

Samoa's Experience of COVID 19- Effect in the Education Sector

UIS Regional Virtual Meeting on COVID 19 (15th May 2020)

Background

COVID - 19 and Education in Samoa

- Samoa is one of the remaining COVID 19 free countries in the Pacific.
- COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted Samoa's Education system when all schools (ECE, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Tertiary and PSET) were closed for six weeks (24th March – 1st May).
- E – learning , Television and using of ICT were gradually introduced as the alternative education pathway for six weeks.
- Being declared free from COVID 19 on Friday, 1st May, Government in relaxing its SOE also allow the resumption of schools.
- Samoa has been on a partial lockdown since then.
- The conditions for schools therefore continues to observe social distancing requirements.
- The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture as the focal point for education has strategically addressed the terms and conditions and provided a schedule that provides education for all levels.

Immediate Effects and Impacts

- Discontinuation of schools raises a lot of challenge for Samoa and confusion from the outset;
- School closure impacted not only students, teachers and families but massive economical impact were observed and experienced; and
- The Samoa Education Sector encountered serious problems due to the lack of ICT resources and even its availability at schools and homes.

Impacts on Students

- Students took a while to get used to using e-learning materials provided by MESCC; others never used any of the services;
- SIM cards provided by mobile companies was only take advantage by a couple of students;
- Limited information were available to complete tasks and complete practical expectations of the curriculum (using of science labs, practising vocational and technical work) and assignments as lockdown affected all sources of information;
- With home commitments and chores, students often faced limited hours to complete assignments;
- Students struggled to commit the required hours needed to fully achieve all the Learning outcomes in the Curriculum; and
- The learning environment from a classroom setting to home isolation affected those driven by peer – learning and those with both kinetic and oral learning styles.

Impacts on Teachers and Families

- Schools in Samoa are Not financially stable, (Private schools or non government Institutes) therefore most teachers were forced to leave without pay in the period of the State of Emergency.
- Adapting to e – learning was a challenge for some with limited ICT skills;
- Striving to Complete Tasks on short noticed for an uncertain period of time put a lot teacher under duress
- Financial struggles were noted for families with the need to cater for e-learning resources.
- Parents employed in essential services were forced to find and pay sitter and carer of school aged children; and
- With children at home for longer hours, the pressure on costs of foods, home entertainment, electricity bills and water increased tremendously.

E-Learning /Digital Learning Problems

- Only 29% of PSET Institutes have the resources to fully function and operate the Digital Learning programmes;
- Across Samoa, students have limited access to internet;
- Where coverage was available and SIM cards were offered, not all students have the devices to use the available internet services;
- Generally, students are not familiar with the e-learning platforms available;
- ICT providers however were also not fully equipped to deliver the relevant services; and
- Even with submarine cables, it is still costly to access the Internet or buy the required devices;
- Lack of proper training and tailor made capacity strengthening on the required computer skills.

National Data Strategies

- PSET Annual Data collection (to produce PSET Statistical Bulletin for the Academic year 2019) have been affected by the COVID 19 State of Emergency period.
- This results to a lapse in Time and Date to produce the PSET Statistical Bulletin 2019.
- Enrolment and Graduates data are not affected considering schools in Samoa started in late January and lockdown was effective in the 24th March.
- MESC and tertiary institutions have also delayed reporting and sharing of any information due to COVID – 19.

Aggregate Measures

- Schools (head of schools, lecturers, trainers and tutors) are responsible for recording the usual aggregate measures, students, teachers and to distinguish the learning capacities of students between homes schools and formal schools.
- This Report may take some time to complete and present to national stakeholders;
- If needed for any measure, SQA will conduct research to collect the appropriate data;
- Engaging the Samoa Bureau of Statistics utilising their own available platforms will be an alternative option.

Key Issues and challenges

- Limited access to E-learning / Digital Learning
 - Limited digital resources available in school and homes.
 - Limited internet access (considering Samoa also has no free public WI-FI)\Improving these services should be a top priority.
- Financially Unstable - proper stimulus packages that considers the cost of pandemics on our education system; the call to be a saving culture increases as self sufficiency measures need being encouraged.
- Home schooling puts most parents on the spot as they were not prepared to take up such responsibilities – Refresher courses should have been offered also for parents;
- Parents with limited education struggle to attend with the needs of their children; - an area that should be considered with utmost care as not all parents are educationally equipped to assist their children;
- Students loses interest in learning (considering the length of lockdown) – calls for innovative, engaging and dynamic teaching styles
- Increase of drop out rates – maintaining the status quo is a challenge to both parents, educators and students.

Key Challenges and Issues

- COVID 19 is a wake up call for Samoa to enforce ICT in every school and seeks to ensure that all ICT packages will include devices and resources, free internet or availability of information and continuous support to both students and their parents;
- Samoa needs to develop proper ICT platforms in every school to accommodate with Emergency situations (Natural Disasters and Pandemics);
- The ICT Platform must include provision of capacity building, funding and support to both the school, teachers and students – as well as the communities.
- Samoa is in dire need of assistance to improve the quality and availability of its ICT to ensure sustainable development of its people, resources and country.
- Improving ICT in Samoa is achieving SDG Goal 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure development, while also enabling us to meet SDG Goal 4 on quality education, and enabling our students to meet Goal 8 – acquiring decent work in the future and economic growth for the country
- With ICT our nation will continue to provide for everyone, leaving no one behind, and reduce inequalities (Goal 10).
- Eventually we will sustain our cities and communities (Goal 11) while strengthening partnerships with our donor partners and international communities (Goal 17)

- Thank you and Faafetai