Education Working Paper

Bridging the Gap between Education Policy, Planning and Practice: Establishing and Effecting National Minimum Quality Service Standards for Effective Schools in Pacific Island Countries

Simon J. Molendijk
Prof Steven J. Coombs & Dr Madhumita Bhattacharya

unicef
for every child

EAPR/Pacific/Education

Abstract[1]
Low student literacy outcomes are of great concern to Governments in the Pacific region and especially the least developed Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) of Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. To further enhance student learning outcomes, the author argues that schools need to become more effective. This paper examines how key elements of school effectiveness have been integrated into national minimum quality service standards (NMQSS) aimed at improving school effectiveness in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. To encourage sustainability, these standards were incorporated into national school-based management and/or school grants systems in the three countries. The authors[2] suggest that introducing the characteristics of effective schools with systems for school-based management and school grants allow schools to initiate local solutions to improve school effectiveness and achieve desired targets for school outcomes.

Key words: Pacific, Education, Quality, School Effectiveness, School Standards

Introduction
Even though primary school student literacy and numeracy learning outcomes in the Pacific have gradually improved over the last decade, low student literacy rates continue to be of great concern to PICT governments. Only 46 per cent of both Year 4 and Year 6 students participating in the 2015 Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) met or exceeded expected literacy proficiency levels.[i] The Pacific Community has set a target that at least 50 per cent of Year 4 and 6 children achieve minimum literacy and numeracy standards by 2022.[ii] Primary school enrolment rates in PICTs stabilized between 1999 and 2012 to an average of around 90 per cent, according to UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Education for All (EFA) reports.[iii] These results shows that PICTs continue to struggle to provide quality education for all school-aged children of the Pacific

To equip learners with the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes required to strengthen school performance and student learning outcomes, the concept of school effectiveness has increasingly captured the attention of researchers, policymakers, government officials, educators, parents and other stakeholders.[iv] No standard definition exists for the concept of school effectiveness; however, recent school effectiveness studies can be divided into the following two groups[v]: studies in which the school effectiveness concept focuses on school outcomes and achievements[vi] and studies that seek to identify the "key features" of effective schools.[vii]

A considerable number of studies have explored the key attributes of schools that have been effective in improving school outcomes.[viii] International research suggests the following characteristics are associated with effective schools: (i) an orderly and safe environment conducive to learning; (ii) student time on task; (iii) regular monitoring of students' progress to improve performance and behaviour; (iv) good instructional leadership; (v) a clear vision understood by all stakeholders including parents; (vi) high expectations for success; (vii) positive relations between parents, teachers and school leaders; (viii) emphasizing student rights and responsibilities; (ix) developing staff skills at the school site; (x) ensuring effective teaching and learning in class; and, (xi) active participation of parents in school activities and processes.[ix]

The concept of school effectiveness has not yet been widely applied to the study of education structures in PICTs and existing research on assessing school effectiveness in the context of the Pacific region is outdated.[x] Data presented in this paper was collected through a literature review of school effectiveness as well as research on school-based management. In addition, the first author carried out action field research whilst providing technical support to the Governments of Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu in developing NMQSS for effective schools. This article also presents a case study on defining the concept of school effectiveness in these three countries based on a UNICEF-supported initiative to promote child-friendly education. The case study describes how a stand-alone child-friendly school (CFS) initiative was transformed through the development and implementation of NMQSS for effective schools that are consistent with the key characteristics for effective schools summarized above. It is further argued that the process to develop and implement NMQSS for effective schools detailed in the case study can be a successful policy, planning and practice blueprint for other countries in the Pacific region and beyond. This article also submits that minimum quality service standards for effective schools can be used to bridge the gap between national education policy and school-level practice. Moreover, the integration of such standards into national school-based management and school grants programmes is a viable approach to further strengthening school effectiveness and access to quality education in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

This paper will first explore educational challenges in the Pacific region generally and then examine how they relate more specifically to the least developed countries of Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. A literature review follows of global school effectiveness research and best practices for adopting the key characteristics that researchers have found make schools most effective. The literature review includes an analysis of devolved decision-making practices in the education sector. A case study is presented next that describes the promotion, in a sustainable manner, of the concept of school effectiveness in the Pacific through the development of minimum quality service standards for effective schools. The article concludes with recommendations for the development and roll-out of minimum quality service standards for schools.

The regional context: Quality education challenges in the least developed countries of the South Pacific
Even though the Governments of Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu continue to increase investments in their respective education sectors, significant challenges persist in strengthening school effectiveness and providing equitable access to quality basic education. These challenges include stagnating primary school enrolment rates, low rates of transition from primary to secondary education and poor student literacy and numeracy outcomes.

The net enrolment rate (NER) for primary education in Kiribati dropped from 93 per cent in 2008 to 82 per cent (girls: 83 per cent) in 2011[xi] while the NER for primary education in Solomon Islands stabilized[xii] to around 89 per cent (girls: 89 per cent) between 2008 and 2013. The NER for primary school-aged children in Vanuatu dropped from 88 per cent (girls: 88 per cent) in 2011 to 86 per cent (girls: 86 per cent) in 2015.[xiii]

The rate of transition from primary to secondary school remains low in the three countries. In Kiribati, 64 per cent (girls: 70 per cent) of students who had completed primary education were found to be enrolled in junior secondary schools in 2011.[xiv] Only 38 per cent of boys and 39 per cent of girls in Solomon Islands who had completed primary education were found to be enrolled in lower secondary schools in 2013.[xv] In Vanuatu, 35 per cent (girls: 38 per cent) of students who had completed primary education were enrolled in secondary education in 2015.[xvi]

Student literacy and numeracy outcomes remain critically low in the three PICTs. Kiribati Standardised Test of Achievement results for 2011 revealed that only 22.5 per cent of Year 6 students had performed satisfactorily in English language; more than 60 per cent performed satisfactorily in the Kiribati language; and, only 18 per cent scored satisfactorily in numeracy. Solomon Islands Standardised Test of Achievement results for 2010 found that only 40 per cent of Year 6 students had scored satisfactorily in literacy and 45 per cent performed satisfactorily in numeracy.[xvii] Vanuatu Standardised Test of Achievement results for 2009 revealed that only 18 per cent of Year 4 students had performed satisfactorily in literacy and 24 per cent scored satisfactorily in numeracy.[xviii] Results for the 2015 PILNA showed some improvement in student numeracy learning outcomes, but on average only 46 per cent of Year 4 and 6 children in PICTs had achieved desired literacy targets.[xix]

To address the issues outlined above, the Governments of Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have welcomed support from development partners that aligns with their respective education sector strategies to further strengthen equitable access to quality education.

Literature review on school effectiveness
To enable learners to adapt to the rapidly changing market trends of the 21st century, there is a need to improve school performance and equip learners with relevant knowledge skills and attitudes.[xx] The concept of school effectiveness is often debated. Bollen et al. have argued that school effectiveness is "the extent to which any educational institution… given certain means and resources fulfils its objectives without incapacitating its… resources and without placing undue strain on its members."[xxi] Several studies have attempted to quantify the impact of school factors on student outcomes[xxii] and the effects generally have been found to be much greater in studies of schools in developing countries. For example, Jaap Scheerens and Roel Bosker suggested that schools, on average, account for around 5 per cent to 18 per cent of the achievement differences between students after control for initial differences.[xxiii] Scheerens and Bosker further suggested that the combined effect of school and teachers account for 15 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively of student outcomes.[xxiv]

More recent school effectiveness studies can largely be divided into two groups – research that focuses on school outcomes and studies that emphasize the importance of school characteristics.[xxv] Some scholars[xxvi] equate school effectiveness with the ability of schools to achieve desired outcomes while others[xxvii] define school effectiveness as the congruence between school objectives and achievements. David Kirk and Terry Jones[xxviii] have postulated that effective schools have the following unique characteristics that are correlated with student success: (i) a clearly articulated school mission that is communicated to staff, parents and students; (ii) positive relations between teachers and parents/caregivers to ensure their active involvement in the education of their children; (iii) regular monitoring of students' progress to improve their performance and behaviour; (iv) orderly and safe learning environments that are free from threat and harm; (v) effective instructional leadership that ensures that expectations for student achievement are understood across classrooms; (vi) high expectations for success and school staff that believes and demonstrates that all students can master the essential school curriculum; and (vii) student time on task. In addition to these

characteristics, scholars Charles Teddlie and David Reynolds have argued the following are also critical to school effectiveness: emphasizing student rights and responsibilities; developing staff skills at the school site; and ensuring effective teaching and learning in class.[xxix]

Thus, research suggests that a focus both on outcomes and characteristics is essential to school effectiveness. Outcomes provide important information about whether schools have reached their goals while the characteristics are akin to a road map for stakeholders in education to further enhance the effectiveness of their respective schools. If school outcomes are considered the destination for effective schools and school characteristics the road map then school-based management (SBM) and the provision of school grants are the vehicles to achieve effective school outcomes.

SBM refers to the exercise of management authority and leadership at the level of the school allowing for increased autonomy in decisions about their human, material and financial resources.[xxx] Research has shown that the benefits of SBM include increased democratic decision-making that is more relevant and less bureaucratic; enhanced effectiveness through greater autonomy and accountability of the local stakeholders; and greater mobilization of resources.[xxxi] Furthermore, SBM and school grants anchored in an integrated education policy allow schools to initiate local solutions to become more effective and achieve desired school outcomes.[xxxii] However, SBM and school grants must be implemented carefully to yield the benefits. Ownership of SBM by the intended beneficiaries – namely, teachers and parents – can be poor if it is introduced in developing countries by external development partners. In addition, weak government support of schools particularly in remote disadvantaged areas hampers effective implementation of SBM.[xxxiii]

SBM should not be an end in itself; rather, SBM is most effective when it focuses on building professional learning communities, developing two-way relationships between schools and their communities, and establishing a framework for external accountability.[xxxiv] Preconditions, strategies and interventions can increase the probability of SBM having a positive impact on the quality of education.[xxxv] These include having in place a minimum of resources, competent teachers and committed head teachers with essential management and leadership skills. The development of an integrated policy at the central level that explicitly aims at strengthening school management and the role of head teachers and robust support from local education authorities are also important.[xxxvi]

Scholars Kerri Briggs and Priscilla Wohlstetter synthesized research findings from major SBM studies to identify the essential elements of a successful SBM strategy. By comparing schools that used SBM successfully with schools that struggled with implementing SBM, they found that SBM can improve instructional programmes and result in higher levels of student learning. The research identified eight elements of schooling associated with successful SBM: leadership, vision, resources, power, decision-making authority, knowledge and skills, information, and rewards.[xxxvii]

Clear vision also is considered a critical element of school effectiveness. It is therefore argued in this paper that establishing a national vision for effective schools through the development and introduction of minimum quality service standards for schools by governments helps to guide national education systems and schools in becoming more effective. Moreover, the potential exists to use such standards to bridge the gap between education policies, planning and practice. A child-friendly school (CFS) initiative, supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children, was designed based on the key characteristics for effective schools described above and promotes devolved management through the introduction of SBM. Globally, UNICEF and Save the Children have supported this initiative to further strengthen equitable access to quality education.[xxxviii]

Case study: CFS initiative in the South Pacific
The CFS initiative was chosen for this case study because the initiative promotes the establishment of effective schools through devolved SBM and national school grant systems using NMQSS for schools to further strengthen equitable access to quality education. The CFS

framework will be introduced to help readers better understand the CFS principles and how these are linked to a literature review on effective schools that was presented in the previous section. A description follows of the process to develop and integrate NMQSS in devolved planning processes. It is anticipated that the introduction of these standards will further strengthen school effectiveness in the UNICEF-targeted countries of Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Introduction to the CFS framework
The CFS initiative is firmly anchored in the United Nations' Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Moreover, the CFS initiative aims to establish a holistic, rights-based and child-participatory approach to educational development that promotes equitable access to education, improvements in student learning outcomes, and decentralized governance through SBM.[xxxix]

The CFS initiative supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning" all as well as the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which aims to mobilize all countries and partners around this ambitious SDG and its associated targets. This Framework for Action proposes measures for implementing, coordinating, financing and monitoring the 2030 education agenda to ensure equal education opportunity for all.[xl]

The UNICEF education strategy outlined in the UNICEF Strategic Plans 2014–2017 and 2018-2021[xli] are based on international education agreements such as Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals, SDGs as well as Education 2030 and aims to achieve equitable access to quality basic education for all children. The 2014-2017 strategy promotes the establishment of national educational policies and quality service standards that are consistent with educational development objectives set by national governments and similar to benchmarks in place in the United Kingdom[xlii] and the United States of America[xliii], which are based on effective schools models. Global evaluation of UNICEF CFS programming found that 69 countries around the world have adopted national quality service standards based on the CFS concept.[xliv]

UNICEF has traditionally supported the CFS initiative through the following activities: (i) introducing the CFS model to planners, practitioners and key UNICEF partners; (ii) building the capacity of decision makers and practitioners to develop CFS models; and, (iii) providing technical and financial support for the implementation of CFS initiatives.[xlv]

To further scale up and mainstream CFS models in education systems in East Asia and the Pacific, best practices point to embedding and institutionalizing CFS in teacher education in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as these are the least developed countries in the Pacific.[xlvi] In his paper, 'Rolling Out the Child-Friendly School Package in East Asia and the Pacific: Observations and recommendations for UNICEF's consideration', Sheldon Shaeffer also recommended capacity development interventions at the national level. These include the following: (i) provision of orientation on CFS for ministers of education and other high-level officials; (ii) development of a national CFS strategy that details CFS standards; teacher competencies; indicators; and, assessment tools and mechanisms; and (iii) development of a CFS implementation strategy.[xlvii]

The UNICEF CFS global evaluation report concluded that the CFS initiative has had a significant and worldwide impact.[xlviii] The evaluation also found that the CFS initiative has provided ministries of education (MoEs) around the world with a useful and relevant framework for improving education that promotes child development and is inclusive, participatory and responsive.[xlix]

The CFS initiative in the Pacific encompasses the five following interrelated principles which are closely aligned to the characteristics of effective schools that were outlined in the literature review above:

1) Improved access to and inclusion in learning – The right of all female and male school-age children to access quality education and students taking joint responsibility for their learning.

2) Effective teaching and learning – Effective teaching and learning in class is realized by qualified teachers who have high success expectations, monitor their students' progress to improve their performance and behaviour, and ensure high time on task for all students.

3) Healthy, protective and safe school environments – An orderly and safe school environment where children are protected from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

4) Active participation by communities – Positive relations between parents, teachers and school leaders through a dynamic involvement of parents in school activities and processes, such as SBM.

5) Efficient school management and leadership – A clear vision of an effective school, which is understood by all stakeholders including parents, and good instructional leadership to ensure teachers receive the best possible support at the school site to further strengthen their teaching skills and practices.

The CFS framework is an aspirational educational model that does not always align with local education supply and demand realities. Implementation can be quite resource intensive and consequently national governments cannot always sustain CFS interventions. The next section will address these issues and describe how untenable stand-alone CFS interventions have transformed into sustainable NMQSS for effective schools and integrated in national SBM and school grants systems in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Towards a sustainable CFS approach
CFS initiatives in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu initially focused predominantly on short-term capacity development of teachers and community members in a select number of schools and islands. The interventions increased awareness about the role of parents and communities in establishing child-friendly schools and improving physical school environments. UNICEF financial inputs mainly went to consultants who organized and carried out training programmes to develop the capacity of human resources.

By 2010, mounting evidence collected during UNICEF monitoring visits suggested that the CFS initiative was not bringing about the changes that were expected. CFS evaluations carried out in 2011 in Vanuatu and in Solomon Islands in 2012[l] confirmed that even though school environments were generally more appealing than non-targeted schools, student learning outcomes had not changed significantly. In addition, MoEs in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu indicated that CFS initiatives in their respective countries were considered a stand-alone UNICEF projects that were not integral to national planning documents such as the Kiribati Education Sector Strategic Plan, National Education Action Plan in Solomon Islands and the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy. The lack of commitment for and ownership by national Governments for the CFS initiative spurred changes to the UNICEF Pacific strategy to further promote the holistic CFS approach in these countries and the development and roll-out of NQMSS for effective schools.

The Governments of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu introduced national school grant systems to strengthen access to quality education in 2008 and 2010, respectively. Research in Vanuatu revealed a need to link school grants to NMQSS to ensure efficient use of school funds.[li]

To encourage commitment from MoEs in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the first author introduced the NMQSS concept during meetings with senior education officials and explained how the CFS concept links to national planning documents and processes in the respective countries. Details were provided about how the NMQSS help education officials at national, provincial and school levels better align national education policies and priorities with school-level practices to further enhance equitable access, quality and management of education in their respective countries. In addition, senior education officials received information on how these standards could be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes as well as school accreditation processes. Following these meetings, MoEs in

Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu indicated a commitment to implementing NMQSS based on the principles of the CFS initiative and invited UNICEF Pacific to assist them in developing the standards. The first author subsequently was tasked with supporting the MoEs in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu develop minimum quality service standards for their respective countries. An overview of the NMQSS development and implementation process, based on the field experiences of the author, is presented in **Box 1: Steps required to develop and implement NMQSS for schools**.

The first author provided technical support to education officials from Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to analyse existing standards and relevant documents such as standards for principals, head teachers and classroom teachers, education regulation orders, education acts and inspectorate tools to ensure NMQSS aligned with these documents. National workshops were organized in each country to draft standards and progress indicators, based on this analysis that linked to the five CFS principles and defined each respective national vision for an effective school. To ensure broad support for and ownership of the NMQSS, education officials from national, provincial and school levels were invited to share their ideas during these workshops. In Vanuatu, the MoE invited to the workshop development partners from the education sector such as Australia and New Zealand, Peace Corps, and Save the Children Australia. In retrospect, other education sector stakeholders such as teacher associations and representatives from key sectors such as child protection, health, water, sanitation and hygiene also should have been encouraged to participate at these workshops to bolster intersectoral commitment to roll out and monitor the standards nationally.

Workshop participants drafted 39 standards in Kiribati, 31 in Solomon Islands and 53 in Vanuatu. Later it was noted that the number of standards was too large and some described schools of excellence rather than minimum quality service standards for schools. Thus, in retrospect, it would have been better to limit the number of standards drafted at these initial workshops to between 15 and 20 and to stress that the standards are meant to delineate the minimum requirements each school should meet to be effective.

In Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the first author also assisted MoEs in developing progress indicators for each standard. In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, these standards and progress indicators were reviewed and revised at provincial consultation meetings where participants were asked to prioritize the standards. Local stakeholders in education attended the meetings, including provincial and district education officers, head teachers, classroom teachers, community leaders, parents and student representatives. In Kiribati, senior education officials, head teachers, principals and classroom teachers from South Tarawa participated in this process.

The results of these consultation meetings were consolidated and presented to all departments of the respective MoEs. In Vanuatu, officials from the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's Office as well as development partners such as Australia and New Zealand, Peace Corps and Save the Children Australia participated in the consultation meeting.

The Kiribati Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports opted to maintain all 39 standards that had been drafted while the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development prioritized 21 standards from the original list of 31 and the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) selected 15 of 53 standards drafted. **Box 2: Example Standard and Progress Indicators from Kiribati** describes one of the standards and accompanying progress indicators that were developed.

It should be noted that the process to develop and officially approve the standards was highly time-consuming and took about a year. However, the protracted process yielded an important benefit – strong ownership of the standards by the respective MoEs and a robust commitment to roll out the standards nationally.

In Vanuatu, Australia recruited a consultant to cost the NMQSS and determine the level of school grants required by the Government of Vanuatu for 2013 and beyond. However, the consultant was not able to complete the task because it proved too difficult to cost all the

---

> **Box 1: Steps required to develop and implement NMQSS for schools**
>
> 1. Introduce the NMQSS concept to senior education officials linking the concept to both the key characteristics of an effective school and national planning documents and processes.
>
> 2. Analyse literature of existing standards, relevant education policies and inspectorate tools.
>
> 3. Organize a national workshop on developing standards that define the key characteristics of an effective school using the results of the literature analysis.
>
> 4. Develop progress indicators for each standard.
>
> 5. Organize provincial consultation meetings to review, revise and prioritize these standards and progress indicators.
>
> 6. Organize a national workshop for government officials from all MoE departments, the Ministry of Finance and Prime Minister's Office as well as key development partners from the education and other sectors to finalize and prioritize NMQSS.
>
> 7. Conduct a NMQSS costing exercise to determine the level of school grant required for subsequent years.
>
> 8. Secure official endorsement of NMQSS.
>
> 9. Develop NMQSS information, education and communication materials as well as a guidebook that explain the standards.
>
> 10. Develop a strategic communications plan to raise awareness among all stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels about the NMQSS and how they can help achieve these standards.
>
> 11. Integrate the NMQSS into school-based management systems.
>
> 12. Provide frequent supportive monitoring and supervision of the implementation of NMQSS through the development and implementation of school-level improvement plans.
>
> Source: First author

standards. In retrospect, the person tasked with costing the NMQSS ought to have been involved in the process from the onset to provide guidance on how NMQSS may be developed to ensure they can be costed.

The standards were endorsed in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.[lii] Information, education and communication materials were developed in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to raise awareness about and promote the minimum quality service standards. The MoET in Vanuatu also developed a NMQSS guidebook,[liii] with the support of the first author, for all stakeholders in education, including MoET officials at the national, provincial and school levels, community leaders, and parents. The guidebook provides an explanation of the standards as well as practical ideas on how stakeholders can help to achieve those standards in their respective schools. In addition, the MoET in Vanuatu has developed a strategic communications plan to inform all stakeholders at national, provincial and school levels about the standards and what they can do to contribute to achieving these standards at the school level.

MoEs in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have integrated NMQSS in their respective school improvement planning manuals as

---

> **Box 2: Example Standard and Progress Indicators from Kiribati** **Standard:** Every school-aged child is enrolled in Primary and Junior Secondary School
>
> **Progress Indicators:**
> a) The Head Teacher/Principal has a list of students enrolled in their school.
> b) The School Committee members have identified the out-of-school children in the catchment area and the reasons why these children are not enrolled.
> c) The School Committee members report the out-of-school children in the school catchment area to the Head Teacher/Principal.
> d) The Head Teacher/Principal takes action to enroll all these out-of-school children.
>
> Source: Government of Kiribati School Improvement Plan Training for Head Teachers, Principals, SIP Committee Members: Participants' Handbook published in 2013 by the Ministry of Education

part of their SBM programmes.[liv] As a result, an increasing number of schools in these countries are developing and implementing school-level improvement plans based on their respective NMQSS with the aim of enhancing school effectiveness. To further strengthen the SBM system and finance the implementation of school-level

improvement plans, the Governments of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have linked their respective national school grants programmes to SBM. It has been hypothesized but further research is required to verify the supposition that integrating standards into SBM systems allows schools to use school grants more effectively to achieve school-level and national-level priorities. Nevertheless, for this to become reality, it is paramount that schools receive frequent supportive monitoring from local education authorities in the development and implementation of costed school-based improvement plans.[lv]

Conclusion and Recommendations

A review of international literature on effective schools and SBM concluded that school effectiveness can affect student outcomes.[lvi] The research that was analysed also stressed that at least three elements are vital to enhance school effectiveness: (i) developing and monitoring clear educational outcomes that inform education authorities and schools whether goals are being achieved; (ii) identifying and promoting the key characteristics of effective schools to increase awareness among stakeholders in education about how they may further enhance the effectiveness of their schools; and (iii) promoting devolved decision-making through SBM and the provision of school grants so that local solutions can be actioned to further enhance school effectiveness. The CFS case study from the Pacific presented in this paper described how the characteristics of effective schools were operationalized through the development and implementation of minimum quality service standards for schools in conjunction with SBM and national school grants. As such, the paper provides the concrete steps required of countries to develop and roll out these minimum quality service standards nationwide. The conclusions of research included in the literature review and the lessons from the case study on the CFS initiation both suggest that the integration of standards into national SBM and school grants programmes is a viable approach to further strengthening school effectiveness and access to quality education. Further research will help to elucidate the extent to which the introduction of minimum quality service standards for effective schools, SBM and school grants contribute to enhanced student learning outcomes in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

In the meantime, the following key measures are recommended to advance NMQSS for effective schools in educational policy, planning and practice:

1) The case study provides a policy, planning and practice blueprint for national governments in the Pacific and beyond to successfully develop and implement minimum quality service standards for schools. It is recommended that MoEs who are interested in developing NMQSS tailor this blueprint for their country-specific context so that it meets local needs and reflects the local values and culture.

2) It is important to involve all stakeholders from the education sector including teacher associations and representatives from other key sectors such as child protection, health, water, sanitation and hygiene from the onset to encourage ownership of the NMQSS development process and its long-term sustainability. The robust engagement of diverse stakeholders also helps to ensure that governments and development partners leverage funds for schools to achieve minimum quality service standards. It is therefore advised that a NMQSS steering committee be established, which includes key stakeholders from the education sector, to oversee and legitimize the development and endorsement process.

3) NMQSS, SBM and national school grant interventions should be aligned in ensuring that local stakeholders can work towards enhancing the effectiveness of their respective school. Thus, it is recommended that MoEs develop a user-friendly implementation manual for schools that provides concrete suggestions for local stakeholders on how to use school grants to achieve minimum quality service standards. This NMQSS implementation manual, in turn, ought to be linked to high quality continuing professional development (CPD) programmes that target all school teachers including principals. CPD programmes should be school-based, incorporate curriculum changes and practices and, ideally, be similar to action research and teacher practitioner educational development models advocated by scholars John Elliot, Steven Coombs, Mark Potts and Jack Whitehead.[lvii]

4) Estimating the cost implementing minimum quality service standards for schools is important for financial planning purposes. Therefore, it is recommended that education financing researchers/consultants be recruited from the onset of the NMQSS development process.

5) National quality assurance mechanisms and tools ought to be aligned to NMQSS to ensure that these standards are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis, which, in turn, improves sustainability.

Endnotes

[i] Pacific Community Education Quality and Assessment Program, *2015 Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) Regional Report*, Pacific Community, Suva, 2016.

[ii] Learning targets are defined as the desired Pacific regional literacy and numeracy standards consensually agreed by the Pacific Community and member countries.

[iii] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the marginalized*, Oxford Press and UNESCO, Paris and Oxford and UNESCO, *Pacific EFA 2015 Review*, UNESCO, Paris and Apia, 2015.

[iv] Harris, Alma and Nigel Bennett, eds., *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: Alternative Perspectives*, Continuum, London, 2004.

[v] Alzahrani, Saeed Musaid H., Linda Hammersley-Fletcher and Geoff Bright, 'Identifying Characteristics of a "Good School" in the British and Saudi Arabian Education Systems', *Journal of Education and Practice*, vol. 7, no. 27, pp. 136–148.

[vi] Ganihar, Noorjehan N. and Sanjeevkumar S. Hangal, *School Effectiveness: Learner and Institution Perspective at Primary Level*, New York, NY: Global Vision Publishing, New Delhi, 2008; Bollen, Robert, Bert P.M. Creemers, David Hopkins, Nils Lagerweij, David Reynolds and Louise Stoll, *Making Good Schools: Linking School Effectiveness and Improvement*, Routledge, London, 1996

[vii] Kirk, David and Terry L. Jones, 'Effective Schools Assessment Report', Pearson Education, San Antonio, July 2004 and Teddlie, Charles and David Reynolds, *The International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research*, Routledge, New York, 2000.

[viii] Bollen, Robert, Bert P.M. Creemers, David Hopkins, Nils Lagerweij, David Reynolds and Louise Stoll, *Making Good Schools: Linking School Effectiveness and Improvement*, Routledge, London, 1996; Ganihar and Hangal, *School Effectiveness*; Harris and Bennett, *School Effectiveness;* and, Kirk and Jones, Effective Schools'.

[ix] Kirk and Jones, 'Effective Schools' and Teddlie and Reynolds, *The International Handbook*.

[x] Thaman, Konaiholeva H., *Good Schools (and Bad): Some issues in assessing school effectiveness in Pacific Island contexts*, Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1985

[xi] Republic of Kiribati Ministry of Education Statistics Unit, *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*, Ministry of Education, Tarawa, 2011.

[xii] Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), *MEHRD Performance Assessment Report 2006–2013*, MEHRD, November 2013.

[xiii] Republic of Vanuatu Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Unit, *Annual Statistical Report 2015*, Ministry of Education Port Vila, 2015

[xiv] Kiribati, *Digest of Education Statistics 2011.*

[xv] Solomon Islands, *Performance Assessment Report 2006–2013.*

[xvi] Vanuatu, *Annual Statistical Report 2015.*

[xvii] Solomon Islands Government MEHRD, *Performance Assessment Framework report 2009–2011*, MEHRD, August 2012.

[xviii] Republic of Vanuatu Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Unit, *Annual Statistical Report 2010–2011*, Ministry of Education, Port Vila, 2012.

[xix] Pacific Community, *2015 PILNA*.

[xx] Harris and Bennett, *School Effectiveness*.

[xxi] Bollen, et. al, *Making Good Schools*.

[xxii] Sammons, Pam and Linda Bakkum, 'Effective Schools, Equity and Teacher Effectiveness: A Review to the Literature' *Profesorado*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 10–26. Retrieved 6 November 2017 from: http://images.pearsonassessments.com/images/tmrs/tmrs_rg/EffectiveSchools.pdf.

[xxiii] Scheerens, Jaap and Roe Bosker, *The Foundations of Educational Effectiveness*, Pergamon, Oxford, UK, 1997.

[xxiv] Ibid.

[xxv] Alzahrani,et. al, Identifying Characteristics of a "Good School"'.

[xxvi] Ganihar and Hangal, *School Effectiveness*.

[xxvii] Ibid

[xxviii] Kirk and Jones, 'Effective Schools Assessment Report'.

[xxix] Teddlie and Reynolds, *The International Handbook*.

[xxx] De Grauwe, Anton, 'Improving the quality of education through school-based management: Learning from international experience', *International Review of Education*, vol. 51, July 2005, pp. 269–287

[xxxi] Ibid.

[xxxii] Ibid.

[xxxiii] Fullan, Michael and Nancy Watson, 'School-based Management: Reconceptualizing to Improve Learning Outcomes', Final paper prepared for the World Bank: "Improving Learning Outcomes in the Caribbean", Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, August 1999.

[xxxv] De Grauwe, 'Improving the quality of education'.

[xxxvi] Ibid.

[xxxvii] Briggs, Kerri L. and Priscilla Wohlstetter, 'Key Elements of a Successful School-Based Management Strategy', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, vol. 14, 2003, pp. 351–372.

[xxxviii] UNICEF Evaluation Office, *Child Friendly Schools Programming: Global Evaluation Report*, UNICEF, New York, December 2009; UNICEF, *Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals*, UNICEF, New York, 7 September 2010; and, UNICEF, *Strategic Plan 2014–2017*, UNICEF, New York, June 2014.

[xxxix] UNICEF, *Child Friendly Schools Programming*.

[xl] UNESCO, *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*, UNESCO, Paris, December 2015.

[xli] UNICEF, *Strategic Plan 2014–2017*. UNICEF, *Draft Strategic Plan 2018-2021,* UNICEF New York, June 2017.

[xlii] *Every Child Matters* (presented to United Kingdom Parliament by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury by Command of Her Majesty), The Stationery Office, Norwich, September 2003. Retrieved 9 November 2017 from: https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadabledocs/everychildmatters.pdf.

[xliii] http://www.corestandards.org/ Accessed on 04-12-2017

[xliv] United Nations Economic and Social Council, Report on the end-of-cycle review of the medium-term strategic plan 2006–2013, presented at first regular session 2013 of UNICEF Executive Board, United Nations, New York, 7 December 2012.

[xlv] Shaeffer, Sheldon, 'Rolling Out the Child-Friendly School Package in East Asia and the Pacific: Observations and recommendations for UNICEF's consideration', UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok, 2009.

[xlvi] Ibid.

[xlvii] Ibid, p. 12.

[xlviii] UNICEF, *Child Friendly Schools Programming*.

[xlix] Ibid.

[l] Haslett, Stephen and Hilary Smith, 'Evaluation of the Child Friendly Schools Programme in Isabel Province, Solomon Islands' (unpublished report), 2012.

[li] Houston, J. Reeves and B. Yiu Hing, 'Independent Review of the School Grants Scheme established under the Government of Vanuatu's Universal Primary Education policy (unpublished report), 2010.

[lii] Kiribati Ministry of Education, *School Improvement Plan (SIP) Training for Head Teachers, Principals, SIP Committee Members: Participants' Handbook*, Ministry of Education, Tarawa, 2013; Government of Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, *Whole School Development Plan Manual*, MEHRD, Honiara, 2012; and Government of Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, *Minimum Quality Service Standards*. MoET, Port Vila, 2012.

[liii] Government of Vanuatu, 'Vanuatu Minimum Quality Standards for Primary Schools', Ministry of Education, Port Vila, 2013.

[liv] Government of Vanuatu, *Primary School Improvement Planning: A capacity building training manual*, Ministry of Education, Port Vila, 2013; Solomon Islands Government, *Whole School Development Planning Manual*, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Honiara, 2012; and, Kiribati, *SIP Training*.

[lv] De Grauwe, 'Improving the quality of education'.

[lvi] Scheerens and Bosker, *The Foundations of Educational Effectiveness.*

[lvii] Elliot, John, *Action Research for Educational Change*, Open University Press, Philadelphia, 1991 and Coombs, Steven, Mark Potts and Jack Whitehead, *International Educational Development and Learning through Sustainable Partnerships: Living Global Citizenship*, Palgrave, London and New York, 2014.