

ALL CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children



EASTERN CARIBBEAN

SUMMARY



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Preface



“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular (...) take measures to encourage regular attendance at school and the reduction of drop-out rates”

(Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28, 1-e).

The text above is an excerpt from the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which the General Assembly of the United Nations approved on 20 November 1989. Some 193 countries ratified it, including all the Caribbean countries. Almost 30

years after the CRC there are still many barriers that countries must overcome to ensure quality education for all children and adolescents.

At the end of 2014, the international community signed the 2030 agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognising that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is the greatest global challenge and the main pillar of the international cooperation for the next 15 years. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs highlighted education as the key strategy to address the challenge. The SDGs identified a specific goal for the education sector:

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Access to education is a human right, but it is also a key right that guarantees other rights. It is estimated that investments in quality education for all can produce seven-fold medium- and long-term economic returns for the individuals and communities.

By 2013, approximately 124 million children and adolescents worldwide aged of 6–15 years were out of school, which represented an increase of 2 million over 2011 estimates. Adolescents of lower secondary school age (typically 12–15 years) were almost twice as likely to be out of school as primary school age children, with 1 out of 6 (17 percent) not enrolled in school¹. Children from poor households,

¹ UNICEF/UIS (2015). A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark. A Policy Paper/22/Fact Sheet 31. Available online: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/fs-31-out-of-school-children-en.pdf>

rural areas or ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and those who must work to help their families, faced the greatest risk of being denied their right to education. Routine programmes have not provided educational opportunities to the world's most marginalised children, therefore, the out-of-school children initiative is one way UNICEF is helping to identify and combat specific challenges associated with universal education and quality learning outcomes.

At the global level, education systems are facing several challenges and difficulties, mainly related to:

- *Early child care/early childhood development:* The integral attention and stimulation to under-five children is essential for their cognitive and physical development.
- *Out-of-school children:* Despite the progress countries made in the last decades, millions of children are still outside the basic education system, particularly those living in the most remote areas and conflict-affected regions.
- *Learning:* Access to education alone is not enough, the curriculum needs to be adapted to the local culture and reality and provide appropriate knowledge and skills to address local challenges.
- *Education for adolescents and young people:* Nowadays, adolescents and young people are the largest population in several countries. Education for adolescents should be life skills oriented and facilitate access to the labour market.

The challenges are similar in the developing island countries of the Eastern Caribbean. This report presents out-of-school figures for the region, and based on these, national authorities will be able to adopt new public programmes that would guarantee the right to education for all children and adolescents in the region, including access, retention in school and learning.

This study used a framework developed by UNICEF and UNESCO Institute of Statistics and was conducted in partnership with the School of Education, Cave Hill Campus, University of West Indies; Organization of Eastern Caribbean States; the Asociacion Civil Education para Todos, Argentina; and UNICEF and in close cooperation with the national education authorities. It was conducted in seven countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The study aimed to support a systematic analysis of the bottlenecks to achieving universal primary education and lower secondary education and help understand why well-intentioned policies have not been yielding the expected results. Given the policy to enhance universal access to secondary education in the countries in this study, outside of the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) framework, some attention was also paid to aspects of upper secondary education.

Education in the Eastern Caribbean



In the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Countries and the Turks and Caicos Islands, there is a general support for and belief in the right to education. Members States see education as a critical factor to individual, national and regional development. Annual expenditure on education by the governments of the countries in this study ranges from 10 to 19 percent of the national budget². The philosophy and value of access to basic education for all children in the region is supported by sub-regional, regional and international agreements and initiatives to which these governments are signatories.

² OECS (2012). Education Statistical Digest; and Turks and Caicos Islands (2014). Education Digest.

Compulsory primary and secondary education is provided for all children in the Eastern Caribbean sub-region, and it comprises 12 years of legally mandatory school attendance, which, in most member states, ranges from age five to 16. Students generally spend 6–7 years in the primary grades and five years in secondary school.

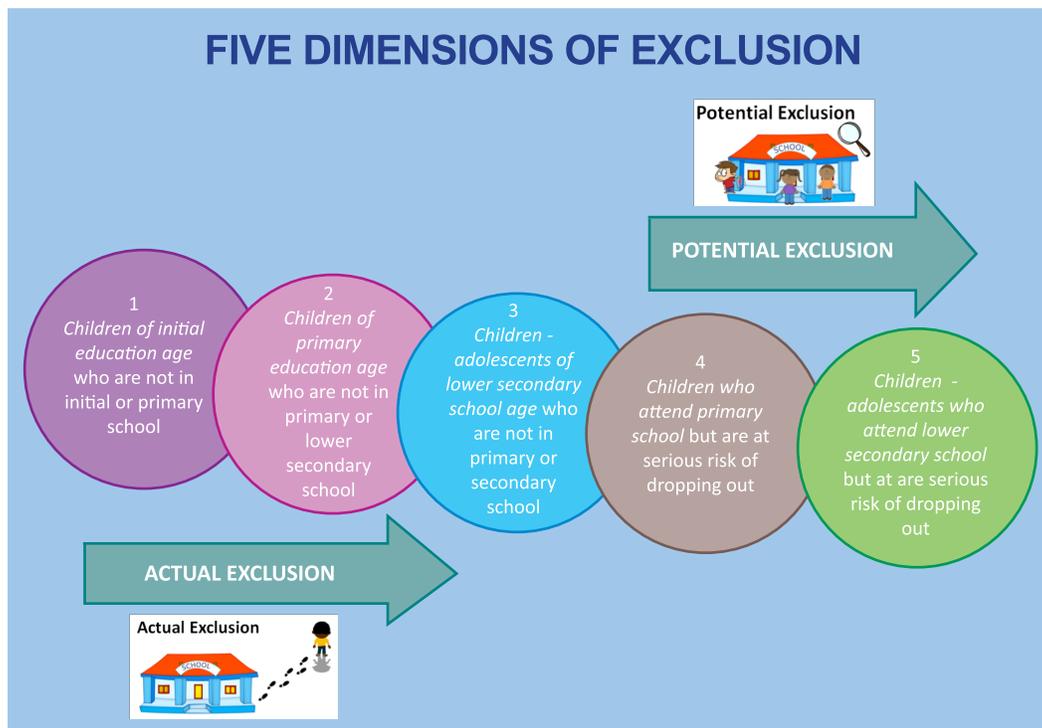
Majority of children are in schools from 4+ years and attend lower secondary school (up to third form) .

Study Methodology

The methodology used for this study was recommended by the OOSCI operational manual and guided by its core model of the five dimensions of exclusion (5DE):

- Dimension 1 (D1): Children of early childhood education (ECE) age who are not in ECE or primary school.³
- Dimension 2 (D2): Children of primary school age who are not in primary or lower secondary school.
- Dimension 3 (D3): Children/adolescents of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.
- Dimension 4 (D4): Children in primary school who are at risk of dropping out.
- Dimension 5 (D5): Children/adolescents in lower secondary school who are at risk of dropping out.

³ This refers to children 4+, i.e. one year before the official entry at age 5 (not the traditional pre-school age of 3-5 years)



The first three dimensions comprise present or total exclusion, as they refer to populations that do not attend school at the corresponding age. The last two dimensions refer to potential exclusion, as they consider those who are in school but at risk of dropping out.

Exclusion (D1–D3) was calculated using comparison of enrolment and population size while potential exclusion (D4 and D5) was based on the number of students who have experienced two or more educational breakdowns and therefore are two or more years over-age.

The main data sources were the official educational and population data. For the educational data, administrative school records were crucial and these were collected from each statistical division of the Ministries of Education within the study territories. Information collected included enrolment by age and grade, repeaters, dropouts and in some cases graduates of the secondary level, all with the highest possible disaggregation available in each country (parish, school, sex).

The five-dimension model was used to build a static snapshot for 2013 covering all official ages from the last grade of early childhood education until the end of lower secondary school. The analysis showed that total/present exclusion was limited while potential exclusion was more pronounced.

This analysis of the over-age situation in the Eastern Caribbean was a key factor in understanding the significant risk for school dropout or unsuccessful school completion. Consequently, wherever possible, some analysis of upper secondary grades (15–20 years) was included in this report.

This analysis is however limited because the definition of school completion in the region is still not clear; there is variation in definition not only among countries but also between schools in the same country.

School completion can be defined by the rates of graduation or the attainment of minimal qualifications based on the Caribbean Examinations Council processes. But the challenge with this

definition is that currently graduation rates are not dependent on students acquiring established skills, competencies and grade standards but rather on attendance at school until the end of the fifth form. Consequently, it is possible to graduate from school without having any certification that would enable admission to tertiary education or the minimum job requirements.

Out-of-School Children in the Eastern Caribbean Sub-region

Despite the advances of the last decades in the sub-region, some children are still not accessing educational services.

Total/present exclusion

- 0.5% of children aged 4 years are out of school (D1).
- 1.4% of children aged 5–11 years are out of school (D2).
- 3.3% of children aged 12–14 years are out of school (D3).

Students start to repeat in primary schools. By 3rd Form, 33% of students are overage and at risk for not successfully completing school.

Although these figures are relatively low, it is important to identify and appropriately support these children. To achieve the SDGs in the sub-region, it is critical to develop relevant policies and programmes to reach these populations.

Potential/future exclusion

- 17% of children aged 5–11 are at risk of dropping out (D4).
- 33% of children aged 12–14 are at risk of dropping out (D5).

Total or Present Exclusion	Dimension 1	Total exclusion by the age of attending the last year of Early Childhood Education: almost 50 children out of school, 0.5% of population of age 4	
	Dimension 2	Total exclusion by the age of Primary: 840 children out of school, 1.4% of population of age 5 to 11	
	Dimension 3	Total exclusion by the age of Lower Secondary: over 1,000 children out of school, 3.3% of population of ages 12 to 14	
Potential or Partial Exclusion	Dimension 4	Potential exclusion within Primary: 1,700 students with two or more years of overage (at critical risk), representing 2% of Primary enrolment.	
	Dimension 5	Potential exclusion within Lower Secondary: more than 3,600 students with two or more years of overage (at critical risk); They represent 11% of students of Forms 1 to 3. And 7,500 students with 1 year overage (moderate risk), 22% of Lower Secondary enrolment	

The data on the potential/future exclusion from the education system is worrying and signal the need for urgent and appropriate measures to halt the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of educational services.

The potential/future exclusion can be categorised into critical risk factors and moderate risk factors, depending on the years of over-age. More than 1,700 (2%) students at the primary level were two or more years over-age and more than 10,400 (15%) were one year over-age. In the lower secondary level, more than 3,600 (11%) students were two or more years over-age and around 7,500 (22%) were one year over-age.

Therefore, more than 23,000 students in these countries were at risk of dropping out or not successfully completing school; they are not progressing along the educational levels and are most likely not learning as expected.

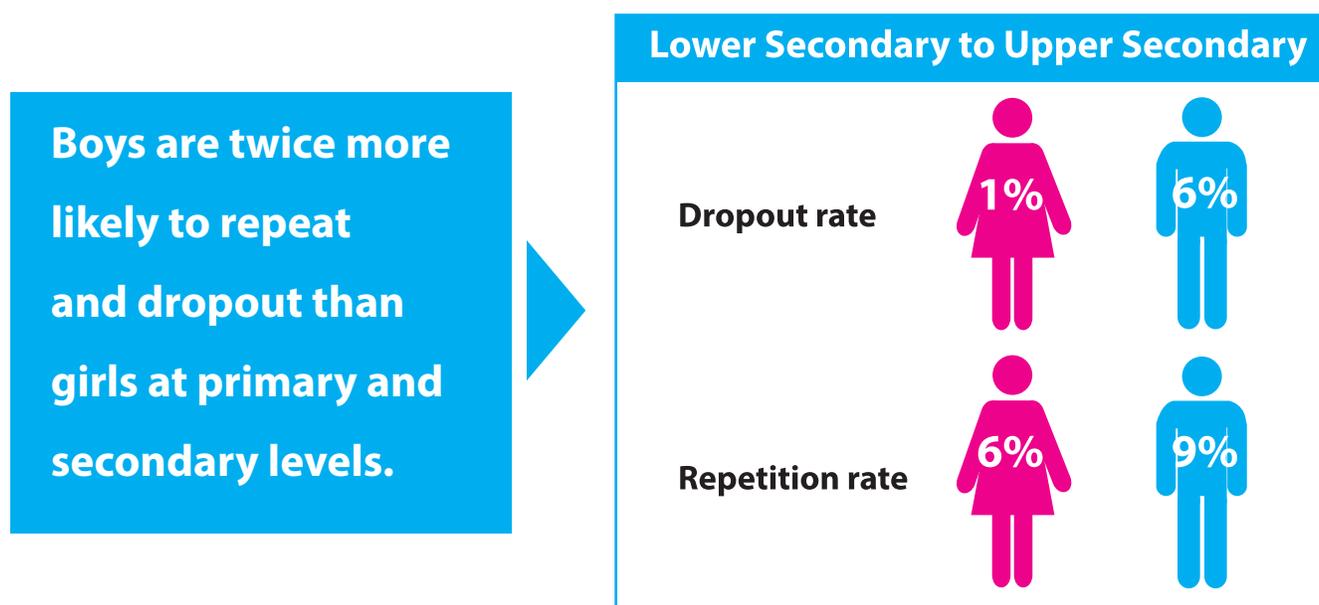
Gender disparities within the education system persist. Repetition is a risk factor for dropping out, and repetition rates in primary and lower secondary education are higher for boys than girls in every country in the study, with the exception of Saint Kitts and Nevis. This is also affecting transition from

primary to secondary school. In 2011, for example, 106 girls repeated for every 100 boys enrolled in secondary education. Also in Antigua and Barbuda out-of-school rate for boys of lower secondary school age was 10 percent or higher than for girls.

Out-of-School Adolescents Aged 15–20

The five-dimension model helped build a static snapshot for 2013 covering all official ages from the last grade of early childhood education until the end of lower secondary level. The analysis showed lower total/present exclusion than potential exclusion. Given the high secondary school enrolment in this region, efforts were made to analyse the ages and educational levels, in order to better understand and describe core elements of school exclusion. For this reason, efforts were made to include upper secondary grades and ages 15–20 in this report.

The full report includes some data on upper secondary education, but limitations in the model and available data constrained the extent of analysis for the group. One key finding was that exclusion increased from age 15. Some 2,675 students aged 15–16 dropped out between 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, representing 15% of this age group.



For modelling purposes, the study reviewed detailed analyses from different sources for a specific country, to establish the current and potential exclusion for the specific group. The main findings are:

- 23% of students (1,390 adolescents) did not attend or conclude primary or lower secondary education.
- 16% of students (935 adolescents) dropped out during transition from lower to upper secondary school or at this level, or completed but failed to qualify for certification.
- 41% of students (2,461 adolescents) attending upper secondary school were over-age.
- 20% of students (1,224 adolescents) attending primary or lower secondary school were over-age.

These findings highlight the need for further analysis of upper secondary education, to better understand the extent of current exclusion and the potential risk, and to design and implement relevant policies and programmes to address the situation.

It also highlights the current data gaps as a result of students “ageing out” of school. Since compulsory school age varies in many countries (5–16 years), adolescents who leave school at 16 but have not completed their course of instruction and related examinations are often not recorded as dropouts. This therefore has implications for a comprehensive appreciation of those students who may have left school prematurely.

Main Barriers causing Potential Exclusion and Recommended Strategies



Enabling environment

Low parental engagement and involvement in schooling

Active parental engagement in schooling remains a challenge, including low attendance at parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings, deficiencies in parenting styles, and weaknesses in parental support for student learning at home⁴. Parents considered PTAs to be generally dysfunctional with the dominant focus of meetings on fundraising. At the same time, educators lamented the many

⁴ George, P. (2009). A Social Risk Assessment of the Education System of Antigua and Barbuda. Report prepared for the Caribbean Development Bank; and OECS (2006). Comprehensive Study of School Discipline Issues in the OECS: Research report summary. Saint Lucia: OERU.

absentee parents who leave children to raise and support themselves and their younger siblings during their formative years. Weaknesses in parental communication skills also contribute to difficult parent-child relationships, which often results in children 'acting out' at school.

Strategies to address low parental engagement and involvement in schooling

- Outreach by schools to develop stronger partnerships with families including facilitating parent orientation sessions.
- Provision of parenting courses/classes, through schools, focusing on parental strategies for supporting and improving child education experience.
- Greater emphasis by PTA on students' learning support and holistic development.
- Greater facilitation of home visits by trained school counsellors.

Child abuse and violence

Child abuse, neglect and violence compromise children's development and wellbeing, and undermine their health and performance in school. Violence against children is one of the major threats to childhood in the Caribbean. Incest, non-family abuse, transactional sex, cell phone pornography, internet abuse, child sexual tourism, bullying, domestic violence and corporal punishment are all forms of violence against children that affect their well-being.

Strategies to address the prevalence of child abuse and violence

- Strengthening systems to prevent child sexual abuse by raising awareness and encouraging early recognition and response to the problem.

- Adoption of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse for professionals.
- Relevant public education campaigns.
- Establishment of child-sensitive justice systems to deal with child abuse crimes.
- Enhanced mechanisms for easier reporting of sexual and other abuse.
- Strengthening school-based counselling services to support affected children and their families

Streaming among and within schools

In most Eastern Caribbean countries, there is a social system that encourages ranking of some schools as *elite* and others as *low performing*.

The elite schools mostly traditionally served the social elite in the pre-colonial and immediate post-colonial periods and continue to excel academically. Several of the newer secondary schools are so ranked because they have more varied intake and often record low overall performance in the regional CXC-CSEC examinations. The system used by Ministries of Education for transition of students from primary to secondary schools gives students with the highest examination scores preferential choice in public schools and this often results in the placement of higher performing students in elite schools, while the lowest performing students are placed in the least preferred schools. There is however an exception in Saint Kitts and Nevis where placement is based totally on geographical residence.

Ironically, schools accepting students with the lowest test scores often lack facilities and resources to provide the needed academic and other learning support. Such schools often report significantly higher levels of disruptive classroom behaviour, teacher stress, students' lack of interest in schooling, strained teacher-student relationships, inadequate instructional pedagogy, and misfit between

curriculum and students' interests/needs⁵. Such negative reports confirm the social perception and often facilitate negative stereotyping of students who attend the schools. They in turn contribute to students' negative perception of themselves as low performing students.

Many schools also practice streaming within schools, where students are grouped according to ability. Such schools often do not invest resources in students requiring additional academic support but in supporting the "high fliers" to excel.

Strategies to address streaming among and within schools

- Provide appropriate training and instructional skills development for teachers.
- Promote approaches that allow student mobility between streamed groups and/or classes, based on progress.
- Introduce more flexible grouping systems (including rotation of teachers) so that all the students have opportunity to learn from the most effective teachers.
- Take relevant actions to improve learning among low performing groups.

Discipline, policies and practices

Education Acts in the Eastern Caribbean sub-region generally provide the main administrative and legal framework for school discipline but they are largely very broad guidelines. Some countries such as Dominica and Saint Lucia also have separate policies on discipline, developed by the Ministry of Education or schools⁶, others do not have.

5 Thompson, B. (2010). Quality Education for All: The impact of disruptive classroom behaviour (DCB). Caribbean Educational Research Journal, Vol. 2, (1), 37-46; Knight, V., & Obidah, J. (2014). Instituting Universal Secondary Education: Caribbean students' perceptions of the schooling experiences. Journal of Education and Practice, Volume 5 (32), 71-81; and Marks, V. (2009). Universal access to secondary education in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies, 34 (2), 56-70.

6 OECS (2006). Comprehensive Study of School Discipline Issues in the OECS: Research report summary. Saint Lucia: OERU.

Children who misbehave are subject to a range of disciplinary actions, which often include corporal punishment and in more serious cases suspension or even expulsion from school. Consequently, some students with chronic behavioural challenges may drift in and out of school because of the frequent disciplinary actions. This affects their performance negatively and often makes them drop out of school. For such students very few optional programmes are available for them to complete their secondary education.

Strategies to address discipline in schools

- Develop separate discipline policies that are based on rights-based approaches and ensure consistent application across schools.
- Strengthen teacher training programmes to enhance their pedagogical and classroom management skills.
- Build the capacity of schools to use positive behaviour intervention support, including greater use of structured in-school suspension programmes.
- Provide an enabling environment for greater participation and involvement of students in schools operations.
- Strengthen outreach and collaboration with parents.
- Ensure adequate delivery of life-skills education in schools and competency in basic inter- and intra-personal skills, and foster greater self-awareness and self-regulation among students.
- Provide specialised referral services for students with severe behavioural challenges.

Inadequate provision for early childhood education (ECE)

In the sub-region, there is a general tendency to register children for ECE between ages three and five years, especially in the urban areas because this is considered as school age by the society. The challenges faced by the ministries of education in relation to the development

of the early childhood sector can be divided into three main categories: inadequacies in institutional and policy frameworks; difficulties in monitoring the quality of services provided by early childhood centers, and inequitable access to ECE across the sub-region.

The consequences of these challenges are inadequate provisions for students and weak foundational skills development in primary schools. These difficulties may persist throughout primary school if not appropriately addressed and the potential risk is often greater for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, limitations in access to quality ECE services throughout the sub-region remain a key factor for student failure.

Strategies to address inadequate provisions for early childhood education

- Establish relevant national legislation, policy and standards for the regulation of ECE services.
- Support upgrading of existing ECE centres, including the private centres, according to national standards.
- Identify areas where ECE services are most needed and increase the services for all students.
- Ensure that all ECE centres and programmes have the capacity to cater to the needs of all students, including those with special needs/ disabilities.
- Adopt a national ECE curriculum that emphasises child-centered, holistic and participatory approaches to pre-school education.

Inadequate provisions for students with special needs

All of the countries in this study have either signed or ratified the Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities, but provisions are made only for the placement of students in special education schools, classes, or facilities as available. Due to the high costs, ministries of education are often unable to provide adequately for the education of special needs students according to required international

standards. However, efforts continue in this regard and students with varying levels of diagnosed and undiagnosed disabilities are being increasingly integrated in the regular schools.

There is a growing problem of undiagnosed special needs especially in secondary schools. The expansion of access to secondary education has been accompanied by an increase in the number of students experiencing academic and behavioural difficulties. Teachers in the 'lower performing' schools report the highest incidences of behavioural disruptions, many of which are believed to be associated with undiagnosed student conditions, mental illnesses, and attention disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and are inhibiting student learning in the classroom⁷.

Strategies to address inadequate provisions for students with special needs

- Promote early screening to facilitate early identification of children with special needs and provision of relevant support to children and their families to support their learning.
- Compile data on children living with disabilities and other special needs to guide relevant policy and planning.
- Establish inclusive education policies to guide programming and address social and cultural barriers in the classroom.
- Support inclusive social protection systems to facilitate access to free assistive aids such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs, etc.
- Establish policies and practices which support increased flexibility and variety in assessment methodologies in the classroom and beyond.
- Support increased availability and use of appropriate technology, instruments, tools and activities adapted to the various needs and abilities.

7 Thompson, B. (2010). Quality Education for All: The impact of disruptive classroom behaviour (DCB). Caribbean Educational Research Journal, Vol. 2, (1), 37-46.

Barriers affecting the supply of education

Inadequate students support for struggling learners

Despite significant public investments in education, many schools (especially schools serving predominantly lower performing students) lack adequate human and information communication technology (ICT) support and other resources that facilitate learning for struggling students who need it most. This is compounded by inadequate formal pupil services such as guidance and counselling programmes⁸. Indeed additional funding is generally not provided to schools that predominantly serve low performing students.

Grade repetition is a frequent remedial response strategy for academically weak students in the region but this practice has often not contributed to student improvement because there is often minimal change (if any) in the pedagogical approaches or other complementary student support services. Indeed grade repetition practices in the sub-region appears to have negative impact on students.

Basic academic support services available in secondary schools have expanded in recent years to generally include a guidance counsellor, a special needs teacher and/or reading specialist who are expected to serve the needs of all students in the school. Unfortunately, student needs often quickly surpass the capacity of this limited support structure. Guidance counsellors in schools are also generally not monitored or assessed, and confidentiality remains a major concern in the provision of services to students⁹.

8 Marks, V. (2009). Universal access to secondary education in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, 34 (2), 56-70; and Gaible, E. (2008). *Survey of ICT and Education in the Caribbean: A summary report, Based on 16 Country Surveys*. Washington, DC.

9 Knight, V., & Obidah, J. (2014). Instilling Universal Secondary Education: Caribbean students' perceptions of the schooling experiences. *Journal of Education and Practice*, Volume 5 (32), 71-81.

Strategies to address inadequate support for struggling learners

- Support innovative changes to classroom instruction methods, including personalised professional development for teachers and support staff to increase their effectiveness.
- Expand school-based student and family support with improved links to community resources and other external services.
- Provide specialised support for students facing involuntary grade retention.
- Support the establishment/strengthening of crisis response mechanisms for more timely and effective support that will help avoid education breaks.
- Establish mechanisms to enhance support for children through transitions, especially from primary to secondary school and involving families.

Deficiencies in teacher quality and training

Quality education is dependent on the process of interaction between the student and the teacher, therefore, well-trained teachers and active learning techniques are essential to achieve quality learning outcomes. Teacher training certification presents a significant challenge to quality teaching and learning in schools across the sub-region (with the exception of Turks and Caicos Islands which have 90 percent trained teachers at the primary level and 95 percent at the secondary level). The problem is greater at the secondary level; half of the teachers across OECS sub-region and 39 percent in Grenada are untrained/uncertified¹⁰.

This has implications not only for the quality of teaching, but teachers' capacity (and subsequent willingness) to provide academic support to struggling students who may have not fully developed the basic literacy and numeracy skills

at the primary level. Indeed most students with literacy weaknesses generally do not improve upon transfer to secondary school, they often continue to experience difficulties throughout secondary school.

Strategies to address deficiencies in teacher quality and training

- Provide pre-service training for all new teacher recruits, which should cover subject knowledge, pedagogy and diagnosis of students' learning needs.
- Provide on-going in-service training and professional development for all teachers, making use of communities of practice and following up on training.
- Re-focus a substantial proportion of financing for post-secondary education on the development of high quality teacher training programmes.
- Mandate all new teachers to go through one-year professional development induction programmes before being fully attached to schools.
- Develop and enforce high national standards of training in the teaching profession and in line with international standards.-
- Use innovative approaches to support teachers' professional development, e.g. using select low performing schools as professional development schools requiring recruitment of the best teachers as mentors with pedagogical experimentation.
- Allocate a minimum of 20 percent of national budgets, or six percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education, and ensure that at least 50 percent of this is spent on basic education, with a much higher percentage where necessary.

Barriers to the demand for education

Poverty

Economic or financial factors negatively impact access to or demand for education at all levels in

¹⁰ OECS (2014). Education Statistical Digest.

the Eastern Caribbean. Although the countries have reached a level of development that should allow a significant proportion of the poor to escape from poverty, poverty is still a problem in the sub-region. It manifests in low incomes and inability to afford the direct and indirect costs of schooling. Poverty rates in the region ranges from 12 to 14 percent in Barbados and British Virgin Islands to 38 to 39 percent in Dominica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

The situation of those living below the poverty line in the region is exacerbated by high income inequality: the richest 20 percent of the population receives 57 percent of the total income and the poorest 20 percent receives less than 3 percent. Moreover, students from a lower socio-economic status, or students living in poverty, experience greater constraints than students from a higher socioeconomic status do. Thus, school dropout rates are higher among students living in poverty. The most disadvantaged in the region include an estimated 250,000 children from resource-poor families and children from poor rural areas and outlying islands. Some of these have dropped out of school and some are living on the streets¹¹.

There is a gender dimension to poverty in most countries in Eastern Caribbean. In Grenada, 44 percent of female-headed households are in the bottom three welfare quintiles compared to 18 percent of families with male heads. In Dominica, there is little difference in poverty level among individual females and males but the poverty headcount is 45 percent in female-headed households and 36 percent in male-headed households. No statistical relationship between gender and poverty was found in the Turks and Caicos Islands¹².

11 UNICEF (2011). Eastern Caribbean Multi-Country Programme: Country Programme Document 2012 – 2016.

12 UNICEF. (2007a). Promoting the Rights of Children with disabilities. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Digest No. 13.

Strategies to address poverty barriers

- Integrate health, nutrition, education and socio-economic development.
- Collaborate with government agencies and civil society.
- Establish direct contact with children and involve the parents.
- Provide tailored programmes for disadvantaged children.
- Provide opportunities for initiation and exploration for children.
- Provide traditional childrearing practices using evidence-based approaches.
- Pay attention to quality, including structure, child ration and group size, and processes, including caregiver/teacher warmth and responsiveness.

Secondary school teachers' attitude towards academically weak students

Given the recent nature of the transition to universalised access to secondary education for some countries, in many secondary schools there exists a negative perception by some secondary school teachers regarding the transitioning of low performing students to secondary schools. Given that secondary access had previously been restricted to academically inclined students, expansion of access to include increased numbers of students with deficiencies in basic literacy and numeracy skills has presented some challenges for teachers and principals. These teachers therefore perceive the recent expansion of access as negatively affecting traditional teaching and performance standards, and their perceptions are very evident to students¹³. This perception contributes to strained teacher-

13 Marks, V. (2009). Universal access to secondary education in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, 34 (2), 56-70; Thompson, B. (2010). Quality Education for All: The impact of disruptive classroom behaviour (DCB). *Caribbean Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 2, (1), 37-46; and Knight, V. (2014). The Policy of Universal Secondary Education (USE): Its influence on secondary schooling in Grenada. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Volume 9 (1), p. 16-35.

student relationships and consequently presents a barrier to positive classroom interactions.

Strategies to address secondary school teachers' attitudes to academically weak students

- Encourage practicing teachers to act as change agents for the students by exposing teachers to relevant professional development programmes.
- Build into the teacher education curriculum the three dispositions of openness, self-awareness or self-reflectiveness and commitment to social justice to help students and teachers develop awareness of diversity.
- Base the selection of teachers for the first year of secondary school on their ideology and predispositions.

Boys' disadvantage in educational participation and performance

The different experiences of girls and boys make it important to consider gender as a concern in understanding the participation and performance of children in school. Ensuring that boys and girls have equal educational opportunities is one of the most important and powerful steps towards combating gender discrimination and advancing children's rights.

Perceptions and traditions around gender can often combine with location, income and age to determine whether a child is in school or not¹⁴. Gender disparity is a barrier to education in the Eastern Caribbean; there are still differences in access and outcomes for boys and girls. Studies suggest that an entrenched concept of masculinity where the labour of boys is seen as vital for family livelihoods contributes to boys' dropout. On average, girls stay in school longer and achieve higher levels of functional education at the end of schooling than boys¹⁵.

14 UNICEF/UIS (2015). A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark. A Policy Paper/22/Fact Sheet 31.

15 Ibidem

Strategies to address the issue of boys' disadvantage in educational participation and performance

- Create a positive learning environment where peer pressure works positively for the students.
- Maintain a consistent, proactive, positive and gender neutral approach to behaviour management, including provision of appropriate incentives/rewards for effort and consistency.
- Ensure early identification of disengaged boys and girls and ensure appropriate remedial actions.
- Mentored boys have been found to be positively influenced by their mentor or role model.
- Promote the use of approaches that have proved to be successful with boys with clear objectives, real-life contextual settings, quick feedback, elements of fun and competition, and variety of activities.
- Use alternative curricula with greater vocational element.
- Increase parent involvement, a combination of strong learning ethos in school and increased involvement of parents in their sons' education could raise aspirations and achievement.

Barriers affecting the quality of education

Poor readiness of students for transition from primary to secondary school

While examination outcomes at the primary school are not comparable across countries, student performance in national examinations and in literacy and numeracy are generally found to be below national expectations, indicating low-level readiness for secondary education. For example, the pass rates for primary examinations in English in Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were 40%, 25.5%, 62.3% and 52.6% and 75.9 respectively while the pass rates in mathematics were 25.0%, 21%, 29%, 46.1%, 75%, 68% respectively¹⁶. Weak literacy

16 World Bank. (2013). How to improve quality of education in the Caribbean for the next generation?; and Saint Lucia Ministry of Education (2008).

and numeracy skills lead to weak performance in primary school and difficulty in transitioning from primary to secondary school in the Caribbean, and by extension transitioning from lower secondary to upper secondary school.

Gender differences in academic achievement are still a common challenge in the region. The Inter-American Development Bank¹⁷ confirms that in most Caribbean countries, females outperform males at various levels of schooling in a broad range of curriculum subjects, a pattern that is substantiated by in-class and national examinations. In other words, there is more low-level readiness among boys and this contributes to higher repetition and dropout rates.

Strategies to address the issue of poor readiness of students for transition from primary to secondary school

- Train teachers in differentiated instruction and positive behaviour support.
- Ensure that supervision and curriculum monitoring are done regularly and systematically.
- Implement early numeracy intervention programmes.
- Expand the reach of early literacy intervention services.
- Ensure that ICT resources, training and technical assistance are provided to support ICT integration efforts.



¹⁷ IDB / CDB (2008). Literacy and numeracy in the Caribbean. Report of the subregional meeting. Barbados.

¹⁸ Data available for three countries only - Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Final Thoughts



Eastern Caribbean faced a new challenge in 2015: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which makes more sense than ever in the region. The SDGs aim to complete the unfinished agenda of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the education sector there are many challenges to overcome in the following years, there is a need for special attention to the total or present exclusion (for children aged 4–17 out-of-school), but also to potential exclusion for children and adolescents at risk of dropping out.

National authorities have made great efforts to guarantee access to children and adolescents in the countries covered by the UNICEF Office for Eastern Caribbean. However, it is necessary to design and implement new and innovative education policies to guarantee the rights of those children still out-of-school and those attending school but cannot effectively use their educational opportunities.

Similar measures should be taken at the national and regional levels to ensure that children remain in school and learn while in the education system. Teachers, support staff, families and communities have a key role to play in ensuring that children and adolescents stay in school and have access to good quality education. Other sectors (health, protection, among others) also need to work with the education sector in supporting children and their families to overcome all obstacles to successful school completion.

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