

What lies ahead?

Restructuring Secondary Education in Timor-Leste

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the country’s independence, the Timorese Government has embarked upon several initiatives to rebuild its educational system, namely its general secondary education curriculum. The implementation of this new curriculum was closely followed by a team of researchers who were responsible for the development of the TIMOR project. The purpose of this poster is to present the project general aims and its main results. Based on data collected from a variety of sources, results seem to point at positive changes resulting from the implementation of the new curriculum. Although they are still incipient, they provide useful insights for the continuous improvement of the new curriculum implementation.



The TIMOR Project

After 2002, Timorese education planning focused on the challenges of rebuilding schools, changing from an Indonesian curriculum into a new one, which required changing the language of instruction into Portuguese, and recruiting skilled teachers. A new curriculum for the general secondary education (GSE) was implemented in 2012, which involved the development of didactic resources and teacher training [1]. In 2013, the Timor Project was initiated with the main aims of (i) investigating the impact of its implementation, through its monitoring and short-term evaluation [2] and (ii) providing evidence based feedback to Timorese stakeholders [3].

The study was structured in two phases: phase I (monitoring) and phase II (evaluation). It relied on a qualitative methodology, with quantitative methods being additionally used. Data was collected in Portugal and in Timor-Leste in May-June 2014 (phase I) and in October 2014 (phase II) at different levels (macro, meso and micro). It included the use of different techniques / instruments and circa 750 participants. Results presented hereby pertain to the following categories: (i) school conditions and infrastructures; (ii) teacher training; (iii) curricular materials; (iv) teaching and (v) learning.

Results

- (i) some schools have been improved, but they are still insufficient to accommodate the large number of students attending GSE, ill-equipped, underfunded and lack basic infrastructure. Also, most schools still lack a proper management and administrative structure and are not organized into curricular departments;
- (ii) the first steps towards creating courses for the initial training of teachers, namely for some of the new subjects in the GSE, have been taken and training for in-service teachers has been provided. Participants recognise teachers’ curricular and didactical flaws and agree that more training must be offered, not only in specific subject areas, but also on Portuguese language;
- (iii) curricular materials are clear, well organized and considered essential for the implementation of the new curriculum. They also provide the necessary conditions for students to pursue further studies or enter working life. However, they have not been distributed in a timely manner and in sufficient number. Language used demands a proficiency in Portuguese most students and teachers do not have yet and therefore teachers continue to rely on textbooks from the Indonesian curriculum;
- (iv) overall, teachers recognize the degree of autonomy the new curriculum assigns to students and some try to promote active teaching strategies, such as questioning. Still, most continue to assume themselves as curriculum transmitters. Linguistic flaws and limitations in the scientific and pedagogical training received combined with the conditions already mentioned (i) may prevent teachers to become curriculum developers;
- (v) in general, students have a positive attitude towards learning and perceive it as an active process of comprehension and knowledge construction, but common study habits emphasize reading for memorization, doing homework assignments and summarizing.

Conclusion

More than challenges, opportunities lie ahead in improving Timorese educational system. Change is evident regarding the creation of a structured and standardized educational system that did not exist before. Measures are being made to rebuild schools and equip them with the necessary conditions for the implementation of the new curriculum and to keep providing initial and in-service training to teachers. These, along with the distribution of sufficient curricular materials will enable teachers and students to develop the necessary competences for ensuring the building of an economically, culturally and politically sustainable future.

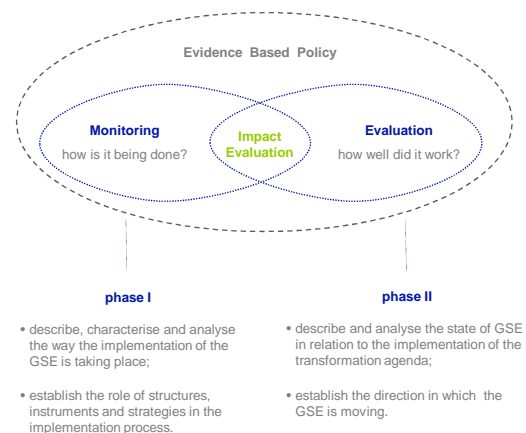


Fig 1 / Conceptual framework and aims of both phases.

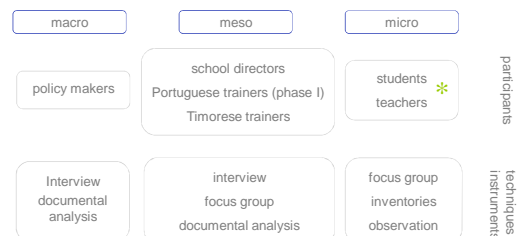


Fig 2 / Multilevel mixed methodology.

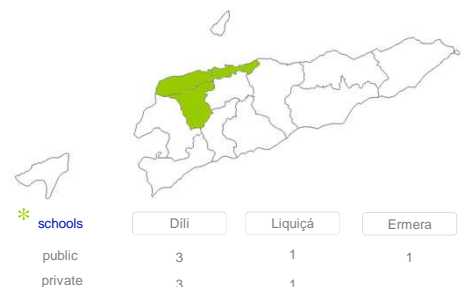


Fig 3 / Number and type of schools per district.

References

- [1] Projeto Falar Português (2014). Fases/tarefas do projeto. Consultado a 09/01/15, em <http://www.ua.pt/esgtimor/>.
- [2] Gertler, P., Martinez, S., Premand, P., Rawlings, L., & Vermeersch, C. (2011). Impact evaluation in practice. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- [3] Albergaria Almeida, P., Martinho, M., & Cabrita, I. (2014). Evaluating the impact of restructuring Secondary Education in East Timor. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 141, 665-669.