

03



EDUCATION

ENROLMENT

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY

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SITUATION REVIEW ON ENROLMENT

Trends

There is no doubt that East Asia and the Pacific has done more than any other region to increase access to education over the past 30 years. In 1970, there were over 50 million primary school-aged children in this region who were out of school, a figure that has been reduced to less than 7 million today. Efforts at expanding access to primary education constitute a pillar on which the economic development of the region has been based, and provides hope for continued prosperity, national development, peace and security. However, without attention being paid to educational quality and to curriculum relevance, children will continue to drop out before completing their basic education and long term national development will be undermined.

When we analyze who is being left behind and why, we can see continuing trends of disparity affecting specific groups of children. The graph below shows that while within the East Asia and Pacific region the primary net enrolment rate (NER) stands at over 95 per cent, there are tremendous differences between and within countries. In the graph below, we have shown for each country the national primary NER and the range of sub-national rates ranging from highest to lowest. For example, while Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has a national NER of 80 per cent, the provincial NERs within the country range from a low of 56 per cent in one province up to 97 per cent in the highest, while in China, the range is from 91 per cent to 100 per cent – around the national average of 98 per cent.

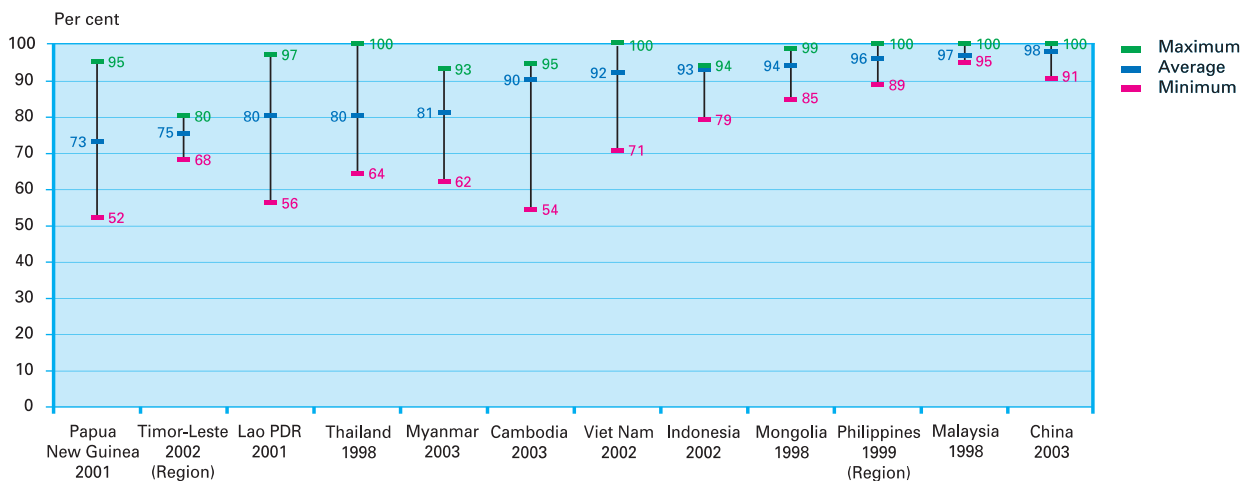
National net enrolment rates – with sub-national disparity between high and low regions

It is extremely difficult to obtain data on specifically which children are not being enrolled in school.

We must rely on extrapolation, qualitative reports and common sense to determine who is being excluded. Of course the lack of clear data on exclusion, is itself an indication of the shortage of attention that is paid by governments to the plight of marginalized children. Educational statistics are rarely disaggregated by ethnic minority, by language group (Viet Nam being a notable exception), by religious affiliation or by socio-economic status. This lack of data on the children being left behind makes it extremely difficult for governments to take concrete and effective steps to address factors that create disparities. Regionally, we find five core groups of children who are being denied their right to basic education: ethnic minorities; children in remote areas; migrant children; children of internally-displaced people; and the disabled.

There are currently over 60 million children in the region who do not enrol in secondary school. Moreover, when we look at average gross enrolment and compare this to sub-national figures, as we did above for primary net enrolment, we find even greater levels of disparity. In the Philippines, for example, regional secondary gross enrolment rates range from 31 to 97 per cent. Given the expanded economic and social opportunities that secondary education provides for young people and the harm reduction that regular secondary school attendance provides, such disparity between sub-national areas is of particular concern. In every country of the region, the enrolment gap between boys and girls that is found in primary education is more pronounced in secondary. Gender roles and gender stereotyping are also prominent in many secondary school systems and can be seen in the differing sports, clubs and extra-curricular activities that are available to boys and girls.

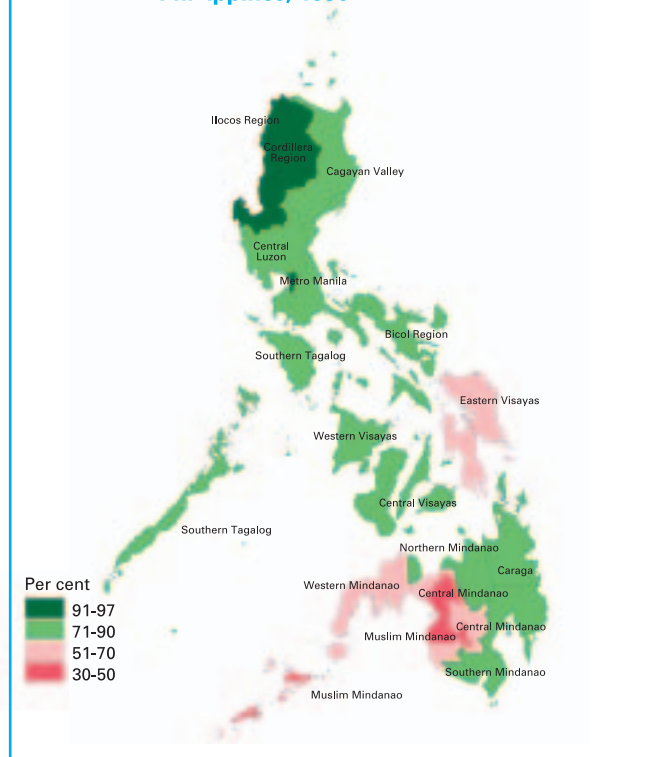
Figure 3.1 Net enrolment ratio in primary education



Note: Papua New Guinea uses the gross enrolment rate (GER) figure

Sources: Cambodia: Education Management Information System, 2003-2004; China: Essential Statistics of Education in China 2003; Indonesia: National Socio-economic Survey 2002; Lao PDR: MDG for the Lao PDR, Ministry of Education (2002/3) Annual Report; Malaysia: Education for All 2000 Assessment, 2000; Mongolia: Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture/National Statistical Office. Statistical Yearbooks, 1998; Myanmar: Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2003; Philippines: Department of Education, Culture and Sports. Annual Report 1998, 1999; Papua New Guinea: Department of Education, State of Education in PNG report, March 2003; Thailand: Ministry of Education. Regional Education Report, 1998; Timor-Leste: Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2002; Viet Nam: Viet Nam Millennium Development Goals, Closing the Millennium Gaps, November 2003

Figure 3.2 Gross enrolment rate in secondary education, Philippines, 1998



Source: Ministry of Education/UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Education for All 2000 Assessment, 2000

School fees and the direct and indirect costs of schooling have a tremendous effect on enrolment and completion. In countries with school fee systems and policies in place, many children are denied their right to basic education for lack of money. There is a fine balance between the responsibilities of families to support their children's education and the responsibilities of the state to remove all barriers to participation in school. In many Pacific Island States and Papua New Guinea, the school fee issue is particularly critical and is resulting in large numbers of youth dropping out, especially in the later years of schooling when fees are typically at their highest. While, in terms of enrolment, gender disparities do differ between matrilineal and patrilineal societies, differences are usually found between boys' and girls' enrolment and completion rates, especially in the higher grades and in countries with school fee policies in place.

Ethnic minorities, often living in remote areas, face many obstacles to ensuring their children's right to education. The first and foremost of these is the language of instruction. If families see their children struggling with basic comprehension, learning from a teacher with whom they cannot communicate and textbooks they cannot understand, there is little incentive for regular attendance, and even less incentive to enrol younger children in school when elder siblings have dropped out as a consequence of language issues. Bilingual education and the use

of mother tongue instruction are proven means of ensuring that ethnic minorities complete their basic education, acquire the national language and become more productive members of society. Both China and Cambodia are investing in bilingual programmes that allow ethnic minority children to commence pre-school in their mother tongue and spend the first few years of primary school learning the national language as a subject, while at the same time studying math, social studies and reading in their own language. By grade 4, these students are able to make the transition into learning core subjects in the national language, with the option of continuing to study their mother tongue as a subject. This approach has required investments in textbook and materials development, in the recruitment and special training of ethnic minority teachers, and in advocacy and awareness raising for communities and leaders on the long-term benefits of bilingual education. By depriving ethnic minority children of their right to learn, governments run the risk of further fragmenting society, increasing existing disparities and fomenting discontent.

Children of families who, for one reason or another, have moved away from their home often face difficulties in achieving educational success. In the case of the resettlement of whole communities, children often face psychological adjustments which accompany such shifts, including the lack of community support networks, the loss of status, and family economic difficulties which can conspire to pull them out of school. Internally displaced people who have been forced to shift due to internal conflict or natural disasters are often unable to access education or make the adjustments necessary to re-enrol their children in school. In this context governments have an obligation to provide access, to invest in services and to remove barriers, both legislative and financial. An example of such measures is China's revision of educational policies to allow children of migrant workers – its "floating population" of 100 million – access to school, even if the parents are not officially registered. Countries have the obligation within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide education to all children within their borders, even those who may not be recognized as citizens or legal immigrants. This is a tremendous challenge for countries in the Mekong with relatively porous borders and a history of shifting populations, especially when low levels of birth registration and documentation often result in children being deprived of their right to enrol in school.

Children with disabilities are also disadvantaged by low enrolment rates in schools as a consequence of both social stigmatisation and unwelcoming schools. It is estimated by the World Bank that globally, less than 5 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries are ever enrolled in school. Parents often feel embarrassed if they have children who are differently abled and therefore can be reluctant to send them to school. Social norms often imply that

children with disabilities are stupid and cannot learn, even if their disability is not connected to learning. Schools themselves, especially teachers, fear that allowing a disabled child into their classroom will cause disruption and impair learning for others. To counter this trend of excluding disabled children, more and more countries in the region are turning to “inclusive” education strategies, whereby teachers are trained to include handicapped children in their regular classrooms. Relying on teacher training, community advocacy and awareness-raising among all students, inclusive education approaches are resulting in increasing numbers of disabled children attaining their right to basic education and increasing societies’ capacity to appreciate and understand people with disabilities. It is important that inclusive education be supported by health checks, referral systems for treatment and specialized educational opportunities – especially for the teaching of sign language and Braille. Regionally, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and New Zealand have model programmes that feature the inclusion of children with disabilities.

While the region is justifiably proud of the small gender gaps in primary enrolment, there are other aspects of gender inequality and disparity. Within schools, the treatment of boys and girls is often unequal, especially in regard to discipline, seating arrangements and the allocation of time for interaction with the teacher. It is important to note that discrimination, gender stereotyping and unequal treatment based on sex can affect either boys or girls negatively. In some countries, boys are bullied emotionally and physically by teachers, resulting in their dropping out. In other countries, girls may be harassed by male students, on the way to and from school, impacting their ability to attend regularly and their capacity to concentrate on studies.

Disparity in secondary education enrolments affects far larger groups of children to a far greater extent than in primary education. Ethnic minorities and disabled children are even less likely to be found in

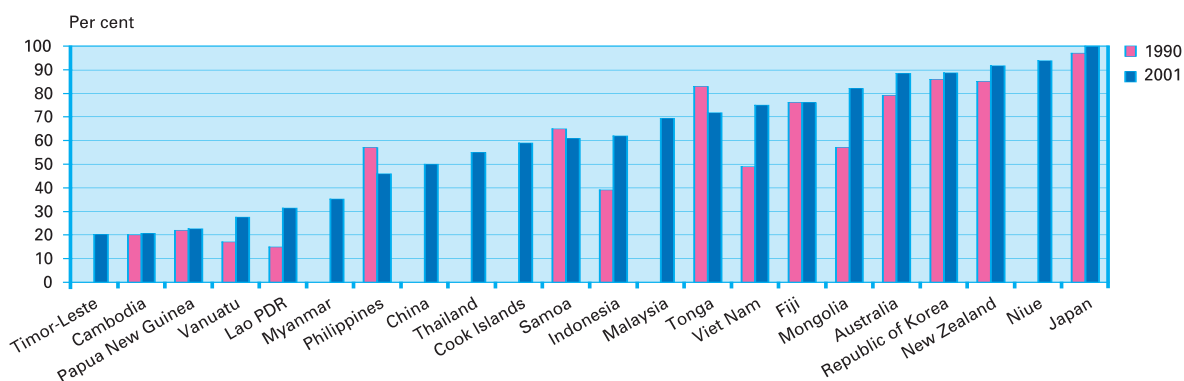
secondary schools than they are in primary. The rural-urban divide in access to secondary education is also very high, with far fewer rural schools serving much larger populations of potential students. Distance between the home and school also plays a much greater role in rural areas as there are fewer secondary schools, requiring students to stay away from home or face long daily commutes. In both cases, girls are often at risk and disadvantaged, as are all children in remote communities and/or children who are poor. Economic factors also play an important part in inequity, especially as private schools become increasingly common for secondary education. Fierce competition for relatively limited places in government secondary schools favours the urbanized and affluent.

Disparities in educational attainment both reflect and result in greater disparities in earning power and economic opportunity, in self-esteem and social standing, and in health and nutritional status of future families. By whole heartedly addressing access to education governments can ensure that disparities do not lead to dangerous levels of social inequity. It is equally important that children have access to quality education as it is well documented that low quality schools are the key cause of dropout and of low rates of student attendance. Experience has shown that providing the children who are being left behind with quality education can be more costly than the provision of education for those children who are enrolled; however, the longer term economic and social costs of not providing education for out of school children will be far greater.

Action points

- We need better **data and an improved use of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)** to draw attention to disparities and highlight which groups of the population are being denied their full educational rights. The use of disaggregated data by district, by ethnic minority, by rural/urban, by boy/girl and by other relevant indicators can help in planning for action.

Figure 3.3 Net enrolment ratio in secondary education, EAP countries, 1990 and 2001



Sources: UNESCO. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004 and 2005; China: UNDP. Human Development Report 2002; Indonesia: National Socio-Economic Survey data calculated for MDG Report, 2003; Mongolia: Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture, 2002; Philippines: Department of Education

- Recognize the link between **quality** and **access**.
- Improve efforts to link “special education” with an inclusive approach for **disabled** children. Encourage greater enrolment of children with disabilities in regular schools while providing special courses on Braille and sign language for teachers and students during holidays or at special times of the year.
- Allow children who enrol late in Grade 1, or who are older and have capacity to learn quickly, to try **accelerated learning**, so that they can catch up to their age cohort through extra non-formal courses, coaching or extra homework.
- Increase **national budgets** for education to maintain high levels of primary enrolment while expanding the secondary school system.
- Invest in development of **local language** maths, literacy and social studies textbooks for Grades 1-3, as well as specialized materials on learning the national language, so that ethnic minority children can study successfully their first three grades while learning the national language.

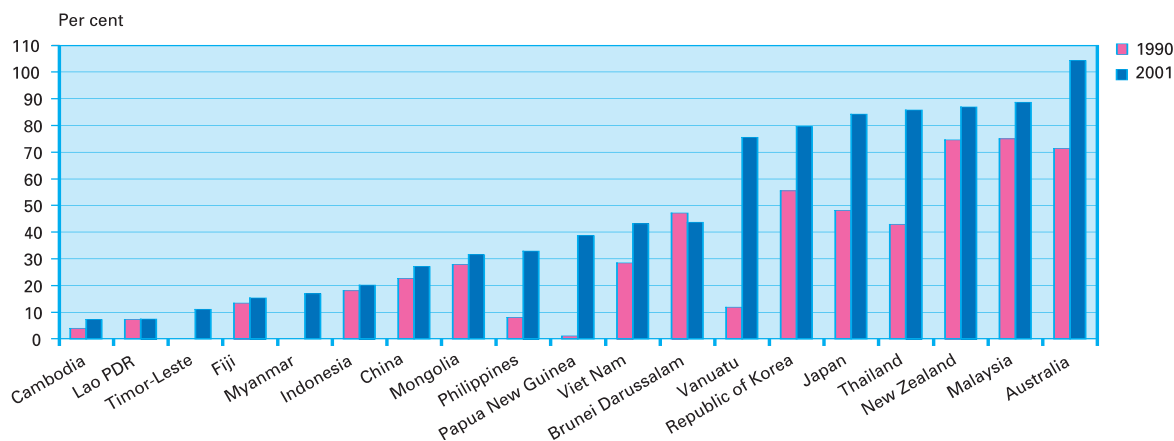
SITUATION REVIEW ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Trends

The expansion of pre-primary education is the first of the Education for All (EFA) Dakar goals. There was a general expansion of pre-school coverage in the region between 1990 and 2000, but more recent trends suggest that in several countries, the coverage of pre-primary education has stagnated, and in some cases declined. As can be seen in the graph below, there is still much that needs to be done to ensure that all children have access to organized learning opportunities before they enter primary school. It is worth noting that while several countries, including the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and Malaysia, have over 80 per cent of their 3 to 5 year-old children in organized learning centres, other countries such as Lao PDR, Cambodia and Timor-Leste have reached less than 10 per cent of their young children.

A diminishing national budget for pre-primary education in several countries is accompanied by increasing reliance on privatization. Several countries have been pursuing privatization strategies in pre-school and organized early learning. In China, the Ministry has reduced its budget for Early Childhood Education and no longer covers the running costs of pre-schools, which are now paid for by local government and families. Limited resources are provided by the Ministry for central monitoring, supervision and training – a model being followed by several countries in the region. Increasingly, parents are expected to pay fees and tuition costs even in government pre-schools and child care centres and especially in countries where pre-schools are being handed over to the private sector to manage. In all countries, private pre-schools are being opened (especially in urban areas) and operated often with

Figure 3.4 Gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education, EAP countries, 1990 and 2001



Sources: UNESCO. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/2004 and 2005; EFA 2000; Myanmar: Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2003

higher quality, thereby increasing the disparity in school readiness between rich and poor, urban and rural. These disparities become even more pronounced when government pre-schools and community child care centres in less affluent communities are closed, so only those who can afford private pre-schools can provide early-learning opportunities for their children.

It is important to differentiate between Early Child Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Education (ECE). ECD is the holistic development of the young child, encompassing health, nutrition, birth registration, early stimulation, care and education. Good quality care with love can improve the development of the young child. ECD is usually referred to in the context of the broader needs of children under the age of five years whereas, by contrast, ECE is focused more upon the cognitive and psycho-social development of children under 5. This can be provided in home-based and community-based centres or in school-based pre-schools and kindergartens. There is ample research to show that adequate nutrition, low incidence of illness, and good hygiene in the early years have a direct and significant impact on intelligence and the capacity to learn. It is the combination of stimulation and early learning with good health and nutrition that has the optimal impact on the development of young children. When using the term ECE, it is important that this be defined as broadly as possible, and not just as pre-school. While middle income countries generally refer to formal, school-based models or pre-schools, there are many examples of community-based and home-based child care centres which can deliver as high a quality of organized early learning as school-based pre-schools. Regardless of whether early childhood centres are school or community based, regular training, supervision and professional support are essential. In addition, EMIS systems need to be modified so that community-based and non-formal day care centres are included in national data sets on early learning.

Within Ministries of Education and Finance, policy makers and staff do not necessarily understand the full importance of investing in pre-primary and organized early child care. The benefits of stimulation and early learning include a wide range of direct and indirect outcomes, the most immediate of which is success in primary school. Extensive research from Asia and the Pacific shows that children who are exposed to pre-school and organized early learning groups have higher completion and achievement rates in primary school, and lower repetition and drop out when compared with those children who have not been attending pre-school or community-based centres. Long-term studies of children in the USA show that children with pre-school experience had higher education levels and higher paying jobs later in life. Lower incidences of anti-social behaviour,

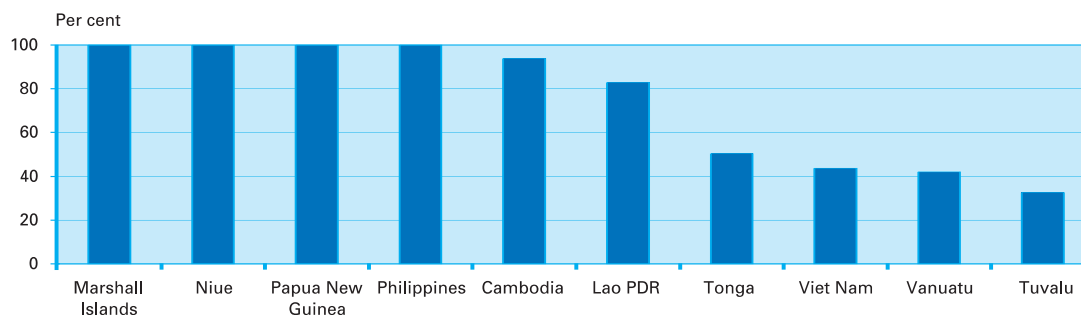
teenage pregnancy, drug use and crime are also associated with improved levels of pre-school experience. Publicly funded early child education programmes can play an increasing role in reducing social exclusion and educational disparity. By investing in quality early learning programmes, governments can reduce the waste of resources that is the result of children having to repeat (especially the early grades), with the dual effect of improving the future of young children and saving money through increased efficiency in primary education.

Quality, according to a recent OECD study, implies a well-informed and clear vision of aims, strong partnerships with families and primary schools, well thought out policies for access, high standards of staffing and training and a long-term agenda for research and evaluation. There are a number of risks governments face when reducing budgets for early childhood, or even when allowing budgets and early childhood coverage levels to stagnate. The most serious risk is that of lowering the quality of child-care centres. Without sufficient budgets for training, for regular supervision and inspection, for ensuring hygienic and safe environments and for appropriate materials, child-care centres can run the risk of being of such poor quality as to be detrimental to the well-being of children. This is true of both public and private pre-schools.

As can be seen below, there are tremendous differences between countries in regard to the percentage of pre-school teachers who have been trained. Without investing in the basics required for quality, including pre-service training, regular in-service training and professional support, regular supervision and the provision of materials and learning aids, governments cannot expect full returns for their investment in early childhood education. In the graph on the following page, it should be noted that while Papua New Guinea and Lao PDR have high levels of trained ECE teachers, overall national coverage is quite low. As countries scale up their provision of ECE, it is important that they plan for the requirements for trained teachers, and that they expand their pre-service training capacity accordingly.

It is also important to note that appropriate care of the young child interrelates with health, nutritional status and psycho-social development of the child. Infants who are well-nourished will have better cognitive development than malnourished children, while children who are well-nourished and also receive appropriate stimulation and care will have even higher rates of development. This is not a cause and effect relationship, but an example of the interrelatedness of interventions on behalf of the young child and an indication of the importance for government, communities and families to continue to invest more in young children in order to ensure that they reach their full potential.

Figure 3.5 Trained teachers in pre-primary education, 2001



Source: UNESCO. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005

Action Points

- Each government should play a crucial role in **ensuring minimum standards** and improving the quality of early learning. Different forms of early learning have their values and as such should all be recognized by statistics bureaus monitored for quality and supported in terms of training, materials and supervision. In particular, government supervision should ensure that private day-care centres without trained teachers, proper hygiene and sanitation, without learning materials or toys, and safety features, should not be allowed to operate.
- The privatization of pre-schools should be complemented with **free or subsidized opportunities** for the disadvantaged and poor.
- The more that parents recognise the value of good early learning, the more they will be able to advocate for it in their community. Therefore, **raising public awareness** and focusing attention on what is required to achieve quality in an early learning centre or pre-school will help ensure the quality of centres.
- To enhance the work of pre-schools and early learning centres, **parenting education** components should be planned and supported. Extension into the home, through parent days, parent self-learning materials, special events or meetings is a proven way of increasing the impact of early learning and educating parents on how to optimize their child's development.

SITUATION REVIEW ON QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Trends

While access to primary education has increased significantly in most countries of East Asia and the Pacific, there are still serious concerns about the quality of education being provided. School attendance is just a prerequisite of education. For learning to take place, the quality of education is crucial. Moreover, access to education of low quality also reduces future enrolment – children leave school through boredom and similarly, recognizing school's irrelevance, parents find better uses for their children's time than sending them to school.

Quality in an education system implies quality in five key elements: learners; processes; environment; content; and outcomes. "Quality learners" refers to

students who do not have developmental delays due to malnutrition in their early years, who are fed breakfast and lunch during school days, who do not suffer from worm infestations and disease, and who are not victims of violence, abuse or exploitation at home. "Quality processes" rely on teachers who are well trained and regularly supervised in child-centred methodologies and creative teaching/learning activities. "Quality content" covers relevant and practical subject matter that ensures mastery of reading, writing and mathematics and, when necessary, the use of languages of instruction that students can understand. "Quality learning environments" includes quality classroom spaces, the provision of toilets and water for drinking and washing, and a protective, safe atmosphere. A quality learning environment also

refers to more basic issues, such as the provision of textbooks, blackboards and other learning materials. “Quality outcomes” involve regular systems of assessing progress so that teachers can be assured that all students can master the basic competencies of each grade. Attention to all five of these dimensions can together ensure a quality education system.

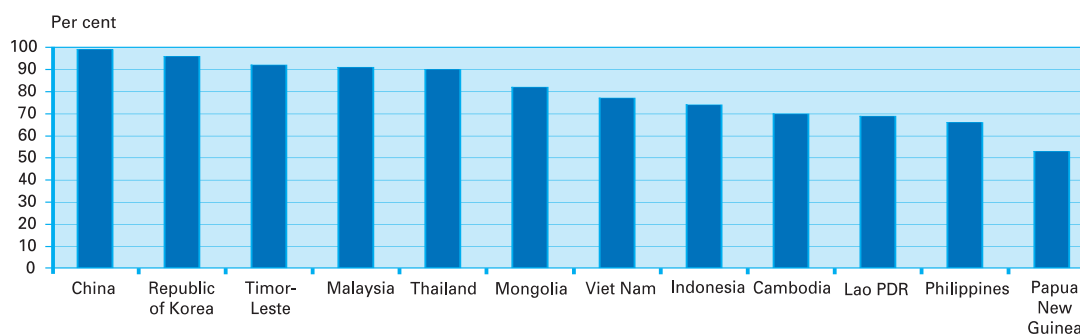
Access to quality education can vary significantly between different population groups, e.g. rich and poor, remote and urban, boys and girls. Schools with a relatively low resource base will not have the same level of quality processes, of quality learners or of quality environment as more affluent schools. Less affluent schools may not have textbooks for all their students, may not have trained teachers, may not have students who have had access to organized early learning – all factors that have a direct impact on quality and learning. Teachers may also have biases in terms of their treatments of boys and girls – calling on boys more often and seating girls in the back, or beating and humiliating boys, resulting in their dropping out. Without measures to address gaps in quality, there will continue to be disparities in outcomes – between boys and girls, between ethnic minorities and national majorities, between wealthier and poorer remote schools – with the potential for perpetuating disparities for generations to come.

Quality is difficult to measure directly, so we often use several other statistics as proxy indicators. Below we present a graph of **primary completion rates**, which shows a range of nearly 100 per cent of children completing their primary education in China and in the Republic of Korea, down to just over 50 per cent in Papua New Guinea. Completion rates give us a good indication of whether schools have a strong enough attraction to keep children enrolled and engaged throughout the primary cycle. As stated above, schools with low quality tend to lose students, and schools of high quality tend to keep students – even

students from poor and disadvantaged households. Other factors affecting completion are the direct and indirect costs of schooling, language barriers, incomplete schools in remote areas, violence and bullying in schools and other social factors. Low quality can result in high dropout and repetition rates and low completion rates, all of which represent a significant waste of resources.

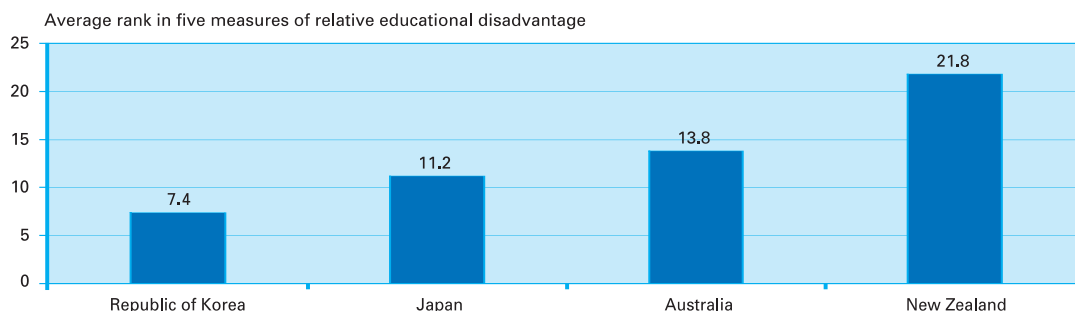
Another aspect of disparity is the differences found in student performance between rural and remote provinces and urban centres, and between affluent and poor students. Two international studies of student achievement (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS)) enable an examination of the disparities between the highest, average and lowest performers within countries as well as a comparison of this disparity across countries. The gap between the levels of achievement would not be considered inequitable if this represented the different natural abilities of children and if all students were achieving to their full potential. The TIMSS and PISA studies measured the inequality, or relative gap in test scores between the 5th percentile and 50th percentiles, which included four countries in this region (Republic of Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand). As can be seen on the following page, the relative gap in the Republic of Korea was three times less than that of New Zealand and half that of Australia’s. The reasons for the differences in the relative gap between average and low performing students is still not clear, but the social and economic consequences of such disparities are likely to be significant and are most probably intergenerational. Similar research has yet to be carried out in programme countries in East Asia and the Pacific but we can assume that there will be great differences in learning achievement between groups when analysed by economic status, by urban/rural and by sex.

Figure 3.6 Primary school completion rate, 2001



Sources: World Bank. World Development Report 2004; MDG reports (Indonesia, Philippines, Viet Nam); Timor-Leste: Ministry of Education and Culture. Statistik Pendidikan Menurut Jender, 1996

Figure 3.7 Difference between lowest and average test scores



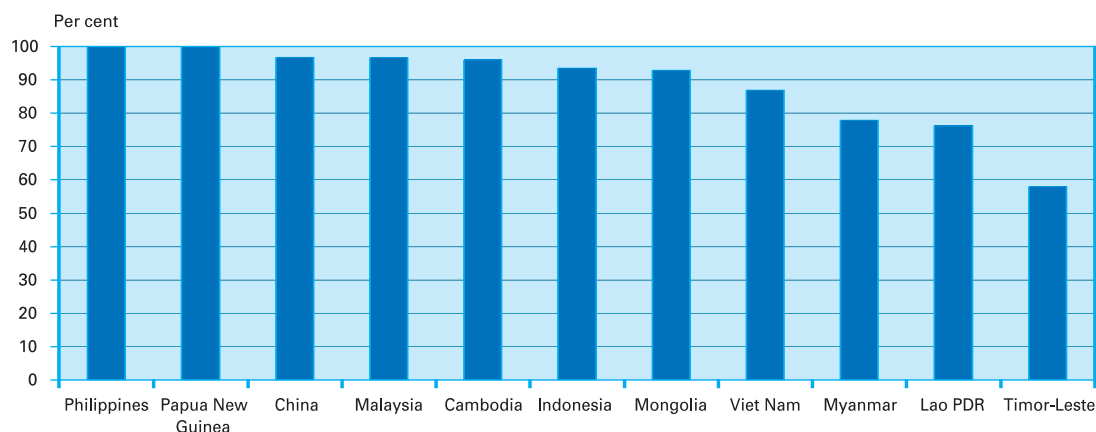
Source: Innocenti Report Card, Issue No.4, November 2002

The Child Friendly School (CFS) framework has been developed to assist in increasing education quality. CFS interventions have five dimensions, which address three of the main pillars of quality mentioned above. A child-friendly school is inclusive and child-seeking; effective and child-centred; protective, safe and healthy; gender sensitive and responsive; and actively engaged with students, parents and communities. Substantial experience in the region with CFS has shown that sustained quality improvements are indeed possible, even in poor and remote schools. Excellent examples of CFS models working through communities and parent-teacher associations to improve school quality can be found in Thailand, Vanuatu and the Philippines. In Mongolia, a national CFS policy was adopted in early 2004, paving the way for the introduction of CFS into pre-service and in service teacher training programmes. CFS is currently being implemented, with support from UNICEF, UNESCO and national governments, in 50 countries globally and in nearly 20 countries of this region. Local commitment, central-level leadership, and

technical support at all levels of implementation are crucial success factors in attaining quality education through CFS.

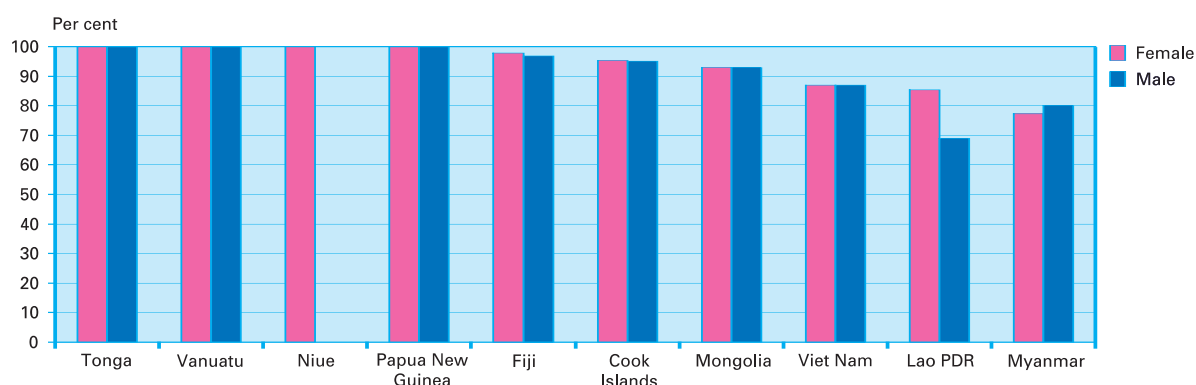
Teacher-pupil ratios are another way of looking at the potential for quality education, with the assumption that the larger the class-size, the more difficult it is for the teacher to deliver quality instruction. In the East Asia and Pacific region, average primary classroom size ranges from over 50 students per teacher in Cambodia to under 20 students per teacher in Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand, Japan and Malaysia – countries that are known for the quality of their education systems. Disparity in pupil-teacher ratios between rural and urban schools exists in all countries, often with semi-urban schools struggling with overcrowded conditions and poor remote schools with smaller catchment areas having lower ratios. But research in OECD countries found that class size alone does not have a direct impact on learning achievement. Only when accompanied by other inputs is it an important element in quality.

Figure 3.8 Trained teachers in primary education, 2001



Source: UNESCO. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005

Figure 3.9 Trained teachers in primary education, 2001



Source: UNESCO. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005

Another proxy indicator for quality is the **percentage of trained teachers** in the school system. While there are large disparities in the definition of trained and qualified teachers across the region, from eight years of education with three years of training, to completion of university with specialization in teaching, the graph above shows how difficult it is for some countries to recruit and retain trained teachers. The lack of trained teachers is especially high in remote rural areas, where it is difficult to recruit teachers locally and where urban teachers often refuse to be assigned. It is worth noting that through intensive efforts to provide accredited in-service teacher training, Lao PDR has been able to raise the number of trained primary teachers from less than 50 per cent in 1995 to nearly 80 per cent today. In ensuring the recruitment of teachers from ethnic minority groups not proficient in the national language, special provisions can be adopted for hiring teachers with lower education qualifications if provided with special training and follow-up support, as has been done in Viet Nam and Cambodia. The issue of language is also a challenge in Timor-Leste, where Portuguese and Tetum are the two official languages used in schools but may not necessarily be the mother tongue of the teachers or students. This in turn affects the quality of teaching, enrolment levels and the learning achievement of children.

One aspect of educational interventions missing from almost all countries of the region is a systematic process of **assessing student achievement**. This is not to be confused with national exams, which serve as gate-keepers for access to higher education. Rather,

this refers to the systematic use of assessment to assure that all students are acquiring the basic competencies from the curriculum, and which allows schools and teachers to take remedial action if they find that students are not learning as expected. At present, only a few countries are instituting such assessment systems, although a core group of seven countries (DPR Korea, Mongolia, China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Timor-Leste) has started to collaborate with UNICEF on a regional pilot to assess learning achievement in primary schools. Viet Nam and Lao PDR are also working with the World Bank on building national learning achievement systems.

In secondary schools, ensuring quality is essential for keeping students enrolled until they complete the full secondary cycle. Secondary schools provide protective environments for children. Integrating life skills approaches in the classroom equips students with the skills they need to avoid high-risk behaviour through informed choice as such mitigating the chances of them contracting HIV/AIDS and reducing incidences of substance abuse, illegal activities, or premature sex. Practical livelihood skills, provided to adolescents through quality secondary systems, also help ensure that students can earn incomes and that the process of secondary education is perceived as worth completing. Without paying increasing attention to secondary education, and budgeting for the needs of adolescents for relevant and practical quality education, nations will not be producing the trained young work force needed to drive national economies in the future.

Action points

- **Teacher quality** can be improved by the use of 'model schools' and practice teaching in pre-service training. Regular in-service training and teacher development programmes can also transform classroom teaching and help to make the bridge from theory to practice in the classroom. Regular and professional support and supervision, requiring investment by the education ministries, is also a key element of quality. These investments include more supervisors and the cost of their travel to get out and visit schools, as well as opportunities for teachers and headmasters to develop professionally and to be rewarded for their efforts.
- **Curricula can be improved** by decentralizing authority and building local capacity for curriculum modification. We need to allow schools to tap into local knowledge and community experts to make learning practical for the needs of the community. Provincial and district education offices must be equipped with the tools, capacity and budget to develop local materials, using community experts and students as authors – in local languages if required.
- Teaching will be more effective for those who do not speak the main national language if there is **bi-lingual education**, and if special learning programmes for ethnic minorities are developed to support their transition to the use of national language. This may imply high initial costs, but the impact in terms of providing these groups with education and the resultant economic and social benefits will more than return the investment within one generation. These bi-lingual and transition programmes have to be of high enough quality to be effective. Local language programmes for three hours per week do not constitute a bi-lingual programme and will not have the same effect as bi-lingual education.
- Without **assessment**, the quality of teaching cannot systematically improve. As such so countries need to develop systematic methods for the assessment of student achievement. Such assessments are different from the 'gate keeping' function of school-leaving exams (e.g. between primary and secondary school); rather, they are instead a means of assessing learning achievement and of ensuring that all children learn.
- **Textbooks** are still an issue for many countries in the region. An education system without school books for all children is like a health system without vaccines. It is within the grasp of every government to ensure that every classroom has enough learning materials for students. Systems for the timely printing, storage and distribution of learning materials require strong coordination, teamwork and a regular budget.

There is no doubt that East Asia and the Pacific has done more than any other region to increase access to education over the past 30 years.

Between 1990 and 2000 there was a general expansion of pre-school coverage in the region, but more recent trends suggest that in several countries, the coverage of pre-primary education has stagnated and in some cases declined.

While primary enrolments have increased significantly in most countries in the East Asia and Pacific region, serious concerns remain in regard to disparities in access and the quality of education being provided.



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