

THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN IN PNG

Tadatoshi HIRAKAWA

Formal Childhood Education

The aim of this paper is to report on the educational environment of children from childhood to adolescent in PNG from the viewpoint of two cultures; the traditional village and the modern school. The ego-identity status of male students in PNG will be also reported.

The formal education of children in PNG is made up of Community Schools, Provincial High Schools, National High Schools and Universities (Fig.1).

According to "Education Annual Report" (Department of Education, 1985a) of a government publication, there are 2358 Community Schools, 34 International Primary Schools, 113 Provincial High Schools, 2 International High Schools, 4 National High Schools, 8 Technical Colleges, 92 Vocational Training Centers, 9 Teacher Education Colleges, the University of Papua New Guinea and the Papua New Guinea University of Technology.

About 80% of the 7-year-old children were enrolled in the first grade of Community Schools in 1984. They should go to Community Schools at the age of 7 years, but about 25% of the enrolled children quit before they reach the 6th grade. This means that many thousands of children will never complete Community Schools. The reasons are partially due to the Schools themselves, but mainly to the parents' ignorance concerning the value of a basic education. It is also interesting that children in Grade 1 are not always 7 years (SAIL, 1984). Fig. 2 shows the number of pupils based on 1984 enrollment.

The purpose of Community School is to educate the majority of children for useful lives in their villages and only a minority for further studies in high school. The curriculum of Community Schools consisted of English, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Expressive Arts, Health, Physical Education and Religious Instruction. However, there are many problems on the subjects in discussing with teachers and old men of the village. Many of the subjects taught in Community School are useful in the school, but not in the village community. So, Community Life was adopted as a new subject in place of Social Science. The newly introduced subject is seen as bridging the gap between school and village community and includes the teaching of agriculture and cultural activities suitable to the local village and the achieving of the ethnic identity. So it is very effective when taught by teachers originally from the village.

Provincial High School have been regarded as the secondary education agency to develop the nation. At Independence in 1975, there were 78 Provincial High Schools and in 1985 there were 113, an increase of 45%. The percentage of students proceeding to Provincial High School was 18% in 1980 as seen in Fig. 2. Recently, more academic skills such as English and Mathematics have been required rather than practical skills such as Agriculture and Economics.

The number of National High Schools are only 4 in PNG and 9.5% of all 10th Grade stu-

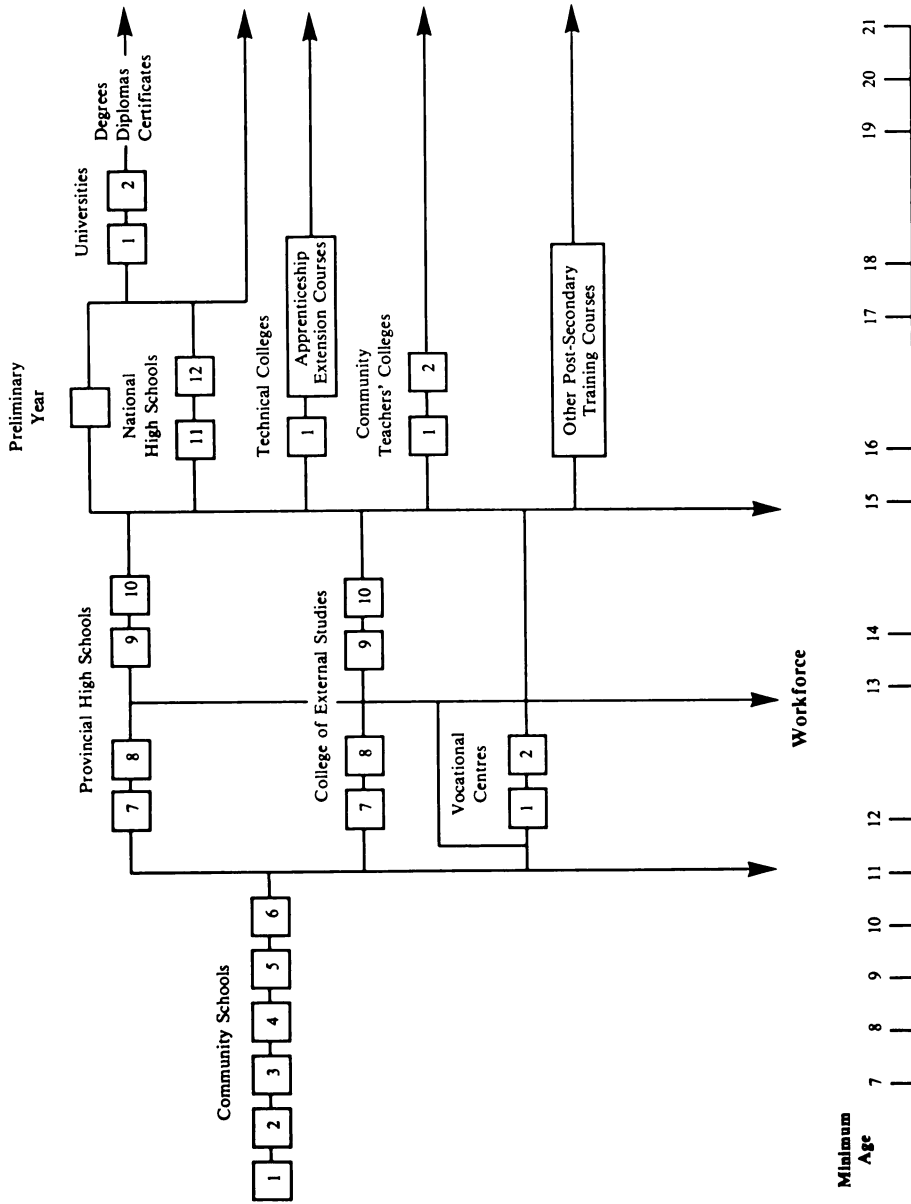
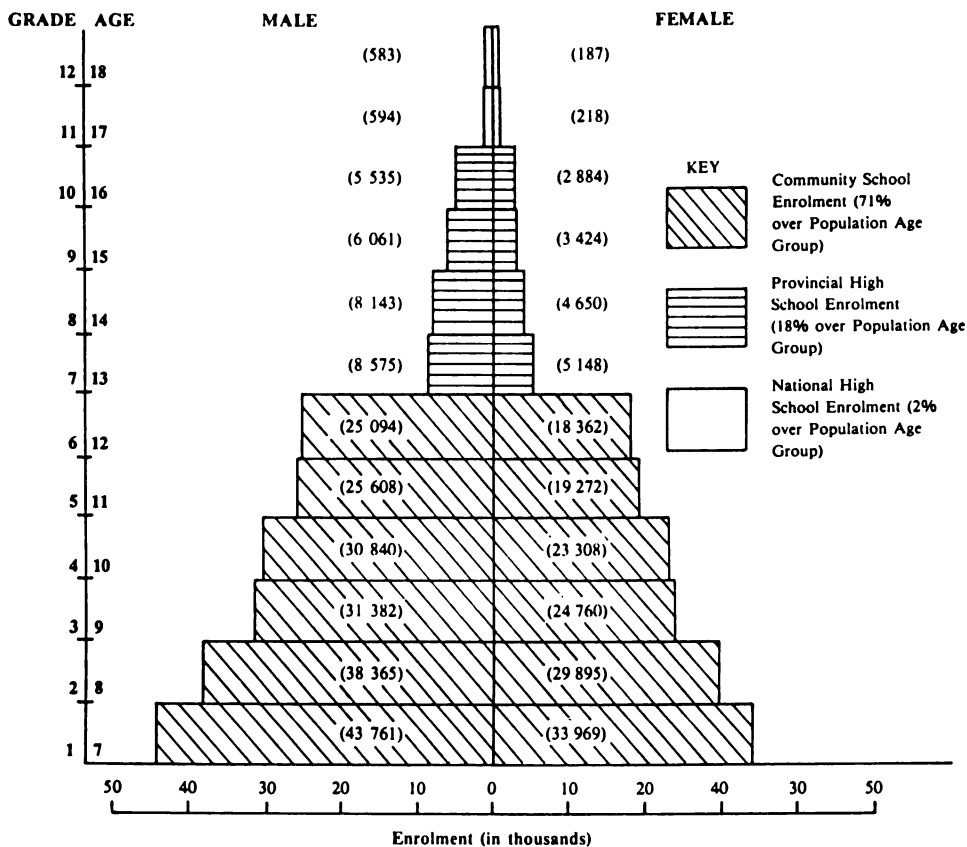


Fig. 1. The structure of the education system (Department of Education, 1985b).



Note: Total population in age group (93 000) grade 1 only

Fig. 2. The national education system pyramid – community, provincial high and national high schools – based on 1980 population census, Papua New Guinea (Department of Education, 1985b).

dents have been selected for these schools. A total of 1,600 students are attending the four National High Schools in PNG and they have to study for 2 years there. The aims of National High Schools are as follows;

1. To train, prepare, and educate young Papua New Guineans for further studies at the two universities and other institutions in PNG.
2. To train, prepare, and educate young Papua New Guineans to meet manpower needs both in the private and public sectors.
3. To develop and foster a spirit of national unity by drawing students together from all over the country for a two-year course of studies.

Papua New Guinea now has a total of 92 Vocational Training Centers. This system is defined as any organized learning activity which happens outside the classroom and enables people to gain knowledge and skills which will help them improve themselves and their communities. Since formal education including Community School and High School reaches only a small

proportion of the population, Vocational Training Centers aim to provide the educational opportunities for young and old people who have never been to school or want to improve their skills and life style. It has a variety of two-year courses including Agriculture, Machine and Carpentry. There were 4,940 males and 1,862 females enrolled in Vocational Training Centers in 1984.

Cultural Causes of Absenteeism in Community Schools

In PNG, there are many children unenrolled in or who have dropped out of Community School. About 75% of children in PNG who began Grade 1 reached Grade 6. BRAY & BOZE (1982) suggested the following causes for not going to school according to their research in the Western Province.

1. The clearest reason for dropping out of school was death or disease or being expelled from their village for some reason.
2. Also, the distance from their house to school is another factor. Many drop-outs in one village took about three hours by canoe to get to school. Especially, in the wet season, some took up to five hours.
3. The life style of the village critically affects school education. Many adults in one village used to spend a lot of time hunting in the mountains. They would often leave their children behind for two or three months or take them hunting with them.
4. Many children were needed to work to provide food for their families, and so they were too busy to go to school.
5. Tuition costs were another reason for absenteeism from school. Since their parents do not receive cash from their work, they cannot pay the minor school fees.
6. Some children were mocked in school, because their parents' or their own behavior was very odd.
7. In some cases, trouble between pupils and teachers caused absenteeism from school. One delinquent boy attempted to stab the principal with a dagger. In such cases, absenteeism is regarded as the best solution, and so many teachers do not try to remedy poor attendance.
8. Similarly, a major factor leading to the high truancy was said to be clan rivalry among some villages and ethnic conflict. Whenever children of two different and hostile villages go to the same school, ethnic troubles often occur in the school. Each village want to establish schools solely for their own children to save their ethnic identity.

Conversely, the parents of diligent children who always went to school were asked why their children went to school. They stressed the values of education as follows;

1. People who obtained advanced education would acquire good jobs and large incomes.
2. The village pastors are usually people with a higher education.
3. Frequently community school teachers earn large incomes and have cars in the villages.

Interview of Identity Status to Students

The identity statuses of ten male students were determined by means of a short time semi-structured interview evaluating the presence or absence of decision-making (crisis) and the extent of a subject's investment (commitment) in his occupation, contribution to this country in

the near future, and religion. Identity status is a term applied by MARCIA (1966) to the four ways of coping with adolescent identity crisis described by ERIKSON (1963).

These interviews were conducted on the campuses of UNITEC and UPNG by the author. Most of them didn't experience a crisis and didn't have a commitment to their occupations in the near future. Ideology on politics was omitted by some reasons. Two students were judged as being a Foreclosure status which had experienced no crisis, yet had firm commitments, and set unrealistically high goals on their occupations in the future. The rest of them could not be judged as belong to any categories; Identity achievement, Moratorium, Identity confusion. One of the major factors leading to such a conclusion was the small number of occupations available in PNG for the graduates.

Summary

The children's educational environment in PNG was reported on in this paper. The reasons for absenteeism were discussed in terms of cultural background from a paper of BRAY & BOZE (1982). Vocational Training Centers were also introduced as a supplementary education system.

Identity statuses of ten students of two universities were estimated in accordance with a version of MARCIA's (1966) method. It was very difficult to categorize them by MARCIA's (1966) category because of the difference of social background, but two students were regarded as being a Foreclosure status by the author.

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