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National Report on the Development of Education
in Trinidad and Tobago

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National Report on the Development of Education in Trinidad and Tobago Inclusive Education

Overview

The twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) consists of two main islands with a total land area of 5128 km². The current population is estimated at 1.3 million, while annual population growth stands at 0.27% per annum. (CSO, 2000). English is the principal language spoken; however, Spanish, Hindi, English Creole and a French patois are also spoken. (T& T, 2001). Trinidad and Tobago's economy is based primarily on petroleum and petro-chemicals. The country is a democratic republic. For the past thirteen years, the economy has been experiencing prosperity.



Figure 1: Map of Trinidad and Tobago

In terms of trends, the average annual increase in GDP (at 2000 prices) for the period 2003 to 2007 is 7.9%. (Table 1 below provides details on GDP trends for the past 5 years), while GDP per capita also rose from US\$6,970 in 2001 to US\$16,091.8 in 2007. The unemployment rate continued its downward trend falling to 5.8 percent during October 2006 to March 2007, from 6.8 percent in the similar 2005/2006 period.

Table 1: Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago at Constant (2000) Prices/TT\$ Millions

Sector	2003r	2004r	2005r	2006r	2007p
GDP	66,100.2	71,232.4	75,597.7	84,794.6	89,444.8
% Change	14.4	7.8	6.1	12.2	5.5

Source: Review of the Economy 2007, Ministry of Finance 2008

1.1 Major reforms and innovations in the education system

1.1.1 The organization, structure and management of the education system: Policy Setting

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has charted a course to developed country status by the year 2020 within the context of national, regional and international goals and commitments; and has developed a framework for the realization of this vision which identifies five (5) key developmental priorities: developing innovative people; nurturing a caring society; enabling competitive business; investing in sound infrastructure and environment; and promoting effective government. These developmental priorities have been translated into economic and social transformation and reformation policies, strategies and initiatives to facilitate competitiveness and effectiveness in a dynamic global environment.

The government, in its Vision 2020 draft National Strategic Plan The Ministry of Education (MOE), in collaboration and consultation with other key Ministries and stakeholders, is charged with the responsibility of creating the innovative people defined as *highly skilled, well-educated people aspiring to a local culture of excellence that is driven by equal access to learning opportunities*, who will, in turn serve as a solid *foundation* for a developed society and nation.

The government aims to create a seamless, high-quality, world class education system in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) which will contribute to a highly skilled, talented and knowledgeable workforce and to the development of a people characterized by excellence in innovation. It is within this context that the MOE has been working diligently, along with other key stakeholders, in restructuring and developing the education system in T&T.

The Ministry has developed a Corporate Plan for the period 2008-2012 which identifies three (3) strategic priorities – focus on the schools; change/reform the Ministry; and involve the community; which establish the framework within which educational goal setting, policy development, strategic planning, programme development and implementation, establishment and management of quality standards, and monitoring and evaluation are conducted by the Ministry's central administration.

Other key initiatives of the Ministry include implementation of a decentralized service delivery system to support the operationalization of the strategic priorities, and to ensure optimum efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery to its clients.

At the school level, school-based management will be the main strategy used to ensure the effective delivery of quality education to our students and the development of all our schools as *centres of excellence*.

1.1.2 The aims and purposes of education at each level

The MOE champions the transformation, growth and strengthening efforts at four (4) of the five (5) levels of the education system, namely, the early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-secondary (non-tertiary) levels; whilst the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education champions initiatives at the fifth or tertiary level.

The early childhood programme offers two (2) years of centre-based programmes for children from three (3) to four (4) years old. The underlying goal of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is to provide the young children with opportunities to succeed in all areas of development utilizing the constructivist learning theory. Currently, there are 963 ECCE centres, with a total enrolment of 29,685.

Primary education serves to ensure the transmission of culture and values, deepen cognitive and social development, and prepare students with literacy and numeracy skills to successfully pursue a quality secondary level programme. The primary level comprises seven (7) years of schooling, with 548 government, government-assisted and private schools serving a student enrolment of 133,692.

The five year Secondary programme marks the transition from receiving and gathering information at the early childhood and primary levels, to analytical and critical thinking supported by a well-rounded general education. At this level, there are 199 government, government-assisted and private schools offering both academic and technical and vocational courses, with a student enrolment of 102,030.

Post-secondary education, which allows access to two (2) additional years of schooling at the sixth form/non-tertiary/university-preparatory level at a secondary school, has a student enrolment of 9,240.

1.1.3 Curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies

The MOE has identified six essential learning outcomes which help to define standards of attainment for all secondary school students – aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication, personal development, problem solving, and technological competence. Curriculum design therefore facilitates the attainment of these learning outcomes, and prepares students for further study or for entry into the world of work.

The national curricula should also provide all students with the maximum opportunity to develop their potential and should therefore reflect and support our national ideals; be flexible and responsive to the developmental needs, life experiences and unique abilities of each individual; provide learners with the resources to construct knowledge that is relevant to their needs and interests; and equip all learners with the knowledge and skills to attain a good quality of life.

In the area of curriculum development and delivery, the major initiatives being pursued at the secondary level include:

- Revision and implementation of the new curricula for forms 1 to 3, in eight (8) core subjects - Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Spanish, Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education, Technology Education, as well as for forms 4 and 5 in all subject areas;
- Development and distribution of curriculum and teachers' guides;
- Development and implementation of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications Programme;
- Upgrade, outfitting and overall modernization of school facilities to facilitate the effective delivery of revised curricula, particularly for specialized subjects such as Technology Education and Visual and Performing Arts; and

Initiatives in the area of curriculum development and delivery at the primary level include:

- Review and revision of the curriculum in the subject areas of Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and Physical Education;
- Development of a strategy and implementation plan for the introduction of Spanish as the first foreign language; and

This is all within the context of the MOE's development of an integrated curriculum for children in the early primary grades to ensure a seamless transition from the early childhood to the primary level.

1.1.4 The legal and regulatory framework for education

The system of education in T&T is organized and regulated by the provisions of the Education Act, Chapter 39:01, of the Laws of the Republic of T&T. The Education Act is currently being revised to create a legislative environment which supports the entire restructuring process.

Another area of focus is a modification of the current Contract with the denominational school boards of management which manage 71 percent of public primary schools. Arrangements for school refurbishment, reconstruction and outfitting form the core of this reform initiative.

The Ministry's reform agenda is in keeping with its thrust towards the attainment of a high quality education system for all citizens. To ensure the effectiveness of its reform strategies, the Ministry is developing a quality management system which will include rigorous monitoring, analysis and feedback, and facilitate continuous improvements throughout the system. In connection with this, the Ministry has conducted extensive research and ongoing stakeholder consultations, to inform the development of Quality Standards for Education in T&T, intended to regulate the administration and management of the education system at all levels, and form the basis for monitoring and assessment of the system.

The Ministry has also compiled Standards and Guidelines for the Operation of All Schools which will allow for consistency in the delivery of education at all primary and secondary schools

across the country. The standards will regulate, inter alia, the registration and admission of students; suitability of physical facilities; safety and health of students; record-keeping; and staffing.

1.1.5 Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

The Ministry has, over the past 10 years, embarked upon a comprehensive overhaul of secondary education delivery in Trinidad and Tobago, through the SEMP. With that programme well underway, the ECCE and primary levels now enter the spotlight. In this regard, the Ministry has commenced the planning and preparation for a Seamless Education System expected to yield maximum student achievement; increased productivity in the education system; and greater connectivity between student, school and the wider learning community. This includes the conduct of six (6) studies in the areas of early childhood care and education; inclusive education; primary education - curriculum, testing and Spanish as the first foreign language; school mapping and rationalization of resources; and sector management.

The MOE has also finalized and disseminated a policy on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Education which provides the framework for the integration of ICT into the operation and management of the business of the Ministry. Additional ICT initiatives include the establishment of fully equipped computer laboratories at primary schools; networking of secondary schools and maintenance of ICT infrastructure; provision of instructional ICT training to educators; provision of tools for educators to develop instructional software and collaborative classroom systems.

The MOE has identified restructuring and decentralization as a key strategy for transforming the education system. This strategy aims to improve learning, teaching and management in the education system, as well as organizational performance and effectiveness. In addition, the establishment of a national system of local school boards to assist schools has been completed at the secondary level, and is currently being instituted at the primary and early childhood levels.

1.2. Main policies, achievements and lessons learned

1.2.1 Access to education

The guiding philosophy of the Ministry is that all children, regardless of ethnic group, religion, socio-economic status or gender, have a right to become all they are capable of becoming. The government successfully achieved universal primary education capacity (UPE) since the mid 1950s; and universal secondary education (USE) in 2000. At the ECCE level, however, **72** percent of the 3-4 age group currently access education of varying degrees of quality. In seeking to address this issue, the GORTT has embarked on a plan to expand the sector, which will be outlined at 1.2.2 below.

The Ministry is in the process of developing a Policy on Inclusive Education which will address the provision of support and services to all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social or emotional conditions. The policy identifies ten (10) underlying principles which must be observed to attain an inclusive education system. These principles include equal opportunity, valuing diversity, facilitating access, participation of parents, identifying and addressing individual needs, continuous professional development of staff, developing partnerships within the sector and externally.

A new initiative at the secondary level is the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ), a competence-based qualification developed from industry-set, regionally approved occupational standards. The CVQ is available in several occupational areas including agriculture, business, communication, construction, energy, health and manufacturing, at two levels, level 1: entry level - semi-skilled, apprentice, supervised beginning worker and level 2: independent, skilled worker. It allows for flexible articulation within the general education system as well as a smooth transition to the world of work.

Another innovation embarked upon within recent years is the National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSTT). This is an educational system which uses a blend of classroom and distance education methods and employs a wide range of educational media. It is complementary to the formal education system; however, it emphasizes entry-level skills knowledge, abilities

and competencies rather than qualifications. Courses offered range from early childhood education through primary, secondary, technical and vocational education, ICT training, enrichment and leisure programme and life skills. By offering more diversified curricula, the Open School facilitates those who may have missed out at an earlier stage or those who may simply wish to further their career goals or personal development.

1.2.2 Early childhood intervention

The philosophy underlying early childhood care and education (ECCE) in T&T is that all children can learn and each child, regardless of economic status, physical or emotional challenges or gender has a right to high quality education to realize his/her full potential. Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes have been found to contribute to overall pupil performance.

Such programmes can enhance physical well-being and motor development, language development and basic cognitive skills. ECCE programmes can improve school readiness; (.....) and increase completion and achievement. (UNESCO, 2006, p. 111).

It is within this context that the MOE has developed and commenced the implementation of a comprehensive programme aimed at achieving universal access to ECCE for all 3-4 year old children. This programme is expected to address challenges including the lack of access to quality ECCE programmes; ad hoc policies; inconsistencies in the quality of services offered to young children; developmentally inappropriate curriculum programmes; lack of appropriately qualified and competent teachers; and inadequate physical facilities and educational resources.

The programme included the development of a National Policy on Child Care - Quality Standards for Regulating Early Childhood Services in T&T. Critical areas addressed in this standards document are the registration and licensing of ECCE centres, staffing, quality early childhood practices, quality standards for early childhood environments, record-keeping, health and safety and the physical environment.

Additionally, the Ministry has developed a National ECCE Curriculum Guide, which forms the basis for a shared philosophy and consistent curriculum offerings at all ECCE centres. The new

child-centred curriculum is characterized by creative and constructive activities that seek to develop children's knowledge, understanding and skills in areas including personal, social and emotional development; language and literacy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; life skills; mathematical concepts; creative development; and spiritual and moral development.

The Ministry has also invested in the development of an effective system of early childhood professional development .

The ECCE construction programme, aimed at constructing six hundred (600) centres throughout T&T to achieve universal access, is moving apace to provide learning environments in which the physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional and social needs of the children are satisfactorily met. The new design of these centres consist of a well laid-out single storey building, built to modern structural standards and accessible to the physically challenged, with appropriate lighting and ventilation, and outfitted with developmentally appropriate teaching and learning resources. Of note is the focus on initial provision of Centres in areas identified as disadvantaged in the 2005 Survey of Living Conditions.

1.2.3 Learning outcomes

The Ministry, recognizing that students have varying interests, abilities and learning styles, has commenced the reform of the national assessment system to address unacceptably low levels of academic achievement and unsatisfactory personal and social development outcomes.

The Ministry has commenced the implementation of a restructured Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP), which integrates ongoing or continuous classroom assessment into the teaching and learning process, both at the primary and secondary levels. The CAP is designed to influence the quality and style of teaching and learning in the classroom; inform on students' readiness for the next level of learning and facilitate a smooth transition through the system; and promote diagnostic remedial and preventative intervention when necessary. In addition, an Operational Manual was developed for teachers to promote good teaching and assessment practices aimed at improving students' learning.

At the primary level, between 10-12 percent of pupils annually score 30% or less at the Secondary Entrance Assessment, the results of which are used for placement at the secondary level. In order to address this issue of poor performance, a continuous assessment system was instituted for early identification of pupils at risk in order to facilitate remediation. The National Test, best described as an annual summative assessment integral to the CAP at the primary level, seeks to track students' progress in school, identify areas of academic weaknesses and gather information for decision-making at the school, district and national levels. Administration of these examinations early on in children's careers enables remediation since reports are sent to schools as well as to the educational districts, and corrective programmes are organized at either the school or district level under the direction of the School Supervision and Curriculum Divisions. Teachers are provided with training and strategies to counteract identified areas of weakness. Schools may also organize their own remedial programmes. In conjunction with the Student Support Services, individual education programmes (IEPs) may be developed for individual pupils.

The Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT) Programme was established to alleviate problems of illiteracy, and focuses on pupils from Infant Year 2 to Standard 2. It seeks to ensure that best practices are employed in the teaching of reading. The programme provides training in the teaching of reading to make every teacher a reading teacher. Currently, CETT is operational in 61 schools, and this number is expected to be increase to 200 centres in 2008/9.

The National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE) is a new system of certification designed to address the problem of students leaving school without full certification after five years of secondary education. The NCSE certificate will provide, for all secondary school students, a comprehensive testimonial of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they have attained from active and successful participation in a programme of academic, vocational and aesthetic education and co-curricular activities. The programme utilizes a combination of continuous and summative assessment which is more sensitive to the varying interests, abilities, needs and learning styles of the student population. This type of assessment responds to the modernized national curriculum which is now in place, providing education in eight (8) core subject areas identified at 1.1.3 above.

1.2.4 Teacher education and teaching

New standards for teacher education, professional development and performance in T&T are being established with a view to achieving high quality instructional delivery and improved student performance. The Ministry is developing a policy on Teaching and Teacher Education in T&T, which will address the development of our teachers from pre-service preparation to retirement including pre-service preparation and training of teachers; teacher recruitment and selection; teacher certification and licensing; teacher induction and mentoring; performance appraisal; continuous professional development; and quality assurance.

The MOE is currently engaged in reforming the current system of teacher recruitment and selection aimed at ensuring teachers possess both academic and pedagogic qualifications. The Ministry has therefore collaborated with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and other stakeholders, and developed and implemented pre-service undergraduate programmes in education for teachers and educators. In addition, the Ministry conducts continual training to re-skill and equip incumbent teachers to deliver the curriculum in a manner that is responsive to the needs of learners.

Training Programmes for teachers and other educational professionals are being facilitated through the Secondary Education Modernization Programme. Persons have been trained at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in areas including Technology Education, Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Educational Leadership. In addition, short courses were conducted in the eight core subject areas to ensure effective implementation of the revised curriculum in Forms 1 to 3.

1.3 Combating Poverty and Promoting Inclusion through Social Programmes

1.3.1 Social programmes

A comprehensive system of support is being implemented to address the barriers to learning, especially those which impact on the psycho-social development of school children. In order to give the same chance to all students to learn in appropriate environment, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago provides through existing programmes, meals, books and transportation to the school population. Through its social support programmes the ministry seeks to provide students with the basic resources necessary to facilitate their attendance at school, so that they can benefit fully from the education system. These programmes include the following:

The School Nutrition Programme established to provide one third of the day's total nutrient requirements for lunch, thereby contributing to the improvement of the nutritional status of students, especially the underprivileged child, thereby enhancing the child's ability to learn. Lunches and breakfasts are provided at Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary levels.

The 2005 Survey of Living Conditions indicated that 81.1 percent of primary pupils for example, now have access to free school meals, and only 5.5 percent have no access. Further, 71 percent of poor pupils and 45 percent of non poor pupils take advantage of school meals (Kairi Consultants Limited, 2007). These data indicated a high level of success in reaching the needy.

The Textbook Rental/Loan Programme involves the provision of textbooks and other educational resources required for the core curriculum areas, for students at public and private schools from early childhood care and education to secondary level, including special schools and technical and vocational schools. Beneficiaries of this programme total 257,795 students as at June 2008. In this regard the 2005 Survey of Living conditions indicated that only 4 percent of primary pupils and 10 percent of secondary students did not have all the required schoolbooks. This programme is thus having the desired effect.

The School Transport System through the use of the Public Transport Services Corporation (PTSC) buses and private maxi-taxis caters to the needs of students who experience difficulties

in traveling to and from school. This service is provided mainly to secondary students who travel longer comparative distances from home to school. In the fiscal year 2007/08, 36,500 students have been provided with daily transportation services to and from school (June 2008). This facility has had a significant positive effect on students' attendance and punctuality.

1.3.2 Education and poverty alleviation

In Trinidad and Tobago education has long been perceived as the major vehicle for elevating citizens out of poverty. The economic growth of the recent past has afforded the government the opportunity to expand secondary education in order to ensure that all children are given a chance to fulfil their educational potential. At the same time the secondary curricula were reformed in an attempt to keep pace with local and global job market requirements. Part of this reform is the inclusion of Health and Family Life Education, which prepares students for modern socio-cultural challenges, and teaches them the benefits of healthy lifestyles. The expansion of the Student Support Services through the provision of school social workers as well as programmes aimed at ensuring that school climates were more conducive to learning also helped students experiencing difficulty to adjust and benefit from, secondary education.

In addition, new and innovative ways were sought to ensure that those exiting the system without certification are provided with a second chance. Section 2.3.4 below provides more detail on this area.

2.1 Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future

2.1.1 Conceptualization of inclusive education in Trinidad and Tobago

From a global perspective, the issues of inclusive education are included in the “Education for All (EFA)” (*The Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. (UNESCO, 2000). The EFA Plan takes account of the needs of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV and AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs.

With the future of this country pegged against the creation of a society of innovative people capable of participating fully in the mainstream socioeconomic activities, this country must embrace the diversity of its people. In this regard, the Ministry of Education is currently finalizing a Policy Document on Inclusive Education. Trinidad and Tobago subscribes to UNESCO’s definition of inclusion as

A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participating in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education (Booth 1996).

It subscribes to the view that inclusive education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal and non formal educational settings. Therefore, rather than being a marginal theme on how some learners can be integrated into the mainstream education system, education is an approach that looks into how to transform the education system in order to respond to the diversity of learners, so that every student receives a learning experience that is appropriate to his/her individual needs.

Inclusive education in Trinidad and Tobago is also based on the Ministry of Education’s philosophical direction which was clearly outlined in the Education Policy Paper 1993-2003 and further defined in the Strategic Plan 2002-2006. The Draft Corporate Plan 2008-2012 also supports initiatives for inclusive education. These can be considered stepping stones toward full

participation in education by all citizens. The philosophical underpinning for inclusion is based on the premises that:

- Every child has an inherent right to an education which will enhance the development of maximum capability regardless of gender, ethnic, economic, social and religious background;
- Every child has the ability to learn and that we must build on this positive assumption;
- Children vary in natural ability and schools therefore should provide for all students programmes which are adapted to varying abilities and which provide opportunities to develop differing and socially useful talents.

Vision for Inclusive Education

One main aim of inclusive education is the gradual integration of special education services into mainstream education. Any separate Special Education should be aimed at preparing students for education in the general school system. The concept of inclusion accepts that students learn and use their learning differently. Inclusion is an effort to ensure that students with special educational needs attend schools along with their siblings, friends and neighbours, while also receiving the specially designed instruction and support they need to succeed as learners and to aspire to achieving the highest possible standards. Inclusion refers to the opportunity for persons with special educational needs to participate fully in all of the educational, employment, consumer, recreational, community and domestic activities that typify everyday society.

2.1.2 Challenges to social and educational inclusion

The White Paper (1993-2003) identified the changing context of the society as a major reason for establishing support services for students. It highlighted changes in the labour market, changes in the size, composition and structure of the family, problems related to teenage suicide, pregnancy and substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse and decline in positive male role models. The main challenge to ensuring educational and social inclusion for students at risk was the lack of a co-ordinated mechanism for student identification, diagnosis, and remediation.

Based on the concerns expressed above, a decision was taken to pilot Diagnostic Prescriptive Services at the educational district level. Despite being under-resourced, this pilot provided the

Ministry of Education with information outlined below, which demonstrated the need for a more Comprehensive Student support service.

- Of the 1888 students referred to the Diagnostic Prescriptive Service, about 78% had a combination of learning disabilities, emotional and social difficulties as well as hearing, vision or physical impairments. This revealed the serious nature of learning and behavioral problems at the Primary level which needs to be addressed if learning is to take place and indiscipline reduced.
- The identification of the learning and behavioural difficulties emphasized the importance and the need for early diagnosis and intervention in the form of educational and behavioural assessment along with immediate intervention of individualized education programmes.
- The necessity of having the parents involved in the learning process as early as possible so as to have them participate meaningfully in the intervention process.
- Continuous in-service education for teachers at the school site proved to be absolutely essential as teachers began appreciating the concept of child-centred learning whereas before these children would not have been given much attention.
- Prevention and developmental programmes especially those of personal / social, career and educational guidance have demonstrated their effectiveness in enhancing the learning process and reducing indiscipline amongst students.

This evidence led to the establishment in 2004 of the Student Support Services Division. The main foci of this Division are addressing the needs of all students, especially vulnerable students and those in difficult circumstances, providing diagnostic and prescriptive services, guidance and counseling, social work and special education services. The objectives of the student support services are to:

- Facilitate early detection through diagnosis and intervention from early childhood through primary level;
- Provide academic, personal/social and career guidance for all students from primary through secondary level;

- Make available counseling and specialized intervention strategies for students with emotional, behavioural and learning concerns at the primary and secondary level; and
- Provide specialized services for gifted students, for students with moderate and severe special educational needs as well as with special educational needs attending regular schools.

The Ministry is now in the second phase of its three-phase project for full establishment of student support services, with full implementation expected by the year 2015, having commenced in 2005. While the first phase saw the strengthening of the support systems in selected primary schools, the second phase seeks to develop support services at the early childhood level, at additional primary schools and selected secondary schools. These services include:

- Expansion of guidance and counselling at the secondary level
- Expansion of support services at the primary level schools through the provision of on-site School Social Workers, Special Education Teachers, Guidance Officers, Special Education Resource Aides and Hearing Interpreters;
- Expansion of off-site services for students with severe emotional and behavioural problems;
- Preparation of students from special schools for mainstreaming at regular schools and the preparation of regular schools for children with special education needs;
- Continued early identification and intervention of students with special education needs at ECCE Centres and primary schools;
- Sensitisation and outreach of education personnel to inclusive education.

Thus far the main challenges to implementation of this massive programme have been the lack of sufficient quantities of suitably qualified personnel; and cumbersome human resource systems and mechanisms.

2.1.3 Inclusive Education – Legal frameworks and categories of the excluded

In its thrust towards inclusive education, Trinidad and Tobago places particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement. The Ministry in its National Policy on the student Support Services System developed in 2004, and in the more recent Policy on Inclusive Education (First Draft completed in 2008) sought to identify the categories of students for intervention. The groups identified for particular concern are as follows:

- Dropouts,
- Students with learning or other disabilities,
- Students who are gifted and talented,
- Students infected or affected by HIV,
- Students with social, emotional or behavioral difficulties,
- ESL Students (English for speakers of other languages), that is, students not fluent in the language of instruction.

Additionally, the following sub categories are recognized:

- Asperger Syndrome
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
- Autism
- Cerebral Palsy
- Congenital Developmental Problems/ Delay/ Disability
- Down's Syndrome
- Dysphasia, Dyscalculia and Dyslexia
- Hearing Impairment
- Hydrocephalus
- Mental Retardation
- Mild Mental Retardation
- Speech and Language Disorder
- Visual Impairment

2.2 Public Policies

2.2.1 Current dimensions of exclusion and indicators to inform policy

The overall conceptualization of student inclusive education needs in Trinidad and Tobago was based mainly on studies conducted and reports generated in the recent past; as well as on statistical indicators of pupil and student performance. These data gave an indication of the relative proportions of students falling under each category requiring immediate and specific attention. The proportions identified, and the source of the data which were, in turn, used to develop the comprehensive inclusive education programme, are identified in the table below.

Table 2: Areas of special concern that require immediate attention

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percentage Affected</i>	<i>Information Source</i>
Gifted	2%	Based on International Standard figure
Learning & Behaviourally challenged	10-15%	Based on cut off 30 th percentile of Secondary Entrance Assessment Examination results (2002-2007)
Under achievers – Having the ability to perform but are poorly motivated because of domestic, social and school related problems	40-50%	Based on CXC-CSEC results of students not achieving

Source: National Policy on the Student Support Services System, MOE 2004

NB: CXC-CSEC is the terminal secondary examination

The main indicator utilized by the Ministry of Education to facilitate inclusive education is student performance at national and regional examinations. At the primary level, all Standard 1 and 3 pupils are required to sit a National Test in Mathematics and Language Arts; while with effect from 2008, Standard 2 and 4 pupils will be tested in Science and Social Studies. Results from these examinations are used to provide data for making decisions and developing strategies intended to improve educational output at the school, district, and national levels. Prior to inception of the National Test, pupils were tested only at the end of the primary cycle for

placement at the secondary level, and too late to facilitate intervention for pupils found to be in need.

Pupil performance is currently analysed according to educational district, gender, school type; and is amenable to further analysis according to socio-economic status at the level of the administrative district, teacher qualification, and intervention by the Student Support Services Division. The results of these examinations indicate areas of weakness in curriculum design and pedagogy; as well as the number of pupils at risk, thus providing a basis for policy development and reform. The average score of individual schools is also used to determine the levels at which intervention should take place, the need for remedial teacher training, placement of auxiliary staff, and qualification for a broad spectrum of interventions.

Results of the terminal primary examination, the Secondary Entrance Assessment are also used to assess pupil performance and as an indicator of the need for further interventions at the secondary level. Since this examination is also used to assign students to secondary schools on the basis of merit – students with similar scores are placed together, it is also an indicator of the need of individual schools for remedial staff.

At the secondary level, student performance at the National Certificate of Secondary Education (Form 3); and the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (the terminal secondary examination), are also used to inform policy and to indicate the need for additional resources.

Another indicator is the specific problems/ issues facing the students and schools currently serviced by the SSSD. A record of the types of issues and their prevalence, and the types of interventions necessary to combat them naturally inform the policy and programme design.

2.2.2 Current issues relevant to inclusive education policy in Trinidad and Tobago

The main focus of inclusive education prior to 2004 was:

- Students with significant learning difficulties,
- Students with deficits of hearing, vision or mobility, but without serious intellectual or emotional problems; and

- Students with severe educational needs (mentally challenged).

Subsequent to 2004 with the establishment of SSSD, additional emphasis was placed on students with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties particularly at the primary level. Within the past 20 years there has been an increase in the forces and factors which contribute to social vulnerability. These include growing economic disparities within communities; increases in personal and community security and safety issues – high crime levels; and weakening of traditional institutions, in particular the extended family and value systems (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). This in turn, has led to an increase in violence and indiscipline in the school setting, as well as an increase in the variety of social issues impinging on the school population.

Further, the 2005 Survey of Living Conditions indicated that 16.7 percent of the national population lived in poverty. Moreover, there was a tendency for poverty to be concentrated in younger age groups since households with a larger number of children run a greater risk of being poor. The survey also indicated a higher tendency among poor students to be out of school (10-14 and 15-19 age-groups).

These factors speak to a need to develop methodologies within the education system for dealing with the emotional baggage of children exposed to these conditions; quite apart from providing short term solutions to material issues such as school feeding and textbook provision.

The Caribbean as a region has one of the highest incidences of HIV infections, especially among females aged 15-24 (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). The Policy on Inclusiveness also speaks to students infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, in an attempt to address their psycho-social concerns. The Ministry of Education has also developed a policy on HIV/AIDS.

Another new focus is students not fluent in the language of instruction. The current construction boom in Trinidad and Tobago has necessitated the importation of foreign labour. Additionally, as indicated above, Trinidad and Tobago's economy is based on a thriving petrochemical sector consisting of petroleum, natural gas and asphalt. The favourable economic conditions resulting from the spiralling oil prices have resulted in an increase in the number of foreign nationals

migrating to this country to take advantage of business opportunities. These new immigrants may be native Spanish, Arabic or Chinese speakers. These conditions have resulted in a steady increase in the number of students in the education system who do not speak English, and thus the need to develop policies to ensure the inclusion and ultimate success of these students.

Another new focus is students who are gifted and talented. This area is of particular importance to the Ministry of Education in light of the need to ensure that we can produce critical thinkers, artists, scientists, mathematicians and inventors to participate and contribute to the knowledge economy of the 21st century. This area will be further explored in 2008/09.

2.2.3 Vulnerable groups and those not accounted for in the inclusiveness policy

The Inclusiveness Policy seeks to ensure that the educational needs of all students are met, thus ensuring that they fulfil their potential. At all national examinations in Trinidad and Tobago, at both the primary and secondary levels, girls have been found to out-perform boys. At the SEA for example, between 2002 and 2007 the percentage of boys scoring 30 percent or less far exceeded that of girls. (Table 3 below indicates the disparity).

Table 3: SEA Results 2003 – 2007 - Remedial students by Gender

Year	No. who wrote	No. of Remedial students scoring 30% & below (% of students who wrote)	No. of male students (% of Remedial students)	No. of female students (% of remedial students)
2003	20669	2146 (10.4%)	1596 (74.4%)	550 (25.6%)
2004	20814	2433 (11.7%)	1737 (71.4%)	696 (28.6%)
2005	19786	2209 (11.2%)	1559 (70.5%)	650 (29.5%)
2006	18719	1932 (10.3%)	1390 (71.9%)	542 (28.1%)
2007	17804	2405 (13.5%)	1650 (68.6%)	755 (31.4%)

Conversely, among those scoring 90 percent and above, girls were over-represented, 61% to 39%. The figures for 2007 presented in Table 4 below indicate that this phenomenon is evident to greater or lesser degrees in all educational districts. This pattern is also evident among younger pupils as early as Standard 1, and continues at the secondary level. It is thus a serious

problem which must be investigated and dealt with comprehensively. In order to accurately diagnose and treat with this trend, and to facilitate meaningful amendments to the Policy on Inclusion, research must be done to develop an accurate profile of the underperforming male.

Table 4: SEA results 2007 – Students scoring 90% and above by Gender

DISTRICTS	TOTAL			GENDER			
	No. Entered	No. Above 90%	Percentage Above 90%	MALE		FEMALE	
				Number	Percentage Male	Number	Percentage Female
Caroni	2709	236	8.7	99	41.9	137	58.1
North Eastern	953	34	3.6	14	41.2	20	58.8
Port of Spain	3346	253	7.6	101	39.9	152	60.1
St. George East	4054	333	8.2	133	39.9	200	60.1
St. Patrick	1819	66	3.6	24	36.4	42	63.6
South Eastern	1455	75	5.2	20	26.7	55	73.3
Victoria	2634	293	11.1	112	38.2	181	61.8
Tobago	834	11	1.3	4	36.4	7	63.6
TOTAL	17804	1301	7.3	507	39.0	794	61.0

2.2.4 Current educational reforms and inclusive education

The Ministry's main priority for the period 2008-2012 is the renewal of the school. In this regard the main objectives are:

- Guaranteeing access and opportunity for **every** child
- Providing a quality, world-class education
- Establishing a safe, nurturing learning environment
- Instituting a capacity for learning and achievement.

The realization of this vision demands a holistic approach to the reform effort. The Ministry's reform agenda therefore includes the restructuring of the administrative systems, upgrade of physical facilities, review of the legal machinery, development of a supportive policy framework, international co-operation where beneficial, institutional strengthening, and involvement of all of our stakeholders; with professional development to improve the capacity of the staff to carry out reforms and sustain the system-wide change. Inclusive education is

therefore being adopted against the background of system-wide reform. The intention is to ensure success by providing all the necessary supports and resources for inclusiveness, and by educating our publics. It is against this background that the thrust for inclusive education is being executed. The major initiatives are outlined below.

Quality Management

To ensure the effectiveness of its reform strategies, the Ministry is **developing a quality management system** which will include rigorous monitoring, analysis and feedback, and facilitate continuous improvements throughout the system. In this connection, the Ministry has conducted extensive research and ongoing stakeholder consultations, to inform the development of Quality Standards for Education in T&T (revised Green Paper). These standards will guide the administration and management of the education system at all levels, and will be used to monitor, assess and improve the respective processes within the system.

Standard Setting

The Ministry has also compiled Standards and Guidelines for the Operation of All Schools (revised Green Paper), which will allow for consistency in the delivery of education at all primary and secondary schools across the country. The standards will regulate the registration and admission of students; curriculum and methods of instruction; suitability of physical facilities; safety and health of students; discipline of staff and students; administration and organization; record-keeping; and staffing.

Seamless Education System

The major on-going educational reform in T&T is the development of a seamless education system, from early childhood care, through primary, secondary, post secondary, tertiary to the work-place. Inclusive education is at the heart of this project. The overall objectives of the project are enhanced equity, quality and relevance of the education services provided at the ECCE and primary levels; and improved sector management, monitoring and evaluation. The development and implementation of a seamless education system is informed, by the following principles inter alia, which encompass inclusive education:

- **Equitable access to education and training opportunities** for all from early childhood care, through primary, secondary, post secondary, tertiary education; with sensitivity to population diversity.
- **Co-ordinated and integrated education and training system** with proper co-ordination and articulation among the various levels.
- **Learner-centredness** – Student interest rather than administrative convenience should determine instructional decision-making.
- **Quality/Standards of Education and Training** – High standards of academic achievement should be set, and high expectations held for student achievement.
- Seamless education should also **provide second chances** for those who exit the system without certification; and re-entry opportunities for dropouts.
- There should be **articulation between levels**, without compromising the distinct nature of each level.

The **Inclusive Education component** of the Seamless Education initiative is broad in scope, with four components as follows:

- 1 Enhanced equity, quality and relevance of the education services;
- 2 Improved quality and relevance for primary education;
- 3 Improved sector management; and
- 4 Social Marketing.

Inclusive education is encompassed as a sub-component under Component one, and is intended to strengthen the capacity of Ministry to increase understanding of the policy and concept of inclusive education strategies among stakeholders; and develop and enhance programmes which provide appropriate services to meet the learning needs of the diverse student body with a view to facilitating the each child's academic and human potential.

Under the ambit of the Seamless Education System, the Ministry is also seeking to ensure that physical facilities are in keeping with the new vision for education. In the attempt to meet individual pupils' needs, the ECCE Centres and Primary schools constructed in the future will be equipped with a separate facility for therapeutic services. Additionally, schools constructed over the past 20 years have been outfitted to accommodate the physically challenged.

Restructuring and Decentralization

In addition, the Ministry is currently restructuring and decentralizing its functions and processes. To this end decentralization policies to support school-level management and decision-making responsive to local contexts and conditions have been developed. Further, a system of Local School Boards has been instituted and fully operationalized in all public secondary schools; while preparations are being made for institution at the primary and ECCE levels. Student Councils have also been established at 102 public secondary schools; and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) implemented at the majority of primary and secondary schools. At the central level, plans are in train for the establishment of district offices which will perform a wide array of services inclusive of curriculum implementation and student support services. The provision of offices and services at the district level, together with the provision of school level supports, provide a management framework against which the inclusive system can be implemented.

Information and Communication Technology Integration in Education

The Moe has also embraced the wider use of technology in every aspect of the education system. An Education Management Information System which is being introduced on a phased basis involves the provision of software and database management systems required for effective student records management, teaching delivery management, and school administration. This system will facilitate the keeping of detailed records necessary for interventions at the individual student level, the tracking of students' progress through the system and evaluation of interventions. The incorporation of a GIS component will also facilitate the co-ordination of student support services at the district level.

Stakeholder Involvement

The Ministry of Education recognizes that stakeholder involvement and participation; and improved and increased communication are the keys to restoring the relationship between school and community, engaging parents in a more supportive modality, providing a steady environment for student learning, and facilitating the linkage between the world of school and the world of work.

2.3 *Systems Links and Transitions*

2.3.1 Main barriers to inclusive education

Realization of the goal of establishing an inclusive education system in Trinidad and Tobago entails “changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision (...) and conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children”. (MOE, SSSD, 2007).

The commitment to inclusive education needs to be demonstrated in a real way, through the provision of adequate human and material resources. Instituting this system necessitates a change in the current *modus operandi* of the MOE in particular, as well as the wider Government. Consultants Miske Witt and Associates (2008) in their analysis of the local education system indicated the need for a number of policies to support the implementation of the system at the level of the school. While within the context of the current economic affluence, the funding may be available to finance necessary changes, cumbersome and time-consuming hiring practices may result in delays in project implementation. Further, the current practice of hiring individuals on short term contracts may negatively affect continuity. Miske Witt and Associates also indicated the need to establish career paths and incentives suited to the new responsibilities, and additional qualifications required; as well as the need for the standards for new positions to be set by the Accreditation Council.

At the level of the school, policies must also be put in place to regulate class sizes and teacher: student ratios; and to allow for common daily planning time for all teachers and support personnel. Failure to put these policies in place could have a negative effect on the success of the programme.

At the national level, the report also indicated the need for ratification and/or enforcement of relevant bills, conventions and policies as follows:

- National Policy on Inclusive Education
- National Policy on Persons with Disabilities

- Equal Opportunities Bill
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- United Nations Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities.

Another issue which may impede progress along the path to inclusive education is the dearth of personnel with the required skills and training. The phased implementation of the programme can, however, facilitate the offering of incentives for interested persons to acquire the requisite qualifications.

Adoption of the inclusive education policy involves a change in the outlook and attitude toward education on the part of parents and students. The Miske Witt and Associates Report indicated that both parents and students perceived inclusion of students with special education needs as “a liability in mainstream schools”. (Miske Witt and Associates, 2008, p.20). Their main concerns stemmed from fears that the mainstreamed students would be alienated, or impede the instructional pace to the detriment of the other students. It is instructive that international studies indicate that weak students stand to benefit from inclusion in mixed ability classes, improving overall performance, although there may be slight losses for those who perform at the highest level (Duru-Bellat, 2004). The socialization and outreach aspect of the Inclusive Education project will seek to overcome this barrier.

Another issue which could potentially reduce the efficacy of the project is teacher attitude. As indicated above, the success of this initiative requires change in approaches *inter alia*. While the project includes a professional development sub-component, the challenge is to ensure that teachers internalize and apply the training. Innovative reforms in teacher assessment, which form part of the programme, should work to eliminate this barrier.

The current trend of economic growth and the central position education holds in terms of fulfillment of national development goals means that at present, on the part of the Ministry, there is no economic barrier to programme implementation. A socio-economic barrier to success may, however, exist on the part of the intended beneficiaries. Studies have indicated that students from

poor and vulnerable backgrounds in the society are less successful in school than those from the wealthier groups (Duru-Bellat, 2004). In seeking to address this issue, theorists have indicated the need to allocate resources on the basis if need, more resources being channeled to those with less (Ross and Levacic, 1999). The success of the inclusive education intervention relies on the degree to which programmes are tailored to meet specific, identified needs of individuals or groups of individuals. The guiding principle must be equity rather than equality. One size fit all solutions are not recommended. In seeking to identify and overcome barriers to learning, student socio-economic status must therefore be taken into account. In this regard the MOE is currently developing a subsidy management programme to ensure scientific objective means of targeting subsidy beneficiaries.

2.3.2 Facilitators of inclusive education

Trinidad and Tobago as a signatory to the Dakar Framework for action is committed to the Education for All (EFA) goals intended to ensure sound learning for all learners, worldwide. Goals 2 and 6, indicated below speak most directly to inclusive education, advocating the principle of inclusiveness at the primary level, and uniform quality of the education provided for all.

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 6: "Improving all aspects of quality and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills"

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago in its Vision 2020 policy document, placed education at the centre of the national development plan which seeks to build upon a basis of innovative people:

Innovative people are the foundation of a developed society. We recognize in this process the importance of individual citizens and their central role in the strategy to develop our nation. (Ministry of Planning and Development, 2005, p. 36).

Support of the political directorate is one of the main facilitators of the move toward inclusive education. The central role education plays in the realization of national goals ensures the political will necessary to usher in the transformation of the education to respond to the diversity of learners.

2.3.3 Specific measures adopted to make the education system more inclusive

The key measure designed to make the education system more inclusive is the development and implementation of a Seamless Education System, which incorporates an Inclusive Education sub-component. The key areas of intervention include:

- Dissemination of the policy for inclusive education;
- Establishment of 12 demonstration schools (6 ECCE and 6 primary schools) to model inclusive education practice in regular schools and classrooms; and to generate knowledge regarding best practices to meet diverse student needs;
- Professional development to enhance the knowledge, skills, and capacity of teachers, support personnel and administrators to meet the learning needs of all students;
- Financing on a declining basis additional staff required for implementing inclusive education;
- Development of a strategy to institutionalize screening of all students at an early age;
- Promoting public awareness of inclusion and diversity in schools;
- Upgrading of schools with appropriate facilities and support to enable multiple dimensions of access and participation;
- Design and implementation of a co-ordinated system of monitoring and evaluation to address identified needs and priorities. (Draft Operations Manual for the Seamless Education System, 2008.)

Additionally a draft policy on Inclusive Education has been developed and is currently being revised.

Another major contributory initiative toward the institutionalization of inclusive education was the establishment in 2004, of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD). In keeping with

their *raison d'être*, this Division has sought, to institute a number of initiatives including augmentation of the cadre of Guidance Officers; increasing the categories of staff providing student support services at schools to include Social Workers, Diagnostic Prescriptive Officers and Special Education Teachers; institution of a system of early screening for primary pupils; provision of training for teachers in areas such as identification and management of autism, and language development for the deaf; and parent education.

2.3. 4 Flexibility and re-entry into the system

The Ministry of Education, in recognition of the needs of out of school students as well as the benefits of non-formal education systems, initiated, in 2006, the first phase of National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSTT). This Open School uses a blend of classroom and Distance Education methods. While it is complementary to the formal education system, it also emphasizes entry-level skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies rather than qualifications. Persons who may not have participated in the formal education system or those who may simply wish to further their career goals or personal development can participate in this programme. The National Open School Centres offer tuition in Mathematics, English, Science, Social Studies and Spanish.

In addition, 45 Adult Education Centres were established to ensure that learning is accessible to all citizens throughout their lifetime. Like the Open School, the Adult Education and Continuation Classes Programme participate in the diversification of learning opportunities and make the education more inclusive in the country. This programme provides tuition in basic literacy and numeracy; CSEC subjects such as Mathematics, English, Spanish, Principles of Business and Principles of Accounts; as well as a variety of vocational and leisure programmes inclusive of Plumbing, Garment Construction, Fabric Design Craft and Cake Decorating. The target population is persons 15 years and older. These programmes provide persons with qualifications allowing for re-entry into the system, or further study.

As indicated in section 1.2.1, the MOE (in collaboration with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and the National Training Agency (NTA) of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education) is seeking to provide students with the Caribbean Vocational

Qualifications (CVQ) which is a competence-based qualification, developed from industry-set, regionally- approved occupational standards. Benefits of this system include certification of students according to their level of competency; recognition of the qualifications throughout the CARICIM region; parallel standing with academic qualifications; provision of real work experience; and provision of alternative paths to higher education.

As well, the GORTT has instituted a Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification (TTNVQ) which allows for certification of work experience, thus enabling persons to re-enter the formal tertiary system accordingly.

2.4 *Learners and Teachers*

2.4.1 New approaches to teaching and learning

Consistent with its goal to reform the education sector, the Ministry of Education has adopted some new and aggressive measures to ensure that varied approaches to teaching and learning geared to facilitate the multiplicity of learning styles and levels of intelligence are applied in the nation's classrooms.

Under the umbrella of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) principals, administrators and teachers have benefited from the Professional Development component of the Programme. Since its inception in **2003** approximately **280** Principals, Vice Principals and teachers have participated in the following:

- One year Diploma in Educational Technology
- One year diploma in Visual and Performing Arts
- Two year Masters degree programme in Educational Leadership
- Modular Leadership Programme through Mc Gill University, Canada

While millions of dollars have been invested in the education sector over the last decade, the learning outcomes of students leave much to be desired as evidenced in the performance of students at the SEA and CSEC Examinations. Table 3 above provides the trend for SEA, indicating that annually, between 10.3 and 13.5 percent of pupils score 30 percent or less at this examination. At the CSEC level, results for the period 2002 to 2007 indicate a general decline in pass rates in English, falling from 64.4 % passes in 2002 down to 52.8% in 2007. At Mathematics, for the same period pass rates range from a low of 41.2% in 2005 to a high of 51.1% in 2002. This seems to suggest that there are students in the system struggling to master basic numeric and literacy skills.

In order to arrest the problem that appears to be pervasive at all levels of the system new measures are being considered. At both the primary and secondary levels, teachers are now required to adopt student centred approaches to teaching and learning. These strategies include:

- The teacher acting as guide to students rather than as a lecturer or sage on the stage;
- Demonstrating rather than lecturing;
- Use of peer teaching; and
- Infusion of information/communication technologies into the process.

From the point of view of the student, new approaches to learning are also being encouraged. For example the level of student interaction has been increased to 45 percent of class time; software have been designed to encourage self-paced learning in Mathematics, Spanish and English; and problem solving and project based learning have been introduced to give students responsibility for their own learning styles. It is expected that with the application of new knowledge and skills in the classroom there should be in a turnaround in the performance of student learning outcomes.

These are timely interventions especially since there are many teachers who believe that they are not adequately prepared to handle special education challenges within the regular classroom. At the same time, there are teachers who believe that if they receive appropriate training the inclusive classroom would offer unlimited opportunities to develop more flexible and responsive learning spaces ((Miske Witt, 2008).

Another major thrust, therefore, is the establishment of inclusive schools, which involves having students of different abilities and backgrounds work along side each other in a learning environment that is academically and socially beneficial to them. There are several challenges with this approach and while they are not insurmountable, they will require attitudinal change, more physical resources, training for teachers, and placement of specialist staff at schools.

A number of steps have been and continue to be taken to provide the necessary support to both students and teachers, in an attempt to reduce the disparities especially as they relate to students with diverse learning needs. One such measure is the establishment, by the Ministry of Education, of the Student Support Services Division, responsible for providing a range of specialized services for students with moderate and severe special educational needs, as well as

meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. The target population served by the Division includes students with special education needs as indicated in section 2.1.3 above.

Some of the services provided include the provision of interpreters and teachers of the hearing impaired, teachers' aides and brailers. The Division is staffed by a range of professional staff, currently insufficient in numbers to readily impact on/ cater to the needs of all children throughout the system. The timetable for full establishment and staffing of this Division is, nevertheless, on schedule. A major challenge to full implementation is the absence of an adequate number of personnel with the requisite training in the country.

The following recommendations for addressing national needs, which were made by the Division are currently being considered by the Ministry:

- The designation of inclusive schools in every district with ease of accessibility for transport and to be centrally located.
- Establishment of resource learning centres devoted to the support of students with disabilities and to the inclusive thrust in general.
- Institution of changes in teacher education programmes to prepare teachers to accommodate the diverse needs of students including those with disabilities in regular classrooms.
- Provision of training for educational leaders, school administrators, teachers and other key personnel who are vital to the transformation of the process.

2.4.2 Curriculum design and organization to respond to the diversity of learners

Major curriculum reform has started under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP). Based on the underlying principle that all students can learn; as well as to cater for the different learning needs and styles of students, the curriculum at both the primary and secondary levels are being revamped. These changes dovetail with the ECCE curriculum that is being developed and provide the linkages in the creation of a seamless education system.

To date new curricula for Forms 1 to 3 have been developed, tested and revised; and curricula for Forms 4 and 5 were completed and are now being implemented at the secondary level. These new curricula comprise three novel designs as follows:

- The **Modular Format** which responds to learners' needs for self-paced learning. This format allows students to complete each module at their own pace, and facilitates assessment at the end of each module.
- The **Strands Format** which aligns the reading, writing and listening skills at increasingly difficult levels per strand. The assessment for each strand effectively profiles the learner on the completion of each strand, allowing for accurate identification of weak areas thus facilitating targeted remediation.
- The **Skill-Based Format** within which the student is trained alongside an occupational skills-based profile to fit a specific occupation upon graduation. The general broad base of the curriculum also allows the student to go further in educational training.

At the primary level, the curricula are also being revised to address the cognitive as well as the social and affective skills of students. One innovation which seeks to cater to different learning styles is the presentation of learning materials in different modes – tactile, visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic for example. In support of this initiative the Ministry has also developed alternative and continuous modes of assessment at this level.

A major challenge for the success of inclusive education is the need for general and special education teachers to work together to develop curriculum supports and adaptations, and to provide instruction based upon the individual needs of their students. To overcome this challenge pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes are being designed.

The Curricula are also organized in such a way as to provide support for inclusive education, and include Teacher Guides, Instructional Materials, Assessment Approaches best suited to the instructional materials, and feedback mechanisms for constant curriculum upgrade.

2.4.3 Teaching of reading at the primary level

Primary education in Trinidad and Tobago is seven years in duration, catering to the 5 to 11 age-group. Ideally, children enter primary school after two years Early Childhood Care and Education.

Literacy is considered one of the basic/chief skills to be acquired at this level; and the degree to which pupils acquire this skill has long been a subject for local and international research. The value placed on acquisition of this skill is indicated by the stipulation by the Curriculum Division of the Ministry that 30 percent of school time for younger pupils should be devoted to the teaching of reading. This amounts to 292 hours per school year. For pupils in the two final grades, the time spent on reading may decrease to approximately 175 hours per school year.

A large portion of national testing concentrates on assessment of pupils' literacy skills. The SEA, the terminal primary examination which determines placement at the secondary level has 3 components, 2 of which (Language Arts and Creative Writing) are measures of pupil literacy. Language Arts is also one of the main subjects examined in the third and fifth primary years through the National Test.

At the international level, (in 1990 for example), Trinidad and Tobago was a participant in the IEA Reading Literacy Survey. Results of this survey indicated below average performance levels for Trinidad and Tobago pupils (Elley, 1992). Further, our participation in the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS) which examined the reading literacy skills of the 10 year old age cohort also indicated low achievement levels. Trinidad and Tobago's average scores were below the PIRLS international mean of 500 in every category examined, with an overall average of 436 points (Mullis et al, 2007). These findings were similar to pupil performance at the Language Arts National Test (in 2005 64% of pupils scored at or below the Basic level).

In order to address these deficiencies in literacy as well as concerns over continued poor performance at the SEA (see Table 3 above), T&T has participated in a regional programme dedicated to the training of teachers as teachers of reading, the Caribbean Centre of Excellence

for Teacher Training (CCETT). This programme focuses on alleviating the problems of illiteracy from Infant Year 2 to Standard Two. It was noted that the experts in reading all agree that children who master reading skills by grade three, generally performed better in school. In this regard CCETT seeks to improve the quality of reading instruction of students, by placing emphasis on the following areas:

- Diagnostic and performance Assessment
- Teaching and Learning material
- Training Teachers
- Action Research
- Information and Communication Technology

As a result of the CCETT the Ministry of Education has, since January 2005, employed Reading Specialists who have engaged in the development of innovative approaches to the teaching of reading at 80 pilot schools.

Most recently, in July of 2008, in an attempt to ensure teachers adhere to the time requirements, the Ministry has directed primary schools to institute a Literacy Hour every day for pupils in the first five primary grades, and three days per week for the last two grades. This is intended to develop the reading skills of students to a greater degree than at present through a change in the current approach to the teaching of reading. The new creative and comprehensive approach entails the following seven areas:

Phonemic awareness – This involves teachers engaging children in activities that require focus on the sound elements of spoken language, particularly blending and segmenting sounds. Instruction proceeds systematically from the concept of the whole word to “word parts” (syllables), to individual phonemes.

Phonics – Children are engaged in explicit instruction until they master of all 42 English phoneme correspondences. Letter sounds are taught systematically based on sequences proven to be most effective.

Vocabulary – Children are introduced to new words through daily read-aloud sessions, and provided with one sentence definitions. Words are then reviewed on a daily basis.

Fluency – The reading teacher models fluent reading with appropriate pacing and expression. Pupils are given adequate guided practice and independent practice until a short selection is mastered.

Comprehension – Pre-readers are orally guided through tell-and-retell, cause and effect, main idea and other comprehension or thinking exercises which have been modelled by the teacher. For older pupils comprehension strategies are modelled by the teacher followed by ample opportunities for guided and independent practice.

Writing – The teacher in early grades guides pupils in producing legible handwriting, appropriate letter size and shape. To these skills will be added punctuation and spelling in written genre styles, editing and publishing skills as the pupils advance to the final 3 grades.

Explicit Instruction – Instruction follows a sequence of defining the skill, modelling the skill, providing adequate guided practice, and providing adequate independent practice and application. The teacher checks for understanding frequently in the course of instruction.

Training in the fundamentals of the new concept will be provided for Principals, Vice Principal, Senior Teachers and Teachers.

2.4.4 Training teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners

Teacher training for inclusive education includes instruction in, and introduction to, the range of special education needs, challenges and exceptionalities that exist among our student population. Teachers are trained to recognize students in need, and provided with practical strategies for addressing student those needs including training in differentiated instruction; curricular designed to allow for parental input; training of teachers to help parents to assist their children; and training of teachers to design assessment instruments that facilitate diagnosis and feedback.

Additional strategies employed at present in the training of teachers include ICT literacy; a focus on improving teachers' ability to teach literacy and numeracy; upgrading of their testing, assessment and item response analysis skills; application of project based learning, and portfolio design for different levels and subjects; and spatial, kinaesthetic and musical intelligence training.

2.4.5 Organization of the formal and non-formal learning environments to ensure the inclusion of all learners

The Formal System

At present, the formal learning environments in Trinidad and Tobago employ several approaches which support inclusiveness. In the first instance, a number of student supports are employed to level the educational playing field. These include the provision of school meals, books and transport, as well as provision of parent education to facilitate the creation of enabling environments which in turn support the curricula.

Another strategy for improving the performance of all students is reduction of the student: teacher ratios. This must, be accompanied by training of teachers to take advantage of the potential benefits of smaller classes. Infusion of ICT into the curricula and the concurrent upgrade of teachers ICT skills also have the potential to improve the effectiveness of the teaching and learning environments. Related activities include the training of all primary teachers in the teaching of Reading and Mathematics.

The provision of adequate material and human resources also contributes to the effectiveness of the education system and its ability to cater to the differentiated student needs. In this regard at the primary level textbooks have been standardized, and workbooks are utilized; while multi-media libraries are provided at the secondary level. In addition, support-staff are provided for tasks such as record keeping and data storage, allowing teachers to devote additional time to teaching and learning; while trainee teachers can be used as classroom assistants, providing one on one interaction for weak pupils.

Teaching and learning strategies currently employed to increase the effectiveness of student: teacher interaction include student-centred learning – for example through the use of individual learning stations at the secondary level; and project-based learning at the primary level, where pupils are encouraged to discover information based on quality manipulatives.

Innovations

At the system-wide level, the Ministry of Education, in recognition of the needs of out of school students as well as the benefits of informal methods initiated, in 2006, the first phase of the National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSTT) details of which are found at section 2.3.4 above. Other programmes (for example the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centers Programme) have also been also created to cater to the needs of the various disadvantaged citizens who find it difficult to follow the ordinary mainstream curriculum.

Informal Education

In addition to the NOSTT, the non-governmental organization SERVOL offers programmes outside of the formal system which cater to the needs of those adolescents in disadvantaged areas. The main advantages of SERVOL programmes are their community-based nature; their focus on strengthening family life skills; and the holistic nature of these programmes which combine training in basic literacy with skills training, and attitude and self-esteem components. SERVOL programmes cater to two age groups as follows:

- Junior Life Centres for the 12 – 14 age group; and
- SERVOL Life Centres Programme featuring: Skills Training and High Tech Training Programmes for 15+.

At the Junior Life Centre level, the curriculum is based on the social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and spiritual development of the trainees. All SERVOL Life Centre trainees are required to participate in the Adolescent Development Programme which is a three month component “designed to prepare them for subsequent training by allowing them to understand themselves and to open themselves up to caring, sharing and loving. They are also given basic knowledge of their country and in many cases basic skills of reading, writing and counting” (SERVOL, 2008, p. 1).

Collaboration between the formal sector and the informal SERVOL programmes comes in the form of formal recognition of the programmes by the Ministry of Education; placement of primary school graduates with low achievement levels into SERVOL Junior life Centres; and facilitation of re-entry of Junior Life Centre graduates into the formal secondary system.

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