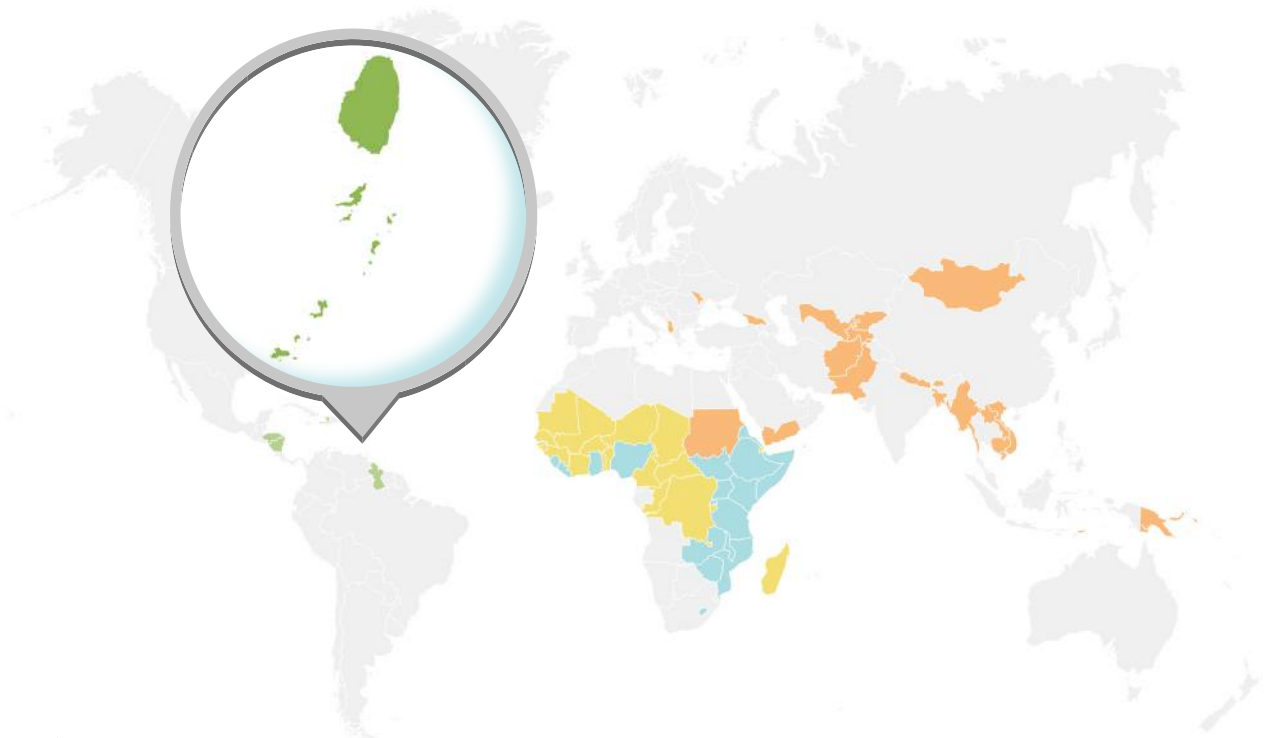




COUNTRY REVIEW

Challenges and opportunities in the education system of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



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ISSN: 2735-6221 (online).

To quote this document: Knight, V., Marshall, J., Depradine, K., & Moody-Marshall, R. (2021). *Country review. Challenges and opportunities in the education system of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*. Serie Working Papers SUMMA. N° 16. Published by SUMMA. Santiago de Chile.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of SUMMA, OECS and IDRC, or its Boards of Governors. This work has been prepared by the KIX Regional Hub with the support of the Global Partnership for Education and the International Development Research Centre, Canada.

Challenges and opportunities in the education system of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



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ABOUT SUMMA

SUMMA is the first Laboratory of Education Research and Innovation for Latin America and the Caribbean. It was established in 2016 by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), with support from the education ministries of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay.

Since 2018, the ministries of Guatemala, Honduras and Panama have also joined. Its mission is to contribute to and increase the quality, equity and inclusion of the region's education systems by improving the decision-making process for education policies and practices. To accomplish its mission, SUMMA organizes its actions in three strategic pillars that allow the promotion, development and dissemination of (1) cutting-edge research aimed at diagnosing the main challenges in the region and promoting shared work agendas, (2) innovation in education policies and practices aimed at providing solutions for the main education problems in the region, and (3) collaborative spaces that allow exchange between policymakers, researchers, innovators and the school community, based on a shared regional agenda.

ABOUT OECS

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was created in 1981 as an intergovernmental organization for promoting cooperation, harmonization and integration among its member states.

OECS has developed a considerable amount of valuable knowledge sharing and direct technical assistance among Ministries of Education. It has also been part of the Regional Education Strategy and has supported participatory planning and monitoring processes. In this regard, the OECS has a strong leadership role with the Caribbean States, and especially in supporting the countries that belong to this territory: Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As a current partner of the GPE, the OECS has led the implementation of the Education Sector Plans in these states.

ABOUT KIX LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Knowledge and Innovation Exchange Hub (KIX) of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a joint initiative of the Global Partnership for Education – GPE – and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), which brings together various stakeholders in education. The regional network is led by SUMMA (Educational Research and Innovation Laboratory for Latin America and the Caribbean), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, and aims to contribute to the strengthening of education systems in partner countries: Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

KIX connects expertise, innovation and knowledge to help developing countries build stronger education systems and move towards SDG 4: inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

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SUMMARY OF KIX LAC EASTERN CARIBBEAN ROUNDTABLE

The Eastern Caribbean Roundtable was held on July 8th and it counted on the presence of the following KIX LAC representatives:

Dominica

Bekissa Labadie
Mr. Mervin Alexander
Dr. Kimone Joseph
Mrs. Octavia Timothy

Saint Lucia

Claudia Louis
Merphilus James

Grenada

Mrs Michelle Brathwaite
Dr. Nicole Phillip-Dowe
Mr. Frankson Marshall
Miss JudyAnn Auld
Mr. Glenroy George

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Mr. Dixon Findlay
Mrs. Michelle King Campbell
Mr. Oswald Robinson

Dr. Verna Knight and her team at the University of West Indies (Dr. Rasheda Moody-Marshall, Dr. Jason Marshall and Dr. Kathy Depradine) presented the main findings of the research for the Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines separately, although at the end they stressed common challenges and opportunities for the sub-region.

After the presentation, some of the representatives shared their perspectives and gave inputs for further discussion. Overall, there was a collective perception that the four countries are not as different as they think they are. In this sense, Dr. Kimone Joseph (UWI – Dominica), Dr. Phillip-Dowe (UWI-Grenada) and Frankson Marshall (Teachers' Union, Grenada) highlighted this aspect.

Improving access to technology, evidenced by the COVID-19 context, was something that representatives such as Dr. Kimone Joseph, Mr. Oswald Robinson (Teachers' Union, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) and Michelle Brathwaite (Ministry of Education, Grenada) mentioned.

Additionally, Mr. Robinson raised the topic of inclusive education and how special education is integrated into the school system. Although it wasn't directly approached during the presentation, researchers informed that the subject is covered in the four reports. Actually, Ms. Schenelle Leonce (participant from the Ministry of Education of Saint Lucia informed us that they are working specifically to provide access to education for our special needs children.

On the other hand, both Mr. Robinson and Mrs. Brathwaite underlined the importance of ongoing training for administrators, school leaders and teachers for both emergencies and for a virtual context.

Finally, Dr. Neva Pemberton (OECS) gave the final remarks, where she emphasized the extent to which evidence-based policy action and sector planning has been and remains a developmental priority for the OECS and KIX LAC. In the end, these documents would help OECS and KIX LAC in designing some of the key activities in their new education sector program, specifically in terms of capacity building for teachers and educational leaders, to support improved learning.

As Dr. Knight pointed out, these reports are not intended to tell countries what to do. Instead, KIX LAC purpose is that they are used as inputs, especially given that Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are now in the process of developing a new sector plan.

FOREWORD

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) continue to face major social challenges, and their education systems are a mirror of the contexts of inequality in which they are embedded. Today it is urgent to move forward under the commitment of transforming our education systems into living, collaborative ecosystems that make use of evidence, innovation and knowledge sharing to address the challenges related to improving quality, equity and adaptability in the face of the new challenges of recent years. At the core, Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) initiative emphasizes the ultimate purpose of improving the holistic learning outcomes of all students in the region.

For this reason, the KIX LAC Hub, led by the partnership between SUMMA - Laboratory for Research and Innovation in Education for Latin America and the Caribbean - and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), concentrates its efforts on contributing to the improvement of the equity and quality of the region's education systems through its three main pillars of work: identifying a regional education policy agenda, mobilizing knowledge to respond to countries' needs and strengthening the institutional capacities of country partners.

In this context and with the conviction of the importance of consolidating a regional education policy agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, SUMMA and OECS have promoted a series of studies with specialists, under the common denominator "Challenges and opportunities in the education systems of the KIX LAC countries". As a result of this research, it was proposed to develop a series of working papers aimed at updating the educational diagnosis of each country and identifying the difficulties, strengths, challenges and current priorities faced by the following countries: Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

This series of working papers focuses on six thematic areas prioritized by KIX such as: (i) early childhood education, (ii) learning assessment systems, (iii) gender equity, (iv) data systems, (v) equity and inclusion, and (vi) teaching and learning. The research papers drew on secondary sources and interviews with key local stakeholders that delve into the challenges and experiences of different education systems from various perspectives: legal and policy frameworks, governance and financing, the impact of the pandemic, curriculum and learning materials, teachers, learning environments, and the contribution of educational communities and students.

This valuable research is the result of collaborative work between the SUMMA, OECS and researchers from the region, and it counts with the support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). It is hoped that these documents will encourage reflection and public policy dialogue, open a regional collaboration agenda that will strengthen learning environments among countries and become a real contribution to the construction of fairer and more sustainable education systems.

KIX LAC Team

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAPE	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CEO	Chief Education Officer
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CPEA	Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment
CXC	Caribbean Examinations Council
DTE	Division of Teacher Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Global Education Monitor
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
JBTE	Joint Board of Teacher Education
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
OESS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Education Sector Strategy
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
SKYE	Skills for Youth Employment
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SVGCC	St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UWI	University of the West Indies
YATE	Youth and Adult Training for Education
ZHTF	Zero Hunger Trust Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) funded this important and timely research. It was commissioned under the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) initiative in the Eastern Caribbean. This initiative seeks to connect the expertise, innovation, and knowledge of GPE partners to aid developing countries in strengthening their education systems.

KIX comprises regional KIX hubs, where partners share information, innovations, and best practices in education. It also includes a funding mechanism that provides grants at the global and regional levels to invest in knowledge generation and educational innovations in eligible countries. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is the grant agent for KIX. In the Eastern Caribbean, SUMMA and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have partnered to create a KIX Regional Hub in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). SUMMA has primary oversight for this current project.

Initiated by KIX, this country review of education systems in the Eastern Caribbean region was commissioned for four countries: Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This current country review report will focus on education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. More specifically, it provides an analysis of some of the critical features of the education system in this country while highlighting the current needs and challenges impacting this sector.

Information gathered from primary and secondary sources is used throughout the report to provide evidence-based recommendations. It is hoped that if these recommendations are considered/implemented they will strengthen education provisions, and by extension, improve the educational experiences of every learner through data-driven education policy.

In addition to understanding the nuances of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' education system, this country review report is also necessary for developing a plan that will guide discussions between St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ministry of Education and KIX from April 2021 to December 2023. These discussions will focus on addressing education priorities in the country. The aim is to support education development aligned with the essential educational needs in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Therefore, this report will provide insight into some of the burgeoning educational priorities across the country's educational landscape and the innovations required for this sector.

The consulting team used multiple data collection methods to identify these priority educational needs. Working closely with a focal point in the Ministry of Education

and National Reconciliation, enabled the team to access and review important legislative and policy-related documents. The team also utilised desk research, which encompassed the analysis of reputable online sources from international and regional organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Global Education Monitor (GEM), and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

The team also gathered information from important education stakeholders, including senior ministry officials, union members, and teacher trainers. These individuals were either interviewed or completed questionnaires which included questions designed to obtain specific information about the educational realities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The main findings are reported according to the identified thematic research areas for the project. A synopsis of each thematic area, along with key issues and recommendations is provided below. A brief report on a S.W.O.T analysis of the country's education system is also included.

COVID-19 AND EDUCATION

COVID-19 has changed the face of education in the Caribbean. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, over 28,000 students and over 2,000 teachers continue to experience the educational disruption caused by the pandemic. Many parents were also affected, some of whom found themselves jobless. While the Ministry of Education has received support from international and regional organisations to mitigate the negative consequences of COVID-19, the shift to emergency remote teaching has brought several challenges that have to be addressed if all students are to benefit from the high-quality education they deserve.

- **Key Issues:** The pandemic significantly impacted education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Some of the main challenges that have worsened because of the pandemic include:
 - Unequal access to technology among students
 - Lack of online pedagogical readiness by teachers
 - Loss of instructional time
 - Poor internet connectivity
 - Insufficient internet access
- **Recommendations:** Given the unpredictability of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education will need to:
 - continue its push to ensure that each student has access to digital technologies.

- utilise different methods (i.e., radio and television) to reach those students who have issues with internet connectivity.
- work closely with the Telecommunications Service Providers to improve bandwidth across the country.
- work collaboratively with other Ministries to continue its thrust to ensure the safety of all education stakeholders.
- provide continuous professional development opportunities for teachers on online pedagogy.
- equip students at all levels with knowledge of digital citizenship.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Education policy heavily impacts the operations of schools. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, policy decisions are made and ratified by the Cabinet. A cross-ministerial approach is often taken in decision-making. As indicated in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Education Act (2006), the Minister of Education has overall responsibility for ensuring that the education system functions efficiently. While the Minister is not bound to accept the advice of the Education Advisory Board, it is generally expected that he or she should work in collaboration with this group and the Chief Education Officer (CEO) to make policy decisions that affect education. Although the Education Act (2006) clearly delineates the legislation related to education, there are still a few concerns about education policy.

- **Key Issues:** Even though the Vincentian Government has remained committed to improving education through policy, there are still significant challenges for them to navigate; these include the following:
 - the quality of early childhood education
 - reading skills
 - lack of human and financial resources to effectively monitor and evaluate policy.
 - the need for additional research to inform decision-making by the political directorate.
- **Recommendations:** The Ministry of Education should consider strengthening its push to improve quality early childhood education and to improve its monitoring and evaluation processes; these can be achieved by:
 - increasing the number of trained caregivers and providing incentives for those individuals who undertake training.

- building on existing best practices (i.e., systematic collection of data of its Educational Digest) and investing human and financial capital in improving its current processes and Education Management Information System.
- strengthening the quality and increasing the amount of education research conducted on policy-related issues.

THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Teacher professional development in St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to be one of the critical aspects of education in the country. Currently, the training provided is predominantly pre-service, as most individuals complete teacher training before entering the teaching profession. On average, 75% of teachers at the primary and secondary levels are trained. However, efforts to increase the percentage of trained teachers should continue to be intensified. In addition to teacher training, there are also concerns about working conditions, teacher recruitment, appointments, and salaries.

- **Key Issues:** Some of the predominant educational challenges in the teaching profession include the following.
 - The salary scale for entry-level teachers is relatively low.
 - Attracting highly qualified individuals to the profession
 - Increasing the percentage of trained teachers
 - The shortage of male teachers
 - Curriculum reform
- **Recommendations:** The Ministry of Education can effectively address the teaching profession's challenges by considering the following.
 - Raising the minimum qualification level for entry-level teachers (i.e., requiring teachers to have a First Degree)
 - Increasing the amount of remuneration for entry-level teachers
 - Establishing a formal mentorship programme for entry-level teachers
 - Making training a mandatory requirement for teachers before they enter the profession
 - Creating a recruitment drive to attract male teachers and dispel the notion that teaching is a feminised profession
 - Review the current teacher training curriculum with the aim of 'modernising' the curriculum to reflect the current educational realities

VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Inclusive practices in education are critical. In collaboration with the Ministry of National Mobilisation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Ministry of Education has implemented several education initiatives designed to support individuals from vulnerable groups. One of the key innovations is the Teen Mothers' Reintegration to Education Programme, which was established to support young teen mothers who are desirous of continuing their education. The ministry has also continued its thrust to provide economic support for students who cannot pay for their education. Even though these achievements are laudable, there is still additional work to be done in Special Education, where concerns about early intervention and inclusion continue to grow.

Key Issues: While student experiences in the mainstream classroom drive many policy issues, more attention also needs to be given to students with special educational needs and other vulnerable populations (i.e., persons from low socio-economic backgrounds). Also of concern is the number of teen mothers. These issues are itemised below.

- The rate of teenage pregnancy
- Integrating special education students into the mainstream classroom
- Inadequate number of teachers trained in special education
- High unemployment numbers (increased number of persons requiring government assistance to access quality education)

Recommendations: The gaps identified above will require the Ministry of Education to partner with local, regional, and international organisations to address these issues. To close these gaps, the ministry can consider prioritising the following areas.

- Strengthening educational campaigns to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancy
- Training and increased continuous professional development opportunities for teachers (both special education teachers and teachers in the mainstream classroom)
- Improvements in early intervention detection for students with special education needs

Apart from the challenges identified above, results from the S.W.O.T analysis revealed that there are also various strengths and opportunities that can be used to fortify the Vincentian education system. Some of these include:

Strengths

- Universal access to secondary education
- Strong Government support of socio-economically-disadvantaged groups

- Support of privately-owned childhood centers

Opportunities

- Increasing access to funding from international organisations
- Improving ICT infrastructure at schools
- Improving teacher online pedagogical competency

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in Caribbean development. For many individuals who reside in this region, it is the key to social and economic advancement. In Small Island States and developing economies such as those in the OECS, investments in human capital through high-quality education and training are critical for sustainable economic growth and development to occur. Regional governments must be committed to developing the education sector to maximise the possibility of sustainable economic growth.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines *Education Revolution* thrust is the driving force of various education reforms and innovations throughout the country. The primary goal of this thrust is to improve the quality of life for *all* citizens by providing unrestricted access to education.

Propelled by its national vision of improving the quality of life for all Vincentians, the country's current National and Social Economic Development Plan (2013–2025) has five primary strategic priorities that aim to strengthen its socio-economic potential and improve its investment in human capital. The five priorities include: 1) re-engineering economic growth; 2) enabling increased human and social development; 3) promoting good governance and effectiveness of public administration; 4) improving physical infrastructure and building resilience to climate change, and 5) building national pride, identity, and culture. Even with a cursory glance at these priorities, one can conclude that investment in education is the key to their attainment. However, equally as necessary, and the foundation to achieving these coveted outcomes, is the continuous assessment and review of the education sector to inform education planning and decision-making for strengthening and supporting timely education innovations and reforms needed in the country.

Given the preceding, this report provides a holistic overview of essential aspects of the education system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to highlight the current needs and challenges. The report will also provide evidence-based recommendations that can improve education provisions in the country by identifying the knowledge gaps and areas needing innovation.

While there are several pieces of documentation about education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, this information is somewhat scatt. Each piece of documentation by itself does not provide a holistic picture of the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the education system in the country. This report aims to address this gap by examining vital issues affecting the country's education system. It will also consider the extent to which the historical, socio-political, and economic context has impacted educational operations. The report emphasises matters related to governance and policy, teacher education, COVID-19 and education, and inclusion, with specific reference to vulnerable groups among the Vincentian population. Although there are various descriptive elements

of the report, the intention is to provide key analyses and recommendations on the major challenges in the education sector. Consequently, the report comprises six key chapters. A synopsis of each chapter is provided below.

Chapter One provides an overview of the critical demographic, political, economic, historical, and social forces that shape the country's education system.

Chapter Two includes an overview and analysis of the initial impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the education system and its main stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents/guardians). This section offers insight into some of the relevant decisions that guided the continued provision of education via emergency remote teaching while in-person classes were suspended.

Chapter Three provides a summary of the main policies and programmes that shape the country's education system. It specifically highlights the national education priorities, the most important reforms, and the main characteristics of currently implemented programmes.

Chapter Four describes the main demographic characteristics of the teaching profession and provides an analysis of the key challenges facing the profession. Special attention is paid to teacher training, working conditions, and factors contributing to teacher shortages.


Chapter Five focuses on the country's inclusive practices in education. It addresses the challenges facing vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, while highlighting the various support systems in place. Concerns related to gender gaps and trends in education will also be discussed in this chapter.

The final chapter, **Chapter Six**, provides a synopsis of the critical areas that affect the education sector in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In this chapter, recommendations are advanced for improving the education system based on the findings that emerged from the data collected.

IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROJECT

The need, relevance, and timeliness of this project for St. Vincent and the Grenadines is clear. The sudden and unpredictable arrival of COVID-19 and the recent eruption of the La Soufriere volcano underscore the need for the country to build a resilient education system that minimises inequity and inequality, while promoting social justice and inclusion, and technological infusion/integration.

With thousands of people displaced due to the volcanic eruption, new and creative measures are required to reach students to ensure that they can continue their education. As such, with COVID-19 and the eruption of La Soufriere in April 2021 disrupting education, this research was not merely a data collection pursuit. It presented an opportunity for education leaders in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to holistically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the current educational structures. Indeed,



this is a critical juncture for the country as educational leaders engage with their educational partners and stakeholders to pivot, innovate, and build resilience in the face of new and daunting educational, economic, and social realities.

METHODOLOGY

This report was developed using data collected in two sequential phases. In Phase 1 of the research, documentary analysis was used to gather secondary data relevant to the thematic issues (COVID-19 and education, policies and programmes, teacher education, vulnerable groups) that were the focus of this report. This phase was completed through an initial desk review and subsequent engagements with an identified focal point in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The focal point worked with the researcher to identify and source specific documents needed for developing each chapter of the report. The data collected from Phase 1 guided the team in identifying gaps in existing data and obtaining the support of senior personnel from the Ministry of Education in filling these gaps, where possible. In cases where gaps still exist, information was not readily available from the Ministry of Education.

Phase 2 involved the collection of field data from several senior education officials, inclusive of education administrators, members of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union, and members of the Division of Teacher Education of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College (SVGCC). Two key data collection processes – documentary analysis and field research via interviews with senior education officials were used. The interviews were conducted to supplement data collected from these officials using surveys comprising several open-ended questions.

Table 1 provides a summary of the key individuals who provided information on essential aspects of the research.

Table 1: Key respondents in the data collection process

Key Respondents/ Interviewees	Area of Responsibility
Mrs. Elizabeth Walker	Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education
Mr. Dixon Findlay	Deputy Education Officer, Ministry of Education
Mr. Keith Thomas	Education Planner, Ministry of Education
Dr. Idelia Ferdinand	Senior Education Officer, Research and School Safety, Ministry of Education
Mrs. Jasmine Creese	Coordinator of the Student Support Unit, Ministry of Education
Dr. Harriette Da Silva	Dean of the Division of Teacher Education
Mr. Oswald Robinson	President of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union

Each interviewee was purposively selected based on their experience and depth of knowledge of the education system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as their ability to provide additional information needed for specific sections of the report. These participants were provided with a survey comprising open-ended questions, and, if they were available, a Zoom or telephone interview was arranged following the completion of the survey.

Due to conflicting demands facing the relevant personnel at the Ministry of Education as they grappled with the evolving pandemic and its impact on school processes, some persons were able to complete the questionnaire but unable to make time for an online interview. Where necessary, follow-up emails and WhatsApp messages were utilised to obtain further details and clarifications based on initial data submissions.

Engagement with the focal point was crucial to establishing communication with senior personnel in the Ministry of Education, who provided important data that assisted with meeting the objectives for this project. Table 2 provides information on the key objectives of the consultancy and the strategies used to collect the data.

Table 2: Summary of Methodology Relative to Report Objectives

Objectives	Methodological Approach
<p>To outline the main features of the education system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and describe its primary social, economic, and demographic indicators and the political characteristics and historical events relevant to understanding the system.</p>	<p>Desk Review and Documentary Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed and analysed secondary data from reputable educational organisations (i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, and local sources of educational documentation - i.e., education policy papers and legislative documents).
<p>To explore the main educational challenges in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in terms of: (a) the impact of COVID-19; (b) governance and regulation; (c) resources; (d) policies and programs; (e) students; (f) teachers and educational leaders; (g) curriculum and pedagogies; (h) accountability and support; (i) innovation and knowledge mobilisation; (j) vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.</p>	<p>Desk Review and Documentary Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed and analysed secondary data from reputable educational organisations (i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, and local sources of educational documentation - i.e., policy papers from the Ministry of Education) <p>Open-ended Questionnaires and One-on-one (virtual) interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended Questionnaires and Interviews with key education stakeholders

<p>To understand how institutions and the interactions among key actors contribute to shaping the education system and its outcomes.</p>	<p>Desk Review and Document Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed and analysed secondary data from reputable educational organisations (i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, and local sources of educational documentation – i.e., policy papers from the Ministry of Education) <p>Surveys with Open-ended Questions and One-on-one (virtual) interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended Questionnaires and Interviews with key education stakeholders
<p>To analyse the knowledge, mobilisation, and use of educational evidence in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, through a bibliometric analysis that helps identify the key documents/ pieces of research that are taken into consideration in policymaking.</p>	<p>Desk Review and Document Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed and analysed secondary data from reputable educational organisations (i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, and local sources of educational documentation – i.e., policy papers from the Ministry of Education) <p>Surveys with Open-ended Questions and One-on-one (virtual) interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended Questionnaires and Interviews with key education stakeholders
<p>Development of Matrix with relevant statistical information on the education system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines</p>	<p>Desk Review and Document Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed and analysed secondary data from reputable educational organisations (i.e., UNICEF, UNESCO, and local sources of educational documentation and data – i.e., policy papers from the various Ministries of Education)

CHAPTER 1:

OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Education does not operate in a vacuum. The national context and global realities each country faces influence how its education system operates and functions. In Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it is imperative to understand how the national and global contexts in which the education system operates influence this sector. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the political, historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts within which the education system of St. Vincent and the Grenadines functions.

1. 1 POLITICAL ORGANISATION AND CONTEXT

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a constitutional monarchy. It gained its independence from Britain on October 27th, 1979. This transition of power that led to the country's political independence is enshrined in its Constitution. Queen Elizabeth the II currently functions as the Head of State, represented by the Governor-General of the country, whom the Queen appoints on the Prime Minister's advice. Constitutionally, elections are due every five years, or they can be called earlier by the Prime Minister, who is the Head of Government.

The nation's political system operates on the principles of parliamentary democracy and follows the Westminster model of government. The country uses the First-past-the-post system to facilitate its electoral process. During elections, political candidates vie to represent one of the 15 constituencies in the country. Those candidates who win the plurality of votes in their constituency get a seat in parliament. On a broader scale, the party that wins the most constituencies form the Government. The Prime Minister, who is appointed by the Governor-General, is the leader of this political party in the House of Assembly.

November 5th, 2020, was the most recent general election. The United Labour Party (ULP) led by the incumbent Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, was victorious for the fifth consecutive time (despite losing the popular vote). They won nine (9) of the fifteen (15) contested seats. The main Opposition Party, the New Democratic Party, won the remaining seats (Electoral Office, Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2021).

The House of Assembly comprises 21 seats (15 elected members of parliament and six (6) senators – four (4) appointed by the Governor-General, on the advice of the Prime Minister, and two (2) appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the leader of the Opposition Party).

The Cabinet is the decision-making arm of the Government. The Governor-General appoints members of the Cabinet on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Cabinet meets weekly, or as required, to make policy decisions based on proposals from the various ministries. At cabinet meetings, each minister is given the opportunity to provide updates (i.e., plans and activities/projects) on their ministries. This whole-of-government approach increases awareness of what is occurring across Government and promotes cross-ministerial collaboration. In executing its role, Cabinet, where deemed necessary, can establish subcommittees that address specific concerns and provide advice to the Cabinet to facilitate informed decision-making (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2020).

1.2 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a Small Island Developing State in the Eastern Caribbean. It is one of the four Windward Islands in the Lesser Antilles. It has a population of 111, 000 (est.). About 90% of the country's population occupies the mainland of St. Vincent, while the remaining 10% comprises inhabitants of the Grenadine Islands, an archipelago of islands shared between St. Vincent and Grenada. Recent figures indicate that males account for 50.7% of the population while females account for 47.3%. (World Bank, 2019). The average life expectancy is 72.7 years (75.1 years for females and 70.3 years for males) (United Nations Population Division, Human Development Report, 2020).

In 1981, the country joined the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) – an Eastern Caribbean organisation with its historical roots in the dissolution of the British West Indies Federation in 1962 (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, 2020.). The OECS was ratified through the signing of the Treaty of Basseterre on June 18th, 1981. In 2010, an economic union was established through the Revised Treaty of Basseterre. The new treaty was created to promote greater regionality and self-sufficiency among the Member States by minimising/removing barriers to trade and movement of people. St. Vincent and the Grenadines' membership within this economic bloc influences many of the Government's policies and decisions relating to the education sector.

With a Human Development Index of 0.738 (indicative of high human development), St. Vincent and the Grenadines is ranked at number 97 in the world in terms of its human development (United Nations Population Division, Human Development Report, 2020). Nevertheless, despite this laudable achievement, as a Small Island Developing State, the country faces several social and economic challenges that threaten its potential for socio-economic advancement.

Macro-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and fiscal deficits feature centrally on the Government's agenda as policymakers develop plans to arrest these issues and chart a path for social and economic sustainability (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Budget, 2020). The arrival of COVID-19 has also served to magnify the social and economic realities currently faced by the country.

In the 2020 Budget Speech, the Government outlined its growing concern about poverty in the country (St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2020 Budget Speech). Furthermore, the most recent Country Poverty Assessment report, conducted by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) in 2008, revealed a 30.2% poverty rate. Income inequality (an indicator of poverty rates) was also a cause for concern, the CDB reported a GINI index of 0.402.

The Assessment also showed that female-headed households are disproportionately affected by poverty compared to male-headed households. The concern about the disproportionate impact of poverty on women was also outlined in the country's 2020 Budget, more than a decade later. An excerpt from the Budget Speech is provided below.

“a series of low-wage jobs typically occupied by women in St Vincent and the Grenadines offer little scope to break the cycle of poverty. Some exhausting but essential jobs that are overwhelmingly done by women in our country – like mother, caregiver, and housekeeper – earn no wages at all. NIS data indicate that domestic workers – again overwhelmingly women – are severely underrepresented on the rolls of workers whose employers are making legally-required social security payments. With Budget 2020, the Government seeks to address the discriminatory impact of poverty on women in bold and creative ways. For example, this year's 25% increase to low-wage part-time workers at schools, hospitals, and offices, will undoubtedly be a boost to the women who dominate these job categories. So too will our work to regularise teacher appointment[s] and nurses' allowances. Similarly, given the disproportionate number of women who are supported by the social safety net – including single mothers and elderly women – recent efforts to supplement that support have measurable benefits.”

The above finding is not surprising given that the unemployment rates among women in the country are usually higher when compared to men. A 2017 Labour Force Survey indicated an unemployment rate of 25.8%. When disaggregated by gender, the unemployment rate for males was 21.5% compared to 30.6% among females (Statistical Office of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2020).

In addition to the concerns about gender disparities in employment, recent World Bank statistics point to a similar unemployment trend among the country's youth (ages 15-24). For example, data from the World Bank statistics indicate that an estimated 39.8% of the country's youth are currently unemployed (World Bank, 2019).

The unemployment rates among vulnerable groups such as women and young people also contribute to high poverty levels. However, poverty reduction is a focal point of the Government. It has led to various initiatives to reduce the poverty and indigence rates by providing support for individuals and families living below the breadline. One of the key initiatives to tackle this problem is The Zero Hunger Trust Fund (ZHTF), established in 2016. The Fund aims to create a pathway to the country's achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1 (no poverty) and 2 (no hunger).

Despite its economic challenges (i.e., the decline in the banana industry, high unemployment rates, and poverty), the country has been witnessing steady growth in its GDP (the current GDP is US\$824, 718, 518, 519) (World Bank, n.d.)

1.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS

The economic advancement of a country heavily depends on a coalescence of factors, including access to health care, employment, education, among other vital elements. However, it is also important that the demographic structure of the country enables development. Table 1.1 provides information on the age structure of the population of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As can be gleaned from the table, most of the population falls within the 15-64 age group. This age structure is indicative of an excellent opportunity to create a demographic dividend.

Table 1.1: Age Structure of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Total Population (110, 696)		
0-14 Age Group	15-64 (Age Group)	65+ (Age Group)
27, 296 (24.6% of population)	73,276 (66.1% of population)	10,124 (9.1% of population)

The infant mortality rate (per 1 000 live births) is 13.4 per 1000 live births (based on 2019 estimates), which is slightly lower than the average rate among the other OECS Member States, and the regional average for Latin America and the Caribbean, which is 14 per 1000 live births (World Bank, 2020).

1.4 EDUCATION SYSTEM CONTEXT

In developing countries, education is one of the most important avenues for social and economic advancement. As such, the Small Island Developing States governments must provide the necessary infrastructures and support to enable everyone to access education.

World Bank statistics indicate that in 2018, education accounted for 18.8% of St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ government expenditure (see Table 1.2). In 2018, 5.7% of the Government’s GDP was directed toward education. This percentage is higher than both the regional average (4.8%) and the average for its income group (4.7%) (World Bank, 2020).

Table 1.2: A Comparison of the Caribbean Governments' Investment in Education as a Percentage of GDP based on World Bank Statistics Updated Between 2017–2020

Caribbean Countries	Education as a Percentage of GDP (%)	Education as a Percentage of Total Government Expenditure
Grenada (most recent updated year, 2017)	3.2	14
Dominica (most recent updated year, 2019)	5.6	9.4
St. Lucia (most recent updated year, 2018)	3.3	14.4
St. Vincent and the Grenadines (most recent updated year, 2018)	5.7	18.8
Barbados (most recent updated year, 2017)	4.4	12.9
Haiti (most recent updated year, 2018)	2.8	14.4
Jamaica (most recent updated year, 2019)	5.2	17.3
Turks and Caicos Islands (most recent updated year, 2018)	2.9	12.1
Latin America and the Caribbean, Average (most recent updated year, 2017)	4.5	17

Source: World Bank (2020)

In the last five years, the Government has invested millions of dollars in education (see Table 1.3)

Table 1.3: Government spending in the Education Sector, 2016–2020

Year	Education Sub-sector	Salaries	Maintenance Expenses	Operating Expenses	Training	Supplies and Materials
2016	Pre-Primary and Primary Education	\$39,397,114.00	\$123,930.00	\$82,620.00	\$2,560.00	\$1,586,205.00
	Secondary Education	\$35,605,533.00	\$104,392.00	\$69,594.00		\$241,585.00
	Technical Vocational Education	\$2,918,192.00	\$7,330.00	\$10,994.00		\$80,213.00
	Special Education Services	\$1,587,985.00	\$4,957.00	\$7,436.00	\$16,000.00	\$13,770.00
	Adult and Continuing Education	\$1,118,689.00	\$24,786.00	\$37,179.00	\$76,800.00	\$34,425.00
2017	Pre-Primary and Primary Education	\$38,923,393.00	\$70,000.00	\$136,550.00	\$2,560.00	\$1,586,205.00
	Secondary Education	\$34,982,113.00	\$65,000.00	\$108,986.00	Not Available	\$241,585.00
	Technical Vocational Education	\$2,914,624.00	\$11,625.00	\$6,600.00	Not Available	\$80,213.00
	Special Education Services	\$1,666,644.00	\$4,957.00	\$7,436.00	\$16,000.00	\$13,770.00
	Adult and Continuing Education	\$1,026,257.00	\$26,000.00	\$35,965.00	\$76,800.00	\$34,425.00
2018	Pre-Primary and Primary Education	\$40,075,430.00	\$70,000.00	\$170,150.00	\$2,560.00	\$1,552,605.00
	Secondary Education	\$35,349,951.00	\$65,000.00	\$108,986.00	Not Available	\$221,585.00
	Technical Vocational Education	\$2,995,886.00	\$11,625.00	\$10,600.00		\$76,213.00
	Special Education Services	\$1,681,468.00	\$4,957.00	\$7,436.00	\$16,000.00	\$13,770.00
	Adult and Continuing Education	\$1,049,996.00	\$26,000.00	\$35,965.00	\$76,800.00	\$34,425.00
2019	Pre-Primary and Primary Education	\$42,358,223.00	\$70,000.00	\$170,150.00	\$2,560.00	\$1,552,605.00
	Secondary Education	\$37,954,247.00	\$65,000.00	\$128,986.00	Not Available	\$221,585.00
	Technical Vocational Education	\$3,109,253.00	\$23,625.00	\$6,600.00	Not Available	\$70,213.00
	Special Education Services	\$1,829,634.00	\$4,957.00	\$7,436.00	\$16,000.00	\$13,770.00
	Adult and Continuing Education	\$1,146,466.00	\$26,000.00	\$35,965.00	\$76,800.00	\$34,425.00
2020	Pre-Primary and Primary Education	\$43,969,483.00	\$70,000.00	\$170,150.00	\$2,560.00	\$1,552,605.00
	Secondary Education	\$40,620,489.00	\$65,000.00	\$128,986.00	Not Available	\$221,585.00
	Technical Vocational Education	\$3,187,096.00	\$23,625.00	\$6,600.00	Not Available	\$70,213.00
	Special Education Services	\$1,875,756.00	\$4,957.00	\$7,436.00	\$16,000.00	\$13,770.00
	Adult and Continuing Education	\$1,170,630.00	\$26,000.00	\$35,965.00	\$76,800.00	\$34,425.00

Source: Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation. *Note: Expenditure in \$XCD*

Apart from the Government's willingness to invest in education, the country's membership of the OECS also plays a pivotal role in its strategic priorities for the sector. For example, as a member of the OECS, the country's Ministry of Education has also been committed to obtaining the goals outlined in the OECS Education Sector Strategy (OESS). Within the OECS Economic Union context, the OESS provides the framework for collaboration to strengthen regional education systems among the Member States. Seven strategic imperatives currently guide its operations. These are listed below. These are listed below.

- Improving the quality and accountability of leadership and management.
- Improving teachers' professional development.
- Improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improving the curriculum and strategies for assessment.
- Increasing (and expanding) access to quality Early Childhood Development services.
- Providing opportunities for all learners in Technical and Vocational Training,
- Increasing provisions for tertiary and continuing education.

1.5 GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The formal education system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines has four tiers. It includes the preschool, primary school, secondary school, and tertiary level.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Data from the most recent St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Educational Statistical Digest (2018-19) indicate that there are one hundred and twenty-eight (128) preschools in the country, of this number, one hundred and seventeen (117) are privately-owned, while the remaining eleven (11) are government-owned. These preschools cater to children between the ages of three (3) to five (5). The overall enrollment for the period 2018-19 was three thousand, nine hundred and nineteen (3919) students, 50.75% of these students were females, and 49.25% were male.

In the government-owned preschools, for the academic year 2018/19, four hundred and thirty-four (434) students enrolled, compared to three thousand, four hundred and eighty-five (3,485) students who enrolled in the private-owned preschools. The child to caregiver ratio was reported as 7:1.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

The most recent publicly available statistics reported in the 2018/19 St. Vincent and the Grenadines Educational Statistical Digest – indicate that there are sixty-eight (68) primary schools in the country. Of this number, fifty-seven (57) are public, while the remaining eleven (11) are privately-owned or government-assisted. These primary schools cater to children between five (5) to eleven (11) years of age. The overall student enrolment for the 2018-19 period was twelve thousand, nine hundred and sixty-two (12,962), 48.97% of these students were females, and 51.03% were males. The student to teacher ratio for the period was 14:1.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

The most recent publicly available statistics for St. Vincent and the Grenadines indicate that there are twenty-seven (27) secondary schools, nineteen (19) of which are government-owned, the remaining eight (8) are owned by churches. These are given financial support by the Government (St. Vincent and the Grenadines Educational Statistical Digest, 2019). Students attend secondary school between the ages of eleven (11) to sixteen (16). For the period 2018-19, the number of students enrolled in secondary schools totaled nine thousand, five hundred and ten (9, 510), 49.02% were females, and 50.98% were males. The student to teacher ratio for the period was 13:1.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

There are three (3) dedicated special education schools in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The overall student enrollment in these schools for the period 2018-19 was one hundred and sixteen (116), 33.6% of the students were females and 66.4% were males. The students enrolled in these schools have various challenges that require dedicated attention; these include:

- Learning challenges
- Intellectual impairments
- Visual impairments
- Hearing impairments
- Autism

SCHOOL TERM SCHEDULE

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the academic year consists of three terms. Term 1 commences from early September and continues until the middle of December; Term 2 runs from early January to the end of March, and Term 3 runs from mid-April to the end of June with vacation breaks ranging from 2-3 weeks in Terms 1 and 2, and for 8 - 9 weeks in Term 3.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

While preschool, primary, and secondary education are the starting points of students' educational journey, tertiary level education provides excellent social and economic advancement opportunities. St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College (SVGG) is the primary state-owned institution that offers tertiary level education (St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Educational Statistical Digest, 2019). However, students also access tertiary education through enrollment with The University of the West Indies, Open Campus, and privately-owned tertiary institutions.

In 2018/19, at the SVGCC, a total of two thousand and seventy-one (2,071) students were enrolled in various divisions (Arts Sciences & General Studies, Technical and Vocational Education, Teacher Education, and Nursing Education), 64.6% of the student population comprised of females, whereas the remaining 35.4% were males.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION

The overall administration of education is very centralised in terms of personnel, resources, and decision-making, as very little authority resides at the school level. Educational services are controlled by the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation. A Cabinet Minister heads the Ministry of Education. The Permanent Secretary provides administrative support to the Minister. He or she is responsible for managing all budgetary and accounting related to the public education sector. The Chief Education Officer (CEO) has oversight for the management of the education system. He or she has the support of a technical team of Senior Education Officers with responsibility for principle areas of planning and development, school administration, and curriculum development.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The sudden and unanticipated arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic placed unprecedented strains on education systems globally. It magnified longstanding issues in education such as equity, lack of access to technology, infusion of technology, among many others. St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to experience these unprecedented challenges during the ongoing pandemic. The fluidity and the uniqueness of the COVID-19 situation required the country's Government and its Ministries of Education and Health to be proactive in addressing education issues that arose (Leacock & Warrican, 2020).

Bearing the preceding information in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education operations of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The chapter will also provide information on the implementation of critical decisions that the country's Government made to address the plethora of issues in education exacerbated by the pandemic.

The chapter will examine the following areas.

- The suspension of classes and the impact on student learning.
- Strategies used to facilitate learning during the pandemic.
- Teacher technological training during COVID-19.
- The recommencement of in-person classes.

2.1 DISRUPTIONS TO SCHOOLING AND IMPACT ON LEARNING

The first reported case of COVID-19 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines was on March 11th, 2020 (Ministry of Education Guidelines for the Safe Reopening of Schools, 2020). Given the health challenges associated with the virus and the unrelenting threats it posed to the safety and well-being of staff, students, and the public, the Government decided to suspend in-person school at all levels from March 20th, 2020 (one week ahead of the Easter holiday). This disruption impacted over 28 000 students across the varying school levels. An estimated disaggregation of these figures is in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Number of Students Impacted by the Pandemic by School Level

School Level	Number of Students Impacted
Pre-school	3,704
Primary school	13, 029
Secondary School	9,510
St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College	2, 140
Special Needs Education	235
Total	28, 618

Source: This information obtained from a senior Ministry of Education official

In summarising the impact of the pandemic on education in the OECS, the Education Development Management Unit (2020), in its report on the COVID-19 response strategy, expressed the chilling view that “the Coronavirus crisis in the OECS region will have a [serious] socioeconomic impact on students and will negatively affect instruction time, student assessment, and students’ psychosocial health.” (p.3). Unfortunately, this synopsis reflected many of the challenges and realities faced by St. Vincent and the Grenadines from the time of the first reported COVID case.

In addition to the official disruption of schooling, COVID-19 magnified several issues in the education sector that threatened to erode the quality of education that all Vincentian students should receive. Issues of equity and equality, along with the lack of student access to technology, featured heavily in educational discussions on maintaining the quality and standard of education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines during the pandemic. These issues presented several challenges for all arms of the country’s Government, especially the Ministry of Education. Effective strategies had to be developed to continue to meaningfully engage students in the learning process, despite the ongoing pandemic.

At the primary and secondary levels of education, not only were students unfamiliar with attending classes online but there were also concerns about students who did not have access to technology to attend these classes; this put them at immediate risk and disadvantage. Apart from the technology-related issues, the Government also had to ensure that it continued to provide the necessary safety nets for students on the School Feeding Programme.

Given the complexity of the challenges thrust upon the Government by COVID-19, educational leaders had to develop effective strategies to address these issues before the resumption of in-person classes. However, it could not be a one-size-fits-all approach. While in 2020, the date for the official reopening of schools was September 7th, various accommodations had to be made for students at the primary and secondary levels preparing to take high-stake examinations (i.e., CXC). The preparation for these

examinations required these students and their teachers to return to the physical classroom earlier than other students. Table 2.2 provides a synopsis of the dates for the reopening of schools according to the school level. It also includes information regarding any variations from the established recommencement date in September.

Table 2.2: *Recommencement Dates of In-person Learning by School Level*

School Level	Recommencement of In-person Classes	Comments
Primary School	September 7 th , 2020	Students in Grade 6 who were preparing for the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA), returned to the physical classroom on May 25 th , 2020. The other students engaged in remote learning up to July 3 rd , 2020
Secondary School	September 7 th , 2020	Students in fourth and fifth forms, who were preparing for their CXC's, returned to the physical classroom on May 25 th , 2020. The other students engaged in remote learning up to July 3 rd , 2020.
Tertiary Level	September 7 th , 2020	Classes continued to be delivered mainly online. A phased approach was used with different divisions returning at least one week apart.

When schools reopened in September, there were mandatory requirements for all individuals entering the school compound to abide by the international and local safety protocols (temperature checking, hand sanitising, masks-wearing, and physical distancing). The Ministry of Education circulated a document entitled *Guidelines for the Safe Opening of Schools for the 2021 Academic Year – COVID-19 Smart* and conducted onsite assessments (in collaboration with the Ministry of Health) to ensure adherence to health protocols.

2.2 GOVERNMENT PLANS TO PROVIDE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19, INCLUDING DISTANCE EDUCATION POSSIBILITIES

According to a senior education official in the Ministry of Education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as a first response to the COVID-19 pandemic, teams of educators were established to produce lessons for students from Kindergarten to Grade 6 at the primary level and Forms 1-5 at the secondary level. This senior official also reported that the resources targeted students who were preparing for examinations in the

initial phase. This provision of resources included supporting students in fourth and 5th Forms who were preparing to take their CXC examinations at the secondary level. At the primary level, the resource support prioritised Grade 6 students registered to take the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA). These accommodations were eventually expanded to include all other year groups.

To ensure that content and resources reached as many students as possible, the Ministry of Education utilised various forms of media. Lessons were streamed live via television – Iktv and digital media such as Facebook at scheduled times during the week (9 am -12 noon) from April – June 2020. One hundred and five (105) learning videos were developed to support student learning while students remained out of the physical learning space. The videos covered a range of subject areas, including Language Arts/ English Language and Literature, Science, Math, French and Spanish, and Health and Family Life Education. The svgcd.org website also provided a wide range of materials and resources for students across the various school levels.

During the pandemic, concerns arose over the poor quality of internet connectivity and student access to technology. Students who did not have internet access, received learning packages comprising workbooks and other learning materials. United Nations (2020) statistics support this concern about internet access. They indicate that only 22 of every 100 inhabitants use the internet.

Furthermore, the digital divide meant that to mitigate the issue of access to technology, the Government had to procure technology devices for students who did not have access to digital technologies. With the support of UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education, the Ministry of Education was able to obtain technology devices for those students most in need.

Despite the provision of technology resources to many students, other concerns manifested in terms of teacher preparation to facilitate learning in an online environment. To address this, the Ministry of Education provided teachers with training on several learning platforms and strategies for the effective use of technology. The training included the following.

- Microsoft Teams platform training
- Blackboard Collaborate training
- Technology Enabled Learning
- Online assessment tools and delivery
- Gamification

According to a senior Ministry of Education official, in the initial stages of the pandemic, after exploring various online platforms, the Ministry of Education deemed the Microsoft Suite for Education as the most suitable platform to support online learning for students across the various levels. Students from all primary schools and fifteen (15) secondary schools accessed their synchronous classes and the relevant learning materials using

this Suite. The remaining secondary schools opted to utilise the Moodle and G-Suite for Education platforms. Some schools also used WhatsApp and Edmodo to facilitate communication.

In addition to intensified efforts by local and regional organisations, the Ministry of Education also received support from various international agencies and organizations to minimise the disruption to schooling. These organisations and their contributions are identified in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: *Non-governmental organisations and strategic partners that supported the COVID-19 response.*

Organisation	Support Provided
UNICEF	Provided face masks, cleaning supplies, and tablets for vulnerable students
The World Bank	Provided tablets
Global Partnership for Education	Provided cleaning supplies and established an Academic Recovery Programme

It is also important to note that the Education Development Management Unit (EDMU), through the OECS Commission, and in collaboration with the Member States, has embarked on a standardised OECS Education Sector Response to COVID-19 strategy, with the primary aim of:

- Harmonising policy responses in educational policy
- Transitioning to a digital education system
- Strengthening safety nets for students
- Promoting engagement

2.3 AFTER COVID-19

The Ministry of Education is currently working on an academic recovery programme for primary schools under the OECS Education Sector Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19 which will be financed by the Global Partnership for Education. After the pandemic, the Ministry must commit to drawing on the lessons learned by intensifying its efforts to:

- reduce the digital divide;
- develop a renewed push for teachers to engage in continuous professional development where they can hone their technical and pedagogical skills in delivering online instruction, and

- provide resources to facilitate the infusion of technology during in-person learning.

With the steep decline in COVID cases since March 2021, the Government, recognising the vast education inequities that have been created by emergency remote learning, has begun plans to resume in-person education in April of 2021. However, these plans were brought to a sudden halt by the eruption of La Soufriere.

2.4 SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

The fluidity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevalence and fluctuation in the number of cases continue to present significant educational challenges globally. The capricious and unpredictable nature of the pandemic has meant that several scheduled return dates for schools had to be shelved. For example, schools in St. Vincent and the Grenadines were scheduled to reopen on January 4th, 2021, after a stable period of a relatively low number of COVID-19 cases. However, an unexpected spike in cases (and evidence of local transmission) meant that this reopening was delayed.

In March 2021, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, having started its vaccination programme, in combination with a reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases, expressed its desire to reopen schools by the end of that month, commencing with the reentry of students who have to sit external examinations (CXC and CPEA). This decision on the reopening of schools created some discord between teachers and the Ministry of Education.

In a Press Release dated March 15th, 2021, St. Vincent and Grenadines Teachers' Union highlighted some of its members' concerns regarding the Ministry of Education's decision for students to return to the physical classroom. The Release highlighted the need for greater efficiency in planning and policy to facilitate the safe return to school for both teachers and students. The information provided in the Union's press release suggests that there is still a high degree of apprehension and uncertainty among teachers regarding the reopening of schools, despite myriad challenges with online learning.

For St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like many other countries worldwide, the challenges associated with teaching online during the pandemic are many. For example, on a radio talk show (called Teachers Talk) hosted by St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union, some teachers expressed challenges with having inadequate training in the use of Microsoft Teams and the lack of access to devices among students. Furthermore, it was reported that, in some cases, students had to use their parents' phones to attend classes, a practice that was not sustainable. Adding to the complexity of the problems outlined above is the issue of poor internet connectivity. Two primary issues drive this problem:

1. Students with no access to the internet
2. Students who have access to the internet but insufficient bandwidth

These challenges pose serious threats to the quality of learning that students can obtain during the pandemic. Inadequate access to the internet is akin to students missing several in-person classes during regular teaching. Therefore, the Ministry of Education must continue to work closely with the various telecommunication service providers to improve the quality of internet access throughout the country. This improvement in internet access will require extensive work given that currently the internet penetration rate (22%) for St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the lowest when compared to Dominica (69.60%), Grenada (59%), and St. Lucia (50.80%).

What also continues to be a challenge for teachers is that many of them are also parents and, as such, they must find ways to balance their profession as a teacher and their responsibilities as parents. Therefore, working remotely has led to an increased workload among teachers. This has contributed to intensifying concerns about teacher burnout.

As the Government and its Ministry of Education move to reopen schools, it will be important to consider the educational issues that arose during the pandemic. It will be important to make the necessary arrangements to build on the lessons learned, not only to improve in-person teaching, but also to ensure that all education stakeholders are *ready* should there be a need to return to full-scale online learning.

Unfortunately, while the country has been able to navigate COVID-19 to the degree that plans were in full swing for recommencing in-person teaching, in April 2021, the eruption of La Soufriere has displaced many students and caused major disruption in water, food supplies, and other necessities. This further eroded any plans for in-person teaching to recommence at the scheduled time.

CHAPTER 3

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

This chapter will identify the key stakeholders and institutions that influence the education policy cycle in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Emphasis will be placed on describing the power distribution among the key decision-makers in education. A synopsis of the central policies and programmes that shape the education system in the country will also be provided. Discussions on the country's national educational priorities, the most important education reforms, and the main characteristics of the currently implemented programmes will feature prominently in this chapter. The chapter will identify and examine the main challenges and knowledge gaps in educational policies and programmes in the country.

3.1 ACTORS AND POWER DISTRIBUTION

The key policy actors in St. Vincent and the Grenadines education system include the Minister of Education, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, the Chief Education Officer (CEO), and members of the Education Advisory Board (the Board comprises – The Director of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College, The Resident Tutor, University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Studies, the President of the Students' Council, and several other education stakeholder representatives; i.e., representatives from St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union, The primary Head Teachers' Council, the Association of Principals of Secondary Schools, the National Council of Parents Teachers' Association, the National Council for Technical, Vocational Education and Training).

While the above stakeholders are the main policy actors that feature heavily in policy formulation and implementation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, there may also be instances where external organisations influence education policy. For example, external bodies such as the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) can influence policy relating to assessment (i.e., the replacement of the Common Entrance Examination with the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment in 2014 required extensive engagement with this examining body). Other organisations that may influence policy are funding agencies such as the World Bank, the United Nations International, Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO), the Global Partnership of Education (GPE), and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The Education Development and Management Unit in the OECS Commission can also influence policy based on the regional strategic directives.

Public education in the country is regulated by government policy through the Education Act (2006). The Minister of Education has overall responsibility for ensuring the successful provision of education across the various levels of schooling. Decision-making power regarding education policy ultimately resides with the Minister, who can also delegate authority to the CEO to execute assigned tasks. While the Education Act suggests that there should be consultation with the Advisory Board members, the Minister is not bound to accept the advice of the Board. Therefore, decision-making is highly centralised. In addition to the Advisory Board, the Minister can also establish a special committee for which he/she may seek advice concerning any specific matter that may arise.

THE POLICY CYCLE PROCESS

The Minister's responsibilities include identifying and addressing issues that could potentially compromise the quality of education offered in the country. To this end, it is crucial that the Minister (and his/her team of administrative and technical experts) formulates and implements policies that improve the standard of education.

The Ministry of Education is one of several ministries in the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Although each ministry has a unique portfolio, the Government takes a cross-ministerial approach to decision-making through its Cabinet – the decision-making arm of the Government. Even though policy ideas may originate in the Ministry of Education, must be discussed in Cabinet (which is chaired by the Prime Minister) before they are ratified and implemented. The Cabinet meets each week, or as required, to make policy decisions based on submissions from the various ministries. Cabinet meetings are where each minister provides updates on what is happening in his/her ministry. This promotes a whole-of-government approach to decision-making. This approach is particularly important, especially where cross-cutting issues impact policy in the education sector and may influence other sectors/ministries (i.e., working with the Ministry of Health to address COVID-19 related issues that impact education).

In addition to the typical actors (identified above) involved in the policy cycle, the Ministry of Education also receives external support from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and funding agencies. These include external funding agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, GPE, and CDB. These entities do not only give financial support, but they also provide technical expertise and guidance. They play an important role in the policy cycle, especially regarding the ratification of policy in Cabinet.

After Cabinet approves an education policy, initiatives are put in place to facilitate its implementation and the required monitoring and evaluation. The entire cycle includes setting the agenda, policy formulation, policy implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

AGENDA SETTING

The education policy issues identified and placed on the Government's agenda can either originate from an existing or emerging educational concern that is considered problematic and may affect a wide cross-section of education stakeholders (i.e., COVID-19). They can also be issues that the Government has formally decided to undertake as part of its policy mandate on education (i.e., target areas in education identified to be addressed in the government's political manifesto).

Furthermore, given that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a Member State of the OECS, its Government's policy and agenda setting for education is guided by the OECS Education Sector Strategy (OESS). The Strategy coordinates efforts among the Member States to develop and implement education policies and initiatives that seek to achieve the Strategy's vision for the *success of every learner* (OECS Education Sector Strategy, n.d.).

For a policy to be on the agenda, there must be a consensus that the situation is sufficiently problematic to warrant the Government's intervention. This aspect of agenda-setting requires extensive consultation with key education stakeholders (i.e., the Chief Education Officer, members of the Education Advisory Board, civil society, and other stakeholders.) to identify the problematic aspects of the situation, propose solutions, and engage in activities that influence the Government and pressure it to intervene. It includes identifying groups that can play an active role in addressing the problem.

POLICY FORMULATION

Having gained consensus on the problem, the Minister (in conjunction with other arms of the Government) will seek to chart a path forward to address the problem(s) through the creation of a relevant policy. During this stage, there is an exploration of several probable solutions to the problem before finalising the policy. This 'brainstorming phase' usually requires extensive consultation with the stakeholders who will be affected by the policy.

This consultation is important to ensure that when the policy is formulated and goes through ratification processes, the input of the affected stakeholders is considered. This viewpoint is corroborated by a clause in the Education Act (2006) which states that "in the exercise of the powers conferred in subsection (1), the Minister shall consult the Advisory Board, the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union, and any other organisations representing the teaching profession and not represented on the Advisory Board as the Minister considers appropriate". (St Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Act, 2006).

Several factors influence policy formulation, including the likelihood that the policy will be effective, the availability of resources, the feasibility of the policy, and the buy-in of relevant stakeholders. Regarding the latter point, while the Minister of Education is

not bound to accept the Advisory Board's advice, it is common practice for some form of consultation to take place between the Minister and members of the Board, before, during, and after the process of policy formulation.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The CEO and his or her team from the Ministry of Education, are responsible for overseeing the implementation of policy directives. This responsibility is clearly outlined in St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Act (2006) which states that "The Chief Education Officer shall – develop administrative principles and procedures for implementing general policies and administering the educational system". This means that the CEO must manage any educational policy that directly affects the operations of schools. The CEO works in collaboration with his or her team of senior education officers, the principals of the relevant schools, other officials within the Ministry of Education (i.e., the Permanent Secretary), and St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union to implement policy initiatives.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In the Ministry of Education, there is a Schools Inspection Unit responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of policy directives. This work is done in collaboration with the Senior Education Officer and Curriculum Officers, who seek to ensure that quality standards are being adhered to in the delivery of education.

THE BROAD POLICY FRAMEWORK

A few education policy frameworks (international, regional, and subregional) which inform educational planning and programmes in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are briefly outlined below to provide the required context on education policy decisions in the country.

THE EDUCATION 2030: INCHEON DECLARATION

This international education framework (CARICOM is also a signatory) reaffirms the vision of the worldwide movement of Education for All initiated in Jomtien in 1990 and reiterated in Dakar in 2000. It represents a commitment to fulfilling the implementation of SDG 4 – "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Regarding inclusion and equity, the Declaration emphasises a commitment to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities, and inequalities in access, participation, and learning outcomes.

Gender equality is also an integral element of the framework. It includes supporting gender-sensitive policies, planning, and learning environments, mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula, and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in schools. The focus on quality includes a commitment to improving

learning outcomes by strengthening inputs, processes, evaluation of outcomes, and measuring progress. It also encompasses ensuring that teachers and educators are “empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems” (UNESCO, 2015, pp. iii-iv).

To achieve SDG 4 on education (and the education targets included under other SDGs), UNESCO (2015) notes that it will be necessary to mobilise national, regional, and global efforts that:

- Achieve effective and inclusive partnerships.
- Improve education policies and the way they work together.
- Ensure highly equitable, inclusive, and quality education systems for all.
- Provide resources for adequate financing for education.
- Ensure monitoring, follow-up, and review of all targets.

The strengthening of education policies, plans, legislation, and systems is pivotal to achieving these goals.

THE CARICOM HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (HRD) 2030

The HRD 2030 Strategy emphasises the importance of the Caribbean Region investing in its human capital as one of the main strategies to facilitate socio-economic development, foster regional integration, build resilience, and promote sustainable development.

Propelled by its vision to develop the *Ideal Caribbean Person*, the Strategy signals CARICOM’s renewed commitment to ensuring the development of skills and competencies across the Region. It aims to achieve the mandate of its Heads of Government to improve economic efficiency and promote personal and professional development and good citizenship across the Member States. The *Ideal Caribbean Person* framework also plays a pivotal role in St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ education policy. It is considered one of the driving forces of education in the country.

The HRD Strategy intends to i) establish new priority areas for the Region’s HRD; ii) facilitate regional convergence of HRD policies and initiatives by Member States for effective transformational change and actions; and iii) address the measures in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with particular reference to SDG 4 which targets inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all (as well as SDG 8 – which addresses education and training of youth and adults leading to sustainable employability and employment (CARICOM, 2017). This goal aligns with the strategic educational priorities for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is evident in their push to have one graduate per household by 2030, improve early childhood education, and the Government’s support to vulnerable groups through various initiatives (i.e.,

the Zero Hunger Trust Fund, the Teen Mothers Reintegration into School Programme, the Skills, Youth and Education Programme, etc.)

The four strategic priorities which give direction to the Strategy - namely, Access, Equity, Quality, and Relevance - have been specifically targeted to address the significant inefficiencies and wastage in education and training systems throughout the Region. Specifically, schools and learning communities have been identified fundamental pillars in attaining the targeted outcomes. Some of the areas of emphasis include:

- Universal access and participation in schools
- Multiple curricula pathways
- Student support services
- Equitable access policies
- Managed gender disparities
- Special needs education
- ICT in education
- Learning for migrant children
- Displaced and refugee children

Many of the areas listed above form part of the educational thrust of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. For example, the One Laptop Initiative is evidence of the Government's push to infuse ICT in education. Furthermore, the Government's economically disadvantaged support programme reflects its desire to provide unwavering support for students in terms of equitable access to educational opportunities. However, while significant gains continue in these areas, strengthening the provisions for students with special education is desperately needed.

THE OECS EDUCATION SECTOR STRATEGY 2012-2026

The regional policy framework which has the most significant influence on education planning, programmes, and practices at the national level is the OECS Education Sector Strategy. As a Member State of the OECS, education planning in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is strongly influenced by the regional OESS 2012-21 (recently revised to 2026). Over the last nine (9) years, the OESS has provided a common education framework for facilitating collaboration for the development of education across the OECS subregion. Over time, the expectation is that all national education strategies and plans will align with the regional strategy to allow for greater convergence in implementing a common education strategy across the OECS region. The seven agreed areas of priority under the OESS are in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Strategic Imperatives and Supporting Outcomes (adapted from the OECS Secretariat, 2012)

	Strategic Imperative	Outcomes
#1	Improve the quality and accountability of Leadership and Management	<p>Qualified leaders in place across the education system supported by Boards (where applicable) and governing bodies.</p> <p>Education leaders and managers have access to continuing professional development.</p> <p>Revised legislation, knowledge management and accountability frameworks that devolve decision-making to schools.</p>
#2	Improve Teachers' Professional Development	<p>Improved teacher quality.</p> <p>Pre-service training and professional development programmes in place for all prospective and in-service teachers' and teacher trainers' respectively, relevant to each stage of their career.</p> <p>Regular and systematic teacher appraisal operates in conjunction with established teacher professional standards.</p> <p>Reduced numbers of out-of-field teachers in schools.</p>
#3	Improve the quality of Teaching and Learning	<p>Learners engaged with all learning and their expectations met.</p> <p>Achievement levels significantly improved, all learners acquire required levels of literacy, numeracy, and technological skills, and are equipped to use relevant competencies at school, at college, at home and for future work.</p>
#4	Improve Curriculum and strategies for Assessment	<p>Flexible, learner-centred curricula with assessment at each stage which includes a wide range of learning outcomes targeting academic, technical and personal development skills.</p> <p>A relevant and comprehensive education and skills strategy operates nationally and across the OECS region with resulting curricula that are learner-centred and competency-based to meet the needs of all learners.</p> <p>All performance measures for learner outcomes indicate improvement year-on-year at each stage and match comparable international benchmarks.</p> <p>All learners can demonstrate core knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies needed to be successful 21st century Caribbean citizens, and can confidently contribute and progress at school, college, in their communities and at work.</p>

#5	Increase access to quality Early Childhood Development Services	<p>National operational plans developed and implemented to pre-primary education for all learners aged three to five.</p> <p>Formal Early Childhood Development Services meet required minimum standards.</p> <p>A sustainable funding strategy for ECD, supported by both public and private sectors investment in place and operational.</p> <p>Functioning inter-sector, parent and community collaborative mechanisms in place in all Member States made up of a variety of stakeholders.</p>
#6	Provide opportunities for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for all learners	<p>Primary school curricula, teaching and learning incorporate exploratory learning experiences that develop basic technical competencies and an appreciation for the world of work.</p> <p>Competency-based curricula linked to CVQ framework established across secondary and tertiary education and in all other educational settings in work and in the community.</p> <p>A Qualification Framework established that enables learners to move seamlessly between academic and vocational qualifications in formal and informal educational settings.</p>
#7	Increase access to and relevance of Tertiary and Continuing Education	<p>Sustainable funding mechanisms for tertiary and continuing education to meet the economic, social, and labour market needs of the OECS and learners can access affordable tertiary education.</p> <p>A legal and institutional framework that improve the status, sustainability, and outcomes of tertiary and continuing education institutions across the OECS.</p> <p>Accredited tertiary and continuing education institutions in and outside the OECS produce high quality relevant programmes and research results fostering creativity and innovations.</p>

The Chief Education Officer or his or her representative is part of a subregional working group that annually reports on national progress towards the achievement of education outcomes related to each of these priority areas. As such, many of the educational initiatives that are identified in international conventions and regional bodies, also inform the policy priorities highlighted in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Sector Plan. Policy priorities are also guided by provisions in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Act (2006).

3.2 POLICY PRIORITIES

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines remains committed to the improvement of education across all levels. As part of its mandate, it has undertaken a large-scale project which it has dubbed 'The Educational Revolution'. It aims to improve the quality of education and increase opportunities for Vincentians to access all levels

of education. Many of the Government's education policies reflect two main criteria: quality and access. In fact, the St. Vincent and the Grenadines National and Economic and Social Development Plan (2013–2025) outlines some of the Government's central policy and strategic priorities pertaining to the education sector. These priorities include the following.

1. ESTABLISHING A WELL-MANAGED, EFFECTIVE, AND EFFICIENT EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT FOCUSES ON QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

Some of the strategic interventions associated with this strategic priority include:

- Encouraging greater participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.
- Ensuring the implementation of curricula designed to meet the changing needs of society.
- The enhancement of Early Childhood Education Programmes.
- Improving the quality of education using Information and Communication Technologies.
- Improving the student-teacher ratio.
- Improving the standards of achievement by providing effective primary education.
- Upgrading the secondary education programme to ensure better delivery of results.

2. THE PROMOTION OF STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM IN PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND SERVICES

Some of the strategic interventions associated with this strategic priority include:

- Establishing new and continuing ongoing professional development programmes
- Improving the learning environment.
- Establishing standards of excellence in instruction and research.
- Expanding the system of accreditation for skilled professionals.

3. THE PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION THROUGHOUT ADULTHOOD

Some of the strategic interventions associated with this strategic priority include:

- Fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship to provide opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Establishing and implementing policies to ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups in the education system.
- Encouraging the involvement of parents in the educational development of the children.

As highlighted previously, many of the educational priorities of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ministry of Education are influenced by national, regional, and global policies on education. Global mandates such as the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Education 2030, Incheon Framework for Action feature strongly in the Government's policy priorities for education. Regionally, as a Member State of the OECS and CARICOM, the country's educational mandate is also driven by the collective mission of Caribbean countries to improve education throughout this region. Consequently, regional frameworks like the CARICOM Human Resource Development Strategy (2030) and the OECS Education Sector Strategy (2012-2021) also impact educational policy.

Locally, the Government, in its Education Sector Plan (2014-2019), has reinforced its policy priorities. Its focus continues to be on Early Childhood Education, improving literacy skills, integrating technology in teaching and learning, inclusive education, access to tertiary level education, school infrastructure, and the improvement of technical and vocational education.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The early years of experience in a child's life are a crucial foundation to his or her subsequent stages of development (UNICEF, 2019). As such, improving the quality of education delivered at this level is one of the main strategic initiatives for Member States of the OECS, as outlined in the OECS Education Sector Strategy (2012-2021). Unfortunately, Early Childhood Education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines has not yet reached the standard that the Government has envisioned. Therefore, it remains one of its leading policy priorities.

The Government's concern about the quality of this level of education stems mainly from the fact that most of the country's early childhood centers are privately owned. In many cases, the owners and the caregivers do not possess the relevant formal qualifications necessary to deliver high-quality early childhood education. Even though the Government has made recommendations to improve the quality of education provided at these centers, enforcement is challenging to regulate.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges for many of the privately owned early childhood centers as the owners grapple with the financial fall-out initiated by the pandemic. For example, there are lower levels of enrolment because of COVID-19 restrictions and parental job loss. This crisis continues to have important implications for the centers in meeting operational costs (i.e., payment of rent).

Given that many of the centers are rented properties, they are usually not fit-for-purpose. Consequently, they cannot be easily retrofitted to accommodate the requirements of an accredited early childhood center. Recognising the issues of the quality of early childhood education and the compounding issue of accessibility (i.e., many parents cannot afford to send their children to private daycares), the Government implemented measures to address this situation. As part of its educational mandate to improve the quality of early childhood services and provide universal access to pre-primary education, the Government has begun to establish government-owned early childhood care centers in underserved communities. To strengthen the quality of services offered in the private centers, the Government also provides an annual subvention to early childhood centers with an enrolment of fifteen (15) or more students (St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Educational Statistical Digest, 2019). The overall aim is to reduce costs, and by extension, increase opportunities for access to preschool education, particularly for those children who come from indigent homes.

IMPROVING LITERACY SKILLS

While specific data on learning poverty is unavailable for St. Vincent and the Grenadines, anecdotally, this is a concern. Compelling statistics from a 2020 World Bank report on the Human Capital Index indicates that more than 50% of 10-year-olds in the Latin American and Caribbean region cannot read or understand a simple text by the end of primary school (World Bank, 2020). Therefore, reducing learning poverty must be a primary focus of the Government's policy agenda as this level of schooling lays the foundation for the education trajectory of the child. It can have far-reaching consequences if it is not remedied immediately.

INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

While COVID-19 has hastened the pace of integrating technology in teaching and learning in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the infusion of technology to enhance learning has been a part of the Government's mandate long before the unexpected 'arrival' of the pandemic. One of the key policy initiatives that the Government has taken to achieve this goal is the One-Laptop-Per-Child (OLPC) Initiative. With growing concerns about equity and access as potential stumbling blocks to the successful integration of technology, in 2014, they launched this initiative in partnership with Dennis Publishing, one of the United Kingdom's largest publishing companies. The policy initiative has reaped a great level of success, with many secondary school students now having access to a laptop.

Despite the significant gains in the OLPC initiative, concerns continue about access to devices for primary school children. Some of them do not have access to technology to allow them to attend online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Government's commitment to inclusive education is evident in its Education Act (2006). Section 27 states that "subject to this Act, a person who is eligible for admission to an educational institution or school as a student shall not be refused admission on any discriminatory ground relating to that student or a parent of that student . . . *discriminatory ground* means a ground-based on religion, race, place of origin, political opinion, color, creed, social status, physical handicap and in the case of mixed-gender schools, sex".

In addition to this legislation, the Government also remains committed implementing regional and international strategies including the Education For all (EFA) initiative which emerged from the Dakar Framework for Action to facilitate inclusion in the classroom. The primary aim is to meet the learning needs of all young people and adults through the provision of equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.

The above point is corroborated by Section 112 of the country's Education Act (2006) indicates that "the Chief Education Officer shall provide a special education programme for any student at compulsory school-age and may provide such education for the student beyond that age, who by virtue of intellectual, communicative, behavioral, physical or multiple exceptionalities is in need of special education". The Act further states that "a student who is entitled to a special education programme shall have the programme delivered in the least restrictive and most enabling environment that resources permit, and that is considered practicable by the Chief Education Officer in consultation with the principal and professional staff of the school and the students' parents, having due regard to the educational needs and rights of other students".

In addition to its inclusive legislative frameworks, the Vincentian Government has also signed on to various conventions (i.e., the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention of the Rights of a Child, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), which reinforce their commitment to achieving full inclusion.

While there have been some promising developments in creating a more inclusive educational environment, there are still several outstanding issues regarding Special Education. These gaps were identified in 2015 when the Government undertook St. Vincent and the Grenadines Education for All 2015 Review. Two key findings which emerged from this project were: (1) the lack of outreach to students with special needs and (2) poor integration of these students into mainstream primary and secondary schools. In 2021, these are still fundamental concerns that feature prominently in discussions about the quality of education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

ONE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE PER HOUSEHOLD BY 2030

In keeping with its mandate to increase access to education, the Government continues to emphasise the need for all Vincentians to have the opportunity to pursue tertiary level education. The anticipated outcome is that the country will have at least one university graduate per household by 2030. To facilitate increased access to tertiary education, there has been an expansion of the Government's student loan programmes, with specific emphasis on providing financial assistance to individuals in the lower socio-economic bracket, who are desirous of furthering their studies at the university level. In 2020, the Government reported that 61 students received student loans through the Economically Disadvantaged Student Loan Programme, where the government serves as the guarantor on the loans. This financial support enabled a more significant number of Vincentians from indigent homes to access tertiary level education.

The number of scholarships awarded to individuals desirous of accessing tertiary education is further evidence of the Government's commitment to increasing access to tertiary education. In 2020, the Government reported that 1,295 Vincentians pursued tertiary education through State scholarships (St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Budget, 2020).

IMPROVING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

While primary and secondary education have featured prominently in many of the policy initiatives in St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Ministry of Education, the ministry has not lost sight of the importance of Technical and Vocational Education. In 2010, the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) established as a statutory body, through the ratification of the Sector Skills Development Agency Act, "to provide opportunities for appropriate training and certification in a range of occupational areas to all persons desirous of such; thereby meeting St. Vincent and the Grenadines' needs for an efficient and productive workforce equal to the challenges and opportunities of a changing regional and international environment" (Sector Skills Development Agency, 2020) (Sector Skills Development Agency, 2020).

TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher training is also an important focal point for the Ministry of Education as they continue to seek to improve the number of qualified teachers in the country. As outlined in the Government's 2020 Estimates, this was one of the priorities for the Ministry. More specifically, in 2020, at the secondary level, the Ministry aimed to:

- Provide training and certification for 25 untrained graduate teachers.
- Provide a minimum of 40 hours of on-going professional development to 30 non-graduate teachers.

- Increase interest and enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics
- Train 20 school leaders in institutional leadership and management.

3.3 REFORMS

In terms of education reforms, the Ministry has taken several steps to improve educational provisions, especially inclusion and access. One of the major education reforms that the Government has used to promote inclusion through access, is the replacement of the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) with the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA) in 2014. As insinuated in the country's Education Sector Plan (2014-2019), this change was primarily driven by concern about the fairness of this high-stakes assessment in determining which secondary school a student exiting the primary level (usually at Grade 6) will attend. Before introducing the CPEA, students preparing to transition to secondary school after completing the CEE had a lot of pressure to perform well; if students failed this examination, they did not make it into the 'esteemed secondary schools' in the country. In 2005, despite this selective approach in facilitating student transition to secondary school, the country proclaimed Universal Access to Secondary Education.

Currently, students who are not successful with the CPEA are permitted to transition to secondary school (even though they may require remedial instruction). This new transition process will also require teacher training in delivering instruction and conducting assessments with groups of mixed-ability students. There has been some concern that teachers in some of the more prestigious secondary schools may be struggling to adjust as they are accustomed to working with students who were successful on the Common Entrance (Global Education Monitor, 2020).

3.4 INNOVATIONS

Based on its enacted policies and strategic initiatives, it is evident that the Government sees education as the primary means of addressing societal issues, especially in the workforce. The Government continues to intensify its efforts to increase job opportunities by equipping individuals with the skills needed in the workforce. Through the SSDA, three key educational innovations have been implemented to achieve this goal. These are listed and described below.

1. ACCESS TO ANOTHER NEXUS IN EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (ANEW)

This programme is funded under the TVET Development project, it facilitates individuals' selection and enrollment into Technical Vocational Education. Through the programme, these individuals can develop job competencies to improve their

marketability and employability. Trainees have access to a range of services including career guidance, mentorship, and counselling. This support is in keeping with the programmes aim to assist at-risk youth, vulnerable, and marginalised groups with developing the technical skills and expertise required for the workforce.

2. YOUTH AND ADULTS TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT (YATE)

This initiative is funded under the Human Development Service Delivery (HDSD) project. It assists underprivileged and unemployed youth and adults between the ages of 17-45 in developing the essential competencies needed to obtain employment and/or to pursue further employment-related training.

3. PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR)

PLAR is a programme designed for persons employed in various industries or self-employed individuals who are seeking certification for skills acquired. It assesses the formal and non-formal experiences gained in a skill area over a period. The assessment encompasses matching what the individual already knows and can do with the National or Regional Qualifications Standards performance indicators. Persons who are interested in being considered must provide evidence of competence for each unit in which certification is sought. These may include samples of work, letters of validation, photos, videos, and any other artefacts that can assist with verifying the candidate's competencies.

4. SKILLS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT (SKYE) PROGRAMME

The SKYE programme provides certified technical, vocational education, and training (TVET) to young people between the ages of 15-30. The key aim of the programme is to improve their employability/marketability in sectors where there is an apparent demand for skilled workers.

3.5 SUMMARY OF KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Despite the significant strides made by the Government in improving education in St. Vincent and Grenadines, there are key knowledge gaps and challenges that must be addressed if the sector is to be further enhanced. Some of these include the centralisation of power in the policy cycle, monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation, ensuring quality in Early Childhood Education, technological infusion in teaching, and improving school infrastructure. A few of these issues are discussed below.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation has also presented itself as a challenge for the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ministry of Education. One senior ministry official described this as one of the ministry's weakest areas. Many of the challenges that arise stem from a lack of human resources and inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems. Of specific concern is the difficulty associated with the monitoring and evaluation process in the Grenadine islands, given the amount of commute that must take place to ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

ENSURING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The lack of quality in the delivery of Early Childhood Education has been a perennial problem in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This unrelenting issue stems from the number (over 90%) of private childcare centers, which makes it more difficult for the Government to regulate and ensure adherence to quality standards. Some of the critical challenges in this area of education include existence of preschools that are not fit-for-purpose, lack of formal training of staff delivering services in early childhood education, and the financial instability of early childhood centers.

Recognising these issues, the Government has regarded the improvement of Early Childhood Education as a strategic priority. It is listed as an important action item in the Education Sector Development Plan (2014-2019), where various costs for training and the retrofitting of early childhood centers were identified.

REFURBISHING AND UPGRADING OF SCHOOLS

Regarding school infrastructure, there have been concerns about the condition of schools across the island. Even though the Government has allocated a significant portion of the education budget to address matters of this nature, concern still abounds about the reality that there are too many schools across the country that are not in good physical condition.

CHAPTER 4

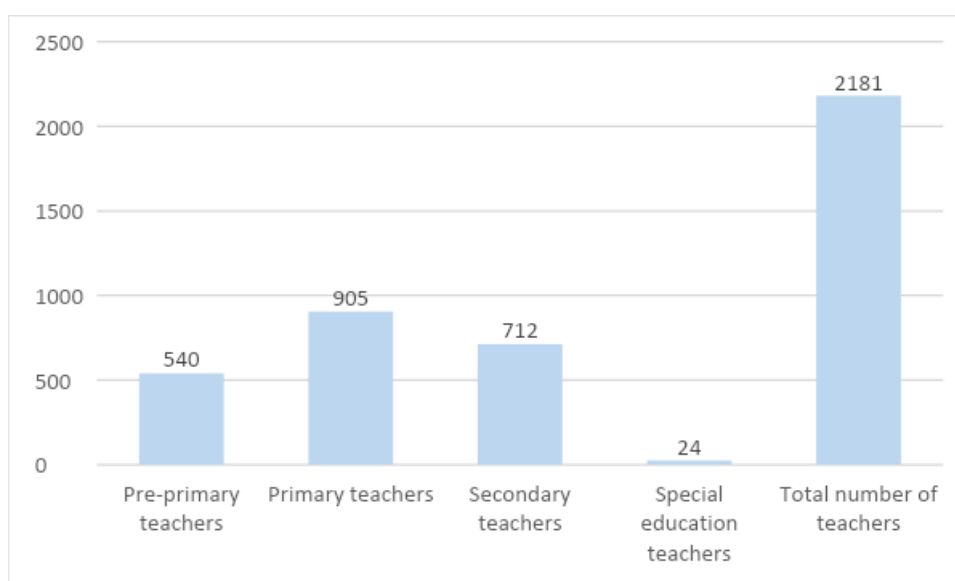
TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the teaching profession in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The chapter will commence with a discussion on teacher population characteristics (i.e., the age range of teachers and the percentage of trained teachers). It also includes a synopsis of the main features of pre-service and in-service teacher education in the country. Teacher salary and working conditions will be discussed in the context of the country's Collective Agreement between St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union and the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The chapter will culminate with a summary and assessment of the knowledge gaps and the main challenges in the teaching profession.

4.1 TEACHER POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

According to the latest publicly available data from St. Vincent and the Grenadines' 2018–19 OECS Educational Statistical Digest, in 2019, there was a total of 2,181 teachers employed in the education sector. At the pre-school level, there were 540 teachers; at the primary level, 905 teachers, at the secondary level, 712 teachers, and 24 teachers employed at the three special education centers. Figure 4.1 displays this data.

Figure 4.1: Number of teachers (by education subsector) in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 2018/19

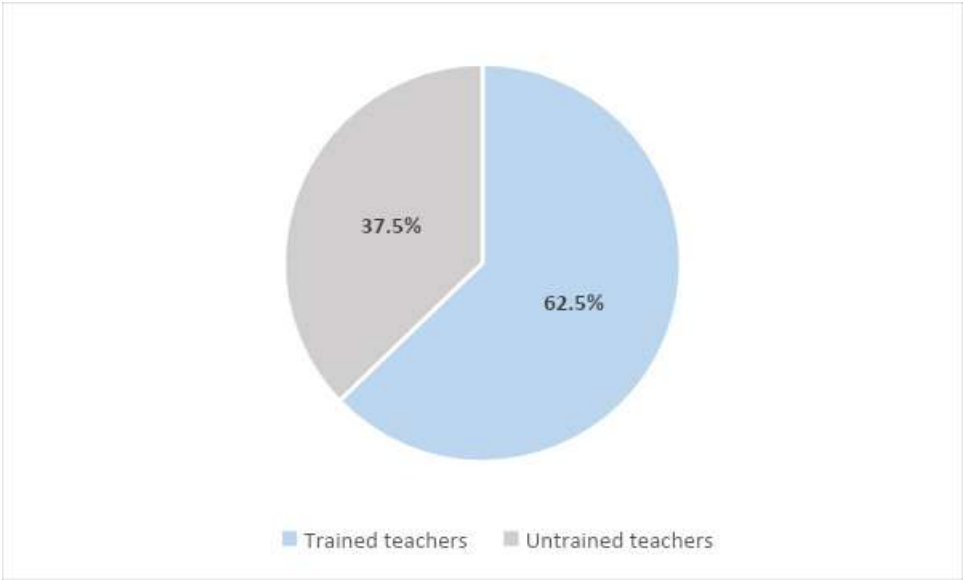


At the primary level, there is a significant disparity between the number of male ($n = 132$) and female ($n = 773$) teachers, with female teachers accounting for 85% of the

teaching staff at this level in 2019. While the gender ratio at the secondary level during this period appeared to be a bit more balanced (male teachers, 222; female teachers, 490), females accounted for close to 70% of the teaching population at this level.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, to enter the teaching profession, the individual must be at least 18 years of age. Teachers can teach up to the retirement age (age 60). It is estimated that overall, about 75% of teachers are trained at the primary and secondary levels. The most recent publicly available information on the percentage of trained teachers (2018/19) indicates that up to 2019, at the primary level, 85% of teachers were trained, whereas, at the secondary level, only 62.5% were trained (St. Vincent and the Grenadines' OECS Educational Statistical Digest, 2019). This information is displayed in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Percentage of teachers trained at the **secondary** level, 2018/19



- Two key points of concern raised in an interview with a senior education official were:
1. despite the growing number of trained teachers, concern about the low number of qualified male teachers in the profession and
 2. the inability of the Government to attract suitably qualified teachers to teach the STEM subjects and, to some extent, the Foreign Languages continues to grow.

4.2 PRE-SERVICE EDUCATION

Pre-service teacher education is a significant part of the teacher professional development and the training provided by St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ministry of Education. However, there is a need for a formal policy and incentives to attract/recruit students who are genuinely interested in the profession. Recent statistics indicate that an estimated 88% of the teacher population in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are trained pre-service (Knight, 2019). Although this may be considered commendable, there is growing concern that teachers do not consistently uphold the best teaching practices after training. This issue suggests a need to emphasise

continuous professional development among trained teachers. Furthermore, it will also be important to reassess the qualification requirements to become a teacher.

The main qualifications required to become a teacher at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels are identified in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: *Qualifications Required to become a Teacher According to School Level*

Level	Qualifications
Pre-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be eighteen years of age. • Successful completion of a minimum of six GCE 'O' Level or CSEC subjects • The subjects should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English Language - Mathematics - Social Studies/History/Geography - Science – Integrated Science/ Human and Social Biology/ Agricultural Science - One additional subject
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be eighteen years of age. • Successful completion of a minimum of GCE 'O' Level or CXC/CSEC subjects • The subjects should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English Language - Mathematics - Social Studies/History/Geography - Science – Integrated Science/ Human and Social Biology/ Agricultural Science - One additional subject
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be eighteen years of age. • Successful completion of a minimum of six GCE 'O' Level or CXC/CSEC subjects, including English Language, and two GCE 'A' Level subjects or their equivalent. <p>Requirements for Specialised Subject Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAPE - 2 units or an Associate Degree in the specialist subject or GCE Advanced level passes for the Major- At least a Grade 1 pass at the CSEC level or the equivalent in the specialist subject for the Minor. • For the Social Studies specialization, the following will be accepted: CAPE - 2 units in Geography or History or Sociology or Caribbean Studies or GCE Advanced level in Geography or History.

The Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE) is the certifying body for teacher education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It plays a critical role in regulating the teaching profession in the country. In its Regulations, the Board outlines the attributes of a good teacher. These attributes include the following.

- Knowledge of their own society and cultural development.
- The ability to be compassionate.
- Excellent interpersonal skills.
- Excellent leadership skills.
- High levels of community involvement.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

While no formal documentation with a list of professional standards was found, these standards can be inferred from the curriculum designed to facilitate teacher training offered at the teachers' training college. It is generally accepted that teachers, having met the specific minimum qualification requirements, should also possess the following knowledge and skills.

- Subject-specific knowledge
- Pedagogical skills
- Instructional design
- Assessment
- Writing
- Speaking
- Knowledge of childhood development

The Division of Teacher Education (DTE) at St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College (SVGCC) has primary oversight for the provision of pre-service and in-service training of teachers. Members of the Division work closely with the JBTE in ensuring that the standard of training provided to teachers is of the highest quality. The Division offers teacher training programmes in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, and Technical and Vocational Education. The duration of each programme is two (2) years and requires students to complete sixty-six (66) credits. In terms of content, emphasis is placed on childhood development (at the primary level), educational psychology, curriculum, and assessment.

Each programme culminates with a Practicum that involves students' assignment to various schools where their teaching practice is observed over ten weeks. The first three (3) weeks (weeks 1-3) of the Practicum are used to provide developmental guidance; no grades are assigned. During weeks 4-8, the students are observed by

college staff, and grades are assigned for five (5) lessons. In the final weeks, weeks 9-10, the students are observed by External Examiners and are graded on three (3) lessons (see Table 4.2). Students must complete the Practicum component to be awarded the Degree.

Table 4.2: *Practicum Assessment Process for teachers at the Division of Teacher Education*

Weeks	Practicum Assessment Process
Weeks 1-3	Developmental Guidance
Weeks 4-8	Observed by college staff and grades are assigned for 5 lessons
Weeks 9-10	Students are observed and graded by external examiners

4.3 IN-SERVICE EDUCATION AND CAREER PATH

Article 23-1 of the Collective Agreement between the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union (SVGTU) states that "the employer should organise and execute induction courses for new entrants into the profession and to new positions. This shall be done in conjunction with the Union." This induction is usually executed in the form of a one to two-day workshop where teachers are oriented to the main features of the job and the key requirements of the school to which they were assigned. Some of the topics covered include professionalism, work ethics, and the Code of Conduct. Important skills such as lesson planning, assessment practices, and instructional delivery are usually emphasised. Some schools may also assign a senior teacher to work with the inductee.

Article 22 of the Collective Agreement stipulates that schools are required to hold at least one in-service professional development workshop per term. Furthermore, teachers are expected to make themselves available for all professional development opportunities. In addition, teachers selected for In-Service Training Workshops by the Ministry of Education and the Union are required to attend these workshops at least once every three years.

To aid in the continuous professional development of teachers, the SVGTU, based on expressed training needs, provides annual training for teachers during the Summer period. This training is usually done in conjunction with the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Workshops and Seminars are also coordinated with the Caribbean Teachers' Union. From time to time, members of the Union will assist with delivering instruction at the DTE by conducting sessions with pre-service and in-service teachers.

CAREER PATH

Teachers who have completed teacher training at the DTE enter the profession under the designation of Teacher I (see Table 4.3). After ten years of service, they can be

promoted to Teacher VI if their appraisal score is 80% or above. The Post of Graduate Teacher is assigned to those individuals who have obtained a University Degree (this can be considered as an incentive for teachers to further their studies). To become a Principal or Deputy Principal, the individual must have at least 10 years of teaching experience as a trained teacher and must have obtained a bachelor's degree.

4.4 TEACHER SALARY AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Even though there are avenues for teacher professional advancement in schools, teacher salary in St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to be a point of concern. The teacher's qualifications and experience determine his or her salary (See Table 4.3). As such, teachers' salaries can range from approximately EC\$ 17, 616 (Teacher I) to approximately EC\$76, 008 (Senior Graduate Teacher) annually.

Table 4.3: Teacher position, qualifications, and salary scale.

Teacher Grade	Qualifications	Annual Salary Scale (in EC\$)
Teacher I	Highest qualification being CSEC subjects	\$17, 616 - \$23, 808
Teacher II	Highest qualifications A' levels or CAPE subjects	\$21,936 - \$29,664
Teacher III	Completion of Teacher Training	\$33,720 - \$43, 994
Teacher IV	Ten years as a trained teacher and specialist training	\$40, 380 - \$52,188
Teacher V (Grade F) – Graduate Teacher	Must possess a University Degree – on two-year probationary period	\$46, 932 - \$60,900
Teacher V (Grade E) – Graduate Teacher	Must possess a University Degree and must have successfully completed the two-year probationary period as a Teacher V (Grade F)	\$53, 172 - \$68, 292
Senior Graduate Teacher	Must have been in service for at least ten years as a Graduate Teacher	\$58, 998- \$76,008

Note: This information was obtained from St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2020: Appendix 3, pg 724-732

The current salary freeze is also a cause for concern for teachers and senior trade unionists, especially in light of the growing economic difficulties. This is compounded by a great degree of disquiet about the protracted appointment of teachers who have met the relevant criteria for professional advancement (Vincentian, 2020). While the Government continues to address delays in teacher appointments, concern still exists that there are many teachers who are not appointed in a timely fashion.

Apart from salary, working conditions is also an important aspect of a teacher's experience. The Collective Agreement speaks to specific working conditions that should be in place to ensure the well-being of Union members. The conditions addressed in the Agreement include staff allocation, health, safety, and security. With regards to staff allocation, the Agreement specifies what is considered an acceptable teacher to student ratio. At the primary level, the recommended ratio is 1:15 in Grade K and 1:25 for Grades 1 through 6. The most recent publicly available statistics (2019) suggest that this ratio has been met.

At the secondary level, the recommended teacher-to-student ratio in the Collective Agreement is 1:23. Statistics from the 2018-19 St. Vincent and the Grenadines Statistical Digest indicate that the current teacher-to-student ratio at this level is well below the ratio proposed in the Agreement; the reported ratio was 1:13; this is commendable.

However, while there are satisfactory reports about the general teacher-to-student ratio, there are some concerns about the physical school infrastructure, especially in rural areas of the mainland where some schools need extensive repair. Concerns about the health and safety of teachers and students are directly connected with issues relating to poor physical infrastructure at some schools. At a few schools, there have been reports on the unavailability of separate washroom facilities for males and females, inadequate, or extensively damaged furniture, and poor internet service (Vincentian, 2020).

COVID-19 WORKING CONDITIONS

The current working conditions for teachers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines must also be examined in the context of COVID-19. As discussed in Chapter 2, the sudden arrival of COVID-19 meant that initially teachers had to conduct many of their classes online. In December 2020, with the reduction in infection rates, the Ministry of Education, working collaboratively with the Ministry of Health, made plans to recommence in-person teaching in January 2021. However, during this time, the number of COVID cases rose steeply across the country.

The increase in infection rates meant that the Ministry had to reverse its original decision to recommence in-person classes during this period. Despite the continuation of online teaching, issues such as poor internet connectivity (i.e., bandwidth issues), lack of training to use the online platform, Microsoft Teams (which has been made mandatory for all schools by the Ministry), and lack of technological devices for students continue to impact the quality of education.

4.5 TEACHERS' UNIONS

The main Teachers' Union in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union. The Union is a representative body for its members. It was formed to advocate and protect the rights of teachers. Its primary mandate is to work with the Government to ensure that the stipulations in the Collective Agreement are adhered to so that its members and other education stakeholders can benefit from or provide high-quality education across the various levels.

Apart from worker advocacy, the Union also has a professional arm in which, through collaboration with other educational institutions, it provides opportunities for training and the professional development of its members. At various points, senior members of the Union may also be called upon to share their expertise with pre-service and in-service teachers about matters pertaining to industrial relations and other areas that influence and shape the profession of teaching.

4.6 SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

As can be gleaned from the preceding information, there are several challenges and knowledge gaps that are currently confronting the teaching profession in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. According to officials in both the Ministry of Education and the Division of Teacher Education, some of the main challenges relate to attracting individuals (especially in specialised subject areas) who are genuinely interested in the profession, poor working conditions. Furthermore, while recent statistics indicate that about 88% of the teacher population are trained pre-service (Knight, 2019), there is growing concern that after teachers have been trained, they do not continue to consistently uphold the best practices of teaching. This issue suggests that a greater effort is needed to facilitate continuous professional development in the teaching profession.

Several education officials interviewed for this project indicated that attracting individuals to the profession to teach the STEM subjects was challenging primarily because they are more interested in pursuing careers directly related to their subject area (i.e., mathematics and physics). However, one can also assume that given the salary scales (especially for entry-level teachers), some individuals may not feel financially incentivised to consider teaching as a career.

The arrival of COVID-19 and the sudden transition to emergency remote teaching have also complicated the delivery of quality education. Both teachers and students are grappling with the new requirements of teaching and learning in a virtual space. It suggests that the technological training provided by the DTE needs to be further enhanced to ensure that teachers feel comfortable with delivering online education. Added to the ambiguity caused by COVID-19, the recent eruptive activity of the country's volcano – La Soufriere, has not only heightened teacher anxiety on a personal level

but has also caused an incredible amount of discomfort among teachers with the uncertainty of what will happen to education.

The preceding information suggests that there needs to be substantial improvements in key areas of the teaching profession in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. For example, some degree of certainty and standardisation will be required for scheduling the appointment of teachers who have met the qualification criteria (especially given that these appointments are directly associated with compensation and benefit packages). There also appears to be a need to consolidate the training on the use of Microsoft Teams as the main teaching platform during the pandemic. This is substantiated by several reports of teachers and students having challenges with using this platform. Emphasis should also be placed on providing continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning throughout the country.

CHAPTER 5

VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the main educational gaps in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in terms of access, attainment, and completion. Special attention will be given to diversity and intercultural education, both in practice and in the curriculum. The chapter will examine issues of gender inequality and any other phenomenon that may threaten identities or create imbalanced situations for any individual because of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. Therefore, throughout the chapter, there will be a discussion on the curriculum and the social dynamics at schools and other educational institutions that influence the educational experiences of vulnerable individuals. Special attention will be given to those situations that might not be addressed by what is reflected with statistics.

It is important to note that for issues of inequality in education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Ministry of Education works closely with the Ministry of National Mobilisation, Social Development, Local Government, Gender Affairs, Youth, Housing, and Informal Human Settlement (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of National Mobilization). This Ministry's primary goal is to empower the poor and the vulnerable to experience a better-quality life. Its primary mandate is driven by the Sustainable Development Goals, which focus on:

- eradicating poverty and hunger.
- promoting gender equality and reducing inequalities.

At the national level, this Ministry's directives are shaped by the country's 2013–2025 National, Economic, and Social Development Plan.

5.1 GENDER GAPS: TRENDS AND POLICIES

Gender disparities in education continue to be a central point of discussion in the in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Disparities between male and female academic achievement (i.e., on the CPEA in 2020, there was a 90% pass rate for girls in comparison to an 81% pass rate for boys), the underrepresentation of males in higher education, issues of teenage pregnancy, and poverty are some of the main gender-related concerns that are influencing educational policy in the country.

It is important to note that gender-related issues and policies in St. Vincent and the Grenadines cannot be discussed without reference to the country's economic context. The socio-economic circumstances of males and females also impact opportunities for education access, continuation, and achievement. The remit of the Government of

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is to target these vulnerable gender groups to enhance and empower them to excel by providing them with educational opportunities.

One of the primary examples of how the Government has sought to support gender-related empowerment is its Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Programme, which provides opportunities for adolescent mothers to be reintegrated into the education system with adequate support from the Government through social and financial interventions.

The serious concern with the teenage pregnancy rate is best reflected in the country's strategic education priorities. In its Education Sector Development Plan (2014-2019), the Government highlights its grave concern with the increasing number of young mothers. The document states that women disproportionately bear the burden of the education system and, by extension, the country's burden. Within this context, the Government also sees teenage pregnancy as a matter in need of urgent attention.

Furthermore, statistics from the World Health Organisation indicate that Latin America and the Caribbean Region have the highest percentage of teenage pregnancy in the world. For St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the numbers are also a bit troubling. In 2018, statistics reported by the World Bank indicated that the number of births per every 1,000 girls ages 15-19 was 48.2 – this was among the highest rates in the English-speaking Caribbean.

5.2. DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

DISABILITIES

Article 112 of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Act (2006) stipulates that "the Chief Education Officer shall provide a special education programme for any student at compulsory school age and may provide such education for the student beyond that age, who by virtue of intellectual, communicative, behavioral, physical or multiple exceptionalities is in need of special education." It also states that, "a student who is entitled to a special education programme shall have the programme delivered in the least restrictive and most enabling environment that resources permit, and that is considered practicable by the Chief Education Officer in consultation with the principal and professional staff of the school and the students' parents, having due regard to the educational needs and rights of other students."

The above clauses in the Education Act suggest special education is a priority focus for the Ministry of Education. However, although there are provisions (i.e., three dedicated special education schools) made to assist students with special educational needs, concern still abounds about the level of attention given to these students. Much of this concern arises from the fact that not all students with special educational needs are identified and appropriately placed.

Education officials note that while the three dedicated special education facilities cater to students with physical disabilities, many students who have learning challenges still attend regular primary and secondary schools. Many of these schools do not have enough of the required educational resources to assist these students. This issue creates challenges for both teachers and students, especially given that many teachers are untrained in special education. It means that the quality of instruction and the child's specific educational needs are potentially being compromised as the students experiencing these issues may go undiagnosed (The St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Sector Development Plan, 2014-2019).

Another point of concern regarding special education is the re-integration of students who are provisionally removed from their school because of practices counterproductive to learning (i.e., for behavioral issues). The re-integration of these students into mainstream schools appears to be somewhat ad hoc. According to one senior ministry official, decisions on re-integration are mainly based on discussions between the teachers and parents.

UNDERREPRESENTED/MINORITY GROUPS

Apart from special education, some other general focal areas regarding inclusion in education encompass gender identity, migrant populations, and refugee children. Most children from these minority groups are fully integrated into the St. Vincent and the Grenadines education system. As such, there are no specific education policies pertaining to these groups. However, it is important to note that the behaviors of students at school reflect what happens in the general community. Therefore, students' and teachers' practices of acceptance and tolerance may only manifest in the school setting if there are exhibited in the wider community.

SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS.

As part of its mandate for the '*Education Revolution*', the Government of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines has made it a primary policy initiative to support the educational pursuits of individuals from impoverished circumstances who, otherwise, may not have the opportunity to advance through education.

Several budgeted programmes target children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. These include a national Primary School Feeding Programme, a secondary school book loan scheme, a distribution of tablets initiative, provision of counselling support in schools, and various vacation programmes targeting this group.

5.4 SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender disparities in education remain a point of concern in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines Education for All 2015 Review, it was stated that “the elimination of any form of gender discrimination will remain a high priority on Government’s agenda for the next five (5) years” (St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ Education for All Review, 2015, p. 23). While the Government is currently undertaking various initiatives to address these disparities, there is still a fair amount of work to be done to ensure equal access to education for both males and females, regardless of their circumstances. Of particular concern is the impact of teenage pregnancy on the education of young girls, who continue to remain vulnerable despite several initiatives that have been implemented to reduce adolescent pregnancy rates. With regards to males, achievement and the low numbers pursuing higher education also remain areas of concern.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

There are some improvements required to enhance the quality of special education. Some of the primary concerns relate to inadequate resources and provisions for students with special educational needs, including inadequate training of teachers. Improvements in diagnostic strategies to assist with the identification of students (and early intervention) with special education needs are also required.

UNDERREPRESENTED/MINORITY GROUPS

Most children from minority groups in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are fully integrated into the regular classroom. Even though this is commendable, the Government still needs to make a sustained effort to address any issue that may be peculiar to individuals who comprise these minority groups. Integration into mainstream education for these groups, while commendable, may lead to undetected issues that can only be potentially addressed within the context of the experiences of the members of the minority group.

SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Providing educational opportunities for members of socio-economically disadvantaged groups remains high on the Government’s agenda. The Government must be commended for the variety of programmes established to provide opportunities for educational enrichment among the indigent population and at-risk youths. The significant gains (i.e., number of scholarships awarded to persons from impoverished backgrounds in 2020) that have been made in this area should only be regarded as the start, especially if the Government remains committed to having at least one graduate per household by 2030.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide an analysis of the main educational challenges facing St. Vincent and the Grenadines. These challenges will be discussed based on the following thematic areas that were examined throughout this research. These areas include:

- COVID-19 and education
- Education policy and programmes
- Teacher Education
- Vulnerable groups in education

Therefore, the main questions that this chapter will answer, include the following.

- What are the country's main educational challenges in terms of COVID-19, policies and programmes, teacher education, and vulnerable groups in education?
- What are the current innovations in education, and where are additional innovations necessary?
- What are the main knowledge gaps, and where is it necessary to conduct further research?

In addition to addressing the previous questions, in this chapter, the consulting team will provide policy recommendations for consideration in addressing unsustainable educational challenges in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The findings will also be used to identify priority educational issues where additional research is required to increase evidence-based decision-making at the policy level. Furthermore, to provide a holistic picture of what is occurring in the education system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a S.W.O.T analysis table will be provided based on the key research findings in the relevant areas.

Before delving into a discussion on the educational challenges, research gaps, policy recommendations, and existing and required innovations, it is important to consider how the country's socio-political, historical, and economic contexts have impacted the education system.

THE IMPACT OF THE POLITICAL, HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The colonial history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has shaped the country's socio-political and economic context. The heavy impact of colonialism meant that after becoming independent in 1979, governments had to chart a new path socially, economically, and politically. Yet, many aspects of the country's operations (i.e., political system) still reflect or are impacted by this colonial influence. Even though charting this new path has been challenging, the country's membership of the OECS since 1981 has allowed it to benefit from a collaborative approach (with the other Member States) to addressing some of the national issues that affect the country and education is no exception.

As a Small Island Developing State in the Caribbean, the human and financial resources available to St. Vincent and the Grenadines are limited, especially compared to More Developed Countries. Therefore, resources available to provide heavy financial injections into the education system to ensure the employment of sufficiently qualified staff and to improve the internal efficiency of the system are limited.

Evidence of the lack of financial and human resources available to the Ministry of Education is reflected in the many difficulties that the Government continues to have in addressing issues related to COVID-19, the monitoring and evaluation of policy, and teacher education.

Further complicating the issue of limited capital is the fact that country's poverty assessment in 2008 re-emphasises the importance of education which has been regarded by many as one of the primary means of economic and social mobility. This limited capital means that the Government needs to continue to find innovative ways to invest in the sector. Recognising this, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, through its *Education Revolution*, has bolstered its efforts to increase access to education for individuals living at or below the poverty line.

Vulnerable groups often require additional support beyond what is given to individuals who do not fall into these categories. Concerns about members of the indigent population and the high unemployment rate means that the Government must continue its efforts to make access to education for at-risk groups a policy and programme priority. As such, several safety nets have already been established to assist individuals that fall into these categories with their access to education. In addition to access, there is also mounting concern about the quality of special education.

Education access and assistance for vulnerable groups are only two of the many issues confronting the education sector in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As mentioned previously, these issues have been magnified by COVID-19 but existed long before the unexpected arrival of the pandemic. What follows, therefore, is a discussion on some of the key longstanding challenges that continue to threaten education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

MAIN EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES RELATED TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create and magnify issues in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines education system. What has become apparent due to the pandemic is the inadequacy of the ICT infrastructure in the country. Reports from senior education officials indicate that poor internet connectivity and the lack of student access to technology continue to impact the ability of students to benefit from quality education during the pandemic.

Inequities that exist in the country's population drive these issues, especially student access to technology devices. Indeed, while the Government has spared no to provide students with access to these technologies (i.e., the One Laptop Initiative), on-the-ground reports from teachers and Union officials indicate that *all* students were not reached. One Union member spoke about issues of students having to use the mobile phones of their parents to attend classes; a practice that was not sustainable. Furthermore, many students were unfamiliar with the online platforms. This also impacted the teachers' ability to deliver the lesson as they had to take time to assist students who had technology-related issues. This technical support took away from the already limited instructional time that was available to teachers.

Based on the above realities, it comes as no surprise that in-service and pre-service teachers were also negatively impacted by the pandemic. One of the concerns raised by teachers during this research was the difficulty they had adapting to the new requirements to teach online. They pointed to issues of training, internet connectivity, and increased workload. One noteworthy area of concern was the mandatory requirement to use Microsoft Teams to teach. Several teachers were unaccustomed to this platform, and even though the training was provided, they still found it difficult to adjust. In addition to the software related issues, there were reports of parents interrupting live sessions to ensure that their children got a chance to share their thoughts.

Apart from issues of training, there is also concern about how pre-service teachers were going to be assessed. To be more specific, due to the pandemic, pre-service teachers were being assessed online. They did not have the opportunity to teach in-person. However, the Government's decision to return to in-person classes in April 2021 meant that pre-service teachers while being given developmental guidance online were now going to be externally assessed for their ability to teach in-person; an area they would not have received developmental guidance on. This, however, did not materialise due to the eruption of La Soufriere.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING COVID-RELATED EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

With the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccines, many governments are now looking forward to a world where there are fewer cases (and less severe cases) of the virus. Caribbean Ministries of Education are eagerly anticipating the return to in-person

learning. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the educational challenges created by COVID-19 are many and varied. While there is evidence to suggest that the disease is likely to be contained, the uncertainty surrounding new variants indicates that the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines needs to be fully prepared at the policy level to mitigate any severe negative impact on education. The impact of COVID-19 must also be managed in conjunction with the damage caused by the eruption of La Soufriere in April 2021. The lessons learned between 2020 and 2021 (based on these two disasters) must be evident in future policy decisions, which should be designed to build a resilient education system. Some of the key policy areas that the Government will need to address are discussed below.

ADDRESSING INEQUITIES IN TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

While the Government has been committed to ensuring access to technology for students and teachers, this must continue to be given priority at the policy level. To ensure evidence-based decision-making and policy, consideration can be given to conducting a needs analysis to ascertain those students who do not have access to the required technologies because of issues of affordability. It is these individuals that should be prioritised when these technologies are distributed. This view is supported by findings from a recent study conducted on the transition to virtual learning by Member States of the OECS. The authors state that “in relatively low-income countries and regions such as the Caribbean, the transition to virtual learning may be complicated by the fact that not all students and teachers have access to the required equipment and stable internet connection” (Emmanuel & Anthony, 2020, p. 9).

Furthermore, it will be important for the Vincentian Government to work collaboratively with the Internet Service Providers in the country to assess and improve the internet connectivity in areas where there are reports of poor bandwidth or no internet access. This would mean that, should the need arise for the return to online learning, issues of internet connectivity will be reduced in those areas where the bandwidth is less than desirable.

INFUSING TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teacher training in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is regulated by the Joint Board of Teacher Education. The Board works closely with the Ministries of Education in countries throughout the OECS. However, what was evident from the COVID-19 response is that there is a need for the two entities (and other Ministries of Education in the OECS) to look closely at the curriculum currently provided for teacher training with the view of strengthening or introducing material that emphasises teaching and learning with technology. In this revised curriculum, pre-service and in-service teachers will not only be introduced to various online platforms and technologies, but they will also be equipped with the pedagogical skills required to effectively teach online. This should be a policy priority in the upcoming Education Sector Plan for the country.

One of the assumptions that was made during COVID-19 was that, because students are digital natives, they would easily adapt to teaching and learning in the online environment (Emmanuel & Anthony, 2020); this is not the reality. In fact, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines COVID-19 signaled the importance of having Digital Citizenship Education training for teachers and students. At the Ministry level, thought should be given to designing (or redesigning) and developing curricula at the primary and secondary levels that equip students with the skills to effectively navigate the online environment and efficiently use technology tools.

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19, despite the havoc that it has caused, has also provided opportunities for countries to strengthen their education systems. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it will be important to build on this opportunity by conducting research to inform educational practice. One of the first research initiatives that can be considered is to assess the experiences of teachers and students while teaching and learning online during COVID-19. Most of the information that exists is anecdotal. The information gathered from this research can potentially inform a redesigned curriculum that emphasises the infusion of technology in teaching and learning and it can also serve to help the Ministry of Education identify key training needs in the teaching profession.

MAIN EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES RELATED TO EDUCATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Policy creation and implementation are critical phases in the policy-cycle, which must be supported by rigorous monitoring and evaluation. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines education policy is ratified by the Cabinet. However, administrative responsibility regarding the implementation of policy lies with the Chief Education Officer in the Ministry of Education. Two of the key policy challenges that exist in the country are the centralisation of decision-making and the lack of human and financial resources to ensure the efficient monitoring and evaluation of policies that have been ratified.

Clause 12 of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Act (2006) stipulates that the Minister is not bound to accept the advice of the Advisory Board. While this Clause may assist with improvements in the timeliness of decision-making, it can also be a potential barrier to *informed* decision-making. That is, if the views of education stakeholders (i.e., parents, teachers, and students) are not taken into consideration when education policy decisions are made, there can be negative implications in terms of the implementation of these decisions. This top-down approach is also reflected in the Ministry's organisational chart where decisions are filtered down from the political-directorate to the administrative arms of education.

Apart from the distribution of power, the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation continue to be a challenge in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A large

part of this issue stems from inadequate access to human and financial resources to effectively conduct these processes. It is clear from the Ministry of Education's Education Sector Plan (2014–2019) that it is fully committed to the monitoring and evaluation processes (i.e., for the implementation of policy initiatives in the country's Education Sector Plan (2014–2019), monitoring and evaluation committees were established to oversee the various actions that were to be taken). However, the Ministry's ability to execute these processes is restricted by the lack of human and financial capital. One senior education official described monitoring and evaluation as one of the Ministry's weakest areas, which is restricted largely by the absence of adequate resources.

Apart from issues related to decision-making and monitoring and evaluation, one of the primary policy challenges for the Government is in Early Childhood Education. Over 90% of the pre-primary education centers are privately owned. This creates challenges for the Government in terms of regulating the procedures. This issue is further complicated by the fact that many of the privately owned centers:

- lack highly trained staff
- are not purpose-built
- are not affordable for persons from indigent homes
- do not adequately prepare children for entry into primary level education

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING ISSUES IN THE EDUCATION POLICY

To maximise the possibility of the successful implementation of new education policies and programmes, it is recommended that the Government continues to support the Ministry of Education through the provision of increased resources (i.e., financial, human, and technical resources) to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation processes. Even though this may be challenging in these difficult financial times, it must be considered as an investment designed to reduce wastage of resources and improve efficiency. That is, by strengthening the current monitoring and evaluation system, the Government will be able to make more informed decisions regarding the effectiveness of their education policies and programmes, whether any modifications are necessary, and how these modifications should be made.

A major aspect of monitoring and evaluation in education is the efficient collection and analysis of data to ascertain the progress made with a particular project. This point is supported by one of the policy issues identified in the Education Sector Plan (2014–2019), where it was stated that:

“There is need for considerable improvement in the routines and arrangements for collecting and analysing data; for making such data available to the public and support organisations and agencies; and for the systematic use of such data in planning and decision-making” (p. 25).

While this usually requires skilled and trained experts to manage the process, it also necessitates good record-keeping by individuals directly involved in the delivery of education (i.e., principals and teachers). As such, the Ministry of Education must obtain the support of these stakeholders to ensure accurate and efficient record-keeping. Improved record-keeping will also require efforts to strengthen the country's Education Management Information System (EMIS). In a 2012 assessment report, the country's EMIS was rated as emerging, which suggests that substantial improvements were needed (Porta et al., 2012). Even though there has not been a recent assessment of the EMIS, the unavailability of basic educational data suggests that there is room for improvement.

In the preparation of the 2021-2025 Education Sector Plan, the Ministry of Education must aim to improve on the monitoring and evaluation strategies that were recommended for the 2014-19 Plan. For example, simply carrying out surveys as a means of verification, while useful, will not provide a holistic picture of the extent to which policy and programme initiatives are being implemented. It will be important, therefore, that in the upcoming Plan, consideration be given to using monitoring strategies that will provide the most accurate data that reflects what is occurring during the implementation of policy.

In addition to improved monitoring and evaluation, there needs to be a sustained effort to improve the quality of consultation with stakeholders (especially teachers) before policy decisions being made. The top-down approach to decision-making that some education officials in the country have reported, may only serve to undermine the intended benefits of new policies or programmes that were created and ratified with minimal to no consultation with members of the Advisory Board. Indeed, Clause 12 in the Education Act which stipulates that the Minister is not bound to accept the advice of the Board may need to be revisited to provide a greater scope of influence for education stakeholders in terms of decision-making.

The two previous recommendations will also be important in informing the direction of policy in the Early Childhood Education subsector. In this regard, the Government needs to continue its current push to strengthen its public-private sector partnership with owners of private pre-primary centers. This relationship must be supportive to improve the quality of pedagogy offered at privately-owned centers. To achieve the desired quality, there must be standardised curricula used to guide teaching and learning and an increase in professional development opportunities for caregivers (the Government can also provide financial support for individuals who may not be able to afford further studies) in the private sphere. This support must be coupled with an intensified push for universal access to pre-primary education (SDG 4.2) and close monitoring of the operations of early childhood centers.

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN THE POLICY

Policy creation and implementation should be driven by empirical data. For example, in the St Vincent and the Grenadines' Education Sector Plan (2014-2019), two of the major

policy concerns highlighted were the underperformance of students in STEM subjects and the gender gap in performance among students. For the Government to arrest these issues, it will be important to conduct educational research to ascertain the factors that contribute to educational challenges that arise. A review of the Educator Sector Plan revealed that there needed to be additional emphasis on conducting high-quality research to drive decision-making.

One major implication of limited education research is the continued existence of knowledge gaps about the reasons for many of the educational issues that the country faces. In the absence of rigorously collected empirical data, many of the decisions that continue to be made may not reflect the educational realities of the country. This view is supported by a senior educational official that participated in this project. The individual stated that:

“The budget for investment in Research, Development, and Innovation is quite limited in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We do not engage in meaningful research projects. Although education remains a top priority for the Government enough attention is not being paid to education research.”

This view supports the point that the Ministry of Education needs to make a sustained effort to invest in research projects that will drive policy decision-making. For example, in terms of early childhood, further research will be needed in the development of materials and content relevant to St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ cultural context.

MAIN EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES RELATED TO TEACHER EDUCATION IN ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Teacher training in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is regulated by the Joint Board of Teacher Education. The training programmes are delivered by the Division of Teacher Education of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ Community College. Most of the training that is done is completed by pre-service teachers.

Two of the major challenges facing teacher education include:

1. attracting suitably qualified teachers (i.e., in the STEM subjects),
2. shortage of male teachers
3. teacher salary and career path

ATTRACTING SUITABLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

The quality of the education a child receives is heavily impacted by the pedagogical and psychosocial skills of the teacher. The profession must therefore engage highly skilled and qualified experts to ensure that the learning experiences students receive are of high-quality.

Unfortunately, the challenge of attracting suitably qualified teachers continues to impact the teaching profession in St. Vincent and the Grenadines across all levels of schooling. This, however, must be discussed in the context of the minimum qualifications required to become a teacher in the country. To be qualified to enter the teaching profession at the primary level, individuals must have successfully completed at least six CXC subjects (inclusive of English). To teach at the secondary level, individuals must have completed at least six CXC subjects and two GCE subjects. Therefore, some individuals may be gainfully employed as teachers when they have only recently completed secondary school and have not yet pursued tertiary level studies; this gap has created instructional shortfalls in the education system.

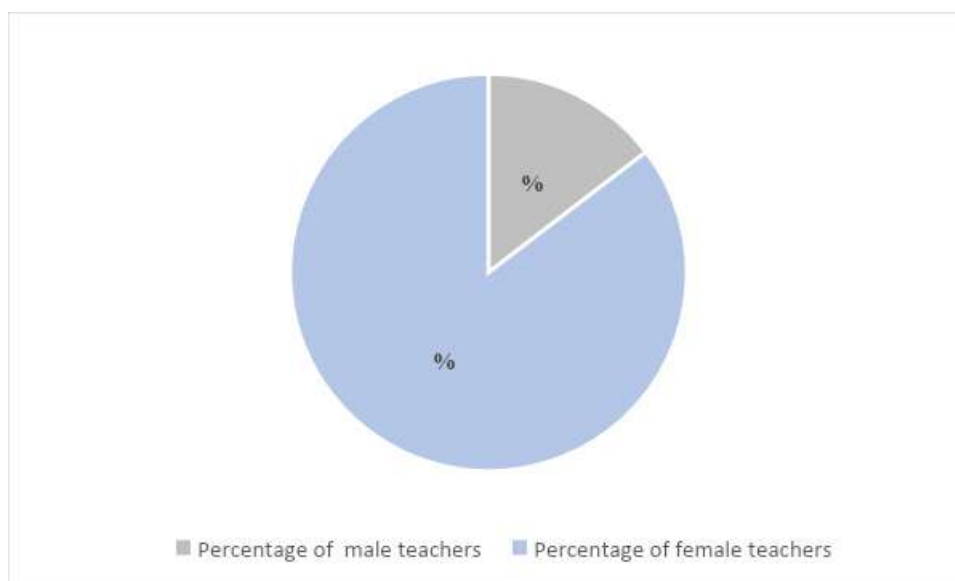
Although pre-service teacher training is an expectation, there is no clause in the Education Act (2006) which suggests that this training is a mandatory requirement for teacher employment. In fact, conversations with various education officials during the data collection phase of this project indicate that, although there have been marked improvements in teacher training, many teachers still enter the profession without this training behind them (i.e., at the secondary level for the academic year 2018/19, more than 30% of the teachers were untrained).

Given that the minimum qualifications for entry into the teaching profession do not require students to have undertaken rigorous tertiary level education or complete pre-service training, a potential compromise of pedagogical quality can occur, especially in subject areas such as Mathematics, Science, and Technology. Due to the inability to attract suitably qualified individuals to teach these subjects, some individuals, without the content knowledge may have to teach these subject areas. This practice can potentially negatively impact the academic rigour of the education that students receive as some teachers themselves may have difficulty with the content.

SHORTAGE OF MALE TEACHERS

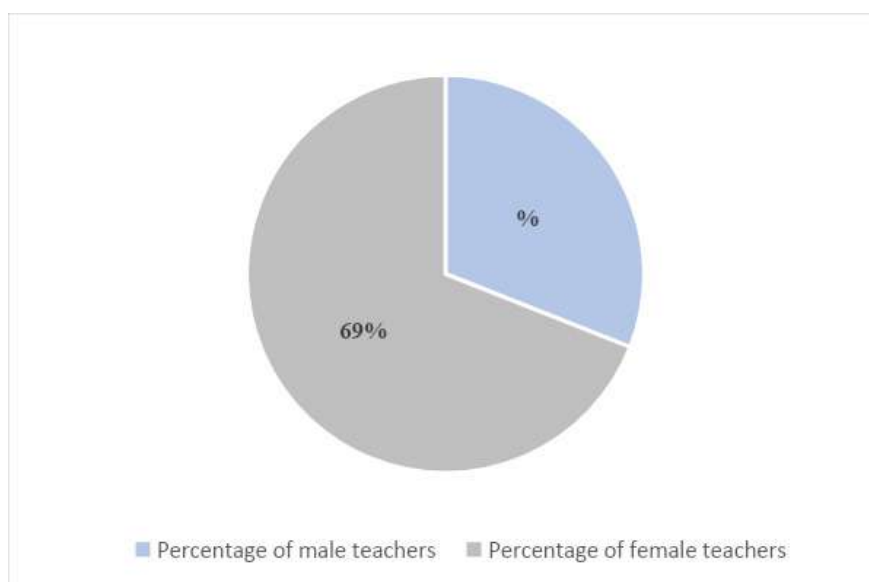
In addition to the challenges of attracting suitably qualified teachers, there also appears to be a major difficulty attracting male teachers to the profession. Statistics for the academic year 2018/19 indicate that, of the 905 teachers employed at the primary level, only 132 (14.6%) were male (see Figure 6.1). At the secondary level, the scale is a bit more balanced, but it is still evident that males are underrepresented in the teaching profession. For the academic year 2018/19, there were 490 (69%) female teachers compared to 222 (31%) male teachers (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.1 percentage of male and female teachers at the primary level, academic year 2018/19



Note: These statistics are based on data reported in *St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2018/19 Educational Statistical Digest*

Figure 6.2: Percentage of male and female teachers at the secondary level, academic year 2018/2019



Note: These statistics are based on data reported in *St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2018/19 Educational Statistical Digest*

Further compounding the issues relating to the shortage of male teachers is the fact that a significant number of male teachers who are employed at the secondary level are not trained. For the academic year 2018/19, only 57% of male teachers were trained, compared to 77% at the primary level. These statistics suggest that the desire

to attract an increased number of males to the profession may lead the Ministry to be a bit keener to encourage males to teach even though they are not trained.

TEACHER SALARIES AND CAREER PATHS

Most career-driven individuals are attracted to a profession, not only because of the nobility associated with the job but also because of the compensation and benefits. Therefore, the inability to attract suitably qualified teachers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines must also be discussed in the context of how the profession is perceived as well as the 'contractual benefits' that are derived from becoming a teacher.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the remuneration for entry-level teachers is quite low especially when compared to other professions in the country. For example, an individual's decision to become an Architect or an Accountant would be more financially rewarding than becoming a teacher. Persons who pursue their studies in these areas may be less likely to be attracted to the teaching profession when they compare the compensation and benefits to what they could potentially receive if they pursue a career directly associated with their subject area.

The difficulty of recruiting highly qualified teachers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is not surprising especially given that (based on the minimum qualifications) entry into the profession does not require individuals to possess a First Degree. This perhaps shapes individuals' perceptions of the profession as one in which 'little is required' to become a teacher. The accompanying salary scale may also create apprehension for those who otherwise would be desirous of entering the profession. Added to this, the length of time required to become a senior teacher (in St. Vincent and the Grenadines this could be 10 years or more) may be less than desirable for many.

Low salaries, coupled with muddled career paths, can also impact teacher motivation, and perhaps increase job turnover. While the documentation reviewed and the persons interviewed for this project did not indicate that there were high teacher turnover rates, it is not farfetched to believe that this can become a reality if there is an increase in job opportunities in other fields for young teachers. This can create greater shortages of suitably qualified teachers in the foreseeable future.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Attracting suitably qualified teachers will require significant changes at the policy level. The Government will need to work closely with the members of the Advisory Board to refashion what the profession looks like. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the following policy recommendations are being proposed. Consideration should be given to:

1. making pre-service teacher training mandatory for individuals desirous of entering the profession

2. revisiting the minimum qualifications required to become a teacher to include the possession of a First Degree as a minimum requirement
3. revising the current compensation and benefits package to further incentivize individuals to consider pursuing the profession
4. revisit the requirements for career progression with shorter timelines for appointment to senior positions (i.e., 6 years instead of 10 years to become a senior teacher)

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The challenge of attracting suitably qualified teachers must be strategically addressed. This will require large-scale research that includes in-service, pre-service teachers as well as the public at large. The main goals of this research will be to ascertain:

- the perception of the profession
- the extent to which persons are willing to join the profession
- the experiences and concerns of individuals in the teaching profession
- the factors that attract persons (especially males) to the profession
- the factors that make individuals decide against becoming a teacher

Armed with this empirical information, there would be greater scope for designing a recruitment strategy that will address key areas of concern that dissuade persons from pursuing teaching as a career path.

In addition to the above research focus, it will also be worthwhile to investigate the different remuneration packages that are offered to teachers in the Caribbean region and worldwide. Even though it may be challenging for the Government to facilitate any salary increases at this point, it will be worthwhile to research strategies that can be used to improve the compensation and benefits offered to teachers.

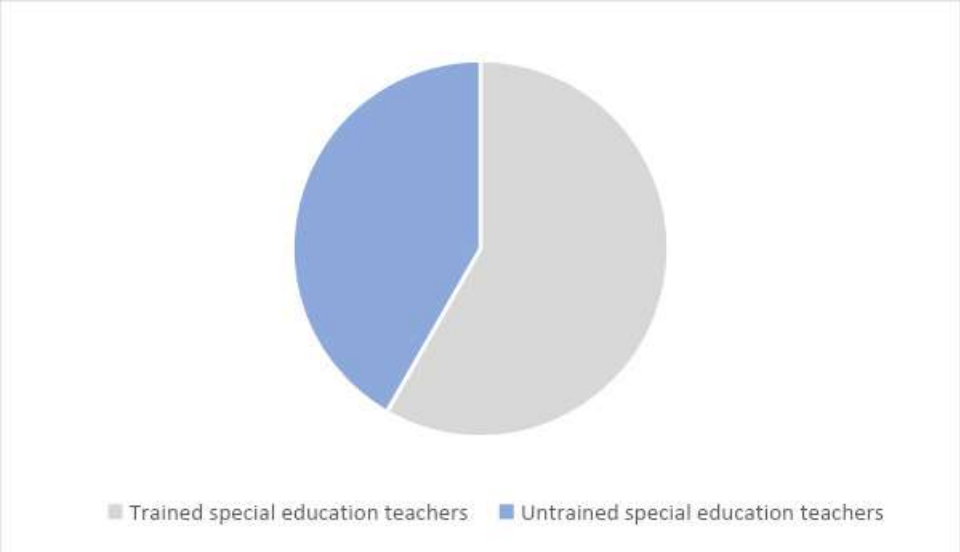
MAIN CHALLENGES FACING VULNERABLE GROUPS IN EDUCATION

Not everyone has the luxury of easy access to education; for some groups, it is much more difficult. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, students with learning disabilities, young mothers, and underachieving males, are among the main groups at-risk of not benefitting from quality education. Even though the Government continues to implement innovative strategies to reach those in the most disadvantaged groups, there is still additional work to be done.

With regards to special education, a 2017 UNICEF situation analysis of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' education system concluded that, even though there are three special education centers, students with special needs do not have readily available access

to the relevant resources (i.e., trained teachers, therapeutic interventions, etc.) and support required. For example, during the academic year 2018/19, only 58.3% of special education teachers were trained (see Figure 6.3). The UNICEF report also indicated that there was no evidence of a plan to integrate special education students into mainstream education.

Figure 6.3: Percentage of trained and untrained special education teachers teaching at Special Education Centers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the academic year 2018/19



Note: These statistics are based on data reported in St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2018/19 Educational Statistical Digest

Early intervention to support children with special needs has also been identified as a major shortfall in the system. Many teachers at the primary and secondary levels are not fully trained in how to support students with special education needs. In fact, the pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes at the primary and secondary levels only require the trainees to take one three (3) credit course in special education. This means that teachers at these levels may not be fully prepared to address the needs of learners who have various difficulties in the mainstream classroom. It also suggests that there is not a heavy emphasis on diversity in the classroom.

Apart from special education students, one of the other vulnerable groups is teenage mothers. When young children become pregnant, it disrupts their education, especially if systems are not in place to reintegrate young mothers into the education system. The Ministry of Education recognises this and, as such, works closely with the Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of National Mobilisation, through its Re-entry of Teen Mothers Programme, to assist young women who had to discontinue school because of pregnancy.

For the academic year 2019/20, a total of eighty-five (85) teenage mothers were given the opportunity to continue their secondary education (Ministry of National Mobilisation,

Social Development, Family, Gender Affairs, Youth, Housing, and Informal Human Settlement, 2020). While the Government must be lauded for taking this initiative, the number of teenage pregnancies in the country is still disconcerting and makes young girls more vulnerable to not being able to continue their education without being subjected to prejudice and discrimination. Discussions with senior education officials revealed that, more often than not, teenage mothers are not encouraged to return to the secondary school they attended when they first became pregnant.

The alarming number of teenage mothers included in the programme suggests that despite Government's efforts, the issue of teenage pregnancy continues to persist. Given that women are disproportionately affected if they discontinue their education, measures need to be implemented not only to support teen mothers but also to minimise the occurrences of teenage pregnancy.

While special education students and teenage mothers are primary concerns, perhaps the largest vulnerable group is young people from indigent homes. Due to low household income, many students do not have easy access to basic amenities (i.e., three square meals per day, electricity, internet, etc.). The Government, through the Ministry of National Mobilisation, continues to provide several safety nets to support individuals who struggle to access basic commodities. Indeed, they must be lauded for the number of programmes and innovations in this area, but there is still significant work ahead as many individuals may still be living below the breadline.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSISTING VULNERABLE GROUPS WITH ACCESS TO EDUCATION

As the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to intensify its efforts to operate its education system based on a policy of inclusion and diversity, additional consideration needs to be given to prioritising policy in the following areas.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Reports indicate that while there are three (3) special education centers, there is an urgent need for an increase in the number of trained special education teachers. At the policy level, given the vulnerability of students with special education needs, it will be important for the Government to make training a mandatory requirement for persons desirous of teaching these students. Furthermore, efforts will also be needed to increase the professional development opportunities for persons involved with the education of this group of students.

The systematic development and implementation of early intervention programmes will also be important. In these programmes, as part of their continuing professional development, teachers at the primary and secondary levels should be provided with training on the skills required to assist with identifying students who may potentially have special learning needs.

TEENAGE MOTHERS

The success of the Government's teen mothers reintegration education programme cannot be denied. Nonetheless, it is equally important for the Government to tackle the root cause of the problem – early pregnancy. This will require an intensification of efforts to educate young people about the negative implications of early pregnancy. A strong educational campaign (with abstinence at the forefront of the messaging) should be undertaken to support an initiative of this nature. This campaign should target *both* adolescent girls and boys. Efforts should also be made to re-emphasise the importance of reproductive health and safety in the HFLE curriculum. Workshops, Summer programmes, and seminars can also be held as part of this education drive. This policy initiative will require a cross-ministerial approach (i.e., Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Mobilisation, Ministry of Education, etc.).

SUPPORTING MEMBERS OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Many of the issues that exist with students coming from indigent households are complex and multilayered. For example, these students may live in households where most persons are unemployed or the breadwinner may have a low-paying job, making it difficult to afford important commodities. What this suggests is that the issue of at-risk economically disadvantaged students is not just a policy concern for the Ministry of Education, but other ministries and government departments as well; it requires cross-ministerial support. However, the Government also needs to ensure that current education policies are not exacerbating issues for students from indigent homes. For example, given that disadvantaged students are more likely to be at risk of dropping out and failing academically, it may best to have procedures in place to address learning gaps rather than have students repeat grades.

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS ON EDUCATION FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

Education is a fundamental right for *all*. Therefore, governments and their relevant ministries must do all that they can to ensure that *everyone* can access quality education. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, to strengthen its push for inclusion, the Ministry of Education needs to take the lead in conducting additional research required to fill key knowledge gaps that exist on the most vulnerable groups in education; this research must include all education stakeholders, not just students and teachers (i.e., for students with special education needs, it is imperative to understand the difficulties that their parents are facing in providing the necessary support at home to ensure that each student reaches their full academic potential).

Furthermore, given that inclusion into mainstream classrooms is one of the key education priorities (Global Education Monitor, 2020), it will also be important for the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to understand the attitudes of teachers and students toward students with special needs. This research will provide insight on

the framework(s) that will need to be put in place to promote a culture of tolerance and acceptance in classrooms across St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

To further solidify its efforts to create a culture of inclusion in education, the Ministry of Education will also need to consider conducting research on curricula based on inclusion to ascertain the extent to which they incorporate universal design for learning principles to accommodate the needs and strengths of diverse learners.

To consolidate their support of young adolescent girls, the Government needs to conduct further research on the psychosocial factors that contribute to early pregnancy in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This research can provide further insights into the cause of the problem so that strategies can be implemented to tackle its roots. By understanding the causes, a good foundation for strategic planning can be developed to tackle the issue.

MAIN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS AND WHERE INNOVATIONS ARE NEEDED

To strengthen its education system, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines will need to continue to be innovative in its approach to delivering education. While education innovations are quite apparent in Technical and Vocational Education, there is a need to strengthen and establish innovations in the other subsectors (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Existing and Required Innovations in St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Education System

Existing Innovations	Required Innovations
Early Childhood Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	Early Childhood Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Development • Positive Parenting (i.e., Saving Brains, Grenada) • Psychological, Emotional, and Social Development • Digital Citizenship
Primary Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Laptop Per Child • School Feeding Programme 	Primary Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Development • Positive Parenting (i.e., Saving Brains, Grenada) • Psychological, Emotional, and Social Development • Digital Citizenship Education

<p>Secondary Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Laptop Per Child • Skills for Youth Employment Programme • School Feeding Programme 	<p>Secondary Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology • Digital Citizenship • Experiential learning opportunities
<p>Special Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<p>Special Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology • Inclusion in mainstream education • Literacy • Training • Special education programme
<p>Tertiary Education</p>	
<p>Technical and Vocational Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills for Youth Employment Programme • Youth and Adult Training for Employment Programme 	<p>Technical and Vocational Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurial hub

S.W.O.T ANALYSIS

To provide a holistic picture of what is occurring in St. Vincent and the Grenadines' education system, a S.W.O.T. analysis was conducted. The results are displayed in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: S.W.O.T Analysis of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Education System

Strengths 	Weaknesses 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government’s commitment to improving education through its Education Revolution • High literacy rate • Universal access to secondary education • Government support of privately-owned early childhood centers • Establishment of government-owned early childhood centers • Membership of the OECS • Innovations in TVET • Strong financial support for students from indigent homes • Availability of educational scholarships • Teen mothers re-integration programme • Strong Teachers’ Union • Advisory Education Board (comprised of key education stakeholder groups) • Good student achievement rates in external examinations • Funding from international and regional organisations • Universal access to secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of innovation in various subsectors in education • Inadequate number of trained teachers • No clear special education (inclusion) policy • Inadequate infrastructural support systems for students with special education needs • Unequal access to pre-primary education • Student readiness for primary education • Skills-deficit in the use of technology among teachers • Unequal access to technology for students • Monitoring and evaluation of policy • Centralisation of decision-making • Compensation and benefits package for teachers • Attracting highly qualified teachers • Low qualification requirements for entry level teachers • Student performance in STEM subjects • Poor educational research culture • Poor performance in mathematics in the CPEA • Shortage of male teachers at the primary and secondary levels • Poor reading skills among primary school students • Lack of an educational research culture

Opportunities

- Increased educational funding from international and regional organisations
- Development of a Special Education Teacher Training Programme
- Pedagogical training in the infusion of technology
- Use of technology to strengthen the level of parental involvement in children's education
- Strengthening of the public-private sector partnership in early childhood education
- Improvement in ICT infrastructure throughout the country

Threats

- Limited access to coronavirus vaccines
- Continuation of the coronavirus pandemic
- Poor ICT infrastructure
- Low internet penetration rate
- Growing number of unemployed individuals
- Economic downturn
- Teen pregnancy
- Poverty
- Unemployment

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