Maldives

Education policies, curriculum design and implementation at the level of upper primary and general secondary education

Abdul Muhsin Mohamed and Maryam Azra Ahmed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated population (1995)</th>
<th>200,000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public expenditure on education as percentage of Gross National Product (1995)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of compulsory education (years)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Primary or basic education**

| Pupils enrolled (1995) | 50,733 |
| Teachers (1995) | – |
| Pupil/teacher ratio | 31:1 |

| Gross enrolment ratio (1995) | |
| Total | 133 |
| Male | 135 |
| Female | 130 |

| Net enrolment ratio (1995) | |
| Total | 100 |
| Male | 100 |
| Female | 100 |

| Estimated percentage of repeaters (1992) | 18 |
| Estimated percentage of drop-outs (1995) | 7 |
| School-age population out of school (1995) | 0 |

**Secondary education**

| Students enrolled (1995) | 40,000 |
| Gross enrolment ratio (1995) | |
| Total | 49 |
| Male | 49 |
| Female | 49 |

**Third-level enrolment ratio (1995)** | – |

**Estimated adult literacy rate (1995)**

| Total | 93 |
| Male | 93 |
| Female | 93 |

Notes:
1. Last year available


INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Maldives is an archipelago of approximately 1,190 coral islands located south-west of the Indian sub-continent. The islands form twenty-six natural atolls, which are grouped into twenty atolls for administrative purposes. The total population of the Maldives is around 250,000. The population is dispersed among 200 inhabited islands, with 90% of them having a population of less than 1,000. Around 25% of the population is concentrated in the capital, Malé.

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF EDUCATION IN THE MALDIVES

The system of education prevailing in the Maldives today has its roots in a traditional system of schooling that has existed for hundreds of years. These traditional schools, known as edhuruge, makthab or madhrasa, are privately owned or operated by the island communities and are usually self-financing. The edhuruge is a gathering of children in a private home with the objective of teaching them to read the Quran, to read and write Dhivehi, the mother tongue of Maldivians, and to provide some rudiments of arithmetic. The madhrasa is more formal and offers almost the same curriculum, while in the madhrasa the curriculum is more far-ranging. These schools have contributed towards achieving many educational objectives, including a high rate of literacy and the preservation of national culture and tradition (Ministry of Education, 1992). However, the present system of education is the result of a merger between the traditional system of schooling and a Western style of schooling introduced since 1960.

The Western style of schooling was introduced in English-medium schools in the capital Malé as part of a conscious effort to prepare individuals for training that they would receive overseas in order to meet the increasing developmental needs of the country. Thus, the beginning of a public school system was patterned after the British system in terms of organization of curriculum and methods of instruction.

One of the most significant historical developments in education was in 1978 with the decision to unify the national education system. Under this system, schooling in the Maldives was structured on a 5-2-3-2 cycle—five years of primary schooling leading to two years at the middle school level followed by three years of junior secondary school studies and two years of senior secondary
school studies. At the end of the 3-year junior secondary cycle and the 2-year junior secondary cycle students sit the London EDEXCEL GCE Ordinary-level and Advanced-level examinations respectively.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

In January 1980, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced the first five-year primary curriculum. In 1982, a workshop was held to review this curriculum and to produce another one for the middle-school level. The resulting revisions and re-orientation of the primary curriculum led to the introduction of the first National Curriculum (NC) in 1984.

The NC in Maldives covers the primary and middle school cycles in all subject areas. The secondary curriculum content is designed around the O-level and A-level examinations offered by EDEXCEL. However, in the case of Islamic studies, the Dhivehi language and fisheries science, the curricula are designed locally—even for the secondary levels.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR MALDIVES

1. The goals of education follow from the national development goals. They are:
   (a) to develop capable individuals with useful occupational skills, knowledge and attitudes for national development with a sense of dignity about labour, and for preserving the nation’s environmental resources.
   (b) to promote social justice and equity by ensuring universal primary education and equal educational opportunity for all citizens.
   (c) to develop, within an education system based on the principles of Islam, an awareness among all citizens that, as members of the nation, they are also part of the Muslim Ummah.
   (d) to promote in individuals a spirit of independence and self-reliance such that they may seek to enhance the quality of life by discovering ways and means of improving their own health, nutrition, and well-being.
   (e) to strengthen national consciousness, and to preserve the nation’s cultural heritage by promoting desirable cultural values, traditions and the national language.
   (f) to provide facilities for lifelong education for all citizens, so that the individual becomes a self-learner and continues to extend his/her intellectual capacity; technical skills and ability to cope with new technologies and discoveries, and develops an appreciation and understanding of changes now occurring in the social and economic life of Maldives.
   (g) to develop a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of peoples in the national and international communities.

2. The major objectives of education are as follows:
   (a) Expand and strengthen the provision of childhood care and education.
   (b) Provide universal basic education (grades 1-7) by the year 2000.
   (c) Increase the numbers of trained manpower.
   (d) Contribute to the national effort to increase trained manpower.
   (e) Improve educational efficiency through quality enhancement.
   (f) Improve equity in access and quality of education by gender and location.
   (g) Improve curricular relevance to prepare students both for further education and for emerging educational opportunities and to develop appropriate values and attitudes.
   (h) Improve and strengthen the management of the education system.

3. The national philosophy of education includes four main aspects dealing with students’ physical and emotional development, cognitive development, social and moral development and skills development. The subjects are developed so as to enhance these various aspects appropriately. Syllabuses are designed by incorporating these elements in an integrated, cohesive and well-defined manner. The teaching material or textbooks are then prepared with the aim of achieving the objectives of the syllabuses.

4. The National Curriculum offers seven subjects namely: mathematics, English, Dhivehi, Islam, environmental studies, practical arts and physical education at the primary level. At middle-school level, environmental studies is replaced by social studies and general science. There are two levels of secondary education comprising a three-year programme of lower secondary education where students are prepared to take the GCE ‘O’-Level examinations, and two years of upper secondary, grades 11 and 12, after which students take the GCE ‘A’-Level examinations offered by EDEXCEL.

MECHANISMS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The National Curriculum is based on fundamental principles within an Islamic framework. These principles, derived after several stages of consultations, encompass democracy, equity, nationalism, independence, innovation for development and strengthening of the Maldivian society. Based on these fundamental principles, the MOE, in consultation with the National Education Council (NEC), produces national objectives for the education sector (see above). The Educational Development Centre...

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1 Educational Development Centre, Ministry of Education, 1984, Introduction and guidance for teachers on the National Curriculum for Primary and Middle Schools.
4 Ibid.
(EDC) is responsible for translating these national objectives into curriculum statements after appropriate consultations. Once the Minister of Education adopts the curriculum statements as policy, EDC draws up the national frameworks for individual subject areas, the syllabi, textbooks, teacher’s guides and other relevant resources. Subject panels, consisting of practising teachers and subject specialists from various sectors, including the Department of Public Examinations and the Institute of Teacher Education, help the EDC in the process.

As of 1999, EDC is also responsible for specifying the curriculum materials for the secondary levels. The centre develops teaching materials and resources for Islamic Studies, Dhivehi and Fisheries Science. For the other subjects EDC specifies the materials and resources to be used. Even at the secondary level, subject panels assist EDC.

Table 1 shows in detail the interrelationships between the various bodies involved in the adaptation of curricula in the Maldives.

### TABLE 1. The curriculum: who makes which choices?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRAL LEVEL</th>
<th>REGIONAL/PROVINCIAL</th>
<th>SCHOOL LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE)</td>
<td>ISLAND OFFICES (10)</td>
<td>HEADS SUPERVISORS (SP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (EDC)</td>
<td>ATOLL EDUCATION CENTRES (AEC)</td>
<td>TEACHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS (DPE)</td>
<td>ATOLL PRIMARY SCHOOLS (APS)</td>
<td>COMMUNITY PARENT/TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS (PTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTITUTE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION (ITE)</td>
<td>SUBJECT PANELS (P)</td>
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<td>isers</td>
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#### AIMS & OBJECTIVES
- Sets national aims (EDC MOE).
- Sets national codes of behaviour (MOE).
- Trains teachers according to national goals (ITE).
- Ensures school-based supervision and support (MOE).
- Interprets aims to teachers (IO/AEC/APS).
- Interprets national codes of behaviour for pupils and teachers.
- Sets local codes of behaviour for pupils (AEC/APS).
- Interprets aims and objectives to pupils (heads/teachers).
- Interprets local and national codes of behaviour for teachers and pupils (heads).

#### CURRICULUM PLAN
- Writes national syllabus and allocates appropriate syllabus for secondary level (EDC, P).
- Decides time allocations (EDC/MOE). Trains teachers for the implementation of the national curriculum (ITE).
- Ensures achievement of curriculum objectives (MOE).
- Teaches according to national syllabus (AEC, APS).
- Timetable as recommended (AEC, APS).
- Recommends community participation (IO, AEC, APS).
- Makes schemes of work (teachers, SP, heads).
- Timetable according to recommended time allocations (heads, SP and teachers).
- Relate teaching to local community (teachers).

#### METHODS & APPROACHES TO TEACHING
- Prepare teachers’ guides which recommend teaching methodology (EDC, P).
- Moderate teaching methodology through supervision (MOE).
- Train teachers in the use of certain methodology (ITE).
- Conduct workshops for teachers on teaching methodology (AEC, APS).
- Facilitate in conducting field trips and other field work (AO, IO).
- Practices recommended methodologies (teachers).
- Relate methods according to student needs (teachers).
- Relate teaching to local community (teachers).

#### MATERIALS
- Commissions to write textbooks for the national syllabus (EDC, P). Choose textbooks for secondary schools. Produces or commissions to produce audio-visual materials for the national syllabus (EDC).
- Choose educational resources for school use (AEC, APS).
- Initiate locally relevant resource materials (AEC, APS).
- Gives importance to the use of recommended textbooks (heads, SP, teachers).
- Procure resource and supplementary materials (heads, PTA, community/parents).

#### EVALUATION & EXAMINATION
- Set central examinations and expected standards (DPE).
- Train teachers in assessment and evaluation (ITE).
- Conduct regional workshops for teachers on assessment and evaluation (AEC, APS).
- Evaluate and assess all aspects of student achievement (teachers, SP, heads).
- Sets all internal tests and examinations (teachers, SP, heads).
- Marks work and keeps records (teachers, SP, heads).
PROBLEMS FACED BY CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS

Curriculum developers at EDC are responsible for the formulation and development of curriculum materials. Each curriculum developer is responsible for a subject area. The curriculum developer has to design the syllabus, decide on the content and prepare textbooks and teacher’s guides. In conducting these activities, curriculum developers have to overcome a number of difficulties, such as the following:

At the curriculum design level
- Some curriculum developers need further training, particularly in modern curriculum design techniques.
- There is a particular lack in the region of adequate reference materials, journals and curriculum materials used in other countries.
- There is limited access to the Internet.

At the implementation level
- There is a need for strengthening a process of regular feedback from teachers on implementation.
- There are limited opportunities for curriculum developers to observe classroom teaching.

At the evaluation level
- There is a lack of regular interaction with teachers.
- There is a lack of regular feedback from teachers.
- In some instances, teaching is not geared to achieve curriculum objectives.
- In some instances, testing and examinations are not aligned with curriculum objectives.

A RECENT CURRICULUM REFORM: REVISITING THE SOCIAL STUDIES SYLLABI AND TEXTBOOKS

Rationale for change
As local and global developments influence Maldivian society, there is recognition of the need for the syllabi and teaching materials to reflect these changes. In this respect, many emerging issues need to be incorporated into the social studies syllabus. These include environmental issues (with special focus on the effect of greenhouse gases and the rise in sea-level), overpopulation, the challenges of living in a rapidly developing world, international understanding, tolerance, health and population education, gender prejudice and other social, economic and political issues.

Process of reform
In 1990, social studies subject-panel meetings were held to discuss the relevance, appropriateness and accuracy of the existing syllabi. Discussions generated the view that most of the topics in social studies needed to be presented in a new perspective since some of the information was outdated. Thus, the textbooks also needed to be changed. Questionnaires were sent out to all schools that taught this subject. These questionnaires were directed at obtaining a wide range of information on the current materials. Feedback from these schools supported the view of the panel members.

Draft syllabi for social studies were prepared under the guidance of subject experts and the subject panel. After discussions with teachers and the panel, the Ministry of Education approved the final syllabi (see Figure 1) in 1991.

The syllabi were designed to encourage changes in teaching style in order to accomplish the objectives of the National Curriculum. They encourage teachers:
- to develop metacognitive skills and understanding;
- to be problem posers and guides rather than problem solvers;
- to present the material in everyday contexts;
- to encourage wider involvement of community, parents, etc. in the learning process;
- to enhance group work; and
- to encourage process-oriented teaching.

Textbooks and teacher’s guides were prepared and pre-tested with the help of practising teachers according to the requirements of the new syllabi. After the trials, the textbooks and teacher’s guides were published.

The new syllabi and the accompanying textbooks for social studies brought very positive feedback from schools. It was claimed that students’ interest in the subject had increased and that the presentation and layout of the new textbooks stimulated interest, generating lively classroom discussions. Teachers also indicated that the curriculum introduced and enhanced research skills in students, fostering their motivation to learn. It also introduced critical thinking skills, making students more active participants in class. However, some schools noted that the level of English used in the texts was higher than in other subjects, which posed some problems for students.

CONCLUSION

The Maldives islands are widely dispersed and, as access to some of them is not very frequent, curriculum developers do not receive regular feedback from schools. At the implementation stage, curriculum developers need contact with teachers to get first-hand information about the syllabuses or teaching material. To gauge the effectiveness of these materials, systematic evaluation is also of utmost importance. Measures need to be taken to ensure that teachers are informed of the evaluation results so that steps can be taken to remedy the situation.

One of the major constraints in curriculum development is the need for further streamlining of the curriculum development process. In the new framework, EDC’s role will shift more towards the management of curriculum development, while increasing the involvement of experienced teachers in the process. As teachers are the deliverers of the curriculum at classroom level, effective implementation largely depends on them.

Several reforms have already been introduced into the content and teaching methodologies of the national curriculum that came into effect in 1984. However, this curriculum now needs a major revision to adjust and strengthen it to enable our citizens to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. A major nationwide curriculum review activity is planned for April 1999.
FIGURE 1. Revision of social studies textbooks

One of the reforms recently undertaken in the area of social studies can be illustrated the new syllabus designed for use at middle-school level. The new social studies syllabus is designed to try to cope with the rising challenges arising from globalization.

The textbooks based on the previous syllabuses for Grade 6 and 7 social studies were structured as follows:

**Grade 6—Social studies (published in 1986)**
- Unit 1: The family.
- Unit 2: Comparative study.
- Unit 3: The community.
- Unit 4: Internationalism.
- Unit 5: Climatic regions.
- Unit 6: International links.
- Unit 7: Links by commerce to the international world.

**Grade 7—Social studies (published in 1986)**
- Unit 1: First Maldivians.
- Unit 2: Post-conversion.
- Unit 3: Independence of Maldives and our neighbours.
- Unit 4: The Republic.
- Unit 5: Resource development.
- Unit 6: Law and order.
- Unit 7: International relations.

**Component 2: Economic activities and settlement patterns with special reference to Maldives.**

*Aim of the component:* Introducing students to economic geography, human geography and commerce. In introducing these disciplines, students are first required to view the global background and then the Maldivian scene. This component deals with Main Objective no. 5 in the Social Studies Syllabus.
- Unit 5: Some major economic activities in Maldives.
- Unit 6: Economic activities in Maldives.
- Unit 7: Population, environment and migration in Maldives.
- Unit 8: Introduction to commercial activities.

**Component 3: Governments at home and abroad**

*Aim of the component:* Understanding modern governments in the global context and viewing the structure and development of government in Maldives.
- Unit 9: Modern statecraft.
- Unit 10: The structure of Maldivian government.

**Component 4: Towards a global outlook**

*Aim of the component:* Understanding the forces that have shaped and are continuing to shape the global outlook of the contemporary world. Global outlook is a major theme for the whole syllabus and is an important feature in the history of humanity.
- Unit 11: 1. War and Peace in the twentieth century.
- Unit 11: 2. Interaction and regional organizations.

The textbooks based on the new syllabuses for Grade 6 and 7 social studies are structured as follows:

**Grade 6—Social studies (published in 1993)**

*Component 1—Earth the living planet.*
- Unit 1: The universe, the solar system and planet earth.
- Unit 2: The atmosphere, lithosphere and hydrosphere.
- Unit 3: Weather and climate.
- Unit 4: Physical and political geography of the world.

*Component 2—Humanity*
- Unit 5: Astronomy, geography and navigation in the Maldives.
- Unit 6: Origins and development of human cultures.
- Unit 7: The world civilizations.
- Unit 8: Western civilization and the industrial revolution.
- Unit 9: The space age.

*Component 3—Human institutions*
- Unit 10: Society and culture.
- Unit 11: Languages and scripts.
- Unit 12: The religions of humanity.

**Grade 7—Social studies (published in 1994)**

*Component 1: History of Maldives in the perspectives of global development*

*Aim of the component:* Viewing the history of Maldives against the background of global developments. Teachers should encourage students to always view the history of Maldives against the global background and not as an isolated entity.
- Unit 1: The South-Asian heritage of early Maldives.
- Unit 2: Islam and the history of Maldives.
- Unit 3: Maldives and the advent of colonialism in South Asia.
- Unit 4: Nationalism in Asia and the Maldives in the Twentieth Century.