



World Data on Education Données mondiales de l'éducation Datos Mundiales de Educación

VII Ed. 2010/11



Eritrea

Revised version, September 2010.

Principles and general objectives of education

The general objectives of the education system, as outlined in the Government's Macro-Policy of 1994, are:

- to produce a population equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and culture for a self-reliant and modern economy;
- to develop self-consciousness and self-motivation in the population to fight poverty, disease and all the attendant causes of backwardness and ignorance;
- to make basic education available for all.

The main goal is to create a united, prosperous, peaceful and democratic nation by educating women and men who:

- have the various needed skills and commitment to work together to reconstruct the economic, environmental and social fabric;
- have a love of and respect for their nation and all peoples within it, regardless of sex, ethnic group, age, religion or profession; this includes producing citizens who are fully literate in their mother tongue and who know and wish to preserve the best aspects of their culture whilst changing those negative aspects, including working towards the achievement of gender and ethnic equality;
- have a respect for democratic institutions, and who fully and effectively participate in the democratic process, including developing and defending the basic human rights;
- are guided by and adhere to the highest ethical principles;
- have a deep knowledge of and respect for the environment, and the need for its restoration and protection;
- have the ability to wisely use scientific processes and developments so as to develop self-sufficiency in food, and a modern services and industrial sector, based on the principle of environmental sustainability;
- have the opportunity to develop to the fullest their creative potential in all aspects.

In the Human Resources Policy Document (November 2001), the principles of education are defined by the Government as follows: "Education in Eritrea is a fundamental human right and a lifelong process by which all individuals are given opportunities to attain their potential as all-round citizens along with a firm belief in and loyalty to the Eritrea nation. This process includes the development of enlightened, creative, confident and productive individuals with a sense of responsibility and social justice who are capable of contributing towards the development of a united, harmonious, democratic, equitable, modern, technologically advanced and self-reliant Eritrea." (World Bank, 2002).



The revised National Policy on Education, issued in February 2003, articulates the central value placed on gender equality in education. It states that, in basic education (primary and middle levels), “the government will work towards equitable education opportunities to all citizens irrespective of rural-urban, regional, gender and ethnic differences”. In the same policy document, it is stated that: the provision of eight years of basic education is compulsory to all school-age children, and it is free of charge; the five-year elementary education programme is compulsory for all citizens; education will be made all-inclusive and the government will work towards realizing equitable educational opportunities to all citizens irrespective of rural, urban, regional and ethnic differences. (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

In accordance with the **Legal Notice No. 1** of 1991, concerning regulations enacted to determine the establishment and management of non-government schools and their supervision, the Ministry of Education is the organ that implements the educational policies formulated by the State, prepares the national curriculum, and ensures the application of such a curriculum throughout the country.

The **Legal Notice No. 2** of 1991 contains some regulations enacted to determine the relationships between schools and parents and the supervision of schools.

Article 21(1) of the Constitution of Eritrea ratified on 23 May 1997 stipulates that: “Every citizen shall have the right of equal access to publicly funded social services. The State shall endeavour, within the limits of its resources, to make available to all citizens health, education, cultural, and other social services.” Over the years, the Government has established national and sectoral legal frameworks to guide various aspects of the education course. These legal framework documents assure that every citizen has the right to free and quality education at least at the basic education level. (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Administration and management of the education system

The organizational structure of the **Ministry of Education**, which is responsible for primary, secondary and technical and vocational education, comprises five departments namely: General Education; Research and Human Resource Development; Technical Education and Vocational Training; Administration and Finance; and Adult and Media Education. These departments as well as the Minister’s office include divisions and units. Tertiary and higher education is under the supervision of the **National Board for Higher Education**.

At the regional level, in line with the decentralization policy, there are six **Zoba/Regional Education Branch Offices** which are responsible for implementing operational activities, including performance reporting system as well as monitoring of quality and effectiveness within their geographical area. There are also plans for sub-zonal offices, each one responsible for the schools within each sub-zone.

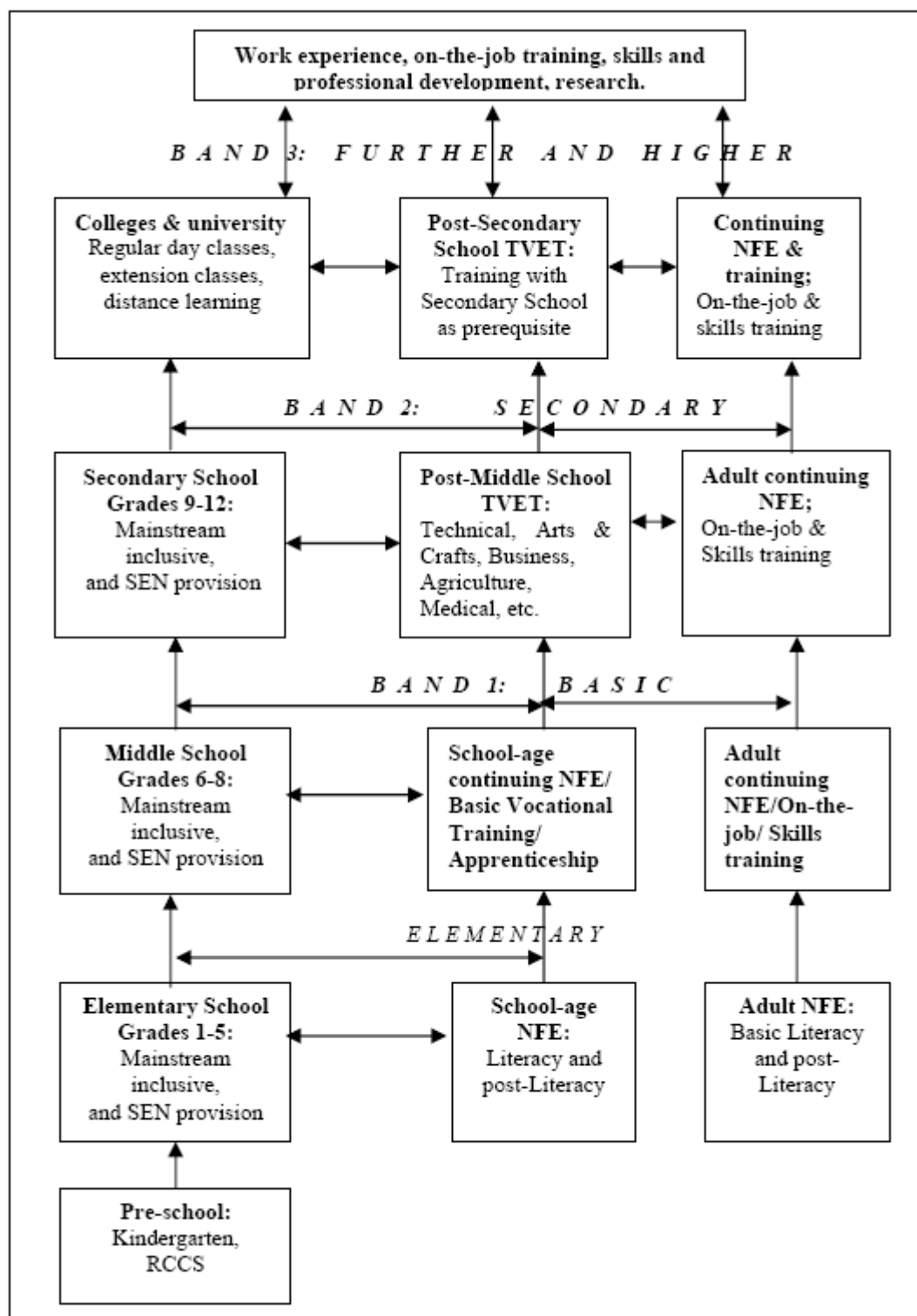


Various professional training programmes are run by other ministries. The most important are those of the **Ministry of Health** (for nurses, pharmacists, village health workers, technicians, etc.) and of the **Ministry of Agriculture**, for a wide range of Ministry staff and also farmers. The **National Union of Eritrean Women** is responsible for women's literacy programmes, and the **National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students** offers a variety of educational programmes. The **Ministry of Information** began broadcasting a British Council-sponsored television course for the teaching of English in late 1995.

Given the shortage of qualified staff existing in all ministries, many NGOs assist with training courses, workshops, etc. The role of the National Union of Eritrean Women and the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, as mentioned above, is especially important in offering a wide range of vocational and, sometimes, academic courses across the country.

Structure and organization of the education system

Eritrea: structure of the education system (2008)



Source: Ministry of Education, 2008.



Pre-school education

Pre-school education lasts two years and is for children aged 5-6. Pre-school provision is extremely limited, with a net enrolment ratio estimated at 14.6% in 2007/08, almost wholly concentrated in urban areas—especially in Asmara, the capital.

Primary education

Primary (elementary) education lasts five years and the official starting age is 7. Elementary education is considered part of the basic education cycle.

Secondary education

Elementary education is followed by three years of junior secondary (middle school), completing the basic education cycle, and four years of senior secondary education (high school, grades 9-12). There are two types of secondary schools, namely science and commerce. At the end of high school, students sit the Eritrean School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE). There is a three-tiered structure for the delivery of technical and vocational education and training (TVET): basic, intermediate and advanced. The duration of the programmes ranges from one to three years.

Higher education

Post-secondary and tertiary education is provided in colleges, technical schools, the National Centre for Vocational Training, the Teacher Training Institute, the University of Asmara and the Eritrea Institute of Science and Technology. The duration of tertiary studies ranges from one-year teacher certificate programmes at teacher training institutes to four-year degree programmes at higher education institutions.

The length of the school year is approximately 200 working days, divided into two semesters (four half-semester). Schools in lowland areas operate six days a week, so as to finish before the very hot season.

The educational process

The medium of instruction at the elementary school is the mother tongue, although currently communities are permitted to choose another language if they wish. However, the language of instruction at the post-elementary level is English. Measures to enforce the standardization of the curriculum across all Eritrean schools have been taken. All community schools must follow the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education.

A National Curriculum Conference took place in 1996, after which the preparation of the new curriculum was begun. At pre-school level, comprehensive curriculum guidelines have already been drawn up. Some changes were introduced into the existing elementary, middle and secondary curricula. Elementary textbooks for the minority languages have been revised. New English books have been prepared for grades 2 and 3 and grades 6-9. New junior secondary school textbooks have been



prepared for science, mathematics, geography, history and, for the first time, civics. Revised secondary school textbooks have also been prepared.

In line with the National Education Reform, a curriculum framework has been designed. (Ministry of Education, 2008).

“A major thrust of the ongoing education reform in the country is the revision of the curriculum to equip the learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to become productive citizens. UNESCO has assisted the Ministry of Education on curriculum reform and teacher development. Specifically, UNESCO with the assistance from the Japan Trust Fund, supported the Ministry and the Asmara Teacher Education Institute through training of a core team of professionals on school-based approaches for the implementation of interactive and learner-centered pedagogy.

The project implemented in five regions (*Zobas*) covers the following areas: i) recruitment and training of trainers drawn from the Asmara Teacher Education Institute, Ministry of Education and *Zoba* (regional) education offices; ii) development of school-level training curriculum based on interactive pedagogy; iii) training of teachers from model schools; iv) development of a training programme for implementation of curriculum initiatives nationwide; and v) support to the Department of Research and Human Resources of the Ministry of Education.

The intervention has made a significant contribution to curriculum implementation and improved school management. Through the workshops and training of teachers and other stakeholders, the project created a better understanding on school management and best educational practices. A lot of training and support materials were developed such as a teachers’ manual on application of interactive pedagogy in the classroom; a compendium of resource materials for curriculum implementation on interactive pedagogy; and modules on school management.” (UNESCO, 2008).

Pre-primary education

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is largely a community responsibility with the government giving functional support, i.e. developing policies, guidelines, programmes, monitoring and teacher training activities. The overall tendency is to encourage non-governmental organizations and non-formal activities in this field. The ECE policy gives much attention to the need and importance of early and extensive investment in health care, cognitive development and socialization.

ECE has been regarded as the first component of the basic education strategy and is organized at two levels—nursery programmes and kindergarten. However, the investment in formal pre-school education has not been addressed properly and the government intervention in the establishment of formal pre-school centres has been very limited. In 1996, many kindergartens run by the municipalities were transferred to private institutions and communities, and some were closed immediately due to lack funds.

Most establishments are situated in urban areas—especially in Asmara—and are controlled by religious institutions. The curriculum emphasizes the holistic



development of the child which includes the physical, cognitive, social and emotional dimensions. Curriculum areas consist of context-appropriate themes rather than about subjects to be thought separately. The themes reflect children's interests in the form of learning corners. Teachers act as facilitators of the learning areas and help children's initiatives. The teaching-learning methods are based on child-centered pedagogy and a developmentally appropriate approach. These place the child at the center of planning with the idea that every thing on the curriculum may reflect the child. The purpose of the developmentally appropriate approach was to keep young children away from rote memorization and routine drill; instead practice the learning of life skills. Methods of the learning strategy include story telling, songs, rhymes poetry, drama and other forms of art or play.

In general, kindergartens (age group 4-6 years) offer programmes lasting 15 hours per week (32 weeks per year); Rural Children's Centers (age group 5-6 years), 6 hours per week (32 weeks per year); and Outreach Activities (age group 5-6 years) consist of two hours per week (32 weeks per year).

The learning environment in most centres is inadequate due to the lack of basic resources and materials used for play. About 99% of the teachers and 64% of the assistants are female. (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Between 2002 and 2004, 211 kindergarten teachers completed pre-service training (the training period being 8 months). Moreover, 275 community caregivers were trained for a month between 2001 and 2005. Such programmes are backed up by shorter courses lasting more or less two to three weeks.

Enrolment has increased from 7,747 in 1993 to 11,581 in 1998, at an average of about 10% yearly. In 1998, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) was estimated at 6.5%. UNESCO Nairobi Office reports that in 2004/05 there were 489 pre-primary schools with an enrolment of 30,744 children (15,322 were boys and 15, 422 girls). There were 1,168 pre-primary teachers, the majority of whom professionally trained. (UNESCO, 2008). In 2007/08, the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 14.6%. (ADF, 2010).

Primary education

Elementary education covers grades 1-5 and is part of basic education. The aims of this level of education are to:

- promote national awareness and support the development of Eritrean national outlook;
- provide basic communication and life skills (including literacy and numeracy) appropriate to every context;
- encourage the development of socially desirable values such as cooperation, responsibility, tolerance and service to others;
- offer the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for the holistic development of the individual and for lifelong learning and productive work in adult life;

- lay the foundation for an understanding and appreciation of science and technology together with the promotion of care and concern for the environment.

The new national curriculum is designed to offer broad, balanced and relevant learning. In order to reflect these broad ideals, the curriculum gives due consideration to the following themes: i) the holistic development of individual learners through the growth of their aesthetic and physical abilities as well as the social, moral and cultural needs; ii) science and technology and its application to everyday life in view of the foreseeable trends and demands of the future; iii) forging cohesive Eritrean national culture that respects Eritrea's multi-cultural nature; and iv) incorporating common core of social values (self-reliance, self-confidence, commitment and perseverance) which flourished during the liberation struggle for independence.

The curriculum offers learners a set of core learning areas organized and sequenced spirally along the levels. Expected learning outcomes and competencies defined in every subject for each grade level ensure such spiral progression. To ensure accessibility as well, the curriculum outlines that mother tongue serves as language of instruction in elementary schools. Starting from the middle school level, English serves as the medium of education. Learners are required as well to develop sufficient competence in English and Arabic by the end of basic education cycle.

Moreover, the curriculum reform in its planning and organization gives due precedence to:

- Cross-curriculum themes such as environmental education which give the curriculum unity beyond subject divisions.
- Subject integration to show the holistic approach to learning, and the relationship that exists between subjects.
- Co-curricular programmes such as the development of affective values, cooperation, and team spirit to complement and strengthen the learning that occurs within the context of formal curriculum.

To a great extent, time allocation in the formal curriculum reflects the weighting given to the various components at the different levels in the school system. At the elementary level, 47% of time is allocated to language, 23% to mathematics, 12.5% to natural sciences, 12.5% to arts and physical education, and 5% to social sciences.

Another feature of the educational reform is its emphasis on learner-centred and interactive pedagogic approaches in the delivery of curriculum content. This strategy is outlined in the Guidelines on Learner-centred and Interactive Pedagogy in the National Curriculum. Furthermore, the process of monitoring progress and achievement is applied through the use of multi-faceted continuous assessment techniques that include oral/written work, project, and dialogue. (Ministry of Education, 2008).

UNESCO Nairobi Office reports that in 2005 there were 377,511 children (167,451 girls and 210,060 boys) enrolled in elementary schools. In 2007/08 the total



enrolment was 314,034 pupils at 783 schools; the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 50%. (ADF, 2010).

Secondary education

Middle level education (grades 6-8) completes the basic education cycle. Middle level has both formal and non-formal forms of provision. Formal middle level education offers a broad-based general education with opportunities for exposure to practically-oriented learning experiences. The non-formal middle school provision allows for a diversity of learning arrangements while at the same time making it possible for learners to move between formal and non-formal learning activities.

At the end of the basic education cycle (e.g. grade 8), an assessment of learning standards through a National Examination is conducted. The National Examination also serves as entrance for secondary school. The aims of middle school are to:

- further develop national consciousness, unity and loyalty to the nation;
- consolidate the development of basic communication and problem-solving skills;
- foster the spirit of creativity, self-confidence and self-reliance;
- prepare learners for social and civic responsibilities within a framework of democracy and social justice;
- provide learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for personal development and productive work;
- prepare a sound basis for further learning and human resource development;
- promote the study of science and technology along with the development of values and attitudes for responsible utilization of the environment.

The main features of the curriculum are similar to those of elementary education. At the middle school level, 34% of time is allocated to language, 17% to mathematics, 14% to natural sciences, 12% to arts and physical education, and 17% to social sciences.

The aims of secondary education (grades 9-12) are to:

- foster national consciousness and cohesion through an informed and enlightened understanding of the Eritrean People's collective culture, experience and aspirations;
- offer the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills, and the application of these abilities to meet personal and societal challenges;
- instil a sense of self-discipline, self-confidence, self-reliance, creativity, initiative and personal responsibility;
- assist learners to appreciate and assume civic and social responsibilities in line with the principles of democracy, social justice and service to the nation and to others;
- promote the development of the learners' potential in line with their needs and interests.



- enable learners to develop skills of problem-solving, inquiry, information gathering, analysis, interpretation, communication and other essential learning process;
- lay a firm foundation for further education and the world of work;
- prepare a sound basis for an understanding and appreciation of science and technology together with the development of knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment to protect and improve the environment

Secondary education prepares for both further education and the world of work. At this level, the curriculum provision is guided by general core conceptions of balance between content and transferable skills. This level has both formal and non-formal forms of provision as well. The formal secondary education curriculum is organized around core, enrichment and advanced placement courses. Work-related practical studies with relevance to individual learner interests and work-related development needs are an integral part of the curriculum provision. On completion of secondary education, school leavers can have the option of either seeking employment or pursuing further education and training in a less differentiated division between academic and vocational pathways.

The Ministry of Education has been exerting efforts to produce semi-skilled and skilled workers with the aim of creating opportunities for gainful employment. Thus, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) aims at providing the technical and vocational knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, infrastructural and service sector development needs of the country, and thereby laying a firm foundation for producing a pool of skilled, disciplined, adaptable and technologically-aware workers with the potential of effecting qualitative improvements in the life of Eritrean people. In addition to formal TVET programmes, non-formal skills development and training forms are also available. Women, youth and other disadvantaged groups of the population are main beneficiaries of this scheme. There is a three-tiered structure for delivery of TVET: basic, intermediate and advanced. The duration of the programmes is between one and three years.

The Ministry of Education reports that in 2006/07 the total enrolment at the middle school level was 178,807 boys and 152,731 girls, and the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 45.7% and 38.9% respectively. At the secondary level, the total enrolment was 75,800 students, for a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 21.4% and a net enrolment ratio (NER) of 14.2% (25.6% for boys and 17.1% for girls). In the same year, total TVET enrolment (intermediate technical and agricultural, and advanced levels) was 1,499 learners. (Ministry of Education, 2008).

In 2007/08, there were 144,031 pupils enrolled at 245 middle schools and the NER was estimated at 25%. NER for girls at this level was lower than that for boys, standing at 23% compared to 27% for boys. The GER was estimated at 44.7%, which suggests a substantial overage enrolment at the middle level. In the same year, the NER at the secondary level was estimated at 15%. (ADF, 2010).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Curriculum research findings from a study carried out in 1996 have shown a weak positive correlation between achievement scores and age in grades 1 and 5. No gender-based differences in performance were detected in grade 1, but such differences become significant in all subjects at higher grades. In grade 1—and particularly in grade 5—the major determinant of variations in scores is the type and performance of the school being attended. Data indicated that high school students showed low performance in questions demanding application and other higher-order skills, while they do better in factual recall. The overall competence in English has improved greatly. (Ministry of Education, 1999).

The introduction of new curriculum in conjunction with learner-centred and interactive pedagogical approaches has improved students' learning outcome. Promotion rate has increased. Dropout and failure, in general, has been reduced as well. The promotion rate for elementary, middle and secondary schools in 2006/07 was respectively 78.5%, 77.9%, and 82.2% respectively. The average dropout rate at the elementary level was 6.2% for boys and 4.8% for girls; at the middle level, it was 7.8% and 6.1% respectively. The average repetition rate at the elementary level was 16.1% for boys and 15.1% for girls; at the middle level, it was 15.9% and 14% respectively. (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Teaching staff

In order to improve educational quality, pre- and in-service teacher training are a top priority.

Since 1991, the number of teachers at the elementary, middle and secondary school levels has increased by 53%, 21% and 43%, respectively. There are large numbers of ex-fighters in the teaching profession, in addition to university students teaching as part of their National Service. An increasing number of expatriate teachers have been recruited at the middle and secondary levels to teach English, mathematics and sciences, or as methodology trainers at the elementary level. These volunteers are making a significant contribution to changing the traditional teacher-centred methodology in the classroom.

The minimum teaching qualifications are: i) basic education level: one-year certificate from the Teacher Training Institute (TTI); ii) middle school level: diploma from Asmara University (two-year programme on a full-time basis); iii) secondary level: bachelor's degree (three-year programme).

The University of Asmara is responsible for the training of middle and secondary school teachers and directors. The TTI is responsible for basic education teacher training.

Under the revised regulations issued for the 1995/96 academic year, teachers at all levels have to teach thirty to thirty-five periods a week, and are obliged to stay



on the school premises throughout the day. This is a measure aimed at encouraging teachers to spend more time preparing lessons. Teachers' working and living conditions are far from ideal in most places. Housing is a serious problem, in addition to the poor physical condition of many schools, the remoteness of some areas, the lack of textbooks and equipment, and large classes. Most new schools, however, have built in teachers' accommodation.

Recruitment is through several paths, one of which is direct entry into the Asmara Teacher Training Institute (TTI). Candidates have to pass an entrance exam, have attained a minimum 1.8 GPA in the school-leaving examination, and an average of over 70% in their secondary school examination scores. Another path is the recruitment of university graduates to teach in secondary schools. In addition, all university students currently have to teach for one year in middle or secondary schools as part of their National Service. Teachers are also recruited from overseas. One path is for expatriate volunteers, supplied by a variety of organizations and paid local salaries or allowances. Another is the direct recruitment of some expatriates from developing countries under special contracts.

The number of qualified teachers and school management personnel has increased over the past years, and the total teaching force was 11,189 teachers in 2006/07. The majority serve at the levels of elementary (6,933 teachers, of whom 87.1% qualified) and middle school (2,478 teachers, of whom 36.8% qualified). In the same year, there were 1,778 teachers at the secondary level, of whom 85.5% were qualified.

Middle schools face a real shortage of qualified teachers. The total annual output of the teacher education colleges cannot meet the demand created due to the expansion and reform of the education system. The education sector continued to face constraint in this regard in terms of both number and quality of training, particularly at the basic education level.

In line with the implementation of the new curriculum, the Ministry of Education has taken initiatives to produce qualified and well-trained teachers. The measures taken include: i) development of teacher education and development master plan; ii) expansion of college education; and iii) provision of in-service staff development programmes in order to upgrade teachers professionally and flourish a culture of interactive and learner-centred pedagogic practice.

As part of the Distance Education Program for Elementary Teachers, the Ministry trained a large number of uncertified elementary school teachers. Recently, the Ministry launched Open and Distance Education Programmes as part of the in-service training. About 2,000 middle school teachers will be upgraded to the diploma level. (Ministry of Education, 2008).



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Web resources

- Ministry of Education: <http://www.erimoe.gov.er/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010. Site not accessible.]
- National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students: <http://www.eriyoung.org.er/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010.]
- University of Asmara: <http://www.uoa.edu.er/> [In English. Last checked: September 2010. Very slow connection.]
- For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO:* <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>