6 Education

Introduction

This chapter focuses on education in Samoa. It commences with a limited number of relevant comparisons with other Pacific Island nations. The data serve solely for broad comparative purposes and demonstrate that the general regional trend toward educational improvement is incontrovertible. The chapter then examines education in Samoa, where numerous interventions are underway. The analyses find that primary education is the single most important priority for further strengthening.

Overview of the Education System

International Comparisons

Samoa has one of the highest adult literacy rates in the Pacific region. Coupled with the second highest primary-school enrollment rate, it appears that the present Samoan educational system is satisfactory by comparison to other similar nations (see Table 6.1). Certainly there is room for improvement and this has been recognized for some time. Reform is a major policy commitment of the Government, with education policy directed to that end.

Education Policy

Education policy supports the Government of Samoa's vision, "Samoa to lead the region in structural and public-sector reform, good governance and increasing per-capita incomes, growth in employment and improved health and education standards, while incorporating social and cultural values and environmental sustainability." (Education Mini Summit Final Report 1999). The objective is for reform that: (i) improves the efficiency and quality of services delivered by departments and

Table 6.1 **Regional Comparisons for Education**

	Total adult literacy 1995	Primary school enrollment ratio 1990–1996
	%	%
Fiji Islands	91	128
Kiribati	93	91
Micronesia	81	100
Palau	98	103
Samoa	98	107
Solomon Islands	62	97
Tonga	99	98

Note: **The UNICEF population estimate has been maintained for consistency of this set of tabular data.**
Source: **UNICEF (2000).**

(ii) strengthens the partnership between public and private sectors.

The Department of Education has been active in both areas. A New Zealand-sponsored Education, Policy and Planning Development Project commenced work from late 1993 to 1994 to fully review education policy and to upgrade the Education Information Management System to assist both planning and monitoring. The second stage of project outputs included the *Western Samoa Education Strategies 1995–2005* and *Western Samoa Education Policies 1995–2005*. The former document has since served as a blueprint for implementing changes to education to meet the first objective of the reforms. With regard to the second objective, consultation with stakeholders occurred most recently at the Education Mini Summit on May 5, 1999.

Principles and Strategic Objectives

Education policy, as undertaken through the education strategy, seeks to address four guiding principles: equity, quality, relevancy, and efficiency. Policy is presently focused on meeting the eight objectives of the Strategic Education Plan:

- Supporting early childhood education;
- Improving the overall quality of primary education;
- Increasing access to senior secondary education by merging two streams into a single-stream system and at the same time improving overall quality;
- Meeting the requirements of special needs education;
- Strengthening teacher education and improving the quality of graduates;

- Facilitating linkages between secondary schools and postsecondary institutions;
- Introducing best practice into the department's central management; and
- Providing assistance to school management committees.

Both the Department of Education and donors have acted to take components from the strategy and the Department has labeled these *component projects*. As a result, considerable overseas support has recently been focused on education. There are a number of education projects presently underway or commencing in either grant or loan form. This is covered in greater detail later in this chapter. First, however, a brief review of the present system is in order.

Mandatory Education

Education is mandatory in Samoa for all persons aged five to 14. The Government does not collect fees, but local communities (school committees) levy fees mainly to cover maintenance. The Government funds free stationery, teacher salaries, curricula, and books. Some 29 percent of Samoa's population was enrolled in primary or secondary school in 1999.

Various nongovernment organizations (NGOs) report that a small percentage of children (less than 2 percent) never attend school. They and some education authorities also believe that the imposition of fees may contribute to the dropout rate of some students who have commenced schooling. The weight of this factor compared to other factors, such as parental attitudes, the perceived relevance of the curricula, principal and teacher commitment, and other variables cannot presently be determined. Certainly, costs are greater and thus potentially more of an issue for secondary and postsecondary education. At primary levels, village school fees have often remained static for years. Thus, although these fees are an area of perennial complaint, they do not appear to represent a particularly onerous burden for the majority. A small minority may need special assistance.

Early Childhood Education

At present preschool education remains the domain of NGOs, especially churches. There are 63 preschool centers operating in Samoa. Preschool teacher training is conducted by the University of the South Pacific's Extension Center, the Sogi Early Childhood Education Asso-

ciation, and the newly-established National Council of Early Childhood Education. Demand for preschool enrollment is growing, with government now committed to providing support for curriculum, production of materials, and strategic guidance on the further development of preschooling in Samoa. However, government budget support remains very limited. UNDP also presently sponsors some limited project support for preschools. Given other priorities, preschools will remain a primarily nongovernment concern for some time to come.

Primary Education

Samoa's formal education system is founded on eight years of primary schooling. The majority of schools are run by village committees responsible for setting and collecting school fees, determining how the fees will be spent (with only force of custom requiring fees to be spent on education), construction and maintenance of buildings, teacher housing, and the provision of many consumables. Government funding covers the teacher's salary, a low level of consumables, and initial sets of school texts, on the expectation of textbooks being maintained for a minimum of five years. In essence, schools are community-owned. This means that village committees have long taken the lead in determining admission and other school policies. The Department of Education has been attempting to standardize primary-school practices since 1996, for example, banning corporal punishment. To date the limited resources available for sustained interaction have meant the department has achieved only limited success in standardizing primary-school policy and practice.

Malifa

The principal exception to government support for primary schools is the Malifa compound in Apia (the site of the old teachers college). Here nearly all costs are covered by Government. Students do pay fees (33 tala a year) that may be slightly higher than the village school norm. However, no further community inputs in cash or kind are required to subsidize building and maintenance, as is the case for village schools.

The general belief is that students receive a better education at Malifa. This is consistent with exam results, although the results are also dependant on a pool of highly motivated achievers. The result is a very high student-to-teacher ratio, as parents migrate to Apia, at least in part so that their children can go to Malifa; have children board with relatives in Apia; or have their children commute from villages on Upolu.

Some children are reported to endure considerable daily travel times in order to attend the most crowded classes in Samoa. Obviously the desire for good quality primary education is driving this behavior. The Department of Education recorded a student to teacher ratio of 36:1 at Malifa for 1999, the next highest ratio being 29:1 and the average at only 23:1 for all government schools. The Malifa rate appears to be rising even higher as enrollments commence in the year 2000.

Languages of Instruction

Primary instruction is given in Samoan to year six, with English introduced in year four. Years seven and eight are supposed to be taught entirely in English. The year eight final examination is in English, with ramifications for those who do poorly. Primary teacher ability in English is obviously one critical variable, as is student opportunity to practice English. The urban setting of Apia is definitely advantageous to the present system. A study supported by UNDP on the impact of the present language approach to instruction is now underway and should assist in future solutions to the problem.

Promotion of Literacy in the Home Environment

Primary education faces difficulties in the broader context of Samoan society, which still revolves closely around village life and village practices. In rural areas, the opportunity to practice English may be limited. Generally, for the majority of both rural and urban inhabitants, it appears that access to books and other reading material in households is limited (often to the Bible). The lack of widely available reading material in either Samoan or English in homes, especially in rural areas, remains a major constraint to improved numeracy and literacy.

The development of literacy and numeracy skills cannot be the sole responsibility of schools. These skills need to be reinforced within the wider culture encompassed by the home. The introduction to households of effective materials to improve reading and simple mathematical skills, however, would involve a cultural shift. To some extent, this is occurring at present through radio and television. In fact, some educators and parents have found television to interfere with homework, further weakening the foundation for literacy. Educational broadcasts on radio are a part of the Department of Education's supplementation to schools (with international assistance recently completed in upgrading facilities). However, no such educational programming is available on television.

Secondary Education

Secondary school covers years nine through to 13, with several major transition points that are marked by considerable attrition. The exam-based nature of secondary school and the higher fees charged are considered to contribute to the present patterns shown in Table 6.2 that details government school transition rates. Note that total national rates (not shown in this table) which include both mission and private schools, are generally better than government school transition rates, as is to be expected from a higher resource base. Recent improvement to government school transition rates is evident from Year 11 to 12.

Table 6.2 **Transition Rates for Government Schools in Samoa, 1995–1999**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Year 8–9	63	57	59	59	57
Year 11–12	23	28	46	53	54
Year 12–13	53	69	47	46	46

Source: **Department of Education (1999).**

There are 21 junior secondary schools, run through district committees and supported by Government in a manner similar to village elementary schools. There are only three private junior secondary schools. At the senior secondary level, the situation is reversed: the Government operates only four schools (government colleges) and there are 17 nongovernment schools. In the past, streaming by year eight examination results relegated students with poorer results to junior secondary schools and those with higher grades to senior secondary schools. The junior secondary schools had a separate curriculum, generally judged to be far less satisfactory than that of senior secondary schools. Changes are now in place to remove the dual curriculum, although the streaming system continues at present.

Gender and School Enrollment

The gender balance of school enrollments generally reflects the gender situation presented in the 1991 census of 0–14 year olds. The census records 52 percent boys and 48 percent girls for this age group. Most school enrollments approximate this, with variation most evident at junior secondary mission schools, where girls are markedly in the majority, representing some 58 percent of enrollments (the absolute figures are small, however). In general, there is a slight tendency for girls to receive

more schooling than boys, who are more prone to dropping out. Thus, senior secondary school has a slightly higher number of girls than boys. In general terms, gender does not seem to be a major issue with regard to enrollments. (See Table A5 for enrollment details in percentages by sex and type of institution.)

Dropouts and those Who Never Attend School

The *Demographic and Health Survey 1999* (Department of Statistics undated), which sampled 20 percent of the nation's total population, recorded 2 percent of the population 15 and over having never attended school. This is in line with the 1991 census, which found a similar 2 percent of individuals 15 and older who had never attended school. Schooling is held in esteem by most Samoans, and the great majority do attend.

For the same group of individuals 15 and older, the *1999 Demographic and Health Survey* also recorded that some 98 percent had reached some level of primary school and 71 percent had reached some level of secondary school. The completion levels of primary or secondary school achieved are not stated. Thus a minimum of more than 70 percent of the 15-and-older population has completed eight years of primary education.

There does appear to be a continuing problem with dropouts at all levels of school, particularly at secondary levels. On average, for the years 1993 through 1999, some 4,500 students may have dropped out of primary or secondary school. A small percentage will have gone to vocational education courses or may be part of internal migration processes or emigration, but ultimately the majority will join the labor force. Given an annual average enrollment during the same period of some 1,038 year 13 students plus a possible maximum 4,450 leaving before year 13, the total number annually leaving school is in the order or 4,500 to 5,500. Based on the 1991 census, by age 20 approximately 60 percent of these persons will enter the labor force, representing some 3,000 a year. (These data are derived from an unpublished 1999 "Labor Force Policy Paper" produced through ADB assistance.) The figures indicate that more students are dropping out or graduating than are initially enrolling in year one (the shortfall is assumed to be made up by new enrollments in other years or may reflect internal migration and possible double counting of some enrollments). Details of specific figures may vary, but the general trend presented is supported by the very slight changes to total enrollments.

The 1991 census recorded labor force participation rates of some 34 percent for boys and 14 percent for girls in the 15–19-year-old age group. This would equate with an average 1,340 persons, at present dropout

rates, entering the workforce annually from within that set of youth. Participation in the workforce by children younger than 15 is not recorded, but it does occur.

Postsecondary and Tertiary Education

There is a relatively large number of institutions in Samoa for secondary school graduates (to include individuals from years 10, 11 and 12 in some vocational cases). The National University of Samoa is the largest tertiary institution in the nation. It has faculties in education, nursing, commerce, arts, and science. There is also a branch of the University of the South Pacific dedicated to agriculture and seven vocational centers. The leader and most prestigious is the Samoa Polytechnic (co-educational). There is also the Don Bosco Technical Center for boys only which accepts students commencing from year 11 and has enjoyed a high success rate for student employment following graduation. No such institution of this caliber exists for girls at present. There are five other smaller vocational centers listed by the Department of Education, in addition to a further set of religious seminaries and other small training institutes.

The National University of Samoa and the University of the South Pacific, Faculty of Agriculture, are both located in Apia. The latter caters to a regional student body with only some 25 Samoans attending. The total number of Samoans at these two institutions (full- and part-time) at the commencement of the 1999 academic year was approximately 1,245 persons. A further 70 were at Brigham Young University, Hawaii, and some 370 were on international scholarships abroad. Not counting self-funding students abroad, this was some 1,700 university students or a bit over 1 percent of the total population. Numbers have since declined as the National University of Samoa has experienced a contraction in both full- and part-time students by some 30 percent as shown in Table 6.3. (Possible causes for the contraction are considered below.)

Table 6.3 **Total Enrollments at the National University of Samoa, 1996–1999**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	
				1st Semester	2nd Semester
Enrollments	648	665	958	1220	862
percent change	–	*2.6*	*44.1*	*27.3*	*–29.3*

Sources: **National University of Samoa (1998); Vice Chancellor's Report 30 Sept.–1 Oct. 1999.**

In 1999, the Samoa Polytechnic enrolled some 673 students, of whom approximately half were part-time (including short courses). Other vocational institutes accounted for a further 500 students. Thus the total number of postsecondary and tertiary students was on the order of 2,800 persons or close to 2 percent of the total population.

Potential for Contracting Student Numbers

For the year 2000, enrollments appear to be dropping for the Samoa Polytechnic and stabilizing at the national university. In 1998, 1,271 persons enrolled in year 13 and in 1999, 1,293 (with the numbers of those actually graduating assumed to be fractionally less). It may well be that the required secondary school through-put in terms of both quality and quantity of the high school graduates is insufficient to maintain increasing enrollments in the face of the varied opportunities now available and the standards needed to continue once a student has been accepted.

Competition for Courses and Course Relevance to the Workforce

The most sought-after course of study at the National University is the University Preparation Year. Entrants are prepared for study overseas and compete for scholarships. Over two thirds of each year's intake subsequently receive scholarships, with a host of options for international studies. The study of commerce is also a popular option. Health and education tend not to be a first choice of study and this poses a particularly problematic situation because they lead to employment in the important but at present woefully short-staffed fields of teaching and nursing (other medical study being overseas). One immediately apparent risk is the lowering of standards to maintain student numbers. On the other hand, standards have recently been raised for commerce at the national university and the Faculties of both Education and Nursing have newly-renovated curricula and programs.

The problem remains, however, that both the health and education faculties are having difficulty attracting students. They attribute this to their graduates' perceived low status, working conditions, and rates of pay as either primary-school teachers or nurses. Thus training is available, but attracting sufficient suitable candidates presents difficulties. A limited number of scholarships is on offer, but again, this is not the complete solution. The focus must move to what is happening after graduation.

In other areas, such as tourism and fisheries, postsecondary education demonstrates an ability to respond to emerging workforce training

needs. Thus the Polytechnic has recently opened a hospitality course in response to present and future tourism needs. It also offers, for example, computing, electrical, refrigeration and air conditioning, horticulture, and maritime training courses aimed at internal workforce requirements (possibly also suitable for some external work.) Again the problem is not a lack of courses, but one of sufficient and sufficiently prepared candidates.

Financial Resources

Resource Allocation

Chapter 2 demonstrates that the Government of Samoa dedicates a substantial portion of recurrent expenditure to health and education, with proportionally large increases occurring in recent years. For education, the central issue then becomes what proportion of total resources have been dedicated to the various levels of schooling and whether they are appropriate.

There are four principal sources of funding for public education in Samoa: Department of Education recurrent expenditure, donor funding through the Department of Education, school fees and community contributions, and scholarship funds from donors administered through the Public Service Commission.

Approximate unit costs for primary and secondary education are given in Table 6.4. The data are based on recurrent costs in government schools using the 1999–2000 Budget.

The higher comparative costs for government colleges arises because of the more highly qualified teachers, who command larger salaries on average than do teachers at junior secondary schools. School fees amount to some 13 percent (or SAT$3.3 million) of recurrent expenditure for

Table 6.4 **Department of Education, Recurrent Expenditure Per Unit for Primary and Secondary Education, 1999–2000**

Type of school	Tala	US Dollar
Village primary schools	397	132
Malifa primary schools	468	156
Average all primary schools	460	153
Junior Secondary schools	798	266
Government colleges	1,337	446
Average secondary schools	1,015	338
Average all schools	570	190

Source: **TA3236-SAM Education Sector Project, Draft Final Report, ADB.**

primary and secondary public schooling. In addition, there are other community contributions to schools in cash or kind, with the wealth of individual communities a factor in school quality.

If the average unit costs, estimated at US$1,355 (SAT$4,065) in 1999, are compared to gross national product (GNP) per capita, the recurrent expenditure per unit dedicated to primary education represents some 11 percent of per capita GNP. And the recurrent expenditure per unit dedicated to secondary education represents some 25 percent of per capita GNP. These figures compare well with 14 Asian countries where Mingat (1995) found average recurrent unit costs were 10 percent of GNP per capita in primary schools and 20 percent for secondary schools.

The Department of Education adopted performance-based budgeting commencing in the financial year 1996–1997; a Treasury Department Institutional Strengthening Project is presently working on means to strengthen the procedures for relating estimates to expenditures. The new system should ultimately produce more accountability in both the detailing of actual expenditure and the effectiveness of that expenditure.

At the postsecondary/tertiary level, unit costs per student will vary considerably on a year-to-year basis if student numbers continue to fluctuate significantly. For 1999, Table 6.5 calculates nominal per unit costs:

Table 6.5 **Unit Costs for Postsecondary Education in Samoa, 1999**

	Recurrent expenditure	Full time equivalent students[a]	Unit cost
	Tala million		Tala
National University of Samoa	6.15	956	6,433
Samoa Polytechnic	3.90	456	8,369

Note: **a. Assumes that three part-time students are equivalent to one full-time student.**
Source: **TA3236-SAM Education Sector Project, Draft Final Report, ADB.**

Donor Resources

Donor funding presently concentrates heavily on education. For example, the Education Mini Summit reported that 42 percent of all Australian assistance, 68 percent of all New Zealand assistance, and 58 percent of all EU microproject assistance was dedicated to education. Of the 153 expatriate personnel serving in the country under aid programs, 52 percent are in the education sector (mainly as teachers in the fields for which local expertise remains inadequate). The tertiary sector includes 430 students on scholarships in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji Islands, and Samoa (budgeted through the Public Service Commission).

An examination of total donor funding for 1998–1999 and 1999–2001

shows that the proportions are heavily weighted to the postsecondary/tertiary level. Just prior to this period, during the Japanese funding of the new campus for the National University of Samoa, the weighting was even more heavily in favor of tertiary education. Proportional data on total donor funding by education sector provided by the Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs to the Education Mini Summit (May 1999) are shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 **Allocation of Overseas Assistance by Level of Education in 1998–1999**

	Proportion allocated
	%
Postsecondary/Tertiary	71
Secondary	8
Primary	15
Early Childhood	1
Other	4
Total value (Tala million)	25

Source: **Department of Education (1999).**

The table conflates two streams of funding. One is direct donor funding through the Department of Education; the other is through the Public Service Commission allocation for human resource development (scholarships at the tertiary level). This represents a major donor boost to tertiary education. For 1998–99 total overseas assistance (as shown proportionally in Table 6.6) was valued at some SAT$25 million. For 1999–2000 funding levels are similar, comprising approximately SAT$8.9 million in education development assistance and SAT$14.3 million for human resource development through the Public Service Commission; the resulting proportions are similar to those appearing in Table 6.6. Thus, substantial education resources are directed to the postsecondary/tertiary sector of education, while serious problems remain for primary education.

A formidable array of international assistance has been set in place to meet the challenges presented to education, and most recently, those raised in the *Education Policies 1995–2005* (Department of Education 1995). International assistance has targeted early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, special needs education, tertiary education, teacher education, department management, school management, and further institutional strengthening. Considerable project work has been completed since the start of the 1990s. Table 6.7 provides only a sample of the many projects undertaken during the decade. It does cover those that are most significant in meeting some of the aims of the present

Table 6.7 **Significant Education Projects Completed, 1990–1999**

Project Title	Brief Description
Teacher Education Improvement Project	Commencing at the start of the decade (1991–1996), the Teacher Education Improvement Project, funded by the New Zealand Government, engaged in a major overhaul and consolidation of in-service and pre-service teacher training to include improvement in curriculum and resources.
National University of Samoa Le Papaigalagala Campus	Through Japanese funding (approximately US$30 million) the new University was completed and opened in September 1997. The Samoa Teachers College became the Education Faculty of the university and a committee was set in place to foster cooperation between the University of the South Pacific and the National University of Samoa.
Vaitele-uta school building	Chinese government funding provided for the construction and completion of the 12-room Vaitele-uta school building at the Malifa compound. The objective was to relieve some of the overcrowding.
Early Primary Literacy Development Project	A two-year Early Primary Literacy Development Project was funded by the Government of Canada. The project supplied 20 readers in Samoan (and other materials including posters) to all primary schools in 1996–1997. It also provided in-service training for some 30 percent of all primary teachers.
Basic Education for Life Skills Programme	The Basic Education for Life Skills Programme is regional and multilaterally funded. It has progressed through three stages, 1993–1995, 1995–1997, and on-going. Implementation has focused on strengthening primary education and literacy, education systems planning and management, and curriculum for life skills (the focus of the latter being agriculture).
Postsecondary Education Planning	An Australian government-sponsored project targeting postsecondary education was implemented in 1997–1999.
Teachers Professional Development	The Western Samoa Secondary Teachers Professional Development Project (1992–1994) focused on junior secondary teacher training.
EU Microprojects	As examples only, for 1998–99 financial year, there were 16 EU microprojects directed to preschool improvements, 16 EU microprojects directed to primary-school improvements, and 4 EU microprojects for secondary schools.
Other small grants	Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, and Germany all provide small grant assistance to individual schools: however, the EU is the leader in this field.
Scholarships	Scholarships are coordinated through Foreign Affairs, with 430 students receiving assistance in 1998–99.

Source: **Department of Education.**

strategic framework. It also signals that some of the past responses have possibly not achieved the long-term outputs desired.

Table 6.8 lists projects that are being undertaken at present. The great majority are principally directed to implementing the strategic framework (and all subsequent planning that has followed). Scholarships and small grants are not shown in this table.

Priority Issues

Addressing the Challenges

The Government of Samoa has long recognized that numerous challenges face education and has spent the past decade addressing them with the help of development assistance. The production and implementation of the *Education Policies 1995–2005* marks a turning point in comprehensively addressing education issues. The strategy (and corollary policy document) outlines the many problems faced by education. The responses through component projects are documented in Table 6.8. A very considerable effort to improve education is now underway, with virtually all the significant problems being addressed. This comprehensive approach to improvement is ambitious. The Government and donors will need to exercise care in avoiding the overburdening of education officials and other stakeholders by attempting to accomplish too much too quickly.

Numeracy and Literacy

The fundamental priority is to ensure that primary education outputs include an increasing number of functionally literate and numerate students. Meeting this major challenge involves a nexus of concerns raised about primary education. These include

- the low levels of functional literacy and numeracy apparently being achieved at present;
- teacher quality and the relatively high turnover of teachers, with primary-level vacancies taking up to eight months to fill;
- the resources dedicated to primary education;
- the general lack of reinforcement for literacy and numeracy beyond the confines of the primary school; and
- the issues of access and equity, subject to a host of variables depending on individual school committees and the Malifa compound.

Table 6.8 **Present Education Projects**

Project Title	Brief Description
Early Childhood Education Development	Early Childhood Education Development is being supported through a subproject of the UNDP Augmenting Institutions for General Attainment 1998–2002, with complementary Government of Samoa activities, and Basic Education for Life Skills teacher training.
Infant Materials	Design for the project is now commencing through Australian government support.
Primary Education Materials Project	Commenced in 1996 and should be completed in July 2000. The focus has been on years 4–8 primary school. Major achievements include the production of texts (7,500 per subject) in all major subject areas and other materials production.
Basic Education for Life Phase III	Focus on teaching and learning, literacy education, and community support training, especially early childhood education. A regional program for 1997–2000.
Secondary Education Single-Stream Curriculum & Materials Development	Commenced in 1998 for four years to 2002, funded by New Zealand, with a focus on developing curriculum and teaching materials; and on providing teacher in-service training for years 9–12 with possible expansion to year 13. (Note complementary with the Canadian-funded project for primary years 1–3 and the Australian project covering years 4–8).
Library Facilities	The Provision of Libraries and Laboratories Facilities in Junior Secondary Schools Project is funded through Japanese grants administered by the World Bank, with procurement of equipment in progress. The project has been ongoing since 1995.
Special Needs Education	Special needs education is a subproject of the UNDP Augmenting Institutions for General Attainment 1998–2002.
National Training	Activities to develop a National Training Authority form a subproject of the UNDP Augmenting Institutions for General Attainment 1998–2002.
Language research	Activities concerning problems of bilingual education and testing in English are a UNDP Augmenting Institutions for General Attainment 1998–2002 subproject.
Literacy and numeracy	Consolidating Basic Education for Life Skills literacy and numeracy is a UNDP Augmenting Institutions for General Attainment 1998–2002 subproject.
School-based assessment	Regional initiative developed by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment commencing in 1996 with continuing support with exam alternatives.

Associated Schools Project	A regional initiative of UNESCO with New Zealand funding started in 1996 to twin schools and focus on UN themes towards peace.
School-based teacher training	A model schools project through UNESCO with New Zealand funding started 1996 and extended to 2001.
Distance Education and Teacher Support	New Zealand-funded and started in 1999.
Peace Corps Science and Commerce	Peace Corps volunteers replace junior secondary school science and commerce teachers so the latter may attend the National University of Samoa for the qualification upgrading of some 54 teachers. (1998–2001)
Institutional Strengthening	The Department of Education Institutional Strengthening Project is Australian-funded for 5 years, commencing 1999, to strengthen capacities to develop and implement corporate and management plans.
Infrastructure Strengthening	ADB education-sector loan for improvement of the educational physical infrastructure (complements Institutional Strengthening above).
Science Education in Pacific Schools	A proposed regional project through UNDP and UNESCO, with regional government partnership
Polytechnic Staff and Course Development	Commenced in 1997 for staff development and quality control, with Phase II now developing courses in horticulture and hospitality management.
Coastal Small Island Project	UNESCO pilot project on education for sustainable village living (commences shortly).
Health	Health Dept.-led, with WHO and AusAID funding to provide first-aid kits to schools and health instruction for staff.

Note: **Small grants and scholarships are *not* recorded in this table but do significantly impact education.**
Sources: **Department of Education (1999c); New Zealand High Commission Official Development Assistance (1998/99); AusAID.**

Past Efforts to Improve Literacy and Numeracy

In the past, a sizable portion of resources, both from Government and through international assistance (both grant and loan aid), has emphasized improvement to secondary, postsecondary vocational, and tertiary education. This approach has limited the donor resources available for improvements to basic numeracy and literacy. Education officials appear fully cognizant of the issue, as evidenced by the present strategic approach to Samoan education as shown in *Education Policies 1995–2005*, but up to now initiatives to address the problem have been limited.

The Present Situation

The village primary-school teacher still faces a plethora of difficulties. These reverberate through the entire education system, to the detriment of basic human resource development. One result is that Polytechnic and University authorities report continuing difficulties with the skills standards of new entrants. At the Department of Education's Education Mini Summit, May 5, 1999, the Linkages with Post-Secondary Institutions Group, which included full university and vocational representation, noted that

> core areas needing attention in schools are in communication and basic mathematics. Polytechnic now requires about half a semester to "bridge the gap" so that students can [begin] to cope with the basic areas of study. USP [University of the South Pacific] finds the problem to be one almost of "literacy". The capacity to write legibly and simply articulate oneself is missing. Numerical skills are missing with many students. These are not complex mathematical skills, but basic arithmetical skills . . . At NUS [National University of Samoa] literacy in simple Samoan and English is a problem . . . Secondary schools assume too readily that the basic[s] of education have been adequately addressed in primary schools. Remedial work should be continuous.

The evidence is clear that primary education, the basic building block of formal education, requires strengthening. At present, the top-ranking students completing secondary school and successfully passing examination requirements to enter postsecondary and university courses are held to be deficient in basic numeracy and literacy skills. Total graduates of year 13 represent some 20 percent of all yearly school leavers. If the best of this 20 percent is now being found deficient, then there are grave implications for all the others. Supporting this inference are unreleased UNESCO studies of year four and six primary-school literacy that indicate a serious degree of functional illiteracy.

Responses to Strengthen Basic Numeracy and Literacy

The Samoan Government, in particular through the Department of Education, foreign donors, and multilateral lending agencies, has attacked the problem at all levels. In fact, the plethora of assistance projects and loans appears to be taxing the capacity of the Department of Education. At the primary-school level, the following examples are relevant:

- Programs to monitor literacy are being implemented;
- Improvements in physical infrastructure are being assisted through both loans and grants;
- Educational radio programs are supplementing teaching;
- Teacher training is improving through the Faculty of Education at the National University of Samoa;
- Work is underway to increase the interaction, responsiveness, and abilities of village school committees in concert with the Department of Education; and
- The options for revisions to bilingual primary education systems are being studied.

Australian and ADB assistance is especially directed to a number of these problems, including the situation at Malifa. Projects are also in train to improve Malifa compound facilities and to relieve some of the pressure on student numbers by strengthening nearby village primary schools. The challenge will be to find sustainable means for village school committees to maintain improved facilities and accept students from beyond the committee's catchment responsibilities. Improvements to physical infrastructure at Malifa may result in a continuation of the compound's attractiveness. One long-term option proposed for consideration within the education system is to place the running of Malifa in the hands of a village-like committee constituted within Apia.

These initiatives should assist in improvements to basic numeracy and literacy. However, challenges continue: for example, primary teachers' salaries remain low, teacher turnover is above 10 percent per annum, and morale varies amongst schools, as reflected in teacher and principal absence. A further allocation of resources to support primary-school teachers directly may be required to ensure sustainable results.

The present situation marks considerable progress in education and training. The strategic and policy framework supported by both Government and overseas assistance, in concert with processes to strengthen stakeholder involvement, should further strengthen education. The next challenge and most pressing priority is to achieve a sustained improvement in primary-school teaching, teaching materials, and primary school teachers.