

Quality Education

THE SITUATION

Since gaining independence, Timor-Leste has made remarkable progress in education, reflecting a significant commitment to the country's future generations. Despite this, there remains much to be done towards achieving universal quality preschool and basic education, especially in rural areas.



Ensuring quality education for every child.
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Today in Timor-Leste, about 14 per cent of Timorese children attend preschool¹, mainly in urban areas. While about 92 per cent of 6-11 year olds are enrolled in primary school (Grade 1-6), one-third of Grade 1 students repeat the grade². Around 26 percent of students drop out of school before they reach Grade 6³. Poor learning outcomes remain as a key concern, as more than 70 per cent of students at the end of Grade 1 cannot read a single word of a simple passage⁴. Furthermore, only 32 per cent of primary schools have access to toilet facilities with an appropriate water supply⁵.

WHY EDUCATION?

A head start: Global evidence shows that the first five years of a child's life are a critical time for development. Early childhood development and education programmes give children the best possible chance to succeed and stay in school. Return of investment for preschool education is higher than investment in any other level of education.

Bright futures: When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunities that influence generations to come. When children have access to quality education and stay in school longer, they are more likely to have the skills and knowledge they need to fulfil their potential as productive citizens of the future. Global evidence shows that when 10 per cent more girls go to school, a country's GDP increases on average by 3 per cent.

Quality is key: The quality of learning opportunities is key to ensuring not only that more children enter school, but that more students stay there and learn. The Ministry of Education's (MoE) Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) model (known locally as "Eskola Foun") for which UNICEF has advocated,

¹ EMIS 2013, Ministry of Education (MoE)

² EMIS 2013, Ministry of Education (MoE)

³ National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), 2011-2030, MoE

⁴ Early Grades Reading Assessment (EGRA), WB 2010

⁵ EMIS 2010, Ministry of Education (MoE)

promotes holistic support for children's learning and development through enhancing child-centered teaching and learning practices, improved school management, a safe and healthy school environment, and active participation of parents and communities in schools. . The CFS approach underlines the importance of safe, hygienic, child-friendly, gender sensitive and sustainable WASH facilities in schools.

UNICEF's CONTRIBUTION

UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education with the development of key sector policies, plans, standards and monitoring systems. UNICEF also supports building national capacity in delivering quality education services in an equitable manner.

Preschool Learning:



Preschool helps students to prepare for a better start of a life.

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UNICEF played a key role in supporting the development of a National Framework for Preschool Education, which was approved in 2013. The Framework takes a holistic approach and has an equity focus to reach disadvantaged children who are living in the remote areas and with disabilities. UNICEF is currently working with the MoE to develop a 5-year Costed Action Plan for effective implementation of the same Policy Framework.

In 2014, UNICEF began supporting the establishment of community-based preschools in minority-language-speaking communities in Ermera and Viqueque Districts. A total of 6,000 preschool-aged children and their parents/caregivers will benefit from an inclusive, participatory preschool learning approach by June 2016. UNICEF is also currently working with the MoE to open eight pilot public preschools in rural communities in Aileu and Ermera Districts attached to existing Child friendly approach locally known as "Eskola Foun" basic education schools.

Quality Basic Education: UNICEF has been the principal partner to the MoE in the CFS ("Eskola Foun") approach for many years. With UNICEF support, the National Quality School Standards Framework (NQSSF) was finalized in 2014. This Framework is based on the CFS/"Eskola Foun" principles focusing on a cross-sectoral approach to holistically address each children's needs. CFS includes a clean and safe learning environment for children by providing sustainable and child-friendly WASH facilities. Acknowledging the effects of CFS/"Eskola Foun", the MoE adopted the CFS approach in the new preschool and basic education curriculum developed in 2014. The CFS principles were also adopted for the revised, in-service teacher training.

Between 2009 and 2014, UNICEF has supported the roll-out of “Eskola Foun” in 121 basic education schools, just over 10 percent of the total basic education schools, enabling more than 34,000 children each year to have access to quality education and resulting in significant improvements in enrollment, retention and learning outcomes. Over 1,400 teachers and 121 school directors and deputy directors of these 121 schools were trained on child-centered, participatory methodology. Additionally, all of the 202 school assistance personnel, 65 school inspectors and 13 district education superintendents in 13 districts nation-wide benefited from the CFS school training on CFS methodology and school management.

Since 2009, UNICEF has supported the construction of 81 classrooms in 32 schools and the rehabilitation of 36 classrooms in 11 schools - benefiting a total of more than 12,000 students annually. In addition, over 17,800 children have been benefitted from improved WASH facilities installed in 89 rural primary schools across six districts.

The MoE has now recognized “Eskola Foun” as the key strategy to improving basic education across the country and is in the process of scaling-up this approach.

Knowledge Generation and Management

UNICEF has been supporting the Government in improving the capacity of the Education Information Management System (EMIS) to effectively support evidence-based decision making in the education sector, by making key basic education indicators and data publicly available.

PRIORITIES

“Quality Education for All” is the national priority for the education sector in Timor-Leste. It is stipulated in key GoTL documents, including the National Strategic Development Plan (SDP), the Programme of the Fifth and Sixth Constitutional Government 2012-2017 and the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2011-2030.

More specifically, the following five areas are highlighted:

- Expanded preschool coverage of children aged 3-5 years old
- Improved teaching learning environment through the provision of safe, child-friendly, inclusive and gender sensitive WASH services
- Enhanced learning outcomes through improved teaching and learning quality
- Universal preschool and basic education enrollment and completion, with an equity focus
- Management reform (including de-concentration, EMIS and evidence-based planning and budgeting).