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# Introduction

## – Understanding Education in the Seychelles

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Access to quality education a basic human right. It is the key to sustainable development and national/international progress. There are good reasons for the UN (United Nations, 2015) to list *quality education* as a key goal for sustainable development. Not only is it a prerequisite for many of the other goals, such as the elimination of poverty and hunger, access to good health care and decent work, as well as innovation and economic growth, and the development of industry and infrastructure. It is also the key for current and future generations to understand and respect our relationship to ourselves, each other, and the earth we are living on. Such knowledge is essential for personal growth, gender equality, respect for our oceans and life on land, and responsible consumption – other key goals listed under the 2030 Agenda. Without this knowledge and understanding, the future looks bleak, and in this sense, it is not an overstatement to claim that education is indeed a “matter of life and death”!

Given the importance of education, it is small wonder that this budget post in public expenditure often is prioritized. On a global basis, nations spend an average of approximately 4 per cent of their GDP (Gross domestic product) on education (the World Bank, 2022), but this figure varies greatly from nation to nation. Noteworthy here is that many nations that rank high in terms of GDP, innovation and sustainability, also tend to spend above average on education. For example, the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Norway), known for their innovation and high standards of living, all spend between 10-15 per cent of their total government expenditure on education. The equivalent figure for the Seychelles is around 10 per cent. In short, much of our tax money goes to education – a wise investment.

Education is also something which we all have a relationship to, and school matters tend to be widely and vigorously debated topics in media, in the Seychelles and elsewhere. The general picture that often comes across is one of declining results and standards. “Things were better back in the days”. Unlike other areas of public concern, such as health care – a domain where, by general consensus, specific professional knowledge seems to be a prerequisite for research activities – everyone seems to be an expert when it comes to education. After all, we have all gone to school and experienced education firsthand, and many parents, if not all, have

strong opinions of how schools should be run. This is understandable; we all care for our children. The general concern for matters related to education is also something which politicians are quick to home in on, and it is, and arguably should be, a focus that can decide political success or failure in elections. While the public and political engagement in educational matters should be seen as positive, there is also a danger in this.

Education is complex and there is no quick fix. A comprehensive state system must cater for all its learners, and each child has different prerequisites and needs for learning. There is no one single formula that will solve this. In addition, a school never works in isolation. Activities in even the best run school can, and will at times be, disrupted by external factors over which school leaders and teachers have little control – outside events such as a pandemic, disrupted family constellations, substance abuse, and poverty are just some examples. Running a school also means meeting various needs and demands from different parties of interest (learners, staff, parents and authorities), while still adhering to the requirements of various steering documents and... keeping within a budget. A school must also meet the ever-changing needs of society, and prepare children for a future which we know nothing about, except that it will be very different from the present. This can indeed be a balancing act.

Factors such as those listed above mean that the only constant in an education system is unpredictability and change. Consequently, no matter how strong an education system is, it needs constant development and renewal to maintain its success. We argue, however, that such development should not be driven by short term populist agendas (political or otherwise). Instead, educational development should be guided by science, systematic research and recognized experience from the field. With a vision to build knowledge for a better tomorrow, and a mission to create a forum for developing and disseminating interdisciplinary research to support progressive educational, and socio-economic transformations, ESERI wants to contribute to such sustainable educational development through this publication. All research below has been undertaken using sound scientific principles from the field of education, and the studies have been carried out by practitioners who together represent centuries of practical experience.

The texts below have been organized into four distinct themes. The first three studies deal with the topic of **inclusive education**, that is an “approach to teaching and learning based on a philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each learner to feel respected, confident and safe so as to better promote the development of his or her full potential” (Ministry of Education, 2015). **Study 1**, “Understanding Teachers’ Challenges of Inclusive Education Implementation in order to Improve Leadership in Secondary Schools in the Seychelles” by **Jenny Kilindo**,

focusses on the progress of the implementation of inclusivity in the Seychelles, and investigates teachers' and Special Needs Coordinators' perceptions, experiences and reflections of inclusive education and how it is organized in five secondary schools. Kilindo complements these perceptions and experiences with observations from the field, and thereby manages to draw up a holistic picture of the realities of implementing inclusive education in secondary schools.

Addressing the same issue but from a primary school perspective, **Study 2**, "Catering for Students' Learning Styles: A Case of a State Primary School in the Seychelles", by **Fatma Jeanine Bibi**, provides a context-based analysis of the nature and level of individual learning styles provision in one school in the Seychelles. Considering teachers' understanding of learning styles, their didactic approaches to cater for them, and the support they get to implement them, the paper comes up with some interesting observations regarding the relationship between the teachers' perceived situation with differentiated teaching and its practical reality.

**Study 3**, "Issues and Concerns in Implementation of Inclusive Education in Primary Schools in the Seychelles", by **Jina Andimignon**, also examines issues related to the implementation of inclusive education from a primary school perspective, but this time using evidence from several schools. The study identifies some deficiencies in hindering the realization of the *Inclusive Education Policy* formulated by the Seychelles Ministry of Education in 2015. Through the analysis of how Inclusive Education is perceived, practiced and managed in three primary schools of different size, the paper provides a focused overview summary of shortcomings and formulates suggestions to address them.

The second theme, **Supporting Learner Achievement**, is motivated by the Competency Based Approach (CBA) to curriculum, adopted in 2017. The theme deals with various issues of how learning institutions work to help students realise their learning potentials. In **Study 4**, "Does Leadership Training Make a Difference? - A Case Study of the Impact of Leadership Training on Curriculum Leadership and Student Performance in Six Seychelles Primary Schools", **Lina Marlene Lesperance** looks at the process of introducing a new curriculum approach, the Competency Based Approach (CBA), aimed at improving learners' success in primary schools. The study specifically examines the impact of leadership training of headteachers on curriculum leadership and student performance. An area of special interest in this study, is the relationship between headteachers and middle leaders, who are more directly involved in the implementation of the curriculum.

In **Study 5**, "Influence of Teacher Characteristics on Academic Achievement of Learners in the Seychelles", **Anne Jeremie** explores what teacher characteristics contribute to successful

learning in the classroom. Here she investigates the correlation between learner achievement and the teacher characteristics age, experience, qualification, and ICT competency. The target group investigated were primary 2 pupils, and the subjects chosen were English and Mathematics. The study points to the importance of teacher experience in assuring learner success, and stresses the importance of measures to ensure that teachers stay in the profession.

The final study in the theme **Supporting Learner Achievement**, namely **Study 6**, “Low Self-esteem: A Challenge Hindering Student Progression and Practical Advancement. A Case Study of the Seychelles Tourism Academy”, by Cecile Payet explores the extent to which students’ low self-esteem affects their ability to handle practical components of their training. Focusing on manifestations, causes and implications of students’ low self-esteem for their practical training and further professional success, the study contributes to a better understanding of the concept of self-esteem as an element of professional education.

The next theme, **Family Involvement**, is of great importance given the Seychelles government’s renewed emphasis on improving family values and education as being a ‘shared responsibility’. The theme approaches the ways in which parents and guardians can support learners, and evaluates the impact of such activities. In **Study 7**, “Family Involvement in Children’s Learning – A Case Study of its Nature, Context and Impact on Primary Level Academic Performance”, **Therese Agnes Athanase** evaluates the impact of family involvement on learners’ achievement. The ambition here is to gain a better understanding of what constitutes family involvement in the Seychelles, and what factors affect this involvement. An overarching ambition is to help inform schools to choose the most effective and appropriate ways to improve the overall relationship with parents/family in order to increase their impact on the outcomes of the learning of their children.

**Study 8**, “The Impact of Parental Engagement on Pupils’ Academic Attainment: A Case Study of a Primary School in the Seychelles” by **Agnelle Monthy** also explores the relationship between pupils’ academic attainment and their parents’ engagement in their learning. Presenting the results of an intervention, the paper demonstrates that a centralized policy-oriented approach to Parental Engagement can yield positive results, translating not only in improved academic performance, but in enhanced confidence of pupils, potentially facilitating them in long-term personal and career growth.

**Study 9**, “The Implementation and Evaluation of a Parental Involvement Intervention in Students’ Learning in the Seychelles during the COVID-19 Pandemic”, by **Jacqueline Celestine**, examines the specific case of how parents were mobilized to help their children in their learning during the COVID-19 lock-down in 2021. The study describes how a well-

structured and clearly communicated programme for parental involvement and support surprisingly improved learners' achievement despite the lock-down.

The final theme, **Building and Supporting Teacher Competencies**, approaches a key prerequisite for a functioning education system – the competence and well-being of its teachers. The theme constitutes two studies. In **Study 10**, “Issues and Concerns of Novice Teachers in the Primary Schools: A Study of Three Primary State Schools on Mahe, Seychelles”, **Barbara Medor** catalogues the factors contributing to insecurity and dissatisfaction of teachers in early years of their career, which can potentially lead to their quitting the profession and thus wasting the effort invested in their professional development. The paper suggests some steps to address the above issues and thus cut down on, or prevent, the existing teachers flow and shortage.

The final **Study 11**, “Teachers’ Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Mathematics – A case study of Early Childhood teachers in Seychelles Primary Schools”, by **Louissette Germaine Amelie**, explores primary teachers’ Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in the subject of Mathematics in primary one and two, and how this impacts on learner achievements. PCK in this context is defined as the teacher’s ability to transform content into methods that are pedagogically powerful, and that can adapt to the various abilities and backgrounds that students bring to school.

The studies are followed by a **conclusion**, where we will home in on common and particularly urgent aspects of concern highlighted by the various studies. We will also point out gaps and suggest relevant topics for future research.

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