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ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION KEY INDICATORS FOR 2015 Peter Michael Magury

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Key Points

- PNG Constitution places “human development” as one of the most important development priorities, which supports the notion of providing everyone in the country with basic education.
- Universal Basic Education key indicators are selected to inform the status of the human development measured by access rates to schools, keeping students in schools measured by retention rate and education learning outcomes measured by examination pass rate.
- The importance of basic education can be seen as the foundation of education and all beneficiaries of the other levels of education have to pass through this level of education.
- Basic education shapes the needed manpower for national development in the future.

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ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION KEY INDICATORS FOR 2015

By Peter Michael Magury

Basic education has been regarded as one of the most important government policy in Papua New Guinea (PNG). This is perhaps due to the fact that it is the foundation in which all other levels of education are built on. The importance of basic education can be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by requirement, have to pass through this level of education. Recognising the importance of basic education, all governments in PNG, both past and present, make it the priority of their educational policies. These policies set the foundation that will improve the capabilities of human resource development in PNG. In support of this policy, are selected indicators identified to measure and monitor progress in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in PNG. The agreed indicators are measured by access to school, cohort retention and the examination pass rates.

Universal Basic Education

Basic education has been defined by a number of academics and organisations, with each definition representing central themes. Each of the definitions of basic education presents key elements. These include the development of competencies, knowledge, attitudes and values as a foundation for lifelong learning (Department of Education, 2009).

Basic education was defined at the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand as:

“Whole range of educational activities, taking place in various settings, that aim to meet basic learning needs”

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022), basic education comprises primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). It also covers a wide variety of informal public and private activities intended to meet the basic learning needs of people of all ages.

The UBE Plan, 2010-2019 defines UBE as all school-aged children enrolling in school to complete nine years of basic education and should have learnt skills, knowledge and values covered in the basic education curriculum regardless of their circumstances (Department of Education, 2009).

The above definitions reveal the fact that UBE is a policy reform measure by the government of PNG aimed at improving the basic education in the country. The program is structured towards human development as well as to encourage and accelerate national development in the country. This makes basic education the bedrock that shapes the future of human resource development in PNG.

Universal Basic Education and Development

Fabunmi (2004), identifies national development as the improvement of a country's productive changes such as social attitude, values and behaviour. Thus, changes toward economic, social and political equality and elimination of poverty. Fabunmi (2004) also reported a strong and positive relationship between investment in basic education and national development.

Jaiyeoba (2007) supported the idea that basic education is the foundation that shapes the needed manpower for national development in the future. More so, basic education is now seen by many as an important asset which will improve individual knowledge, skills, character, and values that will contribute to national development and better life. The trained engineers, teachers, medical doctors, nurses, lawyers and accountants are all the products of universal basic education. This explains why it is argued also that the quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development (Ogbonnia, 2020).

The UBE Plan, 2010-2019 defines basic education as an education level consisting of three years of elementary and six years of primary school (Department of Education, 2009)..

On the basis of this definition, there are three selected indicators to monitor progress as well as to help identify and prioritise strategies for working towards UBE. The three key indicators shape the needed manpower for national development in the future. They are access, cohort retention and examination pass rate.

Selected key indicators to measure UBE

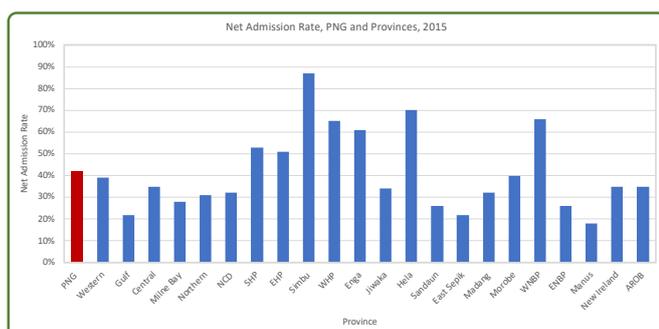
This section presents a brief overview of the key UBE indicators to monitor the progress and status of UBE to ensure all school-age children of PNG acquire a good basic education for future development. They are;

1. Access rate

In PNG, access to the first level of education is measured in terms of the proportion of the six-year-old children admitted to elementary prep compared to the six year olds of related school-age population (Department of Education, 2009). This measure is described as the net admission rate (NAR).

One of the objectives under the UBE plan is to have all children at the official school-starting age of six enrol in elementary prep (Department of Education, 2009). Figure 1 below presents the NAR for national and by province, which shows the enormity of the task by enrolling the six-year-old children in school. While the national NAR for elementary prep was 40 percent, the rate varied across the 22 provinces. Simbu (88%) is doing very well. Hela (85%) has the second highest NAR. In contrast, NARs are extremely low for Manus (18%), Gulf (22%) and East Sepik (22%) provinces. This would seem to merit further investigation into the factors behind the low participation rate of six year olds.

Figure 1 Net admission rates in relation to provinces



Sources: Net admission rates based on the author's own calculations

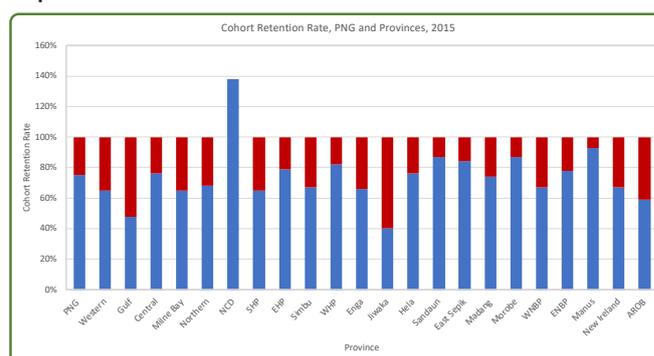
In the six southern, four Momase and four island provinces, the rates were less than 50 percent. Within most, if not all provinces, there are wide differences in access due in part to isolated communities and their lack of access to schools. Better understanding of the reasons will help in designing effective strategies for getting parents to enrol their six year olds in school.

2. Cohort retention rate

The cohort retention rate (CRR) measures the number of students who successfully sit for the Grade 8 examination and completed basic education in 2015 as a percentage of those who started in the elementary prep in 2007. The cohort retention rate is 75 percent for PNG as a whole. This means that, of the 158,000 children enrolled in elementary prep in 2007, about 118,000 successfully completed basic education in 2015. On the other hand, 25 percent of children either drop out of school without completing the full cycle of basic education or were still in school but did not sit for the examination. In numerical terms, this is about 40,000

children dropping out of school at the basic education level. This is quite high and is considered to be a bigger problem than having access to school and participating in education. Provincial distributions show that there is wide variability in this indicator, which is above 75 percent in 11 provinces. Figure 2 shows that NCD (138%) has the highest CRR. Manus (93%) has the second highest. On the other hand, CRRs are extremely low for Jiwaka (40%), Gulf (48%) and Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) (59%).

Figure 2 Cohort retention and dropout rates in relation to provinces



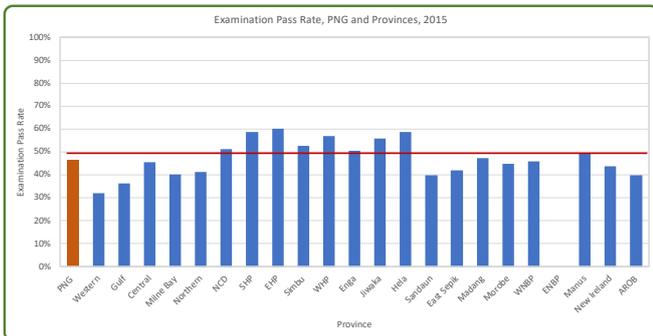
Source: Cohort retention and dropout rates based on the author's own calculations

In an efficient education system, the CRR is 100 percent. However, in the case of the NCD, the CRR is 138%. This implies that there are some students repeating, more students transferring into NCD due to economic activities, parents' employments opportunities or are just looking for better services in the capital city.

3. Examination pass rate

In PNG, there are few clear methods of assessing the quality of learning outcomes. However, in this paper, the Grade 8 examination pass rate is considered to be a reasonable proxy measure to use as an outcome indicator to measure students' learning outcomes. Grade 8 examination results are a limited alternative source of information. While they do not necessarily measure the level of achievement of pupils in mastering the curriculum, they do reflect the degree to which students have performed in the tests set for them. The results are poor; the all-PNG average (45 percent) was below the 50 percent mark. The average scores for NCD and all Highlands provinces (SHP, EHP, Simbu, WHP, Enga, Jiwaka and Hela) were just above 50 per cent (Figure 3). On the other hand, the Momase, Southern and New Guinea Islands provinces were below 50 percent, with variations across provinces of between 34 percent and 60 percent.

Figure 3. Grade 8 examination average scores in relation to provinces



Sources: Grade 8 examination scores based on the author's own calculations

The exam results also show pronounced differences between provinces and weaker mathematics performance against national standards. The mean score for numeracy is 40 percent and combined subject was 46 percent. Literacy was just above 50 percent.

Some possible strategies that can be used to improve UBE outcomes

Access

Some of the main interventions to improve access are direct transfers of tuition-free (TFF) funds to schools, District and Provincial Sector Improvement Program grants, and, for children with disabilities and support for the provincial Inclusive Education Resource Centres.

The government has to provide interventions to improve girls' enrolment in the early grades and public campaigns to change attitudes. Both GoPNG and development partners must continue to invest in school infrastructures, remote area teacher training and child-friendly schools to improve access to basic education.

Retention

The implementation of government policies to increase spaces for school children in schools. More schools and classrooms should be built, so that students can stay on in school.

The local community should establish a truancy policy, with village leaders appointed at each school to ensure that children turn up for classes. They would also charge parents at village courts if the child does not attend school regularly, or if the child drops out of school.

The local community has to provide school level infrastructure that improve girls' school attendance, access to safe water and adequate sanitation facilities and better security for girls.

Examination pass rates

Factors that can contribute to effective learning from PNG and Global research can be used to inform school and community as well as district officials to undertake relevant activities that can improve learning opportunities at the school level. Many of these factors are simple low-cost interventions such as ensuring that teachers and students are engaging in learning activities every day of the school week. The provision of textbooks and good classroom learning environment are other low cost-effective community-based interventions.

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