggests six key dimensions for art education: Creation, Criticism, Aesthesia, Expression, Fruition, and Reflection. These six dimensions of art education can be used to promote hobby development in various areas, such as visual arts, dance, music, and theatre. Educators can encourage students to explore and develop their hobbies and interests in various art forms by incorporating these dimensions into their teaching methods (Costin & Pontual, 2020).

In Brazil, life skills education is integral to the curricular framework, though it is not taught as a separate subject. The third version of the National Curricular Common Base (BNCC) introduced a significant feature: establishing ten essential skills that students should develop throughout their basic education, starting early childhood. The core competencies include lifelong learning, critical thinking, aesthetic sensibilities, communication skills, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, self-care, empathy, citizenship, and ethics (Costin & Pontual, 2020).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

"The legislation in 1996 confirmed that moral education should not be obligatory in the curriculum. However, also, in the same year, the Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN) [Brazilian Curricular

Parameters] (Brazil. Ministério da Educaç o, 1996a) determined that themes such as ethics, cultural plurality, environment, health and sexual orientation should be introduced as cross-curricular projects and activities in the curriculum for students from 7 to 14 years old. Since then, Brazilian schools have been encouraged to develop moral education activities, though not as specific subjects" (Araújo & Arantes, 2009, p.492). In line with this policy, in 2003, the MEC chose ethics, human rights, democratic coexistence, and social inclusion as core issues to launch its Ethics and Citizenship Program: Constructing Values in School and Society (Brazil. MEC, 2003).

According to the MEC (2003), the Ethics and Citizenship Program commits to social change and assumes that:

> *Every child also has the right to learn the meaning of citizenship in its broadest sense. It is, therefore, the duty of schools to teach and act based on the principles of democracy, ethics, social responsibility, collective interest and national identity. (p. 9, Our Translation)*

Thus, although moral education cannot be considered a major educational priority in Brazil, the steps mentioned above would foster the development of moral values in schools and their surrounding communities. They are essential tools with which the significant inequalities of Brazilian society construct social justice, democracy and solidarity. (Araújo et.al., 2009).

BNCC's 9th and 10th competencies focus on Moral, Social, and Cultural Education.

1. To practice empathy, engage in dialogue, resolve conflicts, and cooperate by earning respect and promoting it for others and human rights while appreciating the diversity of individuals and social groups, including their knowledge, identities, cultures, and potential, and avoiding all forms of prejudice.

2. To act individually and collectively with autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, resilience, and determination, making decisions grounded in ethical, democratic, inclusive, sustainable, and solidarity principles (MoE, 2017, p. 10).

Two perspectives on promoting intercultural approaches exist in the Brazilian education system. The first one, focused on curricular reforms, aims to acknowledge the contribution of traditionally oppressed groups, such as Afro-Brazilians and Amerindians. The second perspective centres on equal access policies through social and ethnic quotas to gain admission to certain educational institutions. Although the first perspective has not met with much explicit resistance, it has not yet been implemented in the daily life of schools or has taken the form of only a few commemorative days. On the other hand, the second perspective, which challenges the social privilege of being white, has been the subject of numerous unresolved controversies (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022).

Peace and Happiness Education

Violence is a significant concern in Brazilian society, particularly in larger urban areas where rates of violence and insecurity have surged over the past few decades. Homicides are a significant cause of death among men and the leading cause for youth aged 15 to 39, with Black men and women being the most frequent victims of violence. Additionally, domestic violence was already recognised as a major human rights violation even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inclusive teaching practices should foster a culture of non-violence, engaging the entire school staff, parents, and the local community in a collaborative effort. UNESCO actively promotes values, attitudes, and behaviours that encourage dialogue, non-violence, and cultural understanding, aligning with the principles outlined in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO Brasilia, n. d.).

Teachers and other education professionals in Brazil feel ill-equipped to handle school violence. Many do not believe their basic teacher training has provided them with the necessary tools to deal with such situations. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritise the development of tools that can promote positive changes and increase teachers' confidence in handling these issues. To achieve this, new ideas and practices must be evaluated, and projects, courses, and written materials must be developed specifically for professionals working in public schools. These resources should focus on preventing violence in schools and providing training to professionals to mediate conflicts.

The Foundation for the Development of Education, through the DPE - Office of Special Projects, initiated Project Prevention in São Paulo public schools to promote healthy citizenship and reduce vulnerabilities related to teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and STD/AIDS. Additionally, Project Justice and Education aims to foster citizenship by equipping students in state primary and secondary schools with skills to resolve conflicts preventively (Adam & Scotuzzi, 2012).

Summary and Conclusion

The Brazilian educational system is diverse and decentralised. It is primarily public at all levels except higher education. Public schools offer free education to 89% of students in the basic education segment (kindergarten, primary, and secondary).

The Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LDB), enacted in 1996, redefined the roles and responsibilities of Brazil's federal, state, and municipal education systems. It granted more autonomy to individual schools, increased curricular flexibility, and aimed to enhance teachers' qualifications. The law mandated that by 2007, all primary education teachers should possess university-level training. These reforms created a favourable environment for implementing

substantial changes in Brazil's educational system, promoting decentralisation, flexibility, and improved teacher preparation.

The states and municipalities are responsible for compulsory primary and secondary education (grades 1 through 8). Day nurseries (0-3 years) and preschool education (4-6 years) are also included in this responsibility. The central government guides redistribution and subsidiarity and offers assistance and subsidies to reduce social and regional inequalities. The Union directly maintains higher education institutions and middle-level techno-professional schools (Souza et al., 2015).

In December 2018, the federal government approved the complete Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) for all levels of Basic Education in Brazil, starting from early childhood through upper secondary education. This 600-page document outlines the learning objectives, skills, and competencies that every student in Brazil must achieve. The most significant aspect of the BNCC is the ten general competencies, which serve as the guiding principles for all grades and subject-specific objectives, skills, and competencies. These competencies align closely with the twenty-first-century abilities essential for all students to develop to lead successful and productive lives as global citizens. The ultimate goal of BNCC is to align the education policies of Brazil's highly decentralised education system with these higher standards, including local curricula at the state and city levels, classroom materials, student evaluations, and initial and ongoing teacher training. The aim is to improve student outcomes across the board (Costin & Pontual, 2020).

Some reflections on the uniqueness of the curriculum of Brazil are as follows:

In Brazil, Physical Education classes are required by law, but there are no set rules regarding the number or duration of these classes. The frequency of these classes varies depending on the region and education system. However, in a traditional setting, they are offered twice weekly (Constantino et al., 2018). Intercultural approaches are incorporated into the Brazilian curriculum, which aims to recognise the contributions of historically marginalised groups, such as Afro-Brazilians and Amerindians. Additionally, it focuses on implementing equal access policies, including social and ethnic quotas, to ensure admission to certain educational institutions. While moral education is not considered a top educational priority in Brazil and is not included in the school curriculum, various programs and policies are being implemented to promote the development of moral values in schools and their surrounding communities. Therefore, it is well-assumed that all-around development is not happening through the present curriculum in Brazil. Instead, it is burdened with cognitive education, and no balance between cognitive, affective, social, and psychomotor education can be noted.

Brazil has a well-established and technically sound student evaluation system that has dramatically influenced the curricula of cities and states. The BNCC provides more comprehensive and detailed guidance to cities and states for developing their curricula and policies, including classroom materials, professional development, and local student evaluation systems.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Brazil currently has low coverage but is rising. Compared to general education, VET is gaining traction and attracting more students who might otherwise pursue traditional paths. Although VET enrolment still constitutes a small fraction of total secondary education, it has significantly increased in recent years. Federal spending on vocational education grew from 0.04% of GDP in 2007 to approximately 0.2% in 2013, increasing VET enrolment from 9% to 17% of total secondary education students (Souza et al., 2015).

In Brazil, while there is some openness to discussing cultural diversity internationally, advancing beyond existing legislative, judicial, and historical frameworks is essential. A critical system must be established to address and challenge interethnic relationships within schools and society (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022).

Teachers are essential in addressing the Brazilian education system's reluctance towards intercultural approaches. Teachers need a comprehensive understanding of intercultural education to effect meaningful change in cultural diversity discussions, going beyond superficial knowledge of customs, festivals, and cuisine. They should view intercultural education through the lens of critical and democratic citizenship rather than merely appreciating the cultural richness of various ethnic groups.

The BNCC's third version outlines ten essential skills for basic education, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and ethics. These 21st-century skills are vital for the next generation to tackle the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution and foster attributes of peaceful, happy global citizenship.

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Educational Development in the Era of Conflicts: Colombia

Syedah Fawzia Nadeem

Abstract

Colombia, a former Spanish colony, gained independence in 1819 and is one of the emerging economies likely to enter the club of Developed Countries. Colombia has made significant progress in universalising basic education. This chapter examines the educational development and reforms in the country, especially during this millennium. The General Education Act 1994 and General Education Law 2010 are the landmarks. Besides, there are several policy initiatives. One year of preschool education is compulsory, followed by 11 years of primary to upper secondary education, later with vocational education and training opted by 26% of students. Notably, expenditure per student equals 29% of per capita GDP, higher than the OECD average. Colombia is a pioneer in technology-integrated education and is home to several educational startups, including BabySpark, Tarefa, Arukay, and others. Nonetheless, several challenges include school dropout, grade repetition, etc. Colombia's access and equity education achievement must complement quality to compete globally.

Keywords: General Education Law 2010, Educational Policy, School Education System Curriculum, Jornada Única, La Mejor Educada, online classes, peace curriculum

Introduction

Colombia is in the northwestern part of South America. In its north is the Caribbean Sea, and to the west is the Pacific Ocean, with Panama on the northwest; Venezuela and Brazil are on the east, and Peru and Ecuador are on the south. Colombia has a total area of 1,141,749 km² (440,831 mi²) and a total coastline of 3,208 km (1,993.4 mi) (World Data, n.d.). The population is mainly concentrated

in the mountainous regions, where Bogotá, the national capital, is situated on a plateau in the northern Andes Mountains.

Colombia is one of the world's most biologically diverse countries, with a topography ranging from mountains to rainforests to vast plains and long coastlines. Colombia's economy depends heavily on its natural resources and exports, particularly energy (Latin America's fourth largest oil producer) and mining products (fourth largest coal exporter). The energy and mining sectors are vital for the Colombian economy.

As per 2021 estimates, the total population is 51.26 million, increasing at a growth rate of 0.8%. The percentage of the female population is 50.90% compared to 49.10% male population (Statistics Times, 2024). Declining birth rates notwithstanding, a quarter of the country's population are young people between 15 and 24 (Carroll et al., 2020). The Life Expectancy is 79 – 76 for males and 83 for females. The population density in Colombia is 42.25 inhabitants per square kilometre. The country has a diverse population of European, Native Amerindian and African ancestry. The demographic composition is Mestizo and White 87.6%, Afro-Colombian (includes Mulatto, Raizal, and Palenquero) 6.8%, Indigenous 4.3%, unspecified 1.4% (2018 est.) (WFB, 2024).

Colombia's GDP is USD343.62 billion (World Bank, 2022); GDP Per Capita was USD 6,239.274 in Dec 2021. The HDI of Colombia was 0.752 points in 2021, leaving it in 88th place in the table of 191 countries (Country Economy, 2024). Colombia ranks 72nd in the Happiness Index; it ranks 140th out of 163 countries in the Peace Index. Wealth disparities, meanwhile, make Colombia one of the most unequal societies in the world. At the same time, considerable progress has been made in levelling inequality over the past decade. However, rising participation in education is of utmost importance for social mobility in a young society plagued by extreme wealth disparities (Carroll et al., 2020).

Colombia is a decentralised but unitary state divided into 32 departments, further subdivided into 1,123 municipalities. Bogotá, Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Cartagena and Santa Marta have special administrative status, and categorised as special districts (*distritos especiales*) (UCLG & OECD, 2016).

Basic and secondary education students were around 9.7 million in 2022 (Statista, 2024). Though participation rates have been rising, access to primary education is not universal in Colombia. Ninety-three per cent of Colombian children aged 3 to 5 attend school. Most (83%) Colombian children aged 11 to 12 start secondary school (Carroll et al., 2020). The GER at the primary level was 106 (2021), and the completion rate at the lower secondary level was 85.6% (2021); school net enrolment at the secondary level was 77 (2018) (CEIC, 2020).

Colombia was a Spanish colony. The Catholic missionaries set up modern schools in the 16th century for the children of the Spanish rulers. The education system was highly elitist. After independence, the education sector came under the charge of the Government; however, the Church continued to influence education well into the twentieth century. As a result, even though education had become free and compulsory in 1870, mass participation in education was lacking as the Church opposed public education (Carroll et al., 2020). The number of students enrolled in school education was about 9.7 million in 2022 – about 4.07 million in primary and 4.7 million in lower or upper secondary school (Statista, 2024).

Educational Policy

The General Education Act 1994 gave schools autonomy over curricula and skills assessment. Law 715 of 2001 further specified the responsibilities of actors by education level and regionalised the allocation of funds. In the decentralisation process, all departments had to undergo a certification process regardless of their capacity or location at the district or municipality level. The 1994 Act has, however, not been without controversies. Litigations have claimed the unconstitutionality of Article 183 of the General Education Law (Colombia Constitutional Court, 2010).

In 2001, the Colombian government decentralised its education system. Thereby, the Colombian Constitution from 1991 and the General Education Act of 1994 laid the ground for the shift in responsibilities from the central to the departmental and municipal level- including the responsibilities from pre-primary to secondary education, education personnel, funding of the system and supervision of private education providers (OECD, 2016a). “The criteria for certification include adequate physical and financial resources, a basic information system, and the capacity to manage the teaching profession. Institutions that passed the certification process received the status of Certified Territorial Entities (Entidades Territoriales Certificadas, ETCs). Decentralisation contributed to increasing enrolment to enable municipalities to expand the provision of education through a system of subsidised private education and to expand access to and quality of education” (KOF, 2017, pp.9-10).

Colombia prioritised education to improve the country's economic and social prosperity and pledged more resources to this sector than any other policy area. In 1989, basic education comprising five years of primary education, two years of lower secondary education and two years of upper secondary education (academic or technical streams) was made compulsory.

The Pre-Primary Education/ Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy was made to provide all children under six with a holistic education based on a rights-based approach. The Policy addresses the children’s care, upbringing, health, nutrition, education, recreation, and socialisation.

The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare, the national body responsible for children under five, implements it (OECD, 2016a).

One year of preschool was made compulsory. As per the 1991 Constitution, basic education services were transferred to departments and municipalities to improve the effectiveness of education delivery.

In recent years, the government has been promoting enrolment "at private institutions with a program called Ser Pilo Paga—an initiative that, intentionally or not, funnelled more students into private institutions by subsidising top-performing students with loans and scholarships" (Carroll et al., 2020).

In addition to strengthening the development of education, many policy initiatives were taken:

- *Jornada Única* (Single Day): This programme aims to increase a student's stay in school with the dual objective of reducing students' vulnerability to social risk factors and simultaneously underlining the positive relationship between overall class time and educational achievement.
- *La Mejor Educada* (The Best Educated): This initiative involves and works with parents, youth, teachers, the government, and civil society to create equal opportunities, economic growth, social transformation, and peace.
- *Sistema General de Participaciones, SGP* (The General Participation System): The SGP is a mechanism whereby the Central Government funds are transferred to finance educational institutions focusing on the rural population to get educational funding.
- *Generation E* (Generation E)- This scheme has three main objectives: first, to cover 100 per cent of enrolment costs for students; second, to strengthen all 61 participating institutions with annual funding of COP223m ($76,300); and third, to be available to students with less privileged economic backgrounds who may not otherwise enrol. *EdTech* Technology plays a very important role in Colombia's education system. Technology initiatives like BabySpark, Tarefa, etc. (ProFuturo, 2022).

The Structure of School Education

The school education system consists of 11 grades**.** Elementary school lasts five years, followed by lower secondary education (4 years) and upper secondary education (2 years). Before elementary

education, there is early childhood education and preschool education for children under five (Figure 42.1).

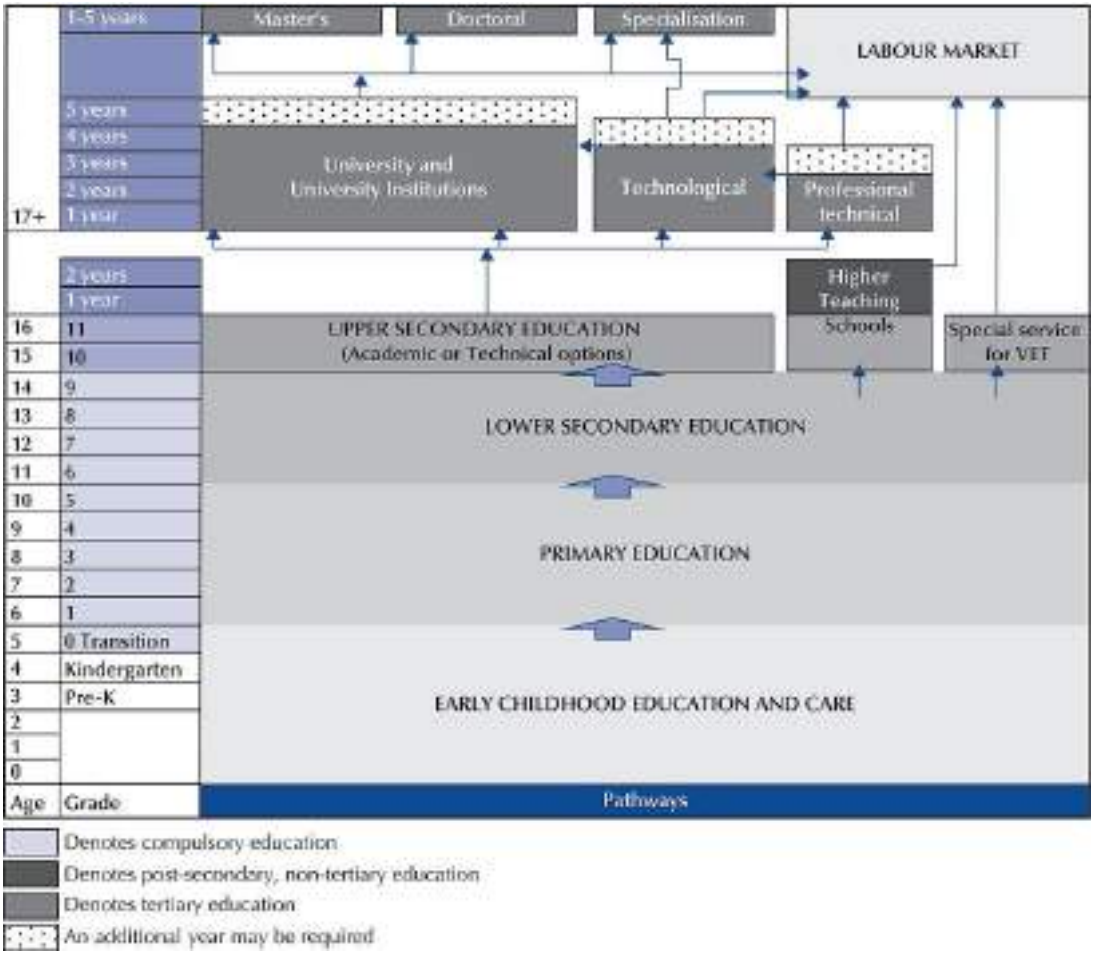

Figure 42.1 Structure of the Colombian School Education System

Source: *OECD, 2016a*

Curricular Framework

In 1994, the General Education Law (Colombia) gave every school the right to define its curriculum. The government adopted a decentralisation policy and regarded it as crucial to ensuring that schools meet the needs of the country's diverse population groups and communities.

The Ministry of National Education (MNE) oversees the five-year primary education curriculum. It contains classical general education subjects like mathematics, science, history, etc. Upon

completion, students receive the Certificate. Lower secondary school lasts for four years, from grades six to nine. The typical starting age is 11. Besides general education subjects, students are also taught vocational subjects. Upon completion, they receive the Certificate of Basic Baccalaureate Studies (Certificado de Estudios de Bachillerato Básico or Certificado de Conclusión del Ciclo Básico) (ibid.). Subjects include -Spanish, Foreign Language, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts, Ethics, Religion, Arts, Technology and Computing (Carroll et al., 2020).

Upper secondary education lasts two years and serves students aged 15 and 16 (Grades 10 and 11). Students can choose between general (Bachillerato académico) and vocational education and training (VET).

While general education programs impart science, arts, and humanities education, the VET program aims to prepare students for the labour market. In 2014, 74 per cent of upper-secondary education students attended general education, and 26 per cent attended VET programs (OECD, 2016b).

The vocational education and training programmes in Colombia are called technical education programmes. “Often, general education and VET programs are offered by different institutions. Most subjects the students have to attend are the same in general education, and the VET program, i.e., more than half of the curriculum contents, are the same for both programs. Therefore, both education pathways are very similar. While some upper secondary schools organise vocational courses independently, others cooperate with external providers to provide vocational courses (OECD, 2016c).

Often, general education and VET programs are offered by different institutions. Most of the subjects the students have to attend are the same in both programs, i.e., more than half of the curriculum contents are the same for both programs. Therefore, both education pathways are very similar (OECD, 2016c).

All schools must be registered with the MNE to offer education programs and award degrees. To become registered, the MNE checks if the applicant fulfils basic quality requirements. Once registered, the MNE only provides the guidelines for curriculum development (Carroll et al., 2020) for several subjects, such as social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics and physics. Though the schools do not need to follow these guidelines, it benefits in the case of external evaluations, which determine the financial resources schools receive.

“In addition, since 2003, the MEN has formulated competence standards. However, the flood of competence standards leads to fragmentation rather than standardisation of the learning agendas. Apart from the guidelines provided by the MEN, the upper secondary and tertiary level institutions

are free to develop their own curricula and graduation requirements. However, no national qualification system would help standardise the skills taught at the SENA or the tertiary institutions providing vocational training; both have a high autonomy in designing their vocational courses" (OCDE, 2016a cited in KOF, 2017, p. 29). On completion, both programs make students eligible for admission to tertiary education. At the end of grade 11, all high school graduates who want to continue their education must take the national ICFES exam.

"Across all levels, from primary to tertiary education, Colombia spends USD 4,481 annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power), compared to the OECD average of USD 12,647. Expenditure per student equals 29% of per capita GDP, above the OECD average of 27%" (OECD, 2023, p.3). Colombia spends an estimated 6.6% of its GDP on education - 36% on primary education, 29% on lower secondary education, 12% on upper secondary education and 23% on tertiary education (OECD, 2023). Government funding for the upper secondary level is generally very low since it is not part of compulsory education.

"Schools offering both VET and general education sometimes lack a clear distinction between VET curricula and general education. Even though practical training is foreseen, there are no national standards regarding the hours spent in practical training across professions. In addition, there are problems regarding VET's quality assurance. Different studies state considerable differences in quality between different VET courses" (CRECE, 2012, cited in KOF, 2017, p.31). In addition, the OECD (2016) pointed out the lack of a national qualifications framework and the high level of fragmentation of curricula in the Colombian education system. One major concern is that students in vocational education would not acquire the skills needed to continue to the tertiary level (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2013).

Furthermore, schools offering both VET and general education sometimes lack a clear distinction between VET curricula and general education. Even though practical training is foreseen, there are no national standards regarding the hours spent in practical training across professions. In addition, there are problems regarding VET's quality assurance. Different studies state considerable differences in quality between different VET courses (CRECE, 2012).

The OECD (2022) report analyses the major strengths and challenges of its education system, from early childhood education and care to tertiary education. As per the report, 55 per cent of children attending rural schools drop out before concluding their studies. Rural education accounts for 80 per cent of the total, with many isolated schools and some of them lacking electricity. A high rate of rural illiteracy is observed (average urban rate was 5.4 per cent and rural per cent). On the other hand, the quality of education is a great concern.

Though the upper-secondary GER spiked from 58 per cent in 2000 to almost 80 per cent in 2018, the NER has been primarily stagnant at 42.5 per cent, indicating many grade repeaters and overage students. (Carroll et al., 2020)

The academic year is from February to November, which is 38 weeks, divided into two semesters. Schools work five days a week (Monday through Friday), 198 days a year (Evaluation World, n.d.). "The MEN has set forth minimum teaching hours per year for the school system: 800 hours at the preschool level, 1,000 in elementary education, and 1,200 in secondary education". According to the Ministry, "there may be some variations at the local level". Private institutions can use different semester systems if they teach the required minimum hours per year" (Carroll et al., 2020, Academic Calendar).

Schools can choose how many hours they want to devote to each mandatory subject, which accounts for eighty per cent of the overall learning time. When the second phase of basic education starts, the number of contact hours increases from 25 to 30 per week.

"A growing number of international schools in Colombia cater to the children of wealthier households. In many cases, students at these schools earn both a Colombian *bachillerato* diploma and a foreign qualification, such as a U.S. high school diploma" (Carroll et al., 2020).

Colombia is home to more than 87 ethnic groups and 64 indigenous languages. However, Spanish is the official and most commonly used medium of instruction. Only in certain areas are indigenous and other languages also used for instruction. In 2010, a new law on native languages was introduced to enhance ethno-education and promote bilingualism. There has been a significant emphasis on promoting English proficiency in recent years to improve Colombia's competitiveness in the global economy (Carroll et al., 2020. The MNE has initiated several English language learning initiatives, such as the English Syllabus (1982), the COFE project (1991), the Gender Law of Education (1994) and the Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages (1999) (Usma, 2009). "However, EFL policy has become more vigorous in the last decade" (Perez et al., 2019, p.86).

Nonetheless, Colombia has made English mandatory in high schools and universities. Despite progress, English proficiency levels have fallen short of targets, with Colombia trailing behind other South American countries in rankings. Most university programs in Colombia are also taught in Spanish (Carroll et al., 2020).

Teaching and Learning

Colombia developed the teaching method known as Escuela Nueva or "New School" at the elementary level, transforming predominant teacher-talk classrooms into student-centric learning in rural communities (Kline, 2000).

As technology becomes vital in education, Colombia attempts to establish itself as a regional and international player in the start-up culture. BabySpark, a Colombian start-up, was voted the most promising Latin American start-up of 2018 at the Global EdTech Startup Awards semi-finals (Oxford Business Group, 2024). With the help of this mobile application, parents can monitor and analyse their child's development at every step. The programs fit with the Ministry of Education's sector plan despite focusing more on early development than sustained educational attainment.

With 24/7 live or pre-recorded online classes, Tarefa, another Colombian ed-tech start-up platform, links students with qualified professors for various learning needs. Arukay is a start-up that specialises in computer programming for professionals, students, and various educational facilities; in terms of supply, AMIS offers feedback to schools on their instructional models based on data analytics. The availability of several programs is only significant if the current high demand is maintained. The government and academia focus on structural, financial, and operational issues with the educational system, with tech as a supporting element.

Colombia has developed a national innovative ecosystem consisting of initiatives like Colombia Aprende, a set of educational platforms available to teachers and students that offers a variety of resources, guidelines, MOOC-type courses, and a collaborative working platform for teachers (Profuturo, 2022).

Aprendizajes para el futuro is a series of initiatives for training citizens for the 21st century. Using these initiatives, children can learn to program (coding for kids), become familiar with science, maths, engineering, and technology content (the STEM+ approach, the 4th Industrial Revolution, and Eduklabs), and thus learn to function in safe digital environments.

Learning Assessment

Colombian schools have significant autonomy in student assessment despite the mandatory curricular guidelines. This implies that each institution may have different conditions for promotions and methods for assessment. Notably, there are no external exams in basic education; internal school assessments determine promotion from one grade to the next. When students reach the end of grades 5 and 9, they take a standardised test by *Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educacion Superior* (ICFES) in certain core subjects (Carroll et al., 2020). Test results at these grades are solely used for school assessments and do not impact students' promotions; however, at the upper secondary level, the test results determine a student's future academic prospects. The Saber (knowledge), previously known as the ICFES exam, is crucial for high school graduates, as Colombian Higher Education Institutions require it for admission and scholarships. The exam covers five subjects: critical reading, English, mathematics, natural sciences, social science and

civics. The exam consists of multiple-choice and a few essay questions and is conducted twice a year. It is administered in two sessions of four and a half hours.

Health and Physical Education

Colombia has a tradition of public health education. In 1948, the Ministry of Health partnered with the Rockefeller Foundation to establish the National School of Hygiene to train medical doctors in Public Health. The School of Hygiene became part of the National University of Colombia (*Universidad Nacional de Colombia*) in 1951 while still receiving funding from the Ministry of Health. In 1958, it was renamed the National School of Public Health and continued to be academically affiliated with the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (De la Hoz-Restrepo, 2022, *p.588)*.

Physical education is a subject of study in the Colombian school curriculum. Colombia promotes physical activities as a public health agenda to prevent non-communicable diseases. Colombia's 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth indicates that "35.5% of Colombian children between 6 and 17 years were physically active for at least 60 daily minutes during four or more days per week. The prevalence ranges from 26% among adolescents aged 13 to 17 years to 42% among school-age children (6-12 years)" (González, et al., 2018, p. s336). The report also mentioned that 81.4 per cent of Colombian adolescent students attend (self-reported) Physical Education class one day per week, and about 20 per cent of children did not attend during the week despite it being mandatory. The survey concluded that only 30 per cent of Colombian children achieve the recommended Physical Activity level, and 60 per cent of students spend excessive time on screens, resulting in many children displaying low activity levels (González, et al., 2018).

Students find Physical Education classes in school highly competitive; they prefer physical activities in the community where it is 'more fun' (Olaya-Contreras et al., 2016)

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobby development is not an articulated agenda. However, there are opportunities to cultivate hobbies through activity-based subjects like arts, sports and physical education.

There may not be a separate course on life skills education. Colombia focuses on life skills education through courses to equip students with practical skills beyond academic learning routines. The Escuela Nueva model mentioned earlier focuses beyond cognitive skills and academic achievement. It nurtures social-emotional skills, civic engagement, and practical life skills such as responsibility, leadership, and peaceful social interaction (Pells, 2023).

Skills Education

Colombia has a sound vocational skills training provision. Colombia had non-formal education under a law renamed Education for Work and Human Development by an Act (1064) in 2006. The training is linked to labour market needs. This is the National System of Education for Work, nicknamed SNFT. SNFT intends to standardise work competencies, evaluate and certify work competencies, and establish an education system based on work competencies. The standardising body, abbreviated as SENA, has set up a robust infrastructure of laboratories and workshops. It provides free comprehensive training to upgrade the skills and competencies of its labour force.

It has a flexible system. For example, those who complete at least one year get an occupational skills certificate. After four semesters, a candidate is awarded a Bachelor's equivalent qualification in Art and Business (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). Vocational schools offer training in industrial subjects (mechanics, industrial chemistry, welding, farming) and commercial topics (accounting, office clerk) (Scholaro database, 2024). According to a report by UNEVOC-UNESCO (2018), 0.37 million students were enrolled in secondary vocational courses (2018). Earlier studies found that about one-quarter of 1.1 million students enrolled in upper secondary education were offered vocational education and training. Vocational and non-formal skills training is unique in Colombia as it is designed to bridge the skill gap for national development.

Peace and Happiness Education

"Colombia, as described by Rincón (2020), is a nation built from violence that does not know what to do with peace" (Morales, 2021, para 14). Colombia's 200 years is a history of violent conflicts (Karl, 2017), costing thousands (millions!) of lives, displaced and missing, and innumerable victims of sexual violence (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016), making a society of inequality, poverty, and injustice (Velásquez *et al.*, 2017). Only in 2016 did the Colombian government and the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) reach a peace agreement ending one of the longest histories of violent conflict in the world (Morales, 2021). After the peace agreement, the government recognised the role of educational institutions and the need to 'reframe narratives around historical memory and reconciliation in the country' (Chaux & Velásquez, 2016; Torres Gámez, 2016).

The government introduced Cátedra de la Paz "by the law 1732 of 2014 and the decree 1038 of 2015' as a compulsory peace and citizenship course to cultivate peace culture in all educational institutions. More specifically, the course aims to form citizens that interact peacefully, participate actively and through peaceful and democratic means, contribute to the strengthening of democracy and law, value and respect differences, and know the history of the country and the conflict and that respect animals and the environment (Chaux & Velásquez, 2016). In alignment with Colombian

educational policy, the implementation of the Cátedra de la Paz was left to the educational institutions to decide the course organisation and implementation.

The government made content related to peace education mandatory with the establishment of the Law of Peace Chair (Morales, 2021). The peace curriculum was developed in collaboration with Colombian universities (Jaramillo & Mesa, 2009, p.8). Morales (2021) further mentioned the three components of the peace education initiative: a general theoretical and pedagogical framework on Peace education, a detailed description of citizenship learning goals for each grade (K-11), and examples of didactic activities as illustrations of how these goals can be achieved through four classroom lessons.

The Peace Curriculum was complemented with a citizenship program - knowledge about law, democracy, the constitution, the legal system, etc. The Citizenship program comprised a definition of standards for citizenship; a national evaluation system connected to international testing, acknowledgement and dissemination of good practices; the support to the regional and local Secretariats in their guidance on school improvement plans; the support to teachers through training programs and public pedagogical documents (De Poorter & Aguilar-Forero, 2020).

In 2021, the Fundación Escuelas de Paz organised Colombia's first Latin American independent Talking Across Generations on Education (iTAGe). This initiative delved into the role of education in promoting youth participation and a culture of peace within the country. It also aimed to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security. This resolution recognises the positive contributions of young people in peacebuilding and emphasises the importance of investing in education to foster peace, eliminate inequality, promote tolerance, and empower youth.

Moral, Social, and Cultural Education

Present-day Colombia has a rich cultural history dating far beyond what is known as the pre-Columbian era, linked to Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World in 1492. Actual Spanish occupancy and colonisation date back to 1538-39 (McGreevey et al., 2023). McGreevey et al. (2023) mentioned in their analysis "the great indigenous civilisations of the Americas, such as those of Mesoamerica (the Aztec and Maya) and the Andes.

Pre-Columbian civilisations independently established, during this long era, characteristics and hallmarks which included permanent or urban settlements, agriculture, civic and monumental architecture, and complex societal hierarchies" (McGreevey et al., 2023, p.1). However, the civilisational literature and documents were destroyed by European invaders who "viewed such text as heretical, and few survived Christian pyres. Only a few hidden documents remain today, leaving

modern historians only glimpses of ancient culture and knowledge" (New World Encyclopaedia, n.d.).

As a traditional country, Colombia emphasises morality, manners and catholic values. The church is still a dominant institution that influences education. Thus, Christian values permeate families, education and culture. Colombian curriculum and other conventional subjects include human values and ethics education as a compulsory subject in schools. Besides, the curriculum also includes democracy, citizenship and religious education (Colombiaeducation, 2024).

After independence, Colombia promoted moral and value education in the school curriculum. The education instils values such as tolerance, respect, and social responsibility. It also helped to create informed, responsible, and ethically conscious individuals who contribute positively to society. Therefore, it is built into the early years of the schooling curriculum to promote morality and value education. The curriculum emphasises developing practical skills and competencies alongside theoretical knowledge. This approach aligns with fostering ethical behaviour and values.

Colombia's new initiative, in collaboration with UNESCO, is integrating global citizenship education. However, as this initiative is relatively recent, its effect is still unknown. Nonetheless, since this initiative is truly transformative, it needs careful nurturing and strengthening (De Poorter & Aguilar-Forero, 2020).

Summary and Conclusion

The backdrop suggests Colombia is one of the world's most biologically diverse nations. Its economy depends heavily on its natural resources, exports, energy, and mining sectors, which are very important for the Colombian economy.

Therefore, to improve the economic and social prosperity of the country, the Ministry of Education of Colombia made education a main priority. Many policy initiatives were taken to fulfil these goals. The Ministry of Education in Colombia has carried out several policy reforms that have positively impacted participation in education. The most important reform that significantly impacted education is the decentralisation of the education system. The Colombian Constitution of 1991 and the General Education Act of 1994 laid the ground for the shift in responsibilities from the central to the departmental and municipal levels. The process enabled municipalities to expand access to and quality of education.

One of the country's main advantages is its relatively young society, with about a quarter of its population aged 15 to 24. A young population, rich biodiversity, various natural resources and an open and potentially fast-developing economy are assets that need to be exploited to their full potential. As per the demand, the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) made several changes

periodically. The Ministry gave every school the right to define its curriculum. The Ministry publishes curricular guidelines for several subjects, like social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics and physics; adopted decentralisation policy and regarded as crucial to ensuring that schools meet the needs of the country's diverse population groups and communities; for the all-round development of the children, stress is laid not only academic aspects but also health and physical education, life skills, peace, harmony so that in children can become informed citizens of the country.

Despite all the efforts, access and quality remain the main challenges of education in the country. More than 50 per cent of children attending rural schools drop out before completing their studies. Rural schools represent 80% of the enrolment, with many isolated schools with poor infrastructure facilities. The quality of education is also a great concern. Recently, the government has started promoting private institutions to boost enrollment and overcome the problem.

Government funding for upper secondary education is generally very low because it is not part of compulsory education. Schools offering vocational and general education find it difficult to differentiate between curricula. There are no national standards regarding the hours spent in practical training across different professions, and there are also issues with the quality assurance of vocational education and training (KOF, p.31).

Various determinants influence Colombia's journey towards peace, harmony, and higher levels of development, but the need to build a strong education system surpasses all. Colombia has come a long way in universalising school education. However, government funding needs to be consistent and sustained to increase participation rates and reduce gaps in urban and rural schools as well as public and private schools.

Although Colombia has a long heritage history during the pre-Columbian, much of the cultural literature and documents were destroyed by European invaders (New World Encyclopaedia, n.d.). Colombia remained a Spanish colony for nearly three centuries (1538/39 to 1819). Post-colonial period Colombia is a period of prolonged bloody conflict costing millions of lives, displacement, and missing persons. Rincon (2020) described Colombia as a nation built from violence. The peace agreement between the government and FARC was signed only in 2016 – about eight years ago when education became prominent in social reconstruction.

Though there have been some policy initiatives since the early 2000s, following the constitution in 1991, because of conflicts that did not spare the education sector (many young students were recruited to the warring groups), education is relatively new to Colombia. Despite some achievements in enrollment, the high dropout rate neutralises enrollment gain. The well-intentioned curricular reforms, attempts to modernise teaching-learning with ICT integration, the introduction

of skill education, peace and global citizenship education, it is too early to claim all-round development of students; and a matured educational system that can balance cognitive, affective, social and emotional learning and physical and health education. It is still learning what to do with peace.

Nonetheless, the efforts of the Republic and the support of the UN agencies and OECD are commendable.

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Outstanding Performance against Odds: Cuba

Namita Sahoo

Abstract

Cuba, a country led by revolutionary Fidel Castro, has provided meaningful education to the young generation. This chapter examines Cuba's education system, characterised by its commitment to free and compulsory education for all. The country has achieved 100% adult literacy and high primary and secondary education enrollment. The education budget in Cuba is relatively high compared to other developing countries, and the pupil-teacher ratio is low. The education system is centralised and closely tied to political ideology, focusing on solidarity, social justice, and ethical behaviour. The curriculum includes language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and Cuban revolutionary history. Vocational education and distance education options are also available. The assessment is continuous, and students advance to the next grade based on satisfactory grades. The education system in Cuba faces challenges from economic reforms and market opening, but the country remains committed to maintaining its educational achievements.

Keywords: Cuba, Cuban Revolution, Playful Activities, Structure, Student-centric Curriculum, 3Rs, Vocational Education.

Introduction

Cuba is one of the largest islands in the archipelago and a very eminent state in the Caribbean region. It gained formal independence on May 20, 1902, but it had a long and exciting history after that. Cuba's proximity to the United States has powerfully influenced its history (Cuban Research Institute, 2023). The official name of Cuba is 'The Republic of Cuba', and the government is a "Socialist republic". Being a one-party state with the communist party of Cuba is described as the "superior driving force of the society and the state" (Constitute Project, 2018, p. 5).

Cuba, the largest island in the West Indies, covers an area of over 114,447 sq. km. It makes up more than one-half of the Caribbean land mass and boasts a coastline of about 3735 km. The coastline is highly varied, with hundreds of bays, inlets, and narrow, shallow rivers. Situated just south of the Trophic of Cancer in the Atlantic Ocean (Northeast), Cuba borders the Caribbean Sea to the south and the Gulf of Mexico and the Straits of Florida to the north. Cuba's location and natural richness have made it the scene of a power struggle for foreign countries. The country's natural resources include cobalt, nickel, iron ore, chromium, copper, salt, timber, silica, petroleum, and arable land (Country Reports, n.d.). Cuba is divided into 14 provinces.: Ciego de Avila; Cienfuegos; Ciudad de La Habana; Granma; Guantánamo; Holguin; Isla de la Juventud; La Habana; Las Tunas; Matanzas; Pinar del Rio; Sancti Spiritus; Santiago de Cuba; Villa Clara; and 1 special municipality: Camaguey (SELA, n.d.).

According to the Worldometer (2024), Cuba's current population is 11,177,892, with an annual growth rate of -0.18%. The population density in Cuba is 105 per km^2, and life expectancy at birth is 78.3 years (80.7 years for females and 76 years for males). In 2021, the sex ratio in Cuba was 98.57 males per 100 females (Statistics Times, 2021). The ethnic groups in Cuba consist of 64.1% White, 26.6% Mulatto or Mestizo, and 9.3% Black. The official language in Cuba is Spanish. As for religion, Christian makes up 58.9%, Folk religion 17.6%, Buddhist <1%, Hindu <1%, Jewish <1%, Muslim <1%, others <1%, and none 23.2% (WFB, 2024).

Cuba is classified as an upper-middle-income group country. Cuba's economic policy is based on socialist principles and is either state-controlled or a mixed command economy governed by state-run enterprise. It has a centrally planned economy that provides increasing opportunities for private business and foreign investment. As of 2020, Cuba's GDP was USD 107.35 Billion, and the GDP per capita was USD 7449.68 as of 2022, with a GDP growth rate of 2% (Trading Economics, 2024). The Cuban economy is predominantly driven by tourism, fishing, and animal husbandry. Cuba's unemployment rate for 2022 was 1.25% (Macrotrends, 2024). World Happiness Report 2023 did not mention Cuba within 137 countries (Helliwell et al., 2023). On the UN's Human Development Index, with an HDI value of 0.764, Cuba ranked 85 out of 193 countries in 2022 (UNDP, 2023).

Cuba is one of the last communist regimes in the world, showing its effect in the field of education. Education in Cuba is accepted as a basic right of individuals and is run by the state free of charge. The adult literacy rate of Cuba in 2021 was 100% (The World Bank, 2023). In rural and central areas, there is equality of educational opportunity and development of children with little difference. As of 2022, the gross enrolment ratio of primary and secondary was 99.87 and 103.67 per cent, respectively. The primary and upper secondary's net enrolment rates were 95.61 and 82.63 per cent, respectively (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). It should be highlighted that the

pupil-teacher ratio at the primary level in Cuba in 2018 was only 9, according to (The World Bank, 2020).

Cuba has a total of 10,593 schools, consisting of 6,878 primary schools, 1,176 junior high or intermediate schools, 7-9, 414 high schools, 486 technical schools, 365 specialised special education schools, 375 adult education schools, and 23 teacher training schools (Cruz, 2017). The teacher-to-student ratio in Cuba is among the best in the world, with one teacher for every 47 citizens. Although schooling is only compulsory for grade 9, the average education level of all Cubans is 10th/11th grade. Cuba's education budget is approximately 13% of its GDP, which is high compared to other developing countries (Cruz, 2017).

Educational Policy

According to Falcón et al. (2022), Cuba exemplifies effective educational public policy development, notably by adhering to the Education for All (EFA) initiative, which aims to provide quality basic education to all demographics. One hundred sixty-four governments made this commitment during the World Education Forum, articulated in the Dakar Framework for Action, which set six educational goals to be met by 2015 (Peppler-Barry & Fiske, 2000). While only one-third of participating countries achieved these goals, Cuba was the sole country in Latin America and the Caribbean to meet all EFA objectives (UNESCO et al., 2022 & Hickling-Hudson, 2006).

In 1959, the Cuban Revolution represented a significant move towards national independence, transforming the society and economy and shaping the education system of Cuba. The Cuban government launched educational and literacy campaigns emphasising equal access to primary and secondary schooling and substantially increased education spending. Despite economic hardship after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Cuba has maintained universal, tuition-free primary and secondary education (Brandhorst & Beltrán Marín, 2021).

The Cuban government integrated tourism training centres into a unified system 1994, enabling annual worker enrollment in specialised courses. Educational TV channels like University for All and initiatives like the Universalization of Higher Education were developed, positively impacting the education system. These policies demonstrate Cuba's commitment to developing human capital across economic sectors through accessible, targeted educational programs.

The Directorate for the Training of Pedagogical Personnel, part of the Ministry of Education, implements various programs to enhance educators' initial and ongoing training. This training is organised at two levels, including upper-secondary pedagogical schools established in 2011, to prepare teachers for kindergarten, primary, and special education (Falcón et al., 2022). The government fully subsidises the education system, making it mandatory through third grade and

free at all levels, including university (NDF Authors, 2015). Education in Cuba is centralised and closely tied to the political system. The government invested significantly in developing a world-class education system, with educational spending in the 1980s and 1990s ranking among the highest global GDP (Cruz, 2017).

School attendance is compulsory from ages 6 to 15 or 16, covering basic secondary education. Students wear uniforms with colours denoting grade level, regardless of age or sex. Recognising the importance of quality teachers, Cuba selects trainees based on intellect, character, social commitment, and affinity for children. This selective process ensures a strong teaching force dedicated to student development (Kronenberg, 2015).

To boost women's participation in Cuban society, the 1959 Cuban Revolution initiated significant changes, particularly benefiting women. The government launched the Cuban Literacy Campaign to enhance literacy rates and foster communication between rural and urban areas. As a result of these efforts, women began to engage actively in government roles after years of exclusion (Wikimili, 2024). Cuba stands out in Latin America for its education system, particularly its gender-focused approach. By implementing a comprehensive educational program, Cuba has achieved the lowest teenage pregnancy rate in the region, demonstrating how schools shape adolescent and youth development. This is a model for preparing young people (Brandhorst & Beltrán Marín, 2021).

Despite resisting privatisation trends, Cuba's independent, high-quality education system faces challenges from 1990s reforms and the country's partial market opening. These changes are transforming Cuban society and the labour market, which may impact the education system. However, Cuba remains committed to maintaining its educational achievements (Brandhorst & Beltrán Marín, 2021). In 2018, constitutional reform was implemented, including free-market rights, the recognition of private property, and direct foreign investment. In education, earlier reform was based on inputs, but now, its focus has changed and shifted from input to output, such as the achievements of students.

Cuba offers distance education for students seeking professional degrees in history, law, finance, accounting, economics, science, and technology. Admission requires completing secondary school, having one year of work experience, and being between 25 and 35 years old. Applicants must also provide proof of completion of mandatory military service. This flexible learning option expands access to higher education.

Structure of the Education System

Cuba's school education structure consists of pre-primary education, six years of primary education (1-6), and three years each of middle (7-9) and secondary education (10-12), followed by vocational and tertiary education (Scholaro database, n.d.: Figure 43.1).

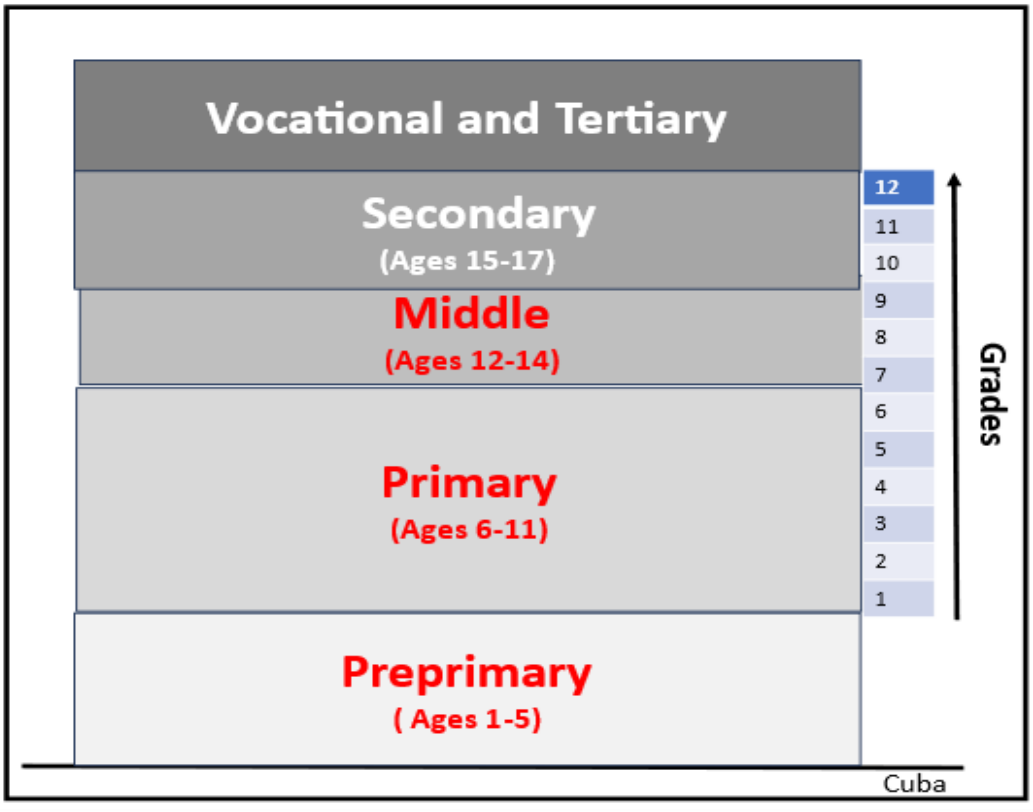

Figure 43.1 Structure of the Education System of Cuba

Source: *Author*

Preschool Education

Every Cuban child between the ages of 1 and 5 participates in a formal or informal preschool programme (UNESCO-IBE, 2010, p. 12). Despite its non-compulsory nature, almost 100% of the children aged one to five attend Preschool, making Cuba regionally unique. Before entering primary school, all children must join the pre-primary for one year; it is free for all.

Primary Education

Primary Education in Cuba is compulsory for children aged 6-11 and consists of grades one to four and five to six (NDF Authors, 2015). During the first level, focus is placed on playful activities, and traditional classes are kept short. In contrast, the second level is more conventional.

Middle Education

The middle education system from 12 to 14 in Cuba is known as middle school or basic secondary education. Children automatically get admitted to these institutions after graduating from sixth grade. Graduation from ninth grade indicates the end of compulsory education, i.e., at 15.

Secondary Education

Secondary education covers children ages 15-17 and grades 10-12. Some students continue to Pre-University or grades 10-12, while others continue the polytechnic. By the end of grade 12, students are awarded the title "bachiller" (Unesco-IBE, 2010, p.7). Ultimately, those who completed the pre-university education are awarded a "bachelorette certificate".

Curricular Framework

The preschool curriculum is based on the age group from 6 months to 5 years, emphasising the child's physical, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic development and ensuring the basis for future learning. Preschool education aims to ensure a child-friendly environment and enable a social foundation for good health, well-being, nutrition, healthy habits, and hygiene.

At the Primary level, the school curriculum includes health and hygiene, gardening, dance and Cuban revolutionary history lessons. Primary students' first to sixth-grade curriculum includes English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, American History and Geography. The six years of primary education begins with the '3Rs' of "reading, rating and rhyme are taught.

The secondary education curriculum is based on "Hard work, Self-discipline, and love of Country." The prescribed curriculum for secondary school is Language, Mathematics, Science, and Social studies. The curriculum at this stage is higher than that of primary education. At this stage, students learn Physical science, application of technology, Eureka math, and Biology. Schools in Cuba use the curriculum published by McGraw Hill for literature.

For grades 6-8, elective subjects like Spanish Language, courses in Art, and grammar, writing, and editing skills are offered. For better grammatical skills in oral language communication,

the Native American one is recommended, and listening and speaking skills are more emphasised. Native American Two is recommended for students in grades 7-12 to develop a practical conversational approach and listening, speaking, and reading skills, which are also in practice. In the Native American, three students utilised their learned skills in oral and written exercises, tests, and various project work.

In addition, the Creative Writing Elective offers the opportunity to develop and improve students' techniques and individual styles of creative writing in poetry, short stories, drama, essays, and other forms of prose. In Cuba, schools have math labs to investigate number theory and operations in algebra, geometry, probability, and statistics through experiments, games, and online computer platforms (CISD, 2021).

The Social Science curriculum is related to knowledge of geology. It focuses on project-based learning and inquiry on rocks, minerals, weather, erosion, deposition, plate tectonics, atmosphere, earth in space and exploring the solar system. It also covers ancient civilisations of the Near and Far East, Greek and Ronan Civilizations, Medieval European life, the rise and fall of civilisations, etc. Along with this, it includes history, geography, civics, government and economics. The Science curriculum is related to Life Science and the Basics of Biology. Students learn about cells and organisms, including genetics, clarification, plant needs, photosynthesis, ecosystems, biomes and evolution.

The 8th-grade science curriculum's physical science is related to basic knowledge of physics and chemistry, project-based learning and inquiry through Physics, energy, magnets, electricity, electromagnetic, density, volume, Newton's law of gravity, atoms and molecules and the periodic table of elements. Construction Career Exploration is recommended for students to expose them to opportunities in construction-related trades such as carpentry, masonry, air conditioning/ refrigeration, plumbing, etc. Family and Consumer Sciences Exploratory is recommended for students. It is an introductory course to study food and nutrition, clothing, child development and care, housing design, decoration and maintenance, etc. (CISD, 2021).

Health and Physical Education courses instruct and develop skills in human movement, physical activities, and fitness, as well as knowledge and skills practice in various health topics. Advancement Via Individual Determination, Pullout classes (Skill Development), Weightlifting, Creative Art/Drawing/Painting, Gateway to Technology, and Social-Emotional Learning are some of the other elective subjects offered in Cuba.

The Cuban education system offers two options for graduates after 9th grade: pre-university education and vocational education (grades 10-12) (UNESCO-IBE, 2010, p. 7).

Adult Education /Continuing Education

The Latin America and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute of Cuba developed and promoted the adult education programme in Cuba, "yo, si puedo" or "yes, I can" for adults. The aim is to make the adults who did not have any opportunity to attend school free of cost. The adult education programme is very effective because it uses prerecorded video lessons delivered by a local facilitator. The institute was awarded the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize in 2006 for globally advocating "Individual and Social potential through innovative teaching methods" (Murphy, 2020). In 2007, a national literacy campaign was launched, and after three years, i.e. in 2010, over 70,000 people completed a 13-week basic literacy course.

Teaching Learning

As per Lavinia Gasperini (2000), Cuban education features universal school enrollment and attendance, nearly complete adult literacy, equal female representation at all educational levels, a solid foundation in scientific training (especially in chemistry and medicine), consistent teaching quality across diverse classrooms, and equitable access to basic education in both urban and rural impoverished areas.

Classes from grades one to four are 30 minutes per period. Academic teaching takes place from around 8:40 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Another 1:30 hours are for free play, and 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. are allotted for various activities. The teaching-learning process of this grade is designed based on learning activities focused on school readiness to attend a high-quality education before entering secondary education.

In the first cycle of primary education, playful activities are emphasised with shorter traditional classes, while the second cycle adopts a more conventional teaching approach (UNESCO–IBE, 2010). The student-centric curriculum includes subjects like arts, music, sports, and drama, and the teaching-learning process includes group learning, peer learning, and collaborative learning. Throughout primary school, there is a locus of guided inquiry to support learning and developing conceptual understanding.

In the secondary stage, the knowledge and skill development curriculum focuses on the different subjects they learn. The objective of the teaching-learning process is based on planning and development to achieve student results. Activities are developed for different subjects and completed by the students on learning by doing, exploring things, experimenting, project work, quizzes, independent work, and group work with the cooperation of the teacher. Courses also focus on developing writing, inquiry, collaboration, self-discovery, leadership and organisational and management skills. The teaching-learning process for this is that students

learn everything under the guidance of teachers and parents, and they complete some activities with their peer group. Some pullout classes are also there for skill development students with Individualised Educational Plans (IEP) who have entered this program.

TV and video programmes have recently been established to improve elementary and secondary education. Two educational channels broadcast daily for more than 12 hours, most of which have educational and didactical characters.

Integration of ICT serves as an entryway to technology. It enables students to take charge of their learning by incorporating technology into their education. Laptops are furnished to students upon enrollment, facilitating online and offline teaching and learning. Using computers aids students in comprehending and covering topics related to physical computing, user-centred design, problem-solving, and data analysis. It empowers them to create their websites, apps, games, etc. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is integral to the learning process. It enables students to learn about understanding and managing their emotions, achieving positive goals, showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions.

Learning Assessment

In Cuba's school education system, assessment is a continuous process at the end of every grade. Tests are related to instruction and combine formal learning with the practical application of subjects in real-life situations. Results are categorised as excellent, very good, good, regular, or poor, and students advance to the next grade when they receive a satisfactory grade. Assessments for students on the primary level are conducted on a school-by-school basis. At the same time, in the first cycle, they receive a qualitative description ranging from excellent to insufficient (UNESCO-IBE, 2010). In the second cycle, grades 5 to 6 are assessed in points out of a maximum of 100, and the passing grade is 60 points.

The New Mexico Public Education Department designs the Cuba pre-registration process, course selection, grading policies, etc., based on the graduation requirements. At the end of each semester, schools provide a progress report every nine weeks, each divided into two nine-week grading periods. Parents and students can view grades and attendance online. Semester grades are recorded on a student's permanent transcript. The grading scale is as follows: 'A' for 90-100%, 'B' for 80-89%, 'C' for 70-79%, 'D' for 60-69%, and 'F' for below 59%. The final exam can account for no more than 20% of the final semester grade. Grades and credits are awarded upon completing each class by the semester's end. No credit is given for grades of 'F' (Failure), 'I' (Incomplete), or 'W' (Withdrawal). If a student receives an 'I', they must finish the coursework within the first two weeks of the following semester, or they will receive an

'F'. The student's grade point average (GPA) includes all grade points for each subject. Students cannot receive duplicate credit for a repeated course. Dual credit and honours classes are weighted differently. The unweighted GPA scale is A=4.0, B=3.0, C=2.0, and F=0. For honours courses, the scale is A=4.5, B=3.5, C=2.5, D=1.5, and F=0. For dual credit courses, it is A=5.0, B=4.0, C=3.0, D=2.0, and F=0 (CISD, 2023).

Health and Physical Education

Health and Physical education provide knowledge and skills practice in various health topics. This course carries 1.5 credits and aims to meet the graduation requirement for health education.

Physical education in elementary school is designed to assist students in learning and improving their physical fitness and sports skills through activities like routine exercise and participation in the Fitness Gram program. Students learn about the five fitness components that play a crucial role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The school introduces lifelong activities designed to improve the likelihood of exercising in the future outside of physical education. The course focuses on cultivating essential social skills like teamwork, perseverance, communication, and resilience. Its main goal is to help students recognise the advantages of consistent exercise and team sports in enhancing their mental, physical, and interpersonal well-being (CISD, 2022).

Skills Education

Skill education is an approach that emphasises the development of practical skills and competencies applicable to real-life situations rather than just theoretical knowledge. It encourages students to actively participate in the teaching and learning process rather than passively memorising information. Pre-kindergarten students cultivate foundational skills in reading and writing, spatial awareness, health, hygiene, and social interactions. In grades 6-8, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) receive tailored instruction in smaller class settings. Through STEM and cooperative learning, these classes enhance reading comprehension, critical thinking, graphing, math, listening, speaking, and strategic thinking skills. Language and arts instruction also focuses on basic grammar, verbal communication, and teamwork, fostering leadership abilities among students from grades 6 to 12 (CISD, 2022).

Vocational schools in Cuba provide skill training for industries, agribusiness, and services to facilitate graduates' social integration (UNICEF, 2022). By 2024, UNICEF aims to engage 8,028 adolescents from 51 vocational schools in programs focused on skill development, personal empowerment, active citizenship, and employability. These efforts align with the new

educational model that caters to adolescents' interests and needs (UNICEF, 2022). Curriculum reform and teacher training are underway to enhance the quality of vocational education and address challenges like teacher shortages and limited digital infrastructure in schools (UNICEF, 2023). Initiatives like the PROFET project aim to improve employability for young people, especially women and disadvantaged groups, by aligning educational programs with industry needs and fostering sustainable practices (UNDP, 2021).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobby development includes dance, drama, health, and hygiene, which require more practice and individual involvement. For the all-round development of a child's personality, the Cuban education system provides a Club for hobby development. Interested students can join the Club and develop their hobbies in these hobby classes. Clubs like Archery, Guitar, Dance, and Photography are available for hobby development. In the Archery Club, students learn safe and accurate bow shooting techniques, including knowledge about bows, arrows, and targets. They also develop skills to estimate target distances and hit bullseyes. In the Guitar Club, students focus on tuning their guitars, mastering hand positioning and basic chords, and playing simple songs. The Dance Club teaches basic and popular Cuban dance skills, enhancing students' social skills and serving as a coping mechanism (CISD, 2021). The Dance club helps students gain self-confidence through their dance practice. In hobby classes, students have fun dancing to the music and learn to respect others and work in a team. Students who want to develop their photography hobby go to the photography club. They learn about different styles of photography they want to try. With the application of technology, they learn how to edit photographs, develop animation, and design, among others.

Life skill education was not given due attention in Cuba. Minimal literature about life skill development in school is pointed out. UNESCO introduces a new approach to training adolescents in life skills and social integration, aligning with UNICEF's priorities for the Second Decade, Generation Unlimited, and the Framework for Life Skills, Employment, and Decent Work. Besides that, vocational education provides training in life skill development (UNICEF, 2022).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Cuba's education system has been acknowledged as one of the most successful education systems in the world. However, few people have studied the philosophical structure underpinning this system. The Cuban education system is based on the belief that education can be more effective,

meaningful, and successful if an appropriate set of values or beliefs guides it. This approach is deeply embedded throughout the school system, universities, and teacher training colleges, making it a fascinating example of values education (Kronenberg, 2016).

Cuba's education system provides a compelling example of how a values-based approach to education can effectively produce well-rounded and socially responsible citizens. José Martí, a prominent Cuban writer, philosopher, and national hero, has significantly influenced Cuba's education system. His teachings are found in all Cuban classrooms and even adorn the walls of Havana. Martí emphasised values such as solidarity, social justice, and ethical behaviour (Kronenberg, 2016).

The new education system is tasked with fostering social change that will lead to the emergence of a new civil society and a revised understanding of the individual. Achieving these new norms and values will require a gradual and adaptable approach. Civic virtues such as self-discipline, civility, compassion, tolerance, and respect for the dignity of all individuals are essential for the effective functioning of civil society and constitutional governance. These qualities should be developed in social institutions like schools to foster a healthy democracy (Gomez, 2018).

Peace and Happiness Education

The Cuban school curriculum does not have a specialised Peace and Happiness education course. However, the curriculum is built upon socialist values and is designed to nurture students who are responsible, caring, and productive members of society. The system aims to instil in students a sense of commitment towards social justice and equality. The education system in Cuba emphasises the importance of community service, volunteerism, and fostering a strong sense of social responsibility. By imparting these values, the Cuban education system strives to create a generation of young people capable of contributing positively towards building a just and equitable society.

In the wake of the crisis, Cuba has actively pursued anti-nuclear and peace education initiatives, particularly within its school systems. The legacy of Che Guevara, who visited Hiroshima in 1959 and returned with a passionate message about the horrors of nuclear warfare, continues to influence Cuba's educational framework. Guevara's advocacy for peace and disarmament resonates in contemporary Cuban classrooms, where students are educated about the dangers of nuclear weapons and the importance of global peace (Yamamoto, 2023). Cuban expert Margarita Mc Pherson is actively working to enhance education as a vital tool for promoting peace, cooperation, and human rights. 2023 May 30, she spoke at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, where she emphasised Cuba's commitment to updating the 1974 UNESCO framework

on education for peace (Lao News Agency, 2023 & Newman, 2023). This initiative aims to integrate peace and human rights principles into educational systems worldwide.

Summary and Conclusion

Cuba's example demonstrates that even poorer developing countries can achieve high-quality education. In Cuba, education is considered a basic individual right that the state provides free of charge. As Cuba is a communist regime, its education system is heavily influenced by this political ideology. After gaining independence, all educational institutions were nationalised, and a government-operated system was created. The basic principle of Cuban education is that it is a right for all, and to make this a reality, Cuba invested heavily in the education sector.

In Cuba, the education system is divided into different stages. The first stage is pre-primary education, intended for children between 1 and 5 years of age. This stage provides children with the necessary skills and knowledge to serve as a foundation for primary education. Pre-primary education, like every other stage of education in Cuba, is free of charge.

Primary education is offered to children aged 5 to 12, focusing on fundamental subjects. Seventh grade signifies the start of a new educational phase, introducing key subjects for students aiming for pre-university studies (second cycle as per UNESCO) or professional technical training. The latter option prepares students to become skilled workers with a basic professional level equivalent to ninth grade or middle technicians with a higher professional level equivalent to twelfth grade.

Almost all children (99%) who complete primary education attend secondary school in Cuba. Furthermore, the country has a gross enrolment rate of 100% and a net enrolment rate of 98%, with women having equal access to education. Cuba places a high value on human resources, so training opportunities are provided to help individuals improve their skills and knowledge. “The indicators well above the average for the region and the world systematic training and improvement of human resources has gained a progressive hierarchy in Cuba’s development strategy embodying one of the fundamental issues of the social transformations achieved and one of the supports to strengthen its economy and enable a positive reinsertion in international markets. An example is that, despite the economic crisis, the national budget has supported the education sector, as evidenced by the considerable percentage of GDP devoted to it” (Falcón et al., 2022, p. 125).

Incorporating skill development education into the curriculum aims to improve practical competencies that can be utilised in real-life situations. Within fields like physical education, vocational education, and technological learning, students learn various skills that can be applied to their future careers. The Cuban education system also offers hobby development classes such as

archery, guitar, dance, and photography, which help in personality development, building team spirit, and instilling the values of sharing and caring. The curriculum prioritises health and physical education, enabling students to improve physical fitness and learn about various health topics such as sports and extension lectures. The curriculum is designed to provide all-round development for children, with academic activities supplemented by skill, hobby, and physical development activities. Cuba is updating its economic model due to macroeconomic imbalances and perceived structural and efficiency problems that could not be addressed with the existing centralised economic model (Lamrani, 2017).

In summary, while Cuba has succeeded in the education sector, the country's economic structure remains underdeveloped due to insufficient industrial and technological progress. The growth rate of production and investment is very low. Cuba's economic policy is founded on socialist principles, with a state-controlled or mixed command economy under the governance of state-run enterprises. A centrally planned economy that allows for the inclusion of private business and foreign investment is necessary.

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44

Challenges and Successes in Educational Reform: Guatemala

Mrityunjoy Kaibarta

Abstract

This chapter deals with education reforms in Guatemala. This Central American country made significant efforts in education reforms through free and mandatory education for children between the ages of 7 and 14 and bilingual education to preserve indigenous languages and cultures. Maor initiatives are decentralisation, curriculum development, and teacher training. Assessment in Guatemala includes diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluation. Physical education and hygiene are priorities. Skills education is integrated into the curriculum, with vocational education options available in higher secondary education. Moral, social, and cultural education aims to foster ethical values, social responsibility, and cultural awareness among students. Peace and happiness education are indirectly integrated into social studies, citizen education, psychology, and artistic expression. Guatemala faces challenges in its education system, including access to quality education, learning outcomes, and disparities between rural and urban areas and Indigenous communities. There is a need for increased resources and effectiveness in utilising those resources to enhance the quality of education in Guatemala.

Keywords: Education reforms, Primary Education, National Basic Curriculum, Bilingual Education, Challenges

Introduction

Guatemala is located in Central America and has an area of 108,890 square kilometres. Guatemala is bordered by Mexico to the north and west, Belize to the northeast, the Caribbean Sea to the east, Honduras to the east and southeast, and El Salvador to the southeast. Guatemalan coastlines cover about 200 miles on the Pacific Ocean and 70 miles on the Caribbean (Country Reports, n.d.). Its diverse landscape includes volcanic mountains, lush rainforests, highlands, coastal plains, and

several large lakes. The country is known for its natural beauty, with attractions such as Lake Atitlán, Tikal National Park, and the Mayan ruins of El Mirador (Horst et al., 2024). Guatemala comprises 22 departments (departamentos), divided into approximately 332 municipalities (municipios).

Guatemala, a country with a promising future, is home to a vibrant and young population. As per the Guatemala Population and Housing Census 2018, the total population of Guatemala is 14,901,286, with 7,678,190 (51.5%) female and 7,223,096 (48.5%) males ((NISG & UNFPA, 2018).). The country's population growth rate was 1.4% as of 2022 (The World Bank, 2022). In 2020, the median age of the Guatemalan population was 21.7 years (O'Neill, 2023). The country boasts a diverse cultural heritage, with most of its population comprising mixed Mestizo (56%) and Indigenous Mayan (41.7%) ancestry. While Spanish is the official language (69.9%), several indigenous languages, such as K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Mam, are also widely spoken. The majority of the people in Guatemala follow Roman Catholicism (41.7%) and Evangelical Christianity (38.8%) (WFB, 2022). Life expectancy at birth was 72 years as of 2019 (WHO, 2019).

Guatemala, an upper-middle-income country, boasts a diverse and robust economy. The agriculture, industry, and services sectors play significant roles, contributing to the country's prosperity. Guatemala is renowned for producing and exporting agricultural products such as coffee, bananas, sugar, and cardamom. It also has significant mineral resources, including nickel, lead, and zinc. The manufacturing industries in Guatemala produce textiles, clothing, beverages, and chemicals. The services sector, including tourism, also substantially contributes to the economy. In 2024, its total gross domestic product (GDP) is US$110.04 billion, and GDP per capita is US$5680, with a growth rate of 3.5% (IMF, 2024). The unemployment rate in Guatemala was 3.2% in 2023 (The World Bank, 2024). In the World Happiness Report, with 6.150 points, Guatemala ranked 43 out of 137 countries (Helliwell et al., 2023). In the Human Development Report, with an HDI value of 0.629, the country ranked 136 out of 193 countries and territories worldwide (UNDP, 2023). However, Guatemala faces challenges such as income inequality, poverty, and a large informal sector.

Education in Guatemala is mandatory and free for children between 7 and 14. However, access to quality education remains a challenge, especially in rural and Indigenous communities. The literacy rate in 2022 in Guatemala is 84%, with a female literacy rate of 79.3% and a male literacy rate of 87.7% (World Population Review, 2024). As of 2022, GER for primary education was 103.91%, and for upper secondary was 31.36%. NER for primary education was 92.31%, and for upper secondary was 35.43% (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). In Guatemala, approximately 9,300 primary schools (Plas, 2007) and 3,571,000 students are enrolled in primary and secondary education. Of these students, 2,351,000 (66%) are in primary education (EPDC, 2018). Indonesia scored an average rank of 69 in PISA 2022. They scored 344 in Mathematics, 374 in Reading, and 373 in Science

(OECD, 2023, p. 29). The country has tried to improve its education system, including implementing bilingual education programs to preserve indigenous languages and cultures. Guatemala spends 2.8 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on education, far less than the regional average. “Challenges still exist in the quality of education, learning outcomes, and transition rates of students into secondary and higher education. Disparities persist between boys and girls, urban and rural, and Ladino and Indigenous communities” (USAID, n.d. para 1).

Educational Policy

The educational reform process in Guatemala has been challenging and constantly evolving, with various efforts being made to improve the country's education system. During the colonial era, education was predominantly provided by the Catholic Church, catering to the privileged class and focusing on religious instruction. 1876, President Justo Rufino Barrios introduced reforms to secularise education and establish public schools (Miller, 1966). The objective was to provide free and mandatory education to all children, but the reforms were only partially successful. The Guatemalan Revolution of 1944 brought about significant political and social changes, resulting in educational reforms to increase access to education (Grieb, 1976). The Ministry of Public Education (Ministerio de Educación Pública) was established in 1945 to supervise the education system and implement reforms.

The Guatemalan Civil War (1960 to 1996) significantly impacted the country's education system. The country's education system is crucial to the 1996 Peace Accords. The Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Accord on Socioeconomic Aspects and Agrarian Situation define the specifics of the transformation (Conciliation Resources, 1997). These Accords aim to make education a way of transmitting and developing values and knowledge in a multicultural society and require that the curricula integrate all cultures and languages equally. Additionally, the Accords identify education and training as keys to achieving equity, national unity, economic modernisation, and international competitiveness. The Accords have set specific targets to be achieved by the year 2000, including a 50% increase in the education budget relative to the 1995 allocation as a per cent of the GDP, provision of at least three years of primary schooling for all 7-12-year-olds, and an increase in literacy rates to 70% by the year 2000. The Accords emphasise community participation, continuous education and training for education sector staff, and financing for the University of San Carlos (Anderson, 2001).

The educational reform provided for in the 1996 Peace Accords, which aimed to infuse the history, language, and culture of the Maya people into Guatemala’s national curriculum, has not yet been implemented (O’Sullivan, 2008; Cuxil, 2002). In the early 2000s, the government implemented various reforms to decentralise education, enhance quality, and increase access. These measures

included establishing the National Council for Educational Development (Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Educativo), tasked with coordinating and implementing educational policies.

In 2012, the Education Quality and Relevance Program (Programa de Calidad y Pertinencia Educativa) was launched to address the quality of education in Guatemala. The program focused on teacher training, curriculum development, and improving infrastructure. Efforts have been made to prioritise bilingual and intercultural education to serve Guatemala's diverse Indigenous populations better. Additionally, initiatives have aimed to promote technical and vocational education to enhance skills development and address high levels of youth unemployment.

Guadarrama (2018) states, "At the heart of the current political struggle that pits community and students against the government is the training of teachers. Many arguments point to the need for improvement and change in the preparation of teachers as the most important strategy that may positively impact educational achievement. Students pursuing their preparation in teacher training colleges, called Escuelas Normales, and the communities that support them have embarked on an intense campaign to repudiate the proposal from the Minister of Education to eliminate the current gratuitous programs and replace them with costly university-based designs that do not even address the true nature of the educational problems (Guadarrama, 2018)."

Structure of the Education System

The education system in Guatemala is overseen by the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for regulating, planning, supervising, and evaluating the initial, pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of public and private education and formal and non-formal education. The University of San Carlos is the sole public tertiary-level institution mandated by the Constitution to direct and develop public tertiary education. Private tertiary education is regulated by the Council of Private Tertiary Education (Consejo de la Enseñanza Privada Superior), which was established by the Constitution of 1985 (Anderson, 2001).

In Guatemala, the education system comprises formal and non-formal education. The non-formal subsystem offers various programs, such as initial education, accelerated pre-primary (CENACEP), extra-mural, and literacy training. This type of education is aimed at those who could not enter the formal education system or dropped out before completing primary education. Non-formal education is conducted through intra-mural or distance modalities. It is sometimes administered by government institutions other than the Ministry of Education, including the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Defense, as well as the National Literacy Council (CONALFA) (Anderson, 2001).

The formal education system in Guatemala is divided into three levels: primary (elementary), Basic Education, and secondary (high school). Primary education is mandatory and free for children aged 7 to 13. It is divided into two cycles: the first comprises grades one to three, while the second

comprises grades four to six. After completing primary education, students move on to básicos, which consist of three grades: primero básico (first básico), segundo básico (second), and tercero básico (third). Upon completing básicos, students may enter carreras (careers), also known as diversificados (diversified) or higher secondary education (Bethanypasma, 2021). This level of education allows students to specialise in fields such as education, agriculture, and business. However, due to the limited accessibility of public schools in rural areas, private schools are more prevalent throughout the country (education.ststeuniversity.com, n.d.).

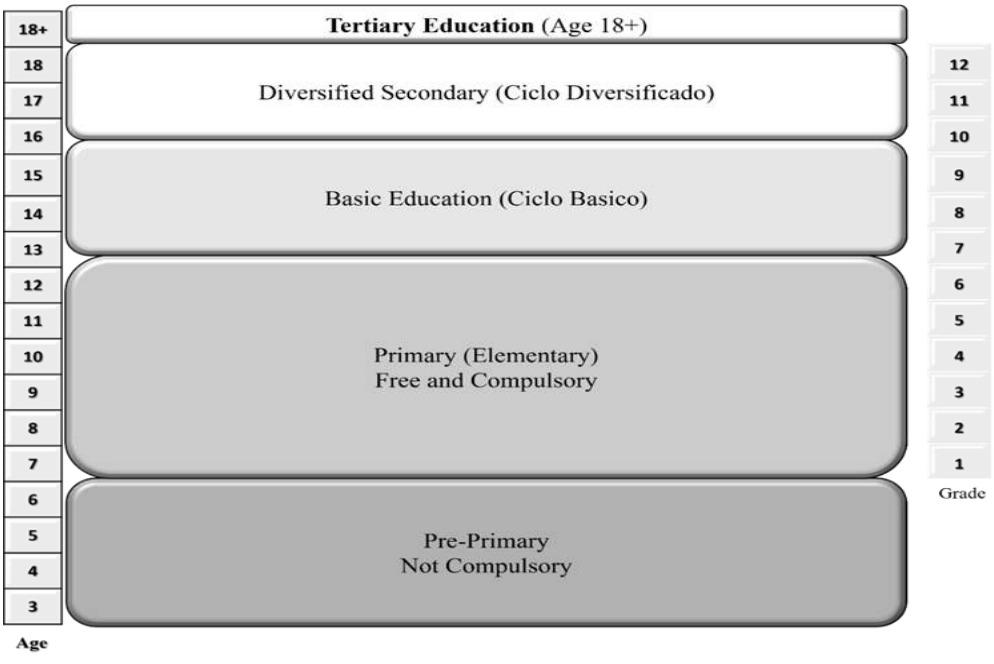

Figure 44.1 School Education Structure of Guatemala

Source: *Author (Adapted from Scholaro database, n.d.)*

Curricular Framework

In Guatemala, a new curriculum, the National Basic Curriculum (Curriculo Nacional Base-CNB), was introduced in 2005. It had various goals, such as strengthening democratic principles, fostering sustainable development, and improving the quality of education (Dyl, 2022). Spanish is the official language of Guatemala, but not all its citizens are fluent in it. Over 20 indigenous Mayan Indian languages, such as K'iche', Kakchiquel, K'ekchi, Mam, and Quiche, are spoken among the nation's high Indian population, primarily in rural areas (education.ststeuniversity.com, n.d.). Only 60% of the country's population speaks Spanish, while 40% speak indigenous Mayan languages, also used

in many of the country's rural schools. One of Guatemala's educational objectives is to become uni-lingual, meaning that ideally, all Guatemalans would be able to speak Spanish (Plas, 2007).

Primary Education

Primary education is compulsory and comprises six studies divided into two three-year cycles (The Long Island RBE-RN, 2015). The primary education curriculum aims to strengthen communication skills, develop logical-mathematical thinking, knowledge and interaction with the social and natural environment, artistic training and physical education. The primary education curriculum includes "basic" disciplines such as language, math, Social and Natural Environment, Natural Sciences and Technology, Social Sciences, Artistic expression, Physical education, Citizen education and Productivity and development. At the end of each year, students must pass a culminating exam to proceed to the next grade level. Most city schools teach Spanish and English at all primary levels, although indigenous Mayan languages are used exclusively in more remote areas (education.ststeuniversity.com, n.d.). Other languages, such as German, French, Italian, Arabic and Chinese, may also be taught in some larger urban schools. Table 44.1 provides the subject-wise weekly class times.

Table 44.1 Subject-wise Weekly Class Times

Area or Subjects	Minimum Hours per week	
	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Communication and Language L1 (Mother Language)	4	4
Communication and Language L2 (Second Language)	2	2
Communication and Language L3 (Third Language)	2	2
Math	5	5
Social and Natural Environment	4	0
Natural Sciences and Technology	0	3
social Sciences	0	3
Artistic expression	2	1
Physical education	2	1
Citizen education	2	1
Productivity and development	0	1

Source: *Ministry of Education, n.d.*

Secondary Education (Basic)

In Guatemala, most children do not attend secondary school as compulsory education only goes up to sixth grade. Only one-third of all children pursue education beyond primary school. This problem may contribute to a high level of illiteracy in adults over age 15. Children may not have easy access to a secondary school, or if they come from agricultural communities, they are unable to attend because they must work to support their families' farms. Most secondary schools are located in

urban areas and are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (Catholicism is the predominant religion of Guatemala, although many Protestants and Mayan religions are practised) (education.ststeuniversity.com, n.d.). Several German, French, and American schools also exist. Teachers at these schools use English rather than Spanish to deliver instruction.

In Guatemala, secondary school education is divided into two cycles: Básicos and Diversificado. Students follow a comprehensive curriculum during the first three years of secondary school, known as Básicos. The Curriculum for the Basic Cycle of the Middle Level has been structured into seven Areas, including Communication and Language (Spanish), Local Language (Maya, Garifuna, or Xinca, depending on the region), Foreign Language (English), Natural Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), Social Sciences, Citizen Education and Interculturality, Artistic Education, Physical Education, Entrepreneurship for Productivity, Learning and Communication Technologies. (Guatemalan Educational System, n.d.). Table 44.2 shows the organisation of areas and subareas for the three grades of the Basic Cycle.

Table 44.2 Grade-wise Organisation of Areas and Subareas for Basic Education Cycle

Area or Subjects	Number of Weekly periods		
	1st year	2nd year	3rd year
Mayan Culture and Language	3	3	3
Communication and Language, Spanish Language	5	5	5
Communication and Language, Foreign Language	3	3	3
Math	5	5	5
natural Sciences	4	4	4
Social Sciences and Citizenship	4	4	4
Education and Artistic Expression	4	4	4
Entrepreneurship for Productivity	3	3	3
Learning and Communication Technologies	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2
Total periods	**35**	**35**	**35**

Source: *Ministry of Education, n.d.*

“The Guatemalan Ministry of Education supports a progressive, globalised curriculum. One of the country's major educational achievements is its focus on globalisation and multicultural affairs (Plas, 2007, p.4). In secondary school, students learn about other cultures, nations, and countries worldwide. This attention to multiculturalism aids Guatemala's presence in international affairs, global commerce, and social development. In Guatemala, the educational curriculum places a

significant emphasis on addressing the social issues prevalent in the country. It also motivates students to play an active role in finding solutions to these problems.

Higher Secondary Education

After completing the Básicos cycle, students progress to a three-year general education program called Ciclo Prevocational, followed by two years of vocational training in a chosen professional area called Ciclo Diversifacado. Upon completing the final three years of study, students receive a Bachillerato, equivalent to a high school diploma, and can apply to universities. Another option for students who do not wish to pursue the Ciclo Diversifacado is to specialise in one of three areas, resulting in certificates in Perito (certification) in industria (industry), Agricola (agriculture), or Contador (law). At state schools, most students choose to study either teaching or accounting. In contrast, private schools offer a wider selection of specialised courses, such as agronomy, auto-mechanics, computers, secretarial services, and tourism (Fajkus, 2022). School hours are 7 am – 1 pm. The subjects taught in Bachelor of Science and Letters (general course) include Language and Literature, English, Information and Communication Technologies, Mathematics, Descriptive Statistics, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Social Science and citizen Education (History, Geography), Psychology, Philosophy, Artistic Expression (Music, Fine arts), Physical Education and Development and Project Management. With this Bachelor of Science and Letters (general course), student can choose their specialisation like Bachelor of Science and Letters with Orientation in Biological Science, Computing, Graphic Design, Education, Education of Productivity and Development, Physical Education, Musical Education, Electricity, Finance and Administration, Office Management, Automotive Mechanics, Productivity and Entrepreneurship, Textiles and Tourism. The curriculum is fully approved by the Ministry of Education in Guatemala. It emphasises self-esteem and community involvement alongside academic achievements. Table 44.3 provides the subject-wise weekly class times.

Teaching Learning

Out of the 180 official instructional days, students only receive an average of 97 days. According to the USAID Measuring School Effectiveness Report in Guatemala, the number of official school days is 180 (900 hours), and the school day is officially five hours in length. The official school day in Guatemala begins at 7:30 am and ends at 12:30 pm. Out of the 180 official instructional days, students are only receiving an average of 97 days of instruction after accounting for days the school is closed, late start, extended recess, early close, and teacher/student absenteeism (44 per cent loss of time annually) (USAID, 2009). Class sizes in Guatemalan schools varied significantly— ranging from 10 to 55 in Grades 1 through 3—more than two-thirds of classrooms had fewer than 30 students (USAID, 2010).

Table 44.3 Subject-wise Weekly Class Times

Areas of Subjects	Distribution of Time (Periods per week of 40 minutes)	
	4th year	**5th year**
Communication and Language		
Language and Literature	5	5
Communication and Language L3 (English)	3	3
Information and Communication Technologies	2	2
Math		
Mathematics	5	5
Descriptive Statistics	-	2
Natural Sciences and Technology		
Physics	3	-
Biology	-	3
Chemistry	-	3
Social Sciences and Citizen Education		
Social Sciences and Citizen Education	3	3
Psychology	2	-
Philosophy	3	-
Artistic Expression		2
Physical Education	2	-
Development and Project Management	2	-
Seminar	-	2
Total	**30**	**30**

Source: *Ministry of Education, n.d.*

Basic instructional practices "include reading aloud, demonstration/lecture, discussion/debate, practice/drill, seatwork, verbal instructions, reading silently, and interpreting the text" (USAID, 2009, p.12). "There were also differences in the types of pedagogical activities linked to each subject. For math, students were engaged in more practice and drill activities. In science, most students' time on task was spent in demonstrations and lectures. For Reading, students spend most of their time on seatwork or copying" (USAID, 2009, p.15).

There were also differences in the types of pedagogical activities linked to each subject. For math, students were engaged in more practice and drill activities. In science, most students' time on task

was spent in demonstrations and lectures. For reading, students spent most of their engaged time doing seatwork or copying. These categories did not vary when disaggregated by department.

The Ministry of Education in Guatemala implemented an innovative program to improve structural educational quality and decrease the achievement gap between rural and urban students. This program, known as SINAE (Sistema Nacional de Acompañamiento Escolar/ National System for Educational Advising and Capacity Building), focuses of SINAE on placing central importance on community outreach and parent engagement. The goal is to actively engage the community and parents in the educational life of their students (Alvarez, 2017).

Learning Assessment

The Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación) in Guatemala is responsible for developing school learning assessment systems. These assessment systems aim to evaluate student performance, track progress, and guarantee the quality of education. The Ministry of Education conducts national assessments, including the National Student Performance Assessment (Evaluación Nacional del Rendimiento Estudiantil - ENRDE), which assesses student achievement in particular subjects at varying grade levels. These assessments offer a comprehensive view of student learning at a national level and aid in identifying areas for improvement in the education system. National Base Curriculum of Guatemala (Curriculo Nacional Base Guatemala- CNB) Suggests three types of assessments:

Initial or Diagnostic Evaluation: This is carried out before the development of the educational process. This type of evaluation aims to adapt the planning of the teaching and learning processes to the needs of the students.

Process or Formative Evaluation: It is carried out simultaneously with the teaching and learning processes, so it is considered an integral part. This type of evaluation allows the teacher to reflect on what has been done in the classroom during and after the action, providing valuable data on the didactic orientation based on the educational intentions taken in the planning.

Evaluation of Results or Summative: It is done at the end of a process or educational cycle. Its main purpose is to certify the degree to which the educational intentions have been achieved. “Students must pass a general examination at each grade level to pass to the subsequent level. Students who fail any part of the year-end examination must repeat that entire year:” (education.ststeuniversity.com, n.d. para 1).

Students must pass a general examination at each grade level to pass to the subsequent level. Students who fail any part of the year-end examination must repeat that entire year. Examinations

are prepared under the supervision of Guatemala's Minister of Education, who also presides over the curriculum and administrative functions of the country's public schools.

The following grading system is used in most Guatemalan Schools.

Table 44.4 Grading System in Guatemalan Schools

Secondary Education Grading System Scale	Grade Description	U.S. Grade	Notes
90-100	Excelente (Excellent)	A	
80-89	Muy Bueno (Very Good)	A-	
70-79	Bueno (Good)	B	
60-69	Acceptable (Acceptable)	B-	Private Schools: 61 is the minimum passing grade.
51-59	Mínimo aceptable (Barely Acceptable)	C	Public schools: 51 is the minimum passing grade.
0-50	Reprobado (Fail)	F	

Source: *The Long Island RBE-RN, 2015*

Health and Physical Education

Physical education is prioritised at every primary, basic, and secondary school curriculum level.

National Base Curriculum of Guatemala (Curriculo Nacional Base Guatemala- CNB) recommends that the "Physical Education Area for primary grades be comprised of the following components:

- *Motor:* This develops kinesthetic and spatial intelligence about students' abilities, movement skills, and physical aptitudes. It emphasises solving motor order problems in daily life.
- *Hygiene and Health*: instils hygienic habits favouring a healthy physical, mental and emotional life.
- *Social:* develops intra and inter-intelligence in students about attitudes and values that allow social integration and a sense of belonging to the group, without discrimination."

USAID supports the Ministry of Education of Guatemala in improving school conditions by installing and improving latrines, handwashing stations, and rainwater catchment systems, training students in good hygiene practices, and promoting clean energy in schools (USAID, n.d.).

Skills Education

Skills education refers to working with hands – using manipulatives, hand tools, trade skills, constructing artefacts, etc. In Guatemalan school education (primary and basic), there is no special trade for such types of education, but physical education and artistic expression are integral parts of the curriculum. Physical education and art education include various types of motor skills:

demonstrating mastery of the body, skillfully controlling and handling a ball, demonstrating balance and eye-hand and eye-foot coordination ability, drawing, painting and dancing. Subjects like Productivity and Development and Entrepreneurship for Productivity are included, but little emphasis is given, and less time is allocated.

From grade 10 and beyond, skills education is converted into vocational education, i.e., students choose any trade of their choice from this class, which includes Computing, Graphic Design, Education, Education of Productivity and Development, Physical Education, Musical Education, Electricity, Finance and Administration, Office Management, Automotive Mechanics, Productivity and Entrepreneurship, Textiles, and Tourism.

USAID has implemented the "Opportunities for My Community" project since 2017 to support Guatemalan youth in building pre-professional skills that will benefit their future careers. This extracurricular program is offered in municipalities with high emigration rates in Guatemala.

The program is called the "B'etil Diploma for Professional Skills," which means "to move forward or advance" in Mam, a Mayan language spoken in Guatemala. The B'etil Diploma comprises three modules that focus on math, communications, and entrepreneurship skills and are connected by two cross-cutting themes: Civic Engagement and Entering the Workforce. The Guatemalan Ministry of Education has reviewed and approved the curriculum to ensure that it aligns with the needs and priorities of the partner schools (Ortega & Madrigal, 2019).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Like many other countries, Guatemala does not have a separate curriculum for hobby development. However, artistic expression has always been integral to Guatemala's Primary, Basic, and Higher Secondary Education curricula. In making the Statement on Artistic Education in Basic Education, the National Base Curriculum of Guatemala (Curriculo Nacional Base Guatemala- CNB) says, "The Artistic Education area constitutes the space for the incorporation of the arts into education. The artistic languages of the visual arts, dance, music, and theatre develop skills and abilities that foster habits, stimulate freedom, promote the assimilation of values and help internalise essential attitudes for individual and collective development in the family group and the social context. (Ministry of Education, n.d.)" However, in Guatemala, hobbies or life skills are not taught separately; they are developed in the students within their curriculum or education process.

Peace and Happiness Education

Though Guatemala struggles with widespread poverty, illiteracy, crime, and high unemployment rates, it stands 43rd happiest in the World Happiness Report (2023). Peace and happiness education is directly and indirectly integrated into the national curriculum framework. This integration includes subjects like social studies, Citizen Education, psychology, and Artistic expression. The

curriculum emphasises respect, empathy, cooperation, and non-violence. Citizen Education is an integral part of the Primary grade curriculum, and Social Science, Citizen Education, and Interculturality are a part of Basic and higher secondary education. Citizen education aims to promote relationships framed in the culture of peace, Human Rights and democracy to strengthen quality relationships in various spaces. It values and respects its culture and that of the people that coexist in the community, the country and the world by promoting intercultural coexistence (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Moral, social, and cultural education is an important aspect of a comprehensive education system that aims to foster ethical values, social responsibility, and cultural awareness among students. In Guatemala, efforts have been made to incorporate these elements into the education system, such as incorporating the language and culture of the Mayans and citizen education. Citizen education's objective is to value their personal, family, social, ethnic, and cultural group identity and their parents and classmates' participation in developing family and classroom activities (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

As per Patricia Galicia's (2016) study, the Guatemalan national curriculum mandates schools to advocate gender equality, inclusivity, and reverence for indigenous communities. The curriculum aims to instil a sense of civic duty and cultivate a peaceful culture among students. Nonetheless, a decade after its approval, teachers have not received adequate training to actualise these objectives in their classrooms.

Summary and Conclusion

Guatemala is intriguing, with natural beauty and social challenges. The nation boasts stunning ancient ruins, majestic volcanoes, picturesque lakes, and thriving forests, but at the same time, it grapples with issues such as violence, corruption, and poverty. Despite the struggles, the people of Guatemala maintain a positive outlook towards life. Around 50% of the population comprises Indigenous people, whose strong sense of community is closely connected to their high life satisfaction and feeling valued. While Guatemala has made significant progress in recent years with economic growth and successful democratic elections, it still faces major obstacles such as widespread poverty, illiteracy, crime, and high unemployment and underemployment rates (Callahan, 2015). Despite these challenges, Guatemala consistently ranks well in the World Happiness Report, which is a testament to the optimistic spirit of its people.

Guatemala spends 2.8 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on education, far less than the regional average (USAID, n.d.). Education in Guatemala is mandatory and free for children between the ages of 7 and 14, but access to quality education remains a challenge, especially in rural and

indigenous communities. The country has tried to improve its education system, including implementing bilingual education programs to preserve indigenous languages and cultures. However, challenges still exist in the quality of education, learning outcomes, and transition rates of students into secondary and higher education. The educational reform process in Guatemala has been challenging and constantly evolving, with various efforts being made to enhance the country's education system. The Ministry of Public Education was established in 1945 to supervise the education system and implement reforms. In 2012, the Education Quality and Relevance Program was launched to address the quality of education in Guatemala. The education system in the country is overseen by the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for regulating, planning, supervising, and evaluating the initial, pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of public and private education, as well as formal and non-formal education.

The year 2005 saw the introduction of the Guatemalan National Basic Curriculum (Curriculo Nacional Base-CNB). Its objectives included the enhancement of democratic principles, the promotion of sustainable development, and the advancement of education quality (Dyl, 2022). Guatemala has Spanish as its official language, but not everyone is proficient in it. The high indigenous Mayan population in rural areas speaks more than 20 different Mayan languages (education.ststeuniversity.com, n.d.). Instructional practices include traditional methods with various types of activity. The National Base Curriculum of Guatemala suggests three types of assessments: Initial or Diagnostic, Process or Formative and Final Results or Summative Evaluation.

The National Base Curriculum of Guatemala focuses on students' all-around development, but due to poverty, geography, and gender desperation, this is not happening. Health and physical education are integrated into the core curriculum. Skills education is also integrated as part of Productivity for development but still needs more emphasis. Hobby development and life skills education, moral, social and cultural education, and peace and happiness education are not part of the curriculum, are not compulsory, and are not credit programmes.

A study conducted by USAID (2019) has revealed that Guatemala's education system is lagging far behind its regional peers due to starting from a very low base across education indicators. Despite some progress in recent years, the system has stalled, with primary enrollment and survival rates dropping while the secondary and tertiary schooling population has declined. Compared to other countries in Central America, the average adult educational attainment in Guatemala is also significantly lower. The primary reasons for these shortcomings are the inadequate allocation of education spending and the lack of effectiveness in utilising the available resources. Therefore, the first step towards improving the education system in Guatemala is to increase the resources

allocated to education and to enhance the effectiveness and reach of those resources. (USAID, 2019, Pp. 29-30).

One of the unique features of Guatemalan school education is bilingual education – education provided in Spanish and through Indigenous languages like K'iche', Q'eqchi', and Mam in regions with high indigenous populations. This also helps preserve indigenous language and culture, which Guatemalans are proud of. Furthermore, the curriculum includes elements of indigenous culture, history, and traditions, providing students with a more inclusive education. Community involvement in managing schools is significant, giving a sense of ownership. Rural schools follow a flexible schedule to respond to the challenges of students' need to help their families during peak farming seasons**.** Despite many challenges, such as poor resources, large-scale poverty, and significant school dropouts, Guatemala introduces innovative programmes like digital resources in collaboration with NGOs for quality improvement.

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In most countries, health and physical education are compulsory and popular among students, but are not credit programmes. With little attention and emphasis, health education remains the weaker cousin of physical education. Students dedicate significant effort and time to academic subjects, often neglecting physical and health education, as most countries adhere to examination-centred education. The performance report should include a credit programme to support students' overall development.

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Towards Universalisation of Education Through Challenges: Haiti

Rama Gupta

Abstract

This chapter deals with educational reforms in Haiti, which is still struggling to recover from the natural disaster of 2010 that destroyed 4000 schools and many higher education institutions. Haiti has achieved universal enrolment in the first grade of primary school and improved access to education in recent years. However, the education system faces significant challenges, with about 10% of students leaving before completing Grade 6 and 40% before finishing Grade 9. By the end of 2022, only 73% of schools had reopened. Factors contributing to this dropout rate include political instability, security risks, teacher qualifications, high absenteeism, and a language barrier, as Creole often predominates over French at home. Haiti lacks a solid and independent policy-making body, and the government's efforts have been inadequate in ensuring the right to education for all citizens. Most schools are privately owned, making costs unaffordable for the majority. As the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti's education system urgently needs support to rebuild it.

Keywords: Bernard Reform, National Plan on Education and Training, Reforms, Curriculum, Challenges, PAGENF, PDEF, Community

Introduction

Haiti, a small Caribbean nation covering 27,750 km^2, is located on Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. Positioned east of Cuba and Jamaica, south of the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands, Haiti occupies the western third of Hispaniola in the Greater Antilles archipelago (Lawless et al., 2024). Haiti has a coastline of 1,771 km and is divided into three regions: northern, central, and southern. The terrain is characterised by rugged mountains, small coastal plains, river

valleys, and a prominent elevated plateau in the east-central area (Library of Congress, 2010). Haiti is divided into ten departments, which are 42 arrondissements, 145 communes, and 571 communal sections (Fandom, n.d.). Haiti is among the world's most vulnerable nations to natural hazards, with 96% of its population exposed to risks such as hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. This high vulnerability is exacerbated by poverty and inadequate infrastructure (The World Bank, 2024).

As of January 2024, the population of Haiti is 11.87 million, with a growth rate of 1.2% (Macrotrends. The female population accounts for 50.5%, while the male population accounts for 49.5%. Most of the population, 59.1%, is in urban centres, while the remaining 40.9% reside in rural areas (Kemp, 2023). Haiti ranks 81 on the list of countries (and dependencies) by population. It has a high population density, with 425 people per sq. km (Worldometer, 2023). Haiti mainly comprises Afro-Haitians, making up around 85% of the population. Within Black Haitian DNA, the composition is roughly 95% African and 5% European or mixed European (DBpedia, n.d.). Additionally, there are also Mulattoes, Europeans, Asians, and Arabs present in the remaining population of Haiti (Dreame, n.d.). Haitians have no official religion according to their constitution. More than half of the population practices Roman Catholicism, while approximately one-fourth are Protestant or independent Christians. Haiti has two official languages, French and Haitian Creole. Creole is commonly used in everyday communication, while French is typically reserved for more formal situations. However, written Creole is not widely accepted due to the education system's emphasis on French as the primary language of instruction (Lawless et al., 2024). In Haiti, life expectancy at birth was 64.1 years as of 2019 (WHO, 2024).

Haiti's economic and social progress is severely impacted by political instability, escalating violence, and unprecedented insecurity. It remains the poorest nation in Latin America and the Caribbean and ranks among the world's poorest countries (The World Bank, 2024). Haiti primarily exports essential oils, apparel, coffee, cocoa, bitter oranges, and mangoes, with the mining sector remaining largely underdeveloped (Sawe, 2019). Haiti's current GDP is $24.05 billion, with a negative growth rate of 3% and a GDP per capita of $1,940 (IMF, 2024). In 2022, Haiti's unemployment rate was 14.78% (Macrotrends, 2024). The World Happiness Report 2023 did not include Haiti among the 137 countries assessed (Helliwell et al., 2023). Haiti ranked 158 out of 193 countries on the UN's Human Development Index, with an HDI value of 0.552 (UNDP, 2023).

The Haiti educational system is ranked 177th out of 186 participating countries in terms of national spending on education (University of the People, 2022). Haiti had a literacy rate of 61.69% in 2016, with males at 65.28% and females at 58.3% (countryeconomy.com, n.d.). Haiti's primary school enrollment rate is 57%, and only a small fraction of those students (less than 30%) make it to sixth grade. According to the World Bank, a significant number of Haitian children (more than 200000) are unable to attend school due to the long distances they must travel to reach the nearest school, a

shortage of experienced teachers, and the high cost of school uniforms and supplies, which many families cannot afford (Hope for Haiti, 2017). Haiti has 15,200 primary schools, and 90% are private schools managed by communities, religious organisations, or NGOs (USAID, 2007). The NER of primary school was 88% in 2011(USAID, 2015). There are about 2,190 secondary schools in Haiti, with three-quarters of private institutions lacking certification from the Ministry of National Education. This allows anyone to establish a school, enrol students, and hire teachers without adhering to minimum standards (Wolff, 2008).

Educational Policy

The education sector in Haiti is overseen by the Ministry of National Education (MENFP), which is mandated by the constitution to ensure the right to education. Articles 32-1 and 32-3 state that the government is responsible for providing free and universal primary education, including classroom facilities and materials. Additionally, the 1987 Constitution includes Article 22, affirming every citizen's right to decent housing, education, food, and social security (Republic of Haiti, 2011).

Despite the significant shortcomings of the education sector in Haiti, many leaders have made a concerted effort to improve education throughout the country. In recent years, three major education reform initiatives have been undertaken: the Bernard Reform of 1978, the National Plan on Education and Training (NPET) of 1997, and the Presidential Commission for Education in Haiti of 2008 (Haiti Now, n.d.). Following the devastating earthquake that struck the country in 2010, Haiti partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank to prioritise the return of children to school. The IDB funded the construction of nearly 600 classrooms on the grounds of schools damaged by the earthquake. These lightweight yet sturdy structures have enabled tens of thousands of students to return to school under safer conditions (IDB, 2010).

The Bernard Reform of 1978 aimed to modernise Haiti's education system, improve efficiency, and align it with labour market demands despite economic constraints. It introduced vocational training as an alternative to traditional education and restructured secondary education into academic and technical tracks (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010; Carlson et al., 2011). The reform also made Creole the language of instruction in the first four grades of primary school, addressing the discrimination against lower socio-economic classes caused by the exclusive use of French. However, the reform faced challenges, including delays in curriculum implementation and inadequate resources and infrastructure to support the proposed changes. Additionally, many parents preferred their children to attend universities, viewing technical schools as low-prestige institutions, leading to a lack of sufficient jobs for liberal arts graduates (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010).

In 1979, a program was launched with World Bank support to establish Creole as Haiti's primary language of instruction. One thousand students participated, with all subjects taught in Creole during the first four years, transitioning to French in the fifth year. However, the program was cancelled in 1982 due to significant challenges, including the failure to make Creole the initial language of instruction, delays in curriculum implementation, and insufficient resources and infrastructure to support the changes (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010).

Education reforms in Haiti were consolidated into a five-year plan from 2010 to 2015. Schools were required to report student and staff numbers to receive funding for facility upgrades and educational materials. To maintain certification, schools had to meet standards, such as adopting a national curriculum, providing teacher training, and improving facilities. This mechanism aimed to establish accountability and quality control in the education system (Carlson et al., 2011).

The plan seeks to reduce waste and enhance efficiency in the education system by eliminating low-quality schools, consolidating others, and ultimately improving the overall quality of education in Haiti (IDB, 2010; Carlson et al., 2011).

The Ministry also mobilised physical and financial resources at the national and international levels. Through the Education for All program, the country received subsidies, training, institutional strengthening, and hot meals for children. The World Bank and Caribbean Development Bank supported Haiti's "Tuition Waiver Program," launched in 2007 for children aged 6 to 8. Schools meeting specific conditions, such as having a government permit, receive $90 per student annually (The World Bank, 2019).

In 2023, the Ministry of National Education in Haiti launched a 'Project to improve the governance of the sub-non-formal education system (PAGENF)'. This project aimed to provide non-formal education to those who have never been to school or have dropped out for various reasons in collaboration with partners for non-formal education. The Ten-Year Education and Training Plan (PDEF) 2020-2030 emphasises non-formal education through two sub-programs: education for out-of-school children and adult literacy. It encourages the school community to commit to adult literacy, particularly for young girls, while ensuring quality education for children in the formal system to prevent dropouts and support those outside it with alternative education strategies (HL, 2023). The Ten-Year Education and Training Plan (PDEF) 2020-2030 aims to enhance the internal and external efficiency of Haiti's education system to meet the country's socio-economic development needs better and contribute to its sustainable and inclusive growth, ultimately transforming the education system (Jacob & Mathurin, 2023).

Education for All in Haiti (2019) reports that in phase II of EFA, "a Quality Assurance System was developed by MENFP between 2016 and 2018, with technical assistance provided by the project,

to establish school profiles based on agreed quality standards. This system laid the foundation of a framework to monitor the quality of service delivery at the school level" (World Bank Group, 2019). The priorities of the Ten-Year Plan are divided into three workstreams composed of priority programs and sub-programs, which will be implemented throughout the coming decade. The three axes are (i) Axis I: Governance, (ii) Axis II: Quality and Relevance, and (iii) Axis III: Access and Equity (UNESCO-IBE, 2023).

Structure of the Education System

Haiti's educational system follows the French model, starting with preschool and ending with nine years of Fundamental Education, divided into three cycles. Primary education is mandatory for children aged 6 to 11, and secondary education lasts seven years. Students can pursue vocational training programs from the second cycle of Fundamental Education (Figure 45.1) (World Education Network, n.d.).

Preschool Education

Preschool in Haiti is officially recognised for children aged 3 to 5, but it is not mandatory. Most preschools are located within elementary schools, and most are privately operated.

Elementary Education

Elementary education in Haiti is mandatory for children aged 6 to 11 and is structured into three cycles of three years each, known as "fundamental education." The third cycle can be completed in either elementary or secondary school. Upon finishing six years of primary education, students receive a primary education certificate, allowing them to enter secondary education.

Secondary Education

Secondary education in Haiti is four years, divided into a three-year lower cycle and a fourth-year upper cycle. Students can specialise in humanities, science, or both during the lower cycle. The upper cycle focuses on classics and arts, culminating in the baccalaureate upon completion. Additionally, students can pursue vocational training starting in the second cycle of Fundamental Education. The final grade of secondary school is referred to as 'Philo'.

Less than 22% of children in Haiti transition from elementary to secondary education, with 75% of those attending private schools. Of the approximately 2,190 secondary schools, 90.5% are private, and 78% are in urban areas. The West Department hosts about half of all schools, highlighting a

significant disparity between this region and others. Additionally, tuition costs have risen sharply over the past decade (Suzata, 2011).

Vocational training in Haiti is offered at various levels between the latter half of secondary school (10 years of education) and the initial years of university (13 years). Students can opt for vocational training starting in the second cycle of fundamental education rather than continuing the formal education path. After completing basic education, students in Haiti can pursue four years of vocational training, earning the 'Diplôme professionnel (1er cycle)' upon graduation. Following the third cycle of basic education, they may also opt for an additional four years of vocational training II, resulting in the 'Diplôme professionnel (2e cycle)'. Students who complete general secondary education can engage in four years of technical education, leading to the 'Diplôme professionnel et technique', or they can undergo one to five years of teacher training, culminating in the 'Diplôme d'instituteur'. These pathways equip students with essential skills for their future careers (UNESCO, 2022).

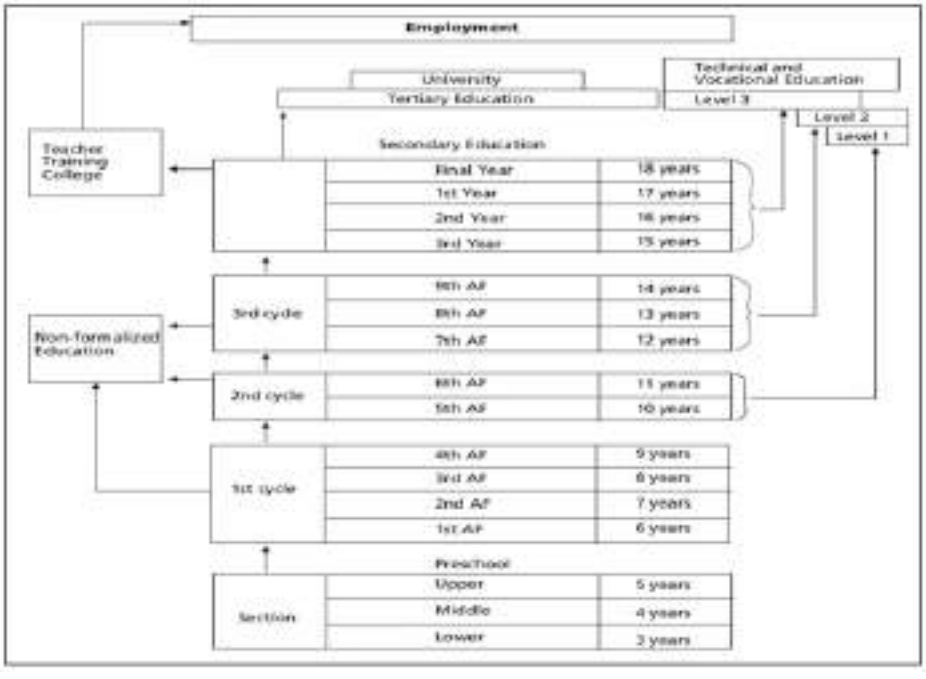

Figure 45.1 Structure of the Education System in Haiti

Source: *Haiti Now, n.d.*

Curricular Framework

The Haitian Ministry of National Education and Professional Development (MENFP) has prioritised curriculum reform as part of a large-scale educational transformation initiated in 2022,

with support from UNESCO-IBE and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Following an initial phase focused on identifying challenges and building capacity, MENFP is ready to implement a comprehensive Roadmap for curriculum transformation, developed collaboratively with all stakeholders involved (Alama et al., 2024)

In 2023, the Curriculum Orientation Framework (COF) was finalised. It offers a detailed picture of a coherent and relevant curriculum, incorporating local and endogenous knowledge while aligning with global educational trends. It clarifies for all actors of the system the competencies that learners should develop and the knowledge to acquire, as well as the pedagogical orientations and practices teachers should implement in their classrooms at all levels of learning. Rooted in Haiti's reality and future vision, the COF is a robust guide for the transformative journey ahead (Alama et al., 2024)

In traditional primary schools, students learn French grammar, arithmetic, world history, geography, Haitian history, religion, civic instruction, introductory sciences, drawing, and physical education. In rural schools, instruction is conducted in Creole, focusing on essential reading, writing, and arithmetic, with additional subjects included based on available staff (State University, n.d.).

Secondary school subjects include French grammar, French literature, Haitian literature, English, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Algebra, Geometry, Human Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Zoology, Botany, World History, Haitian History, World Geography, and Haitian Geography. An additional year after the first part of the baccalauréat provides instruction in philosophy (State University, n.d.).

Haiti recognises Kreyòl and French as its official languages, with French being the primary language used in formal government and private-sector communications. However, primary school instruction is conducted in Kreyòl, although the transition to French as the language of instruction is unclear. National examinations are administered in French, despite most Haitian families speaking Kreyòl. Significant inconsistencies exist in the language of instruction based on region, educational level, and subject matter (Wolff, 2008)

Economically disadvantaged students face further challenges in school, as classes are taught in French, spoken by only 20-40% of the population, predominantly the affluent. This linguistic barrier puts poor children at a significant disadvantage, as they often lack the French proficiency required to complete their education successfully (IJDH, 2011).

Teaching Learning

The National Plan on Education and Training (NPET) implemented in 1997 in Haiti marked an important shift in the country's educational system. This plan aimed to move away from the highly

centralised French educational model, characterised by a teacher-centred approach and passive student learning. Instead, the NPET adopted a new model of participatory learning that emphasises student-centred approaches (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010).

UNICEF's efforts to enhance teaching and learning quality include promoting, developing and implementing a play-based curriculum for early childhood education. This model supports young children's learning processes, strengthens reading and writing skills, creates quality learning environments in the first four years of basic education, improves the pedagogical competencies of teachers and inspectors, and facilitates teacher certification (UNICEF, n.d.).

"Since 2010, USAID has provided more than 60,000 children and 2,000 teachers with innovative reading curricula that meet international standards for literacy instruction and trained teachers and administrators on how to implement the curricula for Haitian Creole and French speakers. These critical resources were specifically designed for Haiti to address best unique challenges in the country's education system" (USAID, 2020, p. 2).

Learning Assessment

National testing is utilised for learning assessments in Haiti, but the education system lacks regulation, oversight, and monitoring. The national exams are costly and challenging, often requiring students to retake them multiple times. The government primarily relies on annual national exam testing to monitor public school standards.

The Ministry of Education conducts annual national testing in all recognised public and private institutions for students completing sixth, ninth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. The tests resemble those given in France four decades ago and those currently used in francophone African countries (Wolff, 2008).

Students undergo three trimestral exams each year, along with finals in July. The grading system is strict, requiring an average of 5 points to pass. Additionally, schools must be equipped with technology (State University, n.d.). On completion of grades 1-6, children must pass national exams to prove their proficiency in all subjects. "The third cycle of Fundamental Education consists of 7th-9th grades. After completing grade nine, students must pass a stringent national exam to earn a certificate of completion and advance to the next level of education. This exam is another major milestone in a Haitian student's education, but often not without struggle" (Anderson, 2018).

After completing primary and secondary education in Haiti, students must pass a state exam to demonstrate their proficiency in the curriculum. The "Certificat" is taken after primary education and lasts three days. It covers Mathematics, French, Creole, Geography, History, and Experimental Sciences. This exam determines a student's readiness for secondary education (Architecture for Humanity, 2011).

Three state exams are required during secondary education. The "Brevet," taken after the ninth grade, spans three to four days and assesses French, Creole, Experimental Sciences, Social Sciences, English or Spanish, and Mathematics students. Success in this exam allows students to continue into higher secondary classes, either in section C (science) or section B (literature) (Architecture for Humanity, 2011).

After the eleventh grade, known as Rétho, students take the "Baccalauréat 1," which reviews material from previous years and prepares them for the "Baccalauréat 2." This final exam, taken at the end of the twelfth grade (Philo), includes subjects like Mathematics or Physics, Biology or Chemistry, English, Spanish, and Philosophy. Students can choose to take each exam in either French or Creole, depending on their comfort level. Those who excel in these exams can pursue further education at universities, professional schools, or vocational institutions (Architecture for Humanity, 2011).

Health and Physical Education

Haiti has one of the highest rates of childhood undernutrition globally, which severely impacts children's overall health and educational outcomes. The country's healthcare system suffers from the lowest health indicators in the Western Hemisphere, with high maternal and under-five mortality rates and a significant prevalence of communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension and heart disease (The Global Goals, 2021), which recognised the emergency of health education. However, health education through school education is not the part. The Global Goals (2021) further stated that school settings are recognised as effective venues for health education and interventions, particularly in areas like water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Integrating health education into the school curriculum can improve attendance and promote healthier lifestyles among students.

Physical education is a compulsory subject in Haiti's education system, but the mandate is not enforced beyond basic academic instruction due to limited funding and insufficient space at public schools. Only a few elite private schools have PE classes, sports fields, and equipped teams, resulting in a decline in the number of high-calibre athletes who can compete at national and international levels. Interscholastic competition is almost non-existent in public schools and only minimally present in private schools (Our Mission, n.d.). In a new Curricular Orientation

Framework (COF-2021), stress is given to health and physical education for the all-round development of children of Haiti.

Skills Education

For sustainable and inclusive development, Haiti adopted a new Curricular Orientation Framework (COC), validated in February 2021, which outlines an education system for all. It orients curricula towards a new paradigm based on socio-constructivism and the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), introducing the knowledge, skills and values required for Haiti's children to be equipped to face their country's challenges (UNESCO-IBE, 2023).

Minister of Education of Haiti said, "Unfortunately, what should have been an asset has turned into a demographic bomb, not because the country is overpopulated, but because there are not enough jobs and qualified workers with skills needed for the reality of the 21st century" (Manigat, 2024). More than 80% of schools in Haiti are managed by private entities such as communities, religious organisations, and non-governmental organisations, and they do not obtain any financial assistance from the government. Unfortunately, due to insufficient infrastructure and resources, these schools struggle to provide quality education, leading to higher rates of illiteracy and school dropouts. Furthermore, child labour is prevalent in Haiti. Most Haitians have limited experience with and access to computers; however, for Haiti to move forward, offices and businesses must begin utilising modern technology (PHL, n.d.).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

The education curriculum in Haiti lacks a specific subject or course dedicated to hobby development and life skills education. While art education is a compulsory subject within the school education curriculum, students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face poverty and limited access to quality education, making the pursuit of hobbies and skill development a luxury that many cannot afford. As a result, students cannot explore their interests and passions outside their academic studies, negatively impacting their personal growth and development. This highlights the need for more comprehensive education that includes opportunities for hobby development and life skills education, particularly for students who face financial barriers.

Organisations like Life Skills Haiti focus on providing essential training and resources to young people, particularly in rural areas. Their mission emphasises the importance of education and skills training to help individuals secure sustainable employment and improve their quality of life. They offer technical and vocational training scholarships, enabling youth to make informed life choices

and contribute positively to their communities. They offer community engagement and holistic development (Life Skills Haiti, 2020).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The National Plan on Education and Training (NPET) introduced in 1997 aimed to establish a new paradigm of citizenship education, fostering civic knowledge and attitudes among students. This approach sought to promote unity and appreciation of diversity within Haitian society, laying the groundwork for an inclusive national identity. The NPET represented a significant advancement in making the Haitian education system more inclusive and participatory, emphasising education's role in social inclusion and equality and setting the stage for future reforms (Luzincourt & Gulbrandson, 2010). Several schools in Haiti are adopting a holistic approach because students come from families with minimal resources; simply providing access to free education is not enough.

Organisations like Action Education provide social education in Haiti and are focused on building community awareness and engagement. Initiatives such as the Lekòl Chimen Libète project aim to transform schools into centres for social change, addressing issues such as access to education and community involvement. This project has been instrumental in supporting rural schools, providing psychosocial support, and training local facilitators to enhance community participation in education (Action Education, 2022). Cultural education in Haiti is vital for preserving and promoting the nation's rich heritage. Using Haitian Creole as the medium of instruction is a significant step towards enhancing cultural identity and inclusivity in education. However, the educational system remains heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors, often leaving marginalised communities at a disadvantage (Scholaro database, n.d.).

Peace and Happiness Education

Haiti's school curriculum currently lacks a specific peace and happiness education course. In 2020, the country approved the Ten-Year Education and Training Plan (PDEF) for 2020-2030, which aims to enhance the education system's internal and external efficiency to better address socio-economic development needs while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth. This plan seeks to transform the Haitian education system (UNESCO-IBE, 2023).

Haiti has made 'citizenship education', 'sports', and 'arts' compulsory subjects from preschool through secondary school to enhance values of peace, discipline, and solidarity among students (Manigat, 2024). Education is crucial for alleviating Haiti's social, economic, and political challenges. The Country Office Annual Report 2022 identifies Haiti as the 11th most fragile country

globally, facing worsening political instability, rising gang violence, deep-rooted multidimensional poverty, and high vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change, all of which impede progress toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (UNICEF, 2022).

UNICEF supports the Ministry for Education in emergencies and promotes emergency preparedness, including developing contingency plans and disaster risk reduction in the university curriculum for teaching professions (UNICEF, n.d.). Peace Education is also suggested to help reduce, resolve, and prevent conflict.

Summary and Conclusion

In 2024, Haiti's population will be approximately 11.9 million, with 60% residing in urban areas and slums lacking adequate public services. The country faces a deteriorating security situation with a police force of less than 10,000 officers and no active armed forces. Despite a rise in net enrollment to 90% over the past 25 years, more than 30% of students drop out before completing primary school, and only 10% finish secondary education (Manigat, 2024).

According to the 2019 national sector analysis, Haiti’s dropout rate is alarming. About 10% of students leave before completing Grade 6 and 40% before finishing Grade 9. By the end of 2022, only 73% of schools had reopened. Factors contributing to this dropout rate include political instability, security risks, teacher qualifications, high absenteeism, and a language barrier, as Creole often predominates over French at home.

Despite these challenges, some education indicators in Haiti are promising, with nearly universal enrollment in the first grade of primary school and improved access to education in recent years. The government should adopt a comprehensive strategy for the education system, focusing on developing public education to ensure access for children, particularly since many people live below the poverty line.

Many factors impact a student’s ability to learn. A holistic approach is essential for students' learning, development, and growth. To fully meet students' needs, the approach involves the social-emotional, health, and educational needs that impact a child’s ability to become successful. Peace education should be an essential component of the curriculum in Haiti as it can help solve conflicts.

UNICEF assists the Ministry of National Education and Professional Training (MENFP) by providing direct services such as school construction, school kits, cash transfers to vulnerable families and teachers, psychosocial support, and integrating disaster risk reduction into school curriculums. Education will continue to be a primary focus for UNICEF in 2023 and beyond.

Innovative approaches are needed to enhance education, including curriculum reform, teacher training programs, youth camps, sports and recreation activities, youth groups, community leader training, parent workshops, media training, travelling theatre and puppet shows, television and radio programs, public relations campaigns, contests, and exhibitions.

Haiti lacks a strong and independent policy-making body. While some responsibility has been decentralised to the country's ten geographic regions, school district offices, and inspection zones, neither decentralisation nor community engagement is present in daily school operations, as authorities believe it fosters social polarisation.

The Haitian government's efforts have been inadequate in ensuring the right to education for all citizens. Most schools are privately owned and charge tuition fees, making it difficult for families to afford education due to additional costs like transport, books, and uniforms. As the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti's education system urgently needs support to improve access for its children. The quality of education was poor due to economic constraints, as public schools were overcrowded, there was a lack of essential educational facilities, such as libraries and laboratories, and they relied on outdated textbooks. Inadequately trained teachers, lack of materials or curricula.

Jacob and Mathurin (2023), in the study, rightly mentioned that the more the Ministry persists in implementing the projects (reforms) without engaging in its transformation, the more its internal weaknesses put severe hardship on its meagre capacities in this area and open gaps that lead to the perversion of its operation and threaten it as an organisation dedicated to a specific mission of great collective interest; because none of the reform plans could be implemented, and the educational services offered remain very questionable not only in terms of their results but also in terms of the needs and aspirations of the various social groups and individuals to make themselves capable of contributing to the formation of this human community. Is the future predictable? While it is true that today, Haitian education is experiencing an unprecedented impasse, it must be recognised that it will not be possible to remedy it without a major recovery in its governance structure, the Ministry of Education.

Haitian education is a story of dreams, a strong desire for education, and formidable barriers, primarily due to poor economic conditions. Approximately 90 per cent of schools are privately run by for-profit organisations, NGOs and religious institutions. The tuition fees charged by private institutions are prohibitive for a very large number of families. Hence, access to education is restricted. The economic condition, around 78% of the population, means that they live on less than $2 a day, which also challenges school continuity. Adult literacy rate is one of the lowest, and so is the school completion – less than 50% complete primary and 20% secondary education. Poor school

facilities add to the woes. The lack of resources severely hampers the quality of education. A conflict of language affects performance – the home language is Haitian Creole, and the official medium of instruction is French. This duality affects students' performance in learning assessments. Nonetheless, with all these mountainous challenges, Haiti has made several innovations, like blended learning models that combine digital tools with traditional face-to-face instruction, to enhance the educational experience and improve learning outcomes.

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Quality Schooling through Teacher Quality and Curricular Reform: Mexico

Mrityunjoy Kaibarta

Abstract

This chapter deals with educational reforms in Mexico. The Mexican Revolution of 1917 recognised education as a fundamental right, mandating free, secular, and compulsory education. In the mid-20th century, efforts were made to promote national unity and social justice. The education system in Mexico consists of Basic Education, Upper Secondary Education, and Higher Education. Basic education includes preschool, primary education, and lower secondary education, while upper secondary education offers general academic, technological, vocational and technical education. The Mexican Federation's quality assurance system is complex due to numerous education providers. Mexico's education system focuses on personal and social development, including art, music, physical education, and soft skills like communication and teamwork. It also emphasises trade-based skills, art education, and soft skill development, creating a supportive and inclusive environment for students' well-being. The Mexican secondary school system blends traditional and modern teaching methods based on fourteen pedagogical principles.

Keywords: Educational Reforms, Curriculum, Quality Assurance System, Basic Education, trade-based skills

Introduction

"The United Mexican States, commonly known as Mexico, is a federal republic in North America" (Government of Mexico, n.d.)[3]. Britannica classified Mexico under Central and North America, along with Belize and Costa Rica. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras. Nicaragua and Panama (Britannica, 2017). The only commonality between Mexico and other Latin American countries is

[3] https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/indonesia/index.php/en/about-mexico

its colonial past. The Mexican Republic shares borders with the United States (3,152 km) to the north, Guatemala (956 km), and Belize (193 km) to the south[4].

Mexico has a land area of 1,972,550 square kilometres. It has a diverse topography comprising deserts, mountains, forests, and coastlines along the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Mexico has always been a top choice for travellers worldwide due to its captivating history, breathtaking scenery, and welcoming culture. The country is highly regarded for its magnificent mountain ranges, such as the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre Oriental, providing numerous opportunities for hiking, mountaineering, and discovering new territories (Cline et al., 2024). Mexico comprises 32 states, with Mexico City serving as its capital.

With a population of 126,014,024 (INEGI, 2021), Mexico is the world's 10th most populous country and has a gender ratio of 95.2 males per 100 females. The population growth rate of Mexico is 0.6%. The life expectancy at birth is 75.0. The ethnic composition of the Mexican population is about 62% Mestizo (Amerindian-Spanish), predominantly Amerindian 21%, Amerindian 7%, and other 10% (primarily European) (2012 est. indexmundi, 2021). Spanish is the official national language and the language of instruction in schools. Mexico has the highest population of Spanish-speaking people in the entire world.

Many public and private schools offer instruction in English as a second language. There is no official religion in Mexico, though more than four-fifths of the population are at least nominally affiliated with Roman Catholics. The Mexican people are a blend of various ethnic groups, including indigenous peoples, mestizos (those of mixed European and indigenous ancestry), and people of European, African, and Asian descent (Cline et al., 2024).

Mexico's economy is the 15th largest in the world, largely due to its abundant natural resources, such as oil and gas. According to The World Bank (n.d.), its GDP is USD1.811 trillion (nominal; 2023), and GDP per capita was USD 10,045.7 in 2021. Mexico's HDI in 2021 was 0.758, ranking 86. Mexico's manufacturing sector is highly developed, with a strong presence in the automotive, electronics, and aerospace industries. The country is also a leading producer and exporter of silver globally, and its tourism industry attracts millions of visitors annually. However, despite its economic growth, Mexico still grapples with issues like poverty, inequality, and corruption. Although there has been progress in expanding access to education in recent years, significant disparities in educational attainment persist between different regions and socioeconomic groups. Mexico ranks 136th on the Peace Index and 25th on the Happiness Index.

[4] https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/memo/knowledge-dissemination/country-reports/MEMO_Background_country_report_Mexico.pdf

Mexico has implemented significant measures to enhance educational opportunities for its populace. Children aged 6 to 18 have been required to attend school, and preschool education has been mandatory since 2004. Adult literacy programs have also been vigorously promoted since the 1970s, in addition to expanding the number of schools for children (*Mexico - Health and Welfare*, n.d.). The federal government is responsible for financing public schools in Mexico. Nearly 75% of primary public schools are situated in rural areas, and these schools are often the most impoverished and unable to provide complete primary education. Private secondary schools are considered superior to public ones, and families who can afford them prefer such institutions. Universities are limited to large cities, with over 50 universities in the country, one-fifth located in Mexico City, where many university students study. The primary education gross enrolment rate (GER) in Mexico is 102%, while the net enrolment rate (NER) is 99.66% as of 2022 (UIS-UNESCO, n. d.). Mexico has a complex education system, with over 26 million students in basic education. The governance arrangements are intricate, with over 225000 schools (OECD, 2019, p. 17). In the academic year 2020-2021, there were nearly 568,900 teachers in elementary schools across Mexico (Statista, 2023).

Educational Policy

Throughout its history, Mexico has undergone numerous educational reforms. During the colonial period, education was dominated by the Catholic Church, which focused on teaching indigenous populations about Christian doctrines and assimilating them into Spanish culture. Access to education was limited and mostly available to the privileged classes and clergy. After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico began implementing reforms to create a more inclusive education system. However, political instability and frequent changes in government hindered these early efforts.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Porfirio Díaz's regime sought to modernise the education system in Mexico. However, education was limited to a small portion of the population, and rural areas had little access to formal schooling. The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, placed education at the forefront of its agenda, emphasising access to education for all Mexicans. In 1917, the Mexican Constitution recognised education as a fundamental right and mandated that the state provide free, secular, and compulsory education (Gill, 1969, p.16).

The Ministry of Public Education was established in 1921 following the revolution to oversee education policies. The government aimed to standardise the education system, create a national curriculum, and train teachers. The government also worked to increase access to education, particularly in rural areas, and to promote indigenous education. In the 1940s and 1950s, the government implemented educational reforms inspired by the philosophy of Mexican educator José Vasconcelos. These reforms aimed to promote national unity, social justice, and cultural identity.

Indigenous languages and cultures were recognised and integrated into the curriculum, promoting bilingual education in some regions (Gill, 1969, p. 30).

During the late 20th century, Mexico faced the challenge of improving education quality and reducing disparities. The government introduced reforms to enhance teacher training, update curricula, and modernise infrastructure to achieve this. The National Commission of Free Textbooks (CONALITEG) was founded in 1959. Since then, Mexico has been using the same textbooks for all schools. During Felipe Calderón's presidency, a curricular reform that adopted the centrality of competencies was approved. In February 2012, a constitutional reform was passed by Congress, which made secondary education compulsory, extending compulsory education in Mexico to 15 years. With the change of administration in 2012, Mexican education policy entered a new phase, focusing on developing curriculum activities. This series of reforms was suddenly interrupted when Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador took office in 2018. The political change was so profound that a new constitutional reform was required, and the new agenda focused on the Federal Strategy of Inclusive Education (Olmeda & Sifuentes, 2021, Abstract).

Mexico has undergone two educational reforms in the 21st century, one led by Enrique Peña Nieto in 2012 and the other by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in 2018 (Beck, 2020). AMLO, while serving as the President of Mexico, implemented diverse measures in the education sector. These measures focus on enhancing access, quality, and equity in the national education system (Pedraza, 2023, Para 1).

Education is compulsory and free for all children between 3 and 18. This includes preschool, primary, and secondary education. Mexico's education policy emphasises the importance of inclusive education, aiming to provide equal opportunities and access to education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, or disabilities. The SEP establishes the national curriculum for basic education, which outlines the core subjects and learning objectives. The curriculum aims to promote the development of competencies in various areas, including language, mathematics, science, social sciences, arts, and physical education. The Mexican government has implemented initiatives to improve teacher training and professional development. These initiatives aim to enhance teaching quality and ensure educators have the necessary skills to provide high-quality education.

Structure of the Education System

The education system in Mexico is divided into three levels: Basic Education (Educación Basica), Upper Secondary Education (Educación Média Superior**)** and Higher Education (Educación Superior. Basic education in Mexico is compulsory, and it comprises preschool (educación preescolar) (ages 3 to 5), primary education (educación primaria) (ages 6 to 11) and lower secondary education (educación secundaria) (ages 12 to 14). Upper secondary education

(ages 15 to 17) comprises grades 10 to 12 in three tracks: General academic (Bachillerato General), Technological education (Bachillerato Tecnológico), and Vocational and technical education (Profesional Técnico) (Figure 46.1. Students can choose any one track. Higher education comprises post-secondary/associate/diploma (Técnico Superior), Undergraduate and first professional degrees (Licenciatura) and Graduate/postgraduate education (Postgrado) (Scholaro database, n. d.).

Three types of preschools exist in Mexico: general, indigenous and community preschools. Most children (88.1%) are enrolled in the general preschool programme in urban and rural areas (OECD, 2006). Basic education focuses on providing a solid foundation of knowledge and skills. Upper secondary education includes three years (grades 10 to 12) and is not compulsory. It includes different types of schools, such as general high schools (bachillerato general), technical high schools (bachillerato técnico), and vocational schools (escuelas de educación técnica). Higher education in Mexico consists of universities and other higher education institutions. Students who complete upper secondary education can pursue tertiary education at universities, technological institutes, or other higher education institutions. Some universities are public, while others are private.

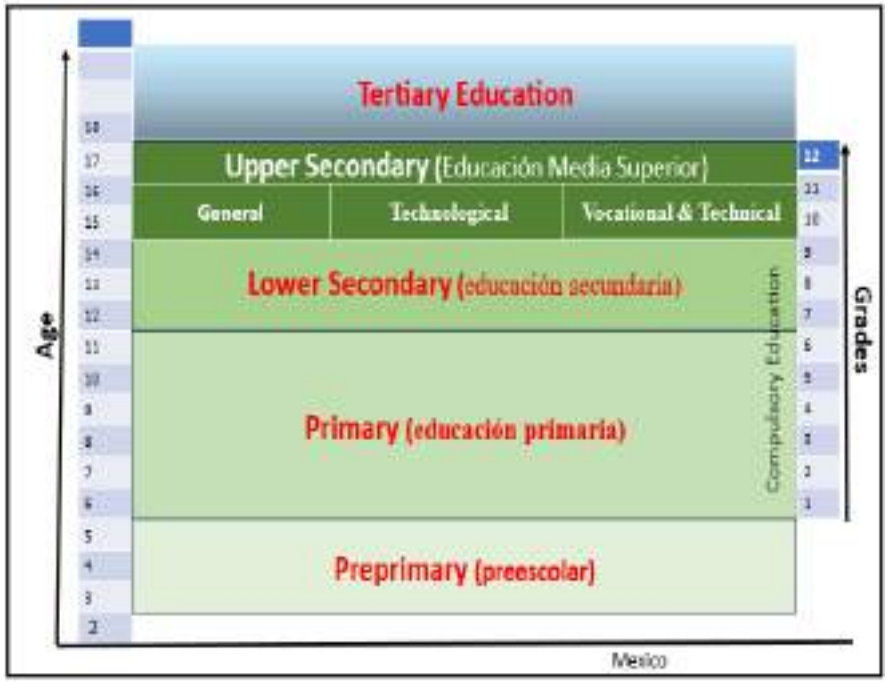

Figure 46.1 Structure of the Education System in Mexico

Source: *Author (data from Scholaro database, n.d.)*

Curricular Framework

The responsibility of administering the Mexican education system is shared between the national Ministry of Education, Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP), and the 32 state-level jurisdictions. In addition, autonomous higher education institutions (HEIs), such as the National Autonomous University of Mexico, have an important oversight role (Monroy & Trines, 2019). The Mexican Federation's quality assurance system is highly complex due to the numerous providers that coexist within and between states, regions, and urban and rural areas. Different quality standards, academic calendars, and regulations exist as a result. Although the federal government has tried to standardise upper-secondary school curricula nationwide, there is still significant variation between states and institutions. Both state and federal governments prescribe elementary and lower secondary education curricula.

The curricular frameworks in Mexico are organised by three educational levels: Basic Education (Educación Básica), Upper Secondary Education (Educación Media Superior), and higher education (Educación Superior). The following is a general overview of each level's curricular framework, including the goals, core subjects, and optional subjects.

Basic Education (Educación Básica)

The Basic Education level in Mexico is further subdivided into Preschool Education (Educación Preescolar), Primary Education (Educación Primaria), and Lower Secondary Education (Educación Secundaria).

The General Directorate of Curriculum Development is a unit of the Under-secretariat for Basic Education responsible for planning, designing, preparing, and keeping the basic education curriculum updated, making it available to educators and society. Its Mission is to establish a relevant, flexible, viable and constantly updated basic education curriculum that allows the development of basic skills to exercise responsible citizenship and continuous learning throughout life (IQAS, 2021, p. 13). The curricular map of basic education specifies four fields: language and communication, mathematical thinking, exploration and understanding of the natural and social world, and personal and social development (Scott et al., 2018).

a) Preschool Education (Ages 3-5) in Mexico focuses on the comprehensive development of children. In 2004, a new curriculum for preschool was formulated – Programa de Educación Preescolar 2004. Six areas of development were chosen – personal and social development, language and communication, mathematical thinking, investigation and knowledge of the world, artistic expression and appreciation, and Health and physical development (OECD, 2006). The goals include fostering creativity, socialisation, and early literacy and numeracy skills. The subjects covered are integrated into a flexible curriculum that may include activities such as language and communication,

mathematics, arts, physical education, and social development. Generally, preschools are open for 3 or 4 hours daily, five days a week. Some preschools offer a morning and an afternoon session (OECD, 2006).

b) Primary Education (Grades 1-6) curriculum aims to develop the basic knowledge, skills, and values necessary for students' educational progression. SEP standardises public and private schools' curricular contents, which include Spanish, mathematics, natural sciences, social studies (history, geography), art and physical education. Other subjects may vary depending on the school's specific program. Religious teachings are banned in public education, making them secular.

c) Lower Secondary Education (Grades 7-9) in Mexico offers students to choose between two types of programs: one that focuses on general academic subjects (secundaria general) and another that prepares them for work in specific industries such as agriculture and forestry (secundaria técnica). The government sets the core curriculum for both programs, including Spanish, maths, science, history, geography, art, and a foreign language. Recently, English was made a mandatory subject. Some Mexican states may also require students to study subjects unique to their local area. In addition to traditional schools, there are also distance learning programs that use TV, videos, or the Internet to teach students who live in rural areas (Monroy & Trines, 2019).

Upper Secondary Education (Educación Media Superior)

Upper secondary education in Mexico consists of three years of study and three modalities. The federal government, state governments, and autonomous institutions like public universities administer high schools. Universities that offer upper-secondary education have the autonomy to create their curricula. Higher secondary curricula are characterised by high diversity and fragmentation for multiple providers. In 2008, the federal government established a national curriculum framework that outlines learning objectives for mathematics, Spanish, English, biology, chemistry, physics, geography, history, and economics.

a) General Academic (Bachillerato General): The general education curriculum aims to provide students with a broad knowledge base and develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For the first two years, core subjects usually include Spanish, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, physical education, and foreign languages. In the final year, students can choose elective subjects according to their interests, such as humanities, arts, technology, or economics, for more specialised study.

b) Technological Education (Bachillerato Tecnológico): The professional technical institutions on the professional track offer technical training that equips students with the

necessary skills to start working right after graduation. These institutions provide a program comparable to Bachillerato General but with more specialised technical subjects geared towards employment in fields such as agricultural technology, business, computer science, industrial technology, marine technology, nursing, or tourism. (Monroy & Trines, 2019).

c) Vocational and Technical Education (Profesional Técnico): Vocational education programmes provide students with specific technical skills and knowledge for various trades and professions to feed into the labour market. The curriculum combines general education subjects with specialised vocational courses related to the chosen field. Approximately fifty vocational specialisations are available in various regions of Mexico, such as accounting, construction, electronics, information technology, mechatronics, optometry, refrigeration technology, and tourism. These specialisations vary by state. Professional Technical Institutions offer vocational education after completing lower secondary school (Educacion Secundaria Básica). Students who succeed in their vocational studies can earn a technical qualification, commonly called the "título de técnico" or "title of technician," which can open doors to pursuing undergraduate studies in their chosen field. (Scholaro database, n.d.).

Higher Education (Educación Superior)

Higher education in Mexico includes undergraduate (licenciatura), postgraduate, and doctoral programs offered by universities and other higher education institutions. The specific curricular frameworks, goals, and subjects vary widely depending on the chosen field of study and the institution offering the program.

Teaching Learning

In Mexican secondary schools, teachers use different teaching methods. However, the most common method combines traditional and modern methods. The traditional method involves lectures and rote memorisation, while the modern method involves more activities and interaction. Many schools use a mix of both approaches to give students a good education (Go Greenva, 2022).

The new curriculum emphasises the importance of teachers acquiring new skills and gradually incorporating new practices into their teaching based on 14 pedagogical principles. These principles include: (1) Focusing the teaching process on students and their learning; (2) Incorporating students' prior knowledge into the learning activities; (3) Providing support to students' learning; (4) Knowing about students' interests and incorporating them into the learning activities; (5) Encouraging students' intrinsic motivation to learn; (6) Recognising the social nature of knowledge

and the importance of students' dialogue and interaction; (7) Incorporating authentic activities into the teaching process to promote situated learning; (8) Viewing lesson planning and learning assessment as two interrelated processes; (9) Modelling learning to students; (10) Valuing students' non-formal and self-directed learning; (11) Encouraging an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning; (12) Fostering a culture of learning; (13) Recognising diversity as a source of knowledge and learning; and (14) Using classroom discipline to promote learning (Bonilla-Rius, 2020, Art. 5.4.4).

It emphasises the importance of teachers acquiring new skills and gradually incorporating new practices into their teaching, grounded in 14 pedagogical principles. These principles are: (1) Focus the teaching process on students and their learning; (2) Incorporate students' prior knowledge into the learning activities; (3) Offer to scaffold to students' learning; (4) Make a point of knowing about students' interests and weave them into the learning activities; (5) Stimulate students' intrinsic motivation to learn; (6) Recognize the social nature of knowledge and thus the importance of students' dialogue and interaction; (7) Promote situated learning by incorporating authentic activities into the teaching process; (8) Visualize lesson planning and learning assessment as two interrelated processes; (9) Model learning to students; (10) Value students' non-formal and self-directed learning; (11) Favor an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning; (12) Foster a learning culture; (13) Cherish diversity as a source for knowledge and learning, and (14) Use classroom discipline as a means to promote learning.

The school year in Mexico runs from August to June, and school days are generally shorter than in other countries. Students attend classes in the morning, from around 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., or in the afternoon, from about 1:30 to 6:30 p.m. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013 by OECD indicates that teachers spent 76% (23 hours) time teaching out of 30 hours per week. Teachers in Mexico spend 12% of their lesson time keeping order in the classroom and the rest of their time on other activities.

As per TALIS-2018, a few of Mexico's good practices are group learning (5/50), student choice of problem-solving procedure (5/50), real-world connectivity (6/50), project-based learning (4/50), providing written feedback (8/50), and student self-assessment (9/50) (OECD, 2018).

The use of technology in education is gaining significance in Mexico. Numerous educational institutions are integrating technological tools like computers, tablets, and interactive whiteboards to improve learning and offer pupils access to digital resources. With traditional schools, Mexico also has distance learning programs for lower secondary (Grades 7-9) that use TV, videos, or the internet to teach students. As per TALIS 2018, ICT or digital technology for instruction is not

adequate in all schools in Mexico. Though many students use ICT for projects or class work, most teachers are prepared to use ICT for teaching (OECD, 2018).

Learning Assessment

The Mexican education system is overseen by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in collaboration with the National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE), ensuring comprehensive monitoring and assessment. In Mexico, the evaluation and assessment framework comprises four key components: student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, and system evaluation (Scott et al., n.d.).

Student performances in Mexico are assessed by various instruments, ranging from national standardised assessments to continuous formative assessments in the classroom. All students are assessed continuously throughout the school year in each curriculum area or subject. Marks used to report student achievement are on a scale of 5 to 10 (Santiago et al., 2012). Each teacher defines assessment criteria and methods. These assessments serve different purposes and provide valuable information to teachers, schools, and educational authorities. Teachers assume the main responsibility for student assessments. All students are assessed continuously throughout the school year in each curriculum area or subject. "There are also externally based national final examinations at the end of both primary (Instrument for Testing New Lower Secondary School Students (IDANIS)) and lower secondary education (National Upper Secondary Education Entrance Exam (EXANI I)). These assessments serve as diagnostics and selections (by the school at the next level)" (OECD, 2012, p.67).

There are also externally-based national final examinations at the end of primary (Instrument for Testing New Lower Secondary School Students, IDANIS) and lower secondary education (National Upper Secondary Education Entrance Exam, EXANI I). These assessments serve diagnostic and selection (by school at the next level) functions. At the national level, a full-cohort external assessment (National Assessment of Academic Achievement in Schools, ENLACE) is also used for diagnosis.

In addition to Formative and Summative assessments, a few other important assessments are conducted in Mexican schools:

1. Public Examinations and Certification: In Mexico, students may be required to take several public examinations and certifications at certain stages of their education. These examinations are typically administered by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). For example, at the end of secondary education (secundaria), students take the Examen

Nacional de Ingreso a la Educación Media Superior (EXANI-I) to gain admission to upper secondary education (bachillerato). Additionally, there is the Examen Nacional para Ingreso a la Educación Superior (EXANI-II) for university admission.

2. National Achievement Survey (ENLACE): The National Achievement Survey, also known as ENLACE (Examen Nacional para la Evaluación de los Aprendizajes), is a large-scale assessment conducted periodically by the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE). It aims to measure student learning outcomes at different grade levels nationwide. ENLACE assesses students' knowledge and skills in Spanish, mathematics, science, and social studies. ENLACE rapidly became a high-stakes assessment with the publication of results at the school level, school rankings published in the media, monetary incentives for teachers based on their students' ENLACE scores and students with the highest scores receiving public recognition. The ENLACE programme was abolished in 2015 (Scott et al., 2018).

3. Teacher Assessments: Mexico also implements evaluations for teachers and student assessments. These assessments gauge teachers' pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and instructional practices. Teacher evaluations may include classroom observations, portfolio reviews, and standardised tests.

Health and Physical Education

Obesity and overweight in Mexico are present in more than 35% of school-aged children and adolescents (Shamah-Levy et al., 2016), and lifestyle behaviours are far from achieving health recommendations. However, according to Villalobos et al. (2013), in Mexico, Physical Education in elementary school occurs only once per week for 1 hour with two sessions at the junior high level. There is no credit allotted for Health and physical education. Unfortunately, many schools and children still do not benefit from a PE teacher. Statistics show a controversial picture, with one indicating that no more than 35% of the schools have a PE teacher and others saying that 70% have a PE teacher (Villalobos et al., 2013).

In 2019, the secretariats of Public Education (SEP) and Health (SSa) designed a new school-based program to promote healthy eating, drinking, and adequate physical activity among schoolchildren named Salud Escolar: Escuelas Saludables y Activas (School Health: Active and Healthy Schools) (Jáuregui et al., 2022). This project is now in the process of implementation.

Skills Education

The Mexican school education curriculum has no special course on Skill development up to the Lower secondary level (age 15). Skills development happens through these grades' cocurricular activities (Art and Physical education). However, in the Upper secondary level (ages 15 to 17), out of three tracks, two are on skill development: Technological education (Bachillerato Tecnológico) and Vocational and technical education (Profesional Técnico). Students can choose any one track. In 2017, Mexico introduced the New Education Model, which included reforms to the compulsory education curriculum to ensure that students can develop the skills required in the 21st century, focusing on developing socio-emotional skills and core competencies (OECD, 2019a).

Mexico places great emphasis on vocational training by aligning educational programs with industry requirements, preparing students to excel in manufacturing jobs right from the start. Two impactful measures the country relies upon to produce skilled workers are specialised technical schools and collaboration with private industry.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, Mexico has established a network of technical schools and training programs that provide students with a firm foundation in engineering, electronics, mechanics, and production processes. These institutions offer specialised curricula to foster a deep understanding of industry-specific knowledge and skill sets. Mexico actively engages in public-private partnerships to ensure the relevance of vocational training programs, connecting educational institutions with the evolving demands of the manufacturing sector. This results in a skilled labour force equipped with the specific competencies and knowledge required by the industry. (TACNA, 2023).

The OECD Skills Strategy Dashboard shows that Mexico's performance on most skills development measures ranks at the bottom 20% of OECD countries (OECD, 2019a).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Like many other countries, Mexico has no curriculum for hobby development and life skills education. However, personal and social development is an important domain of the basic education curriculum, and life skills are taught in this course. Art education has always been integral to Mexico's Primary, Lower Secondary, and Higher Secondary Education curricula. In Higher Secondary, students must complete at least one unit of credit in Art/ Music. This involves various artistic disciplines such as Drawing and Painting, Sculpture, Digital Photography, Studio Art, Women's Choir, Select Choir, Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Intro to Engineering (DDP/PLTW), and Design for Production. These courses are designed to provide students with a comprehensive education in the arts and to help them develop critical thinking skills, creativity, and self-expression.

Students learn and experience different types of art, such as music, visual arts, and performing arts. This helps them be creative, express themselves, and appreciate their culture. The curriculum also includes physical education classes to encourage a healthy lifestyle. Students can participate in sports to improve their physical skills, teamwork, and discipline.

In Mexico, teachers focus not only on traditional academic subjects but also on teaching students important soft skills like communication, teamwork, leadership, empathy, and respect for diversity. These skills will be valuable for students as they become active members of society. Different schools and regions may teach these skills differently, but the Ministry of Education provides guidelines for what should be taught. However, schools and teachers have some flexibility in teaching these skills.

Peace and Happiness Education

While peace and happiness education may not be explicitly integrated into the curriculum in Mexican schools, there is a growing recognition of the importance of promoting emotional well-being and positive social relationships among students. Schools in Mexico often aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment that contributes to students' overall well-being. Many schools in Mexico have adopted Social and Emotional Learning programs to promote the development of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills. Engaging students in community service activities and promoting civic participation can contribute to their sense of purpose, social responsibility, and happiness. Schools encourage students to participate in volunteer work, community projects, or initiatives that promote social justice and equality. Mexico stands as the 35th Happiest country as per the Happiness Index.

Kertyzia and Standish's (2019) study analysed the Plan de Estudios Educación Básica, 2011 (the national curriculum of Mexico) to assess its inclusion of components commonly found in peace education programs. These components are:

1. Recognising Violence: This involves understanding different forms of violence, including direct, structural, and cultural violence.
2. Addressing Conflict Nonviolently: Teaching techniques and strategies for resolving conflicts without violence.
3. Creating Conditions of Positive Peace: Fostering an environment that promotes harmony, cooperation, and well-being (p.50).

The study found that while the curriculum acknowledges some aspects of violence, it provides limited content related to recognising violence, techniques for nonviolent conflict resolution, and contributing to positive peace (Kertyzia & Standish, 2019).

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Moral, social, and cultural education is an important aspect of school education in Mexico. The educational system in Mexico recognises the significance of developing students' moral values, social skills, and cultural understanding to foster their holistic development and active participation in society. Implementing moral, social, and cultural education may vary among schools and regions in Mexico. The Ministry of Education (SEP) provides guidelines and frameworks for these aspects of education. However, schools and teachers have some flexibility in tailoring the curriculum to the needs of their students and communities.

Civics and Ethical education are integral to the Mexican basic education school curriculum. The Civic and Ethical Education program, proposed at the beginning of the 21st century, was modified in 2016 (Conde-Flores et al., 2017, p. 42). For grades 1 to 6, civics and ethical education are allotted one hour per week, and for grades 8 and 9, 4 hours per week. Civics and Ethics education is also a credit course and subject of the assessment process (IQAS, 2021, Pp. 21-23).

Summary and Conclusion

Mexico has undergone numerous educational reforms throughout its history. In 1917, the Mexican Constitution recognised education as a fundamental right and mandated that the state provide free, secular, and compulsory education. In the 21st century, Mexico has undergone two educational reforms to improve educational equity and quality, reduce disparities, and strengthen technical and vocational education. The education system in Mexico is governed by the Secretariat of Public Education, which aims to provide accessible and quality education for all citizens, focusing on inclusivity and equity. Education is compulsory and free for all children between 3 and 18. The education system is divided into three levels: Basic, Upper Secondary, and Higher Education.

The national Ministry of Education, state-level jurisdictions, and autonomous higher education institutions administer the Mexican education system. The quality assurance system is complex due to numerous providers and varying standards and regulations. The curricular frameworks are organised into Basic, Upper Secondary, and Higher Education levels. Basic education comprises three sub-levels: Preschool, Primary, and Lower Secondary Education. The primary education curriculum includes standardised content in Spanish, mathematics, natural sciences, social studies, art, and physical education. In contrast, lower secondary education students can choose between general academic subjects or industry-specific programs. Upper secondary education consists of three years of study and includes three modalities.

Mexican secondary schools combine traditional and modern teaching methods. The school year runs from August to June, with shorter school days. Teachers spend 76% of their time teaching and using pedagogical practices such as group learning and real-world connectivity. Technology is gaining significance in education, with institutions integrating tools like computers and tablets. Distance learning programs for lower secondary grades are also available. However, not all schools have adequate ICT or digital technology for instruction. Mexico's framework for evaluation and assessment in education includes student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, and system evaluation (Santiago et al., 2012). Student performances are assessed through various instruments, including national standardised assessments and continuous formative assessments in the classroom. In addition, there are public examinations and certifications, a national achievement survey, and teacher assessments. The National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE) supports the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in the overall monitoring and evaluation of the Mexican education system (Santiago et al., 2012).

Mexican school education curriculum emphasises students' all-around development, but health and physical education should be more important. The prevalence of obesity and overweight in school-aged children and adolescents in Mexico is high, with lifestyle behaviours not meeting health recommendations. Physical education occurs only once a week for one hour at the elementary level and two sessions at the junior high level, with no credit allotted for Health and Physical education. However, a new school-based program called Salud Escolar aims to promote healthy eating and physical activity among schoolchildren.

To fulfil the labour market demand, providing trade-based skills education from secondary education is an important and out-of-the-box feature of the Mexican education system. Art education is integral to the school curriculum, from primary to higher secondary education. The curriculum also includes physical education classes and soft skill development such as communication, teamwork, leadership, empathy, and respect for diversity. Civics and ethics education is integral to the school curriculum and credit course. While peace and happiness education are not explicitly integrated into the curriculum, schools in Mexico aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment that contributes to students' well-being. Moral, social, and cultural education is also an important aspect of school education in Mexico.

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Educating People During Turmoil: Peru

Mrityunjoy Kaibarta

Abstract

Peru has made notable advancements in its education system over the past decade. The school enrolment and overall literacy rate are high, though gender disparities persist. Policy reforms have been implemented to enhance teaching quality, modernise administration, and improve infrastructure. However, these reforms have encountered challenges from different stakeholders. The Ministry of Education oversees the education system, which is comprised of both public and private institutions. Education is compulsory for children aged 5 to 17. The curriculum emphasises competency development and includes mathematics, communication, English, arts, and physical education. Teachers are encouraged to employ diverse instructional methods to foster active learning. Technology use in education is increasing despite challenges in internet accessibility. Assessment methods include continuous and periodic evaluations. While progress has been made, there remains a need to enhance the quality of education, particularly in emotional and spiritual aspects.

Keywords: Peru, Quality Improvement Program, Peruvian National Curriculum, Socio-constructivist Approach, Digital Tools, Reforms

Introduction

Several important Andean civilisations, including the Inca Empire, once existed in Ancient Peru. The Spanish conquistadors captured the empire in 1533. Peru gained independence from Spain in 1821, after which the remaining Spanish forces were defeated in 1824. In 1980, democratic leadership was restored after a period of military rule (WFB, 2023).

Peru is situated in the west-central region of South America, along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. The country has a land area of 1,285,216 km^2 and a water area of 5,000 km^2. Peru shares borders

with Ecuador and Colombia to the north, Chile to the south, Brazil and Bolivia to the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Extreme contrasts, including sparse deserts, green oases, snow-capped mountains, high plateaus, and deep valleys, characterise the geography of Peru. The Andes Mountains run from the northwest to the southeast of the country. Peru is comprised of 26 units: 25 regions and the Lima Province. The regions are further divided into provinces, which consist of districts. Peru has 196 provinces and 1,869 districts ("Peru", 2023).

Peru is the 45th most populous country in the world, with a population of 34,470,851 and a yearly population growth rate of 0.89%. 79.1% of the population resides in urban areas (Worldometer, 2023). The gender ratio in Peru in 2021 is 98.70 males per 100 females (Statistics Times, 2021). The current life expectancy for Peru in 2023 is 77.44 years. The ethnic composition of Peru includes Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and White) 60.2%, Amerindian 25.8%, White 5.9%, African descent 3.6%, others (includes Chinese and Japanese descent) 1.2%, unspecified 3.3% (2017 est.) (Indexmundi, 2021).

Spanish is the official language of Peru, spoken by a significant majority of the population, around 82.9%. The country also officially recognises Quechua and Aymara as languages, with 13.6% and 1.6% of the population speaking them, respectively. Additionally, there are several other native languages, including many minor Amazonian languages. Most of the population in Peru follows Roman Catholicism, representing 60% of its citizens. Christianity is the second-largest religion, with 14.6% of the population adhering to it. Other religions account for 0.3% of the population, while 4% do not follow any religion. The remaining 21.1% of the population have not specified their religious affiliation (WFB, 2023).

Peru achieved impressive economic growth and poverty reduction before COVID-19 due to macroeconomic stability, trade openness, and favourable international conditions, making it an upper-middle-income economy. In 2022, Peru's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounted to 242.63 billion US dollars, with a per capita GDP of 7125.8 US dollars. The country achieved a 2.7% annual growth rate, indicating a positive economic trajectory (The World Bank, 2023). Peru's Unemployment Rate increased to 6.73% in Sep 2023 from the previously reported figure of 6.64% in Aug 2023 (CEIC, 2023). Peru is the 74th happiest country, with 5.56 points (Helliwell et al., 2022). With a 0.762 HDI Value, Peru ranked 84th in the Human Development Report prepared by UNDP (2022).

Over the last decade, Peru has made significant strides in education. More than eight million students are enrolled in schools nationwide, with another 1.2 million pursuing higher education at universities (International Trade Administration, 2022). The overall literacy rate in Peru for 2020 is 94.5%, with male literacy at 97.12% and females at 92.02% (O'Neill, 2023). As of 2022, the gross

enrolment ratio (GER) for primary and secondary education in Peru is 107.66% and 99.12%, respectively, and the total net enrolment rate (NER) in primary and lower secondary education is 99.74% and 97.68%, respectively (UIS-UNESCO, 2023). In Peru, 34% of 15-19-year-olds are enrolled in general upper secondary education. 8% are enrolled in lower secondary and 5% tertiary programmes (OECD, 2023). In the OECD PISA 2018, Peru was ranked 65th out of 79 countries, indicating near-universal educational access but a lack of quality education.

Educational Policy

The educational reform of Peru started in 1995 with a loan agreement signed with the World Bank. This agreement initiated the Educational Quality Improvement Program (MECEP), which became the focus of most policy initiatives during the second half of the decade, as national public funds were scarce (Balarin & Saavedra, 2023, p.31). Balarin and Saavedra (2023) referred to Du Bois (2004) to state that the MECEP had three primary objectives: to improve teaching quality, modernise the system's administration, and substitute and rehabilitate the country's educational infrastructure. During this time, the government attempted to privatise public education, but these reforms faced strong opposition from the Teachers' Union, civil society groups, and the Catholic Church (Balarin & Saavedra, 2021). In 1996, the Peruvian government passed an education reform law that extended the free and mandatory basic education policy to all residents aged 5–16; the program was called Educacion *basica y tecnico productive* (Osiobe, 2021).

2001, the National Consultation document was presented to Alejandro Toledo's government. Following this, Nicolás Lynch, the first minister of Toledo's government, chose to form his team of experts to devise a five-year plan for the education sector. This team produced a brief document with crucial policy recommendations, but unfortunately, both documents were ineffective and were subsequently dismissed. One of the significant contributions that Toledo's government made to the education sector was the passing of the new General Law of Education in 2003. The legislation focused primarily on the decentralisation and participatory governance of the education system (Balarin & Saavedra, 2021).

In early 2007, Education Minister José Antonio Chang endorsed the National Plan for Education, prepared by the National Council for Education. The plan was designed to guide and organise the education policy agenda. As per Balarin and Saavedra's (2021) study, “Garcia’s government made two major contributions to the learning and quality agenda. One was the establishment of a new, very different style of educational policymaking, which we shall later describe as narrowly technocratic and less focused on participatory and decentralised decision-making. …… The other was the passing of a new teachers’ career law that, while largely ineffective, managed to break the gridlock and establish a meritocratic teachers’ career with regular performance evaluations (Balarin

and Saavedra, 2021. p. 44).” The Ministry of Education (MoE) approved the National Curriculum for Basic Education in June 2016. The new curriculum was set to be implemented in 2017, starting with 12,000 primary schools in urban areas (Balarin & Saavedra, 2021).

Garcia’s government made two major contributions to the learning and quality agenda. One was establishing a new, very different style of policy-making in education, which we shall later describe as narrowly technocratic and less focused on participatory and decentralised decision-making. This is illustrated in the following quote: [the government] began to play maybe in opposition to that other [participationist, decentralising] current of the previous years, and redefined educational policy in a technocratic key. (University professor and former counsellor at the National Council for Education)

The country's education policy was mandated in 2008 to ensure that private and public schools follow the national curriculum (Osiobe, 2021). However, according to Balarin and Saavedra's (2021) research, educational reforms and implementation success are influenced by corruption, political stability, governmental crises, and ministerial changes.

Table 47.1 shows the political transition and subsequent changes in the orientation and key policies. It shows the timeline in 5 years, and how the changes have occurred in key policies during this period can be observed.

Table 47.1 Political Transition and Subsequent Changes in the Orientation and Key Policies

Years	Orientation and Changes in Key Policies
1995-2000	Broad orientation: The beginning of the educational quality reform agenda was truncated by the fall of the autocratic and corrupt regime
	Key Policies: 1995: Start of MECEP and the implementation of a New Pedagogical Model (NEP), Launch of PLANCAD, and Creation of UMC
2000/2001-2006	Broad orientation: Reforming the system's management through decentralisation and participation
	Key Policies: 2001: National Consultation for Education, Shutdown of the Baccalaureate program 2001-2005: Curricular rain, 1996: Beginning of sample-based student implementation of 4 different assessments by UMC 1997-1998: New basic curriculum structures for primary and secondary education 1999: Start of the pilot for the Baccalaureate Program of secondary education versions of the curriculum for secondary education 2002: Start of the national decentralisation process 2003: General Law of Education, Creation of the National Council for Education (CNE) 2005: National Teacher Training Program and Amauta Centres pilot plan
2006-2011	Broad orientation: Teacher reform and standardised assessments as the main driver for policies

	Key Policies: 2006: National Curriculum Design (DCN), readjusted in 2008, and Beginning of ECE national standardised tests, census-based student assessment, by UMC 2007: National Education Plan 2007-2021 (PEN), issued by the CNE, Failed Census Teachers' Assessment, Beginning of PRONAFCAP, Enactment of the new Teachers' Career Law-LCPM N 29062 2008: Start of PELA 2010: Start of the elaboration of the learning standards (later "Progress Maps) by Ipeba-SINEACE
2011-2016	Broad orientation: Achieving results and reforming the pedagogical core
	Key Policies: 2011: Learning Routes 2012: Teacher Reform Law-LRM N° 29944 2013: Redesign of PELA, and Introduction of Bono Escuela, compromisos de Desempeño, and Semaforo Escuela 2016: new National Curriculum for Basic Education (CN)
2016-2020	Broad orientation: Extreme political turbulence and COVID-19 hinder substantial reforms
	Key Policies: 2019: The National Curriculum is formally implemented in all modalities, levels, and cycles of schools and educational programs of Basic Education 2020: Guidelines for In-Service Teacher Education and PEN 2020-2036, issued by the CNE

Source: *Balarin & Saavedra, 2021 (Adapted by Author)*

Structure of the Education System

In Peru, the Ministry of Education administers the education system. The country has public and private educational institutions, and education is compulsory for children aged 5 to 17. The Ley General de Education, enacted in 2003, lays down the framework for education in the country and defines two main levels of education: basic education (educación básica) and higher or post-secondary education (educación superior). Basic education is divided into three stages: the pre-primary stage for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years; the elementary education stage for children between the ages of 6 and 12 years, covering grades 1 to 6; and the secondary education stage for children between the ages of 13 and 17 years, covering grades 7 to 11 (Monroy, 2022).

In the realm of higher education, there are two distinct tracks available to students. The first is the Educación Superior No-Universitaria (Non-University Higher Education) track, which encompasses technology, art, and teacher education. The second track is the Educación Superior Universitaria (University-Level Education) track, which includes programs leading to graduation, master's, and doctoral degrees (Monroy, 2022).

According to the country's constitution, early childhood education is mandatory in Peru, although it is not enforced rigorously. Pre-primary education is available through nurseries, kindergartens, and other preschools. Children up to three years of age are enrolled in crèches, while kindergartens are meant for kids aged three to five. It is worth noting that preschool education is compulsory for children aged five to six (WEN, n.d.).

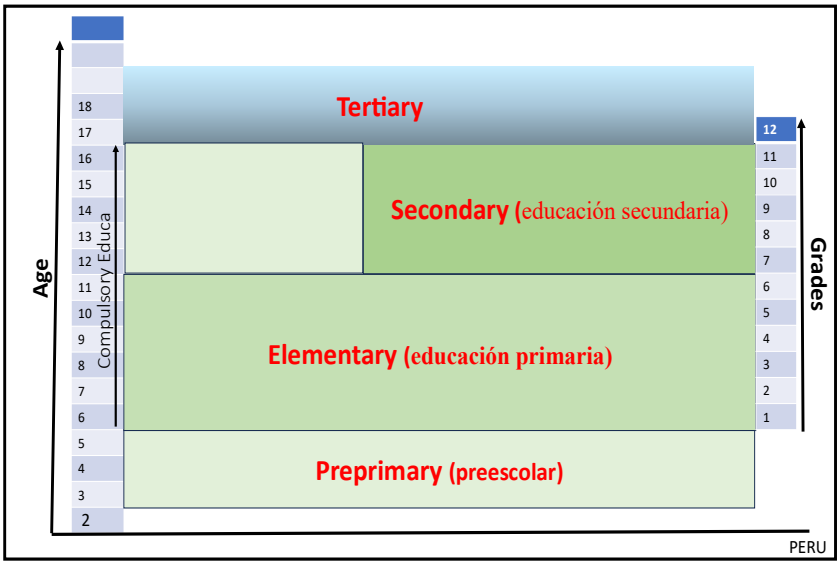

Figure 47.1 Structure of the Peruvian Education System

Source: *Author (Adopted from Monroy, 2022).*

The education system categorises primary-level education into three cycles of two years each. On the other hand, secondary-level education is divided into two stages—general secondary education, which lasts for two years, and academic or technical secondary education, which lasts for three years. During this phase, students can choose between academic and technical secondary education based on their interests and aspirations (WEN, n.d.).

Curricular Framework

In June 2016, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Peru approved the National Curriculum for Basic Education, intending to implement it in 2017. Despite some controversy regarding the curriculum's approach to gender equality in the public sphere, it has been formally implemented across all levels and cycles of schools by 2019. Peru's education system still primarily follows the same curriculum.

In the initial section titled 'Presentation', the objectives of the Peruvian National Curriculum for Basic Education are outlined. These objectives are:

The Peruvian National Curriculum for Basic Education (NCBE) prioritises values and citizenship education to enable students to practice their rights, fulfil their duties, and develop competencies to meet contemporary demands for sustainable development. This includes proficiency in English, professional education, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) education. The curriculum also aims to provide a comprehensive education that strengthens knowledge related to arts and culture and physical and health education within an intercultural, environmental, and inclusive perspective that respects each student's characteristics, interests, and abilities (MINEDU, 2016, p. 8).

The Peruvian National Curriculum for Basic Education outlines 29 competencies students should develop over 11/12 years of basic education, including secondary education. Competencies are:

1: Build your identity.
2: Developing motor skills.
3: Assume a healthy life.
4: Interacts through sociomotor skills.
5: Critically appreciate artistic and cultural manifestations.
6: Create projects from artistic languages.
7, 8, and 9: Communicate, Read, and Write in their native language.
10, 11 & 12: Communicates Reads and Writing in Spanish as a second language.
13, 14, and 15: Communicate, Read, and Write in English as a foreign language.
16: Live together and participate democratically.
17: Build historical interpretations.
18: Responsibly manages space and the environment.
19: Responsibly manages economic resources.
20: Inquires using scientific methods to build their knowledge.
21: Explains the physical world based on knowledge about living beings, matter and energy, biodiversity, Earth, and the universe.
22: Design and build technological solutions to solve problems in your environment
23: Solve quantity problems.
24: Solve problems of regularity, equivalence, and change.
25: Solve data management and uncertainty problems.
26: Solve problems of shape, movement, and location.
27: Manage economic or social entrepreneurship projects.
28: Develops in virtual environments generated by ICT.
29: Manages your learning autonomously (MINEDU, 2016).

Spanish is the primary language in Peru for basic and higher education, but some schools and programs also offer instruction in Indigenous and foreign languages. The academic year follows a schedule, starting in late February or early March and ending in December. Each class period in Peruvian schools lasts 45 minutes, and primary school students attend classes for 30 hours per week. In Secondary education, the first cycle (initial two years) totals 35 hours, while the last cycle (last three years) is 45 hours per week (MINEDU, 2016, p 164).

Primary school lasts six years, and students learn mathematics, communications, English, art and culture, personal development, physical education, religious education, and science and Technology. Secondary school lasts five years, extending the days by an hour. The first two years

consist of a general curriculum, which includes mathematics, communication, English, art and culture, social sciences, personal development, citizenship and civics, physical education, religious education, science and technology, and education for work (Entrepreneurship). In comparison, in the last three years, students can follow either a vocational or academic path (MINEDU, 2016). In primary and secondary education, all subjects are compulsory and credit courses.

Teaching Learning

According to the National Curriculum of Peru, teachers in Peru are expected to use various instructional methods to engage students in the learning process. This may include lectures, discussions, group activities, and hands-on projects. The goal is to cater to different learning styles and promote a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (MINEDU, 2016),). In Peru, the National Curriculum for Basic Education provides a comprehensive and detailed step-by-step teaching framework grounded in the socio-constructivist approach to learning. "To achieve a comprehensive education that strengthens the knowledge related to arts and culture and to physical and health education within an intercultural, environmental and inclusive perspective that respects each student's characteristics, interests, and abilities" (MINEDU, 2016, p.8 in UNESCO-IBE,2018, p.36).

This framework emphasises the importance of active participation, collaboration, and self-reflection in teaching and learning. Teachers are expected to incorporate these guidelines into their planning, execution, and evaluation of teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Doing so can create a safe, supportive, and effective learning environment that promotes student engagement, critical thinking, and academic success."

- Starting from significant situations, generating interest and willingness as a condition for learning, and learning by doing; starting from prior knowledge, building new knowledge, learning from error or constructive error, generating cognitive conflict, mediating student progress from one level of learning to a higher level, Promote cooperative work, and complex thinking (MINEDU, 2016, Translated by Google Translate).

The document emphasises the crucial role of teachers as facilitators in fostering student skills and competencies development. The curriculum framework offers a comprehensive set of guidelines and recommendations in the 'Pedagogical Orientation to the Development of Competencies' section. The primary objective is to guide teachers so students learn specific content and how to act competently. Teachers are encouraged to support their students' skill development through various teaching strategies, including project-based learning, problem-based learning, and case studies. "Prioritise values and citizenship education to put in practice students' rights and duties and develop competencies that enable them to respond to contemporary demands aimed at sustainable

development associated with proficiency in English, professional education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) education" (MINEDU, 2017 in UNESCO-IBE, 2019). Before the National Curriculum of Peru, teaching in Peru relied largely on memorisation rather than critical thinking or practical exercises (Beuermann, 2014).

The use of technology in education is becoming increasingly prevalent in Peru. Schools may incorporate digital tools, online resources, and educational technology to enhance the learning experience and prepare students for the digital age. It is important to highlight that, per the data provided by Peru's National Institute of Statistics, the internet accessibility rate in metropolitan Lima was 75.1% in 2021. In contrast, in other parts of the country, it was only 58.7%. These figures starkly contrast rural regions, where merely 18.5% of households can access internet services (International Trade Administration, 2023). Although studies have highlighted issues of scarcity in digital connectivity (Riega et al., 2021.), there is an effort to adapt according to the availability of digital connectivity. The educational model had to be adapted to the existing conditions: number of students and level of use of technology by students, as well as synchronous and asynchronous pedagogical resources (Riega et al., 2021). The same study highlights the issues related to the digital divide and how socio-economic conditions influence the learning achievements of the learners. Evidence shows that students' achievement depends more on emotional support than technological inputs.

Learning Assessment

The Peruvian education system typically included continuous assessment and periodic evaluations. Continuous assessment involves evaluating students throughout the school year based on their daily performance, class participation, homework, and other ongoing activities. On the other hand, periodic evaluations are conducted at specific intervals, such as the end of each term or semester, and may include written exams and other assessment forms. After completing grade 6, students are eligible to obtain the Certificate of Primary Education (Certificado et al.), and upon finishing secondary school, they receive the Certificado de Estudios de Educación Secundaria (Secondary School Certificate) (Monroy, 2022).

The grading system in Peru often uses a scale from 0 to 20, with 20 being the highest score. The passing grade is usually 11 or 12, depending on the institution. Some subjects may also have practical components, such as laboratory work for science subjects or projects for other disciplines.

The real shock to the education space came when the results from the globally recognised Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 were released: Peru ranked last amongst all 65 participating countries (Chen et al., 2019 in Chaudhary, R.,2023)

Peruvian National Curriculum for Basic Education (CNEB) describes assessment as a process centred around students' learning that "diagnoses students' achievements, provides feedback and enables actions towards the students' learning progress" (MINEDU, 2016, p. 177). The document recognises assessment as formative, comprehensive and continuous.

The CNEB follows a competency-based approach to assess students in the classroom. Competency-based education aims to prepare students for practical challenges they may face in their future careers. This means that assessment focuses on the competencies evaluated through specific criteria. These levels of achievement, tools and techniques provide information for making decisions about the student's pedagogical process. The assessment uses learning standards for each grade to measure how far or close a student is to achieving their expected outcomes. In addition to the classroom assessment, a national assessment is conducted to evaluate the education system using standardised methods. It helps to identify the achievements and challenges at various levels, such as school, local, regional, and national (MINEDU, 2016).

The curriculum framework explains how assessment should be conducted and interpreted at both classroom and national levels. However, it does not specify the exact tools that should be used for this purpose. Instead, it states that normative provisions will regulate this matter. Additionally, there is no specific section in the framework that addresses the monitoring and evaluation processes of the CNEB. Nonetheless, the subsection on national assessment provides some brief information on how the collected data will be utilised to provide feedback and to design policies that enhance the education system (UNESCO-IBE, 2018). Peru has participated in international measurements of both the UNESCO (LLECE, SERCE, TERCE) and OECD (PISA, 2000, 2009 and 2012) (Ñopo & Mariana, 2015). Some projects in the country intend to improve the assessment mechanism for schools and provide the opportunity for the parents to get informed about the assessment. World Bank project has reached millions of learners in schools. The expanded student assessment, which contains annual information on student learning results across all schooling cycles, will help education administrators, school personnel, and communities. (World Bank, 2019).

Health and Physical Education

Peru's basic education curriculum does not mention health education as a standalone subject. However, physical education is integral to the school curriculum, which aims to promote well-being. The curriculum is designed to integrate health and physical education into a holistic approach, including various aspects such as physical fitness, nutrition, mental health, and personal hygiene.

Physical education is a credit course for students in grades K to 12, and it is allotted a total of 3 hours per week as per the organisation and distribution of weekly time (MINEDU, 2016, p. 167).

The course includes various physical activities such as sports, games, gymnastics, and other physical exercises. Assessing students' physical education performance involves combining practical skills, participation, fitness assessments, and theoretical knowledge.

"Attempts to improve physical activity should look for ways to enhance leisure-time physical activity, parental support, physical education classes, healthy dietary behaviours, and normal body weight maintenance in adolescents with integrated efforts from the family and school" (Sharma et al., 2018, Abstract)

In addition to promoting physical well-being, the curriculum aims to develop students' knowledge and understanding of various health-related concepts. This includes educating students on the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, the benefits of regular physical activity, and the impact of nutrition on overall health. The curriculum aims to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead a healthy and active lifestyle.

Skills Education

According to the OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training 2016, Peru has extensive vocational education and training (VET) programmes that aim to build work-related skills, some of which provide high-quality vocational education and training. The same report also points out that the government fails to meet the country's skills development needs (McCarthy & Musset, 2016, p. 9).

In many educational systems, including Peru, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of providing students with academic knowledge and practical skills that prepare them for the workforce. Pre-vocational skills education aims to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for specific careers or trades. Practical, hands-on learning experiences are typically emphasised in pre-vocational education. This may involve creating artefacts, drawing, painting, internships, apprenticeships, or workshops where students can apply their skills in real-world settings.

The Peruvian National Curriculum of Basic Education strongly emphasises developing skills that enable students to meet the demands of the modern world, focusing on achieving sustainable development. Under the Natal Curriculum, there is an area called 'PSICOMOTRIZ' that aims to foster the following competencies in students:

- The ability to develop autonomously through the use of motor skills
- The ability to lead a healthy lifestyle
- The ability to interact with others through socio-motor skills. (MINEDU, 2016, p. 162)

Some schools in Peru offer vocational tracks or specialised programs focusing on specific industries or professions. These programs are designed to prepare students for particular careers, such as technology, agriculture, hospitality, or trades. Schools may collaborate with local industries and businesses to expose students to real workplace environments. This collaboration can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and job market demands. The OECD (2016) points out that improvement is needed to align the supply of VET programmes with the economy's needs.

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), currently being implemented in Peru, reveals that increased skill levels are linked not only to higher productivity and earnings but also to other significant outcomes such as improved health, increased levels of trust, and a greater inclination to contribute to society through volunteering (OECD, 2016, p. 15).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Peru's school education curriculum emphasises developing life competencies in students, but unfortunately, there is no specific agenda for nurturing hobbies. While the focus on competencies is commendable, the absence of a dedicated hobby curriculum means that students may not have the opportunity to explore their interests and passions beyond the scope of their academic coursework.

Peruvian National Curriculum of Basic Education prioritises comprehensive training that strengthens learning linked to art and culture and physical education for health in an intercultural, environmental, and inclusive perspective that respects the students' characteristics, interests, and aptitudes. The basic education curriculum includes the subjects of Art and Culture and aims to develop the skills of 'Critically appreciating artistic-cultural manifestations and Creating projects from artistic languages' (MINEDU, 2016, p. 162).

Arts and culture, practical skills, vocational and technical skills, and extracurricular activities are indirectly part of life skills and hobbies. However, there is a lack of a proper framework for hobbies and skill education in schools.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The conflict over a decade in Peru impacted the country's education system. "EDUCA prepares teachers in Peru's urban and rural areas to use curricula for social, economic and political change at the local and regional levels. Through training, teachers learn to deal with violence and conflict occurring in schools as well as in the homes and communities of their students" (GCPE, n.d.).

Moral, social, and cultural education in Peru's school system is typically addressed through various curriculum components. These aspects are considered important for the holistic development of students, helping them understand ethical values, engage with society, and appreciate cultural

diversity. Subjects like personal, social, and religious education and art and culture foster moral, social, and cultural education. Peruvian National Curriculum of Basic Education prioritises students' values and citizenship education to exercise their rights and duties. Moreover, a unity of purpose and a long-term vision is also present in the Peruvian National Curriculum, which claims that "at the end of Basic Education, Peruvian students will exercise their rights and duties as citizens in an ethnic manner, valuing diversity through intercultural dialogue to contribute actively, both individually and collectively, to the sustainable development of the Peruvian society within a democratic context" (MINEDU, 2016, p. 13).

The education systems established by Peru's indigenous communities offer a distinctive and highly valuable educational experience founded on cultural preservation, hands-on learning, community participation, and environmental protection. These systems play a vital role in safeguarding indigenous knowledge, reinforcing cultural identity, and empowering future generations. By recognising and endorsing these alternative educational models, the country can help preserve the diversity and heritage of Peru's indigenous communities, promoting a more comprehensive and all-encompassing approach to education (Bourke, 2023).

Peace and Happiness Education

During the last two decades, armed rebels and military forces in Peru engaged in violent conflict, forcing the Peruvian people to choose sides, and resulted in over 69,000 deaths (GCPE, n.d.). After the armed conflict, there were efforts at different levels to address the issues directly linked to education.

According to the Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE, n.d.), EDUCA's program had been structured. Some key themes included:

- "Appreciating Diversity (respect, anti-racism and anti-discrimination)
- Peaceful Conflict Resolution (anger management, non-violent language and behaviour)
- Group Participation and Collaboration (cooperation and consensus-building)"

One of the interesting programmes run by one of the organisations in Peru claimed, "Since the Peace Education Program was introduced in 2018, there has been no reported incident of extreme violence or uncontrollable fights, no death or suicide. The amount of bullying has dropped significantly amongst the students who had participated in Peace Education workshops." (The Prem Rawat Foundation, 2019). The foundation has worked in different districts of Peru for their programme in association with the Peru Police. Apart from these efforts, there is an organised effort to address students' happiness and peace overall, including a multiprong approach.

Personal, social, and religious education is crucial in promoting peace and happiness in individuals. Peru's National Curriculum of Basic Education (CNEB) includes a "Personal Social" component to develop various student competencies. These competencies include

- Build your identity
- Live together and participate democratically
- Build historical interpretations
- Responsibly manage the environment and space
- Responsibly manage economic resources
- Build your identity as a human person, loved by God, worthy, free and transcendent
- Assume the experience of the personal and community encounter with God (MINEDU, 2016, p. 162).

Summary and Conclusion

In 1995, Peru initiated the Educational Quality Improvement Program (MECEP) to improve the quality of teaching and modernise the education system. The country passed an education reform law in 1996 extending free and mandatory basic education policy for all residents aged 5-16. The Ministry of Education approved the National Curriculum for Basic Education in 2016. However, the success of educational reforms and implementation is affected by corruption, political instability, governmental crises, and ministerial changes.

Peru's Ministry of Education administers the education system, comprising public and private educational institutions. Education is compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 17. There are two levels of education: basic education and higher education. Basic education is divided into pre-primary, elementary, and secondary education. Early childhood education is considered mandatory but not regularly enforced. Primary education is divided into three cycles of two years each, while secondary education has two stages - general secondary education (two years) and academic or technical secondary education (three years). Students can choose between academic and technical secondary education based on their interests and aspirations.

The Peruvian National Curriculum for Basic Education prioritises values and citizenship education, proficiency in English, professional education, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) education. It aims to achieve comprehensive education that strengthens arts and culture knowledge and physical and health education within an intercultural, environmental, and inclusive perspective. The curriculum outlines 29 competencies students should develop over 11/12 years of basic education, including secondary education. Spanish is the primary language used for basic and

higher education, but some schools and programs also offer instruction in Indigenous and foreign languages. Primary school lasts six years, while secondary school lasts five years. In primary and secondary education, all subjects are compulsory and credit courses.

The National Curriculum for Basic Education in Peru emphasises the importance of active participation, collaboration, and self-reflection in the teaching and learning process. Teachers use various instructional methods, including lectures, group activities, and hands-on projects, to engage students and promote a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The curriculum framework offers guidelines and recommendations to guide teachers in fostering student skills and competencies development. The use of technology in education is becoming increasingly prevalent in Peru, but internet accessibility rates vary significantly depending on the region.

The Peruvian education system uses continuous and periodic assessments for students. The grading system is based on a scale from 0 to 20; the passing grade is usually 11 or 12. The curriculum framework follows a competency-based approach and uses learning standards for each grade to measure student achievement. National assessments are conducted to evaluate the education system as a whole.

The Peruvian National Curriculum of Basic Education does not mention health education as a standalone subject, but physical education is an important part of the school curriculum. Pre-vocational skills education aims to equip students with skills and knowledge needed for specific careers or trades. The curriculum also prioritises comprehensive training that strengthens learning linked to art and culture, physical education for health and citizenship education. Personal, social, and religious education also promotes peace and happiness education.

According to the World Economic Forum, Peru ranked 127th in the quality of its education system in 2020 (International Trade Administration, 2022). According to Quevedo (2020), “Peruvian education is based on measuring competencies, capacities, expected performance, and content, but it does not cover the emotional and spiritual aspect (empathy and compromise) concurrently with the acquisition of knowledge (Para 4)”.

The Peruvian National Curriculum of Basic Education is designed to be competency-based, with each curriculum area intended to contribute to developing vital skills and knowledge. However, the successful implementation of the curriculum in schools requires a significant level of focus and attention. If all the areas of the curriculum were given equal emphasis and attention, there is great potential for the quality of education in Peru to improve significantly. Despite providing education to all its citizens, Peru still has ample room for improvement in the quality of education.

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Learning to Create, Co-exist, and Reflect: Venezuela

Kanupriya Juneja

Abstract

The education system in Venezuela is centralised and overseen by the Ministry of Popular Power for Education. Education is free and compulsory from preschool to university, focusing on achieving universal primary education. However, universal primary education is yet to be achieved. The education system consists of public and private schools, with the majority being public schools. The curriculum focuses on social equity, participation, autonomy, and democracy. The education system faces challenges due to economic and social crises, including budget cuts and a lack of resources. The government has implemented various reforms and programs to improve education, including initiatives for adult literacy and completing secondary education. However, the education system still faces issues of quality, infrastructure, and inequality. Overall, the education system in Venezuela is facing significant difficulties in providing quality education to all students.

Keywords: Bolivarian Education System, Organic Education Law, Revolutionary Curriculum, Ciclo Diversificado, Reciprocity, Continuity, Constructivism, Participation.

Introduction

Venezuela, the 'Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela', is a Latin American country. Its cultural history, called the Neo-Indian period, dates back to 1000 AD and ends with the Spanish occupation in 1522. In stages, it gained full independence in 1830.

Venezuela has a 2,800 km long coastline - the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean on the north. On the east are Guyana, Brazil on the south, and Colombia on the west. Venezuela has a total area

of 912,050 km^2 and a land area of 882,050 km^2 (Haggerty, 1993; CIA, 2021). The varied landscape has the world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls. Venezuela is divided into 23 states, 1 Capital District (Caracas) and 13 Federal Dependencies. Spanish is the main spoken language.

The current population of Venezuela is estimated at 29,281,243 (World Population Review)—50.6% female and 49.4% male. The population growth rate is 1.93%, although this data is affected by outward migration. The life expectancy is 72.89 years. The ethnic composition is 50% Mestizo, 42.5% European descent, 3.5% African descent, 2.5% Indigenous, and 1.2% other groups. Christianity is the dominant religion (Scribid, 2019).

Venezuela is a mixed economy with large oil reserves. The GDP is USD 97.68 Billion, and the per capita GDP is $3691.64 (O'Neill, 2024). The unemployment rate was 5.9 per cent in 2023. It ranked 120th in HDI at 0.691 points (2021) and 88th in the Happiness Index (Helliwell et al., 2023).

The education system is centralised, executed, and monitored by the Ministry of Popular Power for Education, which offers free education from preschool to university. The education up to the secondary level of the child, age 6 to 15, is compulsory. In Venezuela, the GER in primary education is 93% for girls and boys combined and 89% in lower secondary, with a student transition rate of 99% to secondary school. In Venezuela, the primary NER is 84%, and the primary completion rate is 89%. Such data indicates that the country is progressing towards universal primary education but has yet to achieve universal primary education. The Primary completion rate is 89%, while the lower secondary completion rate is 71.9%. The adult literacy rate is 98% (World Bank, 2021).

The school education system comprises 29,400 schools, of which 24,400 are public, with 6.4 million students and 542,000 teachers, and 5,000 are private, with 1.2 million students and 121,000 teachers (Marquez, 2023).

Educational Policy

The policy discourse of Venezuela cannot be understood without acknowledging the strong polarisation of debates about Venezuela that influenced academic policies and programmes (Lander, 2014; Bitar et al., 2015). These reforms were driven by developing future citizens and workers for the economy through mass schooling, leading to a 'socialist transformation' (Griffiths & Williams, 2009). The major economic backlash leading to the social crisis heavily affected the education system. Education suffered from general public spending cuts (Rojas & Mora García, 2019) that must be considered while analysing the education policy.

Under Chavez's regime, the 2009 revised Constitution of Venezuela (1999) Article 102 states that-

"*Education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free and compulsory. The State will assume it as an indeclinable function and maximum interest in all its levels and modalities... (...) Education is a public service based on respect for all currents of thought... (...).*"[5]

Article 103 of the constitution (1999) enshrined the right to education from kindergarten to tertiary level. Towards this mission of free education, the government adopted the 'Bolivarian Education System (SEB)' to prioritise increasing school coverage to ensure the smooth transition of learners from early childhood to university level. Unique educational programmes like "*Robinson Mission*" for adult literacy, "*Misio'n Ribas*" for completing secondary education and "*Misio'n Sucre*" for individuals behind or excluded in higher Education were designed and executed (Rojas & Garcia, 2019)

UNESCO summarised the Bolivarian school education to

- Be a model of integral attention for social equity.
- Provide participation, autonomy, and democracy.
- Provide a school system that values and respects students, the culture, and the community.
- Be a model for permanent teaching improvement.
- Be aware that the Bolivarian schools are for the community and with community participation (UNESCO, 2024).

The Bolivarian National Curriculum (BNC, 2007) was adopted in 2007. It emphasises integrated, interdisciplinary learning and promotes active, participatory learning methodologies. The policy document recognises Learning to Create, Learning to Co-exist and Participate, Learning to Value, and Learning to Reflect as the four pillars of the Bolivarian Education System (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007).

The 2009 educational reform, "Organic Education Law", was a key piece of legislation. Under Article 5, the Republic identified itself as a *Teaching State*. The recent reforms in Venezuela are:

- The family's and communities' roles were recognised in education
- Continuing education for teachers in compliance with the paradigm of lifelong learning
- Structured Law and legal framework would regulate institutions of the education system at all levels

[5] https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Venezuela_2009

- Systematic, regular monitoring and evaluation of education should be democratic, participatory, continuous, holistic, cooperative, systematic, qualitative and quantitative, diagnostic, flexible and accumulative.
- The state guarantees an annual investment in the construction, expansion, renovation and maintenance of school buildings and services, equipment, tools, machines, and technology (UNESCO, 2023).

The new reforms and programmes improved the literacy rate and increased the number of children in primary and secondary schools. Later, the government extended the Bolivarian reforms to the entire education system. However, as a consequence of the high costs of the reform project, not all institutions adopted all parts of the reform project (Rodríguez Trujillo, 2008; Peters, 2013). There are three types of schools: public, private, and mixed. Public schools are free. Private schools charge tuition fees and tend to have better resources and facilities. Mixed schools combine public and private schools and charge a lower tuition fee than private schools.

The major policy initiatives can be summarised below:

1. The Equal Opportunities for Women Act (1999) seeks to guarantee women's full rights and development, including education as the prime focus
2. The Robinson Mission has been working since 2003 to increase the literacy of the population, including people with disabilities.
3. The Neighborhood Mothers Mission, created in 2006, to provide single mothers with economic support and training for home-based employment.
4. The Protection of Children and Adolescents Act (2007) guarantees equality and non-discrimination for all children and adolescents.
5. The People with Disabilities Act (2007) guarantees the comprehensive development of people with disabilities based on equality, cooperation, equity, solidarity, integration, non-segregation, and non-discrimination principles.
6. The Constitution states that “education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free and compulsory.” The same instrument proposes principles of education: “participatory and proactive democracy, social responsibility, equality of all citizens without discrimination of any kind, the practice of equity and inclusion, the sustainability of development, and the right to gender equality.”
7. Article 121 guarantees indigenous peoples the right to education and an intercultural and bilingual education system, considering their sociocultural characteristics, values, and traditions.

8. The Report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015) sets out the country's commitment to and progress in defending the rights of people with disabilities.
9. The 'Fatherland Plan 2025' ensured that 82 per cent of schools are public, free, and of good quality.

Structure of the Education System

The Bolivarian Education System (SEB) comprises Initial, Primary, Middle/Secondary, Vocational/Technical, and Tertiary Education (Table 48.1). Initial Education for ages 0 to 6 comprises Maternal (0 to 3 years) and Preschool (3 to 6 years). It is mandatory.

Table 48.1 Structure of the Present Education System in Venezuela.

Stages	School / Institutional Level	Grade	Age	Years	Notes/ Remarks
Primary	Elementary	1 to 6	6-11	6	
Middle	Common basic cycle	7 to 9	12-14	3	Prior to 2010
Secondary	Secondary Education (High School)	7 to 11	12-17	5	Baccalaureate of Sciences or Baccalaureate of Humanities title of (Science Technician
Vocational	Technical Schools			2-3	Técnico Superior Universitario
Tertiary	Bachelor's			4-5	Licenciado
	Tertiary				
	Master's			2	Maestría
	Doctorate			2-5	Doctor/Doctorado

Source: *Scholaro database, 2024*

Mandatory Primary Education is for children aged 6 to 12. Children who, for any reason, do not complete initial education but are six years of age also form part of this subsystem. Upon completing 6th grade, an elementary education certificate is awarded to children entering secondary education.

Mandatory middle/secondary education for 12 to 17/18 years offers two alternatives: general secondary education (5 years), at the end of which a bachelor's or general secondary education title is given, and six years of secondary technical education, which leads to a technical bachelor's degree or intermediate technician title.

Vocational / Technical Education aims to train in general technology or professional areas. The purpose is to facilitate entry into the job market or continue higher studies. The specialities are available in agriculture, arts, social promotion and health services, industry, commerce and

administrative services, security and defence, and bilingual intercultural education (Ladino et al., 2021).

Curricular Framework

Under Hugo Chávez's leadership, the Bolivarian government introduced socialist philosophy as the basic essence of the curriculum by adapting the "Revolutionary Curriculum," which encompasses the theory and ideas of Karl Marx, Che Guevara, and liberator Simón Bolívar. According to Venezuela's culture ministry, the compulsory book list is designed to help schoolchildren eliminate *capitalist thinking* and better understand the ideas and values necessary to build a socialist country" (K12academics, n.d.).

The Bolivarian National Curriculum, proposed in 2007 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007), identified the following as its foundation:

"Learning to Create, Learning to Co-exist Participate, Learning to Value and Learning to Reflect" integrated with the areas of "Environment and Comprehensive Health, Interculturality, Information and Communication Technology, Liberating Work" along with the curricular areas (in Bolivarian High schools) of "Language, Communication and Culture; Being Human and its Interaction with Other Components of the Environment; Social Sciences and Citizenship; Philosophy, Ethics and Society; Physical Education, Sports and Recreation; Endogenous Development in and for Liberating Work"

The school year is from September to June/July. In public schools, students usually go to school on shifts. Some attend school from early morning until about 1:30 PM, and others attend from the early afternoon until about 6:00 PM.

Pre-primary Education / Initial Education

'*Educación Inicial: Bases Curriculares*' (Ministerio de Educación, 2005) supports various trends in Initial education and takes examples from theorists like Piaget and Vygotsky to present guidelines/ structure for the overall development of children. Initial education centres form part of 'Conventional care' whereas communities and families form part of 'Non-conventional care', especially for children between 0 and 3 years old. Play forms the main activity for Initial Education. After six years, a young child is expected to be an intellectually developed individual with a strong sense of community and environment. The Bolivarian National Curriculum Document 2007 mentions that Initial education would focus on physical development, health and nutrition, recreation and cultural development.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry announced the 'Translate to Every Family a School' programme for the academic year 2020-21. A thematic plan, 'Initial Education- First Moment

Pedagogy' (Ministry of Popular Power of Education, Republic of Venezuela, 2020), outlines the following curricular areas for children in the Maternal or Preschool stage.

- Identity and Citizenship
- Science and Health
- Mathematics in Our Lives
- Productive Partner
- Culture and Recreation

The assessment strategies are also described in the document.

Primary Education

Primary Education aims to develop independent young boys and girls who understand their role in school, community, and families. They should have reflective, critical attitudes and an interest in the sciences, society, and cultural (artistic) activities. The curriculum aims to contribute to their historical awareness for future nation-building.

Subjects at this level include "Identity, citizenship and sovereignty, Natural sciences and health, productive pedagogy, math for life, and Language and communication" (General Directorate of Primary Education, 2021).

The curricular areas continue with those identified in initial education. The primary education subsystem ensures the education of children at the Secondary level. The focus areas also include preventive health care, attention, and the provision of daily meals at school.

Secondary Education

"In 2001, the structure of secondary education came as a supplement to the Educación Básica, which lasted from 5 to 14 years. Secondary education is divided into a two-year programme to train students in science, arts and/or humanities and professionals and a three-year programme to train mid-level technicians (técnicos videos) (State University, n.d.).

Secondary education aims to comprehensively train young people following the principles of the Bolivarian Republic while continuing the focus areas of primary education. It incorporates them in the "socially productive process while guiding them to pursue higher education."

The General secondary education curriculum includes English and other foreign languages, Mathematics, and Physical education, which are studied in all years, along with geography, history, and social sciences, formation of national sovereignty, orientation and society, participation in creation, recreation, and production groups with Art and heritage, and natural sciences only in the

initial two years. Physics, chemistry, biology, and geosciences are part of the specialisation in later years.

Secondary Education is in crisis (Marquez, 2023). This level has significant quality, equipment, ethics, and improvement issues. Most importantly, the system was perceived as a unified structure and lacked the necessary tools to achieve the primary educational goals (State University, n.d.).

"The second cycle, called Ciclo Diversificado, had among its objectives to continue training in the sciences or humanities (for students in secondary education) and to continue training in the general cultural background as well as professional orientation according to their vocation (for students in the technical education track). Once the Ciclo Diversificado was approved, whether in secondary or technical education, students completing the designated programme were awarded the degree of bachiller, majoring in a selected area" (State University, 2023).

Technical education may include vocational and general subjects like mathematics, Spanish, a foreign language, natural sciences, and various work experience placements. The aim is to inculcate young adults with knowledge and skills to develop their nation. Technical institutes produce licentiate technicians after three years of training, while university students take five years to graduate. After that, master's and doctorate courses may be followed.

Completing Basic Education leads to certification called "Certificado de Educación Básica (i.e. primary and middle years of schooling included). "Certificado de Educación Primaria" is awarded upon completion of primary schooling (grades 1-6). After completing 9th grade, students enter a diversified education where, for the next two years, they either choose sciences or humanities, which decides their higher education. This choice helps earn the degrees of 'Bachiller en Ciencias' (Bachelor of Sciences) or 'Bachiller en Humanidades' (Bachelor of Humanities), and in some cases where schools offer professional education, the degree of Técnico en Ciencias (Technician of Sciences).

Though there are some differences, at all levels of schooling, language, maths, social studies, and science usually have equal weightage and similar credit points. At the same time, physical education, including health education, fine arts, ICTs, and other subjects, has relatively less weightage than former subjects.

Teaching Learning

Teachers are expected to differentiate instruction based on students' potential and integrate those with special educational needs to meet with families, participate in pedagogical discussions, and promote student teamwork. They are also responsible for tracking student development,

coordinating, and ensuring a safe and welcoming school environment. Teachers are encouraged to use varied teaching and evaluation strategies, promote research, and use ICT.

The policy document 2007 describes learning as structured around three key strategies- the class, projects, and a comprehensive plan. This learning strategy comprises three stages: the beginning, development, and closing. The beginning explores students' prior knowledge and prepares them for activities. The development stage involves different strategies promoting learning, training in values, critical reflection, and creativity. The closing phase allows teachers to assess learning outcomes and foster positive attitudes toward learning. A special focus is given to participatory classes that encourage dynamic interaction.

Project-based learning is practised where learning activities involve teachers, students, and families to solve problems with social relevance. They include:

- The Comprehensive Community Educational Project defines school management strategies, links the school with the community and plans pedagogical work based on the context.
- The Learning Projects focus on action research and cooperative work based on real-life situations.
- The Endogenous Development Project involves socio-environmental aspects of the community and aims for holistic development.

The learning-teaching follows the ethos and "guidelines along a few principles: 1) as an active member within the educational process, the student is looking for solutions to common problems; 2) the student is in a constant state of adaptation due to the changing internal (school) and external (society) environment; 3) the school offers courses with a strong social, political, economic, and cultural content help the student to become a critical thinker; 4) the school conceives the teacher to be important tool for social change; 5) the school implements a methodology that integrates the arts and the social and natural sciences; 6) this new curriculum demands an active, flexible, and thoughtful method, based on democratic principles that would combine practical experience along with theoretical understanding" (Peters, 2021; also in-State University).

The Fatherland Plan 2025 seeks to continue incorporating ICT into the educational process by using Canaima computers and developing virtual classrooms as a component of remote education.

The educational system in Venezuela lacks the infrastructure and technological platforms that can promote the integration of open technologies in teaching and learning. Venezuela also lacks teachers trained in managing open technologies, creating instructional designs using open technologies, and developing open educational resources. Additionally, Venezuela lacks knowledge of the likely

impact of the digital society on student training and the legalities of using open technologies. This situation may lead to furthering the digital divide, especially in education (Benítez et al., 2023).

Since 2000, the government promoted introducing and using new information technologies through the Centros Bolivarianos de Informáticay Telemática (CBIT). Each CBIT included 20 computers, a server, a television with a DVD player, and a printer (Ministry of Education and Sports of Venezuela, 2004). By 2009, 2246 CBITs had been installed throughout the country, with a rapid expansion of the programme, particularly from 2005 onwards (MPPE, 2010 cited in Peters, 2021). The Programme Canaima has long since replaced CBIT as the flagship of digitisation, and according to official figures, 6,200,000 mini-laptops and almost one million tablets were distributed to students and another 240,000 devices to teachers by the 2017/2018 school year (Peters, 2021). The programme is mainly assessed positively (Lescher et al., 2017). Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the need to turn to virtual education uncovered serious connectivity problems. As a result, many Venezuelan students do not have educational opportunities (Ramírez, 2020).

Learning Assessment

The Bolivarian National Curriculum (1999) defines learning evaluation as a systematic, participatory, and reflective process. It is meant to assess the student's potential development and facilitate decision-making to achieve set objectives. Evaluation is also seen in the continuum within the subsystems. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed.

The qualitative evaluation describes students' achievements and advances in each learning area and is implemented in the Bolivarian Initial Education and Bolivarian Primary Education subsystems. On the other hand, quantitative evaluation focuses on recording numerical scores of students' achievements and is implemented in the subsystems of Bolivarian Secondary Education and Education of Young Adults.

The evaluation operates under several principles, such as reciprocity, continuity, constructivism, and participation, which encourage the involvement of students, teachers, and families in the educational process. This evaluation process is categorised into several types:

- The initial/diagnostic evaluation aims to assess the student's progress and achievements in potential development and their interaction in the social context.
- Procedural/formative evaluation aims to gather information about the educational process development of each student, providing data to reinforce the processes
- The final/summative evaluation aims to assess and interpret the students' achievements in their learning experiences.

The evaluation may be *auto-evaluation* (self-reflective), *co-evaluation* (by both students and teachers) and *hetero-evaluation* (involving all stakeholders).

For children in the age group 0-3 years, the family may communicate with the teacher with a table of activities carried out by children at home, whether they completed them, and how they can help teachers plan activities for the next week. Portfolios were chosen to evaluate the students for General Secondary and Technical education.

Grading is the standardised measurement for varying levels of achievement in a course. Academic grades range from a low of 0 to a high of 20 points. The grades are converted into percentages. Qualitative Labelining and Grade Point Average (GPA) (Table. 48.2).

Table 48.2 Grading System for Assessment

GRADE	Comparable English Term	Equivalent percentage range	Equivalent GPA
18–20	Excellent	90-100	4.0
14–17	Good	70-89	3.0-3.9
10-13	Satisfactory	50-69	2.0-2.9
6-9	Insufficient	30-49	1.0-1.9
0-5	Fail	0-29	0.0

Source: *Venezuela Grading System (https://gradecalculator.io/venezuela/)*

Health and Physical Education

Health and physical education are a part of the curriculum at all levels. In secondary education, the revised curriculum (2015) proposes sexual health education and driving education, particularly for adolescents, based on the UNESCO framework.

The perspectives of physical and health education in the curriculum differ in Venezuela, where revolution and socialism are about participation, not competition. So, how far has Venezuela come in revolutionising sport, turning it instead into an activity that brings people together, raises collective health, and helps us appreciate the social environment? This requires in-depth research. Socialised sport has its place in the Bolivarian Revolution's aim of improving people's economic, social, cultural, and participatory lives (Pearson, 2008).

In Venezuela, the curriculum prescribed ninety minutes for grades one to three and 45 minutes for grades four and five, and in higher classes, it gradually increased. The proposals and normative curricular plans of the state of Venezuela for primary education are then reviewed to reflect that the curriculum has categorical provisions for physical education in the primary schools of Venezuela,

which also cover the dimensions of health education. Physical aptitude, body rhythm, and outdoor activities are majorly covered in the curriculum. Baseball and football are also very popular. Teachers often plan for teaching, but the relationship between classroom practice and the prescribed Curricular Plan is not always matched desirably. Research findings reveal a significant disparity between what is prescribed and taught. This gap varies depending on the category analysed within the Physical Education curriculum (Mayo & De, Balazs, 2013). Physical education that promotes the health of the nation's children has been covered broadly in the system of continuous assessment.

Skills Education

Professional technical education is offered at the secondary and higher levels through training at the national level. Technical education at the secondary level aims to facilitate entry into the job market or continuation of higher studies while contributing to acquiring skills and general culture. Specialities include agriculture, arts, social promotion and health services, industry, commerce and administrative services, security and defence, and bilingual intercultural education.

The proposed curriculum transformation[6] (2016) presents guidelines to introduce technical education based on the country's social and economic needs. The training from year 1 to year 6 has separate modalities to develop skills in the students. The initial years focus on students being "oriented towards technological advances and productive development engines, based on ecological and scientific principles, for their connection and insertion socio-labour, responding to the needs of the Venezuelan people. The curriculum has identified strategies to support pre-rationalisation implementation, focusing on activity-based engagements, construction of artefacts, use of hand tools and local vocational engagement, leading to practice toward technical education studies in Venezuela. These shifts have made sustaining any successful efforts in such curriculum areas difficult. In addition, limited economic and labour market resources have made it extremely difficult to implement any effective, consistent educational policy (Mi, 1986). Allotment of specific hours per week is also practised in many schools, and teachers play crucial roles in integrating such prevocational skills with the content of mainstream subjects.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Engaging learners with hobbies can be instrumental in their well-being, and hobbies provide opportunities for them to do something they love and are passionate about. Hobbies help students hone a skill and provide socio-emotional immunity. In the context of Venezuela, the 'all-day

[6] Document proposing the transformation of curriculum contains the proposed changes and calls for modification by institutions and teachers as per their own requirements.

schooling' project extends the time and pedagogical innovations in providing space for experimentation upholding projects including more flexible curricula and interdisciplinary project learning, extracurricular activities including culture, sports, and art, which are academic exercises linking education to the local context, and social protection measures for students (Peters, 2021). The socialistic policy highlighted community engagement while addressing social-emotional learning. However, their policy is grey enough to provide specific directives regarding how hobbies should be engaged in learning-teaching. Sports and games like basketball, baseball, drama, student government, dance, singing, painting, choir, and much more are part of learning and teaching in Venezuela. Besides being a stress releaser, these activities also boost socialising with peers and enhance students' time management and stress management skills (World Education Network, 2024). The existing self-assessment and teacher assessment cover some of the hobbies but suffer from structuralism.

The progress is not remarkable in the context of life skill education in Venezuela, but it has a prominent footprint in policy and curricular exercise. Through structured initiatives of 'Life Skills Development' with the support of UNICEF, specialised programmes were designed and implemented, equipping more than 50,000 teenagers with useful life skills (Guidi, 2020). The pilot stage of the Skills for Life programme with the educational authorities reached 281,000 students and 14,500 teachers in 804 schools throughout the country to promote a system to support the learning and empowerment of adolescents (UNICEF, 2022).

At the initial and primary levels, the learners learn subjects like art and music, games and indigenous festivities like agriculture and environment, tourism, information technology, etc. are learned which are in different ways skill oriented.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The Bolivarian National Curriculum (2007) places much importance on intercultural education. It recognises that knowledge built in a community is cultural. Orally transmitting knowledge by family members, parents, and grandparents is important for passing on traditions and customs. The indigenous communities can transmit their knowledge about language, rituals, legends and myths, the use and classification of plants and animals, etc. The framework recognises that such knowledge should pass through all the stages of education subsystems. Concerning Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries, it was found that terms related to human rights were quite prevalent in their national curricular frameworks.

In Venezuela, values have been emphasised in policies that promote a sense of community belongingness, which originated in socialistic philosophy. School academic authorities have often adapted programmes that comply with social values. "The Living Values Books' is such evidence where teachers share their experience of value exercise in primary education (Gavidia, 2024). Different programmes also promote diverse ethnic values of Indigenous people along with

Peace and Happiness Education

A peace and Happiness education Background paper by UNESCO on themes in National Curriculum Frameworks (2016) across the world lists the prevalence of terms like Human rights, Gender Equality, Peace and Nonviolence and Human Security, Health and Well-being, Sustainable Development, Interconnectedness and Global Citizenship, Competencies, Pedagogical Approach and methods, and Assessments (IBE-UNESCO, 2016).

The report finds that the term 'Peace and Non-violence and Human security' is least well represented in the curriculum documents. The related terms are found in the following manner: education (18%), awareness of abuse/harassment (44%) and peace and peacebuilding (62%). For data from 2005-2015, Venezuela's curricular document has 70% of terms related to the theme of peace. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, no data shows if these terms are prevalent in Venezuela. This portion needs research and should answer the following questions: Is there any provision for peace and happiness education, and what are its contents, pedagogy, and assessment? Whether peace and happiness education is a credit programme and counted in school performance.

Summary and Conclusion

Schools should be safe meeting spaces for children, teachers, parents and communities, where children feel welcomed and cases of abuse can be reported (UNESCO, 2020). Article 14 of the 2009 Education Act states that education is conceived as an "inclusive and quality" training process. Equity and inclusion are promoted as guiding principles of education; thus, policy commitment is sound and firm.

Despite constitutional commitments, Venezuela's education system is at a new crossroads and plagued with many ailments. Venezuela adheres to different international agreements (like those with the United Nations) to achieve SDGs and even adheres to the values defined by its constitution. However, the country is substantially far from its commitment to actualising educational aspirations and goals regarding assessing and globally comparable quality indicators.

In the early 2000s, with oil revenue, Chavez's government funded education and made educational reforms part of its mandate. Different projects and flagship programmes aimed at reducing illiteracy

increased gross enrolment during these years. By 2005, UNESCO declared Venezuela an illiteracy-free country. The Organic Law of Education, 2009, brought a unified curriculum for public and private schools (UNESCO, 2023).

Any analysis and prediction regarding the burning reality of the Petri dish in the Venezuelan education context is subject to debate, as getting empirical data on education was much more challenging in the political regime of the present governance. This policy analysis must depend on secondary data, international stakeholders' policy drafts, and national policy instruments. Here, sincere efforts have been made to detail research works available on the international academic platform. Hence, it seems necessary to consider this data as an approximation of reality rather than a sound expression (Jerven, 2013). This policy review focuses on the recent policy dynamics encountered in the 21st century regarding the current challenges to education in Venezuela, focusing on the connection between education and social inequalities and the challenges posed by the country's deep economic and social crisis.

The problem being faced by the country after the huge economic backlash in 2013-2015 onwards is not merely economic; it is a complex issue which has been affected by social and political factors as well. The country went into recession, and basic amenities were in acute shortage. Shortage of water and frequent blackouts posed problems for the citizens. The policy paralysis has further worsened the situation despite positive intentions. In the meantime, millions of children have already been suffering, and future generations will see the far-reaching effects of this humanitarian crisis. The figures unearthed that by 2018, over half of all Venezuelan children had dropped out of school, with 58% of students quitting nationwide, while areas near bordering countries saw more than 80% of their students leave. Nationwide, about 93% of schools do not meet the minimum operating requirements, and 77% do not have utilities such as food, water or electricity (Wayback Machine, 2018).

Venezuela achieved important gains regarding access to education by expanding infrastructure and making stakeholders liable. However, even at the primary level, the universalisation of schooling remained far from the goal. While the gender gap in education was effectively mitigated, in terms of access to education, the urban poor, rural, and indigenous populations particularly faced great barriers to entering the education system (Herrera & España, 2006; Peters, 2021). Indeed, access to education improved considerably during the Bolivarian Revolution. However, this was not accompanied by an improvement in education quality. Moreover, the hierarchical fragmentation of the Venezuelan education system increased. Consequently, even in the high times of the Bolivarian Revolution and in a highly polarised political climate that also affected education, education

continued to be highly unequal, and the government did not promote social justice through education reforms (Peters, 2021).

The curriculum framed in compliance with the socialistic education policy promoted includes health and physical education, skills education, hobby development and life skills education, moral, social and cultural education, peace and happiness education, and mainstream subjects. The sense of well-being is promoted by focusing on community living. The cognitive load was not overburdening. However, biased political approaches hinder adapting skills and appropriate strategies to maintain such curricular objectives. Infrastructure and teachers' capacity building was a major challenge that negatively impacted education in accomplishing educational goals. The constitutional mandates voiced equality, but the equity efforts failed utterly. As a result, the disparity among the higher and lower income groups in schooling is quite evident, and this difference in attendance among income groups is seen in lower and higher secondary education. However, women surpass the attendance of boys at all levels.

Several problems challenge the secondary education system. The quality of education is of serious concern, particularly in language (literature) and mathematics. Also, students have problems adapting to different social environments and situations, i.e., students demonstrate little respect for others, poor work ethics, and negative attitudes toward peers (State University, n.d.).

General deterioration of infrastructure, lack of teachers, downsliding quality of education, and lack of adequate financial resources, transportation, food, internet, and other basic services would affect the development of basic competencies among children. Children aged 3 to 17 years are studying in poor learning environments, compromising the actual results of their education. About 54% of students under Basic education were promoted 'without grade level competencies'; they lack basic skills like reading, logic and mathematics, scientific skills, decoding, etc. (Graterol, 2024).

The tsunami in the financial ecosystem in 2015 and the economic collapse due to the COVID-19 pandemic caused the Venezuelan education system to be unable to provide the basic conditions for education. Scenarios for the future are rather bleak (Peters, 2021). It could be concluded that during the oil-boom-induced short "golden age of the Bolivarian Revolution" and contrary to its reports of success, the Bolivian government has not achieved its central education policy objective of reducing social inequalities. Venezuela has been cited as a case of reconfiguration of social inequalities in the education system: access to education and increasing hierarchical fragmentation of the education systems gain relevance for explaining education inequalities (Peters, 2021).

Serious empirical research is needed on policy analysis about the global policy context and ongoing job market changes. Major limitations are that secondary education is generally devoid of employable skills. Secondly, formal education credentials represent only a precondition to access better employment but are not compatible with clients' networks and demands. Third, education is not linked to work-integrated learning given the predominant economic structures: The Venezuelan rentier society does not need productivity gains, as the continuous inflow assures the economic well-being of rent income. Therefore, unproductive jobs in the services sector can offer high salaries irrespective of labour productivity. Consequently, the idealised meritocratic idea that the most talented human capital will be perfectly allocated according to macroeconomic needs is misleading in Venezuela. Hence, it is high time to re-assess the policy discourse of the last two decades from a different lens.

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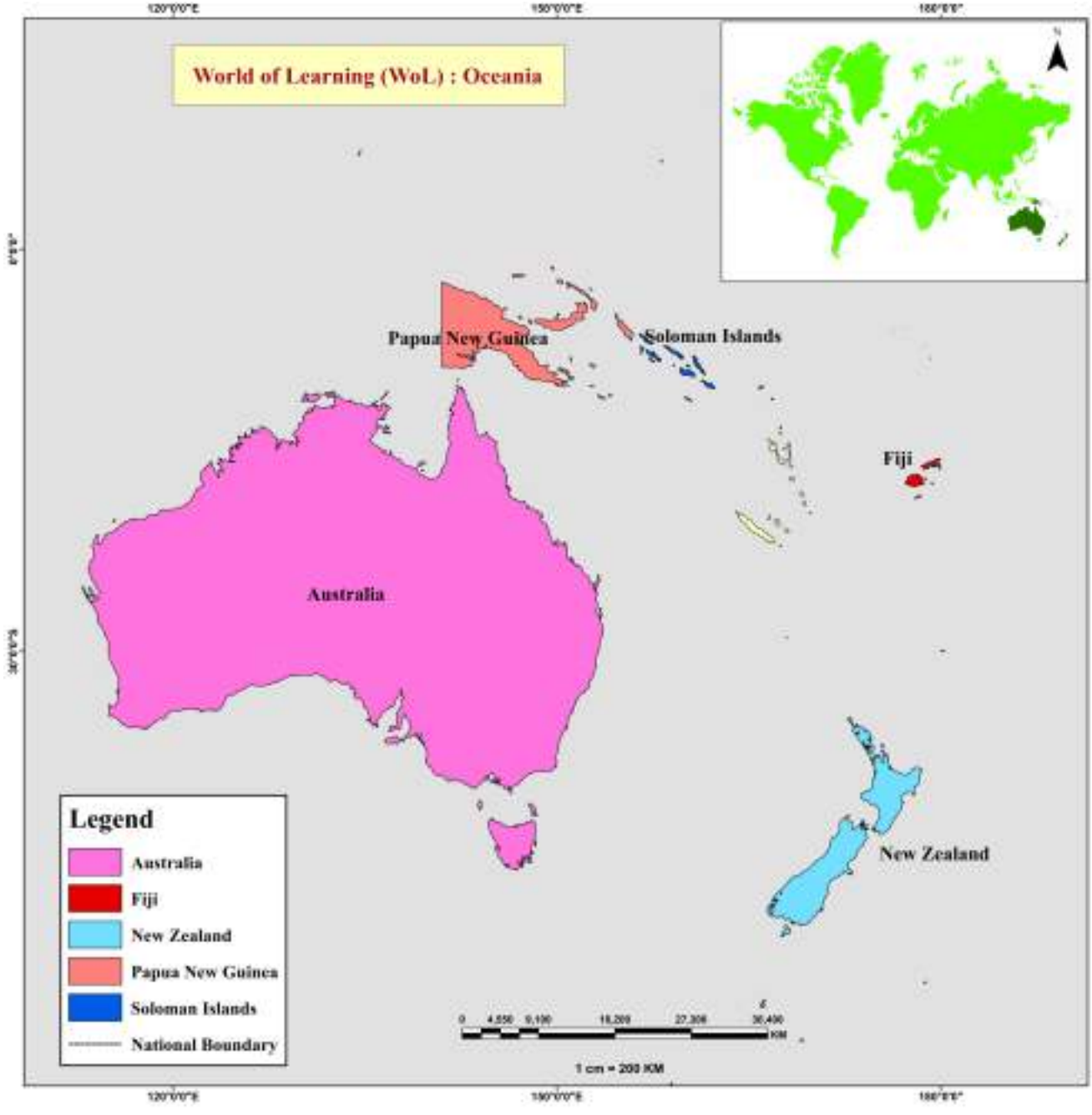
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Equity, Innovation, and Resilience in Education: Australia

Kashyapi Awasthi

Abstract

Australian educational policies are reflected in the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), National Education Strategy, and National STEM School Education Strategy. The AQF defines qualifications in post-compulsory education and ensures seamless transitions between different levels of study. The Australian Government governs the education system with state and territorial governments. The curriculum is structured around learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curricular priorities. The assessment practices in Australia include ongoing formative assessments, summative assessments, and national assessments such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The curriculum also emphasises health and physical education, skills education, and the development of moral, social, and cultural awareness. However, there is a need to emphasise further the development of the affective domain and the holistic well-being of students.

Keywords: Australia, Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), National Education Strategy, STEM School Education Strategy, NAPLAN, Australian Curriculum.

Introduction

Australia etymologically means "southern"; for long referred to as "Terra Australis" or southern land. It is also known as the "Last of Lands" only because it is the last explored by the Europeans. It is the smallest and oldest continent and sixth largest country, with a land area of 7,688,287 kilometres^2 (Geoscience Australia, 2023). Australia has a unique geographic position that makes it different from other countries. It lies between the Pacific and Indian Oceans in the southern hemisphere; it does not share traditional land borders with any other country. The Commonwealth

of Australia is a federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy (Parliamentary Education Office, 2024). It has six states and two territories, which include the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Northern Territory (NT), New South Wales (NSW), Queensland, South Australia (SA), Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia (WA). Australia's capital city is Canberra, located in the southeast region. It is located between Sydney and Melbourne's highly significant economic and cultural hubs.

According to the 2021 Census, the Australian population was 25,422,788, excluding overseas visitors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023a), mostly concentrated in the major cities. According to 2023 estimates by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 86.6% of the total population in Australia lives in urban areas. According to the 2021-22 census, 49.3% of the total population are males with a median age of 37 years, while 50.7% are females with a median age of 39 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a). In 2020-2022, males had a life expectancy of 81.2 years, while females had 85.3 years at birth (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023b). The annual Population Growth rate was 2.4% in 2023 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023c). The Australian population consists of more than 270 ethnic groups. Among the large non-European groups are New Zealanders, Chinese, Vietnamese, and people from Hong Kong, the Philippines, and India. This has brought cosmopolitan culture to Australia and linguistic and religious diversity to the continent. There are 72% English speakers, 2.7% Mandarin, 1.4% Arabic, 1.3% Vietnamese, 1.2% Cantonese, others 15.7% and unspecified 5.7% (2021 est.). As regards religious diversity, there are Roman Catholics (20%), Protestants (18.1%), other Christians (3.5%), Muslims (3.2%), Hindus (2.7%), Buddhists (2.4%), orthodox (2.3%), others 2.1%, none 38.4% and unspecified 7.3% as per the 2021 census.

According to IMF (2024), Australia's GDP is 1.69 trillion USD with a growth rate of 1.2 per cent, and the GDP per capita is USD62,600. Australia's unemployment rate is 4.3 per cent (IMF, 2024). As per the World Happiness Report 2023, Australia ranked 11th with a score of 7.097 (Helliwell et al., 2023). In the Human Development Index 2021-22, Australia ranked 5th at 0.951 (UNDP, 2022). Compared to other countries in the Better Life Index, Australia performs well in many aspects of well-being. On a scale of 0 to 10 for general satisfaction with life, Australians gave an average score of 7.3%, higher than the OECD average of 6.5. This is because Australia outperforms the OECD average across all parameters that contribute to improving quality of life, like income, jobs, education, health, environmental quality, social connections, civic engagement, and life satisfaction (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a).

Australia has an impressive literacy rate of 99% (Burton, 2020) with no gender disparity. As of 2021, the GER for primary education was 99.93% and 109.39% for lower secondary education. The NER for primary education was 99.63%. For lower secondary education, it was 98.98%, and for

upper secondary education, it was 95.50% (UIS-UNESCO, 2024). According to the 2021 Census, 484,185 children were attending preschool; 2,075,224 in primary school; 1,629,624 were in secondary school; 1,185,450 in university or other higher education; and 601,901 attending vocational education including Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and private training providers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). Over 11 million people in Australia have a non-school (vocational or tertiary) qualification; 5.5 million have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 4 million reported having a certificate I to IV (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). In terms of the quality of education, Australian students scored 498 in reading literacy, 487 in mathematics and 507 in science in the OECD's PISA 2022 (OECD, 2023). As of 2022, there were 307,041 full-time equivalents (FTE) teaching staff and 9614 schools in Australia, out of which 64.8% of schools were primary, 15.0% secondary, 14.7% combined and 5.4% were special schools (ACARA, 2022).

Educational Policy

Australian education is a unique case of a shared education system where educational priorities and funding are decided nationally in agreement with the states. Australian education policies are reflected in the Australian Qualification Framework, Australian Education Act, National Education Strategy, National Education Reform, National STEM School Education Strategy, and others.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a comprehensive national policy that standardises qualifications across all education sectors in Australia, enabling smooth transitions between levels and institutions. Introduced in 1995, the AQF consists of ten hierarchical levels encompassing school, vocational, and higher education qualifications (Department of Education and Training, 2015). Policies in support of the AQF:

- "Learning outcomes for each AQF level and qualification type
- AQF specifications for the development and accreditation of qualifications
- Registers of accrediting bodies, awarding bodies and qualifications
- Issuing AQF qualifications
- Linkages and pathways, including credit transfer and articulation
- Adding and removing qualification types" (Department of Education and Training, 2015, p. 4).

The AQF promotes flexible learning and facilitates pathways between education sectors and the workforce. Its governance is managed by the Australian Government's Department of Education and Training in partnership with state and territorial governments. Since its establishment in 1995, the AQF has undergone several revisions, notably in 1998, 2002, 2007, 2011, and 2013 (AQFC, 2013).

Australia has established comprehensive national quality assurance frameworks to maintain high standards across all aspects of educational institutions, including courses, teaching, governance, and student services. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the foundation, integrating school, vocational, and higher education qualifications into a coherent system of fifteen nationally recognised awards, ensuring consistency and quality throughout the education sector (Australian High Commission, n.d.).

Department of Education (Australian Government) outlined the national strategy for schools. These strategies include engaged classrooms: supporting all students to achieve, school assessments, school funding legislation (Australia Education Act 2013), the Australian school curriculum, Indigenous education targets to help close the gap, finding resources for schools, Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, National School Reform Agreement (2023), and advancing national education priorities (Department of Education, 2024).

The National School Reform focuses on enhancing educational excellence in Australian schools, conducting independent education reviews in regional and remote areas, and optimising STEM partnerships between schools and industries. It also addresses policies for senior secondary pathways, teacher workforce needs, initial teacher education accreditation, a unique student identifier, establishing an Australian education research organisation, and improving national data quality (Department of Education, 2023).

The National STEM School Education Strategy 2016-2026 was established by Australian education ministers in 2015. It emphasises foundational skills and enhances mathematical, scientific, and digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Australian Government, 2022a). The National School Reform Agreement, initiated in 2019, aims to ensure equitable, high-quality education for all students. Originally set to expire on December 31, 2023, it has been extended until December 31, 2024, to facilitate a review (COAG, 2018).

OECD (2019), in its policy outlook 2019, traced the evolution of key educational priorities in Australia. It especially mentioned Australia's commitment to improving the quality of initial teacher education and continuing support for the professional development of teachers and school leaders to enhance students' learning outcomes. Given the need for 'greater consistency in evaluation and assessment practices across jurisdictions (and school sectors), capacity building and better-defined articulations between teacher appraisal and student assessment", the Australian policy initiative was more precise evaluation and assessment of how schools can improve.

Equity in education has been a significant issue. In the policy brief, the Gonski Institute for Education (GIE) flags inequities, referring to the impact of students' socioeconomic status on the PISA performance (GIE, n.d.). Ninety per cent of Adult Australians rated equity in education as just

"OK" (study commissioned by GIE). The study highlighted that during the COVID-19 shutdown, well-resourced, fee-paying schools quickly transitioned to online learning, while public schools lacked the necessary resources and personnel for a rapid adaptation. It concluded that Australia's high-quality education system is not universally accessible. In response, the Council of Australian Governments initiated the 'Investing in the Early Years - A National Early Childhood Development Strategy' in 2009 to ensure all children receive the best start by 2020 (COAG, 2009).

In 2020, the Australian government launched the 'Closing the Gap' national strategy to address the persistent inequality faced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The strategy aims to achieve equal life outcomes by focusing on early childhood care and education (Closing the Gap, 2020).

Structure of the Education System

Education and training in Australia are jointly managed by the Federal Government and individual State and Territory Governments (Australian Government, n. d.). They are responsible for delivering, funding, and regulating schooling for all school-age children, including determining curricula, registering schools, and overseeing government institutions. They also provide support services for government and non-government schools, which operate under conditions set by state authorities (Productivity Commission, 2024). Additionally, state and territory governments collaborate to implement national policies, such as standardised curricula, reporting, testing, and teaching standards.

Schools in Australia, by their affiliation, ownership and management, could be categorised into two broad categories:

- Government schools owned and managed by State and Territory governments
- Non-governmental schools owned and managed by non-governmental organisations, including Catholic and independent schools.

Schools are divided into three broad levels: primary, secondary, and senior secondary. special and post-secondary education are also available (Figure 49.1).

Primary schools: Children typically begin primary school at 4.5 or 5 years old, in the foundational Kindergarten/Preparatory/Preschool stage. Primary education extends through Year 6 or 7 across all states and territories (Productivity Commission, 2024).

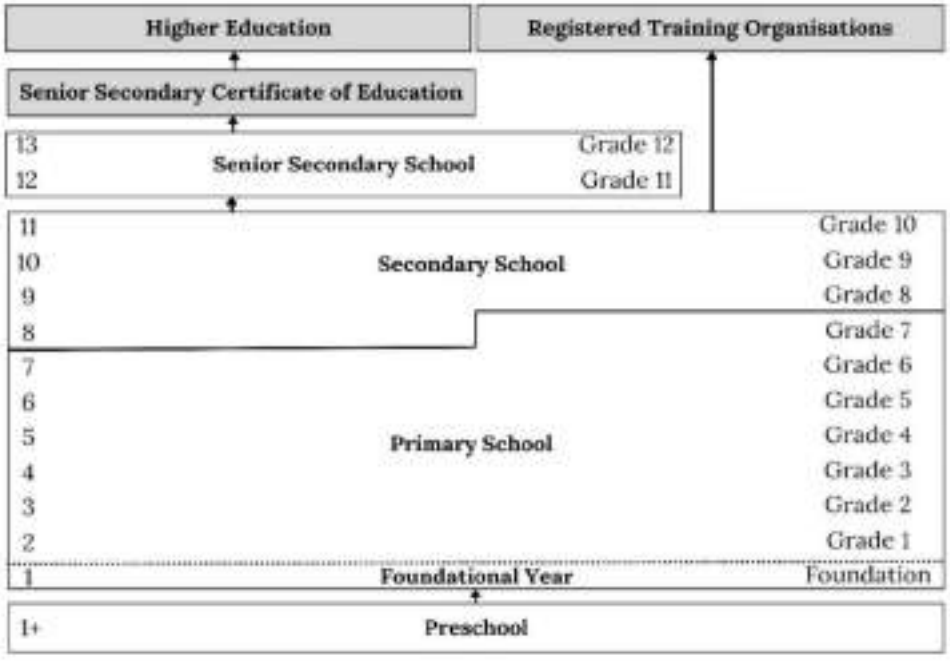

Figure 49.1 Australian School Education System

Source: Department of Education and Training, 2015 (Adapted by Author)

Secondary schools

Secondary schooling commences at the end of primary school and continues through Year 10. The primary and secondary education structures are consistent nationwide (Productivity Commission, 2024).

Senior Secondary schools

Senior secondary schools across Australia offer the final two years of school, Years 11 and 12 (Productivity Commission, 2024).

Special schools in Australia cater to students with mental or physical disabilities, learning difficulties, and social or emotional challenges, as well as those in custody or hospital care. These institutions provide tailored education and support for these students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Postsecondary or tertiary education encompasses higher education and vocational education and training (VET) (Top Hat, n.d.).

Primary and secondary education is mandatory for children aged 6 to 16 (Australian Government, 2023). Students can choose their study options as they progress through the flexible formal education system.

Curricular Framework

The Australian Curriculum Document 2009, approved by education ministers, was a guide for developing the national curriculum (Hale, 2021). It has been updated with each subsequent iteration. A 2020-21 review led to the release of Version 9.0 in May 2022, which jurisdictions plan to implement starting in 2023 (Australian Government, 2022b). For senior secondary (Year 11-12), it follows the Curriculum 8.4 version.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019) commits all Australian governments to two main goals:

1. Promoting excellence and equity in education
2. Ensuring young Australians become confident, creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active, informed members of their communities (Education Council, 2019).

Developing and delivering a world-class school curriculum is an action towards achieving this goal. "The Australian Curriculum provides schools, teachers, parents and students a clear understanding of what students should learn. This curriculum applies no matter where a student lives or their school system" (Department of Education, 2022). In New South Wales, school hours typically run from 8:45 am to 3:00 pm, Monday to Friday. A standard school day consists of five to eight lessons, lasting between 40 minutes and one hour. Teachers supervise two breaks: a morning tea break and a lunch break (NSW Government, n.d.).

The structure of the Australian Curriculum is three-dimensional. It comprises eight learning areas, seven general capabilities, and three cross-curriculum priorities (Figure 49.2).

These three dimensions outline crucial knowledge, understanding, and skills that every young Australian should acquire. It will enable them to learn effectively, contribute meaningfully, and shape their world both present and in the future.

The F-10 Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum outlines a structured learning pathway for students from Foundation to Year 10. It clearly outlines the knowledge and skills to be taught in eight learning areas and sets a high standard for the level of achievement expected from students.

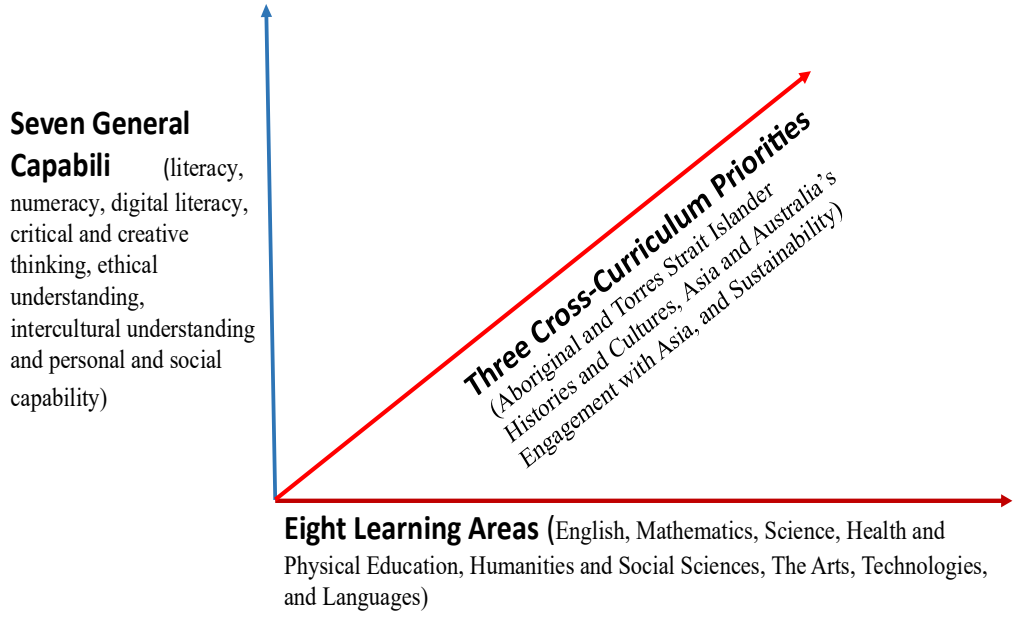

Figure 49.2 3-D Australian Curriculum

Source: Mukhopadhyay, M (Data drawn from Australian Curriculum, 2024)

Eight Discipline-based Learning Areas

The eight learning areas of the Australian Curriculum include English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies, and Languages (Table 49.1). All these learning areas contain disciplinary knowledge. The latter four learning areas have been designed to encompass several subjects consistent with established practice and tradition within the discipline. Each learning area has a common introductory section, which includes:

- Introduction, which specifies each year's levels.
- Rationale, which describes the significance of the learning area and how students will benefit from its study.
- The statement of aims states that students must demonstrate learning outcomes from being taught the content.

- Structure describes how the learning area is structured into strands and sub-strands.
- Key considerations provide essential information to help teachers better understand the learning area and plan for teaching and learning.
- Key connections identify the learning area's relationship to general capabilities, cross-curriculum priorities, and other learning areas.

The Australian Curriculum presents every subject as a learning sequence from Foundation to Year 10. English and Mathematics are both organised into year levels for each year from Foundation to Year 10. Science and HASS present their knowledge and understanding of content for each year level and skills in 2-year bands up to Year 10. The other learning areas present the curriculum for the Foundation year and then in 2-year bands up to Year 10.

Table 49.1 Grade-wise Subjects Taught in Australian Schools

Grade Level	Subjects	Clarifications
Foundation-7	English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Science, Language, Humanities and Social Science, Technologies, and The Arts.	• The Arts-Up to grade 6 includes Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts. • For grades 7 and 8, the arts- one or more in-depth arts subjects. • In Years 9 and 10, The Arts- specialise in one or more arts subjects and • In Years 9 and 10, state and territory authorities or individual schools will determine student access to technology subjects. • The language will include various foreign languages like Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese.
8-10	English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Science, History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, Economics and Business, Language, Technologies, and The Arts.	

Source: Author (Content derived from Australian Curriculum, 2024)

Seven General Capabilities

Alongside disciplinary knowledge, the Australian Curriculum provides seven general capabilities: literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, intercultural

understanding and personal and social ability. These general capabilities are addressed through the content of the learning areas and not as separate subjects or isolated skills (ACARA, n.d.a). This is to strengthen the teaching of learning areas by applying general capabilities and vice-versa. The Australian Curriculum incorporates the development and application of general capabilities throughout the relevant learning areas.

Three Cross-Curriculum Priorities

The Australian Curriculum incorporates three cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and Sustainability. These priorities are not standalone subjects but are integrated into learning area content where relevant, denoted by icons (ACARA, n.d.b).

Each cross-curriculum priority has developed organising ideas that reflect essential knowledge, understanding, and skills. Each priority has an overarching statement describing it and explaining its inclusion in the curriculum. Several organising ideas scaffold the development of priority-related knowledge, understanding, and skills while promoting connections between the priority and learning area content (Australian Curriculum, 2024).

Senior Secondary Curriculum

The senior secondary curriculum includes fifteen subjects in English, mathematics, science, humanities, and social sciences. English, Mathematics, Science, and History subjects were endorsed in December 2012, and Geography was endorsed in July 2013 (ACARA, n.d.c).

- ***English:*** English, English as an Additional Language or Dialect, Essential English and Literature
- ***Mathematics:*** Essential Mathematics, General Mathematics, Mathematical Methods and Specialist Mathematics.
- ***Science:*** biology, chemistry, physics, and Earth and environmental science.
- ***Humanities and Social Sciences:*** Ancient history, Modern history, and Geography.

The Australian Curriculum for senior secondary education outlines each subject's content and achievement standards. The content comprises the knowledge, understanding, and skills that must be imparted and acquired. The achievement standards specify the expected level of learning, indicating the depth of understanding, extent of knowledge, and sophistication of skills that students should possess after studying the subject content.

Teaching Learning

The Australian Curriculum achievement standards are crucial in planning and programming school teaching and learning activities. They outline the expected learning outcomes for students at the end of each year or band of years, guiding teachers in developing their programs. By utilising these standards, teachers can assess students' current learning levels and select appropriate content, which may cover multiple year levels, to teach individuals or groups effectively.

Programs are designed to build on existing knowledge, accommodating students with varying prior achievement levels, whether below, at, or above expectations. After a teaching period, teachers use the achievement standards to evaluate student learning quality, determining if students have met, exceeded, or fallen short of the standards. They rely on assessment data collected throughout the teaching period to inform these judgments and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly, ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed (ACARA, n.d.d).

The Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA, 2013) emphasises the vital role of teachers in delivering the curriculum. It encourages integrated approaches tailored to students' needs, interests, and the local context. ACARA also states teachers can plan their curriculum by identifying targeted content and achievement standards across learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities.

Teachers in Australia enjoy autonomy in delivering the curriculum. However, regarding effective teaching time, Australia ranks 19th out of 33 countries, with over 20% of lesson time spent on non-teaching duties. (Freeman et al., 2014). Australian teachers allocate 7% of their time to paperwork and administrative tasks and 14.5% to maintaining classroom order, leaving only 78.1% of their time dedicated to actual teaching activities.

“In Australia, many students are consistently disengaged in class: as many as 40 per cent are unproductive in a given year” (Goss et al., 2017, p. 3). Australian classroom pedagogy significantly emphasises evidence-based practices **(**AERO, 2022), as schools and teachers are responsible for learning outcomes (Barnes et al., 2018). There is also evidence of differentiated education (Gibbs & McKay, 2021) and self-regulated learning (Peel, 2020) in Australian classrooms. Vassallo et al. (2017) reported that the pedagogical practices in primary grades are the whole group, small group and individual activities, and achievement level grouping.

ACARA (2021) recommended restricting and raising the entry of candidates for teacher education, setting and confirming minimum standards for registration and recognition, and rewarding specialist knowledge and skills.

ICT and Teacher Collaborations in Teaching-Learning

Australia ranks fourth globally in the frequency of teachers using ICT in the classroom, with 66.7% of teachers incorporating it into their lessons. Humanities teachers report more frequent ICT use than mathematics and science teachers. According to TALIS 2013 data, Australian teachers engage more in practices of exchange and coordination than in professional collaboration, indicating that team teaching, peer observation, and joint activities are less common. For example, discussions about student progress or sharing teaching materials among colleagues are limited (Freeman et al., 2014). Notably, most teachers did not consider the use of ICT to be important. However, there was "a significant correlation between teachers who did find it important and those who use technology regularly with their students by posing higher-order tasks" (Prieto-Rodriguez, 2016, p1). Further, girls found the subjects offered in ICT in rural schools to be more boring than those offered in their urban counterparts (Anderson et al., 2007).

Learning Assessment

The Australian Curriculum incorporates various assessment provisions to create a cohesive system that comprehensively views student performance. Assessment occurs at multiple levels and for different purposes, including:

- Ongoing formative assessment in classrooms to monitor learning and provide feedback to both teachers and students.
- Summative assessments are conducted biannually, where schools report students' progress and achievements to parents and caregivers.
- Annual testing of Year 3, Year 5, Year 7, and Year 9 students in literacy and numeracy through the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).
- Periodic sample testing in specific learning areas as part of the National Assessment Program (NAP) (ACARA, n.d.d)**.**

"In the ACT, students are graded each semester on the depth, breadth and range of their knowledge, skills and understanding relative to the expected Achievement Standard and content studied. Levels of depth and breadth are reflected in a common grading tool known as the A-E scale. Teachers' on-balance judgments rely on the quality and variety of assessment tasks students complete over time. The emphasis is on providing various assessment opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding (Teachers' Guide to Assessment" (ACT Government, 2011, p. 7). All ACT schools use the Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards to evaluate and communicate students' progress from kindergarten to year 10.

According to TALIS data, many Australian lower secondary teachers employ various assessment methods, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of student learning (OECD, 2013). A

larger percentage of Australian teachers favour formative assessments over summative ones. Ninety per cent of them frequently observe students and provide immediate feedback, surpassing the TALIS average of 79.7%. Additionally, Australian teachers offer written feedback on student work rather than just grades, and they are more likely to create and administer their assessments than teachers in most other TALIS countries (OECD, 2014).

Health and Physical Education

The Australian Curriculum presents chances for pupils to obtain, assess, and combine data relating to a world that is becoming more intricate, inactive, and rapidly evolving to take affirmative steps to safeguard, enrich, and promote their own and others' health, well-being, safety, and physical activity. Australian school education curriculum integrates health and fitness education within a single subject, and it is a credit programme.

Health and Physical Education comprises of two interrelated strands:

- Personal, social and community health
- Movement and physical activity (ACARA, n.d.e).

In health and physical education, students can make informed decisions regarding their participation in physical activity, safety, health, and overall well-being. "Health and Physical Education aims to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to ensure that individually and collaboratively, students:

- Learn to access, evaluate, and synthesise information, make decisions, seek help, and act to protect, enhance, and advocate for their health, well-being, safety, and physical activity.
- Develop and use personal and social skills and strategies to promote personal identity well-being and build and maintain positive relationships.
- Acquire, apply and evaluate movement skills, concepts and strategic awareness to respond creatively, competently and safely in various physical activity contexts and settings.
- They are provided with regular opportunities to enjoy developmentally appropriate movement experiences and understand and appreciate their significance to personal, social, cultural, and health practices and outcomes.
- Analyze how personal, social, cultural, economic, technological and environmental factors shape understanding of and opportunities for health and physical activity locally, regionally and globally" (ACARA, 2012, p. 7).

The key feature of the curriculum on HPE is the specific focus on relationships, sexuality, and safety explored in an age-appropriate manner across the curriculum from foundation to year 10. ACARA has also initiated additional efforts in the crucial mental health domain for young Australians.

Skills Education

The Australian Curriculum focuses on developing seven general capabilities and skills that enable young Australians to live and work successfully. These capabilities are integrated into the learning areas.

"Australia has been active on the skills agenda. The Australian Qualifications Framework (2011) is the national policy for regulated qualifications, supporting the development of pathways that assist people to move between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market. The Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2012) provides independent advice on skill needs in the Australian economy and on how to direct skills investment to improve productivity" (p-9) (Pont et al., 2013).

"Vocational education and training (VET) in Australia is provided at the general secondary and tertiary education levels. VET in schools enables upper secondary students to study units toward a recognised VET qualification while completing a Senior Certificate". In 2021, 251,200 VET students were in schools (NCVER, 2021). School-aged people may participate in 'VET in Schools' or remain engaged in education through a Registered Training Organization (RTO) or Teaching and Further Education (TAFE). "Overall, 404 600 people aged 15–19 years completed at least one unit of competency as part of a VET qualification at the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate II level or above (at a school or Registered Training Organisation)" (SCRGSP, 2023).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobbies and Life Skills are integrated into the seven general capabilities within the Australian Curriculum rather than being treated as separate entities. Among these capabilities, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, and personal and social capability specifically focus on life skills development. The Intercultural understanding domain emphasises reflecting on cultural diversity, engaging with various cultures, and navigating intercultural contexts. The Personal and Social capability learning continuum comprises four components: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, and Social Management (ACARA, 2021). These capabilities develop students' life skills to be responsible members of society.

In Australia, the school education curriculum does not specifically focus on hobby development. However, students receive a comprehensive arts education under the Foundation to 10 curriculum, which includes various performing and visual arts fields. The Arts curriculum for students up to

grade 6 covers Drama, Dance, Music, Media Arts and Visual Arts. For grades 7 and 8, students can select one or more in-depth arts subjects to study, while in Years 9 and 10, they can specialise in one or more arts subjects. This approach allows students to develop their artistic skills and explore their interests, which can eventually lead to developing their hobbies.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The Australian Curriculum's seven general capabilities include ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, and personal and social capability, focusing on students' moral, social, and cultural awareness. Ethical understanding involves comprehending ethical concepts and perspectives and responding to ethical dilemmas. Intercultural understanding encompasses reflecting on culture and diversity, engaging with cultural and linguistic differences, and navigating intercultural contexts. The personal and social capability learning continuum includes two social elements: Social awareness and Social Management (ACARA, 2021). These capabilities help develop students' moral, social, and cultural awareness, understanding, and behaviour.

Peace and Happiness Education

The emphasis on creative and critical thinking, developing personal and social capabilities and ethical and intercultural understanding enables learners to appreciate other perspectives and experiences through empathy, increasing social awareness through the study of diverse social groups and cultures, exploring values, beliefs and principles that form the basis of judgements and actions and thus analyse, evaluate and synthesise alternative interpretations and representations of the past. Since these are not perceived as standalone courses, no separate teaching or credit is assigned to them; instead, the ACARA (n.d.c) claims that the beauty in learning emerges in its integration with the subject content. However, the terms peace and happiness go missing in the curriculum. Critical thinking and appreciation of multiple perspectives contribute to developing a more rational, tolerant, peaceful, and happy society.

Summary and Conclusion

The Australian Curriculum aims to enable all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. It follows a developmental sequence from Foundation to Year 10, specifying the essential learning content and expected proficiency levels as students progress through school. The curriculum ensures equitable access to high-quality content for all students nationwide, regardless of location.

The Australian Curriculum is structured in three dimensions: learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities. The learning areas encompass various subjects, while general capabilities include life skills that are integrated within these subjects. Cross-curriculum priorities

enhance students' engagement and understanding of their world. These dimensions contribute to a well-rounded education, equipping Australian students with the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary for life and work in the 21st century. Each learning area features an introduction, rationale, aims, structure, key considerations, and relationships, presented as a learning sequence from Foundation to Year 10.

ACARA is at the centre of Australian Curriculum Development and reviews the curriculum every six years. The last review was done in 2020-2021. The Curriculum Framework discussed in the chapter is Version 9.0. The key features of the Australian Curriculum, Version 9.0, include:

1. A strong emphasis on phonics in English, prioritisation of Australian history, and mastery of essential mathematical facts and skills.
2. There will be an increased focus on deepening students' understanding of Australian histories and cultures, including the origins of Australia's democracy and diverse communities.
3. Including privacy and security measures within the Digital Technologies curriculum.
4. A strengthened emphasis on physical activity, resulting in more content that encourages outdoor activities.
5. An enhanced focus on the Foundation year by identifying essential content for the first school year across all learning areas.
6. A reduction in content load to allow for deeper and more rigorous curriculum delivery.
7. The explicit teaching of consent and respectful relationships is now a mandatory aspect of the Health and Physical Education curriculum, addressed in age-appropriate ways from Foundation to Year 10 (ACARA, 2024).

Thus, the curriculum focuses on educating the whole child and understanding the student's personal, social and contextual world. The Australian Curriculum allows schools to design programs that cater to their students' educational needs and challenge them, considering their local contexts, family, cultural, and community backgrounds. This means that states, territories, and schools have the liberty to implement the Australian Curriculum in ways that respect the professional knowledge of their teachers. This autonomy and trust in the teaching community makes learning diverse and more prosperous and addresses students' needs and aspirations. It also would go a long way in nurturing teacher agency, which would develop teachers as reflective practitioners impacting the country's overall learning and education.

The three-dimensional Australian curriculum emphasises the development of the head or the cognitive domain through the emphasis on the learning areas, symbolically represented by writing

pens, the development of the hand or psychomotor domain, symbolically represented through hands and emphasises the development of general capabilities, which include seven identified capabilities and last but not the least the development of global knowledge and one's position in it represented through the cross-cutting priority areas and symbolised by the world map depicting Australia and its neighbourhood. Thus, if we closely examine the curriculum, we see head and hand being aimed at, but the affective domain's heart or development is neither pronounced nor emphasised. However, the general capabilities conceptually address aspects like moral, social, and cultural education through the general capability on ethical understanding and inter-cultural understanding wherein values like respect, trust, integrity, honesty, equity, freedom, tolerance, etc, are mapped from foundation to year 10.

This still misses out on the development of an emotional being. One finds this missing in the introductory statement of the Australian Curriculum, which may be read as its key purpose or vision; "The Australian Curriculum is designed to help all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens" (Australian Curriculum, 2024, p.1). The vision is neither looking at holistic nor happy individuals. It seems to have a very utilitarian approach, demonstrated using the terms 'success', 'confidence', 'creativity', 'active' and 'informed'. So work-related skills and competencies that increase productivity and support global competitiveness are focused, and physical health or activeness and awareness or informed citizens, in that sense, are personal capacities required to live, work, sustain relationships and be a citizen in a globalised world. Supporting this view, The National Catholic Education Commission (2014) suggested "the creation of a more inspiring, larger and comprehensive vision for the whole curriculum".

What, however, is ingrained deeply in the Australian curriculum is its underlying values of basic education like human rights, equality, democracy, preservation of natural and social diversity and the endorsement of multiculturalism. This is common in the curriculum of countries like Finland and Singapore, which are considered to have the world's best education system as per the international test results.

Further, the general capabilities and the cross-cutting priority areas are integrated with the learning areas to make them richer and, at the same time, transact them as a whole by building key connections and mapping their natural occurrence with content areas. Pedagogically, there could not be a better way of dealing with values, skills, and social and global awareness. However, the challenge could be ensuring its development in every child from foundation to year 10. While each learning area has in its elements the identification of key connections and representation through icons, the achievement standards or assessment practices do not detail its growth chart. To be precise, mapping common paths for developing knowledge, skills, and understanding of the general

capability of 'ethical understanding' or 'personal and social capability' is not as detailed as the progression chart for the general capability of 'literacy and numeracy'. Thus, for the development of the holistic child, equal emphasis on the head, heart and hand, as well as the capability to ask existential questions or engage in reflections, is very important to nurture spiritually, socially, emotionally and cognitively evolved beings.

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Education for a Better Future: Fiji

Subhash Chander

Abstract

In the 54 years since independence, the Fiji Islands have made significant educational strides. The country was guided by the outcome-based National Curriculum Framework, developed in 2007 and revised in 2013. The government regularly reviews strategies to meet its constitutional commitment to universal education. A strong emphasis is placed on technical and vocational education from Form-3 to Form-7, with technology integration. Assessment practices have shifted towards a dual focus on assessment for learning and assessment of learning and adopting formative assessment. However, the teaching approach remains predominantly teacher-centric, with many teachers unprepared for technology integration. There is no articulated agenda for hobbies, life skills, or peace and happiness education. However, through subject learning and co-curricular activities, there are ample opportunities to develop hobbies through dance, drama, music, art, sports, games, and life skills. Consequently, the heavy curriculum prioritises lower-order cognitive skills, hindering holistic development and pushback to achieve development goals.

Keywords: Fiji, Constitutional Commitment, Universal Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Teacher-Centric, Curriculum,

Introduction

Fiji was under colonial rule for nearly a century before independence from Great Britain in 1970. The initial governor from Britain introduced over 60,000 Indian labourers under indentured contracts to Fiji. Many of these labourers settled down in Fiji after their contracts ended. By the

early 1900s, Fijian society was segregated along ethnic lines, with indigenous Fijians (iTaukei), Europeans, and Indo-Fijians residing in separate regions and preserving their distinct languages and customs (CIA, 2023). In September 2014, general elections resulted in the democratic election of a government following eight years of military rule. (Koya, 2015). In the December 2022 elections, former opposition leader Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka became the new prime minister by a narrow parliamentary margin (CIA, 2023).

Fiji is an archipelago and nation in the South Pacific Ocean, comprising 540 islets and 330 islands; 100 are inhabited. Fiji islands are of volcanic origin. Fiji has a total area of 18,272 km^2 (7,055 sq mi) and a coastline length of 4,638 km. Fiji does not share a land border with any country. Viti Levu, the largest of Fiji's islands, accounts for over half of the country's total land area (World Atlas, 2024). It has a tropical marine climate with only slight seasonal temperature variations.

Fiji had a population of 933,100 in January 2023, according to Dataportal -Digital Fiji: 49.9 per cent female and 50.1 per cent male. The population growth rate is only 0.5%. The life expectancy at birth (2024) is 68.05 years. The ethnic composition of the Fiji population is iTaukei (Fijian) 56.8%, Indo-Fijian 37.5%, Rotuman 1.2%, and others 4.5% (CIA, 2024)). The religious composition is Christians 64.5%, Hindu 27.9%, Muslim 6.3%, Sikh 0.3%, other 0.3%, none 0.8% (CIA, 2024). According to a survey, Fijians are among the happiest communities in the world. The Fijian constitution has three official languages: English, Fijian, and Fiji Hindi.

Fiji is a middle-income country that is relatively more developed than other Pacific nations. Fiji serves as a hub for re-exporting goods to other Pacific countries. The tourism industry significantly contributes to Fiji's economy, attracting over 750,000 tourists annually and around 38% of the country's GDP (World Bank Group, 2017). Fiji's GDP was USD 4.98 billion in 2022 (Trading Economics), with a GDP growth rate estimated at 6.8 per cent in 2023-24. Its per capita GDP was 10,720 PPP dollars (World Bank, 2021). Fiji's human development index (HDI) was 0.73 points, 99th among 191 countries (2021). The recent valuation for unemployment in Fiji is estimated to be 4.93 per cent (World Bank, 2021).

Fiji has a literacy rate of 93.7 per cent. The NER for primary grades was 100 per cent, and the GER was 108.33 (2013) for both genders. MEHA (2021) reported 154,248 children enrolled in 736 primary schools with 6,196 teachers and 70,093 students in 176 secondary schools with 5,576 teachers (MEHA, 2021).

Educational Policy

After independence, Fiji passed a Constitution in 1970, 1990, 1997, and 2013. The fourth Constitution of 2013 is the guiding document or Law of Fiji. The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (2013) guarantees rights to education in Article 31. It states that

(1) "Every person has the right to early childhood, primary and secondary education, and further education.

(2) The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to free early childhood, primary, secondary and further education; and (b) to education for persons unable to complete their primary and secondary education.

(3) Conversational and contemporary iTaukei and Fiji Hindi languages shall be compulsory in all primary schools.

(4) The State may direct any educational institution to teach subjects about health, civic education and issues of national interest, and any educational institution must comply with any such directions made by the State" (GoF, 2013, p23).

The Constitution held the State responsible for showing the nonavailability of resources whenever it claimed a shortage of resources in implementing any right-based provisions. One of the very important aspects of provisions that give equal rights to all persons is non-discrimination in the right to education.

However, the Education Commission Report of 2000 (MoE, 2000) Provided the directions for future Education in Fiji. The report of the Commission was instrumental in organising the first National Education Summit in 2004, leading to the Suva Declaration in 2005. "The Declaration outlines the major directions for education over the next ten years, 2006 to 2015", said the Minister for Education in the Foreword (p3). Two important components of the Suva Declaration are the 'Child' and 'Curriculum'. The takes on Child and Curriculum are:

- Education should focus on developing fundamental values such as ethics, morals, social awareness, and democratic values. The ultimate goal of education is to create an individual sense of identity through creative expression, instil motivation to become lifelong learners, nurture the ability to lead a full and productive life and prepare them for a world in which change is inevitable. Education should be centred around the child and reflect society's values of social justice, inclusivity, gender equity, and cultural diversity.
- Complementing a child's future, the curriculum must be aligned to the child's holistic development guided by a new National Curriculum Framework from Kindergarten to Form 7 and offer diverse pathways to prepare children for the changing world of work. The curriculum should reflect local culture, values, and life skills while addressing modern

> ideas, globalisation, and technology. Making Vernacular languages, Family Life Education, and Cultural Studies mandatory is essential. Fiji must review assessment methods to incorporate more school-based assessment at all levels. (Suva Declaration, p.12).

Further, the Strategic Plan, complementing the Suva Declaration, for 2005-08 defines a few outcomes that mean business in reconstructing education. A few of the important expected outcomes of the Strategic Plan are:

- Children and increased participation of adults, especially those in disadvantaged groups, especially rural areas, women, persons with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups, will have access to a quality education and be prepared for the world of work where rapid changes are inevitable. The community will have greater participation in education, and Students will have increased awareness of nation-building, Culture and Values. Education personnel – teachers and academic leaders will be qualified, competent and motivated to deliver educational services.
- Quality partnerships and links to industry, higher education institutions, communities, businesses, provincial councils, and Donors will be strengthened. Educational management will be improved through accountability, policies and programmes (MoE, 2005, pp. 14-15)

According to the Access to Quality Education Programme (AQEP) End of Program Evaluation in 2018 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018), significant education reforms have been implemented in Fiji since 2015. One crucial change was the introduction of the Free Education Grant (FEG), which replaced the previous poverty indexing scheme (Disadvantaged Schools Index).

The key reform areas highlighted in the evaluation include:

1. Free Education Grant (FEG): Grants are provided to schools based on enrollment numbers, replacing the previous poverty indexing scheme.
2. Free textbook scheme: The provision of free textbooks to students.
3. Subsidised transport scheme: A scheme offering free bus fare to students.
4. Eliminating school fees: Removing fees students previously had to pay.
5. School feeding program: A program that provides milk and cereals in the morning to kindergarten and Year One students (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018p.11).

Additionally, the MEHA implemented various initiatives, including financial management training, external school review inspection teams, professional development workshops for teachers, efforts to reduce student-teacher ratios, additional allowances for rural teachers, and new regulations

regarding school fundraising. These reforms and initiatives aimed to enhance accessibility, equity, and the overall quality of education in Fiji.

UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (Singh, 2016) mentions that Fiji has developed as a part of its reform process an early childhood education policy (2013), enterprise education policy, examinations and assessments policy (2012), grants distribution policy, policy in effective implementation of inclusive education in Fiji, policy on establishment and recognition and registration of schools, policy on national curriculum assessment and reporting, policy on school zoning (reviewed 2014), rural allowance policy, schools standard monitoring and inspection policy (reviewed 2014), particular education policy (2013). A review of Fiji's education policy reflects diversification in different areas of the education system. However, the effectiveness of the policies in the field is something that many stakeholders question. For example, teachers felt they received less inclusive education training (AQEP, 2022).

Fiji's school and higher education system faces a peculiar challenge of diverse geography. The remote areas and fewer students in those areas lead to a lack of possibility of establishing schools. To deal with this challenge, the government tries to ensure transportation. Schoolboats are an example of how the Fijian government deals with access issues due to geography. Some boarding institutions are open in the state, so those who cannot reach out to the schools due to geography can stay there and learn. Also, distance education is encouraged in the country to allow continuing education. The government has established a meal system to incentivise education for those living in remote areas.

Structure of the Education System

The Fiji school education system comprises preschool, primary and secondary education, and vocational education in the final years of schooling. Primary education covers 1-8 years for 6 to 14 years, and four-year secondary education covers 9-12 for up to 18 years. Primary and secondary education are free and compulsory. Preschool education is not compulsory. Education from primary to secondary education is compulsory. The MEHA is responsible for overseeing and regulating the education system in Fiji.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is emphasised and celebrated in Fiji. The ECE theme 2023 was 'Early Learning Matters: Learning through Connections' (Madigibuli, 2023). There is more than one pattern and practice. While conventional primary schools' kindergarten enrolment happens at five for one year, faith-based or community-run schools admit children as young as three. As of 2020, there were 74 preschool units with 17,912 students supported by 1,426 teachers, a teacher-student ratio of approximately 1:13 (MEHA, 2020).

The state has made significant efforts to reach rural areas and expand the preschool education system. Linguistic and cultural diversity is visible early in the preschool system, emphasising English, Hindi, and Fijian.

In 2020, 736 primary schools, including 17 special education schools, catered to 154,206 students and employed 6,232 teachers, resulting in a teacher-student ratio of about 1:25 (MEHA, 2020). Fiji's education system comprises 172 secondary schools with a total enrollment of 67,547 students, supported by 5,665 teachers, resulting in a teacher-student ratio 1:12.

According to the situational analysis conducted by UNICEF (2017), Fiji has made significant progress in achieving universal primary education, with nearly all students enrolling in primary school having prior early childhood education experience. However, primary and secondary education face many issues and challenges. The dropout rate of students is still considerably high in Fiji. Also, ethnic groups perform poorly compared to other students in schools at the secondary level. The employability and employment of secondary school graduates is a problem.

Primary and secondary education, including School-based vocational education, is tuition-free, and students are given free textbooks. The "Topper's Scheme" scholarship program provides free tuition for the top 600 secondary school graduates. Higher education students can get bank loans after university admission (Singh, 2016).

There are public examination systems at the end of 10 and 12-year schooling. The "Lower secondary school ends at grade 10 with the award of the Junior Certificate examination. Senior secondary school, Grade 12, ends with the Fiji School Leaving Certificate award. Students can then proceed to Form 7, an additional year 13, and complete the Fiji Form 7 Examination in four or five subjects." (Baxton, n.d.). Fiji offers technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs to secondary school students. These programs provide an alternate route to learning at an early age and maintain continuity from secondary to higher education and vocational training.

According to the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (Singh, 2016), Vocational courses have been integrated into secondary schools as part of a policy measure to promote vocational training and meet the skills requirements of students (UNHRC, 2016). Seventy-two secondary schools offer two-year vocational programs to prepare students for employment. In 2020, Fiji had 2,741 students enrolled in technical education programs. Additionally, 106 students pursued vocational education. (MEHA, 2020).

The bridging program called Matua allows former secondary school dropouts to re-enter the education system and complete their secondary education. This program allows them to resume formal schooling at the Year 10 level. Matua students attend evening classes, studying the same curriculum as their counterparts in regular daytime classes. The teachers who instruct the day classes also teach the evening classes, and both groups take the same examinations. After

completing Year 10, Matua students can continue their education and pursue the Year 12 Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination and the Year 13 Fiji Seventh Form Certificate Examination (MEHA, 2015) (Table 50.1 and Figure 50.1).

Table 50.1 Structure of School Education System in Fiji.

	Education Programme	Entrance Age	Duration in years	Compulsory of Optional	Diploma or Certificate at the end of the Programme
1	Preschool	3	3	O	NA
2	Primary (Class 1-6)	6	6	C	NA
3	Junior Secondary (Forms 1-4)	12	4	C	Fiji Junior Certificate
4	Secondary (Forms 5-7)	16	3	C	Fiji School Leaving Certificate

Source: *Author*

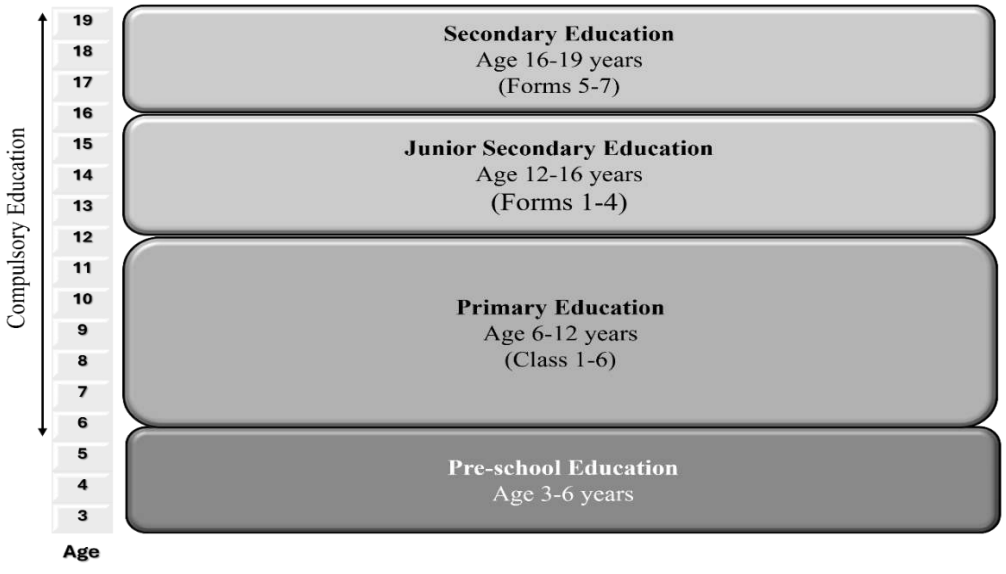

Figure 50.1 Structure of Fijian Education System

Source: *Savu, 2016 (Adapted by Author)*

Curricular Framework

Fiji formulated the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2007 (MoE, 2007) and revised it in 2013 (However, the author needs help accessing the revised 2013 NCF document. He had to depend upon the 2007 version of NCF). In her Foreword, the Chief Executive Officer of Education, Youth and Sport stated, "The NCF is a broad statement about what will constitute education in Fiji. The NCF guides curriculum developers and teachers on what will be taught and how and why this content will be taught. It also provides opportunities for teachers, students, and the community to

contribute to and make relevant decisions about the Curriculum process" (MOE, 2007, p.v foreword).

The Ministry of Education noted in the NCF2007 that during political independence in 1970, one of the significant educational challenges revolved around establishing a sense of national identity and consciousness. Additionally, there was a lack of appropriate curriculum and examinations to replace the previously dominant colonial system. The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) was established within the Ministry of Education in 1968 to address these issues. In 1970, the UNDP and UNESCO initiated the Curriculum Development Project. This collaborative effort focused on developing curricula for Forms 1 to 4 (grades 7 to 10: Junior Secondary levels).

The vision of curricular reforms was "Educating the child holistically for peaceful and prosperous Fiji", and the mission was "To provide a challenging teaching and learning environment in partnership with stakeholders that will nurture and empower the child to become a competent member of society" (MOE, 2007, P vi).

Fiji, through its NCF, adopted an Outcome-based Approach and organised the curriculum into seven Foundation Areas of Learning and Development (FALD) for early childhood and seven Key Learning Areas (KLAs) for primary and secondary education to achieve seven Major Learning Outcomes (MLOs) (Table 50.2).

Table 50.2 Seven FALDs, KLOs and MLOs

	FALDs	KLAs	MLOs
1.	Aesthetics, Creativity and Arts,	Expressive and Creative Arts	Be empowered learners.
2.	Language	Healthy Living and Physical Education	Communicate effectively.
3.	Literacy and Communication	Language	Conduct investigations
4.	Learning to Know	Mathematics	Make decisions.
5.	Learning and Learning to Live together	Science	Select and use information.
6.	Physical Development, Health and Well-Being,	Studies of Society and Economic Development	Show enterprise.
7.	Moral and Spiritual Development	Technology	Understand, change and balance relationships.

Source: *Author (Data sourced from Ministry of Education 2007)*

Preschools focus on physical, cognitive, social, and emotional education. The ECE curriculum aims to build strong foundations in language and communication, social-emotional skills, physical development, and cultural awareness, develop interpersonal relationships, foster cultural and spiritual awareness, promote care and respect for others, and emphasise inclusiveness (Figure 50.1). Introducing Early Learning Development Standards is essential in evaluating how children learn and progress.

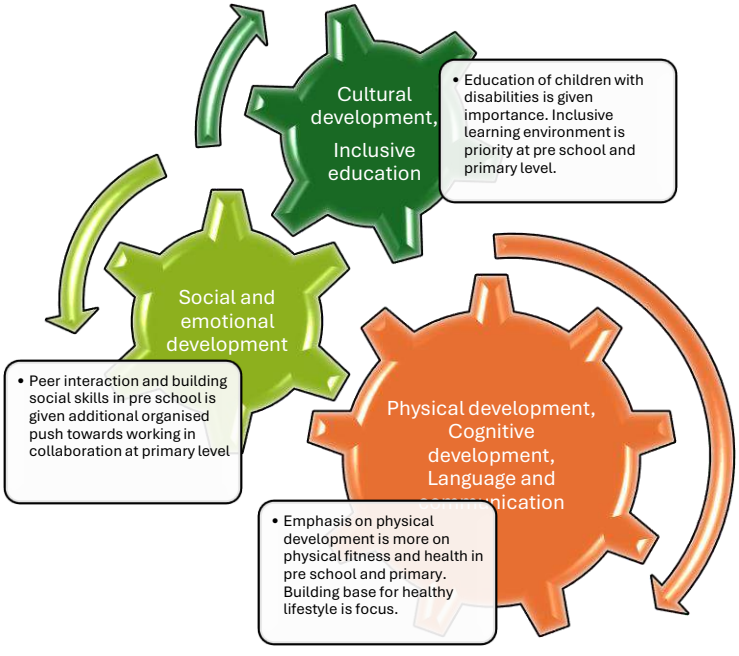

Figure 50.2 Interlocking Educational Priorities in Pre-School Education

Source: *Author*

The primary curriculum aims to develop essential literacy and numeracy skills through an outcomes-based approach. It emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making across all subjects. It integrates Fijian values and cultural knowledge into learning experiences. The curriculum prepares students to transition to secondary education, focusing on lifelong learning skills. The NCF2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007) stipulates subjects for various levels of education (Table 50.3).

At the secondary level, the curriculum consolidates core foundation skills in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking. The students are introduced to career exploration opportunities and guidance. The curriculum offers subject specialisation in chosen fields based on individual interests and aptitudes. It integrates global citizenship education and environmental awareness with digital literacy and technological skills.

Table 50.3 Levels of Schooling and Subjects (NCF2007)

Levels of Schooling: Classes	Subjects
Class 1	
Class 2	Arts; Health, Living and Physical Education; Language; Mathematics; Science; Social Studies; and Technology
Class 3	
Class 4	
Class 5	
Class 6	
Class 7 (form 1)	Arts; Health, Family Life, Physical Education, Sports and Health; Language; Mathematics; Science; Social Studies; and Technology.
Class 8 (form 2)	
Class 9 (form 3)	Art, Craft, Music, Dance, Drama; Health, Family Life, Physical Education, Sports and Health; Language; Mathematics; Science; Commercial Studies and Social Sciences; and Technology - agricultural science, graphic arts or word work or metal work, Home economics, office technology and vocational education
Class 10 (form 4)	
Class 11 (form 5)	Art, Craft, Music, Dance, Drama; Health, Family Life, Physical Education, Sports and Health; Language; Mathematics; Biology, Chemistry, Physics; History, geography, Accounting and Economics Commercial Studies and Social Sciences; and Technology - agricultural science, Adv Home Economics, Wood Technology, Engineering technology, technical drawing, computer studies, office technology and vocational education
Class 12 (form 6)	
Class 13 (form 7)	Unique Feature is Technology Education – Agricultural Science, Textile Technology, Food Science and Technology, Technical Drawing and Design, Information Technology, and Business Administration

Note: Language education is available in Fijian, Hindi, English, Rotuman, Urdu, Mandarin, Tamil and Punjabi
Source: *Ministry of Education, 2007 [Table 1, p.42] (Adapted by Author)*

Senior secondary school offers advanced studies in specific academic fields for students seeking higher education. The senior secondary level encourages research, analysis, and critical reflection. The lifelong learner's curriculum seeks to help learners develop professional and academic skills for their chosen careers.

Two important observations by two UN agencies are:

- Collaboration with other ministries, such as Health, Social Welfare, and Communities, presents an opportunity to enhance the overall well-being of children. (UNHRC, 2016).
- The school subjects are loaded with heavy content, and content is repeated at different levels (UNESCO, 2019).

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) includes technical drawing, woodwork, metalwork, food and nutrition, electronics, etc. Students are also exposed to visual and performing arts. The frequency of the core subjects and other subject areas differs in the schools. Core subjects

are taught multiple times weekly, and moral and religious education is done once or twice weekly. The electives period depends on the choice and number of subjects students choose. It is done in longer blocks in schools.

In Fiji, the school year follows a trimester system. Term 1 typically runs from January to April, Term 2 from May to August, and Term 3 from September to November. The typical school day starts at 8:00 am and ends at 3:00 or 3:30 pm. Break times during school may vary slightly between schools, although a general pattern is observed across most institutions. A typical break schedule includes a morning break from 10:15 am to 10:45 am. The second break, around midday, lasts from 12:30 to 1:15 pm. Individual schools may have slight variations to accommodate their specific needs or preferences (MEHA, 2016).

According to Koya Vaka'uta (2018), the education system in Fiji has undergone limited changes since gaining independence. It was not until the 1990s that locally developed national curricula and examinations were introduced. The 1969 Education Commission report identified significant issues related to access, equity, curriculum, teacher shortages, and teacher dissatisfaction. A subsequent education commission in 2000 found that little had changed since the 1969 review. "Primary education was widely perceived to be reverting to a content-driven curriculum emphasising examination outcomes and challenging the more holistic philosophy valued by the profession" (Crossley et al., 2017, p. 11[7]).

Despite curricular reforms, colonial inheritance creates an imbalance. English as a language receives higher priority than the native Fijian language. Lagi (2016) found that while 77 per cent of students do not find many problems with English, 30 per cent of Indigenous Fijian students do not perform well in Fijian vernacular in the sampled school. The emphasis on English language skills at home and school appears to interfere with learning native vernacular.

Fiji follows a centralised curriculum development approach emphasising content and examinations, reinforcing a teacher-centred pedagogy and rote learning. This "certification mentality" remains deeply ingrained in the education system (Koya Vaka'uta, 2018).

Teaching Learning Process

Corresponding reforms in pedagogy and assessment must accompany curricular innovation and reforms. The pedagogical practices in Fiji schools have been influenced by historical factors, centralised curriculum development, examination-focused approaches, and pressures faced by teachers. Efforts have been made to address these issues. However, teaching-learning in Fiji schools continues to be teacher-centric and primarily transmissive or conventional lectures (Lingam, 2007;

[7] This article is also available as a Word file from the University of Bristol site. This quotation is on page 11.

Martin et al., 2015; Joweli, 2018; Burnett et al., 2019). This situation, despite the knowledgeability of the teachers, is due to heavy curricular content (UNICEF, 2017), exam-centricity (Joweli, 2018) and an inadequate teacher support system (Martin et al., 2015). Gani et al., 2019) found that the Fijian classrooms need to prepare for technology-integrated instruction due to immense challenges.

Burnette et al. (2019) also found the dynamics of classroom management. A few statements, to quote, made by respondents are: "*Those who are disruptive are immediately called out and shamed in front of the class; as well as since the students are new to the school, they are told that if they keep misbehaving, there are many children who wish to attend the school who can easily fill their slot." "The teacher begins the class by telling students there is no room for people who wish to waste time and anyone who misbehaves will be dealt with accordingly". ITE students commonly made references to counselling as a means of dealing with disruptive behaviour, for example, "if any of the students does not listen to the teacher then they are taken for counselling* (Burnette et al., 2019, p.6)*."*

Aue Te Ava (2022) reflected on Fijian cultural values on education. The contention was that teachers should not abandon Fijian values for Western knowledge and culture nor go back to the past; instead, Fijians must look for innovative pedagogy for Western knowledge while holding on to the native cultural values.

Learning Assessment

The NCF 2007 recommends Assessment *for* Learning and Assessment *of* Learning, implying formative and summative assessments. In 2014, discussions were held about reintroducing national examinations as benchmark assessments in years 6 and 10, indicating the ongoing importance placed on examinations in Fiji's education system.

According to the UNESCO 2015 report on Pacific Education for All, Fiji has taken significant steps to align its education system with national planning and development. The country established the Fiji Qualifications Framework, recognising the importance of equipping individuals with skills, knowledge, and attitudes that address current economic shortages and future needs (MEHA, 2015, p. 21). Fiji also developed a National Curriculum Framework, which emphasised the importance of assessment and proposed a shift from assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning. This change led to the implementation of class-based assessments, literacy and numeracy assessments, and the integration of vocational education into the curriculum (MEHA, 2015, p. 10).

Although the influence of the British education system is visible in the assessment at the school level, Fiji's assessment system is a mix of formative and summative assessment. It also tries to be inclusive and responsive towards cultural backgrounds. Further, including learners with a disability

in the assessment framework is a significant development. The school teachers support flexible assessment systems despite a perceived training deficiency (Tikoduadua & Hay, 2016). One of the challenges was examinations at the end of the session. It leads to stress, competition and dropouts among students.

Health and Physical Education

Health and Physical Education (HPE) is part of NCF. The NCF mentions that HPE helps achieve physical well-being, healthy lifestyles, and essential life skills. HPE is a compulsory subject offered throughout primary and secondary education. This ensures a consistent focus on health and physical development for all students. HPE content covers:

- Physical fitness and healthy living practices (nutrition, hygiene, disease prevention)
- Motor skills development and participation in various sports and physical activities
- Personal and social development (self-awareness, communication, teamwork)
- Mental health and well-being awareness.

As indicated in Dorovolomo's study (2015), physical education in Fiji's primary and secondary schools is prescribed in the national curriculum, but delivery varies. Many schools face limited equipment, inadequate facilities, and large class sizes. The absence of physical education in high-stakes assessments contributes to its reduced importance in the curriculum. Additionally, there is a lack of physical education degrees in Fiji and Pacific Island teacher education institutions, limiting the opportunities for physical educators to acquire the necessary qualifications for higher positions within the education system.

According to the Fiji National Sports Commission Annual Report for 2021-22. One hundred and four “Kids in Community Sports” programs were coordinated across 101 communities and 44 schools nationwide. During the initial two months of the year, setbacks in the resumption of sports activities were experienced due to COVID-19, which resulted in a decline in school participation compared to the previous fiscal year. However, there was a notable increase in community-based programs during the 2021-2022. Five “Educate the Educator” programs provided professional development opportunities for 171 teachers from 43 schools. These educators underwent upskilling and accreditation in various training sessions, which were conducted in collaboration with key stakeholders, including Fiji Rugby, OSEP Courses, Oceania Badminton, Fiji Volleyball, Netball Fiji, Fiji Table Tennis, Weightlifting Fiji, and Fiji Swimming (Fiji National Sports Commission, 2022).

Skills Education

Skills education is one of the critical features of the Fiji Islands' school system. The aim is to provide knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to apply technology in the economy's formal and informal sectors. A particular focus of skills education is to benefit students with disabilities. Skills education promotes the dignity of working hands-on in vocational and technical education and work ethics for Fiji's social and economic development. Skills education, better known as TVET, is innovatively conceptualised to benefit those pursuing higher education and the early school leavers seeking employment. One of the guiding principles applicable in TVET is learning in the 'Real World' so that the learners may develop mental pictures of the world of work (for more details, please refer to page 14 of NCF2007).

Career education forms a critical element of Fiji's school education. Career education starts in primary grades as part of general education and is more for awareness development. As the students reach the secondary level, they learn the relationships between the choice of subjects and their relationships with their career aspirations and relate them to the opportunities in the employment market of the Fiji Islands. The schools provide counselling support to the students so they are equipped to make decisions related to their careers.

As mentioned earlier, under the Curriculum Framework, Fiji offers skills education from Form 3 onwards. Some courses are agricultural science, office technology, Information technology and computer studies, Home economics, Textile Technology, Food Science and Technology, Technical Drawing and Design, Information Technology, and Business Administration. There is a scope for taking micro-credentials concerning specific school-level skills. As global practices show that the sync between the private sector, industry and government institutions is important for entrepreneurship education, Fiji has also taken steps to increase these linkages.

By 2014, there were 87 vocational schools, three agricultural training centres, two fisheries training centres and 26 private TVET centres (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2022). Enrollment was 1400, with about 19% at the secondary level and 2900 at the senior secondary level, with only 1.1% of girls. The UNESCO-UNEVOC data are old. Things must have improved during the last decade. Despite the government's efforts and emphasis, TVET programmes are not preferred. Most students opt for general education, leading to a white-collar profession.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobby development is not an explicit agenda of Fiji school education. However, the curriculum framework provides ample hobby development opportunities through art education, physical education, and sports. Students are encouraged to participate in arts, music, dance, and drama

activities. Schools also offer clubs in some specific areas. Although there are programmes for visual and performing art at the tertiary level, the schools do not offer credit-based courses.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) emphasises lifelong learning skills across various subjects and domains, including the development of communication and collaboration, decision-making, self-management, etc. Promoting health and physical education, civic and citizenship education, and environmental awareness programmes are integral to life skill education. However, this life skills education is by default compared to what could have been a course focusing on the inculcation of life skills.

Life skills education is a psychosocial intervention that promotes positive social and mental health and coping skills, develops self-confidence, and enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Prajapati et al., 2017). Singh and Prasad (2023) contend that life skills education is vital for all-around development and future success in the Fijian context. They recommend formal assessment and a credit-based model for strengthening life skills education in Fiji.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

Fiji is a multi-ethnic, multicultural society. Hence, social and cultural education is vital. The National Curriculum Framework emphasises the development of ethical values, responsible citizenship and cultural awareness. Moral, Social and Cultural Education (MSCE) is woven into core subjects and addressed individually through co-curricular activities. Vuniwaqa (2020) investigated the relationship between Fijian language learning and students' cultural identity development. The study found that learning the Fijian language fostered cultural pride, understanding of traditions, and connection to ancestral communities. This aligns with the goal of MSCE to promote cultural awareness and appreciation. However, other studies indicate that parents prefer children to communicate in English rather than in Fijian.

A report by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2018) highlights the importance of equipping teachers with appropriate instructional strategies and resources to deliver MSCE effectively, contributing to its overall impact on students' development.

Moral and value development is a serious concern. Racule (n.d.) mentioned that many qualified young people cannot find employment and turn to crime, which is increasing. Those who start their lives with crime at a young age land up in jails, jeopardising their prospects. The situation further adds to frustration and negative attitudes among young people. Narayan (2022) argued for compulsory moral education as “Bullying, glue sniffing, dealing with drugs, ragging, street fights, cybersex and many others are heavily common amongst our Fijian children be it in primary or

secondary schools (Narayn, 2022)". The situation has prompted the Ministry of Education to re-emphasise the importance of values education. In October 2021, Hon. Minster Premila Kumar stated, "The current issues in the society simply tell us that we need to strategise our *Moral Values* and Civic *Education.*[8] *".* On 10th October, another complementary statement was that the Ministry is developing a civic and moral education curriculum to foster civic pride and moral values. *"*The curriculum intends to inculcate a sense of civic pride and patriotism in a student's life from an early age (Fiji Government, 2021)".

Peace and Happiness Education

Fiji stands for change, peace, and prosperity, as stated by the Fiji Prime Minister in his address on the 53rd Independence Day on October 10, 2023 (Chandar, 2023) Education is a crucial instrument for change, peace, and prosperity. However, peace education is not an independent subject or programme in the school education scheme in Fiji.

Neither happiness education figures in the curricular framework. There are, however, indirect measures of happiness experienced in school education. However, happiness may be experienced in other programs and provisions like life skill education, co-curricular activities, etc. Mindfulness is promoted among students through meditation, yoga, etc. Through various initiatives and integrated elements, schools are encouraged to nurture peaceful and happy individuals equipped with the skills and understanding to contribute to a more harmonious world. Fiji National University Centre for Educational Research (FNUCER, 2023) contended that there are efforts to integrate elements of well-being and social-emotional learning into Fijian education. However, effective implementation and assessment of impact are wanting.

Summary and Conclusion

Fiji Islands gained independence in 1970. During this relatively short 54 years, tremendous progress has been made in education. Fiji has achieved universal primary education and is inching towards universal secondary education, where the NER is already more than 80%.

The Government has taken several policy initiatives, made structural adjustments, and framed a curriculum framework. The National Curriculum Framework, developed in 2007, was revised in 2013. The government has frequently reviewed its progress and revised its strategies to achieve its policy goal and constitutional commitment to universal education.

The National Curriculum Framework has some unique features. The curriculum has been designed as an outcome-based curriculum constructed in terms of FALD for pre-primary education and key

[8] www.education.gov.fj

learning areas for primary and secondary education. The subject learning is oriented towards achieving key learning areas. Besides the general learning outcomes of schooling, the National Curriculum Framework stipulates subject and grade-based learning outcomes in the key learning areas.

An important feature of Fijian education is skills or technical and vocational education. The concerned vertical has been termed technology, which implies technology integration in learning vocational skills. The technical and vocational courses start right from Form 3 and continue to Form 7. There are many options in vocational courses (Table 50.3).

The National Curriculum Framework and policy documents have made several recommendations about modernising classroom practices and learning assessment. In learning assessment, the learning of assessment has been replaced by a dual emphasis on assessment for learning and assessment of learning, introducing formative assessment as an integral component of learning assessment. However, The teaching-learning process continues to be teacher-centric, and teachers are unprepared to adopt technology-integrated education.

'Hobby Education' is not mentioned in the curriculum-related documents. There is no such course. However, there are enough opportunities to develop hobbies while learning dance, drama, music, art, sports, and games. Similarly, there is no specific course on life skills also. Life skills developed have been woven into subject learning and co-curricular activities. Also, there is no profession for peace education or happiness education, though the motto of Fiji Islands is change, peace and prosperity. Research studies revealed an interesting contradiction. One set of studies found that more than 80% of Fijians are either happy or very happy. On the other research and field experiences indicate young, educated people taking to crime early; there are ethnic tensions, though conflicts are substantially reduced. Bullying, glue sniffing, dealing with drugs, ragging, street fights, cybersex and many others are common among Fijian primary and secondary school children (Narayan, 2022). Considering the increasing student behaviour and crime among young, educated people, the government has taken steps to introduce moral education in schools.

Although the school curriculum framework provides for different types of activities, school education continues to be burdened with a heavy curriculum and emphasis on examination performance. As a result, lower-order cognitive development takes the prime position, pushing social, emotional, and physical developments to the back burner.

There is a long way to go to achieve the students' all-around development goal. Although there are provisions for citizenship education, the research evidence of moral deprivation makes it difficult to conclude whether students today and future citizens of tomorrow would teach the values of global citizenship with concern and empathy for others.

The Fiji Islands have done exceptionally well in education in the short period since independence. However, they have a long way to go to achieve their celebrated aspirations of education for a better future characterised by Change, Peace, and Prosperity.

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Trailblazing Education Reforms: New Zealand

Subhash Chander

Abstract

New Zealand is an island nation with a stable, developed economy and a bi-cultural society. The New Zealand Curriculum was last reformed in 2020 for Grades 1 to 13, with plans for full implementation by 2024. Government-owned and funded state schools provide free education for children aged 5 to 19. Attending school for children aged 6 to 16 is compulsory. The curriculum blends scholastic and co-scholastic domains harmoniously. The curriculum emphasises arts, physical education, and multilingualism to promote holistic growth, strongly focusing on literacy, numeracy, and Child-centred effective pedagogy. The assessment framework is designed to be flexible and less stressful. Physical and health education is a core subject. Soft skills are introduced in primary Level 1, and hard skills are emphasised in upper Levels 11-13. However, the curriculum does not explicitly state peace and happiness and social, moral, and cultural education. Overall, New Zealand provides a balanced education nurturing cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.

Keywords: New Zealand, inclusive education, NELP, Maori, Curriculum, Soft Skills, Hard Skills, Assessment.

Introduction

New Zealand is an island country covering an area of 267,710 square kilometres and having a coastline of 15,134 kilometres. Besides the two main islands, the country has about 600 other small islands (World Data, 2024). Cook Straight separates the two main Islands. New Zealand has no land border with any country. The nearest neighbouring countries of New Zealand are Australia, Fiji, and Tonga.

New Zealand has an estimated resident population by the end of 2022 of 5,157,100 people. The gender ratio is 98.6 males per 100 females. The annual growth rate is 0.79%. The life expectancy at birth is 80.5 years for males and 84 years for females (O'Neill, 2024). Ethnically, 70.2% are European, 16.5% are Māori, and the rest are Asian and Pacific people (NZ Govt., 2018, p. 59). New Zealand is not a very diverse nation in terms of religion. As per the New Zealand Census (2018), 36.5% of the population is Christian, and 48.2% have no religion. English, Māori, and New Zealand Sign Language are official languages of New Zealand, with English dominating the communication. The Māori language is taught in schools.

New Zealand is an advanced market economy. New Zealand is a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). New Zealand's current GDP is 247.54 billion USD with an annual growth rate of 1%, and its per capita GDP is USD 47.22 thousand. The current unemployment rate is 4.9% (IMF, 2024). New Zealand ranked 13th on the Human Development Index with a value of 0.937 (UNDP, 2022, p. 299) and 10th on the World Happiness Index 2023 with a score of 7.123 (Helliwell et al., 2023, p. 34). Its economy is mainly based on agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism.

New Zealand has a literacy rate of 99%, one of the highest in the world. The country offers a robust education system that aims to provide high-quality education to all students. In New Zealand, education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 16, and the public education system is well-funded and respected worldwide. The government of New Zealand has also introduced policies to enhance educational outcomes for minority groups, including Maori and Pacific Islander students. (Wisevoter, n.d.). As of 2021, New Zealand's gross enrolment ratio (GER) for primary education is 97.92%, for secondary education is 117.60%, while the net enrolment rate (NER) for primary education is 98.65% and for upper secondary education is 94.66% (UIS-UNESCO, n.d.). As of July 1, 2023, the total number of schools in New Zealand (state, state-integrated and private schools) was 2,538, educating 331038 students (MOE-NZ Govt., 2023). About 39% of the population aged 25-64 are educated at the tertiary level. According to the OECD 2022 PISA results, New Zealand ranked 10th in reading, 11th in science and 23rd in mathematics performance (OECD, 2023).

Educational Policy

The New Zealand education system is marked with significant policy and programme reforms. The concerns ranged from issues of quality to equity in education. The early education system in New Zealand was influenced highly by the British system of education. The Education Act of 1877 is the cornerstone of universal education in New Zealand. This Act established free, compulsory, secular education for all Pākehā New Zealand children. Although the Act did not apply to Māori

children, they could attend the free schools if their parents wanted them to. In 1894, primary school education was made compulsory for Māori (NZ History, 1877).

In 1989, a significant reform was made to New Zealand's education system based on the recommendations of a task force report led by Brian Picot. The government's response to the task force, known as "Tomorrow's Schools," largely accepted those recommendations. The report found significant weaknesses in the system, leading to the creation of a new two-tiered structure. The Ministry of Education (MOE) replaced the Department of Education, abolishing regional education boards. Under the new structure, all schools became autonomous and self-managing institutions controlled by locally elected boards of trustees. These boards were responsible for learning outcomes, budgeting, and the employment of teachers. Each school produced a charter outlining its mission about its community and clientele while also incorporating centrally prescribed requirements for safety, equity, and national standards (Openshaw, 2014).

1995 MOE initiated the Schools Support Project to provide tailored attention, support, and improvements in delivering curriculum, health and safety, governance and management. The evaluation in 1998 showed a significant impact (Creech, 1998). As part of this safety-net network, formal and informal assistance was provided to weak schools to help them overcome their persistent problems. Further, in 2020, New Zealand launched The National School Redevelopment Programme (NSRP). It is a 10-year programme to prioritise and upgrade schools with complex infrastructure needs (MOE, 2024c).

The next reform began with the Education (National Standards) Amendment Bill, introduced to the New Zealand Parliament on December 13, 2008. National Standards assessment system that was followed during the last three terms of government and the controversies surrounding it (Thrupp, 2017). On December 12, 2017, the Labour government announced the abolishment of the national standards in reading, writing, and maths.

Despite the school reforms, New Zealand faced a significant difference in academic performance between Maori and non-Maori students. In response to this issue, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced Ka Hikitia: The Maori Education Strategy. This strategy aimed to increase Maori students' participation and academic achievement to close the performance gap. Since starting in 2008, this strategy has been implemented in three phases. *Managing for Success: 2008-2012, Accelerating Success 2013–2017 and Realising Maori Potential: 2018-2022* (MOE, 2009a; MOE, 2009b).

The government established National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) under the Education and Training Act 2020 to prioritise student well-being and academic success. NEPL and TES strengthen the education system to deliver successful

outcomes for the learners by reducing the performance disparities between English-speaking and Maori students to achieve national equality. The documents aim to create a school environment that is safe and inclusive, free from racism, discrimination, and bullying. They also strive to enhance the quality of education by providing learners with the necessary skills to succeed in education, work, and life. Additionally, they aim to foster better partnerships with employers, industry, and communities while considering learners' needs, identities, languages, and cultures in their education. Te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are also incorporated into daily activities. (MOE, 2022a).

The NELP and TES will focus on improving outcomes and well-being across the education system according to the following education objectives.

1. "Learners at the centre – Learners with their whānau are at the centre of education.
2. Barrier-free access – Great education opportunities and outcomes are within reach for every learner.
3. Quality teaching and leadership – Quality teaching and leadership make a difference for learners and their whānau.
4. Future of learning and work – Learning is relevant to New Zealanders' lives today and throughout their lives.
5. World-class inclusive public education – New Zealand education is trusted and sustainable. (MOE, 2022a)"

The New Zealand Curriculum was refreshed in 2007 to provide a framework for learning for all students during their school years. Schools were given the autonomy to create a curriculum that caters to their students' specific learning requirements while consulting with the broader school community (Hood, 2019).

The last curriculum reform was introduced in 2020, with a plan to implement it by 2024 fully. This five-year program will refresh The New Zealand Curriculum and revamp Te Marautanga o Aotearoa for Maori medium schools (MOE, 2024d). The program aims to provide appropriate knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes for effective learning that is rich and responsive, focusing on the individual experiences of Maori students. The curriculum has given special attention to Maori communities that face significant inequalities. Recognising the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach, it has adopted a differentiated method for students with varying learning levels - self-directed, guided, and supported.

Structure of the Education System

New Zealand's education system is supported by several agencies, each with unique roles and responsibilities.

- Education New Zealand (ENZ) promotes New Zealand education internationally.
- Education Payroll provides accurate, timely, and secure payroll services to state schools on behalf of the Ministry of Education.
- The Education Review Office (ERO) conducts public reviews and issues reports on the quality of education provided in all New Zealand schools and early childhood education services. Additionally, ERO publishes national reports on current education topics.
- Network for Learning (N4L) is a technology company owned by the Crown that provides faster and safer internet services to schools and kura in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
- The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) ensures the credibility and robustness of New Zealand qualifications nationally and internationally.
- The professional body for New Zealand teachers is The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand | Matatū Aotearoa.
- The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for government-funded post-compulsory education and training in New Zealand.
- Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura) provides distance education from the early childhood level to Year 13 (MOE, 2023).

Education in New Zealand is divided into three parts: Early Childhood Education (ECE), Primary and Secondary Education, and further education, which includes higher and vocational education (Figure 51.1).

State schools, owned and funded by the government, provide free education to New Zealand citizens or permanent residents between the ages of 5 and 19. Additionally, school attendance is mandatory from the ages of 6 to 16 (MOE, 2023).

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

ECE is not compulsory in New Zealand, but 96.8% of children attend ECE. ECE is provided in two parts: birth to 3 years and 3 to 5 years. The government subsidises all children who attend ECE for up to 6 hours a day (30 hours per week). ECE service is available in teacher-led or parent-led early childhood centres, play centres, kindergartens, Homeschooling and Te Kōhanga Reo (MOE, 2022b).

Primary Education

Primary Education starts from age 5 or 6. Primary education starts at Year 1 and continues until Year 8. Years 7 and 8 are offered at a primary or separate intermediate school. Parents can select one of the available options for their children's education, which include full-time primary schools (Levels 1-8), contributing primary schools (Levels 1-6) followed by intermediate schools (Levels 7-8), and composite schools (Levels 1-13). Approximately 85 per cent of students attend state schools, 11 per cent of students attend state-integrated schools, and only four per cent attend private schools in 2010 (Cook, 2012).

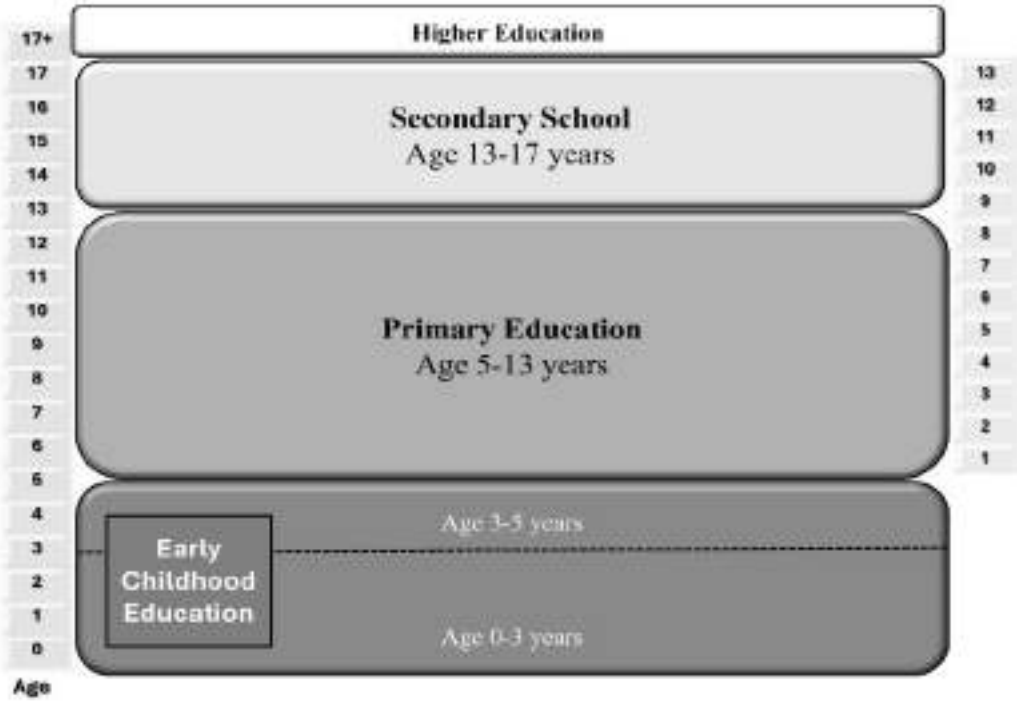

Figure 51.1 Structure of the Education System of New Zealand

Source: *MOE, 2023 (Adapted by Author)*

Secondary Education

Years 9 to 13 comprise the period of secondary education, usually attended by students aged between 13 and 17. Secondary schools run by the state may be referred to as high schools, colleges, or secondary schools (Education System of New Zealand, n.d.). Children complete their final years of education in secondary schools, colleges or high schools, typically in the age range of 13-17.

Tertiary Education in New Zealand is diverse and gives different scope for learners to pursue through universities, technology institutions, private institutions, polytechnics and wānanga

(Māori tertiary education institutions). Eight universities in New Zealand provide graduate degrees and postgraduate programmes. They also have centres for research. There are 18 technology and polytechnics that provide a variety of professional, vocational and technical programmes.

Curricular Framework

The refreshing process for The New Zealand Curriculum began in 2021 and is currently underway. The Ministry of Education is implementing a six-year program to update the curriculum. The refreshed version, *Te Mātaiaho*, aims to enhance student learning experiences (Curriculum Refresh, 2024a). Here are the key details:

- Curriculum Content: The refreshed curriculum content is being developed and released in phases. Schools and kura (Māori-medium schools) have until the beginning of 2027 to fully adopt it.
- Specific Areas: However, schools and Kura must start using the refreshed mathematics, statistics and English learning areas starting in 2025. Science, technology, arts, language, health, and physical education are under development for release in 2024-25.
- Inclusion and Clarity: Te Mātaiaho will be inclusive, clear about the learning that matters, and easy to use from year 0 to year 13.
- Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories: Social Science curriculum was released in November 2022. All schools must teach Aotearoa New Zealand's history (Curriculum Refresh, 2024b).

Preschool Curriculum

Te Whariki is a separate preschool curriculum prepared by MOE in 2017. Its tagline was "A child is a treasure, to be nurtured, to grow, to flourish" (MOE, 2017, p.2). "Te Whāriki includes three pathways, Te Whāriki a Te Kōhanga Reo, Te Ara Whānui and Te Ara Māori. Te Whāriki, a Te Kōhanga Reo, is an indigenous curriculum framework immersed in te reo Māori for ngā kōhanga reo affiliated with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust. Te Ara Whānui is a bicultural framework for early childhood services – expressed in the curriculum document Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum. Te Ara Māori is a curriculum pathway within Te Whāriki for early childhood services wishing to implement a local curriculum rooted in te ao and te reo Māori. The three pathways are not translations of each other. Kei ia ara te mana, each pathway has equal status and mana in its own right (Tahurangi, 2023)."

The preschool curriculum follows joyful play-based learning practices. There are no tests or formal assignments. Teachers use 'learning stories' to showcase children's learning progress before their guardians. Parents usually keep a close watch over their children's development. Every school has digital equipment to monitor students' progress.

Te Whāriki, the Preschool curriculum includes Four Principles: Empowerment, Holistic Development, Family and Community and Relationship; and Five Strands: Well-being, Belonging, Contribution, Communication and Exploration. Every strand has goals and, accordingly, the Learning Outcomes (MOE, 2017).

Primary and Middle School Curriculum

Two main documents constitute the national curriculum of New Zealand: The New Zealand Curriculum, which is designed for English-speaking students, and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa,

tailored for Māori-speaking students. The English version of the curriculum was launched in late 2007, while the Māori version was introduced a year later. Both documents were developed separately and are not translations of each other. However, they share a common objective of providing all students with a strong foundation for learning and academic excellence. They also aim to equip learners with competencies to help them succeed in their studies, work, and lifelong learning. Although the learning goals and objectives of the two documents are not designed to be identical, they share many similarities in learning outcomes and progressions. Individual schools have the authority to decide how to implement the curriculum (Mullis et al., 2016).

The New Zealand curriculum is being updated with the introduction of Te Mātaiaho. The designing and implementation process is currently underway. The new and old curricula are based on the same eight learning areas. The learning associated with each eight area (older framework) is part of a broad, general education and lays a foundation for later specialisation.

The New Zealand Curriculum is organised to fulfil the following broad targets.

- Vision: Young people will be confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners.
- Values: excellence, innovation, inquiry and curiosity; diversity; equity; community and participation; ecological sustainability; integrity; and respect.
- Key Competencies: thinking; using language, symbols, and texts; managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing.

- Learning Areas: English; arts; health and physical education; learning languages; mathematics and statistics; science; social sciences; technology; official languages.
- Principles: high expectations, treaty of Waitangi (bi-culturalism), cultural diversity, inclusion, learning to learn, community engagement, coherence, and future focus (MOE, 2007).

During the years 1-6, children's learning is based on their early childhood experiences. The programs are designed to teach literacy, numeracy, and values, along with other learning areas, by providing a wide range of experiences that build upon and connect with their previous knowledge. Key competencies are also developed during this stage (MOE, 2007).

During years 7-10, students can excel across the spectrum of the New Zealand Curriculum - values, key competencies, and learning areas. This foundation sets them up for a living and future learning. As students undergo rapid physical development and become more socially aware, a responsive curriculum will recognise the importance of positive relationships with adults, community involvement, and authentic learning experiences. Focusing on teaching literacy and numeracy skills is crucial as they remain closely linked to students' learning progress (MOE, 2007).

High School Curriculum

As per the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs), schools must meet specific administrative requirements to deliver the national curriculum. The national curriculum is compulsory for students until Year 10, so New Zealand's schools must offer subjects relevant to the learning areas mentioned above and mandatory for all students. In New Zealand, secondary schools offer students mandatory and optional courses. Starting from Year 11, schools can decide which subjects are mandatory. Typically, schools make mathematics, English, and science mandatory for Year 11 students, only English for Year 12 students, and have no mandatory subjects for Year 13 students (Mee, 2013). Schools offer a list of subjects for students to choose from. The following table (Table 51.1) shows the subjects offered by schools within eight broad subject areas.

The main school leaving qualification in New Zealand is the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), which has three levels: Level 1 (usually in Year 11), Level 2 (usually in Year 12), and Level 3 (usually in Year 13). To attain an NCEA qualification at each level, a student must earn 80 credits. For Level 1, out of 80 credits, ten credits each must be in numeracy and literacy standards. For Level 2, the 80 credits comprise 60 credits at Level 2 or higher and 20 credits at any

other level. Level 3 requires 80 credits of 60 credits at Level 3 or higher and 20 credits at Level 2 or higher (MOE, 2024a).

Table 51.1 Subjects for High School Students

NZ Curriculum Subject Area	Level 13
English	English
Arts	Dance, Drama, History of Art, Music Studies, Design, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture (Practical Art)
Health and Physical Education	Health Education, Home Economics, Physical Education
Languages	Chinese, Cook Islands Maori, French, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, New Zealand Sign Language, Samoan, Spanish, Tongan
Mathematics and Statistics	Calculus, Mathematics, Statistics
Science	Agriculture and Horticultural Science, Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Space Science, Physics
Social Sciences	Accounting, Business Studies, Classical Studies, Economics, Geography, History, Media Studies, Psychology, Social Studies
Technology	Construction and Mechanical Technologies, Design and Visual Communication, Digital Technologies, Processing Technologies, Technology
Others	Education for Sustainability, Religious Studies, Te Reo Māori, Te Reo Rangatira

Source: *Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023, p. 262*

Teaching Learning

The teaching-learning process in New Zealand is given its due importance and is substantially supported by the new developments in the field of technology. Rules prescribed by the ministry guide the education and participation of the teachers in the school system. Although there is flexibility concerning who can choose, it comes with guidelines for the capacity you can engage as teachers in different conditions. Those educated to be teachers, those joining back after the break, those teaching without training, etc., have different guidelines and conditions. This directly influences the quality of teachers in schools at different levels.

The curriculum framework of New Zealand (for English language schools) suggests the following key points concerning pedagogy:

- "Create a supportive learning environment;
- encourage reflective thought and action;
- enhance the relevance of new learning;
- facilitate shared learning
- make connections to prior learning and experience,
- provide sufficient opportunities to learn and
- inquire into the teaching-learning relationship" (MOE, 2007, p.34).

The 2007 New Zealand curriculum framework also suggests teaching as inquiry (Figure 51.2) or inquiry-based teaching methods and E-Learning pedagogy. E-learning pedagogy focuses on technology and ICT-enabled teaching-learning methods.

Innovative learning environments (ILE) were introduced in New Zealand's educational space in 2010. "Initially, the terms modern learning environments and flexible learning spaces were more commonly used in New Zealand, which tended to emphasise the change in architectural design rather than the underlying teaching and learning philosophy underpinning this change. The move to innovative learning environments more closely aligned with changes to pedagogical practices, such as the wider use of educational technologies and the encouragement of self-regulated learning and independent inquiry" (Fletcher & Everatt, 2021, p. 81).

Collaborative teaching is an important teaching strategy practised in New Zealand schools. It involves several teachers working together and sharing responsibility for a group of learners, also known as co-teaching. This approach has been introduced in many New Zealand schools over several years. A growing research base supports its benefits (Grow Waitaha, 2024). MOE New Zealand also acknowledges and influences this approach to improve learners' outcomes (MOE, n.d.).

Information and Communication (ICT) are encouraged to assist learners and teachers in learning new concepts and ideas, overcoming barriers and challenges to learning for any reason, supporting collaborative learning and culturally responsive learning, and enhancing learners' experiences through new technologies.

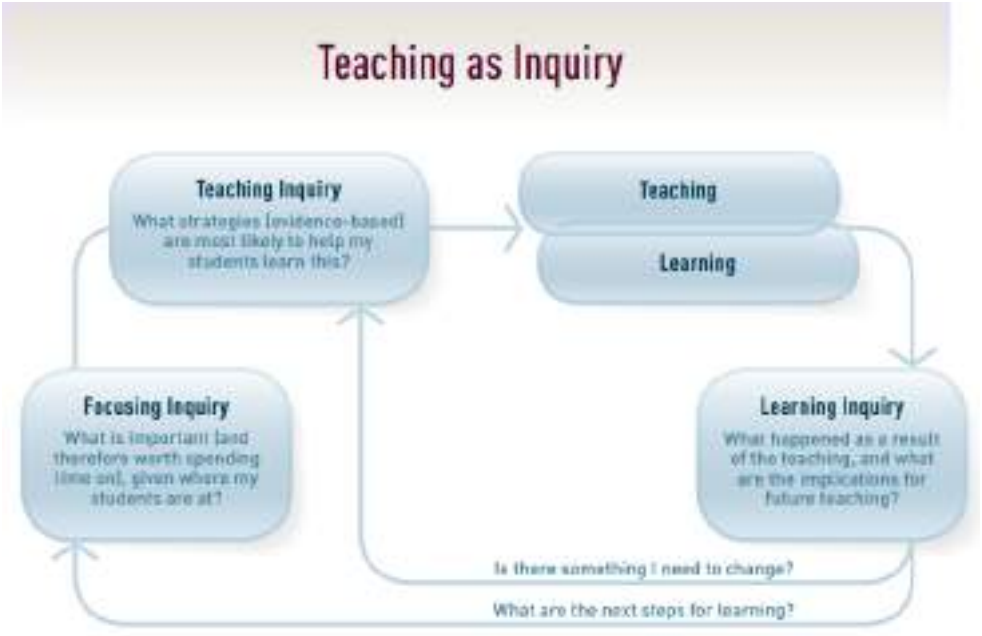

Figure 51.2 Teaching as Inquiry

Source: *MOE, 2007, p.35*

Learning Assessment

According to the New Zealand Curriculum 2007, "the primary purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching as both student and teacher respond to the information it provides. With this in mind, schools must consider how they will effectively gather, analyse, and use assessment information to meet this purpose". The document also provides some characteristics of effective assessment to be followed by teachers. Effective assessment will benefit students, involve students, support teaching and learning goals, be planned and communicated, be suited to the purpose, and be valid and fair (MOE, 2007, p. 39-40).

Teachers can design and carry out assessments to gauge their students' learning progress. They are encouraged to use various assessment practices to monitor students' progress and identify their learning needs. In New Zealand, teachers typically create assessments customised to their students' learning needs, although they can use other sources of test items and tests to compile their assessments.

There are three primary sources of nationally standardised school tests, including intact tests and single items such as Assessment Resource Banks, Assessment Resources for Classroom Teachers and Students, and Progressive Achievement Tests. Moreover, exemplars are available for the

curriculum to demonstrate the anticipated outcomes at specific curricular levels. These pre-prepared tasks and tests employ various formats, such as multiple-choice, constructed-response, and practical open-ended tasks (Taylor et al., 2019).

There is no national testing in New Zealand before Year 11. The NCEA is the main national qualification for secondary students and is administered by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). NCEA is awarded at level 1 in year 11, level 2 in year 12, and level 3 in year 13, with 80 credits each year (MOE, 2024a). Students can choose courses across different levels based on their interests, abilities, and school logistics, such as teacher availability and timetabling. This means that a Year 13 student could take Level 3 arts courses alongside Level 1 or 2 language courses, depending on school requirements and their previous attainment in the subject (Taylor et al., 2019). The NCEA certification is being reviewed, and modifications will be implemented to enhance the strength, uniformity, equality, and availability of NCEA for students of all talents and origins (MOE, 2019).

Health and Physical Education

Health and Physical Education (HPE) is one of the eight core learning areas in the NZC, from level 1 to level 13. At level 10, health and Physical education is integrated into one subject. In levels 11, 12, and 13, students can choose from health education, physical education, and home economics. This is a well-designed credit course that is subject to regular assessments. The health and well-being of the learners and others in society are important at all three New Zealand education stages.

This subject is based on four underlying and interdependent concepts, four standards and seven key areas of learning.

The four underlying and interdependent concepts

- Hauora- a Māori philosophy of well-being
- Attitudes and values – a positive, responsible attitude for students and others well-being
- The socio-ecological perspective – viewing and understanding the interrelationships between the individual, others, and society
- Health promotion – developing and maintaining supportive physical and emotional environments through students in personal and collective action (MOE, 2007, p.22).

The four strands are Personal Health and Physical Development, Movement Concepts and Motor Skills, Relationships with Other People, and Healthy Communities and Environments (MOE, 2007, p.22).

The seven key areas of Health and Physical education are mental health, sexuality education, food and nutrition, body care and physical safety, physical activity, sports studies, and outdoor education MOE, 2007, p. 22).

According to Wilson et al. (2022), promoting physical activity in all forms (including overall activity, active play, recreation, organised sport, and active transportation) and reducing screen time are crucial for New Zealand school education. The study recommends implementing policies, conducting research, developing evidence-based social marketing campaigns, and integrating urban design to achieve this. Regular nationally representative surveys are necessary to ensure consistent and regular measurement of key Report Card indicators.

Skills Education

Though there is no separate subject for skills education, skill development is a basic aim of the New Zealand curriculum. Early childhood curriculum acknowledging young children's growing interests and capabilities says, "They are establishing, consolidating and refining locomotor and other movement skills, and they are seeking greater physical challenges" (MOE, 2017, p. 15). In New Zealand schools, students develop skills through health and physical education (HPE), art education, and technology, three core learning areas out of eight in the NZ Curriculum (NZC). These subjects are compulsory from Years 1 to 10 and focus on developing students' fine and gross motor and technology skills.

In the New Zealand curriculum, each area of study includes vocational skills and the ability to apply concepts practically. Skill development is a crucial aspect of education, and the curriculum for levels 11-13 includes subjects in high demand for employment, such as mechanical engineering, construction, hospitality, communication, and computer science. As students approach the end of their school years and gain more clarity about their future goals, the New Zealand Curriculum allows them to have a greater say in their study subjects. Schools recognise their senior students' varied talents and aspirations and cater to their needs, providing them with options that can help them keep their future study and work options open. Depending on the available choices, students can specialise in specific learning areas or take courses that span multiple or non-traditional learning areas (MOE, 2007).

Learners in New Zealand are taught a range of skills at different levels of education, including basic ones integrated into the curriculum. In addition, secondary-level education institutions offer choice-based skill development opportunities that allow students to learn in practical and everyday scenarios. These skills are typically assessed as part of the syllabus at different levels.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

Hobby development is not an articulated agenda of the New Zealand school curriculum, but hobbies are developed in students with rich co-curricular activities, especially through art education. Over the years 1–8, students learn dance, drama, music and visual art. During 9–10, they learn in at least two. Students aged 11–13 may specialise in one or more disciplines or study multimedia and other new technologies (MOE, 2007). Thus, the New Zealand curriculum provides opportunities for students to explore and express their interests in various art forms, enabling them to develop their hobbies as they age.

Life skills education is an integral part of the education system in New Zealand. Both the curriculum and the pedagogical suggestions emphasise the importance of life skills in personal development. The curriculum is designed to include many life skills as part of the learning plan. The New Zealand curriculum provides a roadmap for learning and has many outcomes directly linked to developing critical life skills in learners. The New Zealand Curriculum provides a list of key competencies to be developed in students through the 13 years of school education, and these all are life skills competencies: thinking; using language, symbols, and texts; managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing (MOE, 2007).

Cowper and Teschers (2023), in a study, found that "the NZC could provide more opportunities for practical life skills to be included in the curriculum, as well as providing clearer instruction on how to implement effective careers education and other knowledge areas and thinking skills relevant for students to develop their art of living (Cowper & Teschers, 2023, p.1)".

Peace and Happiness Education

New Zealand does not offer any separate courses on peace and happiness education. However, the system significantly emphasises the well-being of children and young people. (MOE, 2024b) visualised that the Child and Youth Well-being Strategy's vision is for New Zealand to be the best place in the world for children and young people, focusing on six outcomes that describe what well-being means for them. These outcomes include access to quality education, health, social services, housing, food, and feeling loved, safe, and secure within the whānau (family) and community (MOE, 2024b). The education system is learner-centric, allowing learners to choose the medium and subjects of their choice without putting pressure on them. The Māori curriculum appears to be more centred around building a connection with the cultural roots of the learner and catering to diversity.

Topics related to peace education are placed in different subjects. Concepts like peace and conflict, environment, human rights, multiculturalism, gender issues, poverty and equity, human

rights and social justice, sustainability, etc., are part of the curriculum at different levels in school education. It is thoughtfully kept in the curriculum and supported by resources to facilitate learning.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

The New Zealand education system emphasises understanding cultural diversity. This is evident in the two parallel branches of the system - English medium and Māori medium. The government has made efforts to bring more equity in education, focusing on social and cultural capital. The Māori medium curriculum gives importance to native culture and varies significantly from the English medium curriculum. However, both systems merge with the core values and vision of the New Zealand education system when it comes to education for 21st-century learners and achieving their potential. Students are encouraged to learn about the cultural heritage of New Zealand, with principles such as bi-culturalism, cultural diversity, inclusion, community engagement, coherence, and future focus outlined in the NZC (MOE, 2007).

Summary and Conclusion

New Zealand is an island nation with a stable, developed economy. Its society is bi-cultural, with European settlers and the aboriginal Maori community living together. The country has a well-established education system that has achieved universal literacy. The British education system has significantly influenced New Zealand's early education system. The Education Act of 1877 is the cornerstone of universal education in the country. The government has established the National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) under the Education and Training Act 2020 to prioritise student well-being and academic success. The New Zealand Curriculum was last refreshed in 2007, and the latest curriculum reform was introduced in 2020, with plans to implement it fully by 2024.

In New Zealand, education is divided into three levels: Early Childhood Education (ECE), Primary and Secondary Education, and further education, which includes higher and vocational education. State schools, which are government-owned and funded, provide free education to New Zealand citizens or permanent residents between 5 and 19 years old. Attending school for children aged 6 to 16 in New Zealand is mandatory. The 2020 revised version of the curriculum is known as Te Mātauranga o Aotearoa. This curriculum covers English, arts, health and physical education, learning languages, mathematics and statistics, science, social sciences, and technology for Grades 1 to 13.

The primary learning areas in New Zealand's curriculum are designed to blend scholastic and co-scholastic domains harmoniously. The curriculum places great importance on the arts, physical education, and multi-linguicism, and these subjects are included in the core areas to encourage holistic growth. Much emphasis was placed on literacy and numeracy.

Effective pedagogy and teaching as inquiry are emphasised throughout the curriculum, focusing on keeping children at the centre of pedagogy. The assessment framework is designed to be flexible and less stressful. The NCEI, the main qualification in New Zealand secondary schools, is internationally recognised. New Zealand's schooling system does not solely focus on academic success but seeks to develop well-rounded students involved in sports, cultural, or community activities (Mukhopadhyay & Kundu, 2023).

New Zealand's education system takes physical and health education seriously, as it is part of the core curriculum and is a credit course subject to learning assessments. The skill education in New Zealand's curriculum is thoughtfully designed, with soft skills being introduced as early as primary Level 1 through curricular activities like arts, technology use, numeracy, and literacy, and hard skills being emphasised in upper Levels 11-13 with subjects specialising in mechanical engineering, construction, hospitality, communication, and computer science, all of which are in high demand in today's job market.

In New Zealand's education system, hobby development is an articulated agenda in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC). However, students can still develop these skills through music, art education, school clubs, and other extra-curricular activities. The NZC prioritises life skills education and lists key competencies for students to develop, including thinking, language use, self-management, social interaction, and participation. Although peace and happiness education is not explicitly stated, the curriculum significantly emphasises children's and young people's well-being. The curriculum does not mention social, moral, and cultural education. However, it is developed through various courses such as music, drama, design and visual communication, art painting, and language acquisition in Japanese, Spanish, Maori, or Chinese. As a bi-cultural nation, the NZC is flexible and incorporates European and Aboriginal Maori cultures.

New Zealand provides a balanced education that nurtures cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development and learning. It makes honest efforts to emphasise Maori and European descent equally. However, it is necessary to examine how far the integration of the two communities takes shape in schooling.

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Towards Universal Quality School Education: Papua New Guinea

Sheela Rajeshwari

Abstract

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has limited resources, and the people of PNG are firmly anchored in their ancient traditions while still having a spirit of learning new things. This chapter focuses on the education reformation and restructuring of PNG and its unique challenges. The new 1+6+6 (One year of pre-primary education, six years of primary school, and six years of secondary education) educational framework, which is unique and scientific, emphasises the importance of early childhood development and school education. Several commendable initiatives in national educational planning, curricula, policies, and projects make the government's aim apparent. However, a weak economy with low GDP per capita and national GDP, and consequently low funding for education, dramatically reduces the impact, and quality education is severely hampered in Papua New Guinea.

Keywords: National Education Plan, Education Sector Strategic Plan, Standard Based Curriculum, Teacher Guide, National Skills Development Plan.

Introduction

Papua New Guinea (PNG) gained independence from Australia on September 16, 1975. It is the world's third-largest island, covering the eastern half of New Guinea and around 600 offshore islands. With a land area of 452,860 square kilometres (World Bank, 2021). PNG shares a land border with Indonesia while sharing sea borders with Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Solomon Islands. Its peripheral boundaries include the Pacific Ocean, Solomon Sea, Torres

Strait, Bismarck Sea, Coral Sea, and Gulf of Papua. There are 22 provinces in the country, which are divided into four regions - Southern, Highlands, New Guinea Islands, and Momase (Aiwa, 2013). These provinces serve as the primary administrative divisions and are under the management of the Provincial Governments (PNG High Commission London, 2024).

As of January 2024, the country's total population is 10,420,000, comprising 51.5 per cent males and 48.5 per cent females, with an annual growth rate of 1.8 per cent (Kemp, 2024). PNG is a country with a diverse ethnic composition, including Melanesian, Papuan, Negrito, Micronesian and Polynesian groups. The official languages of PNG are Tok Pisin (widely used), English, and Hiri Motu. Furthermore, there are 839 living indigenous languages spoken in the country. Many of these languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers. Regarding religion, 64.3 per cent of the population follows Protestantism, 26 per cent are Roman Catholic, 5.3 per cent are other Christian denominations, 1.4 per cent follow non-Christian religions, and 3.1 per cent are unspecified (World Fact Book, 2024). As of 2019, the life expectancy at birth in PNG was 65.5 (WHO, 2023).

Based on the IMF Report for 2024, PNG's current GDP is USD 31.72 billion. The GDP per capita is USD 2530, with an annual growth rate of 4.5 per cent (IMF, 2024). Furthermore, as of 2022, the unemployment rate in PNG was 2.80 per cent (Trading Economics, 2023). PNG is not included in the World Happiness Report. PNG ranks 156 out of 191 countries on HDI with a value of 0.558 (UNDP, 2022). However, the findings of the PNG Demographic and Health Survey 2016-18 reflect the poor quality of lifestyle among the population (NSO & ICF, 2019).

According to the 2011 National Population and Housing Census of PNG, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the literacy rate for individuals aged ten and above is 67.6 per cent. The male literacy percentage is 71.1 per cent, while the female literacy percentage is 64.0 per cent (NSO, 2011). The GERs are 131, 81 and 34 for elementary, primary and secondary education, respectively (DoE-PNG, 2020). The NER in primary education between 2007-2023 was 99; in lower secondary education, the rate was 69; in upper secondary education, it was 43 (UNFPA, 2023). About 1,275,000 are enrolled in primary education, 5,07,000 in secondary education (EPDC, 2018) and about 64,000 teachers (DOE-PNG, 2022). PNG does not participate in PISA.

Educational Policy

The traditional education structure was based on predetermined objectives and ideals considered significant by society, such as its norms and values. Traditionally, formal schools and qualified teachers were not available. The knowledge was passed through observation and imitation from one generation to another generation in the form of traditions of culture, skills, religious beliefs, etc. The main aim of the education system was to establish literacy and primary education to translate the Bible and disseminate Christianity among the native people. This evangelisation aimed to produce catechists (teachers of religion), teachers, and skilled artisans in mission work during the

colonial era. The missionaries designed the schools. They followed the French, English, American, Australian or German model, with each set having a separate curriculum, which left the system out of sync. A scholarly education system was lacking throughout the colonial period. Instead, evangelism was more reflected in educational policies and structure.

After independence in 1975, PNG realised the urgent need to reform the educational system to achieve universal primary education. However, PNG still struggles to educate its children and faces numerous challenges in providing Education for All (EFA) (Rena, 2011).

After independence, the Education Plan (1976–1980) created the roadmap for education. The Department of Education continued to be responsible for designing policies, creating curricula, conducting inspections, setting standards, hiring teachers, and providing pre-service and in-service training for educators. National Plan of Education was developed for 1995-2004, 2005-14, 2015-19 and 2020-29.

The NEP 2020–2029 builds on the previous NEPs and the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2011–2030, boosting the Universal Basic Education. The PNG Vision 2050 says, "We Will be a Smart, Wise, Fair, Healthy and Happy Society by 2050" (NSPT, 2009, p. 30). "The goals of the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2011–2030 are:

- Access: All children complete nine years of basic education and have the opportunity for education or training beyond Grade 8;
- Teachers and teacher education: All teachers are well-trained and resourced and are accepted by the community as professionals;
- Curriculum: All curricula are sensitive to local needs and students' aspirations;
- System management and planning: All institutions are managed effectively and transparently and are accountable to their local communities;
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training: A national system of public and private institutions offering skills development courses, ranging from short to full-time, leading to diploma and technician qualifications" (DOE-PNG, 2020, p. 22).

The NEP 2020-2029 includes nine focus areas outlining the education plan. It aims to provide early childhood education for all children, ensure access to 13 years of education, and promote equity regardless of location, economic status, gender, or disability. The plan calls for well-trained and qualified teachers, quality learning materials, a globally comparable curriculum and assessment system, and alternative pathways for education. It emphasises strong local leadership and accountability, efficient management and administration, and instilling a sense of citizenship and values in students (DOE-PNG, 2020). The NEP emphasises indigenous learning and strongly

advocates incorporating elements of traditional knowledge, local language and cultural practices relevant to diverse communities nationwide. The curriculum provides scope to work closely with local communities to involve parents and traditional leaders in the education process to ensure community support and incorporate values and tradition in the education system. Aligning policy reforms with ground-level implementation is challenging for PNG due to limited resources and geographical inaccessibility **(**Joskin, 2021**).**

The department recognises the significance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and has ensured its support by establishing an ECE unit and structural, technical, and financial reforms. The Department of Education (DoE) assumed control over ECE. Under the 1-6-6 structure, the department progressively adopts early childhood education and enrols four—and five-year-olds in the early stages before formal schools. A PNG model for ECE is proposed to be developed over the planned time frame with involvement from every sector of society.

Structure of the Education System

In PNG, education is not free or compulsory. Instead, providing quality education is a shared responsibility and partnership between the government and parents. Schools receive funding from various sources, including national, provincial, district, and local government levels, as well as from the community and the private sector through fees. "According to the Government Tuition Fee Subsidy Policy of 2021, the state pays 62% of the school fees, with parents paying the other 38%. Provincial Education Boards and District Education Offices assist families struggling to pay tuition through grants and subsidies. The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2011-30 aims to introduce free and compulsory education to Grade 10 (ages 6 – 16) by 2030" (UNESCO, 2021, Para 2, Section 2.1).

Previously, PNG had a 3+6+4 school education structure - three years of elementary, six years of primary, and four years of secondary education. However, the National Education Plan for 2020-2029 proposed a new education structure to include all forms of education, recognising the importance of pre-primary education. The new education framework is 1+6+6 - one year of pre-primary education, six years of primary education, and six years of secondary education.

The new framework involves the ECE Policy, which aims to emphasise the significance of early childhood development by introducing kindergarten 1 and 2 classes taught by ECE-trained teachers. The ECE will continue to be delivered in partnership between districts and churches.

Furthermore, the existing elementary 1 and 2 classes will be converted into grade 1 and 2 primary classes taught by primary-trained teachers. Similarly, the current primary school classes in grades

7 and 8 will progress to secondary school classes taught by secondary school teachers in a secondary school setting (Figure 52.1).

<table>
<tr><th rowspan="2">Student age (years)</th><th colspan="2">Current Structure (3-6-4)</th><th colspan="2">New Structure (1-6-6)</th></tr>
<tr><th>Sectors</th><th colspan="2">Grades</th><th>Sectors</th></tr>
<tr><td>18</td><td rowspan="4">Secondary (4 years)</td><td>12</td><td>12</td><td rowspan="5">Secondary (6 years)</td></tr>
<tr><td>17</td><td>11</td><td>11</td></tr>
<tr><td>16</td><td>10</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>15</td><td>9</td><td>9</td></tr>
<tr><td>14</td><td rowspan="6">Primary (6 years)</td><td>8</td><td>8</td></tr>
<tr><td>13</td><td>7</td><td>7</td></tr>
<tr><td>12</td><td>6</td><td>6</td><td rowspan="6">Primary (6 years)</td></tr>
<tr><td>11</td><td>5</td><td>5</td></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td>4</td><td>4</td></tr>
<tr><td>9</td><td>3</td><td>3</td></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td rowspan="2">Elementary (3 years)</td><td>2</td><td>2</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td colspan="2">Elementary Prep</td><td>Preparatory</td><td>Pre - School (1 year)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">4, 5</td><td colspan="2">Public Private Church</td><td>Kindergarten</td><td rowspan="2">Early childhood</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Community Partnership</td><td>1 and 2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total years of school</td><td colspan="2">13 years</td><td colspan="2">13 years</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 52.1 The New Structure of School Education in Papua New Guinea

Source: *NEP document DoE-PNG, 2023a*

Levels of Education in 1-6-6

1. Pre-school Sector → Preparatory Grade *(Kindergarten 1 & 2 by 2023)*
2. Primary Sector → Primary School – Grade 1-6
3. Secondary Sector → Grade 7-12
    - Junior High School – Grade 7-10
    - Senior High School – Grade 11-12
    - National High Schools -11-12
    - (Becomes National School of Excellence)
4. FODE Sector → FODE: Grade 7-12 *(will also offer matriculation)*
5. TVET Sector → Vocational Centers: Grades 8,10,12 *(will offer NC1 and NC2)*
6. Special Education → Inclusive of all sectors

Elementary Education refers to the initial stage of formal education, which includes an elementary preparatory grade, elementary grade 1, and elementary grade 2. These three years of education aim to prepare a child for primary school in grade 3.

Primary Education: Primary education begins in grade 3 and ends in grade 8, catering to the 9 to 14-year-old age group. Lower primary education includes grades 3 to 5, while upper primary comprises grades 6 to 8.

Secondary Education: After the upper primary, this stage begins in grades nine and finishes in 12. It caters to the 15 to 18-year-old age group. There are two levels of secondary education: the lower secondary level of grades 9 and 10 and the upper secondary level of grades 11 and 12.

The government of PNG allows homeschooling through Flexible Open and Distance Education (FODE), an alternative option for students who prefer to study at home. The FODE caters to such students and offers a "second chance" education to those who, for various reasons, cannot continue their education in a regular school environment. As per the Government Tuition Fee Subsidy Policy for 2021, FODE is free and fully subsidised by the government. The FODE program has seen promising results, with over 80,000 students returning to education (Eelkema, 2020). The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2011-30 had set a goal of fully integrating distance education into the mainstream system, and the Education Amendment Act 2020 has included 'correspondence education' as a type of education offered within a school in 2030 (UNESCO, 2021).

Curricular Framework

Previously, PNG used an Outcome-based Education (OBE) curriculum. Many researchers, including the public, have argued that the education system's failure in PNG was due to OBE. The government responded. On January 22, 2013, the National Executive Council (NEC) established a Task Force. It appointed a panel of experts to investigate the nature of the challenges and problems experienced in implementing the OBE system. The government phased out the OBE curriculum based on the task force report. It introduced a Standard Based Curriculum (SBC) (PNG Education News, 2021). According to Kawage (2023), this was the best decision ever made for the growth and development of PNG by the O'Nell-Dion Government. Primary schools implemented it immediately after its introduction. In 2023, all secondary and high schools nationwide would have implemented SBC, beginning with Grade 9 (Kawage, 2023).

The Department of Education provides detailed primary, elementary, and secondary syllabi and teacher guides for grades 3-6 mathematics and science textbooks and teachers' manuals. The Department of Education website contains syllabi, teachers' guides for every grade level, and extensive information on teaching and learning procedures. The author has relied on the information available on this website.

Elementary Education: In this three-year elementary education, children are expected to develop sound literacy and numeracy skills with family and community values, including discipline, personal healthcare and respect for others. The elementary curriculum includes English, language, mathematics, community, and culture (please refer to Table 50.1 for time allocation).

- The English syllabus comprises Speaking and Listening, Phonics, Reading and Writing.
- The language (mother tongue) comprises Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
- The mathematics syllabus is organised into four strands: Number and Operation, Quantities and Measurement, Geometrical Figures, and Data and Mathematical Relations (DOE-PNG, 2015c).
- The Community and Culture syllabus comprises Arts & Crafts, My Community, My Environment, and Healthy Individual & Community.
- Christian Religious Education (CRE).

Table 52.1 Subject-wise Time Allocation for Elementary Grades

Subjects	Total Time	Plus (+)	Minus (-)	Suggested Time	No of Lessons	Mins per week
English	300			300	5×60	300
Language	300			300	1×40	280
Mathematics	240	30		270	4×60	280
Culture and Community	360	60		420	14×30	420
CRE	60			60	1×60	60
Assembly	150			150	5×30	150
Block Time	90		90	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total Time	1500	90	90	1470	30 lessons	1500

Source: *DOE-PNG, 2015a*

Primary Education: This six-year education is divided into Lower and Upper Primary Education. Both levels of the primary syllabus include arts, English, maths, science, and social science. For lower levels, health and physical education are introduced as separate subjects, but at the upper level, health and physical education are integrated into a single subject. 'Making a Living' is a new subject at the upper primary level. For time allocation to each subject, please refer to Table 50.2.

Table 52.2 Subject-wise Time Allocation (minutes/week) for Primary Grades

Subjects	Lower Primary	Upper Primary
English	510	280
Mathematics	240	240
Science	165	200
Social Science	150	160
Arts	135	140
Health	90	180 (Including physical education)
Physical Education	120	160 (Making a Living)
Citizenship and Christian Value Education	60	120
Assembly	75	75
Block time	60	35
Sports	60	60

Source: *DOE-PNG, 2017a & DOE-PNG, 2018a*

Note: 'Making a Living' course comprises Crop Farming, Livestock Farming, Land and Water Resource Management Technology, Business Environment and Practices, Basic Technology, and Home Management

Secondary Education: Secondary education is split into lower secondary, which leads to a 'School Certificate' after the 10th, and upper secondary, which leads to a 'Higher School Certificate' after the 12th.

- The Lower secondary syllabuses include Agriculture, Arts, Business Studies, Design Technology, English, Mathematics, Personal Development, Science, and Social Science (DOE-PNG, 2023b).
- The Upper secondary syllabus includes Accounting, Applied English, Natural Resource Management, Applied Science, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Design Technology, Economics, General Mathematics, Geography, Geology, History, ICT, Language and Literature, Legal Studies, Music, Personal Development, Physical Education, Physics, Theatre Arts, Tourism and Visual Arts (DOE-PNG, 2023b).

PNG has effected several curricular reforms in relatively quick succession. Starting with an Objective-based Curriculum from the day of independence (1975) till 2005, PNG adopted Outcome-based Education in 2005, replacing it with a standard-based curriculum in 2021. Although this shift from outcome to standard-based curriculum was apparently in response to public outcry, these quick changes have their limitations. Inadequate time for planning for implementation,

including developing awareness among the stakeholders, preparing and trialling learning materials, training teachers and academic leaders, and strengthening school infrastructures and others, have restricted the curricular maturity cycle (Goro, 2021). The urgency to be responsive seems to have affected strategic planning for achieving universal quality basic education.

Teaching-Learning

Since implementing the Standard-Based Curriculum in PNG in 2015, teachers have been using the Teacher Guide developed by the Curriculum Development Division of the Department of Education for every grade and subject separately. The Teacher's Guide provides direction and guidance for teachers to assist students in developing their skills and achieving the set standards. The guide details the teaching and learning content, planning, programming examples, and assessment examples. Bloom's Taxonomy and action verbs are included in almost every Teacher's Guide to assist teachers in enhancing students' learning and promoting their thinking skills from low to higher-order levels. Teachers are expected to plan their daily lessons using the examples outlined in the Teacher's Guide and use assessment methods and strategies for students to achieve the content standards.

The major recommendation in teaching-learning is to shift from teacher-centric to learner-centric processes. Teacher's Guides, depending upon the subjects, recommend the use of activities, group learning, peer group consultation, concept cartoon, concept mapping, cooperative learning, demonstration, field trips, games, investigation, problem-solving, projects, role play, drama, dance and movement, strategies for active and independent learning and technology integrated education. The Teacher's Guides provide, in detail, sample guide lessons for each content, e.g. comparison of decimal numbers and whole numbers in grade 5 mathematics.

Although the Department of Education provides a teacher's guide for every grade and subject, teachers can adopt their own teaching and learning strategies. The Teacher Guide says, "It is the teacher's responsibility to help students understand how to learn and apply reasoning skills in learning. Such as helping students understand how to learn and think is like showing a trainee carpenter how to use different carpentry tools. The trainee carpenter is expected to choose what tool to use, where, and how to use it. The trainee must make this decision for the task to be carried out effectively with quality results. Students, likewise, need to be assisted to learn strategies that will help them learn" (DOE-PNG, 2017b, p. 7).

The government of PNG enacted various policies and plans for integrating technology into the education system. The National ICT Policy (2008) aimed to invest in computer devices with pre-loaded literacy and numeracy software under the One Laptop Per Child Program in remote areas, which was launched in 2010 and continued until 2014 (UNESCO, 2023).

The Department of Education, in 2016, intended to teach ICT skills in primary and secondary schools to provide ICT training for all school teachers according to the PNG Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030. The department also planned to create and manage an effective e-learning infrastructure. However, regardless of lofty objectives, many students—especially those studying in schools in distant areas have little to no access to ICT (UNESCO, 2023). Despite all efforts, not all schools in PNG have access to electricity, internet connections, or related equipment.

The teacher shortage, which resulted in approximately 10,000 vacancies in 2016, especially in remote rural areas, is a major challenge in providing quality education. Initiatives such as remote school allowances and scholarships have not attracted teachers to work in these remote regions (Eelkema, 2020). Teacher absenteeism is a major issue in PNG schools, increasing the learning gaps (Devette-Chee, 2022). UNCEN et al. (2012) reported 33.5 per cent overall absenteeism among school teachers. The National (2014) highlighted the warning from the Teaching Service Commission Chairman to teachers, especially government schools, on this issue. Usually, teachers leave school to attend to administrative matters (National Department of Education, 2009).

The country has poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and an unfriendly teacher-student ratio of 1:35.52 in 2016 (Global Economy, 2024). The government spent poorly on education, with only 1.87 per cent of GDP in 2018, which may not allow the constructivist instructional methodologies suggested in the Teachers' Guides.

Learning Assessment

The National Assessment and Reporting Policy (2003) of Papua New Guinea suggested criterion-referenced assessment. The PNG education system used national examinations in Grades 8, 10, and 12 (DOE-PNG, 2003). However, NEP 2020-2029 suggested a long-term objective of having just one exit point, grade 12; the grade 8 and grade 10 examinations would be used to measure and monitor students' learning. The policy suggests a sustainable standardised learning assessment system.

All Teacher Guides suggested assessment as an 'assessment for' and 'assessment of learning'. Assessments such as 'assessment for' are formative assessments, and 'assessments of' are summative assessments (DOE-PNG, 2017c). It also suggests different methods of assessment, namely:

- "Observations of students – informal observations, checklist and notes, watching work in progress, systemic observation, presentation to the class or classes at assembly, and assembly;
- On-going records – student profile, checklists, running record sheets, and student diaries;

- Questionnaires – Oral and written
- Student records – student profile, student journal, working in progress folder, and dairies;
- Talking with students – informal conversation, interview, questioning individuals and small groups, asking open-ended questions, telling stories, and listening to student explanations;
- Student self-assessment – group discussion, concept mapping, peer assessment, and self-assessment;
- Tests – practical and written; and
- Keep a record of practical work, such as models, work samples, and class and group projects" (DOE-PNG, 2017c, p. 50).

The assessment criteria for academic achievement, attitudes, values and other relevant achievements are still based on national certificates across all levels. As a regional trial and assessment, PNG participates in the Pacific Island Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) every three years. This participation is a valuable way to measure PNG's standards against other Pacific Island countries. The NEP 2020-2029 also recommends participating in global large-scale assessment surveys such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Maths and Science Study, and the Progress in International Literacy Study (DOE-PNG, 2017c).

There has been research on student assessment earlier, which is usually linked to quality. Teachers' guide-guided assessments, especially the formative assessments, are now being implemented. Research is needed to understand how far the new assessment techniques are being implemented and their impact on student's learning outcomes and standards. This is particularly important given the gap in the capacity development of teachers and relatively low morale and motivation (Eelkema, 2020).

Health and Physical Education

Health and physical education are integral to the PNG education system (Table 50.2). These are credit programmes. Health and physical education aim to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, morally, spiritually, and socially healthy children with basic life skills.

In elementary grades, health and physical education are two separate units. The elementary education syllabus suggests following national benchmarks.

"Healthy individual and community

- understand and demonstrate the ability to maintain their health and hygiene,
- demonstrate the ability to tell others about good food consumption and preparation for good healthy growth,
- know and identify common health problems in the home and community and ways to improve the problem,
- be knowledgeable and practice healthy lifestyle habits and promote health in their community,

Movement and Physical Activity

- understand that the body creates basic movements for play, work and other lifestyle activities,
- demonstrate the ability to develop physical fitness skills for fitness,
- participate in a variety of traditional and modified sports, games and activities,
- understand that good sportsmanship behaviour requires individuals to be good spectators and players" (DOE-PNG, 2015b, p. 5).

In junior primary grades, health and physical education are treated as two different subjects, but in senior primary grades, these two are integrated into one subject. Junior primary's health education curriculum includes growth and development, individual and community health, nutrition and safety, and first aid (DOE-PNG, 2017d). The physical education curriculum includes safety, movement, and physical activity (DOE-PNG, 2017e). The senior primary grades' integrated health and physical education syllabus comprises safety, growth and development, individual and community health, nutrition, movement, and physical activity (DOE-PNG, 2018b).

The secondary education syllabus has not been updated yet. It still follows the old Outcome-Based Education (OBE). Health and physical education is included in the lower secondary syllabus as part of the personal development subject. Physical education is separate from upper secondary education, and health education is integrated into personal development.

DOE of PNG suggested Observing students during the lesson, Conferencing with students, Student's Portfolio, Tests, and Assignments (projects/reports/quizzes/presentations/practical work samples) as assessment methods in Health and Physical Education lessons (DOE-PNG, 2018b).

Skills Education

The vision of the NEP 2020-2029 is "an education system that is affordable for parents and Government, that appreciates Christian and traditional values, and that prepares literate, skilled and healthy citizens, each educated and trained to their fullest potential, to contribute to the economic

and social development of the nation" (DOE-PNG, 2020, p. 1). So, skill development is an articulated PNG National Education Plan 2020-29 agenda.

Skills education finds a prominent place in the SBC. In upper primary grades, crop farming, livestock farming, land and water resource management technology, business environment and practices, basic technology, and home management are taught under the 'making a living' course. Upper secondary education has several trade courses, such as accounting, natural resource management, business studies, design technology, ICT, theatre arts, tourism and visual arts. These and other such courses have been recommended earlier in OBE and reinforced in SBC.

The PNG government formulated the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP 2021-2025) to tackle the country's national skills priorities. The plan was developed with multiple stakeholders, including Government, Industry, Employers, Church Agencies, Civil Society, Training and Education providers, and Donor partners. NSDP 2021-2025 is a five-year sectoral plan that takes its cue from the National Higher and Technical Education Plan (NHTEP) 2021-2030 (DOHERST, 2021).

Generally speaking, skills education is not included in the school curriculum despite the enormous skills gap in PNG.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

The life skills education is not a standalone programme in PNG. Also, there is a mix-up of life and trade skills (soft skills). While recommending life skills education to the Department of Education, community leader Agatha Mark recommends practical skill courses like carpentry, woodwork, etc., as reported by The National on December 27, 2017 (The National, 2017).

The curriculum framework of PNG includes training in making decisions, solving problems, and overcoming the challenges of daily life. These abilities support psychological well-being and may promote a positive attitude toward life. These aspects are incorporated informally into the curriculum. Elementary education includes community and culture, and upper primary education includes making a living and focuses on life skills development. Making a living is an important life skill subject. The curriculum allows all students to learn, master and apply practical, creative, innovative and entrepreneurial skills to live and work in diverse contexts. Students will acquire fundamental knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to prepare them for high school and effectively respond to the demands of the 21st century (DOE-PNG, 2018c).

Hobby development is not a stated objective of PNG's curriculum and education plan. However, the school curriculum includes arts and physical education programmes. Visual and performing arts

are included from elementary to secondary levels, and sports and games are included in physical education. These allow students to pursue their interests and hobbies.

Moral, Social and Cultural Education

PNG emphasises moral, social and cultural education to foster a sense of identity, community, and ethical conduct among its diverse population. Moral education focuses on instilling principles of honesty, respect, and responsibility. Social education encourages inclusivity and understanding among cultural groups, promoting harmony and cooperation. Cultural education highlights the preservation of traditional practices and customs. PNG's education system incorporates these elements into its curriculum, aiming to nurture well-rounded individuals who respect their cultural heritage, demonstrate ethical behaviour, and contribute positively to society. However, the national assessment policy emphasises the local and cultural approach to assessment at each level. A curriculum for Citizenship and Christian Values Education (CCVE) has been established for all educational levels. Elementary education includes community and culture, which consists of five strands. Three focus on moral, social, and cultural education, e.g., my community, my environment, healthy individual and community (DOE-PNG, 2015b), and all these are credit courses.

Peace and Happiness Education

Peace education is necessary for peacebuilding in PNG. The United States Institute of Peace referred to high rates of domestic and gender-based violence and inter-communal violence in PNG's mountainous highland regions and ongoing negotiations about Bougainville's political status (USIP, 2023). USAID's Papua New Guinea Peace Project (2023) to enhance the ability of communities, civil society, and local institutions in PNG to work in partnership to prevent and peacefully respond to conflict and further increase the safe, meaningful participation of women across society; UNDP's Peace Education Room at Kuluanda Primary School (UNDP, 2023), and other efforts in sustainable peace (Connolly & Mincieli, 2019) are some indications of global concern and PNG's need for peace education.

PNG does not have a specific peace or happiness education programme. The elements of peace are loosely integrated with different subjects and learning activities. The CRE is likely to impact peace education and peacebuilding.

Summary and Conclusion

PNG has come a long way towards universalising quality basic education, as indicated by sound NER at the primary level. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve universalisation, as there is a sudden drop in the GER as the learners move from primary to lower secondary to upper secondary grades. Research on classroom practices is too scanty to make any meaningful conclusion

about teaching learning and learning assessment quality. However, the teacher shortage, absenteeism, and lack of motivation are subjects of concern for quality.

PNG's education system is still trying to find its feet. The government is responsive to the demands of the situation and the need for universal quality education. Several quality initiatives in policies, programmes, curriculum frameworks, and national educational plans indicate the government's will. The impact is seriously compromised due to a weak economy with low per capita GDP and GDP of the country and, accordingly, low financial provision for education. Teacher management is a severe issue that hampers quality education.

PNG implemented Objective-based Education earlier. It switched over to Outcome-based Education/ Curriculum. In response to public outcry and criticism, the government switched to a Standard-based Curriculum. The problem could not have been Outcome-based education as OBE is a well-tested framework. The problem would have been in implementation due to poor infrastructure, weak teacher provision and management, and difficult geographical conditions in certain areas. A genuine apprehension is that SBC might face a similar implementational problem as there is little change in the ground situation. Otherwise, PNG's curricular framework is scientific and unique.

The impact of an ambitious and dynamic curricular framework depends upon quality teachers, adequate infrastructure, and a friendly teacher-student ratio. Further, the curriculum, as indicated by the syllabus, is rather heavy. Though curriculum – both OBC and SBC have provisions for health and physical education, skills education, life skills education in some form, and moral and cultural education, all-round development of students would remain a dream till schools are ready to deliver quality programmes. Though there are some provisions in different forms, affective, social and psychomotor education and development do not figure at the same level as cognitive domain education. Despite various types of conflicts, peace education or happiness education does not find a place in the curricular framework. US Institute of Peace, USAID, and UNDP's initiatives may create grounds for peace education in PNG.

The positive feature of the PNG education system is the readiness of the PNG theory of change. There is an urgent need to translate the theory into action. The strategic implementation plan must align with the modest means that the state can afford, given its economic development. Practice is still wanting. Hopefully, things will change faster with the involvement of international, multinational and bilateral agencies under the umbrella of SDG.

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German Dual Vocational Education System

In Germany, vocational education and training function under a Dual System, which involves collaboration between small and medium-sized enterprises and publicly funded vocational schools. This system is governed by law and provides training in nationally recognised occupations. Training is validated with a certificate issued by a competent body, such as a chamber of industry and commerce or a chamber of crafts and trades. Trainees in the dual system divide their time between vocational school and a company, typically spending part of each week at each location or alternating between longer periods at each. The training generally lasts from two to three and a half years.

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A Resurgent Education System: Solomon Islands[9]

Marmar Mukhopadhyay

Abstract

The Solomon Islands, comprising nine main and 900 smaller islands in Oceania, has a civilisation dating back over 30,000 years. Following nearly 400 years of colonisation by the Spanish and British, European culture was deeply embedded in the nation. Since gaining independence in 1978, the Solomon Islands has made significant strides in educating its people and reviving Indigenous knowledge. This chapter critically explores the country's educational policy and curricular reforms, highlighting key milestones such as the Draft Education Act 2014, the Education White Paper 2015, and the SI Education Act 2023, implemented in January 2024. The chapter also examines the National Education Action Plan (NEAP) 2022-26, focusing on its curricular framework, teaching-learning practices, and approaches to health, pre-vocational, life skills, and moral education. Central to the Solomon Islands' educational discourse is the ongoing debate about the equal importance of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems.

Keywords: Education White Paper, Education Act 2023, National Education Action Plan, National Curriculum Statement, National Qualification Framework.

Introduction

Based on archaeological evidence at Kilu Cave on Buka Island, people settled Solomons in 30,000 to 28,000 BC from the Bismarck Islands and New Guinea during the Pleistocene (Pawley, 2009). Later, there were waves of migrants, including the Lapita people, the ancestors of modern-day

[9] Author gratefully acknowledges Dr Jack Maebuta's, Vice-Chancellor, Solomon Island National University, review comments and suggestions in finalising the case.

Melanesians. The Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira landed in Santa Isabel in 1568. The Solomon Islands (SI) was a British colony in 1893 before it gained independence in 1978.

SI comprises six major islands and over 900 smaller islands. Honiara is the national capital. The SI comprises nine provinces and one Town Council. The nine provinces are Central Island, Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Isabel, Makira & Ulawa, Malaita, Renell & Bellona, Temotu, and Western Province, administered locally by elected Provincial Assemblies and headed by Provincial Premiers (UN, n.d.).

The country has a total land area of 28,900 sq. km and a coastline stretching over 5,313 kilometres (UN, n.d.). The SI does not share land borders with any country. The neighbouring countries are Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Caledonia and Vanuatu, Fiji, Wallis and Futuna, Tuvalu Nauru and Micronesia.

SI's population in 2023 was 740,424, a 2.23% increase from 2022 (Macrotrends, n.d.). The gender ratio is 107 males for every 100 females. The average life expectancy is 77 years (CIA, 2023a). The literacy rate is 76.6%. 95% of the population are indigenous Melanesians. The country also has smaller groups of Chinese, European, Micronesian (1.2%), and Polynesian (3.1%) residents (CIA, 2023b).

The SI's per capita GDP is $2,500 (IMF), and over 75% of its labour is in subsistence farming and fishing (Pratt, 2016). In 2021, the country's GDP was USD 1.71 billion (IMF, 2024), ranking 155th out of 191 countries on the Human Development Index (IMF, 2023).

There are 1050 schools in the SI; of these, 510 are standalone primary schools, of which 131 are non-governmental. All the schools are funded by the government and managed by the provincial education and church authorities. Additionally, there are 243 community schools with a primary section, 16 provincial high schools (2 non-governmental), and ten national high schools (8 non-governmental). There are 284 registered and 280 unregistered early childhood education (ECE) centres (MEHRD, n.d.a). In 2019, the total enrolment across all levels of school education was 209,377 students, with approximately 47-50% being female. Furthermore, rural training centres had 8644 teachers, of whom 53% were female, across all sectors. As of 2019, GER was 82.0% at the ECE level, 114.1% at the primary level, 68.0% at the junior secondary level, and 32.1% at the senior secondary level. The NER at the ECE was 31.2%; at primary, 77.1%; at junior secondary and senior secondary, 17.7% and 18.5%, respectively (MEHRD, n.d.b). The sudden drop in NER from primary to secondary levels is notable.

Educational Policy

The Parliament passed the Solomon Islands Education Act/Bill in 2023 and enforced it in January 2024. The key features of the Education Act 2023 are:

- "To foster an understanding and critical appreciation of moral, spiritual, religious, social, and cultural values shaping Solomon Islands society.
- Promoting culture, customs, values, and attitudes, fostering societal harmony and positive outcomes.
- Nurturing a sense of personal identity, self-esteem, and awareness of one's abilities, aptitudes, and limitations.
- Promoting equal educational opportunity for all, addressing economic, social, physical, and mental factors hindering potential development.
- Developing intellectual skills, a spirit of inquiry, and the capacity to analyse issues critically and constructively.
- Fostering a spirit of self-reliance, innovation, initiative, and imagination.
- Providing students with the necessary education to support the country's economic development and enable effective societal contributions.
- Creating tolerant, responsible, caring, and politically aware citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Ensuring young Solomon Islanders are keenly aware of their national heritage and identity and respect and care for the environment (National Parliament of Solomon Islands, 2023. p.10)".

The Bill has entrusted the Minister of Education with the responsibility of developing the 'Learning Framework'. The bill was passed only in January 2024, so developing the curricular policy will take time.

Draft Education Act 2014 and Education White Paper 2015 are the foundational documents of school education in the SI till the passing of the Education Bill 2023. The SI educational policy covers all levels of education, starting with Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The ECCE will lay the foundation of lifelong learning, a prerequisite for entry into primary education, and eligibility for only final-year ECCE government grants (Fangalasuu & Bateman, 2015).

The White Paper further recommended compulsory education for 5 - 14 years for compulsory education. Schools offering foreign curricula must 'integrate' the national curriculum so that learners may sit for the national examination at the end of senior secondary to be eligible for

government scholarships (Fangalasuu & Bateman, 2015). The 2023 Education Bill makes stringent policies for the enrolment and participation of children in compulsory years of schooling. Non-enrolment and school attendance without sufficient reasons are punishable offences, as is the refusal of enrolment by the education providers. The 2023 Bill endorses the 2015 policy on freedom for religious education and education of children with special needs.

The 2015 White Paper was followed by the National Education Action Plan (NEAP) to achieve the Education Strategic Framework (ESF: 2016-2030). It has gone through the first phase (2016-2021). It is now in the middle of the second phase (2022-26). The ESF and NEAP commit to "*providing universal education to every child in the country through increased access to education, improved quality of education, and improved management"* (MEHRD, n.d., p. 7); to provide all girls and boys access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 and achieve full enrollment of all 5-year-olds by 2025 (MEHRD, n.d.a).

Secondary education must equip students with work-related and transferable skills, including entrepreneurship and ICT skills, to increase the number of young people with relevant skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship (MEHRD, n.d.a). Its goal is to optimally manage education resources efficiently, effectively and transparently to promote access and quality goals in education.

The major legislative (read as policy) reforms (SI NEAP 2022-26) include a stronger emphasis on child protection and inclusivity; province-level micro-planning; education providers roles and responsibilities; effective teacher management; school leaders understanding of roles and responsibilities; improved functioning of school boards (all these are also recommended in Education Bill 23); and better implementation, and transparency in funding and accountability (MEHRD, n.d.a).

The two most distinguishing features of the NEAP 2022-26 are defining key priority areas (Figure 53.1) and the Outcome-based Plan.

The Education Bill 2023 makes strong recommendations on education systems management – items on the left column of the figure above, leaving the development of the 'Learning Framework' (right column above) to the Minister of Education.[10] Its actual implementation and impact will be known later.

[10] The Education Bill of 2023 came into force on Monday, 1 January 2024, following the assent by the Governor General. The Minister of MEHRD had signed on 14 December 2023 (Solomon Islands Government, 2024, 5 January)".

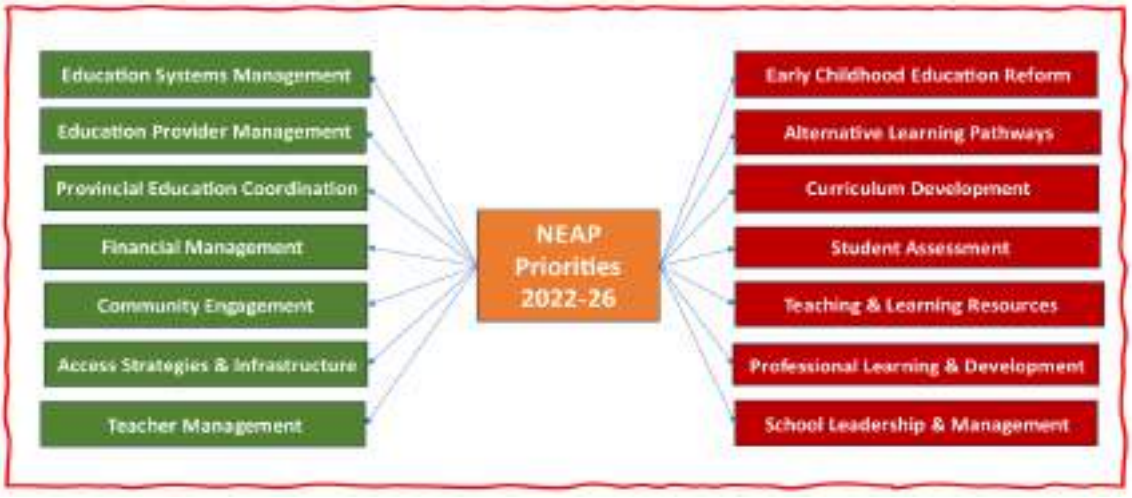

Figure 53.1 Key Priority Areas for NEAP 2022-26

Source: *Author*

Structure of the Education System

SI school education comprises ECCE for 3- to 5-year-olds, six years of primary education for 6- to 12-year-olds, and six years of secondary education for 13- to 18-year-olds. Secondary education is divided into junior (7 to 9 years) and senior secondary (10 to 12 years) education. The school education is followed by four years of undergraduate and one to two years of Master's programmes (MEHRD, 2010). The doctoral programme usually takes three years (Figure 53.2).

Nine years of education is free and compulsory, based on the Policy on Basic Education and 'Fee-Free Basic Education Policy' in the Education Act 2014 and Education White Paper 2015 (Fangalasuu & Bateman, 2015).

Conditions have been stipulated for registering ECE and schools and education providers—both government and non-government. According to the Education Bill 2023, nonenrolment and non-attendance of a child of stipulated school age without adequate reason and/or permission of a competent authority is a punishable offence.

Almost 74% of primary and secondary schools are state-funded and state-owned, covering nearly 70% of total enrolments (UNESCO, 2021).

The government has also established Satellite or Extension Schools to educate children residing in isolated villages who struggle to attend the nearest regular school due to isolation, distance and terrain.

The schools are classified into three types: secondary schools—maybe junior secondary, senior secondary, or both; community high schools—which may cover ECE; and composite schools that include two or more different sub-sectors of education, i.e. ECE, primary, or secondary. The Community High Schools are state-owned, with strong input from the local communities in establishing and managing them.

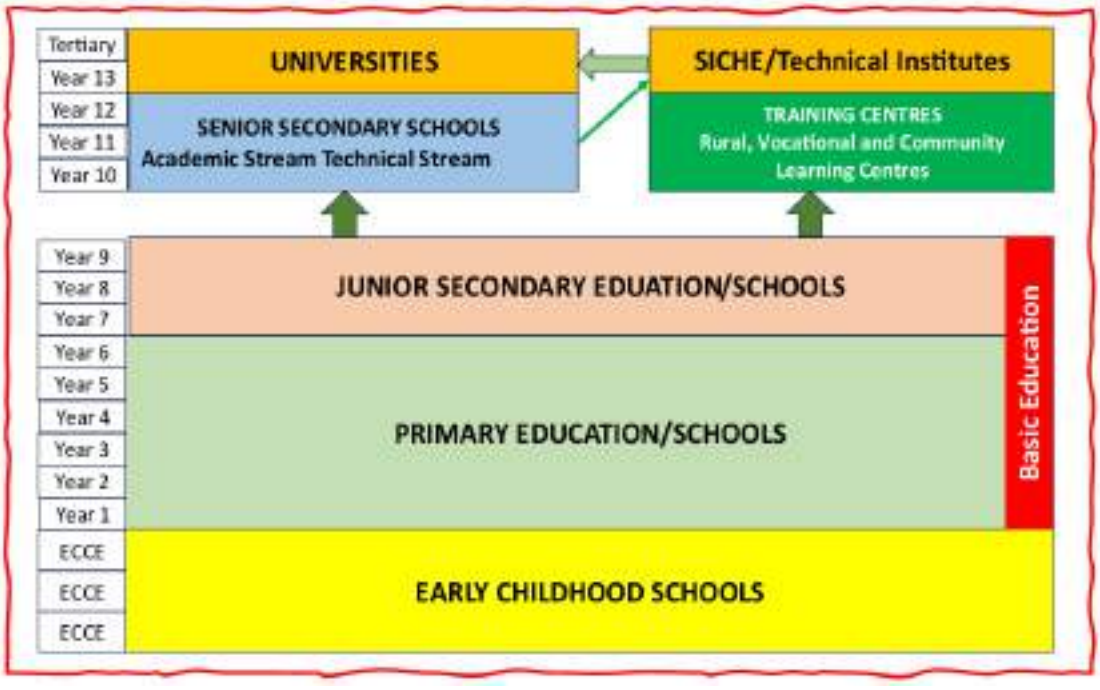

Figure 53.2 Structure of the Education System of Solomon Islands

Source: *SI National Curriculum Statement, 2010 (p15, adapted by Author)*

The Education Bill 2023 assigned the Permanent Secretary the responsibility of deciding the school calendar and days and hours of schooling (National Parliament of Solomon Islands, 2023, p. 53).

Curricular Framework

The Education Bill 2023 has entrusted the Minister to approve the learning framework for early childhood education and each year of primary and secondary education (National Parliament of Solomon Islands, 2023, p. 55). Understandably, learning framework development is time-consuming, and until then, NAEP 2022-2026 should be continued. A communication from the

MEHRD clarified a query (by Prof Jack at the author's request).[11]) "The current ESF and NEAP 2022-2026 are the Ministry's Strategic Plans that reflect our aspirations and expected outcomes that the government seeks to achieve so that it is providing quality education services".

The Education Bill 2023 provides clear direction and advice on implementing and achieving a quality education through 'effective, accountable and transparent administration, and clear resourcing and support'.

In the SI, curricular trends were mostly influenced and imported from Australia and Papua New Guinea. A 2013 study indicated that primary teachers found mathematics (Australian) and English (PNG) curricula non-interesting, non-authentic, and inappropriate. Primarily, the curriculum was found to be difficult, and examples were mostly from the Australian context (mathematics). However, in social studies curriculum developed locally, teachers found them, responding on a 5-point Likert scale, interesting (4.89), authentic (4.41), appropriate (4.67), organised and balanced (4.22), and technically good quality (4.44) (Lingam et al., 2013). Authors claimed this result in social studies to be 'A Shift from Eurocentrism to Solcentrism in Curriculum Making'. This shift is reflected in later policies and plans (Education Act 2014, Education White Paper 2015, ESF 2016-2030, and ongoing NEAP 2022-26).

The most innovative feature of the Solomon Island Curricular Framework is the adoption of an Outcome-based Curriculum. Solomon Island National Curriculum Statement (MEHRD, 2010) recommended outcome-based outcomes of the whole curriculum, outcomes for each education level and outcomes for each subject. It also stipulated the teaching-learning process to ensure learning outcomes and assessment. In an outcome-based curriculum, the emphasis is not on what the learners know but on what they can do. In other words, outcome-based curriculum demands evidence of learning. The National Curriculum Statement was carried forward in the ESF 2016-2030 and NEAP 2022-26.

Pre-Primary Education

At the pre-primary level, there is no subject; there are only specifications of learning outcomes (Table 53.1). Teachers are responsible for designing learning experiences to help children achieve the desired learning outcomes.

[11] Author received the clarification from Prof Jack Maebuta, Vice-Chancellor, Solomon Islands National University, given by Ms Linda Wate, MEHRD, Solomon Islands Government, on 7 January 2024, by email to Prof Jack.

Table 53.1 Expected Learning Outcomes of Pre-primary Education

Development domains	Should have developed or be able to demonstrate
Physical	fine and gross motor skills; basic movement skills; body awareness; eye-hand coordination; good posture; self-help skills; participation in active play.
Cognitive	think things through; colours and shape recognition; object classification and grouping; space and time relationship concepts, symbols, words, etc; skills in early mathematics, science, nature, language and literacy; and how to discover and solve problems.
Social	Interact with peers, teachers, and visitors to the school; share, cooperate, and tolerate; cope with competition and aggression; maintain personal hygiene; recognise healthy habits and routines.
Emotional	Control and appropriate expression of feelings/emotions; facing up the results of their actions.
Moral	Respect, care and concern for other children, parents, teachers, community and the immediate environment; display good manners, values, trust and cultural beliefs.
Language	Language Skills and their usage while interacting: problem-solving, questioning, reasoning, reading and telling stories, etc.

Source: *MEHRD, 2010*

The PPY timetable is divided into Talk Time, Story Time, Move Time, Think Time, and Try Time to develop numeracy, reading, writing, and core values (MEHRD, 2018).

Curriculum statements in primary, junior, and senior secondary education and Training or community centres have specified the expected learning outcomes and curricular structure at different levels of school education and training (Tables 53.2 and 53.3).

Table 53.2 Learning Outcomes of Different Levels of Education

Primary: Students should	• Acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable their full social, cultural, political, and economic potential and meaningful participation in society. • Develop physical, cognitive, mental, emotional, social and spiritual qualities to live satisfying lives. • Develop oracy, literacy, and numeracy skills to function effectively in society after they finish school. • Become self-reliant and responsible members of their community; understand and respect religious, traditional, and cultural values, beliefs, norms, and codes of conduct of the local and wider community in which they live.
Junior: Students should be able to	• acquire and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes required for economic activity and development and benefit from further education or training. • develop and apply physical, mental, social and spiritual abilities in life; • display behaviour and attitudes compatible with the norms of the society;

	• become a self-reliant, committed and responsible leader and a resourceful member of the community; • respect the diversity of SI's religious, traditional and cultural values, traditions, ethnicity, beliefs, norms and codes of conduct of the local community and the wider world;
Senior: Students should be able to	• improve language skills to understand and communicate to gain employment or further progress in their education; • develop higher-order cognitive skills to understand the scientific principles underlying the physical, biological, and technological aspects of the natural world; • describe and reason about patterns, structures, and relationships; • locate and collect information from various sources, evaluate, use, and share it with others; • select, use, and integrate them into their lives, communities, and countries; • work both individually and collaboratively; • value and implement practices that promote personal growth and well-being. • understand their relationship with their environment and have the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in SI life. • students should appreciate and understand the cultural diversity of the SI and live in harmony with others.
Rural & Community Centres: Individuals, on completion of their education, should be able to	• become responsible leaders in their community; • demonstrate skills and attitudes necessary to improve their personal, family and community lives; • demonstrate self-discipline and self-reliance; • develop socially, morally, spiritually, culturally, and physically while acquiring practical skills. • acquire traditional skills to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial skills for self-employment and create employment for others. • find employment and demonstrate a work ethic to succeed in self-employment or working for others.

Source: *MEHRD, 2010. (p24-26: Adapted by Author)*

Primary schools have five conventional subjects and five 'personal development' subjects, including ICT skills. At junior secondary schools, in addition to the conventional academic subjects, students learn practical and vocational subjects and personal development subjects; indeed, it is an innovative design for all-round development. At senior secondary schools, students learn academic, technical and vocational skills subjects. One interesting feature is the focus on agricultural science. At the primary level, agriculture is integrated into the science course; at junior schools, learners are introduced to agricultural business, and at Senior secondary, agriculture science is an independent subject.

Table 53.3 Curricular Structure for Different Levels of Education

Primary Education	Junior Secondary	Senior Secondary	Training or Community Learning Centre
1. Vernacular languages 2. English language 3. Mathematics 4. Science, including Agriculture 5. Social Studies 6. Health Education 7. Physical education and sports 8. Creative Arts and Culture 9. Christian Education 10. Information & Communication Technology	Academic Subjects: English Mathematics Science Social studies Practical / Vocational Subjects: Agriculture Business Studies Home Economics Technology Personal Development Subjects: Creative Arts and Culture Health Christian Education Physical Education	Compulsory Subjects: English Mathematics Academic subjects Business Studies1 New Testament Studies Science Social Studies Technical / Vocational subjects: Agriculture Business Studies1 Home Economics Technology	Agriculture, Life Skills (Home Economics), Building, Carpentry and Joinery and Mechanics. Several other courses have been recommended for rural and urban training centres.

Source: *MEHRD, 2010. (p27-38: Adapted by Author)*

As mentioned earlier, besides defining the learning outcomes of each level of education, the SI curriculum defined the learning outcomes of each subject. For example, a student on completion of primary education *mathematics* should be able to:

1. "understand mathematical concepts through relevant firsthand experience in real situations, working from the real to the abstract;
2. be able to apply mathematical concepts to their environment and culture;
3. take part in practical activities and games applying mathematical concepts;
4. be able to use mathematical skills in practical and problem-solving situations;
5. appreciate the aesthetic nature of mathematics;
6. explore and investigate mathematical problems;

7. talk about their mathematical activities, describing what they do and why they do it" (MEHRD, 2010, p.28)

Time is flexible and progressively allocated to different subjects at different levels of education (Table 53.4).

Table 53.4 Time Allocation to Different Groups of Subjects at Different Levels

	Academic Minutes/week	Practical/Vocational in Minutes/week	Personal Development in minutes/week	Total in minutes/week
Primary 1-3	910	Nil	435	1345
Primary 4-6	1120		400	1520
Junior	720	560	320	1600
Senior	One thousand six hundred minutes are divided into 320 minutes for English, 280 minutes for mathematics and 200 minutes for five subjects to be chosen by the learners.			

Source: *MEHRD, 2010*

The primary 1-3 grade students get 1345 minutes of instruction per week, compared to 1520 minutes for primary grades 4-6 and 1600 minutes per week for the junior and secondary grades. The periods for primary 1-3 are 30 minutes, for primary 4-6 35 minutes, and for junior and senior secondary 40 minutes.

Training Centres (RTC, VTC, and CLC) cannot operate on a short-period timetable. A learning task may take half or even a whole day. Some work on, maybe, a month block for one subject before changing to another subject. Hence, time allocation is flexible.

The curricular structure of SI school education has several innovative features. The first and foremost is the outcome-based approach to curriculum design. The second feature integrates practical and vocational skills education and academic subject learning. Extension centres of schools for children in rugged terrains and dispersed locations are major innovations for inclusion.

The curricular structure and the time allocation will likely change with the implementation of the Education Bill 2023.

Teaching Learning

PPY classrooms are play-based, which means they offer guided discovery learning. PPY classrooms are exciting places where learners are busy and involved. There is noise when talking, listening to music, or singing. There is movement with learners on the floor, investigating, or gathered around a table, discussing or trying something out. Curiosity exists as learners connect to various learning

areas amid a single activity. There is joy and delight as learners make discoveries and give names and voices to what they have found.

There is a detailed recommendation about learning and teaching processes for school education. The learning should be "through an interactive process involving inquiry into information and ideas, and understanding concepts for themselves. Learners should work through planned learning experiences involving experimentation, investigation, observation, discussion, practice of skills and independent study rather than listening and note-taking. The learning process undertaken by the learner must be Active rather than Passive in the schools" (MEHRD, 2010, p. 42). The document recommended a large bouquet of instructional methodologies, like problem posing, inquiry learning, personal or group research, demonstration, practical activity, questioning of learners, discussion, group work, role play, excursions outside the school, fieldwork outside the classroom, peer teaching, brainstorming, and authentic learning.

However, students' performance is a matter of concern. As mentioned earlier, there was a sudden dip from the NER of 77.1% in primary grades to 17.7% in junior secondary level in 2019. In 2020, only 19% of primary school students qualified for moving into grade 7 (junior secondary). This was despite moderately difficult examination papers (Podokolo, 2021).

In another study, Quinn (2021) reported that the analysis of a sample of scripts for national testing indicated poor performance in English literacy, particularly in the ability to write continuous text. However, another study carried out on 952 participating schools across 15 countries in the region, including the SI, by ACER (Cassity, 2022) found that grade 6 students and year four students do not, on average, meet the minimum proficiency levels in reading, though the exceed proficiency level in numeracy. At grade 6, students' performance matches the level of expectation in reading and exceeds that in numeracy. This average performance of students of the Pacific countries does not match that of SI students, as only 19% qualify at the end of primary education.

Learning Assessment

In pre-primary grades, there are formal written or oral tests. Assessment is largely observation-based. The main assessment form is observation to identify individual learners' needs and development issues.

The NEAP 2022-26 provides detailed guidelines covering principles and purposes of assessment, types of assessment, assessment system, subjects of assessment and assessment of individual learning outcomes. Learning aims to monitor learners' achievement to improve learning and teacher planning, share student performance information with stakeholders such as learners, parents, career

masters and employers, and review the school learning programme. The assessment system intends to assess knowledge, understanding, skills, and values using criteria-based or competency-based assessment. The NEAP 2022-26 recommends formative, summative and diagnostic assessment. The diagnostic assessment can be built into a formative assessment. The purpose is to determine the learning level to identify enrichment support from the Assessment Resources Tool for Teaching and Learning (ARTTLe) handbook.

Instead of marks, the learner's performance is rated into six levels, namely Achieved (A), Partially Achieved (PA4), Partially Achieved (PA3), Partially Achieved (PA2), Partially Achieved (PA1), and Not Achieved (NA).

Rodie (2014) found that teachers use unit tests to assess year nine students' learning, performance and achievements in science. Summative assessments are used to compare students' abilities through grading and report their students' achievements to parents and students. Rodie also reported that questions used in learning assessment primarily measure lower-order cognition. Further, the examination results have not been analysed to review teaching plans, which could improve student performance and school effectiveness.

The assessment system is well-designed and was implemented in the 2016-2021 phase of NEAP. There is insufficient evidence of improvement in the transition rate or students' performance against the competency-based criteria. There are not enough studies on how teachers practice the assessment system recommended in the NEAP. Nonetheless, as much as teaching-learning practices, the transformation of assessment requires time, as it is a case of a culture shift.

Health and Physical Education

Health and Physical Education (HPE) starts at the preprimary level with the Move time. The PHE is compulsory at primary and junior secondary schools. In primary 1 to 3, three periods, each 35 minutes, are devoted to HPE and sports per week. This is reduced to two periods (40 minutes) in primary grades 4 to 6. In Junior Secondary Education, only eight periods are allocated weekly for personal development, including PHE. Senior secondary schools have no HPE provision per the National Curriculum Statement 2010. There is a steady decline in the emphasis and curricular provision of HPE and sports in the SI school education system.

Dorovolomo (2003), in a survey, found that 35% of primary teachers in the SI do not teach PE in their classes. A large majority (97%) of the primary schools have intramural sports, and 77% of the schools participate in inter-school sports. Dorovolomo (2003) also found that most teachers do not feel confident teaching 60% of the prescribed syllabus. Teachers were confident in teaching minor games, such as football and netball, but not swimming and gymnastics.

There are cultural barriers to teaching certain sports activities, such as gymnastics. Though swimming is natural for habitants of such islands, there are no swimming pools and enough safe beaches for teaching swimming. As the emphasis is on performance in academic subjects, teachers do not find enough justification for spending time on HPE and sports.

A serious constraint is the shortage of trained teachers in PHE and sports. The Sports and Creative Arts Department at SI National University offers PHE courses in teacher education programmes to fill this gap.

Health education is a serious issue in the SI. "A visitor travelling to the Solomon Islands is made acutely aware of some of the required precautionary measures to protect against dengue fever and malaria. The billboards that greet visitors to Honiara remind them of the dangers of HIV and the need to practise "Abstinence, Be faithful, and use Condoms (ABC)" (taken from a billboard outside the Honiara Football Stadium) in response to emerging concerns about the high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV and AIDS. SI communities appear to be highly vulnerable to HIV and STIs, linked to poor awareness of sexual reproductive health, low levels of condom use, high levels of violence against women, high fertility rates, and high levels of teenage pregnancy" (Petrie & Tehe, 2011, p. 33).

Despite detailed statements on HPE and sports, this domain of school education needs special attention. Students in senior secondary schools are in their prime/late adolescence. Most sporting talents blossom to full potential at this age when HPE and sports find no place in the curriculum. Hopefully, the new curricular framework following the Education Bill 2023 will address this issue more seriously.

Skills Education

Things may change with the new curricular framework following the Education Bill 2023. Presently, skills education finds a prominent place in the curricular framework. Several vocational subjects (Table 53.3) are compulsory in junior high schools. Vocational subjects are available at the senior secondary level (Table 53.3). At the junior secondary level, 560 weekly minutes are allocated for practical and vocational subjects. At the senior secondary level, the weekly duration of instruction depends upon the subjects chosen by the students.

SI is predominantly rural, with 74.42% in 2022. Extension centres exist to overcome the non-viability of schools in dispersed locations and coastal areas. Surveys also indicate a lack of interest in academic studies among young children. The rural population may have access to food but not the opportunity to earn cash to pay for education, housing, and health services, leading to labour migration.

Rural Training Centres (RTC), often located in remote areas, offer vocational programmes in agriculture, carpentry, mechanical trades, financial literacy and textiles (mostly for women). Women comprise about 20% of RTC trainees (World Bank, 2012). These centres operate under the SI Association of Vocational and Rural Training Centres (SIAVRTC). Australian and New Zealand governments collaborate and support the activities in collaboration with SIAVRTC.

RTC courses are now accredited under the Solomon Islands Tertiary and Skills Authority (SITESA) Act. Under the National Qualification Framework, RTC courses are tagged at Certificate II and III levels. The community positively views the RTCs as they fill the gap left by the formal education system, support local livelihoods, and arrest the flow of urban migration. However, RTCs face difficulty in attracting greater government and donor funding due to policy and practice favouring global and national over local issues and efforts (Kathryn, 2015).

Hobby and Life Skills Education

There is no specific mention of hobby education. However, the curricular framework provides enough opportunity for hobby development through Creative Arts and Culture, sports, and physical education, though it is restricted to primary and junior secondary levels. Since these subjects are not at the senior secondary level and are usually given less emphasis, as mentioned above, it is difficult to conclude how far these programmes contribute to hobby development.

A critical analysis of the key learning outcomes of each level of the Whole curriculum indicates the emphasis on life skills. For example, in primary education, a student is expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective participation in society, problem-solving using different strategies, communication skills to participate in society, and effective self-reliance. At junior and senior secondary levels, additional life skills are learning to learn skills to benefit from training and adapting new technologies in life and the community. However, all these life skills are considered to be developed by default through learning and teaching other subjects and courses. There are no specific life skills education programmes.

Moral Social and Cultural Education

Solomon Islanders are very proud and possessive about their indigenous culture. Dorovolomo (2003) mentioned that respect for brothers and sisters is so strong that in Choiseul, girls standing on their heads or doing a forward roll is unacceptable if a sister or cousin sister is present. There are several studies on ethics education in indigenous schools (Sanga, 2019). Fitoo (2014) mentioned that Solomon Islanders defined citizenship education as teaching values that aim to unify through developing new relationships among people with diverse cultures. The values identified are rights,

responsibility, tolerance, ethics, honesty, and cooperation. The steady urbanisation of the SI is a point of tension in the country's cultural milieu.

As per the SI National Curriculum Statement, one of the most important outcomes of school education is the development of moral values, as mentioned in tables 50.1 and 50.2.

Christianity education is included in the curriculum of primary and junior secondary schools. Although the specifics of the content are not publicly available, it can be assumed that Christian values are taught to the students. It is important to note that education on other religions is also provided as required.

Peace and Happiness Education

'Where there is no peace, there is no happiness', said The Gita. Education without happiness is a burden. Hence, learning to be happy or having a happy education should form part of any modern education. Happiness education is not directly mentioned in the national curriculum statement. Pratt's (2016) study revealed that SI's Gross Happiness Index (GHI) is 0.617, lower than Tonga's. Only about 20% of Solomon Islanders were happy, meaning happiness is achieved sufficiency. The Islanders are happier with education, followed by health and mental well-being. More males are happier than females, elders (35 years and above) are happier than their younger counterparts, and tertiary-educated people are happier than their counterparts.

The SI's Gross Happiness Index (GHI) is 0.617, and for Tonga, the Gross Happiness Index (GHI) is 0.788. For Bhutan in 2010, the GNH Index value was 0.74 (Pratt, 2016).

Peace education under such a title does not find a place in the Solomon Island school curriculum. Instead, peace education is built into social studies and other courses. Maebuta's (2012) article on Peace Education for Peace Building is a well-argued paper that can have implications for other countries with ethnic and religious conflicts. The year ten course on Arts and Cultural Studies brings lessons on living in harmony with others and practising peacebuilding. In science courses in Earth and Beyond and Earth Systems, students may learn to maintain peace and harmony during natural disasters. Students learn forgiveness and reconciliation and practise peace in Christian education. Shifting cultivation and its alternatives in Agriculture helps children learn the importance and ways of maintaining environmental peace. Maebuta (2012) claims that speaking and oracy help in conflict resolution.

Peace education is vital for a country susceptible to and witnessing ethnic conflicts and violence. Peace education must begin with teacher education to effectively design, offer, and evaluate a peace education programme. UNESCO has taken several important initiatives in Peace Education. The author's (UNESCO, 2005) Peace Education: Framework for Teacher Education may be helpful.

Summary and Conclusion

Despite ethnic conflicts, political instability and poor national wealth, the SI focused on education as a key instrument for national development. Since the early 2000s, it has adopted a planned approach to educational development. SI made the National Curriculum Statement in 2010, followed by The Education White Paper 2015, which adopted three five-year NEAPs to achieve the ESF: 2016-2030. The first phase (2016-2021) has been completed. It is now in the middle of the second phase (2022-26). The Parliament passed the Education Bill in 2023, enforced in January 2024.

The system comprises three years of pre-primary education, six years of compulsory and free primary education, and junior and senior secondary education. The NER of about 74% at the primary level suddenly drops to 17% at the junior secondary schools, indicating a large proportion of children dropping out after six years of compulsory education. The Education Bill 2023 makes non-enrollment and nonattendance, and education providers' role in facilitating students' non-participation without adequate reason, a punishable offence.

The most innovative feature of the education sector strategy is adopting an outcome-based approach defining the expected learning outcomes for the whole learning experience, each grade and subject, with detailed instructional and assessment strategies guidelines. Including vocational courses in junior secondary education as compulsory subjects and optional at the senior secondary level is another strategic intervention for bridging the skills gap. Further, there are Extension Centres, RTCs and Community Centres to bridge the educational access and skill gaps.

The SI has developed partnerships with various agencies and countries. Australia and New Zealand play a constructive role in developing the islands' educational and vocational education.

Growing urbanisation leads to social tensions and labour migration, which have serious implications for tertiary education and warrant educational policy interaction with the labour market (Parairae, 2017).

Though educational schemes are well balanced between cognitive and non-cognitive domains, learner apathy towards schools remains a formidable barrier to educational development. Though academic, cultural, vocational, and personal development studies are compulsory and considered in the overall assessment at primary and junior secondary levels, the holistic development of a happy learner is still miles away.

The SI experiences a palpable tension between the Indigenous and Western knowledge. Pre-independence educated Islanders felt that Western education had distanced themselves from the indigenous ways of knowledge and learning (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). "Many of the

returning PhD and postgraduates are seeking positions at SI National University's teacher-training college and are pressuring for traditional cultural life practices, values, and ways of thinking and debating to figure prominently in the curriculum" (Watson-Gegeo et al., 2018. p. 417). The negative effects of unquestioningly accepting and implementing foreign education systems have resulted in various issues that disrupt the norms of island and community society, leading to the neglect of traditional family bonds. The survival of the authentic island lifestyle, referred to as the 'Pacific Way', is being threatened by new behaviours alien to the islands (Bugota,1986, pp. 42–49). This debate began with *Education for What* report by the Educational Policy Review Committee in 1979 (Bugotu, 1986).

The formal education in the Pacific does not consider how most Pacific people think, learn and communicate with one another (Thaman, 2009). Indigenous scholars and educators argue that indigenous knowledge is as valid as Western knowledge (Thaman, 2009; Smith, 2012; Biermann, 2011). Oakeshott (2021) claims that "new social studies material, ….., reflects the boundaries that Solomon Islanders typically respect if they talk about Tension with each other (Oakeshott, 2021. p 403)".

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The World of Learning: Comparative Study of Educational Reforms in 52 Countries

Marmar Mukhopadhyay
Mrityunjoy Kaibarta
Bidhan Gantait

Abstract

There are regional and global trends in educational reforms, but most often, these are incidental. Some countries are deliberately trying to cope with global trends and innovations. This chapter deals with trends in reforms in educational policies, structures of the educational systems, curriculum, teaching-learning, learning assessment, Health and physical education, prevocational and vocational education, life skills education, moral and social education, and peace and happiness education. Comparing diverse policies and practices in fifty-two counties on all six continents is daunting. Nevertheless, this chapter flags the trends and innovative practices across the countries, mentioning the countries under the thematic sections. For greater country-specific details, readers are advised to turn back pages to country cases and further to the sources referred to and cited at appropriate places in the text.

Keywords: Educational Policies, SDG4, Structures, Curriculum, Preschool Education, Teaching-learning, UNESCO, UNICEF, Peace.

Introduction

The inspiration for this mega project, as mentioned in the first chapter, came from the concern for global peace and harmony, as human civilisation stands on the threshold of a collapse due to the slow poisoning of climate change and global warming, pollution, poverty and exploitation, double-edged scientific inventions, and many others aggravated by the proliferation of mass-destructive chemical and nuclear weapons to many countries complemented by an ever-increasing range of missiles with heavier payloads.

In recent years, the world has witnessed a prolonged devastating war between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, now spreading to Lebanon, Iran and other neighbouring countries. Many countries are suffering from internal ethnic and religion-based conflicts. There are epidemics, pandemics and natural calamities. All these and more cause serious learning loss, especially among children from economically poorer communities, whose number is overwhelming in the developing and the least developed countries in the Global South.

Further, nearly four hundred years of human history is the history of colonisation of nearly eighty per cent of the world by a few West European countries like France, Portugal, Spain, Britain, and Italy. Besides economic exploitation, the most damaging effect on education was Westernisation, which suited colonial ruling interests. On the one hand, the colonialised countries lost their Indigenous knowledge; on the other hand, they developed a colonial mindset as a legacy, making it difficult to exercise the spirit of independence even after their political independence. The need for and urgency of fast economic regeneration is so overwhelming that human resource generation has been put on the back burner. As a result, most education systems in the Global South still practice shorter years of free and compulsory education without the backup of compulsory preschooling and quality assurance that can only lead to basic and sustainable literacy, nowhere near the celebrated SDG 4.

It would be unwise to look at SDG4 in isolation. For the sustainability of human civilisation with a dignified quality of life, all 17 goals of the SDG must be seen together. That needs a peaceful, happy world where people learn to live together. Only education can develop such human communities that can happily live and grow together.

Contemporary educational practices across countries are not enough to guarantee this. Education needs to be rebuilt, and new education model(s) must be developed to shape a new generation of human communities.

The raging wars and border conflicts with the determination to eliminate people who differ and wipe out the maps from the surface of the earth is a warning bell. In the face of an ineffective UN and undermining the purpose and works of the Security Council by the very members of the Council (UN, 2022), the only alternative for the survival of human civilisation is to create a new generation of human beings who would love peace and harmony over nationalistic, religious and developmental hegemony. A generation comprising holistic human beings where all-round development would become a reality, who will evolve as global citizens without losing their national identity and roots. Education, and only education, can mother such a new generation.

Instead of using utopian poesy to construct our model, we preferred an evidence-based approach. We decided to study education—its status, reforms, agenda, and outcomes wherever possible.

Maybe some good practices are scattered around the countries but not stitched to make any global impact. Our agenda was to identify evidence of good practices and add refreshing new ideas to complete the garland. Our agenda is to arrest one-sided cognitive development without corresponding emotional, social, moral and spiritual development. We aim to create an academic framework to ensure sustainable global peace and harmony.

We could not have studied all the countries in the world. We followed the goal-setting principle, "large enough to be ambitious, but small enough to be achievable." We balanced our ambition by studying 52 out of 196 countries carefully chosen to represent all continents—Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania. Automatically, our sample made a robust representation of the Global South and the Global North.

This chapter presents a cross-country comparative study of educational reforms in policies, structures, curriculum, teaching-learning and assessment and other allied areas of school education.

Educational Policies

Educational policies are the starting point of educational reforms. The scope of educational policies includes societal and educational aims, objectives, and targets; the structure of the educational system; curriculum framework—academic and vocational, teaching-learning, learning assessment, health and physical education; moral and value education; life skills education, global citizenship, and peace and non-violence education.

The policy goals and aims are primarily around access, equity, inclusion and quality. Other aims are prioritisation among the demands, building relevance and skill development linking to the job market, national reconstruction (e.g. Libya), modernisation to match global standards, innovation and competitiveness (e.g. South Korea), and Digital transformation (e.g. Sri Lanka)

Education policies across the globe reflect a diverse range of priorities, with access, equity, and quality emerging as common themes. Some countries, like Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and Canada, emphasise access, equity, and quality, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Malaysia aspires to enhance access, quality, equity, unity, and efficacy (Bush et al., 2019). Nations like Turkey, South Africa, and Sri Lanka prioritise access and quality, while Ethiopia, Indonesia, USA, Mexico and Peru focus on equity and quality. Peru aims to provide quality education to all children. However, the reality reveals that for children of low-income communities, access to schools is limited, and the education journey is fraught with obstacles (Bourke, 2024).

Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Papua New Guinea prioritise enhancing the overall quality of their education systems. For instance, Papua New Guinea's vision is to lead in achieving quality education and training while shaping the direction for educational agencies and providers to meet

government goals (DoE, 2023). Recognising the importance of accessibility, Algeria, Kenya, Nigeria, and Russia highlight the need to increase access to education. On the other hand, Australia prioritises equity, ensuring that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active, informed members of their communities (ACARA, 2023).

Spain, the UK, Argentina, and Guatemala prioritise equitable access to education. The UK provides children's services, education, and skills training to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of background or circumstances (DoE, 2021). Guatemala, Bangladesh, and Mexico emphasise inclusion, while Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Fiji focus on inclusive education.

Singapore, Israel, and New Zealand have fixed policy goals for developing 21st-century knowledge, skills, and values. New Zealand aims to build a leading education system that equips students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for success in the 21st century (MoE, 2024). Japan aims to foster creativity and critical thinking, while Fiji stresses a holistic approach.

Iran and Pakistan prioritise national development, while France emphasises secularism and republican values. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions creating an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education for all, positioning India as a global knowledge superpower (MoE, 2020). Education systems in many regions, particularly South Asia, are closely linked to nation-building missions, with increased globalisation expected to lead to the homogenisation of educational frameworks (Mehendale, 2020). Israel adapts its education system for the 21st century by shifting from rote learning to imparting competencies necessary for a changing world (Eisenberg & Eden, 2019). Jordan aims to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, prioritising inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Lebanon's five-year General Education Plan (2021-2025) seeks to provide equitable and inclusive education (MoE, 2021a).

Algeria, China, and Egypt prioritise modernising their educational systems, while South Korea aims to align its education system with global standards to foster innovation and competitiveness. Sri Lanka focuses on digital transformation in education.

Jordan and the Philippines align their education policies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Saudi Arabia's education policy emphasises practical relevance in linking education with the job market. Saudi Arabia is building an integrated educational journey to improve outcomes aligned with labour market demands as part of its Vision 2030 plan, which aims to create a dynamic, diverse, and sustainable economy (MoE, 2021a). Germany integrates classroom instruction with vocational training.

Kazakhstan has five categories of teachers: teacher, teacher-moderator, teacher-expert, teacher-researcher, and teacher-master. To upgrade to a higher category, teachers must pass a national qualification test and undergo a stocktaking process.

Educational Policy Framework

The concern for growing together was voiced at the Jomtien Conference in 1990. Later, the MDG and SDG were more comprehensive responses to the challenge of a global perspective. SDG4 spelt out in nine clauses (1-9) and 4A, provides the most comprehensive framework for educational policy analysis. We quote SDG4 below as a ready educational policy framework:

"*SDG4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All.*

SDG4.1. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

SDG4.2. By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so they are ready for primary education.

SDG4.3. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

SDG4.4. By 2030, the number of youth and adults with relevant technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship will substantially increase.

SDG4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

SDG4.6. By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

SDG4.7. By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

SDG4.8. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

> *SDG4.9. By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.*
>
> *SDG4A. By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States."*

To appreciate SDG4, it must be read in conjunction with all 17 sustainable development goals, as these are interconnected. SDG4 provides a sound foundation for achieving other goals.

SDG4.2 states, **"***By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so they are ready for primary education".* A large body of research indicates the benefits of preschool education, including performance in PISA and transition to college education. However, UNESCO's (2024) Global report on early childhood care and education does not paint a very encouraging picture. A few of the key findings are:

1. "Only 63 countries (representing 34% of the countries in the analysis) have established at least one year of free pre-primary education in a national legal frame (p.30).
2. An estimated 37% of the world's children (more than 300 million) will not reach minimum proficiency levels in reading by 2030 (p.14)., resulting in a learning crisis unless immediate action is taken.
3. 83% of children aged between 36 and 59 months in countries with free pre-primary education are developmentally on track, compared to 66.6% in countries without this provision (p.14). Hence, a legal imperative is necessary.
4. The enrolment rate for one year of organised learning before the start of primary school fell to 72% in 2022 from 75% in 2020. To meet SDG target 4.2, 1.4 million children must be enrolled in early childhood education annually until 2030 (p.15).
5. In 97 countries with data, only 4% of the poorest children live in households with children's books, and only 46% have playthings at home.
6. Children with disabilities are 25% less likely to attend early childhood education (p.16) (UNESCO, 2024).

Educational policy statements primarily deal with policy goals and aims, free and compulsory education, the structure of the education system, school education in focus in the instant case, curriculum, teaching-learning, learning assessment, and cocurricular activities under a few

identifiable heads. Preschool education and compulsory education are the most fundamental of all education policies. Despite the recommendations in SDG4, countries widely differ in providing compulsory and free preschool and basic education (Table 54.1).

Compulsory and free preschool education implies a legal obligation for states to provide and for parents to ensure the enrollment and participation of their children. In the absence of this legal obligation, participation becomes optional. Also, without the legal obligation, states devolve the responsibility to private enterprise, where participation depends upon the economic capability of the parents. Hence, the losers in terms of participation and becoming victims of the learning crisis are poor and marginalised people and girls.

There are several patterns or combinations in preschool policies – no legal provision or neither free nor compulsory (0/0), not free but compulsory, and free and compulsory of varying duration (Table 54.1) and Figure 54.1.

Only 16 (about 31%) of the 52 countries in The World of Learning sample have some provision of free and compulsory education. Sweden offers four years of free but one year of compulsory preschool education. Three preschool years are compulsory and free in Israel, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, and France. Argentina's regulation is for two years of free and compulsory education. The legal provision in eight other countries is one year of free and compulsory education. Notably, Latin American countries in this sample lead the table on SDG4.2. There are seven cases where data are unavailable primarily because educational policies are decentralised to constituent provinces, like Canada and the USA. For example, in Alberta (Canada), preschooling is not compulsory, though programs are available for children as young as two years and eight months. In Florida, USA, voluntary preschool programmes are free at state initiative. Japan does not provide free and compulsory preschool education. There are, however, several options for early childhood education. Interestingly, preschool education is neither compulsory nor free in many developed countries, though the participation rate is above 90%. This achievement is likely because of parents' education and awareness and high per capita GDP, which allows them to invest in their children's preschool education.

It is very unlikely that SDG4.2 will be achieved by 2030. Nonetheless, some provisions for preschool education are almost universal. The crisis is the absence of legal framework and obligation, quality, poorly qualified and trained teachers, and inadequate funding, especially in developing countries. UNESCO and UNICEF have significantly contributed to spreading awareness about the need for preschool education. However, there is a long way to go to convince most country governments to create financial, infrastructural, and quality mentor provisions with a legal framework of at least three years of preschool education. A larger issue seems to be that preschooling is still a semi-organized sector compared to basic education in most countries; provisions are without adequate legal frameworks. India presents a good example.

Table 54.1 Country-wise Provision for Free and Compulsory Preschool and Basic Education and HDI.

Country	Years of Free/ Compulsory Preprimary education	Years of Compulsory Education	HDI Rank/HDI Score	Country	Years of Free / Compulsory Preprimary education	Years of Compulsory Education	HDI Rank/ Score
Algeria	1/0	10	93/0.745	Iran	0/0	9	78/ 0.780
Egypt	0/0	12	105/0.728	Israel	3/3	15	25/ 0.915
Ethiopia	0/0	8	176/0.492	Jordan	Na/0	10	99/ 0.736
Kenya	1/1	12	146/0.601	Lebanon	0/0	10	109/ 0.723
Libya	0/0	9	92/0.746	Saudi Arabia	0/0	9	40/ 0.875
Nigeria	0/0	9	161/0.548	UAE	0/0	12	17/ 0.937
South Africa	0/0	9	110/0.717	Argentina	2/2	14	48/ 0.849
				Brazil	1/1	14	89/ 0.760
Kazakhstan	1/1	9	67/0.802	Cuba	1/0	9	85/ 0.764
Russia	0/0	11	56/0.821	Colombia	1/1	12	91/ 0.758
Turkey	0/0	12	45/0.855	Guatemala	3/3	16	136/ 0.629
Turkmenistan	1/1	12	94/0.744	Haiti	0/0	6	158/ 0.552
Uzbekistan	0/0	12	106/0.727	Mexico	3/3	14	77/ 0.781
				Peru	3/3	14	87/ 0.762
China	0/0	9	75/0.788	Venezuela	3/3	17	119/ 0.699
Indonesia	0/0	9	112/0.713	Australia	Na/na	11	10/ 0.946
Japan	Na/na	9	24/0.920	Fiji	0/0	8	104/ 0.729
Philippines	1/1	13	113/0.710	New Zealand	0/0	10	16/ 0.939
South Korea	1/1	9	19/0.929	Papua New Guinea*	0/0	6	154/ 0.568
Thailand	0/0	9	66/0.803	Solomon Islands	Na/na	9	156/ 0.562
				Canada	Na/na	10	18 /0.935
Bangladesh	0/0	8	129/0.670	Finland	1/1	11	12/ 0.942
India	0/0	8	134/0.644	France	3/3	13	28/ 0.910
Malaysia (?)	0/0	6	63/0.807	Germany	Na/na	13	7/ 0.950
Pakistan	1/0	12	164/0.540	Spain	3/0	10	27/ 0.911
Singapore	0/0	6	9/0.949	Sweden	4/1	10	5/ 0.952
Sri Lanka	0/0	11	78/0.780	UK	2/0	11	15/ 0.940
				USA	Na/na	12	20/ 0.927

Note: This data is based on Trading Economics. There are discrepancies in data between sources. For example, other sources mention that Canadian compulsory education years are from 6 to 18, i.e. 12 years in most provinces and territories.

Source: *Authors (Data extracted from https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/duration-of-compulsory-education-years-wb-data.html*

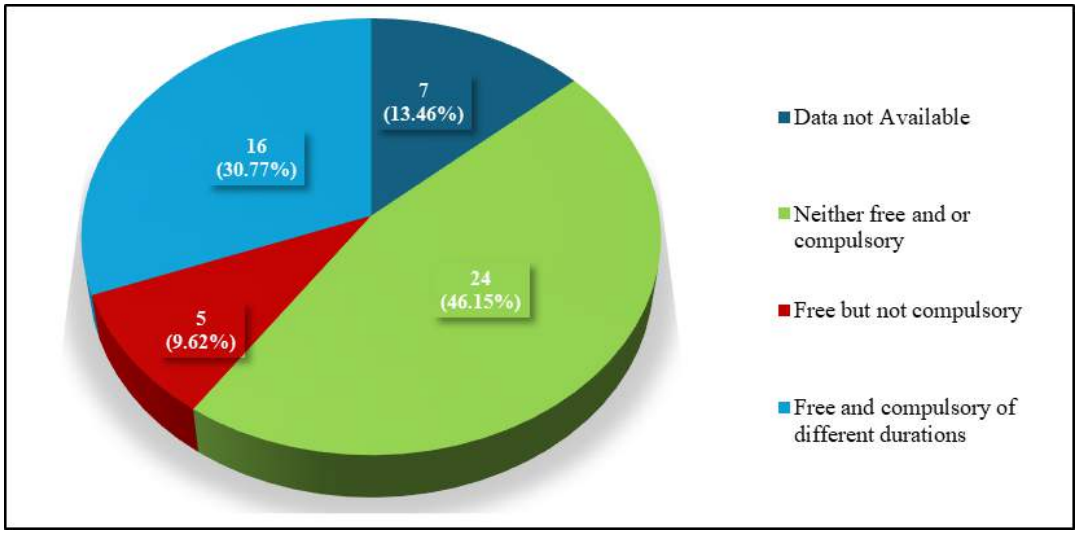


Figure 54.1 Proportion of Countries Offering Free and Compulsory Preschool Education

Source: *Authors*

The continental and regional trends are given in Figure 54.2

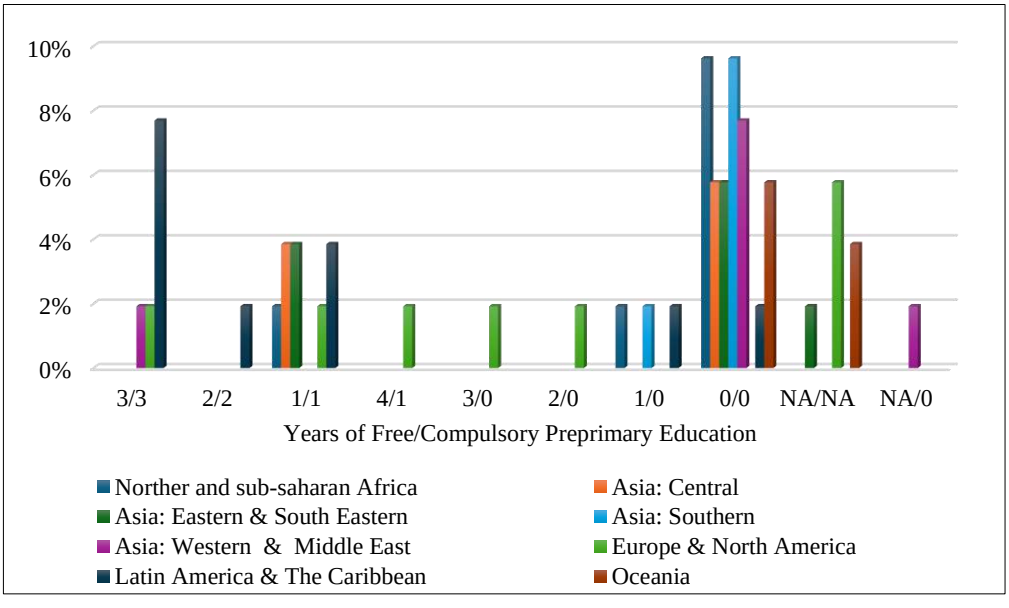


Figure 54.2 Continental and Regional Trends of Free/Compulsory Preschool Education

Source: *Authors*

Box 54.1: Preschool Education in India

According to Census 2011, there was a decline in the population of the 0-6 age group between 2001-2011, from 15.9 to 13.1 per cent. There is estimated to be another 3% decline in the 0-6 child population during the next decade. Accordingly, it is estimated that India has 145 million children in this age group. By extrapolation, it is estimated that India has approximately 72 million children in the age group 3-6. In 2021-2022, about 10 million students enrolled in pre-primary classes in India. New data from the National Family Health Survey 2019–2021 (NFHS-5) of India show that only 41.9% and 60.6% of 3- and 4-year-old children are enrolled in preschool (International Institute for Population Sciences, 2021).

There are multiple options for preschool education in India. 1.4 million Anganvadis and BalVatikas are sanctioned nationwide, of which 1.36 million are operational. These are supposed to accommodate six million children. Private K-12 schools constitute about 25% of all schools in India. All private schools have preschool programmes catering to children of urban areas, including metropolis, class I, II, and III-type cities. Corporations like KidZee, Footprints, Eurokids India, Kangaroo Kids, Cambridge Montessori Preschool and Daycare, etc also run large preschool chains. Early childhood care (0-3) is largely in the unorganised sector, carried out at homes or small hired accommodations without necessarily trained staff.

Government of India stated, "Pre-school programmes are offered through government Anganwadi centres, and pre-schools are attached to government schools, private sector schools, and civil society organisations. In 2013, the Government of India adopted the National ECCE Policy. .... The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE Act, 2010) states, "to prepare children above the age of 3 years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate Government may make necessary arrangements for providing free pre-school education for such children".

Samagra Shiksha, a union government scheme, supports the State Government in providing preschool education up to 2 years for children of the age group 4-6 years. There are also instances of preschool grades located in primary schools. "As per UDISE 2016-17, out of 12.36 lakh schools with primary sections, 2.94 lakh schools, accounting for 24%, have pre-primary sections. 1.36 crore children are enrolled in pre-primary sections (both sections), of which only 0.36 crore are in Government schools" (MOE, 2020).

Free and Compulsory Years of Education

Free and compulsory education policies vary worldwide, reflecting each country's commitment to ensuring that children receive a minimum level of education (Table 54.1). Countries plotted against years of compulsory education provide the trend globally (Table 54.2).

Table 54.2 List of Countries with Year-Wise Compulsory School Education.

Compulsory Education Years	Countries
6	Malaysia, Singapore, Haiti, Papua New Guinea
8	Bangladesh, India, Ethiopia, Fiji
9	Libya, South Africa, Nigeria, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Iran, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Solomon Islands
10	Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Spain, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada
11	Russia, Sri Lanka, Australia, Finland, UK
12	Egypt, Turkey, Kenya, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, UAE, USA, Colombia
13	Philippines, France, Germany
14	Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru
15	Israel
16	Guatemala
17	Venezuela

Source: *Authors*

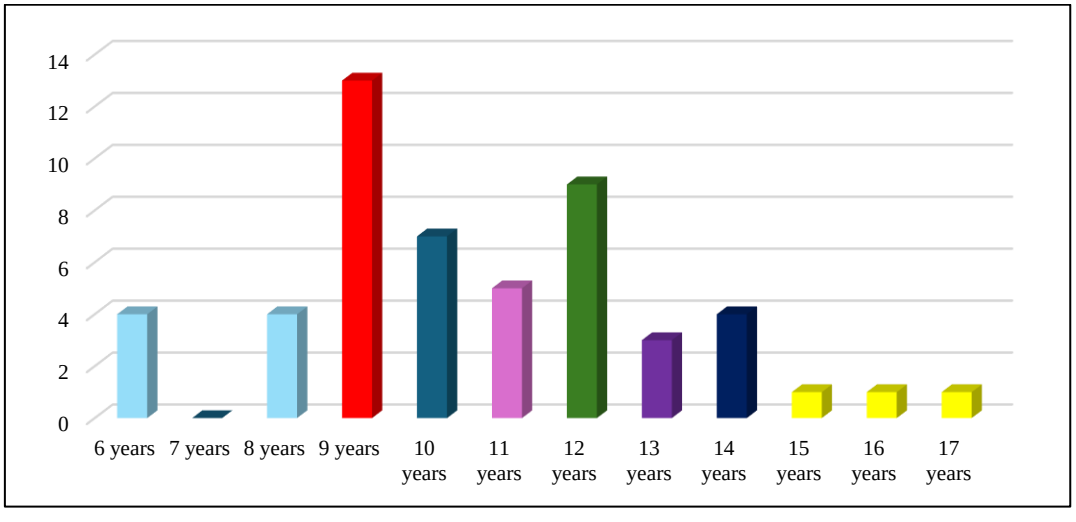


Figure 54.3 Number of Countries and Years of Compulsory Education

Source: *Authors*

Further, the region-wise analysis shows certain patterns (Table 54.4). For example, African and South Asian countries offer shorter compulsory education years. Similarly, except for Australia and New Zealand, Oceania countries offer 6 to 9 years of compulsory education. Europe and North America have a balance of 10-13 years.

Table 54.3 Region-Wise Years of Compulsory Education in Different Countries

	Countries (Years of Compulsory Education)
Africa	Ethiopia (#8), Libya, Nigeria, South Africa (#9), Algeria (#10), Egypt and Kenya (#12)
Asia: Central	Kazakhstan (#9), Russia (#11), Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (#12)
South East Asia	China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand (#9), and Philippines (#13)
South East Asia	Malaysia and Singapore (#6), Bangladesh and India (#8), Sri Lanka (#11), and Pakistan (#12)
Middle East	Iran and Saudi Arabia (#9), Jordan and Lebanon (#10), UAE (#12) and Israel (#15)
Europe and North America	Canada, Spain, and Sweden (#10), the UK and Finland (#11), the USA (#12), and France and Germany (#13)
Latin America	Haiti (#6), Cuba (#9), Colombia (#12), Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru (#14), Guatemala (#16), and Venezuela (#17)
Oceania	Papua New Guinea* (#6), Fiji (#8), Solomon Islands* (#9), New Zealand (#10), and Australia (#11)

Note: The numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of compulsory years of schooling; for example, Ethiopia (#8) means eight years of education are compulsory in Ethiopia.

Source: *Authors*

Compulsory years of education range from 6 to 17 years (see consolidated table 54.2 and Figure 54.3). As many as 13 of 52 countries have prescribed nine years of compulsory education. Next in frequency is 12 years of compulsory education practised in nine countries. Interestingly, the Latin American countries lead the table in terms of the number of years of compulsory schooling, ranging from 9/10 years in Cuba to 17 years in Venezuela. Argentina, Brazil and Mexico have adopted 14 years of compulsory schooling. The range of compulsory schooling is 10 -13 years in the top HDI-ranking developed countries. Most of the policies of African and Asian countries prescribe 6 to 9 years of schooling.

Two issues need special attention. Firstly, there does not seem to be any direct correspondence between years of compulsory schooling and HDI as a development indicator. This points to the importance of quality of schooling over years of schooling. The European and North American countries have established benchmarks of quality schooling. At the same time, the Latin American countries that were European colonies, like Asian and African countries, have made significant progress in GDP and HDI with longer years of schooling. With the available evidence, it is not easy to ascribe one-to-one correspondence between years of schooling and development. A question that should attract policymakers and researchers alike is whether longer years of schooling can compensate for a lesser quality of education.

The second issue concerns *SDG4.1. "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes".*

Education policies of Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Turkmenistan, Bangladesh, India, China, the Philippines, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the USA, and Haiti have pledged to align with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). This global commitment emphasises the importance of quality, access, and lifelong learning in education. For instance, Egypt Vision 2030 aims to achieve sustainable development across three key areas: environmental, economic, and social. Since 2015, China has firmly committed to implementing SDG 4 by formulating a national-level action framework and integrating SDG 4 into its medium- and long-term development strategies, such as China's Education Modernization 2035 and the 14th Five-Year Plan for Education Development. The Basic Education Development Plan 2030 in the Philippines seeks to address various challenges in the educational system from kindergarten to high school, aligning with SDG 2030 to improve participation, completion rates, quality, and delivery of education. Implementing the Education Strategic Plan in Jordan aims to enhance the quality of education by focusing on access, equity, and integrating refugee students into the public education system, with a commitment to achieving SDG 4 by 2030.

To achieve this goal, countries must bring in 10 -12 years of secondary education under the compulsory education cap. As many as 20 countries stop at 6-9 years of education. With 10^{th} as a benchmark for secondary education, 29 countries qualify for the SDG4.1 recommendations; with 12 years of compulsory education as secondary education, only 19 countries are with SDG4.1. However, this analysis does not include the quality component as there is no reliable global quality measure. International assessments like PISA and TIMMS are not adequate measures. Hence, SDG4.1 will likely succeed only partially, maybe only in Global North countries.

UNICEF (2012) conducted a Global Evaluation of Life Skills Education Programmes - relevance, coverage, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of Life Skills Education initiatives. The development of life skills through education is emphasised by Fiji, China, Japan, India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, France, Finland, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Canada, and the USA. Countries such as Uzbekistan, Japan, Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Indonesia, and Pakistan policies recommend the promotion of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The latest curriculum in Indonesia aims to address challenges posed by the 4.0 industrial revolution by integrating skills, literacy, attitudes, and technology mastery into educational standards, reflecting ongoing reforms in response to global changes. From the primary school level, Japan is committed to fostering the necessary skills for the 21st century. The 'Learn for Life' initiative launched in 2020 is a

significant recent development in Singapore's education sector aimed at fostering adaptability skills while enhancing students' connections, collaboration, and creativity.

Nigeria, China, India, Pakistan, and Germany's education policies focus on vocational education. The Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MSP) 2016-2019 and MSP 2018-2022 of Nigeria, the Single National Curriculum (SNC) (2021) of Pakistan, the National Education Policy 2020 of India, and the National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan (2018) of China especially emphasise vocational and technical education. The Länder of Germany formulated 'Vocational Schools 4.0' (2017) to equip vocational schools with innovations.

Educational policies have been classified in many ways, including curricular, ICT in Education, Teacher Management, Secondary Education, and Integrated. We prefer to classify educational policies into four categories – poetic, prosaic, Just-in-Time (JIT) or Resilient and non-articulated or hidden policies. Poetic policies, typically in the cases of developing countries, are metaphysical and dreamy without necessary political will, as evidenced by funding and a well-planned and monitored implementation plan. For example, when a country aspires to be a knowledge superpower but makes only eight years of compulsory education to achieve sustainable literacy and allocates around 3 per cent of GDP, the policy is poetic. Prosaic policies are need-based policy statements that match financial allocations and management competencies. The developed countries usually formulate JIT or resilient policies. To maintain their lead and global competitiveness, they formulate specific goal-oriented policies. Several countries adopt 20 or 25-year split into clusters of four and five-year development plans through interlinked and interdependent interventions. Singapore's four-phase Master Plan for ICT integration in education is a good example (Mukhopadhyay, 2021).

> *Despite the differential structuring of educational systems, countries are steadily moving towards twelve years of schooling, preceded by two to three years of preschooling as a school readiness programme. A few countries offer 13 to 17 years of schooling. Another trend is the increasing privatisation of school education, including compulsory years, widening the gaps between demand and access in developing and least developed countries and widening the quality divide between the rich and the deprived. This growing denationalisation is a major threat to the achievement of SDG4.*

Structures of Educational Systems

Though the education structure varies among countries, there are certain common patterns. School education is divided into preschool, preprimary, primary, secondary and upper secondary. Primary and secondary education are further bifurcated as lower and upper primary and secondary as junior and secondary. Vocational education in some countries parallels upper secondary education, maybe

with an additional year. In some countries, vocational education begins at 18 – after the upper secondary programme. Countries differ in structuring the school year's naming and in several years.

Many countries provide kindergarten, preschool, or pre-primary education before children attend primary or elementary education. For example, in Sweden, children aged 1-6 receive preschool education; in Germany and Cuba, the age group is 1-5; in Brazil, it is 2-3; and in the United Kingdom, it is 3-4. Most commonly, preschool education is offered to children aged 3-5. Among the sample countries, two from Eastern and Southeast Asia (Japan and Thailand), three from Southern Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan), three from Western and Middle East Asia (Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates from Latin America and the Caribbean (Haiti, Mexico, and Peru), and the Solomon Islands and), three France provide preschool education between 3-5 years age. Children aged 3-6 in Algeria and Uzbekistan and two countries from Eastern and Southeast Asia (China and South Korea), Guatemala, Venezuela, and Fiji, receive preschool education.

Table 54.4 Years of Preschool Education in Different Countries

Years of pre-schooling	Countries
1-6	Sweden
1-5	Germany and Cuba
2-3	Brazil
3-4	UK
3-5	Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, the Solomon Islands, France
3-6	Algeria, Uzbekistan, China and South Korea, Guatemala, Venezuela and Fiji

Source: *Authors*

Kindergarten, pre-elementary, or pre-primary education is compulsory for specific age groups in different countries. For example, children aged 4-5 in Jordan, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, and Iran; aged 4-6 in Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, Libya, and Singapore; and aged 5-6 in Malaysia; aged 3-5 in Mexico and France receive preschool education. Also, one year of pre-primary or preschool education is compulsory in Israel, Argentina, Colombia, and Cuba. In Israel, children aged 5-6 and in Finland, before the start of compulsory schooling, students receive free and compulsory pre-primary education. However, pre-elementary programs in most Canadian provinces are not compulsory except in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Labrador.

Table 54.5 Compulsory Pre-primary or Kindergarten Education

4-5	1	Jordan, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, and Iran	4
4-6	2	Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, Colombia, Libya, Argentina and Singapore	7
5-6	1	Malaysia, Israel, Finland, Bangladesh, Cuba (not compulsory)	5
3-5	3	India (Not compulsory), Mexico and France, Algeria,	3

Source: *Authors*

School education usually comprises Primary, Secondary, Upper Secondary, and Vocational Education. The breakdown of different levels of education in terms of the number of years varies among countries.[i]

Research revealed several positive impacts of preschool, such as on performance on academic achievement (Ansari, 2018); students' behaviour and careers (Barnett, 2008), high school graduation and non-dropout retention (Alsobaie, 2015), and increased on-time college enrolment (Dizikes, 2023). However, the long-term academic advantages were primarily explained by their positive effects on academic skills early in formal schooling (Ansari, 2018).

There are studies on the impact of the duration of preschool education. For example, Arteaga et al. (2014) found that Children who attended a two-year preschool program are less likely to receive special education, be abused or neglected, or commit crimes than their counterparts in a one-year program. The findings support the long-term benefits of greater exposure to preschool. Yang et al.'s (2024) study complements Arteaga et al.'s findings on the long-term effects of a caveat. Yang et al. (2024) found that performance drops with the initial period, picking up as it progresses. Duncan and Magnuson (2013) found that preschool programmes benefit a broad set of later-life outcomes like high school graduation rates, which complements the findings of Alsobaie (2015).

> *However, most countries have overlooked the importance of preschooling for human development. UNICEF played an important role in persistently orienting governments and parents on this. As of 2024, preschooling under different names finds a place in the overall educational system of almost all countries, though it is neither compulsory nor free in most countries, especially in the Global South.*

Curricular Framework

The curriculum has often been classified in multiple ways: written (prescribed), practised (taught), assessed (tested), and hidden (including incidental learning), student-centred, teacher-centred, and activity-centred; societal and null curriculum. From the structure standpoint, the curriculum framework comprises core or compulsory subjects and optional or elective subjects. Electives have

been further classified as compulsory elective and optional. A broader classification is Subject-based, Competency-based, Standard-based, Outcome-based, and Integrated curriculum.

- A subject-based curriculum is one in which content is organised around a subject, such as mathematics, history, geography, etc., without inter- or multidisciplinary content. Countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, and Iran implement subject-based curricula, where students study distinct subjects.
- A competency-based curriculum is designed to develop certain skills and competencies among students, possibly through subjects, interdisciplinary learning, and various hands-on learning experiences like project-based learning. A competency-based curriculum is followed in countries like Kenya, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh, Jordan, Finland, Argentina, and Peru. These nations recognise the importance of developing essential competencies for students' future lives and careers. For example, the Peruvian National Curriculum for Basic Education outlines 29 competencies students should develop throughout their basic and secondary education.
- A standard-based curriculum defines what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and subject area. Standards-based curricula are prevalent in Singapore, the UK, Australia, and Papua New Guinea. They reflect the need for a standardised framework to ensure a clear roadmap for teachers and students, facilitate focused instruction and assessment, and ultimately enhance the overall quality of education.
- In an outcome-based curriculum, the focus is on learning outcomes – what a student should be able to demonstrate and do on completing a learning task or a curriculum. Outcome-based education has gained popularity in South Africa, Singapore, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands. These countries emphasise a student-centred approach focusing on measurable outcomes and practical skills applicable to real-world situations. There are instances like Australia that discontinued the competency-based curriculum due to implementation problems.
- An integrated curriculum breaks subject boundaries and integrates knowledge and skills from different domains to make learning relevant and connect diverse areas of study. Finland, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, and South Korea implement integrated curricula.

Social studies, language, mathematics, and environmental science are common features of school curriculums in primary grades. Social science subjects like History, Geography, Civics, Political Science, STEM, and languages are common in junior secondary and secondary education.

Besides STEM and HASS subjects offered across the countries, a few subjects, such as religious education, art and aesthetic education, multilingual and multicultural education, Indigenous knowledge, and gender relationship education, need special mention.

> *Egypt: Students learn about ancient Egyptian history, art, civilisation, and modern Egyptian culture.*

Religious education is an integral component of the school curriculum in many countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Kenya, Nigeria, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Colombia, Haiti, Peru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. In several countries, religious education is elective. For instance, the Kenyan curriculum offers students the choice among Christian, Islamic, and Hindu Religious Education, allowing learners to select one. Similarly, the Nigerian school curriculum includes Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Studies, and other subjects. In Lebanon, religious education is a core subject, while in Israel, religious schools represent one type of educational institution. In various countries, religious education is optional. For example, religious education has become an elective in Spain, and students are not penalised for not choosing. Malaysian schools provide Islamic Studies for Muslim students while offering moral education for non-Muslim students. In some nations, religious education combines secular ethics, values education, and history. In Russia, world religions and secular ethics are taught as a subject, while Sri Lanka includes religious and value education in its curriculum. Brazil incorporates history and religious education in elementary education. Christian religious education is taught in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Islamic religious education is prevalent in Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Additionally, Egypt's curriculum is Islamic education oriented. Iran focused on the desecularisation of education with the Islamization of textbooks, segregation of schools by sex, and mandatory observation of Islamic law. Conversely, Turkmenistan's 2021 law on education emphasises a secular education system, separating it from religious organisations.

"Although Europe represents only about 8 per cent of the planet's landmass, from 1492 to 1914, Europeans conquered or colonised more than 80 per cent of the entire world (Caltech (2015)." The colonies imposed European culture and education to ensure sustainability. In the process, countries with rich indigenous knowledge were undermined and lost. Education and culture of indigenous knowledge are merging many old civilisations in Africa, Asia and Latin American countries as a resurgence movement. Da Silva et al. (2023) identified more than 10,000 studies on indigenous

knowledge. Countries like Colombia, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, and Australia. Da Silva et al. (2023) selected 14 studies on Mozambique, Peru, Taiwan, Kenya, Bogota Columbia, South Africa, Chile, Zimbabwe, Philippines, and Bolivia, detailing the difficulties in integrating Indigenous knowledge in school curricula. In its NEP 2020, India made a strong case for reviving and integrating Indigenous knowledge in education. The Solomon Islands is another country making serious efforts to revive Indigenous knowledge.

> *Papua New Guinea: The Upper secondary syllabus includes, among other subjects, Applied English, Natural Resource Management, Applied Science, Business Studies, Design Technology, Geology, ICT, Legal Studies, Music, Personal Development, Theatre Arts, Tourism and Visual Arts.*

Multilingual education is supported by countries such as the Philippines, Lebanon, Finland, Haiti, and New Zealand. The Philippines implements mother tongue-based multilingual education, allowing students to learn in their first language. Several former French, Portuguese and Spanish colonies with their respective colonial languages as the official languages have introduced English as the core subject. Lebanon teaches French and English from primary school onward to foster proficiency in multiple languages. In Haiti, secondary school subjects include French grammar, French literature, Haitian literature, English, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, reflecting a diverse linguistic curriculum.

Multicultural education is practised in Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Canada, the USA, and Australia. In Sri Lanka, national textbooks promote social cohesion and multi-ethnic understanding among students. The United Arab Emirates incorporates multiculturalism and multilingualism to create effective classroom practices and a conducive learning environment to develop students' global competencies.

Most countries provide core subjects such as Languages, Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, and Social Studies. Many countries offer optional, elective subjects and extracurricular activities that allow students to choose based on their interests and aptitudes.

Lebanon also offers elective and optional subjects in secondary and upper grades. Canada provides optional subjects from grades 7 to 12. Similarly, the United States has elective programs available from grade 7 onwards. In Iran, primary-level students study five additional subjects and seven core subjects. Israel offers various extracurricular activities at the junior high school level, including music, folk dance, drama, and clubs, many of which involve fees (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019, p. 22).

Art education is offered in several countries, including Algeria, Ethiopia, Libya, Nigeria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Israel, Lebanon, France, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the USA, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. In many of these countries, art education is integrated with aligned curricular areas, providing unique curricular focuses such as art and music in Algeria and Argentina, art and craft in Pakistan, arts and handicrafts in Japan, art and culture in Bangladesh and the Solomon Islands, work education and arts in India, visual art education in Malaysia, art and music in Israel and Lebanon, fine arts in the USA and Venezuela, creativity and arts in Fiji, and arts and physical education in Finland.

Despite the large-scale policy and practice of art education in schools, a meta-research by See and Kokolsaki (2015) found no convincing evidence linking art education to academic and other broader outcomes. Research shows little indication that visual arts, such as painting, drawing, and sculpture, positively influence academic performance. Additionally, while rhymes and rhythms are commonly taught in preschool, their impact on children's literacy has not been assessed. In contrast, music—encompassing instrumental instruction, music education, and music integration—shows promise across all age groups.

"The observed results of the Art-based program study show a high and positive impact on academic achievements, a positive and significant impact on various innovative graphical psychometric measures of creativity, and likewise on creative behaviours, that is, an increase in time dedicated to cultural activities" (Egana-delSol, 2023, p.10). Bowen and Kisida(2023) also found that "students receiving the arts in school attend more, are more engaged, and their parents and teachers are more likely to participate and be engaged at school, with larger effects for students with individualised education plans, students with lower standardised test scores, and students with a history of chronic absenteeism" (p.1). These contradictory findings about the impact of art education call for further research on the impact of art education on

Physical education is very popular with students and compulsory in all countries. However, it is not a credit programme and performance in physical education and sports does not count in intergrade transition. Additionally, physical education is provided exclusively for boys in Saudi Arabia. Physical and health education are integrated curricular areas in Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Iran, Sweden, Venezuela, and Australia. Kenya and the Solomon Islands integrate physical education with sports, while Turkmenistan combines it with practical training. Health Education is a separate curricular area in Kenya, South Korea, Finland, Ethiopia, and the Philippines. In Indonesia, Health Education is integrated with sports; in Canada, it is combined with life skills. Life Skills Education is also a distinct curricular entity in Kenya and South Africa.

Several countries offer citizenship education, human rights, and civics education. Citizenship education is prominent in Ethiopia, Turkey, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Peru, Venezuela, Australia, and Papua New Guinea. Human rights education is offered in Turkey and Argentina, while civics education is offered in Japan, India, France, and Haiti. Moral education is in curricular areas of Ethiopia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Lebanon, France, and Fiji.

Entrepreneurship education is unique in Sri Lanka and Peru, military training in Libya, traffic safety education in Turkey and Argentina, musical culture in Uzbekistan, inquiring life and pleasant life in South Korea, and family and consumer science in the USA.

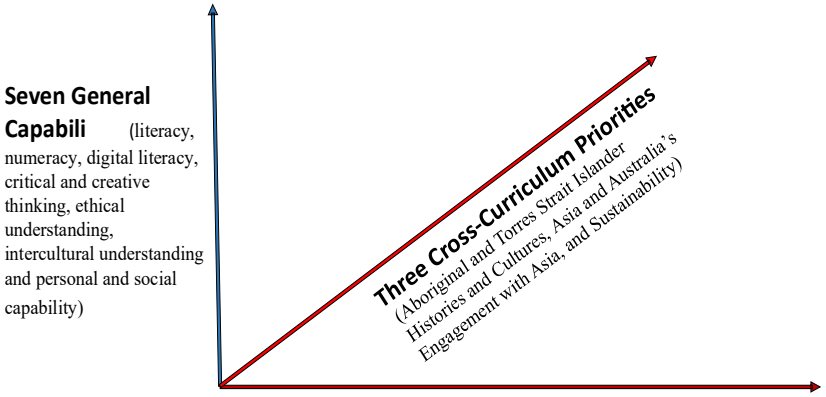
Sex and Relationship Education is not very prominent in the sampled countries, except the United Kingdom. In the school curricula of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, there are indications of gender discrimination; for instance, in Saudi Arabia, the home economics subject is offered only to girls, while in the United Arab Emirates, family education is specifically designed for girls in grades 6-9.

Though countries have been free to design their curriculums ever since their political independence, the colonial effect looms large, as indicated by the tension between the 'Western' and Indigenous knowledge tussle and the problems faced in including the latter in the school curriculum (Da Silva et al., 2023). Indigenous knowledge of Africa, Asia and Latin American countries is often looked down upon as primitive by Western knowledge systems. For the benefit of the human community, there needs to be a concerted effort to rediscover and subject to empirical testing Mcall, 2013; Sengupta, 2012; Sarwal et al., 2024 For example, ancient Indian health care and curing through yoga and pranayama have stood the test of empiricism and now celebrated globally.

STEM subjects are taught globally in different school grades, making it possible to develop global curriculum and standards in these subjects. In HASS subjects, it will be worthwhile to consider introducing a global element, like global geography, history, demography, culture, and citizenship, in the concerned subjects, adjusting the depth according to the grade levels. In literature, the curriculum may include stories, prose and poems from other countries rendered in the language of the concerned country to build an understanding and appreciation of the culture and literature of other countries and lay down the foundation for global citizenship.

> *The curriculum frameworks adopted by various countries share certain common trends and uniqueness. Some frameworks, like Australia's, are innovative.*

Box 54.2. Australian 3-D Curriculum



Source: Mukhopadhyay et al. (2024) (Refer Chapter 54)
(Adapted from https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview#3)

Teaching Learning

Several countries have recommended a student-centred approach, where students actively engage in their learning. Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Finland, Canada (Alberta), Cuba, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands directly endorse this student-centric methodology.

In addition, India, Singapore, Bangladesh, and Finland endorse joyful learning, critical and creative thinking, and constructivist learning. Thailand, Jordan, and Sweden emphasise lifelong learning. Sri Lanka, Jordan, the UK, and the Solomon Islands recommend developing problem-solving skills or problem-based learning.

Sweden, Spain, Cuba, the Philippines, and Finland support collaborative learning, while Peru, the Solomon Islands, Germany, and Australia advocate group-based learning. South Korea, Cuba, and Australia encourage self-directed or regulated learning. Furthermore, Malaysia and Spain recommend entrepreneurial skills and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Several countries have also proposed innovative teaching and learning models, such as 'folk pedagogy' in Singapore, 'Education in the Age of Innovation' in Israel, the 'Next Generation Learning' model in Ontario (Canada), and the 'Know-Do-Understand' model in British Columbia (Canada).

However, each country's practice or reality in teaching-learning is often far from its policy recommendation. In countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Haiti, and Fiji, traditional methods prevail. These approaches typically maintain a teacher-dominated classroom in a theatre-style environment with rote learning, memorisation, and a textbook-oriented focus.

In contrast, teachers in Kenya, China, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Spain, Singapore, UAE, France, Finland, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Canada, the USA, Argentina, Colombia, and Australia engage their students in learner-centred pedagogy.

Group learning is commonly utilised in Germany to create a sense of belonging and a learning community, allowing students to remain in the same group as they progress through grades. Australia emphasises whole-group and small-group activities. Collaborative learning is practised in Spain and Cuba, while individual and self-regulated learning is encouraged. Project-based learning is followed in Thailand and Spain, and homeschooling is expected in the USA and France.

Japan adopted the ‘active-learning’ method in the 1990s, and Colombia developed the teaching method known as Escuela Nueva or ‘New School’ at the elementary level. Constructivist pedagogy is intensely practised in Finland, while tutorials, seminars, workshops, and conferences are commonly used in UK classrooms.

ICT Integration in Teaching-Learning

Key policies and strategies of Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Colombia, France, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the UK, Canada, USA, Solomon Islands and so on mandate the integration of technology and/or information and communication technology (ICT) in education.

Nigeria’s national ICT policy in education introduced in 2019 had the vision of creating universally accessible, empowering, inclusive, and enriching education. ‘Jordan 2025’ focuses on integrating technologies like online or mobile learning into schools’ curricula. EdTech technologies like BabySpark and Tarefa are very important in Colombia’s education system. In 2018, the Digital Learning Strategy developed by the Government of Canada emphasises the integration of digital technologies in education to enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for a digital economy. Since 1986, Russian classroom practices have incorporated IT to enhance learning. In France, upper secondary-level students can access digital textbooks, while Kazakhstan has initiated the ‘Digital Kazakhstan’ program. To create Smart Thailand’, the Thai government launched the One Tablet Per Child (OTPC) program. In Singapore, teaching at the preschool level follows the ‘iTeach’ principles. Argentina has developed ICT integration in school practices through the "Plan for

Educational Digital Inclusion' and 'Digital Primary Schools. Brazil initiated the National Program for Educational Informatics (Programa Nacional de Informática Educativa—PRONINFE).

The education policies of Spain, Kenya, Uzbekistan, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, and Germany emphasise developing digital skills, digital literacy, and digitalisation. For instance, the Uzbekistan government has launched an ambitious program to digitise its education system, including developing online learning and assessment platforms. Kenya's Digital Literacy Program also seeks to enhance learning by distributing digital devices to primary school students.

Digital literacy is integrated into Singapore's 'Refreshing our Curriculum' initiative. Germany initiated the Digital Pact for Schools (DigitalPakt Schule) in 2019, aimed at equipping students with the digital skills necessary for success in the 21st century by establishing essential digital infrastructure in schools. The current education policies of Sri Lanka and South Korea focus on digital transformation; Sri Lanka's National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) aims to improve access, quality, relevance, and digital transformation of its education system, while South Korea's Education Policy Plan 2021 initiated digital transformation to enhance educational quality.

Israel's three-year 'Laptop for Every Teacher' (LET) program aims to equip every teacher with a laptop. The Indonesian government has chosen a cell phone-based approach to ensure access to educational programs and conducts Computer-Based National Examinations. In Cuba, laptops are provided to students upon enrolment, facilitating online and offline teaching and learning.

Australia has invested heavily in technology-integrated education. However, teachers lack confidence in using technology for higher-order learning (McGurk, 2022). In the UK, 64% of teachers have integrated technology into regular classroom activities (Remon, 2022). The majority of South Korean teachers use ICT for instruction.

Japan and South Korea are moving towards integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into teaching and learning processes. In German schools, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and simulations are used to create immersive and engaging learning experiences.

However, several countries face challenges in integrating ICT into regular classrooms. In Pakistan, technology-enabled learning is not part of the instructional or assessment process for various reasons (Sidra & Khan, 2015). Venezuela lacks trained teachers to manage open technologies, create instructional designs using these technologies, and develop open educational resources, which may further exacerbate the digital divide in education (Benítez et al., 2023). Additionally, teacher absenteeism is a significant issue in schools in Papua New Guinea.

Contemporary research emphasises the learning environment as key to quality learning outcomes. The learning environment includes ventilation, temperature, humidity, flexible furniture, ICT facilities, and the teaching-learning process (Heppel, 2020; Mitra, 2020). However, the emphasis continues teaching-learning without considering that group learning needs flexible furniture and technology integration needs classroom technology facilities.

> *Most countries have adopted a policy of technology integration in education. However, developing countries lack financial resources, technology facilities, internet connectivity, and teachers' digital skills. The teacher's attitude towards technology-integrated learning is also a serious challenge.*

Learning Assessment

There is some convergence in policy recommendations on learning assessment. Turkey, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Jordan, Guatemala, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands recommended adopting formative, continuous classroom and performance-based assessments. The assessment tools and methods recommended are classwork, homework, investigative work, observations, self-assessment, peer assessment, project-based assessment, and portfolios. Fiji's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2007 advocates Assessment *for* and *of* Learning, indicating the importance of formative and summative assessments. The 2013 Indonesian curriculum prioritised formative assessment. The National Education Action Plan (NEAP) 2022-26 of the Solomon Islands provides comprehensive guidelines detailing the principles and purposes of assessment, types of assessment, assessment systems, subjects of assessment, and the assessment of individual learning outcomes.

Formative assessment, alongside summative assessment, is practised in various countries, including the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, Finland, Germany, the USA, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Australia, and Fiji. For example, in Bangladesh, the real-time formative and summative assessment for grades 4 to 8 is 60:40; for grades 9 and 10, it is 50:50; for grades 11 and 12, the ratio for compulsory subjects is 30:70, but for electives, it is 100:0. In the UAE, formative assessments account for 30% to 70% of evaluations, depending on the subject and grade level (OECD, 2020). Conversely, summative assessment is heavily practised across all grades in Turkmenistan and at the primary level in Turkey.

Teacher-made tests dominate globally. However, standardised tests are utilised in South Korea, Israel, Lebanon, Sweden, Spain, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. South Korea employs standardised tests to assess the learning outcomes of school children. In Israel, matriculation exams serve as national standardised tests to evaluate achievements in high schools. The Swedish National Board

of Education is responsible for preparing and standardising tests at the school level. In 1993, the Spanish government began administering standardised examinations to a sample of primary and secondary students. Many states and municipalities in Brazil administer standardised assessments of student learning. Peer group assessment is integrated into educational practices to enhance learning outcomes in some countries, e.g., South Korea, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea.

Many countries conduct achievement surveys to evaluate the education system and teachers. In India, NCERT carries out pan-India National Achievement Surveys (NAS) at the end of classes 3, 5, 8, and 10 to assess the education system rather than individual students. In the UK, The National Curriculum Assessments (SATs) are conducted at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 for primary school students to assess their learning outcomes. The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) assesses the skills of students in grades 8 in reading, mathematics, and science every three years. In Australia, The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is conducted annually for students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. It evaluates literacy and numeracy skills. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the "Nation's Report Card," assesses students in grades 4, 8, and 12 in various subjects in the USA. Peru conducts a national assessment using standardised methods to evaluate the education system. Finland does not conduct any national assessment survey; it uses PISA results to assess the system's performance. In Japan, O-NET results are part of teacher evaluations for career advancement and policy recommendations. In contrast, grades 5 and 9 test results are solely used for school assessments without impacting student promotions. Most of these countries integrate technology in national assessment surveys. For example, The National Achievement Survey (NAS) employs a mobile application to facilitate data collection and analysis. This app allows quick access to information on student learning outcomes, enabling visualisation of data in charts and maps, which can be shared easily (Dept of School Education and Literacy, 2023). NAEP (USA) integrates technology in its assessments, including computer-based options for adaptive testing. Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board utilises technology in assessments, including online platforms for conducting tests and analysing results.

Lower-grade assessment is primarily formative in many countries without impacting student promotion. India adopted a no-detention policy until grade 8 based on the recommendation of the NPE1986 assessing students through alternative, continuous and comprehensive methods. It has since been discontinued. In France, promotion from primary to junior secondary school is automatic, and grade 5 and 9 test results do not affect student advancement. Spain practices formative assessment from grades 1 to 3. Argentina and Papua New Guinea utilise criterion-referenced assessment, while Argentina’s school evaluation system also features norm-referenced assessment as a fundamental component.

Besides governmental, national, and regional education bodies, teachers play a significant role in the assessment process. For example, in Turkmenistan, teachers organise Olympiads (competitions) as well as written and oral examinations. They also emphasise the importance of various assessment instruments that require students to demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In Australia, teachers provide written feedback on student work rather than merely assigning grades, which helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

Several countries have discontinued some excellent practices, and others face challenges in their educational assessment processes. Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) in India and the National Assessment Study (Nationale Bildungsberichterstattung) in Germany were discontinued. In Jordan, teacher evaluation procedures in the classroom remain inadequate, while in Saudi Arabia, teachers receive no guidance on exams, and exam details are not included in the assessment process.

Some countries have projected assessment practices to be adopted in future; for example, from 2027, the N- and O-level exams in Singapore will be replaced by the Singapore-Cambridge Secondary Education Certificate (SEC), which aims to provide a more comprehensive assessment. This change allows students to extend their secondary education by another year to pursue more challenging courses (NCEE, 2024). The NEP 2020 of India proposes the establishment of PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) as a standard-setting body to create norms and guidelines for student assessment across all recognised school boards. It will guide the State Achievement Survey and conduct the National Achievement Survey, enhancing assessment practices to meet 21st-century skill requirements.

A common but important shift in learning assessment has been incorporating formative assessment and using various tools in formative assessment. However, in the absence of standardisation of tools and assessment procedures and weak teachers' skill development programmes, formative assessment is yet to realise its full potential for enhancing learning outcomes. Brownie (2016) mentioned the inefficient implementation of formative assessments in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The rigorous experimental study conducted in these regions found no positive effects on learning, even with appropriate implementation.

> *The inclusion of formative assessment is a significant reform in learning assessment. However, the quality and impact of formative assessment on students' learning outcomes are still a matter of concern and investigation. An increasing number of countries are adopting national achievement surveys and participating in international achievement*

tests like PISA. However, schools and education systems still opt for non-standardised teacher-made tests.

Health and Physical Education

Physical Education is very popular among students at all levels of schooling in all countries. It is an integral part of the school education system in all countries. Every country includes health and physical education in their school education curriculum, and it is compulsory. Most countries allocate weekly 1 to 3 periods. In most countries, it is compulsory but not a credit program nor evaluated. It does not get the required emphasis. Students and teachers tend to skip physical education classes to attend academic programs. It is a compulsory and credit program only in a few countries like the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Algeria, Japan, and a few others. There are schools in Russia solely dedicated to sports, called Gymnasia. In countries like Libya and Argentina, Military training is provided as part of school education.

The West Bengal (India) government provides free bicycles to every school student—girls and boys—to facilitate school attendance in rural areas that incidentally support physical education through cycling.

Health education is loosely connected or not included in school curricula except in a few countries. The physical education curriculum in Algeria, Libya, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, India, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the UK, Haiti, Peru and Soloman Island, for example, does not include elements of health education. In Papua New Guinea, in elementary grades, health and physical education are two separate units; in senior primary grades, these two are integrated into one subject. In countries like the USA and Canada, some states integrate health education into physical education; others treat it as a separate subject. In Iranian school education, physical education is taught as a core and compulsory subject in primary school education (from grade 1 to grade 6). In lower secondary education (till grade 8), physical education has been replaced by 'Sports' as a compulsory subject. In Sri Lanka, health and physical education is implemented as a compulsory subject for grades 6 through 9 and as a basket subject for grades 10 and 11. Along with school feeding programs, Kenya provides sanitary towels to reduce absenteeism among girls by addressing menstrual hygiene needs.

In most countries, the curriculum and performance standards for health and physical education are not clearly defined, highlighting the need for standardisation. In many countries, physical education teachers are neither specialists nor well trained, nor do they enjoy the status of mainstream academic subjects like maths, science, language, literature, etc. A serious constraint in countries like Fiji and

Soloman Island is the shortage of trained health and physical education and sports teachers. Research also shows that implementing health and physical education is becoming tough in some third-world countries like Haiti due to limited funding, resources and insufficient school space (USAID, 2024).

> *In most countries, health and physical education are popular among students, but not credit programmes. Students put much emphasis and time into academic subjects, neglecting physical and health education. Health education is a weak partner in health and physical education. A credit programme should be counted on the performance report for students' overall development.*

Skills Education

Skills education can be divided into prevocational and vocational skills. Prevocational skills prepare individuals for future employment and vocational training. These are the foundational skills for transition to work. Prevocational skills include personal skills, such as self-discipline, time management, fundamental digital skills, task prioritisation, accountability, and integrity; communication skills, like active listening, conflict resolution, and phone communication; organisation skills, namely, planning and organising productive work; interpersonal skills, like cooperation, teamwork, perseverance, and tolerance; and kitchen skills, for example, snack/meal prep, making a grocery list, washing/drying dishes, unloading/loading dishwasher, washing counters, and setting and/or clearing the table (Auburn School)[12]

Prevocational skills are classified under knowledge-based competencies, self-competencies, and social competencies (Pilz et al., 2014). Knowledge-based competencies are further subdivided into business and economic competencies. Based on curriculum analysis, Pelz et al. (2014) identified competencies under the four broad heads (Table 54.6).

Table 54.6 Prevocational Skills under Knowledge-based, Self- and Social Competencies

Knowledge-based economic competencies	Basic principles of economics, Market forces of supply and demand, Trade and globalisation, Actors in the market, Monetary system, Government policies and their influences, Market forms, Firms in the market, Income, Indicators of economy, and Labour market.
Knowledge-based business competencies	Business and its external environment, Corporate strategy and planning, Organising, Directing, Controlling, Marketing and sales management, Production and operation management, Human resource management, and Administrative management.

[12]https://www.auburnschl.edu/departments/special_education/related_services_speech_and_language/ot_pt/pre-vocational-activities

Self-competencies	Internal locus of control, Achievement motivation, Eagerness for independence, and Moderate tendency to take risks
Social competencies	Communication ability, Conflict ability, Ability to give and receive criticism, Team ability, and Empathy.

Source: *Authors (Contents derived from Pelz et al., 2014).*

The self- and social competencies identified by Pelz and others overlap with WHO and UNICEF's life skills lists.

In most countries, prevocational skills are poorly defined and not included in educational policy goals and curriculum frameworks. Many countries integrate skills education into their general education curricula, often through subjects like physical education, arts, crafts, and technology, as well as through the teaching-learning process. Students get to learn and experience different types of art, such as music, visual arts, and performing arts. This helps them to be creative, express themselves, and appreciate their culture. Trade-based skills education or vocational education and training are features of higher secondary education.

Vocational skills education is included in numerous countries, including Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Bangladesh, India, China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Lebanon, Finland, Germany, the UK, Argentina, Colombia, Fiji, New Zealand, and the Solomon Islands. Common focuses include agriculture, construction, automotive skills, hospitality, IT, and business administration, and related fields.

South Korea's VET high schools offer five specialisations, Finland has eight fields in its VET program, Germany's dual apprenticeship has 328 occupations, and Estonia's school-based VET has a staggering 657 (Renold et al., 2016).

There are also instances of special focus on skills of immediate relevance. For instance, health and medicine-related vocational skills are emphasised in New Zealand, India, Finland, Germany, and the UK; woodwork and carpentry in Kenya, the Philippines, Argentina, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands; and food processing and culinary arts in Algeria, Singapore, and Argentina.

Box 54.2. Germany's Dual Vocational Education System

In Germany, vocational education and training operate under a Dual System, which involves cooperation between small and medium-sized companies and publicly funded vocational schools. This system is regulated by law and offers training in nationally recognised occupations. The training is recognised with a certificate issued by a competent body, i.e. a chamber of industry and commerce or a chamber of crafts and trades. Trainees in the dual system split their time between vocational school and a company, typically

> *spending part of each week at each location or alternating longer periods at each place. The training usually lasts from two to three-and-a-half years.*

There are shared areas of vocational skills across these countries. Each nation tailors its approach to meet specific economic contexts and workforce requirements. This adaptability ensures that vocational skills remain relevant and effective in preparing individuals for employment.

Despite efforts to improve access to skills education, disparities persist based on socioeconomic status, gender, and geographic location. Government support for skills education varies significantly across countries. Some countries have made significant investments, while others face funding and policy implementation challenges.

Hobby and Life Skills Education

According to WHO (1994), "*Life Skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life*" (p. 1). This adaptability and resilience, fostered by Life Skills Education, is a key aspect that "differs in its objectives and contents from country to country and from one locality to another" (WHO, 1996, p. 3).

In most countries' school curriculum frameworks, life skills education does not find a place as an educational agenda. These are mostly developed as part of cross-curricular subjects and extra/co-curricular activities. In all countries, students derive life skills education by default through teaching and learning processes like collaborative learning, peer group learning, project-based learning, extracurricular activities, technology integration, cultural sensitivity, and diversity.

Some common life skills are creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperation, negotiation, leadership, resolution, productivity, sharing, empathy, respect for diversity, communication, resilience, self-esteem, confidence, self-management, accountability, self and community health awareness, financial literacy and digital literacy.

Egypt's school education curriculum includes a subject for every grade named 'Life Skills and Citizenship Education'. In Canada (Alberta), life skills education is integrated with health and life skills for K-9 grades and career and life management (CALM) for senior high school (10-12 grades). The New Zealand Curriculum provides a list of key competencies to be developed in students through the 13 years of school education, and these all are life skills competencies: thinking; using language, symbols, and texts; managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing (MOE, 2007). Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE: India) introduced life skills education as a Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) component. In collaboration

with NCERT and several other organisations, UNICEF engaged with the government of India to integrate life skills education in schools (UNICEF, n.d.).

"Hobby", as a word, does not figure in any country's school education curriculum, though hobbies are life-enriching. However, schools in all countries offer plenty of cocurricular activities—the opportunity for hobby development. However, schools serve primarily as a platform to demonstrate skills that students learn at home at the parents' instance. Most of the country's schools offer extracurricular activities, clubs, and workshops to encourage students to explore and develop hobbies such as arts and crafts, music, sports, gardening, photography, cooking, and more. In Singapore, The Applied Learning Programme (ALP) and the Learning for Life Programme (LLP) provide students with additional opportunities to pursue their passions while fostering the development of 21st Century Competencies (21CC) by applying classroom knowledge to real-world situations and gaining life skills in genuine contexts (MoE, n.d.).

> *Though there are several opportunities to develop hobbies through participation in co-curricular activities, hobby development is not an articulated schooling agenda. Life skills are also celebrated for their importance and value; these are still left to development by default in most countries. UNICEF, WHO, and UNESCO have provided a robust framework for life skills education.*

Moral, Social, and Cultural Education

Across the globe, moral, social, and cultural education is a fundamental component of school education, and it is explicitly mentioned in the country's educational policies or acts. However, the implementation is not uniform, with each country adopting different approaches. In most nations, moral, social, and cultural education is integrated into teaching and learning methods, forming a part of the language and social science subjects. However, there are unique methods, such as religious education. For instance, in Egypt, the Arabic language and literature curriculum often includes the study of classical Arabic poetry and literature, emphasising their cultural significance. Religious education is fundamental to primary and upper primary school education in Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, and Nigeria. In contrast, Ethiopia, Libya, Kazakhstan, Russia, Canada, and France include civic education as a subject or course within their school curriculum. In Mexico, Civics and Ethics education is a credit course and subject of the assessment process (IQAS, 2021).

In Ethiopia, Moral education is specifically emphasised as a subject at the primary level, typically consisting of three periods per week, totalling 78 hours per year. Moreover, countries such as Algeria, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh, and Singapore have made moral education a distinct subject in their educational systems. In Japan, Moral education is a compulsory and credit course in primary and lower secondary education. Countries like Papua New Gunia

prepared a curriculum for Citizenship and Christian Values Education (CCVE) for all educational levels. Elementary education includes community and culture, which consists of five strands. Three focus on moral, social, and cultural education, e.g., my community, my environment, healthy individual and community (DOE-PNG, 2015), and all these are credit courses.

The literature on the impact of moral and values education is limited, making it difficult to assess its impact. Much of the civilisational crisis mentioned earlier is man-made. The leaders engaging in devastating wars and conflicts, in-country ethnic and religious conflicts, raise serious questions about the impact of moral and values education. The colonial history of violence and exploitation speaks volumes about the value deficit among the colonisers (Osman & Mcnight, 2020; Roy, 2018). Roy (2018) elaborated on how 'Western science long relied on the knowledge and exploitation of colonised peoples, and in many ways, it still does'.

> *Moral and value education is quite common across countries, often referred to as religious education, Islamic Education, or Moral and Value Education. However, in most countries, these are not evaluated or given feedback to determine whether goals of value development are realised.*

Peace and Happiness Education

Peace education has been a response to conflict management throughout human history. Ian Harris (2008) wrote, "Throughout history, humans have taught each other conflict resolution techniques to avoid violence. Peace education is teaching people about the threats of violence and strategies for peace" (p.1). Peace education is carried out through religious teachings, community-based activities, and formal school-based peace education. Achieving can be contextual. It requires different strategies for large-scale inter-country conflicts, inter-ethnic conflicts, and conflicts due to poverty and environmental degradation. Environmentalists see environmental degradation as "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper" (Eliot, 1936, p. 107). Military security against foreign invasion, ignoring the rise of global warming, pollution, rapid species extinction, growing population and poverty, water shortages, etc., is not enough for peace (Mische, 1989).

Harris (2008) lamented that despite its tremendous growth in the twentieth century, "peace education has not taken hold in school systems around the world." In most countries, peace education is seen as a "soft" subject, with greater emphasis on maths, science, and language learning for economic benefits.

The Philippines and Uganda introduced peace education in public schools but lack resources for training teachers in the various complexities of the subject. Japan has introduced peace education. Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), Indonesia made several efforts to redesign the

curriculum for primary and secondary schools related to peace education to implement sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Wahyudin, 2018). The government of Colombia introduced Cátedra de la Paz "by law 1732 of 2014 and decree 1038 of 2015' as a compulsory peace and citizenship course to cultivate peace culture in all educational institutions. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), Kenya, initiated the Peace Education Programme in 2008 to enhance knowledge, skills, and values for peace. In collaboration with UNICEF, Kenya formulated an education sector policy on peace education in 2014 (MoEST, 2014). The policy guidelines stated, "that peace education in Kenya is embedded in the education and training policy and planning, reinforced in each year of schooling, supported by pre-service and continuing in-service training of teachers, developed and sustained in collaboration with stakeholders, including counties and the local communities, and informed by feedback from monitoring and evaluation processes" (MoEST, 2014, p.14).

Without the explicit label "peace education," concepts related to conflict resolution, social justice, human rights, and understanding diverse perspectives are included in subjects like social studies, history, civics, and sometimes even in language arts and other courses. Schools teach about peace through activities like sports and clubs, anti-bullying programs, and involving students in school decisions and community projects. Peace education also overlaps with other educational efforts, such as teaching life skills and helping with mental health. It teaches through hands-on activities and practical lessons. The teaching of values, ethics, civic education, traditional culture, and multiculturalism are all critical components that contribute to fostering a culture of peace and happiness among students.

In most Islamic countries, Koranic studies and Islamic education are integral to school education. Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia teach Islamic religious education. Education on Islamic religion is also offered in many European countries. "Islam" comes from the Arabic word salaam, which means "peace." The Holy Quran strongly emphasises peace.

The African continent is continuously experiencing conflicts in South Africa, riots in Zimbabwe and Cameroon, and terror attacks in western and northern Africa and the Horn of Africa. In response to the challenges, WANEP (2012) developed an implementational guide for Peace Education in Formal Schools in West Africa. Peace education from colonial times has perpetrated a Eurocentric perspective and has not resulted in lasting peace in Africa (Niyitunga, 2020; Parashar & Schulz, 2021).

Out of the selected 52 countries, only eight (New Zealand (2), Canada (10), Singapore (11), Japan (12), Finland (13), Sweden (15), Australia (16), and Germany (17)) countries rank within the top

20 in Global Peace Index (IEP, 2021). Of these eight countries, only Japan taught peace education as an independent subject. Out of the selected 52 countries, only seven (Finland: 1, Sweden:4, Israel: 5, Australia (10), New Zealand (11), Canada (15), and the United Kingdom (20)) rank within the top 20 in the World Happiness Index (2024). No country has peace and/or education as an independent subject of these seven countries. Australia, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, and Sweden are ranked within the top 20 countries on the Peace and Happiness Index. In all these five countries, topics related to peace education are placed in different subjects.

Despite a long history of peace education and tremendous growth of efforts, the wars and conflicts, invisible violence through the exploitation of the poor by the affluent, military dictatorship, remnants of colonial subjugation by governments in 'democratic countries', unabated terrorism pose a serious challenge to the effectiveness of peace education and need for pressing the 'refresh button' in strategies for peacebuilding.

The happiness curriculum is a unique and first initiative in the world by the Delhi Government to teach happiness. The Thai National Commission for UNESCO and the MoE, Thailand, agreed to coordinate in initiating the programme of a happy school project in 2018 as a pilot project (UNESCO, 2021). This educational programme promotes school happiness through enhanced learner well-being and holistic development. UNICEF India pioneered joyful learning to experience the joy of learning. Finland uniquely provides a happy learning experience (Crehan, 2016). Combining Finland's happy learning ambience with UNICEF's joyful learning and Delhi Government's Happiness Curriculum can uniquely impact the learning experience and develop peace-loving, happy citizens.

> *Peace and happiness education are urgent needs, especially as more groups and nations engage in conflicts, battles, and wars. Though there are examples, efforts are too scant to be confident about the future.*

Conclusion

Comparative education studies are often conducted on one or two selected issues, like preschool education, ICT in education, and primary or basic education and are restricted to a few countries. For example, Liu et al. (2013) studied the use of ICT in preschool education in Greece and China, as well as between China and Finland. Some other studies have compared romantic, humanistic, Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia approaches (Asl et al., 2022). The World of Learning had an atrocious ambition of studying education reforms concerning policies, structures, curriculum, teaching-learning, learning assessment, health and physical education, prevocational and vocational

skills education, hobby and life skills education, moral, social and cultural education and peace and happiness education prefaced by history, geography, demography, economy of education of all the selected 52 countries from six continents. Countries were divided into eight regions, each comprising five to nine countries. Put in a matrix; it would mean at least 10 x 8 or 80 studies under one umbrella. Hence, the conclusion is not easy.

However, there are a few important lessons that can be learned. Educational policy goals primarily converge upon access, equity, equality of educational opportunity, and quality. Quality has multiple meanings, such as modernisation, learning optimisation, all-round development, resilience, and innovativeness. Although educational systems' structures differ, the global trend is towards 12 years of schooling preceded by early childhood care and pre-schooling. There are commonalities in STEM and HASS subjects across the countries, but they differ in religious, moral, and value education, as well as art and aesthetics education. Technology-integrated learning and assessment is another common trend across countries with differential emphasis and technology choice. However, the lack of technology resources and digitally skilled teachers with the right attitude is a severe constraint. Nonetheless, teacher-centred instruction and rote learning still dominate classrooms in most countries. Reforms in assessment are more prominent when integrating formative assessment with summative assessment. Physical education is popular among students and compulsory in all countries, but its conceptualisation and implementation differ. Peace and happiness education is missing in most countries when the world's crying need is peace and happiness.

There are tensions as well – tension between the rich Indigenous Knowledge of ancient civilisations and Western Knowledge imposed during the four centuries of colonisation; there are tensions between the developing and developed nations in terms of resources; tensions are also there within the developing countries between haves who can buy quality education at private cost and the have-nots who must depend upon poor quality public education perpetrating the class-gap feeding into a new form of colonialism. Tensions are there between ethnic minorities, migrants and the native population. The depleting youth population and growing ageing population in the Global North who must depend upon immigrant blue and white-collar workers brings a new form of tension in setting global standards of knowledge and skills.

As life on earth and human civilisation face the most serious threat, competitive nationalism must give way to cooperative nationalism. Education and human development are the domains with the most potential for experimenting with cooperative nationalism. As we live in an interconnected global village, we need much larger and deeper regional and global cooperation in education. That warrants the presence of global and regional components in education in every country.

Despite the wide gap between policy intent and impact, the basic trend matches SDG4. Countries may adopt SDG4 to suit local conditions, maintaining a constructive alignment with global needs and goals. Curriculum can be designed to accommodate local, national, and global learning components. Appropriate UN agencies like UNESCO or some kind of Council of Ministers of Education (see Canadian Model) in various regions can create regional and global curriculum frameworks for countries to adapt to suit local conditions and developmental levels. Developed countries derive advantages from the quality of graduates produced by developing countries like Africa, Asia, and Latin America at their own cost. A new economic mechanism must be developed to compensate the countries for investment in the education of the migrating qualified human resources. The era of exploitation and brutalisation must be sealed with the end of the colonial era. Education is the only hope, and cooperation and sharing of resources must begin from education for mutual and global benefits. Let us conclude by quoting a few statements from the UN Secretary-General's address to the UN Assembly on 22 September 2022

> *"Our planet is burning. People are hurting – with the most vulnerable suffering the most. The United Nations Charter and the ideals it represents are in jeopardy. We must act. And yet we are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction.*
>
> *"The international community is not ready or willing to tackle the big dramatic challenges of our age. These crises threaten the very future of humanity and the fate of our planet."*
>
> *"A world without extreme poverty, want or hunger is not an impossible dream. It is within reach. That is the world envisaged by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. But it is not the world we seem to have chosen. Because of our decisions, sustainable development everywhere is at risk. The SDGs are issuing an SOS. Even the most fundamental goals – on poverty, hunger and education – are going into reverse."*
>
> *"The divergence between developed and developing countries ... is at the root of the geopolitical tensions and lack of trust that poison every area of global cooperation ..... But by acting as one, we can nurture fragile shoots of hope ... So, let us develop common solutions to common problems — grounded in goodwill, trust, and the rights shared by every human being."*
>
> The world has enough knowledge, skills, and resources to reverse decadence and create a world of peace and harmony by redesigning education. The ambition of this project and the next of ETMA[13] is to create a response to UN's well-articulated agenda in SDG 4.7: ***education for .... promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship."***

[13] In the follow-up project in 2025, ETMA will present a co-constructed new education model, Education 5.0 for Global Peace and Harmony.

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[i] Table 54.7 Comparative Analysis of the Structure of Education

Country	School Level (age)
Northern & Sub-Saharan Africa	
Algeria	Pre-primary (3-6), Primary (6-10), Secondary (6-9), upper Secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18), Higher vocational education (18-20/21)
Egypt	Nursery (2-4), Kindergartens (4-6), Primary (6-12), Preparatory Education (12-15), Secondary (15-18), Vocational education (15-18)
Ethiopia	Pre-primary (4-6), Primary (7-12), Middle school (13-14), Secondary (15-18), Vocational education (After 18)
Kenya	Pre-primary (4-6), Lower primary (6-9), Upper Primary (9-12), Junior Secondary (12-16), Senior Secondary (16-18), Vocational education [18-21(minimum)]
Libya	Pre-primary (4-6), Primary (6-12), Lower Secondary (12-15), Upper Secondary/Vocational education (15-18/19)
Nigeria	Early child care education (0-4), Pre-primary (5), Primary (6-11), Junior Secondary (12-14), Senior Secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-17)
South Africa	Pre-primary (up to age 6), Primary (6-12), Senior phase (12-15), Further education and training (15-18)
Central Asia	
Kazakhstan	Pre-primary (0-6/7), Primary (7-10), Basic lower secondary (11-15), General upper secondary (16-17), Vocational upper secondary education (16-17/18)
Russia	Pre-primary (0-6/7), Primary (7-10), Lower Secondary (10-15), General upper secondary (16-17), Vocational upper secondary education (16-20/21)
Turkey	Preschool (0-69 months), Primary education (69 months-10 years), Secondary education (10-14), Upper secondary education (14-18), Vocational education (14-18)
Turkmenistan	Early child care education (1-5), Pre-school (up to 6), Primary (6-9), Secondary (10-15), Senior Secondary (16-17)
Uzbekistan	Pre-primary (3-6), Primary (6-10), Lower Secondary (10-15), Upper secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-17)
Eastern South-Eastern Asia	
China	Pre-primary (3-6), Primary (6-11), Junior Secondary (12-14), Senior high school (15-17), Secondary vocational education (15-17)
Indonesia	Playgroup (4), Kindergarten (5-6), Primary (7-12), Junior Secondary (13-15), Senior Secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
Japan	Preschool (3-5), Primary (6-12), Junior high (13-15), Senior high school (16-18), Vocational education (16)
Philippines	Kindergarten (5-6), Primary (6-12), Junior high (12-16), Senior high school (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
South Korea	Early child care education (3-6), Elementary (6-12), Middle school (12-15), High school (15-18), Vocational education (15-18)
Thailand	Early child care education (3-5), Elementary (6-11), Lower secondary (13-14), Upper/senior secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-17)
Southern Asia	

Bangladesh	Pre-primary (3-5), Primary (6-10), Junior secondary (11-13), Secondary (14-15), Upper secondary (16-17), Vocational education (14-17)
India	Pre-school (3-5), Primary (6-11), Upper primary (12-14), Secondary (15-16), Higher secondary (17-18), Vocational education (17-18)
Malaysia	Early child care education (0-4), Pre-primary (5-6), Primary (7-12), Lower secondary (13-15), Upper secondary (16-17), Vocational education (16-17)
Pakistan	Pre-primary (3-5), Primary (6-10), Middle school (11-13), Secondary (14-15), Higher secondary (16-17), Vocational education (16-17)
Singapore	Pre-school (4-6), Primary (7-12), Secondary (13-16/17/18), Vocational education (13-16/17/18)
Sri Lanka	Primary (5-10), Lower secondary (11-14), Senior secondary education phase 1 (15-16), Senior secondary education phase 2 (17–18), Vocational education (15-16)
Western & Middle East Asia	
Iran	Pre-primary (4-5), Primary (6-11), Lower secondary (12-14), Upper secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-17)
Israel	Kindergarten (5-6), Primary (6-12), Junior high school (12-15), Senior high school (15-18), Vocational education (12-15)
Jordan	Kindergarten (4-5), Primary (6-16), Secondary (17-18), Vocational secondary (17-18)
Lebanon	Pre-school (3-5), Primary (6-11), Intermediate (12-14), General secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-17)
Saudi Arabia	Pre-primary (3-5), Elementary (6-12), Intermediate (13-15), Secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
United Arab Emirates	Early childhood education (3-5), Basic (6-10), Intermediate (11-14), Upper secondary (15-17), Vocational education (14-17)
Europe & North America	
France	Pre-primary (3-5), Primary (6-10), Junior secondary (11-14), Secondary (15-18), Technical/ professional education (15-18)
Finland	Early child care education (0-6), Pre-primary (6-7), Primary & lower secondary (7-16), Preparatory (17-18), Upper secondary (17-20), Vocational education (18-21)
Germany	Pre-school (1-5), Primary (6-9), Secondary (10-17/18), Vocational education (15-17/18)
Spain	Pre-school (0-6), Primary (6-12), Secondary (12-16), Upper secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
Sweden	Preschool (1-5), Preschool classes (6), Compulsory education (7-16), Upper secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
United Kingdom	Pre-school (3-4), Primary (5-10), Lower secondary (11-13), Upper secondary (14-15), Upper secondary general (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
Canada (Alberta)	Pre-elementary (4-5/6), Elementary (6-11/12), Junior high school (12/13-14/15), Senior high school (15/16-17/18), Vocational education (17/18+)
USA	Kindergarten (5-6), Elementary (6-10/11/13), Middle school (11/12-13), High schools (14-17), Junior high school (12-14), Junior & Senior high schools (12-17), Senior high school (15-17), Vocational education (14-17)

Latin America & The Caribbean	
Argentina	Pre-primary (0-5), Elementary (6-12/13), Secondary (13/14-20/21), Vocational education (14+)
Brazil	Kindergartens (2-3), Pre-primary (4-5), Primary (6-10), Lower secondary (11-14), Upper secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-19)
Colombia	Early child care education (0-5), Primary (6-10), Lower secondary (11-14), Upper secondary (15-16), Vocational education (15-16)
Cuba	Pre-primary (1-5), Primary (6-11), Middle school (12-14), Secondary (15-17), Vocational education (17+)
Guatemala	Pre-primary (3-6), Primary (7-13), Basic (13-16), Diversified secondary (16-18), Pre-vocational education (16-18)
Haiti	Pre-school (3-5), Primary (6-11), Secondary (12-14 & 15-18), Vocational education [level-I (10-11), level-II (12-14), level-III(15-18)]
Mexico	Pre-primary (3-5), Primary (6-11), Middle (12-14), Upper secondary (15-17), Vocational education (15-17)
Peru	Pre-school (3-5), Elementary (6-11), Secondary (12-16), Vocational education (12-16)
Venezuela	Maternal (0-3), Pre-school (3-6), Primary (6-12), General secondary (12-17), Vocational education (12-18)
Oceania	
Australia	Primary (5-11/12), Secondary (12/13-15), Senior secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)
Fiji	Pre-school (3-6), Primary (6-12), Junior secondary (12-16), Secondary (16-19), Vocational education (16-19)
New Zealand	Early child care education (0-5), Primary (5-13), Secondary (13-17)
Papua New Guinea	Early child care education (4-5), Pre-primary (6), Primary (7-12), Junior secondary (13-16), Senior secondary (17-18), Vocational education (14-18)
Soloman Islands	Early child care education (3-5), Primary (6-12), Lower secondary (13-15), Upper secondary (16-18), Vocational education (16-18)

Source: *Compiled by authors based on the case studies*

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Moral and value education is quite common across countries, often offered as part of religious education, Islamic education, or moral and value education programmes. However, in most countries, these subjects are not evaluated or subjected to feedback to ascertain whether the objectives of value development are being realised.

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UNESCO ON PEACE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

"Learning must be transformative, and help empower learners with the necessary knowledge, values, attitudes and skills and behaviours to become agents of peace in their communities. Education in all its forms and dimensions, in and out of schools, shapes how we see the world and treat others." UNESCO, 2023)[1]

"Education is one of the principal means to build a culture of peace... Such actions include involving children in activities for instilling the values and goals of a culture of peace, revision of curricula and textbooks with consideration to previous declarations of UNESCO on peace..."[2]

"The promotion of peace through education is at the heart of UNESCO's mission... UNESCO's approach to educating for peace is multidimensional, in that it links education with a range of activities that address the root causes of violence, from human security to sustainable development. The goal of UNESCO's education programmes and partnerships is the development of comprehensive systems of education that embrace the values of human rights, intercultural understanding and tolerance."[3]

"Promoting a culture of peace and non-violence through education is one of UNESCO's core missions... There is indeed a need for increased attention to ensure education systems help build peaceful and sustainable societies. This includes integrating education for peace and conflict prevention, as and when appropriate, across the entire education system."[4]

[1] The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development | UNESCO

[2] The United Nations and Peace Education

[3] Resources | Global Citizenship Education (GCED) Clearinghouse | UNESCO & APCEIU

[4] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233601

Subject Index

The World of Learning: Lessons from 52 Countries

The World of Learning (WoL) is a unique, never-before study comparing educational reforms in 52 countries. Largest of its kind in the world.

In today's world, the urgency for a transformative educational paradigm is paramount, given the pressing challenges of climate change, conflict, and global inequality. **The World of Learning (WoL)** project addresses this need by documenting educational reforms across 52 countries, aiming to cultivate a new generation of global citizens.

Drawing from UNESCO reports and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), WoL identifies effective educational practices and compiles insights from over 40 experts into a comprehensive knowledge repository.

This initiative focuses on key elements such as educational policies, curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and assessments, strongly emphasising moral education and global citizenship. It showcases innovative strategies from the Global South that reclaim educational narratives post-colonialism while integrating perspectives from both developed and developing nations.

WoL serves as a vital resource for policymakers and educators seeking to modernize education systems to meet the demands of a connected world. With 52 case studies and over 2,500 references, it offers extensive opportunities for comparative education research.

Looking ahead, WoL plans to co-create **Education 5.0 for Global Peace and Harmony,** reimagining education to foster a more inclusive and peaceful future.

Key themes Covered: Policy Reforms, 21st-Century Schooling, Curricular Reforms, Teaching-Learning and Learning Assessment Reforms, Physical, Moral and Life Skills Education. All-round Development, Global Citizenship and Peace Education

Editors

Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay is the Chairman of Educational Technology and Management Academy (ETMA), Gurugram.

Dr Mrityunjoy Kaibarta is a Guest Faculty, Department of Education, Biswa Bangla Biswabidyalay, Birbhum.

Dr Bidhan Gantait is an Assistant Professor of Education at the School of Education, Lovely Professional University, Punjab.

Dr Mrinal Mukherjee is an Assistant Professor of Education at the Department of Teacher Education, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University, Kolkata.

Educational Technology and Management Academy (ETMA)
T-6/1701, Valley View Estate
Gurgaon-Faridabad Road
Gurugram, Haryana-122003, India
www.etma-india.in

9 788196 999841