



LESOTHO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EQUALITY (MONITORING) REPORT

Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled



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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) is implementing a World Bank funded project; Lesotho Quality Education for Equality (LEQEP) which is aimed at ‘fostering inclusive growth by targeting the least performing schools in lagging areas’¹. The objective of the project is to improve basic education service delivery and student retention in targeted schools. The project is intended to benefit the teachers and students in 312 primary schools and 65 secondary schools. Most schools covered in this project are situated in the remotest areas of Lesotho where residents rely solely on animal and crop farming.

The intended results for the project are increased teacher presence and attendance in targeted schools, improved teacher content knowledge, increased pass rates and retention rates. This project is divided into three (3) components:

- Improve the teaching and learning environment in targeted primary and secondary schools.
- Strengthening school accountability for student learning and retention in targeted schools.
- Strengthening institutional capacity and project management.

Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) as a human rights organisation, values quality inclusive education. To get a better sense of how this project is impacting vulnerable² students and their families, LNFOD is monitoring project implementation in 18 schools.

This report is divided into 4 parts:

- A. Review on Project Design
- B. School Visits
- C. General Observations
- D. Recommendations

¹ See World Bank project document page 30.

² These include students with disabilities, students who come from poor families, deserted children, HIV positive students and orphans.

REVIEW ON PROJECT DESIGN

The project documents clearly state that the project is intended to benefit all students in the target schools. The project document does not explicitly mention vulnerable students as direct beneficiaries of the project. The generalized statement of beneficiaries in the project document poses a danger of exclusion of other classes of students whose educational needs are more specific during implementation of the project.

To implement component two (2)³ of this project, a School Improvement Plan (SIP) manual will be used to give desired results. This manual contains guidelines for improvement of pass rates and retention rates. Schools are supposed to come up with a plan to improve pass rates and retention rates. The school community, school boards, parents and teachers are supposed to work together to devise a plan to overcome their challenges which cause low pass rates and low retention rates in their respective schools. At the completion of developing the plan and upon approval by MoET, school will receive funds for school improvement, save for construction. These plans are referred to as School Improvement Plan (SIP).

This manual, does not disaggregate students' data in anyway other than gender and age. This data disaggregation is likely to overlook causes to low pass rates and retention rates which are related solely to vulnerability of students. Moreover, although construction (which can enhance physical accessibility), is expressly excluded in the design of the project, some children leave schools due to physical inaccessibility. It follows therefore that if the manual is not inclusive, the implementation of this component is not likely to be inclusive.

The Special Education Unit (SEU) is a department in the MOET which is mandated to ensure access to quality education to learners with special educational needs. These learners are mostly learners with different types of disabilities. SEU elaborated that the project is focused solely on learners with visual impairment. It was explained that the main task they have to perform is to buy equipment for visually impaired learners from selected schools⁴. The unit is also going to train teachers from selected primary and secondary schools on how to utilise equipment that has been purchased under the project.

For the project to be solely focused on a certain disability type is in practicality undermining the mandate of the unit. It is not only visually impaired learners that need support in learning; learners with hearing impairment need sign language interpreters or other assistive devices to help them access education on equal basis with other learners. In the same vein, learners with physical disabilities need accessible classrooms in order to get education but the project does not cover these aspects. Students with intellectual disabilities also need support in schools to enable them to access quality education on the same basis as others.

³ This component is for Strengthening School Accountability for Student Learning and Retention in Targeted Schools

⁴ It should be noted that these schools were not originally in the project document as targeted schools.

The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) is responsible for the curricula development and maintenance in the MoET. They are also mandated to ensure quality education in schools. The NCDC team propounded that they are going to perform activities which will ensure that vulnerable learners receive quality education. These activities are teacher capacity building where teachers from selected schools will be trained on inclusive education and best teaching methods, on-going teacher content support, development of education language policy which will set out an appropriate medium of instruction for minority groups, curriculum audit which will ensure the quality of education delivered to learners and commissioning of the consultancy company on improving teaching and learning of mathematics and science in underprivileged Lesotho secondary schools.

Schools which admit students with disabilities were interviewed on the challenges presented by the current curriculum. The outcome was that the present curriculum is not inclusive because it does not accommodate learners with special educational needs. LNFOD held a meeting with the CEO curriculum where this issue was addressed. She promised that during the curriculum audit, LNFOD will be included to ensure inclusivity of the curriculum. Component 3 of the project is intended to strengthen the institutional capacity and project management of department of planning personnel. Under this component, there is going to be a curriculum audit in primary schools.

SCHOOL VISITS

The school visits were conducted in 18 schools⁵ in five different districts. The method which was employed to collect data was the use of questionnaires which were intended for parents, school board members, school principals, School Improvement Plan (SIP) facilitators and students. These questionnaires were intended to investigate into two major components of the 'Lesotho Quality Education for Equality Project' (LEQEP):

1. Low pass rates and high repeat rates
2. High drop-out rates/ low retention rates

These components will be discussed in detail in in four parts.

Low Pass Rates and High Repeat Rates

Low pass rates and high repeat rates are a major concern in the LEQEP, there are contributory factors which cause low pass rates in most schools in Lesotho, during the school visits, the following causes were found:

➤ **Absenteeism**

This has been said to be one of the major cause of low pass rates as it affect both students and teachers alike.

⁵ See annexure 1

In primary schools, students miss school mostly during spring time. This is the time when planting of crops takes place; boys help in the fields while girls take food to the boys who are planting crops in the fields. This period last from two weeks up to a month. Students also said they get absent from school to run errands which their parents tell them to perform. Most of the schools are in the remotest areas of the country and during winter it gets very cold. This is one of the reasons why students miss school because at least at home they can be warm as compared to school where there are no heating facilities or worse no proper classrooms⁶. A huge number of students in the target schools are from poor backgrounds and needs like school uniform, clothing and sanitary pads for girls are hardly ever met. This forces students to miss school whenever they lack in one of these needs. The situation is even worse for girls because they are forced to miss school for a week when they are on their periods. In addition, the absence of toilets⁷ in most schools forces girls to miss school during their menstrual cycles. A number of students also mentioned the fear of severe corporal punishment when they are late drives them to miss school. The other prevalent cause of absence is sickness, quite a number of students in these schools are HIV positive so they miss school whenever they go for their check-ups or not feeling well.

Secondary schools' students also miss school for the same reasons save to mention that due to poor backgrounds, they also miss school because they haven't paid their school fees. Unlike primary schools, secondary schools in Lesotho require school fees from students, failure to pay leads to expulsion from school until school fees are paid or refusal to write exams.

Teachers get absent from school if they have workshops to attend or when they are going to attend to their personal businesses. They pointed out that they only have seven days of leave in a year and it is barely enough as they also have things to do, so if they have to do something in town, they just leave the students. Teachers are also not excluded from absence due to sickness, whenever they are sick, they miss school. The principals mentioned that some of the teachers will procure false sick leaves just to miss school for their personal businesses. The harsh weather conditions also forces some teachers to get absent from school. There is also a concern on lack of commitment of teachers; some will just be focusing on their mobile phones or basking in the sun instead of teaching.

➤ **Unqualified Teachers**

In most primary schools, more than half of the teaching staff is unqualified. They do not possess teaching qualifications. Most of these unqualified teachers did not pass their LGCSE/COSC⁸ examinations. The qualified teachers pointed out that since the unqualified teachers are put to teach lower grades; they give poor foundation to students hence poor

⁶ See annexure 2 figures 1-3

⁷ See annexure 2 figure 4

⁸ These qualifications are equivalent to matric.

performance in grade seven exams. One teacher said that students with poor foundation get to understand essential concepts way too late into their final year which is fruitless.

Secondary schools also blamed their poor performance on the use of unqualified teachers in primary schools. The secondary schools teachers said that most of their students come from poor performing primary schools so when they are supposed to teach secondary school syllabus, they repeat what was supposed to be taught in primary schools.

➤ **Inadequate Teaching Materials**

Almost all the schools which were visited did not have adequate teaching materials; including chalk boards, text books, mathematical and scientific instruments. Inadequacy of teaching materials renders it difficult to teach some subjects mainly, science and mathematics. These are the subjects most students perform badly in second to English.

➤ **New Curriculum⁹**

The new curriculum has been introduced by the MoET, under this curriculum no student should repeat internal grades¹⁰ even if the teacher feels the student is not fit to pass into the higher grade. The teachers commented that the new curriculum has abolished failing of lagging students, i.e. from grade one to grade six students cannot be failed even if they are lagging behind in most of the subjects, this, has been said to cause low pass rates in grade seven because most of the students are not fit to sit for PLSE examinations.

➤ **Multi-Grading**

Most of the primary schools have between two to five teachers. This means that all or some teachers are supposed to teach more than one grade. Most of these teachers said they are not trained for multi-grading hence they cannot give full attention to all the grades they teach, this means that some grades suffer due to this practice. The principals mentioned that it is even more a compromising situation when an unqualified teacher teaches more than one grade.

➤ **Lack of Skills to teach Learners with Disabilities**

On the question of what the schools do to ensure that learners with disabilities get quality education, most schools with learners with disabilities said they do not do anything since they do not have skills to teach such students. Learners with disabilities, mainly intellectual disabilities, are just kept in schools without any gain not even life skills. It is only in one school that the principal said she teaches learners with intellectual/learning disabilities on their pace though she admitted that it is not enough. In the other school a deaf student is taught in local sign language that the principal and the student understands, yet there is no plan for how this student will be able to learn and communicate in secondary school.

⁹ The curriculum was intended to assess every student on what they have learned however the assessment standards have not change hence high repetition rates.

¹⁰ Grade one to six in primary schools and grade eight to nine in secondary schools.

➤ Other Causes

Other causes of low pass rates have been said to be poor nutrition which lessens concentration in class, lack of commitment of teachers and students, lack of parents' involvement in students' education and infiltration from schools with no center numbers during PSLE examinations.

Proposed Solutions to Low Pass Rates and High Repeat Rates

The SIP initiative requires the school community, i.e. principals, teachers, school boards, parents and students to propose or find solutions to problems which they identified as causes to low pass rates and high repeat rates.

To combat low pass rates and high repeat rates, the interviewees suggested that renovation of the school facilities like classrooms, school kitchens, taps and school fences will help to raise the pass rates. Most of the schools do not have proper classrooms; windows and doors are broken, some of the buildings are dilapidated for example, kitchens and toilets are in bad conditions which pose a danger to students hence increased absenteeism rates. It was said that fencing will curb the tendency of students to disappear during school hours or bunking classes and invaders from trespassing to destruct teaching with their animals. They also suggested that purchase of heaters can be of great help during winter to enable students and teachers who miss school due to harsh weather to go to school even in those weathers.

The schools which do not have classrooms and toilets, the proposed solutions were to build classrooms and toilets. Although under LEQEP there is no construction, some schools argued that they need buildings to solve the problem of low pass rates because lack of proper infrastructure causes absenteeism.

The other proposed solutions by most of the school principals and members of school boards were that the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) should expel unqualified teachers from primary schools, hire more qualified teachers, revise the new curriculum and provide teaching materials to enable easy and comprehensive teaching. These teaching materials were said to include computers which the ministry through the SIP facilitators, promised. Although schools with no electricity also suggested computers to be a solution to low pass rates, they mentioned that electricity installation would be a starting point. As for secondary schools, the school boards suggested that the principals should buy teaching materials and text books to enable students and teachers to work easily.

Parents and students raised abolition of corporal punishment as a solution to low pass rates. Moreover the schools suggested that constant feeding schemes in schools should be maintained so that students can concentrate more in classes and also to curb absenteeism.

Teachers also alluded to the fact that they need more training workshops on new teaching methods and inclusive education because they, as teachers, fail to reach learners with special educational needs.

Lastly schools expressed the importance of helping students from needy families, orphans and any vulnerable group of students to get funding from Ministry of Social Development and other organization such as the World Vision to cater for their school needs.

High Dropouts rates/ Low Retention rates.

The rate at which students drop out from schools before finishing grade seven (in case of primary schools) or grade ten (in case of secondary schools) is very high in Lesotho¹¹. This is caused by various reasons which will be discussed below.

➤ **Farming**

Most families in Lesotho rely solely on crop and animal farming for their subsistence due to high unemployment rates. Some parents force their children to leave school to focus on farming since it brings food to their tables. Some of the children who the parents force to leave school are children with disabilities because parents believe they cannot be able to learn. Boys will leave school to become herd boys or shepherds either for their families or other families in order to get money or animals. Sometimes boys leave school to concentrate on crop farming. Apart from parents forcing their children to leave school for farming purposes, children in their own will, leave school to focus on farming because they want to be rich. This practice mostly affects boys than girls and it is the same both in primary and secondary schools.

➤ **Child Labor**

Most students who leave school for work are either orphans, deserted and older than prescribed schooling age. Orphaned and deserted children leave school to work so that they can provide for their siblings. They often find work in middle-class families within their neighborhoods. Boys become herd boys and shepherds while girls become maids. Some parents and guardians force children to leave school to find work while they stay at home doing nothing most of the times. Some students who are older than the prescribed schooling age range leave school because they feel like they do not belong there anymore, they feel like they need to be working in order to be rich and get married. This issue affects boys and girls in the same manner.

➤ **Poverty**

Some students leave school due to their neediness. In primary schools, these are children who do not have clothing nor uniform to wear, shoes and other necessities which will enable them to enjoy learning like other students. Parents said that they take their children out of school on these grounds because their children get humiliated in school due to their

¹¹ Mainly schools in remote areas.

poverty. Students in secondary schools drop out of school mainly because of school fees. They are expelled from school when they cannot pay their fees.

➤ **Marriage and Pregnancy**

Often, girls mostly in secondary schools drop-out of school to get married or due to early pregnancy. In remote areas or the mountains, children start school when they are ten years of age, this practice put girls at risk of leaving school before they finish because they reach adolescent stage in very low grades. It is normal in these areas that when a girl reaches the age of sixteen, they are seen as ripe for marriage. Some girls choose to get married early because they need financial security or wealth while others are forced to get married by their parents for wealth or financial gain from dowry. Some of these teenage girls fall pregnant and drop out of school. The issue of pregnancy was said to be caused by minimal sexual education and contraceptives provision.

➤ **Initiation**

This cultural practice also causes drop-out rates in both primary and secondary schools. Boys and girls drop-out of school to join initiation schools. This practice is however more popular with boys than girls.

➤ **Transfer Outs**

Students often drop-out of schools to join other schools. This is because of amenities, number of students, religion, and better performance of other schools. Some schools have proper school buildings, toilets, taps and sport facilities so students are drawn to those schools and leave theirs. Students also said they can leave their current schools because the number of students is very low so it gets boring. Since most of the schools in Lesotho are church owned, parents take their children to the schools owned by their churches. The issue of performance also draws students from low performing schools to better performing schools. Some students transfer to other schools to flee from corporal punishment or because of long distance to school.

Proposed Solutions to High Drop-out rates and Low retention rates

The school communities proposed a number of solutions which they are confident will help combat high drop-out rates in their respective schools. These solutions were said to be part of the SIP they developed or are going to develop.

Awareness raising campaigns on the importance of education, campaigns against child labor, child marriage and initiation are believed to have a high potential to curb drop-out rates caused by these factors. The school boards also suggested that they can lobby parents to allow students to perform duties after school hours and during school holidays. The same goes for the owners of the initiation schools. The schools expressed the need for sensitization of parents on disability issues and the importance to value their children's education and also to bring to their attention that education is a right for every child.

The interviewees also suggested that sex education and provision of contraceptives in schools can assist in reducing pregnancy rates mostly in secondary schools.

Renovation of the school buildings, erection of new buildings, introduction of computers, installation of electricity and introduction of sporting facilities were recommended for retention purposes. These are believed to be things students like and can stay in school for. The abolition of corporal punishment in schools was also suggested as a solution to low retention rates.

As the solution for secondary school students dropping-out due to no school fees, it was suggested that the MoET should introduce free secondary education.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Although the project is intended to benefit all children, the design and the SIP manual which informs implementation of the project are not inclusive. If the main data collection tool does not include all types and statuses of beneficiaries, those omitted are likely to be left out during implementation.

It is LNFOD's observation that the Special Education Unit was not fully engaged in the design of this project hence the project is not inclusive in terms of other types of disabilities. Overlooking other types of disabilities is tantamount to negating the objective of this project as much as learners with other disabilities apart from visual impairment are vulnerable as well. Primary schools education is compulsory in Lesotho, however there is no mention of getting children who are out of school back into schools. Most orphans, deserted children and children from poor families are not in schools due to a number of factors including child labour.

The explicit exclusion of construction in the project document means that in schools where absenteeism and drop-outs are caused directly by lack or no proper school buildings, the project is not going to solve their problems.

Although the interviewees proposed the above solutions to low pass rates it has been observed that one of the causes of low pass rates is minimal understanding of English language. Since most subjects are taught in English, students find it very difficult to learn the subjects because their English knowledge is too minimal, it is even harder for children to speak and/or write English because their teachers seldom speak nor enforce English speaking at schools. The other issue is introduction of computers, it is almost futile to send computers to schools which do not even have proper or any school buildings at all. Computer operation needs secure places with proper buildings and electricity connection which neither school have. The most feasible solution to low pass rates is to strengthen the capacity of teachers and provision of teaching materials. There should also be strict regulations against teacher and student absenteeism to lessen chances of teachers and students missing school. Strengthening teachers' capacity will also be advantageous as it will improve the ability of children to learn and communicate easily. Parents' involvement in

their children's education is almost impossible as most parents hardly ever finished primary school.

From the visited schools, five principals proved to have knowledge about the school improvement plan. As for the rest; they still believe that this project is going to build toilets and new classrooms for their schools. Up to this far, two schools of the eighteen that have been visited, have not yet been given SIP facilitators. Most representatives of the school boards did not seem to be conversant with the SIP nor what the project entails. They said the facilitator promised them new classroom structures, toilets, kitchens and computers. This means that the facilitators do not introduce the project in an understandable manner.

It has also been observed that minimal use of English language to communicate also causes low pass rates because the students write exams in English and it is very difficult because some of the subjects are delivered in Sesotho, so the only time they see English throughout is when they are in grade 7.

Accommodation of students with disabilities is not too good in these schools because teachers lack capacity to support students with disabilities. They just keep them in school without making an effort to teach them, they are just in a school environment to get lunch and to play with other students. One principal said that they give learners with disabilities tender care and love because they can never be able to learn, they are just kept in school.

Although most of the interviewees said introduction of computers will solve their every problem, it has been observed that the introduction of technology will be useful in many years to come. The feasible solutions to the prevailing situation are teacher capacity building, improvement of school facilities and introduction of new teaching methods according to the school geographic setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendation is that the MoET reviews the SIP manual to take into account all types and statuses of students in Lesotho which are closely related to the problem of low pass rates and retention rates.

It is also recommended that the project be reviewed to accommodate learners with other types of disabilities. Deaf learners need devices which will assist them to learn more effectively. There should also be trainings for Special Education Unit personnel on inclusive education so as to enable them to coordinate it to teachers for them to handle learners with special educational needs in their schools.

The MoET should direct its resources towards capacity building for teachers on inclusive education and practical solutions to improve retention and pass rates. Apart from that the ministry should conduct campaigns against concealment of children with disabilities, initiation of minors, child labour and child marriage.

There should be a re-evaluation of teachers in these schools to ensure that only qualified teachers are the ones teaching the children so as to secure access to quality education.

Though introduction of free secondary school education might need a lot of money and resources, it is important that the MoET works towards it because students who finish their secondary education successfully can be enrolled into vocational schools. The MoET should devise guidelines to regulate initiation schooling, and herding so that children cannot be taken during school terms to go for initiation or herding. The MoET should also focus on providing sanitary towels for teenage girls who cannot afford them. Apart from that there should be constant sexual education for teenagers to help reduce pregnancy rates.

ANNEXURE 1

DISTRICT	SCHOOLS
LERIBE	Laghetto RCL Primary School Laghetto RCL High School T'sehlanyane ACL Primary School Ts'ehlanyane Secondary School Malibamats' o LECSA Secondary School
TEYATEYANENG	Soaing LECSA Primary School Pitsaneng LECSA Primary School Ramothamo Primary School
MASERU	Likotopong LECSA Primary School ST. Rodrigue High School Setibing LECSA Primary School
MAFETENG	Ribaneng LECSA Primary School Makintane Primary School Khola Primary School
MOHALE'SHOEK	Qalike AME Primary School Mats'oareng RCL Primary School Majapereng Primary School

ANNEXURE 2



Figure 1 This is a building used as a classroom for the lower grades (1-3) this building falls apart every time there are heavy storms.



Figure 2 the picture shows the classroom mentioned in figure 1 above, from the outside.



Figure 3 The pictures above show a building used for upper grades (4-7) in Ribaneng LECSA Primary school. The top one is the inside while the bottom one is the outside.



Figure 4 this forest here serves as a toilet for both teachers and students in Ribaneng LECSA primary school.