

Eritrea

Revised version, July 2006.

Principles and general objectives of education

The general objectives of the education system, as outlined in the Government's Macro-Policy (1994), are:

- to educate and equip the population with the necessary skills, knowledge and culture for a self-reliant and modern economy;
- to develop self-consciousness and self-motivation in the population to fight poverty, disease and all the causes of backwardness and ignorance;
- to make basic education available to all.

These objectives aim to create a united, prosperous, peaceful and democratic nation by educating women and men who:

- have the various needed skills and commitment to work together to reconstruct the economic, environmental and social fabric;
- have a love of and respect for their nation and all peoples within it, regardless of sex, ethnic group, age, religion or profession; this includes producing citizens who are fully literate in their mother tongue and who know and wish to preserve the best aspects of their culture whilst changing those negative aspects, including working towards the achievement of gender and ethnic equality;
- have a respect for democratic institutions, and who fully and effectively participate in the democratic process, including developing and defending the basic human rights;
- are guided by and adhere to the highest ethical principles;
- have a deep knowledge of and respect for the environment, and the need for its restoration and protection;
- have the ability to wisely use scientific processes and developments so as to develop self-sufficiency in food, and a modern services and industrial sector, based on the principle of environmental sustainability;
- have the opportunity to develop to the fullest their creative potential in all aspects.

In the Human Resources Policy Document (November 2001), the principles of education are defined by the Government as follows: "Education in Eritrea is a

fundamental human right and a lifelong process by which all individuals are given opportunities to attain their potential as all-round citizens along with a firm belief in and loyalty to the Eritrea nation. This process includes the development of enlightened, creative, confident and productive individuals with a sense of responsibility and social justice who are capable of contributing towards the development of a united, harmonious, democratic, equitable, modern, technologically advanced and self-reliant Eritrea.” (World Bank, 2002).

Current educational priorities and concerns

Official independence of Eritrea was gained in May 1993 after a United Nations supervised referendum, in which over 99% of the people voted in favour of independence. A Constitutional Commission is drafting a new constitution, which will be approved by the National Assembly. Following this, democratic elections will be held. Currently, the legislative body is the National Assembly with 150 representatives, half elected by the people. The Head of State, the President, is elected by the Assembly. The Government’s commitment to working towards gender equality is demonstrated by the 30% quota reserved for women in the National and Zonal Assemblies. This is a minimum figure, with the possibility of more women being elected in open competition with male candidates for the other 70% of seats.

In the country there are nine ethnic groups, each speaking their own language. About 80% of Eritreans live in rural areas, of whom about 20% are pastoralists of one type or other. Adult illiteracy is 80% for men and 90% for women (as there has been no national census, all figures are approximate). Due to the devastation caused by more than thirty years of war, the whole economy is still in the process of reconstruction, with a lower industrial production compared with pre-war levels. Recurrent droughts, soil erosion and deforestation, and mass population migration have caused structural food deficits.

The Government’s national development strategy, as outlined in its Macro-Policy document of 1994, includes the following objectives: (a) improved agricultural production through the development of irrigated agriculture and by enhancing the productivity of peasants, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists; (b) developed capital and knowledge-intensive, export-oriented industries and services; and (c) an upgraded and technologically improved informal sector.

To achieve these objectives, a broad based education incorporating widespread dissemination of skills and languages and extensive human capital formation is necessary. Thus, the advent of peace and the development of a new and democratic nation are shaping the development of a national system of education, which in turn is a pre-requisite for national reconstruction and development.

Given the need for comprehensive change in the whole education system following independence, policies for every sub-sector have had to be developed. The following are the major policies developed since 1991:

- The promotion of equal educational opportunity in terms of access, equity, relevance and continuity of education. In particular, universal basic education



is to be made gradually available to all school-aged children. Basic education is to be accessible to children in their mother tongue, and at least three years of education are to be provided for the population in the age group 15-55 years. Additionally, pre-basic education is to be promoted in all zones, and financed by local communities.

- The encouragement of provision of education by the private sector. Non-government schools, except foreign and non-secular schools, must follow the Ministry of Education curricula, but are not limited by its coverage. Non-secular schools will be given professional competence accreditation in non-religious matters only after completion of established national certification procedures.
- A steady increase in enrolments in secondary, technical and vocational schools to meet skilled manpower requirements. The emphasis in technical and vocational training will be on multi-craft skills so as to enhance the job adaptability and retraining potential of students.
- The provision of continuing education through formal and non-formal channels to achieve a more literate and skilled population.
- The sharing of the costs of education between the government, communities and parents. Basic education will be free and fees may be levied at post-basic level.
- The selective expansion of tertiary education to meet the forecast manpower requirements of the nation.

Recognizing that past neglect has deprived a substantial section of the population of access to education, and that past policies have severely damaged the quality of education provided, strategies are aimed at simultaneously improving educational quality and quantity, on the one hand, and securing equity on the other hand. Major strategies include:

- Opening more basic schools throughout the country, and the adopting of special measures for girls and minority groups such as pastoralists, so that the right to basic education can be exercised throughout the country.
- Improving the quality of education through increasing internal and external efficiency, curriculum change, raising the standard of teacher education, and developing various support systems.
- Promoting popular participation and democratic control of basic education through community management.
- Encouraging non-governmental organizations to open schools at all levels.
- Opening more faculties at the university, including a faculty of education.



- Establishing better equipped secondary schools with a relevant curriculum that will prepare students for work.
- Developing a flexible three-tier system of technical education, and the opening of a new commercial school and an arts and crafts school in order to enhance the job adaptability of students at this level.
- Ensuring the sustainability of financing, in order to create self-reliance within a framework of a partnership with international bodies that help with the initial funding of the programmes.
- Emphasizing training of new and existing educational personnel.

General objectives and strategies of current and future reforms aim at:

- improving the quality of education by: developing a completely new school curriculum at all levels, including an adequate supply of the new textbooks; improving the quality of teachers (i.e. developing pre-service training and organizing decentralized in-service training courses for basic education teachers who are unqualified), including the introduction of appropriate instructional techniques, especially at the basic level; introducing a new system of examinations and assessment; expanding supervisory capacity and quality; and developing school libraries;
- increasing girls and ethnic minority enrolment through special programmes; encourage and enable all minorities to learn in their mother tongue at the elementary level by, among other measures, increasing the numbers of teachers from the ethnic minorities;
- ensuring that the length of the school year conforms to the sub-Saharan average by increasing the number of school days and the number of teaching periods;
- reducing construction costs and providing appropriate designs for different geographical areas by standardizing three school designs;
- encouraging the opening of private kindergartens, by providing teacher training courses and other incentives;
- facilitating the integration of pupils with special needs (other than the deaf and the blind) into the mainstream school system;
- encouraging the participation of the community in funding and running of schools;
- developing a comprehensive technical and vocational sector which will provide useful and needed skills for unemployed youth, as well as higher-level skills for school leavers;



- improving the quality of teaching and the range of courses offered at the university level; make them relevant to the needs of the nation by establishing new diploma programmes in the technical, medical, commercial, agricultural and educational fields; and improve the standard of university entrants, partly by having a pre-qualifying year;
- providing educational opportunities to children aged 10+ who did not enter school at the age of 7;
- expanding adult literacy programmes, by utilizing radio and other media.

There is currently a wide gap between the educational needs of the nation, and the ability of the government and also the people to meet those needs using their own resources. The assistance of the international community is, therefore, essential.

A new national education policy, issued in February 2003, articulates the central value placed on gender equality in education. It states that, in basic education (primary and middle levels), “the government will work towards equitable education opportunities to all citizens irrespective of rural-urban, regional, gender and ethnic differences”. In the same policy document, the government commits itself to implement the six objectives of Education for All (EFA) and the two relevant Millennium Development Goals.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

In accordance with the **Legal Notice No. 1** of 1991, concerning regulations enacted to determine the establishment and management of non-government schools and their supervision, the Ministry of Education is the organ that implements the educational policies formulated by the State, prepares the national curriculum, and ensures the application of such a curriculum throughout the country.

The **Legal Notice No. 2** (1991) contains some regulations enacted to determine the relationships between schools and parents and the supervision of schools.

The Constitution of Eritrea in Article 21(1) provides as follows: "Every citizen shall have the right of equal access to publicly funded social services. The State shall endeavour, within the limits of its resources, to make available to all citizens health, education, cultural, and other social services."

Administration and management of the education system

Following the extensive restructuring of the civil service undertaken in 1995, each ministry now has a maximum of three departments. The **Ministry of Education**, which is responsible for education throughout the country, used to have six. The Department of Planning and Development has become a Planning Office, the Department of Adult Education has been incorporated into the Department of Technical and Adult Education, and the Department of Curriculum and of Supervision has been incorporated into the new Department of National Pedagogy.



In addition, the Ministry of Education now has responsibility for overall cultural affairs, excluding the National Museum.

At the regional level, in line with the decentralization policy, there will be six **Zonal offices**, which will have autonomy to manage all educational matters within their geographical area. There are also plans for sub-zonal offices, each one responsible for the schools within each sub-zone.

Various professional training programmes are run by other ministries. The most important are those of the **Ministry of Health** (for nurses, pharmacists, village health workers, technicians, etc.) and of the **Ministry of Agriculture**, for a very wide range of Ministry staff and also farmers. The **National Union of Eritrean Women** is responsible for women's literacy programmes, and the **National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students** offers a variety of educational programmes. The **Ministry of Information** began broadcasting a British Council-sponsored television course for the teaching of English in late 1995.

Additionally, a new **Institute of Management Studies** has recently been established by the government in order to upgrade the skills of existing civil servants.

Given the shortage of qualified staff existing in all ministries, many NGOs assist with training courses, workshops, etc. The role of the National Union of Eritrean Women and the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, as mentioned above, is especially important in offering a wide range of vocational and, sometimes, academic courses across the nation.

Professional supervision is essential if the quality of education is to be assessed, ensured and improved. The aim is to consolidate the supervision system in the regions so that supervisors work in a cluster of schools, in line with the strategy of monitoring educational quality and localizing training.

Plans have been laid for a new system of regular supervision reports from the regions. The upgrading of existing supervisors and training of new ones is seen as a major priority, given the lack of qualified supervisors.

Structure and organization of the education system

Eritrea: structure of the education system

AGE	Grade				
21	Yr.4]				
20	Yr.3]		Tertiary Level Colleges (Diploma Level) (Course up to 2 years)		
19	Yr.2]	University	^		
18	Yr.1]	^	Teacher Training 1 yr.	^	Commercial School Yr.3 technical Ed.
		^	^	^	
ESECE exam					
17	11]				Yr.3 technical Ed.
16	10]				Yr.3 technical Ed.
15	9]	Secondary education [English medium]			^ ^
14	8]	^			
		^			(Planned) min. 2 yrs. work experience
					^ ^
					> > (Planned) Vocational Training Schemes (Basic Level) > world of work
National Exam					
13	7]				
12	6]	Junior secondary school (English medium)			
11	5]		Elementary Junior Secondary=Basic Education (compulsory)		
10	4]				
9	3]	Elementary school (mother tongue)			
8	2]				
7	1]				
6	ii]				
5	i]	Pre-school			

Pre-school education

Pre-school education lasts two years and begins at the age of 5. Pre-school provision is extremely limited, with a gross enrolment rate estimated at 3.9% in 1994/95, almost wholly concentrated in urban areas—especially in Asmara, the capital.

Primary education

Elementary education lasts five years and the official starting age is 7. As a consequence of previous lack of access to school, the majority of pupils are over age.

Secondary education

Elementary education is followed by two years of junior secondary (completing the basic education cycle) and by four years of senior secondary education. Students sit the Eritrean Secondary Education Certification Exam (ESECE) at the end of the secondary cycle. “Three qualification levels for the ESECE are distinguished: degree, diploma and certificate. The ‘degree’ qualification allows entry into the University of Asmara. A diploma qualifies for entry into a teacher-training institute and several advanced-level technical/vocational education and training schools (there are about eight vocational institutes run by various ministries). The certificate qualifies for a variety of vocational training schools. Those students who do not continue on the



tertiary level participate in the mandatory national service programme.” (World Bank, 2002).

Basic education cycle graduates will have the opportunity to enter the Skill Development Centre, offering basic-level technical training courses. Upon completion of training—subject to entrance exams—there will be a chance for them to enter the intermediate-level technical schools.

For students completing the eleven-year school cycle, there are various career paths available. The duration of tertiary studies ranges from one-year teacher certificate programmes at teacher-training institutes to four-year degree programmes at the University.

The length of the academic year is approximately 200 working days, divided into two semesters (four half-semester). Schools in lowland areas operate six days a week, so as to finish before the very hot season.

The financing of education

As mentioned, education is one of the government’s top priorities. However, although the government did not inherit any debt, its ability to raise funds is severely constrained by the devastated economy and the overall poverty of the people. This means that the needed finances must be raised by a combination of government funds, in-kind contributions from the people and assistance from national and international NGOs. It is also necessary to encourage the non-government sector to build and manage schools with its own funds.

Concerning government funding, the Ministry of Finance is responsible for the overall allocation of the State budget. The Ministry of Education prepares its annual budget based on enrolments, numbers of teachers and other staff, and the school building programme. It is very difficult to give even approximate figures of the percentage of government expenditure devoted to education, as systematic budgeting is only just beginning. In addition, funding for education through the Community Rehabilitation Fund is not disaggregated. Government expenditure on education between 1992 and 1994 amounted to 34.7 million, 46.3 million and 58.8 million *birr*, respectively. The 1995 budget of almost 91 million *birr* represents a 160% increase over the 1992 figure and a 54% increase over the previous year.

Current expenditure has been rising rapidly due to a number of factors, including the increase in teacher numbers and higher spending on supplies caused by the rapid rise in the number of schools.

Most capital expenditure is currently financed by non-governmental organizations, making it more difficult to plan on a long-term basis. Some, however, is financed by the government via the Community Development Fund.

In 1994/95, non-government schools accounted for 21% of all elementary and secondary schools, and 14% and 6%, respectively, of enrolments at these levels. Local



communities contribute with free labour for school construction and, in some areas, with monetary contributions to build or extend schools and/or buy school materials.

In 1995, NGOs pledges towards elementary school construction amounted to US\$3.6 million. Token sports and registration fees are paid in some areas. In Asmara, there is an alcohol tax which goes to help fund Asmara government schools.

The educational process

The medium of instruction at the elementary level is the mother tongue, although currently communities are permitted to choose another language if they wish. However, the language of instruction at the post-elementary level is English. Measures to enforce the standardization of the curriculum across all Eritrean schools have been taken. All community schools must follow the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education.

A new National Examination Centre is charged with preparing and administering national school examinations, and also preparing guidelines for school-based assessment.

A National Curriculum Conference took place in 1996, after which the preparation of the new curriculum was begun. At pre-school level, comprehensive curriculum guidelines have already been drawn up.

In the meantime, some changes have been introduced into the existing elementary, middle and secondary curricula. Elementary textbooks for the minority languages have been revised. New English books have been prepared for Grades II and III and Grades VI-IX. New junior secondary school textbooks have been prepared for science, mathematics, geography, history and, for the first time, civics. Revised secondary school textbooks have also been prepared.

Pre-primary education

Early childhood education (ECE) is largely a community responsibility with the government giving functional support, i.e. developing policies, guidelines, programmes, monitoring and teacher training activities. It is envisaged that the development of ECE provisions and centres will become a major task, but not at the expense of substituting the role and responsibility of parents and the community in early childhood upbringing and education. In addition, the overall tendency is to encourage non-governmental organizations and non-formal activities in this field. The ECE policy gives much attention to the need and importance of early and extensive investment in health care, cognitive development and socialization.

ECE has been regarded as the first component of the basic education strategy and is organized at two levels—nursery programmes and kindergarten. However, the investment in formal pre-school education has not been addressed properly and the government intervention in the establishment of formal pre-school centres has been very limited.



Enrolment has increased from 7,747 in 1993 to 11,581 in 1998, at an average of about 10% yearly. In 1998, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) was estimated at 6.51%. In 1996, many kindergartens run by the municipalities were transferred to private institutions and communities, and some were closed immediately due to lack funds.

Access to kindergarten is very limited. Most establishments are situated in urban areas—especially in Asmara—and are controlled by religious institutions. The curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of the child which includes the physical, cognitive, social and emotional dimensions. Curriculum areas consist of context-appropriate themes rather than about subjects to be thought separately. The themes reflect children's interests in the form of learning corners. Teachers act as facilitators of the learning areas and help children's initiatives. The teaching-learning methods are based on child-centered pedagogy and a developmentally appropriate approach. These place the child at the center of planning with the idea that every thing on the curriculum may reflect the child. The purpose of the developmentally appropriate approach was to keep young children away from rote memorization and routine drill; instead practice the learning of life skills. Methods of the learning strategy include story telling, songs, rhymes poetry, drama and other forms of art or play. In general, kindergartens (age group 4-6 years) offer programmes lasting 15 hours per week (32 weeks per year); Rural Children's Centers (age group 5-6 years), 6 hours per week (32 weeks per year); and Outreach Activities (age group 5-6 years) consist of two hours per week (32 weeks per year).

About 23% of the pre-schools work in double shifts and this is regarded as a means of maximizing the utilization of resources in terms of space allocation and cost effectiveness. The average class size is 42.6, a little more than the maximum standard set in the pre-school regulation, which is 40. The ratio of a teacher to a child is 1:39 but this becomes more unbalanced when the ratio of the assistants and workers is considered—64.9 children per assistant against the standard of one assistant for every forty children. The learning environment in most centres is inadequate due to the lack of basic resources and materials used for play. About 99% of the teachers and 64% of the assistants are female. More than 50% were untrained, and in the last three years a summer training programme for certifying kindergarten teachers has been organized. About 90 teachers have successfully completed the training. (Ministry of Education, 1999).

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2004 there were 18,540 children enrolled at the pre-primary level and the GER was estimated at 7%. The total number of teachers was 492 (65% trained).

Between 2002 and 2004, 211 kindergarten teachers completed pre-service training (the training period being 8 months). Moreover, 275 community caregivers were trained for a month between 2001 and 2005. Such programmes are backed up by shorter courses lasting more or less two to three weeks.

Primary education

Elementary education covers Grades I-V. "The Ministry of Education is moving towards a more streamlined and integrated curriculum provision focusing on core



basic skills at the primary school level so as to achieve functional literacy. The MOE is also proposing that the length of the middle school cycle should be three years, shifting grade 8 from secondary school level into middle school level. This would bring the duration of the basic education phase to a total of eight years. With this change, it is also proposed that secondary school be extended one more year by adding grade 12. This in turn suggests that the four-year secondary education cycle would start in grade 9, with curriculum diversification and possible technical/vocational education and training choices at the end of grade 10.” Primary and middle school together are now defined as basic education. (World Bank, 2002).

“The present curriculum is narrow. For example, there is no place for creative, aesthetic and technological subjects, or for health education. In theory, schools can enrich the curriculum but, in practice, this is usually limited to experimenting with some new teaching approaches or introducing different resources rather than introducing more breadth into the curriculum. The curriculum is not balanced. Often, 40% of instruction time is given to mathematics and science.” (World Bank, 2002).

At the primary level, school exams are given four times per year at the end of every half semester. In addition, tests are regularly administered. Reports are given at the end of each semester. In 1994/95, the pupil-teacher ratio was 40:1. In 1999, the gross enrolment rate was 57%. (World Bank, 2002).

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2004 there were 374,997 pupils enrolled at the primary level and the GER was estimated at 66% (NER: 36%). The total number of teachers was 8,033 (83% trained).

Secondary education

At the junior secondary level, exams are conducted four times per year, with an end-of-cycle national examination introduced in 1995. Admission to the senior secondary school depends on passing the national examination; school-based assessment is also taken into account in the final score. A national policy guideline for this examination is being developed. In 1994/95, the student-teacher ratio was 37:1.

At the senior secondary level, exams are conducted four times per year except in the final year (three times), in addition to regular tests. Upon completion of the secondary cycle, students sit the Eritrean Secondary Education Certification Exam (ESECE). In 1994/95, the student-teacher ratio was 34:1. To gain access to the university, students must pass an entrance examination administered by the University of Asmara.

Drop-out and repetition rates have been steadily declining since 1991, especially for girls. Average drop-out, repetition and promotion rates in 1991/92 were 15%, 48% and 37%, respectively. For girls they were 15%, 68% and 17%, respectively. The table below shows the improvements over the past four years. However, there is still a relatively high repetition rate for girls compared with boys—especially at the end of the first year of the secondary cycle.

Flow rates by gender and grade (govt. and non-govt. schools)

Grade	Drop-out			Students repeating			Promotion		
	Tot %	M%	F%	Tot %	M%	F%	Tot %	M%	F%
I	7.6	8.2	7.0	35.2	34.1	36.5	57.2	57.8	56.5
II	6.3	6.5	6.1	20.5	19.0	22.3	73.2	74.5	71.6
III	7.0	6.8	7.3	16.2	14.1	19.0	76.8	79.1	73.7
IV	7.2	7.2	7.2	23.9	20.1	28.9	68.9	72.7	63.9
V	7.2	7.5	6.9	18.0	14.4	22.5	74.8	78.1	70.6
VI	7.9	8.3	7.4	18.9	12.8	26.4	73.2	78.9	66.2
VII									
VIII	7.8	9.1	6.1	31.5	22.3	43.4	60.7	68.6	50.5
IX	5.8	6.2	5.1	24.8	18.5	34.2	69.4	75.3	60.7
X	6.3	6.3	6.2	24.9	18.7	36.4	68.8	75.0	57.4
XI									
Average	7.1	7.4	6.8	24.2	20.9	28.2	68.7	71.7	65.0

“The MOE’s basic-level Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is intended for those who have completed the primary and middle school cycles, and opt for an area of interest in TVET. This is the first entry point from general education into technical and vocational training. The second entry point is at the end of grade 10 when students can be channelled to intermediate-level TVET.” (World Bank, 2002).

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2004 the total enrolment at the secondary level (all programmes) was 194,124 students and the GER was estimated at 34% (NER: 24%), 61% at the lower secondary and 19% at the upper secondary level. The total number of teachers was 4,058 (11% females), of whom 2,241 at the lower and 1,817 at the upper secondary level.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Curriculum research findings from a study carried out in 1996 have shown a weak positive correlation between achievement scores and age in Grades I and V. No gender-based differences in performance were detected in Grade I, but such differences become significant in all subjects at higher grades. In Grade I—and particularly in Grade V—the major determinant of variations in scores is the type and performance of the school being attended. Data indicated that high school students showed low performance in questions demanding application and other higher-order skills, while they do better in factual recall. The overall competence in English has improved greatly. (Ministry of Education, 1999).



Higher education

The relative importance of higher versus basic and secondary education in an impoverished country is one which needs careful consideration. In Eritrea, a university must be able to gear itself to the nation's needs in the reconstruction period. This is what Asmara University is aiming to do.

The University is the only one in the country. It is an autonomous institution, with its President being appointed by the President of the State, who is its vice-chancellor. It has its own budget, which amounted to 4.2 million birr in 1992, 3.6 million birr in 1993, and 6.1 million in 1994.

Number of students and teachers (1994/95)

Day students:	1,260
Evening students:	800
Lecturers:	88
Graduate assistants:	25

The University underwent a long process of reconstruction and expansion following independence. There are colleges in: science; agriculture; arts and language studies; and business and economics. There are also programmes too small to qualify as colleges in education, engineering and law. Different Ministry-University Committees have been set up to ensure the relevance of University programmes and the subsequent gainful and needed employment of university graduates.

Major constraints include: the lack of faculties in several key areas, causing an imbalance and over-supply of graduates in some areas, and under-supply in others; the low academic standard and especially low English standard of university entrants (of those who sit the ESLC in 1995, only 13.5% qualified for admission); the shortage of staff with doctoral degrees (with 80% of staff at the rank of lecturer or below); and a severe shortage of rooms, laboratories, libraries and dormitories, greatly constraining the numbers of students who can be admitted.

The short-term University plans (1995-2000) call for:

- the raising of the present colleges and programmes to the level of faculties, with special emphasis on science, agriculture, business and economics, education and engineering. A new faculty of health sciences will also be established;
- a student enrolment rate to grow by 26% a year, reaching the target of 4,000 students by the year 2000;



- the numbers of senior staff and graduate assistants to be expanded;
- diploma programmes in the educational, technical, medical, agricultural and commercial fields to be established, geared to the needs of the different ministries;
- a new lecture hall, dormitories, laboratories and guest house for the teaching staff to be built;
- a programme of distance education to be established.

“Tertiary education is still at its infancy stage in Eritrea with only five institutions in the system. Post-secondary education in Eritrea consists of three types of institutions, each requiring successful completion of secondary education: (i) the University of Asmara (UOA); (ii) advanced vocational education institutions (Asmara Business & Commerce Institute and Pavoni Technical Institute); and (iii) teacher-training institutions, or TTIs. The duration of tertiary studies differs by programme and institution, ranging from one-year teacher certificate programmes at TTIs to four-year degree programs at UOA. Teacher-training institutions specialize in training professional teachers for primary schools. Advanced level vocational education institutions comprise the third and final level in TVET provision. These institutions provide training in machine shop, accounting, banking and finance, management, and secretarial science.” (World Bank, 2002).

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2004 the total enrolment at the tertiary level was 4,612 students (13% females), representing an estimated GER of 1%. The total number of teachers was 429.

Special education

A small separate section within the Department of National Pedagogy dealing with special education was established in 1994. Its first task was to establish categories for children and adults with different special needs: learning and behavioural difficulties, orphans, refugees, individuals suffering from trauma, gifted and talented children.

There are three special schools in the country, two for the deaf and one for the blind. The latter has forty students and ten teachers, of whom only two are trained. The schools for the deaf have developed sign language in *Tigrinya*. However, these schools lack expertise in how to adapt the official curriculum to suit their particular circumstances. Additionally, a new special school for disabled ex-fighters is to open soon at “Den Den” fighters camp.

Apart from blind and deaf children, the aim is to integrate all other categories of pupils with special needs into the mainstream school system. A major priority is to train teachers on how to identify and cater to these children. However, current research is mainly being conducted to obtain more precise figures concerning the numbers of children in each category.



Although much work remains to be done, the establishment of the Special Education Panel is seen as a significant step forward in addressing the needs of this important group in the society.

Private education

As a whole, the private sector has only played a tiny role since the early 1970s. This is, hopefully, about to change, as the government is committed to encouraging the growth of this sector in order to: provide more schooling opportunities for disadvantaged and other groups through the opening of new schools; involve the community in the opening and running of schools; and help improve the quality of education offered.

The Ministry of Education wishes to speed up the procedures for the establishment of private schools, and also assist by providing curricula and teacher training.

In spite of the government commitment, enrolment in private education as a percentage of total enrolment has been declining at the elementary and junior secondary school levels. New government schools at these levels have been increasing at a faster rate than non-government schools have been opening. From 1991 to 1993, non-government schools declined from 22% to 15% at the elementary level, and from 17.2% to 15.9% at the middle level. At the secondary level, however, there has been a proportionately greater expansion in the private sector, with private enrolment increasing from 2.7 to 7% of total enrolment.

Concerning the financing of such schools, it is recognized that, for the most part, they are not wealthy establishments, and need a helping hand to become established and function. Therefore, no charges have been made for in-service teacher training courses, or, until now, textbook provision, but methods of cost recovery for textbooks are being investigated.

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

The shortage of textbooks is one of the major bottlenecks in improving the quality of education. In many classes, only the teacher has a book and the student-textbook ratio is estimated at 60:1. School libraries are poorly equipped, mainly with old books. There are no computers at all in any schools. In those schools that have science laboratories, supplies are lacking.

Until 1995, a small number of school textbooks were printed by the Government Printing Press. In 1995, 250,000 textbooks for mathematics, science and geography (junior and senior secondary schools) were printed overseas because the Government press does not have full colour printing facilities. Assistance for the printing of all the elementary textbooks (still to be written) was secured in 1995.

Most middle and secondary schools have a tape recorder, used mainly for English lessons. A very small number of schools in urban centres have a television and video, although there is a shortage of educational video cassettes.



In the academic year 1994/95, of a total of 3,432 classrooms 339 were out of use because of their dilapidated condition. Collectively, over 20% of all schools were in bad condition in 1993/94; in the rural areas, this percentage includes schools built of mats, branches and the like.

However, many new schools were constructed in the period 1992-95: twenty-seven in 1992/93; fifty-six in 1993/94; and fifty-three in 1994/95. A further sixty-two schools were rehabilitated or were under rehabilitation in 1994/95. This means that the existing facilities—which were made of mats, branches, etc.—were replaced by completely new, properly constructed schools. This brought the total number of schools at elementary, junior and senior secondary levels to 510, 88 and 33, respectively, in 1994/95.

Concerning utilization, over 57% of schools operate in a double-shift system. In urban areas, most middle and secondary schools operate in a three-shift system, with the third shift for adult extension evening classes.

Boarding schools currently only exist in three locations, although studies are being made to determine whether or not to build more. These schools are seen as a highly important means of increasing access to education for girls and minority groups in the disadvantaged areas. A total of twenty-four rural schools in the Barka province are also feeding centres for mid-day snacks of milk, protein mixture and high energy biscuits. There is a tiny handful of such centres in the rest of the country.

No school transportation is available. Children travel to school on foot or bicycle. Average distance from home to school ranges from 2.2 km. in the capital Asmara to 8 km. in three of the provinces. Some children spend four to five hours a day walking to and from school. Official figures estimate that 98% of all bicycle users are male, meaning that almost all girls go to school on foot, with consequently increased journey times.

Adult and non-formal education

Previous lack of educational opportunity has meant that illiteracy rates have always been high. The mass literacy campaigns conducted in the past were not effective due to the lack of follow-up, and so the opportunity for reading, which might have developed the reading habit, was never developed. In the liberated areas the literacy campaigns also had a problem of sustainability, and they reached relatively small numbers of people. Lack of personnel and other resources means that the Ministry has to be modest regarding its aims of eradicating illiteracy and has to develop new ways of campaigning—for instance, by utilizing students in the Summer Work Campaign, and by using the radio.

Currently, illiteracy rates are estimated at 80% for males and 90% for females. Additionally, many school-aged children are out of school. The following programmes are offered:

Literacy and post-literacy:

Enrolment figures for the three-year literacy programme in 1993/94 are given below. As can be seen, a very small percentage of the illiterate population was reached by this programme, due to the lack of teachers and financial resources, including transportation to supervise the programme. These, in addition to other difficulties faced by learners, caused high drop-out rates.

Adult literacy programme (1993/94)

Province	Enrolment		Drop-outs		Promoted		Teachers	
	Tot.	F	Tot.	F	Tot.	F	Tot.	F
Akeleguzay	445	445	149	149	296	296	11	6
Asmara Barka	263	40	162	14	101	24	16	3
Dankalia Gash-Setit	483	212	184	72	299	140	13	3
Hamasien Sahel	360	60	175	13	185	47	19	
Semhar	586	511	335	296	251	215	19	2
Total	2,137	1,268	1,005	544	1,132	722	78	14

In 1996, a three-year literacy programme was started for 1,400 women in sixteen villages in the southern region. This follows a successful pilot project which included literacy teacher training and the introduction of child-care centres, which substantially increased women's participation. Additionally, 6,000 women and children attended a summer literacy programme conducted by students in the summer work campaign.

Evening class extension programme:

This is identical in content to the regular formal school programme, with adults learning at the three levels, although currently the secondary programme is spread over five years as opposed to four in the formal programme. Adults attend five or six days a week in forty-three centres across the country.

Distance education:

Radio programmes were started in the *Tigre* and *Tigrinya* languages in 1995, broadcasting agriculture, health and civics courses for adults in fifty pilot centres. Programmes last one year and are broadcast twice a day three times a week. Books are used with an animator once a week.

In addition, 138 ex-fighter teachers attended summer academic upgrading courses.



Teaching staff

In the long struggle towards improving educational quality, pre- and in-service teacher training are a top priority.

Since 1991, the number of teachers at the elementary, junior and senior secondary school levels has increased by 53%, 21% and 43%, respectively. There is a large number of ex-fighters in the teaching profession, in addition to university students teaching as part of their National Service. An increasing number of expatriate teachers are being recruited at the junior and senior secondary levels to teach English, mathematics and sciences, or as methodology trainers at the elementary level. These volunteers are making a significant contribution to changing the traditional teacher-centred methodology in the classroom.

Concentrated in Asmara are 24% of primary teachers, 47% of junior secondary and 67% of senior secondary school teachers. Significant numbers of female teachers are also employed by the capital city—37%, 59% and 82% at the primary, middle school and secondary school levels, respectively. The lowland provinces of Barka, Denkalia, Gash-Setit, Sahel, Semhar and Senhit, taken together, only employ 15% of female junior and senior secondary school teachers, and only 15% of all teachers at this levels.

The percentage of female teachers at the primary level has stabilized, following a two-year decline. At the junior secondary level it has increased slightly, but this was due to a greater decrease in the number of male teachers. At the senior secondary level it is also declining, as proportionately more male than female teachers are recruited.

Under the revised regulations issued for the 1995/96 academic year, teachers at all levels have to teach thirty to thirty-five periods a week, and are obliged to stay on the school premises throughout the day. This is a pilot measure aimed at encouraging teachers to spend more time preparing lessons.

Teachers' working and living conditions are far from ideal in most places. Housing is a serious problem, in addition to the poor physical condition of many schools, the remoteness of some areas, the lack of textbooks and equipment, and large classes. Most new schools, however, have built in teachers accommodation. Although raised substantially in 1992, salaries are low compared with the cost of living. It is also recognized that a transfer policy needs to be formulated.



Starting salaries (qualified teachers)

Elementary school: 415 birr/month

Middle school: 498 birr/month

Secondary: 735 birr/month

Unqualified basic teachers: 339 birr/month

(1 Birr = approx. 6.2 US\$ in 1995).

Recruitment is through several paths, one of which is direct entry into the Asmara Teacher Training Institute (TTI). Candidates have to pass an entrance exam, have attained a minimum 1.8 GPA in the school-leaving examination, and an average of over 70% in their secondary school examination scores. Another path is the recruitment of university graduates to teach in secondary schools. In addition, all university students currently have to teach for one year in junior or senior secondary schools as part of their National Service. Teachers are also recruited from overseas. One path is for expatriate volunteers, supplied by a variety of organizations and paid local salaries or allowances. Another is the direct recruitment of some expatriates from developing countries under special contracts.

The minimum teaching qualifications are:

- Basic level: TTI certificate.
- Middle level: diploma from Asmara University (two years of full-time studies).
- Secondary level: bachelor's degree.

The majority of teachers are unqualified, presenting a great challenge to the Ministry regarding how to plan and prepare in-service training programmes.

All unqualified elementary teachers, will eventually be upgraded to qualified elementary level, primarily via a special distance education programme—DEPETE, Distance Education Programme for Elementary Teachers in Eritrea. This major programme is designed to upgrade 2,000 unqualified elementary teachers over a four-year period, so that they become certified teachers. Twenty top-level trainers have already received training, and they will train 350 selected tutors who will conduct in-service training sessions twice a year in eighty-six teacher resource centres. In addition, correspondence tuition materials are being prepared and printed, and these will be assessed by the tutors. The project will evolve in two phases, a first pilot phase for 500 teachers, and a second phase for 2,000 teachers. The pilot phase will allow time for adjustments to be made. Subjects to be taught are: local languages, English language, integrated science, educational theory and practice, mathematics and social



studies. It is hoped that the programme will significantly improve the methodological and pedagogical skills of the teachers.

For the best qualified elementary teachers, upgrading opportunities—to junior secondary school teacher level or to elementary school director—are currently offered through a part-time university course spread over three summer vacations.

The University of Asmara is responsible for the training of junior secondary and secondary school teachers and directors. The training of the latter will occur with the establishment of the faculty of education. Currently only the TTI is responsible for all basic teacher training in the country.

Pedagogic Resource Centres will be spread over the whole country, where in-service training courses will be conducted by the regional supervisors, the Centre Head, as will DEPETE in-service training.

Pre-school teachers receive special training organized by the Pre-School Panel of the Department of National Pedagogy. Currently, 111 of a total of 256 teachers at this level are not trained.

The in-service courses for existing teachers to be upgraded to elementary school directors (mentioned above) have been held since 1992. In-service training for new directors began in 1966. Emphasis is very much on professional development, so as to improve the management of schools. In both courses, the participants study leadership, management, supervision and monitoring skills; personnel administration; planning of the activities of the school; and pedagogy.

Education research and information

Given the current situation, research in most areas of the education system is crucial if accurate information is to be obtained, reasons for certain situations and attitudes discerned, and thus strategies formulated. There have been problems, however, in implementing all the necessary research due to the shortage of available skilled personnel and the fact that so many new programmes are being implemented simultaneously.

However, several major research studies have been either completed or underway since 1994, including: a national pilot study concerning community wishes for a new curriculum; causes of poor enrolment by girls, and possible remedies; the situation with regard to education of nomads; the structure of technical and vocational education; mother tongue teaching at the elementary level, and communities attitudes to learning in the mother tongue; the extent of special needs among the school-aged population; pre-school provision in the provinces, and ways of expanding it; students' assessment and promotion policies; school organization and structure; teacher education; school mapping in selected provinces.

Given the limited capacity of the Ministry, assistance from the international community in many other research fields is of vital importance, either by providing research consultants and/or funding national researchers.



References

Ministry of Education. *The development of education. National report of the State of Eritrea*. International Conference on Education, 45th session, Geneva, 1996.

Ministry of Education. *Education for All in Eritrea: policies, strategies and prospects. Preliminary draft report*. (Under the co-ordination of T.G. Ogbaghiorghis). Asmara, September 1999.

World Bank. *Eritrea. Education and training sector note*. Report no. 24448-ERI. Washington, DC, July 2002.

Web resources

Ministry of Education: <http://www.erimoe.gov.er/> [In English. Last checked: October 2007.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>