Validation Report

Reference Number: PVR-429
Project Number: 39254-022
Grant Number: 0125
November 2015

Mongolia: Education Sector Reform Project

Independent Evaluation Department
Asian Development Bank
ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMF</td>
<td>design and monitoring framework</td>
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<td>ESIS</td>
<td>education sector information system</td>
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<td>ESRP</td>
<td>education sector reform project</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>information communication technology</td>
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<td>MECS</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Culture and Science</td>
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<td>PCR</td>
<td>project completion report</td>
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<td>PIU</td>
<td>project implementation unit</td>
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<td>PSC</td>
<td>project steering committee</td>
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<td>PSTT</td>
<td>pre-service teacher training</td>
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<td>RRP</td>
<td>report and recommendation of the President</td>
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<td>TEDP</td>
<td>Third Education Development Project</td>
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<td>TRF</td>
<td>textbook revolving fund</td>
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<td>TRS</td>
<td>textbook rental scheme</td>
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<td>TTI</td>
<td>teacher training institute</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>technical and vocational education</td>
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NOTE

In this report, "$" refers to US dollars.

Key Words

adb, asian development bank, education sector policy planning, enrollment, esrp, ict, pre-service teacher training, professional development, pstt, teaching and learning, teacher training institute, textbook rental fund, textbook revolving fund, tti, validation

The guidelines formally adopted by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) on avoiding conflict of interest in its independent evaluations were observed in the preparation of this report. To the knowledge of IED management, there were no conflicts of interest of the persons preparing, reviewing, or approving this report.

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I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. Rationale

1. Mongolia’s education system has, in the past decade, benefited from three previous projects that supported major sector reforms, helped reorient the education system to the needs of the market economy, and provided needed investments (e.g., rehabilitated schools). Further changes were implemented that built on these interventions. Beginning school year (SY) 2008/09, basic and secondary education in Mongolia was extended from 11 years to 12 years, and school-entry age was lowered from 7 years to 6 years in line with international standards. Such changes increased the total student enrollment in primary and secondary education, which in turn required additional classrooms and other school facilities, teachers, and teaching–learning materials such as textbooks.

2. Extending the years of schooling and lowering school-entry age needed to be accompanied with supportive actions, such as a comprehensive reform of pre-service teacher training (PSTT), reduced cost and improved provision of textbooks, streamlined education planning and budgeting methods, and enhanced use of information and communication technology (ICT). To help meet these demands, the government requested the Asian
Development Bank (ADB) for grant assistance to finance a new project—the Education Sector Reform Project (ESRP).\footnote{ADB. 2008. Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on the Proposed Asian Development Fund Grant: Mongolia: Education Sector Reform Project. Manila.}

B. **Expected Impact**

3. The expected impact of this project was improved quality, access, efficiency, and effectiveness of the 12-year education system. These were to be evidenced by (i) progress in gross enrollment rate, (ii) improved performance on assessment exams, (iii) improved financial policies in schools, and (iv) reduced parental cost of education.

C. **Objectives or Expected Outcome**

4. The expected outcome of the project was an effective 12-year education system. The outcome indicators were (i) increased enrollment of 6-year olds in the school system, (ii) increased student transition from lower to upper secondary education, (iii) increased transition from grade 11 to grade 12, and (iv) increased completion rates of boys in secondary education. This validation notes there were close similarities between impact and outcome statements and/or indicators. The stratification of goals is, therefore, not very clear for this project.

D. **Outputs**

5. The project had four designated outputs that correlated with the four project components. These were (i) improved education planning, management, and budgeting; (ii) strengthened PSTT; (iii) enhanced quality, affordability, and levels of provision of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials, including enhanced innovation in the use of ICT in the classroom; and (iv) better learning conditions by upgrading the physical infrastructure of teacher training institutes (TTIs).

6. For Component 1—on improved educational planning, management, and budgeting—the performance targets were (i) a consolidated education management information system designed, installed, and tested by early 2010; (ii) school-based policy framework agreed by the end of 2010; (iii) a government resolution on revised financial policies for basic education issued by mid-2011; and (iv) a national strategy developed and published by the end of 2010.

7. For Component 2—on the strengthened pre-service teacher education—the performance measures were (i) a reformed TTI curriculum in place by 2010, (ii) the national admissions procedure revised by 2010, (iii) a national student teacher assessment in place by the end of 2010, (iv) continuous professional development program for teacher educators developed and implemented by 2011, (v) school-based teacher practice model piloted by 2012 and scaled up by 2014, and (vi) learning and teaching materials for TTIs developed by 2012.

8. For Component 3—on improved affordability, quality, and availability of teaching and learning materials—the six targets were (i) 50 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MECS) staff, authors, and publishers trained in textbook development by 2010; (ii) a new system for textbook submission, evaluation, and approval established by 2010; (iii) up to 80% of students in primary grades use the textbook rental scheme by 2014; (iv) textbook cost reduction and quality improvement measures agreed and implemented starting 2011; (v) 14 ICT centers of excellence established in project schools by 2010 and 1,000 teachers trained in ICT as a
teaching and learning tool by 2011; and (vi) a new Mongolian language educational software developed by 2011.

9. Lastly, for Component 4 on upgraded facilities at TTIs to support reforms in PSTT, it is expected that the facilities of five TTIs will be rehabilitated and upgraded by 2014.

E. Provision of Inputs

10. The project investment cost at appraisal was estimated at $10.8 million, of which $10.0 million was financed from the Asian Development Fund (ADF), equivalent to 92.3% of total costs. The Government of Mongolia was provided $830,000 (7.7% of total project cost) as taxes and duties. Grant financing and relatively low counterpart financing percentage were justified because of the project’s focus on primary and secondary education and education sector reforms to close the rural–urban gap in school participation and educational achievement, and because a part of the investment targeted students in poor and remote areas.

F. Implementation Arrangements

11. The MECS was designated as the executing agency for the project. A project steering committee (PSC), chaired by the state secretary of MECS, provided overall guidance, approved the annual project budget and activity plan, and reviewed and advised on project implementation. The PSC consisted of senior officials of the Ministry of Finance, MECS, and project aimag representatives. The project implementation unit (PIU) responsible for the daily operations of the Second Education Development Project and the Third Education Development Project (TEDP) was also tasked to oversee and manage the work undertaken by the implementing agencies, to manage project finance, and to manage the implementation of the ESRP because the PIU had been in place since the mid-1990s and the staff were experienced in procurement, consultant recruitment, and overall project implementation.

12. Changes, however, were made to project implementation arrangements. The PSC was chaired by the minister, instead of the state secretary, and the committee consisted of senior officials from the Ministry of Finance and MECS, without aimag representatives. A separate PIU, however, was established for the ESRP because the PIU for the TEDP could not manage additional tasks related to the ESRP. This separate PIU was only established 6 months after grant effectiveness, resulting in delays in project start up and implementation.

II. EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE AND RATINGS

A. Relevance of Design and Formulation

13. The project completion report (PCR) rated the ESRP highly relevant to the government’s education sector policy and strategic approach to education based on the country’s education sector master plan at the time of appraisal, and this remained at project completion. The ESRP conformed to the ADB education sector strategies for Mongolia, such

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2 MECS was known as the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) after the change of government in July 2012 and until another change of government in December 2014. This validation uses MECS throughout this paper.

3 Aimag is a provincial administrative unit in Mongolia.


5 ADB. 2006. Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors: Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to Mongolia for the Third Education Development Project. Manila.
as the renewed emphasis on quality, upgrading of teacher skills, capacity development in education institutions, and equitable access. It was also aligned with the ADB country strategy and program update, 2007–2009.6

14. The project design remained consistent with the government’s sector plan, even after a change in government in 2012. This validation notes some design issues, such as some milestones that were front-loaded and too ambitious (paras. 39–40). However, the design of the ESRP was appropriate in supporting the transition to a 12-year education system, which is a challenging undertaking, and complemented the ongoing TEDP by supporting the development and provision of textbooks for the new curriculum that was developed under the TEDP, along with support for PSTT and in-service teacher training. The enhanced use of ICT in the classroom was included in the design as an important innovation to modernize the teaching and learning environment and was supported by the government. On the whole, this validation assesses project design and formulation highly relevant.

B. Effectiveness in Achieving Project Outcome and Outputs

15. The PCR rated the ESRP effective in achieving its outcome, which was an 12-year education system. The transition to the 12-year education system, with the school-entry age lowered to 6 years old, was successfully completed in SY2014/15. Four outcomes were detailed in the design and monitoring framework (DMF) at appraisal. These were (i) increased enrollment of 6-year olds, (ii) increased student transition from lower to upper secondary education, (iii) increased transition from grade 11 to grade 12, and (iv) increased completion rates of boys in secondary education.

16. Enrollment of 6-year-olds (for both girls and boys), exceeded the 95% target by 3 percentage points in SY2014/15. However, the student transition rate from lower (grade 9) to upper (grade 10) decreased from 81% in SY2003/04 to 79% in SY2013/14 (compared to a target of 85%). The PCR (Appendix 1) reported that this shortfall was offset by an increase in enrollment in technical and vocational education (TVET) programs. The TVET programs were adjusted to the 12-year education system, offering both upper secondary education and vocational certificates upon completion, and so can be considered as equivalent. If the numbers of students that transferred to TVET in year 10 were used to assess the numbers transferring to higher levels of secondary education, then the transition rate can be considered as 99%. The third indicator—transition rate from grade 11 to grade 12—increased above expectations to reach 99% in SY2014/15 as compared to the 60% target. The last outcome indicator—completion rates of boys in secondary education—jumped from 45% in 2007 to 97% in 2013 from a target of 65%.7

17. The four project outputs had 17 performance targets (paras. 5–9). Under Component 1—improved educational planning, management, and budgeting—the following were achieved: (i) the consolidated education management information system was designed, installed, and tested in 2013–2014, incurring a delay from the 2010 target; (ii) the school-based financial policy framework was agreed and in place for the 2015–2016 budget; (iii) recommendations for prioritizing investment and recurrent costs and budget classification were in the Fiscal Framework Statement and the 2015 budget; and (iv) an ICT in Education Policy was approved in September 2012.

18. Most of the targets for Component 2—strengthened PSTT—were achieved. First, a revised TTI curriculum was completed. Second, the national student admissions procedure was improved and implemented in SY2014/15. Third the national student teacher assessment was in place by 2013. Fourth, a continuous professional development program for teacher educators was developed and implemented. Fifth, a school-based teacher practice model was piloted and scaled up by SY2013/14. Sixth, improving learning and teaching materials for TTIs was partly achieved with the introduction of online access to journals and selected books.

19. Targets for Component 3—improved affordability, quality, and availability of teaching and learning materials—were achieved and some were exceeded, although there were some delay. First, 38 MECS staff, 200 authors and editors, and 120 publishers got trained in textbook development techniques by 2014. The target was 50 MECS staff, authors, and publishers trained by 2010. Second, the new system for textbook submission, evaluation, and approval was completed as planned. Third, the textbook rental scheme (TRS) and textbook revolving fund (TRF) covered more than the 80% target of grades 6, 10, and 11 students and more than 90% of students in grades 8 and 9. Fourth, the improved textbook submission, evaluation, and approval procedures were introduced that resulted in cost reduction and improved quality of books. Fifth, 22 ICT centers of excellence were established in project schools by 2012 (target: 14) and 1,477 teachers received ICT training (target: 1,000). Lastly, 145 ICT learning objects in Mongolian language for grades 8–12 were developed and uploaded in the MECS website and the Teacher Development Portal in November 2014.

20. The last component on the upgrading of facilities at TTIs was exceeded with six TTIs rehabilitated and upgraded by 2014 from a target of five.

21. Based on the narrative above, outputs that included policy reform activities were delayed both before and after the change of government that occurred in July 2012. Despite the delays, all 17 output indicator targets were achieved. Additional information on the performance targets is presented in the PCR (DMF, Appendix 1). This validation rates the project effective in achieving its planned outcomes and outputs.

C. Efficiency of Resource Use in Achieving Outcome and Outputs

22. The ESRP was rated highly efficient by the PCR in achieving its outcome and outputs. The investment in TTI facilities and textbooks was considered cost-effective, allowing savings of 20% or around $1 million, which were used for additional activities, such as the implementation of the new school-based teaching practices and training for aimag and district statistics officers and school managers on the use of an education sector information system (ESIS). The unit cost of a textbook was reported to be lower during the project period due to the reform of the textbook development system supported under the project and also because of competitive bidding processes. These lower contract prices, compared to what was estimated, permitted MECS to increase the number of ordered textbooks by 20%. Overall, however, there was no comprehensive assessment of costs and benefits of the project. This validation notes that project implementation suffered from delays because of a decision during the early years to explore an alternative 12-year curriculum framework than originally intended, and the suspension of the international consulting service contract (PCR, para. 14). These delayed the implementation of components 2 and 3, which dealt with teachers’ training and the development of teaching and learning materials. It must also be noted that two changes in government administration occurred during the implementation period (PCR, para. 26). Given the above considerations, the project is considered efficient by this validation instead of highly efficient.
D. Preliminary Assessment of Sustainability

23. The PCR rated the project *most likely sustainable* based on the government’s forward commitments and financial trends for the education sector. Teachers, parents, and other stakeholders support the government’s amended law for the transition to a 12-year education system. The legal and regulatory frameworks in support of the project’s outputs are proposed for regulation through budget and policy papers and in the action plan of the government and MECS.

24. The Education Policy Draft for 2014–2024 included recommendations that the legal environment be established to support the development of TTIs. In 2014, MECS has approved the teacher education policy reforms of an enhanced PSTT curriculum, quality assurance in TTIs, and continuing professional development for teacher educators. The textbook policy covering textbook submission, evaluation and approval procedures, national textbook standards, TRS and TRF, and the establishment of a textbook unit and fund was approved in 2014 (PCR, para. 44).

25. A unit for administration and further development of an ESIS was established within MECS in 2014, with operational budgets to the end of 2016. A comprehensive ESIS is likely to be implemented for SY2016/17. The ICT in Education Policy 2012–2016, approved by MECS in 2012, remains a major policy reference for activities related to the use of ICT in education. An ICT portal administered by the Teacher Professional Development Institute is functioning, and ICT centers of excellence and the teacher development ICT centers established under the project are being used by students and teachers for teaching–learning activities and for teachers’ continuous professional development. Internet connectivity to all areas, including rural areas, is expected to be at 100% by the end of 2015 with ongoing project from the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

26. MECS’ expenditures are projected to grow in accordance with the growth of gross domestic product and total public expenditures, which would enable MECS to continue financing the activities. This validation rates the project *most likely sustainable*.

E. Impact

27. The expected impact of the project was improved quality, access, efficiency, and effectiveness of the education sector, and the PCR rated the project’s contribution to this impact *substantial*. It is often premature to attempt a measure of impact within only 1–2 years from project completion. The target areas were (i) gross enrollment rate maintained and net enrollment increased among school-age population, (ii) improved performance in assessment exams for graduates from TTIs (baseline from 2015), (iii) improved financial policies in schools, and (iv) parental costs of education reduced in real terms. The impact data are discussed below.

28. The gross enrollment ratio attained was 101% (101% for girls and 102% for boys) at the primary level and 92% (92% for girls and 91% for boys) at the secondary level for SY2014/15. The net enrollment ratio was 97% (97% for girls and 98% for boys) at the primary level and 92% (92% for girls and 91% for boys) at the secondary level, also for SY2014/15. These achievements largely met the target of 95% gross enrollment rates and the expected increase in net enrollment rates from 90% to 95% among the school-age population.
29. Performance in assessment exams for graduates varied across TTIs. The mean of graduation exam scores among TTIs supported under the project increased, notably from 2.3 in 2007 to 2.5 in 2014 at the Dornod Institute, from 80.0 in 2007 to 83.0 in 2014 at the Khovd University, and from 2.4 in 2007 to 3.1 in 2014 at the Mongolian State University of Education. No quantitative indicator target was set for this impact area.

30. As a proxy for improved financial policies in schools, the PCR reported that the total recurrent budget for primary and secondary education increased from MNT128.7 billion in 2007 to MNT522.3 billion in 2014. However, the PCR was not able to comment on the performance of project schools in managing this increased budget.

31. Data on the last impact indicator—the parental costs of education—were not available. Since the cost per set of textbooks fell by 40% with the implementation of TRS and TRF, it is likely that there were some benefits to parents.

32. The gender action plan had a positive impact on levelling gender imbalances in education, particularly at the secondary level and higher. Prior to the project period, girls outnumbered boys in school and remained longer in school than boys. During the project period, the completion rates of boys in secondary education increased from 45% to 97% during 2007–2013. The gender parity index at the secondary level improved from 1.11 in 2007 to 1.02 in 2014, and the average dropout rate by grade declined from 4.1% during 2006–2007 to 1.7% (1.0% for girls and even more at 2.3% for boys) during 2013–2014. Some gender activities were institutionalized in the policy and operational procedures of MECS, such as the generation of gender-disaggregated data, a teacher education policy promoting male entrants in TTIs, and availability of gender-neutral textbooks. Based on the data available, it appears that the impact of the project was significant. There is a plan for an impact evaluation during 2017–2023.

III. OTHER PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

A. Performance of the Borrower and Executing Agency

33. The performance of the borrower and MECS, as the executing agency, was rated satisfactory. All performance targets were largely accomplished at project completion, which indicates strong compliance with project processes. The borrower met its commitments on counterpart funding (in the form of taxes and duties) and demonstrated strong commitment to the project’s policy reform activities by allocating funding in the 2015 budget to sustain the activities supported under the project.

34. MECS provided the leadership necessary to undertake the policy reforms and the PSC worked efficiently to achieve the performance targets. There was a change in government in 2011 and a change in management that caused a high turnover of staff and position changes within the PIU until around mid-2012. The structure became more stable afterward.

35. The consulting service contract was suspended in March 2011 as a result of changes in government priorities but the contract was reinstated in March 2013 with some revisions. This suspension clearly affected implementation and resulted in the extension of the project completion date by 14 months. Overall, this validation considers the performance of the borrower and executing agency satisfactory.
B. Performance of the Asian Development Bank

36. The PCR rated the performance of ADB satisfactory. There were five review missions conducted by ADB for the project, including the inception review, midterm review, and a project completion report review mission. Some difficulties were encountered up to 2013, with some disagreements between ADB and MECS on project activities, bidding documents, and mode of procurement, which caused delays in project implementation. Training organized on project management (procurement, disbursement, and financial management) was adversely affected by the high level of staff turnover in MECS and PIU in the early stages of the project.

37. However, after 2013, the working relationship between ADB and MECS, particularly with the PIU, improved and became more effective in implementing the project. Arrangements became flexible enough for activities to be adjusted in accordance with changes in the government’s policies and priorities, particularly on policy reforms. Timely ADB advice on policies helped enhance the project’s sustainability. This validation, therefore, views the performance of ADB satisfactory.

IV. OVERALL ASSESSMENT, LESSONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Overall Assessment and Ratings

38. This validation assesses the project successful. The project design and strategic importance were considered highly relevant. It was effective in achieving its intended outcomes to support the transition of Mongolia’s education system. The project’s implementation is assessed as efficient, although there were some delays that required two extensions to the original completion date. Some resource efficiency savings were realized in civil work and in the production of learning and/or teaching materials and the benefit thrusts of the project are most likely to continue. Overall, the project could not be considered highly successful—as suggested in the PCR—because of the attempted changes in the curriculum concepts and/or approaches midway through its implementation that were later considered not necessary. This is a borderline case between successful and highly successful.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>PCR</th>
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<th>Reason for Disagreement and/or Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
<td>Highly relevant</td>
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<td>Effectiveness in achieving outcome and outputs</td>
<td>Effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Efficiency in achieving outcome and outputs</td>
<td>Highly efficient</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>Civil works and procurement of textbooks were done at lower costs than planned. However, project implementation was delayed due to a change in curriculum design. Without a full cost–benefit assessment, it is difficult to affirm the project as highly efficient (para. 22).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preliminary assessment of sustainability</td>
<td>Most likely sustainable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall assessment</td>
<td>Highly successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
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Borrower and executing agency | Satisfactory | Satisfactory
---|---|---
Performance of ADB | Satisfactory | Satisfactory
Impact | Substantial | Significant
Quality of PCR | Satisfactory | Refer to para. 44.

ADB = Asian Development Bank, IED = Independent Evaluation Department, PCR = project completion report.
Source: ADB Independent Evaluation Department

B. Lessons

39. **Project design and implementation schedule.** The PCR noted that the targeted timing of some targets in the DMF were unrealistic. Most milestones were front-loaded and planned to be completed within the first 2 years of implementation, hence, the awarding of related contracts and disbursements presented considerable challenges. Since activities to implement the policy reform require intensive coordination among various stakeholders, sufficient time and a degree of flexibility in scheduling need to be provided in the project design (e.g., to respond to changes in government priorities).

40. **Technical assistance for capacity building.** The PCR suggested that the lack of capacity to prepare bidding documents, evaluate bids, and monitor contract execution delayed project implementation. Technical assistance directed toward building such capacity, along with support in procuring technical equipment and materials (e.g., natural science laboratory equipment, didactic books for TTIIs, and ICT learning objects) could have prevented procurement delays due to capacity constraints.

41. **Provision of consultants and stability of PIU staff.** In situations and certain types of projects where there are expected changes in government and PIU staff, larger consultant inputs is warranted during strategic planning and implementation. Achieving institutional reforms always presents particular challenges and when there is a change of government during implementation, then it should be anticipated that progress is likely to be interrupted.

C. Recommendations for Follow-Up

42. The major outcome of the ESRP, which was to assist in establishing an effective 12-year education system, was achieved. A new curriculum framework, education standards, and textbooks were developed while preservice and in-service teacher training systems were reformed to support the 12-year education system. As a next step, it will be essential that an updated system to evaluate and assess student learning is put in place in line with the new curriculum framework. It is also essential that there is capacity within MECS to monitor not only the implementation of the new 12-year curriculum but to modify it as needed. It is also important that MECS considers developing a system of teacher competency standards so that the quality of teaching can also be monitored.

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

A. Monitoring and Evaluation Design, Implementation, and Utilization

43. The DMF at appraisal (RRP, Appendix 1) and in the PCR (PCR, Appendix 1) were well constructed, comprehensive, and provided most of the required data to fully understand the project outcomes, although there was no full-time monitoring and evaluation specialist in the PIU. Despite the absence of an explicit reference to any monitoring and evaluation project
framework in the PCR, it appears that project personnel had sufficient knowledge to monitor and evaluate project outputs and then reported them in a clear and meaningful manner in the final DMF.

B. Comments on Project Completion Report Quality

44. This validation rates the PCR quality *satisfactory*. It was very well written, concise, and provided adequate details to assess the project’s performance. The DMF of the PCR correlated well with that in the original design (report and recommendation of the President [RRP]).

C. Data Sources for Validation

45. This validation made use of the RRP, PCR, the government’s completion report, loan review mission reports (midterm review in 2011 and other missions during 2012–2014), the final PCR mission report dated 10–21 November 2014, and some previous PCR validation reports.

D. Recommendation for Independent Evaluation Department Follow-Up

46. The Independent Evaluation Department may carry out a project performance evaluation in late 2019, as suggested in the PCR. This would be the time when the first cohort of students will have gone through the 12-year education system. By then, the major reform policies will have been implemented for more than 5 years and the project’s impacts can be fully evaluated. The full evaluation should be carried out in support of other broader education initiatives or ADB work program in Mongolia.

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