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EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE:
SINGAPORE (28-31 MAY, 1997).

Country Paper - Solomon Islands

Presented by Mr J M Ramoni, Under Secretary (Special Duties) of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development.

INTRODUCTION:

Solomon Islands has a land area of 28,369 square Kms. and total area of 1,632,964 Sq.Km. (land and sea). There are about seventy languages and dialects spoken with English as official language. The population was projected at 380,000 in 1996. Approximately 85% of the population live in rural areas while 15% in urban or semi-urban settlements.

Average temperature in Honiara (Capital) is 26.7°C and average rainfall stood at 2.034 mm. There are many islands with rain forests and low lying atolls with beautiful coral reefs.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE TEACHING:

In Solomon Islands children enter the formal school system at age 6 (Primary one) and continue for six years. But before that they have undergone Kindergarten at age 3 and Pre-School classes at age 5.

At the end of the sixth grade at Primary School level all children sit a national examination to enter Secondary Schools.

Teaching of Science begins at Standard/Grade one in primary schools for children who are six or seven years old.
RATIONALE FOR TEACHING SCIENCE:

"The study of Science and Agriculture is an essential component of the Solomon Islands' Primary Curriculum because it is an ideal vehicle for the development of observation and problem solving skills, the understanding of the natural environment and the manipulation of it to produce food, and the application of technology to daily life. Children enjoy studying Science and Agriculture if they are allowed to ask questions based on their own observations and suggest solutions to problems. Teachers will enjoy teaching Science and Agriculture if they are prepared to pose questions which will make children think, to allow children to manipulate equipment, and to help children to develop interest and curiosity in the world about them" (Primary Science/Agriculture Syllabus, 1987).

The above rationale reflects the approach and teaching of Science throughout various levels of the Primary School System. It encompasses children investigations, local environmental studies and local agricultural studies. Learning of Science in Solomon Islands also involve simple physics and chemistry but to a lesser extent while simple biology is well catered for throughout the System.

Children enter Secondary Schools at ages 12 and 13. Currently, two thirds of pupils attending Secondary Schools are boys while one third are girls. This ratio does not reflect who is taking Science because the subject is compulsory throughout the Secondary School System. Thus, Science is compulsory for pupils of ages 12/13 to 16/17 or pupils of form one to form five.

Specialisation occurs at Form 6 where there is Form 6 Science and Form 6 Arts. Pupils may have an option not to take Maths with Science but not usual.

Due to lack of Science teachers vocational Science Courses are rarely available in schools.
SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY:

Currently, most communities in Solomon Islands have little direct connection with Secondary Schools. This is because most Secondary Schools are boarding and located in different islands. Nevertheless, most parents really wish their children to learn Science and to do well in the subject. However only parents who receive higher education may assist their children to learn Science.

There are little or no links between schools and local communities and the situation is the same for Science education in schools with local industry, local agriculture, local ways of living, etc.

CULTURAL RELEVANCE:

The Solomon Islands' Science Curriculum is designed to fit well with local situations and interests but whether this intention is achievable is yet to be seen.

The Science Curriculum is liked by both boys and girls.

POLITICAL ANXIETIES AND MOVEMENTS FOR CHANGE:

Solomon Islands' parents are worried about their children's failure rate at foundation and degree levels in universities.

Apparently, half or more of Solomon Islands' students enrolled in Science Courses at university level failed.

The government and people of Solomon Islands want change in the teaching of Science to improve the performance of our student scholars at higher education levels.

POPULARISATION OF SCIENCE:

The Science Curriculum in Solomon Islands belongs to schools and is alien to the masses of the population. Thus, there is no popularisation of Science amongst both women and men.

There are no non-formal Science education programmes exist in Solomon Islands.
SOME THOUGHTS:

People of Solomon Islands have different beliefs and interpretation of how things happen in their world around them. Superstition has been a phenomena in Solomon Islands’ culture for centuries. This has far great impact on interpreting how things happen around us.

Solomon Islanders take things for granted even up to modern times. Scientific interpretation is not part of Solomon Islands’ Culture.