REMOTE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

THE HOME SCHOOLING PACKAGE IN VANUATU

Survey Report
2020
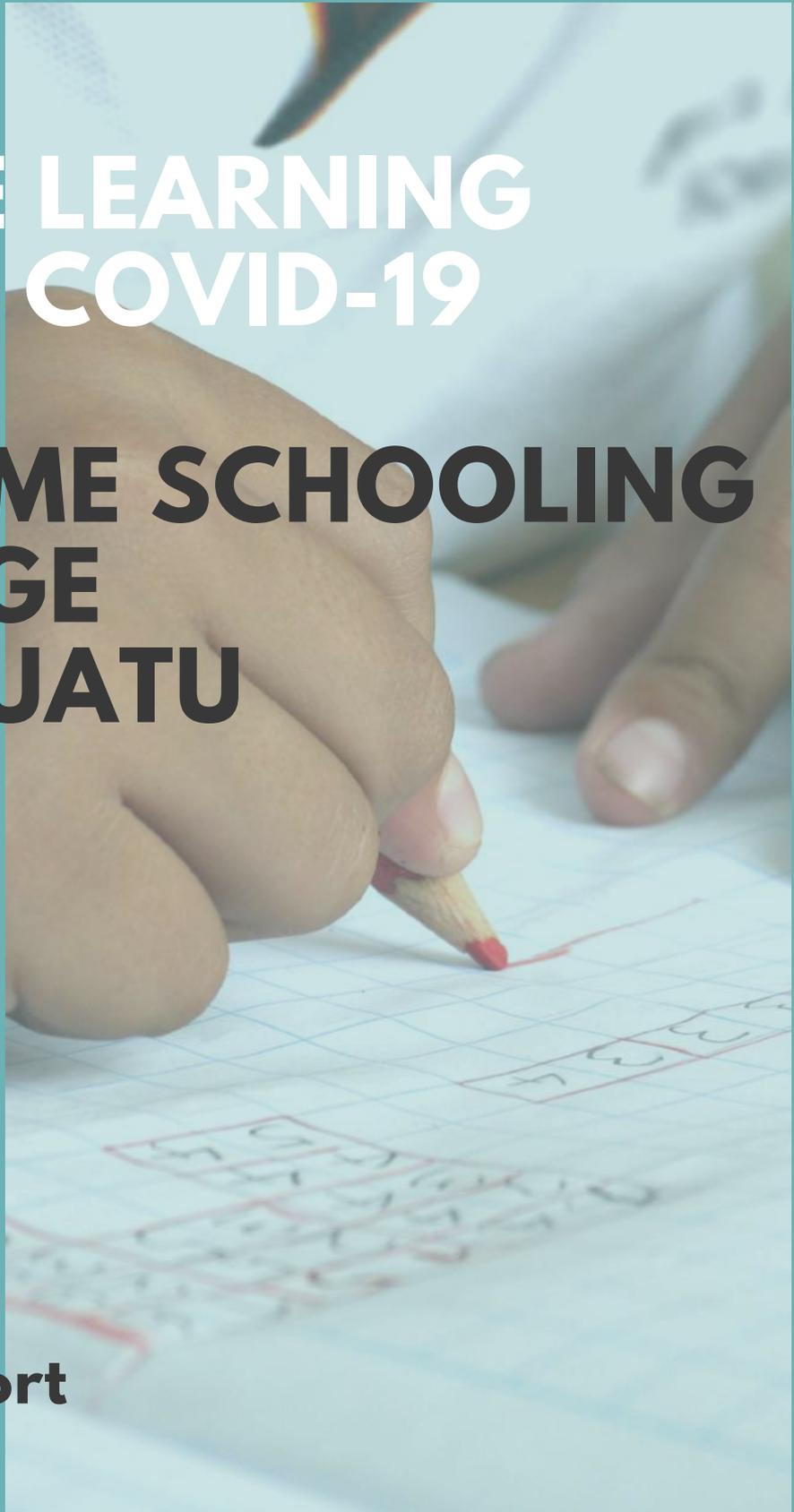
KoBLE | Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen

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Introduction

A national survey was undertaken by a team of researchers hosted by Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen, KOBLE, a national education coalition in Vanuatu, that investigated the experience of students, schools and communities participating in the Home Schooling Package (HSP) program trial due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was introduced throughout government schools in Vanuatu as pandemic restrictions were implemented from March 2020 and there was a need for a rapid shift to remote learning.

This research study serves as a formative evaluation of the program to inform development of a national home schooling policy and strategy.

The study looked at four interlinked levels of engagement on the HSP:
- The experiences of **students** during the period of remote learning through the HSP.
- The experiences of **schools and teachers** to shift to a remote learning modality through the development of a HSP, and their observations on student educational progress during the remote learning period.
- The observations and experiences of **parents and carers** to support their children in HSP learning.
- The experiences and perspectives of **education stakeholders and authorities** to deliver the HSP.

This report summarises the key findings from the survey and makes recommendations towards developing a cohesive and inclusive national home schooling package in Vanuatu, one that will effectively support continuity of education during pandemic and disaster response. The report primarily targets the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training and education actors responsible for the education sector, yet also provides valuable insight to promote lessons learnt within the school community (for schools, teachers, families and communities) to improve future HSP delivery.

Acknowledgements

Background

In March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic exploded globally, almost 1.6 billion children or 87 percent of the global student population were affected by school closures in nearly 165 countries around the world, and 60 million teachers had to work from home (UNESCO, 2020). The bulk of these children are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, but there are also millions of students affected at the pre-primary and tertiary education levels and the statistics are likely to escalate exponentially by the day (Winthrop, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

In Vanuatu, the first lockdown and closure of schools was ordered by the caretaker Minister of Education and Training on the 23rd of March in Shefa, Sanma and Tafea provinces. Vanuatu has implemented strict border and traveller restrictions; as of November 2020, Vanuatu has confirmed only one case of COVID-19, isolated in returned traveller quarantine.

In March, teachers in Shefa, Sanma and Tafea were instructed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to develop home schooling packages for each class, however, the majority of them were not trained to develop these materials. HSP materials were also developed in Penama and Malampa provinces following the devastating impact of TC Harold in April 2020, during which many schools were severely damaged.

The School Based Management Unit at the MoET was given the responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of HSPs, and to date, two surveys have been conducted in Shefa and Tafea provinces. In summary, the major findings of the surveys were:

- While the majority of schools and students engaged in the HSP, there were incidences of poor engagement, and limited support provided to students.
- Majority of parents interviewed stated that they had an adequate level of knowledge to support students, however 25% stated that they need more support.
- No guidelines were provided resulting in a wide variety of HSP formats.

The survey findings indicate a lack of disaggregation in the data and therefore lacked analysis of potentially significant factors influencing engagement in the HSP program. For example, the following were not sufficiently analysed: disability status and special needs of students, parents' literacy level and conflicting commitments, and local infrastructure and resources available.

The Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen (KOBLE) therefore proposed to work with the MoET to design and conduct a further study to explore these outstanding concerns and develop lessons learnt from the HSP program trial.

Vanuatu Education Context Fast Facts

CURRENT EDUCATION STATISTICS

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 'EDUCATION STATISTICS: BASIC TABLES OF 2019'. HTTPS://MOET.GOV.VU

	ECCE	PRIMARY (1-6)	SECONDARY (7-14)
TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	863	479	111
TOTAL SCHOOL ENROLMENT	16,455	54,820	21,379
	8,348 BOYS 8,097 GIRLS	28,988 BOYS 25,832 GIRLS	10,426 BOYS 10,953 GIRLS
TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS	1,314	1,928	988
	50 MALES 1,264 FEMALES	799 MALES 1,129 FEMALES	560 MALES 428 FEMALES
NET ENROLMENT RATE	86.6%	96.1%	43.2%

Source: data derived from Ministry of Education and Training, 'Education Statistics: Basic Tables of 2019'. https://moet.gov.vu

Survey Methodology

Design

The study employed a mixed methods approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods for triangulation purposes. The research sample aimed to be representative, targeting five key participant groupings: students, teachers, parents/carers, principals and key stakeholders (provincial education officers and community leaders).

Research methods utilised included: literature review of existing survey findings and instructions for HSP development; a survey instrument administered via Kobo Toolbox; key informant interviews; focus group discussions; and, observations.

Place-based case studies were then constructed to demonstrate the experiences of location specific school communities with particular characteristics including local infrastructure, size of school, and proximity to urban areas and services.

The data collection was conducted from July to October 2020 by local NGO staff and Youth Action Researchers (hosted by KOBLE) in cooperation with Shefa Education and MoET staff.

Research questions

A series of high level research questions guided the research process. These were:

1. **What is the most effective form of HSP in Vanuatu?**
2. **What support do students require for effective learning through HSP?**
3. **What resources do schools and teachers require to deliver the HSP?**

Key guiding assumptions

The study made several assumptions that were tested through the research, including:

- Challenge of Vanuatu's dispersed population, diverse terrain and remote geographical locations makes delivery of HSP materials difficult without significant resources allocated to transportation.
- Limited and unreliable telecommunications and radio communications access in many communities within each province may create inequity for electronic/digital HSP modalities.
- Limited infrastructure and resources in many schools and communities further restricts HSP delivery. For example, printing and photocopy services.
- Parents and carers are often employed or engaged in full time or part time work which can affect their ability to support their child's learning. Further, many parents and carers may not have the skills or capacity to do so regardless of time available.
- Diverse cultural perspectives and practices may influence the delivery and effectiveness of HSP.
- Diverse living conditions, and home and community spaces. This can be a constraint but also an opportunity to reimagine HSP in informal and outdoor environments.
- Limited financial access to support HSP delivery such as phone data, transport and other materials.
- Complexity through the number of languages spoken and used in instruction in schools throughout Vanuatu (French, English, Bislama and vernacular languages).
- Students with disability or other learning difficulties experience increased disadvantage.

Sample

The research team selected Sanma and Shefa provinces as the sites of the study, with advice from education authorities for the selection of schools/school communities. The study aimed to achieve a representative sample by drawing on participants and schools located in the four location categories: urban, peri-urban, rural and remote.[1]

The survey instruments were administered to 998 people across the two provinces, and observation, in depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in several of school communities selected. Further, a series of interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with educational authorities not linked to specific school communities.

Detailed information regarding the sample is provided in the next section.

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[1] Urban: developed, densely populated area where most inhabitants are engaged in non-agricultural activities
Peri-urban: an area located immediately adjacent to a city or urban area
Rural: a geographical region outside the urban area, characterised by countryside and an agricultural environment
Remote: areas that are far away in distance from urban areas, or considerably secluded

Limitations

The major limitations of the research are:

- This survey aims to generalise for the entire Vanuatu public education context, however the survey population was limited to the provinces of Shefa and Sanma, perhaps best characterised as the two provinces with the greatest level of access to infrastructure, services and connectivity in Vanuatu (however, access is not uniform within provinces).
- Due to software problems, some questions were recorded with a smaller sample than initially intended.
- Potential researcher bias in the translation and administration of questions, and interpretation of participants' answers. The research team endeavoured to maintain high quality control over survey administration and enumerator processes, and this was supported by adequate training, verification and validation processes.

Demographics of Study Participants

The survey recorded 998 respondents in total, from Shefa and Sanma provinces. There were also at least 50 focus group discussions held with over 500 participants in total, many of whom also completed the survey on an individual basis. Additionally, 12 key informant interviews were conducted with key stakeholders.

The following infographic represents the sample disaggregated in different ways such as by participant group, by location, by level of schooling and by gender.
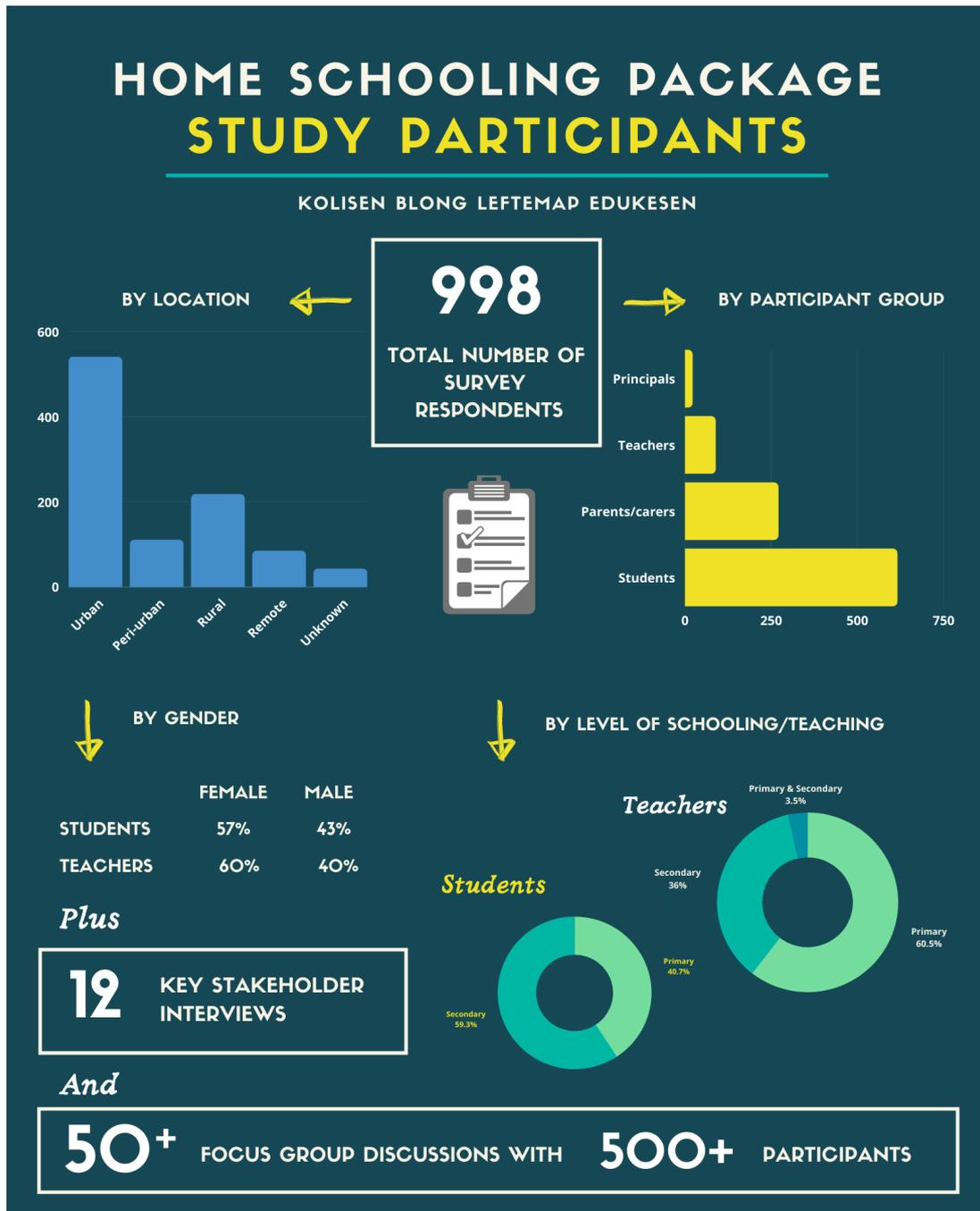
Research sites
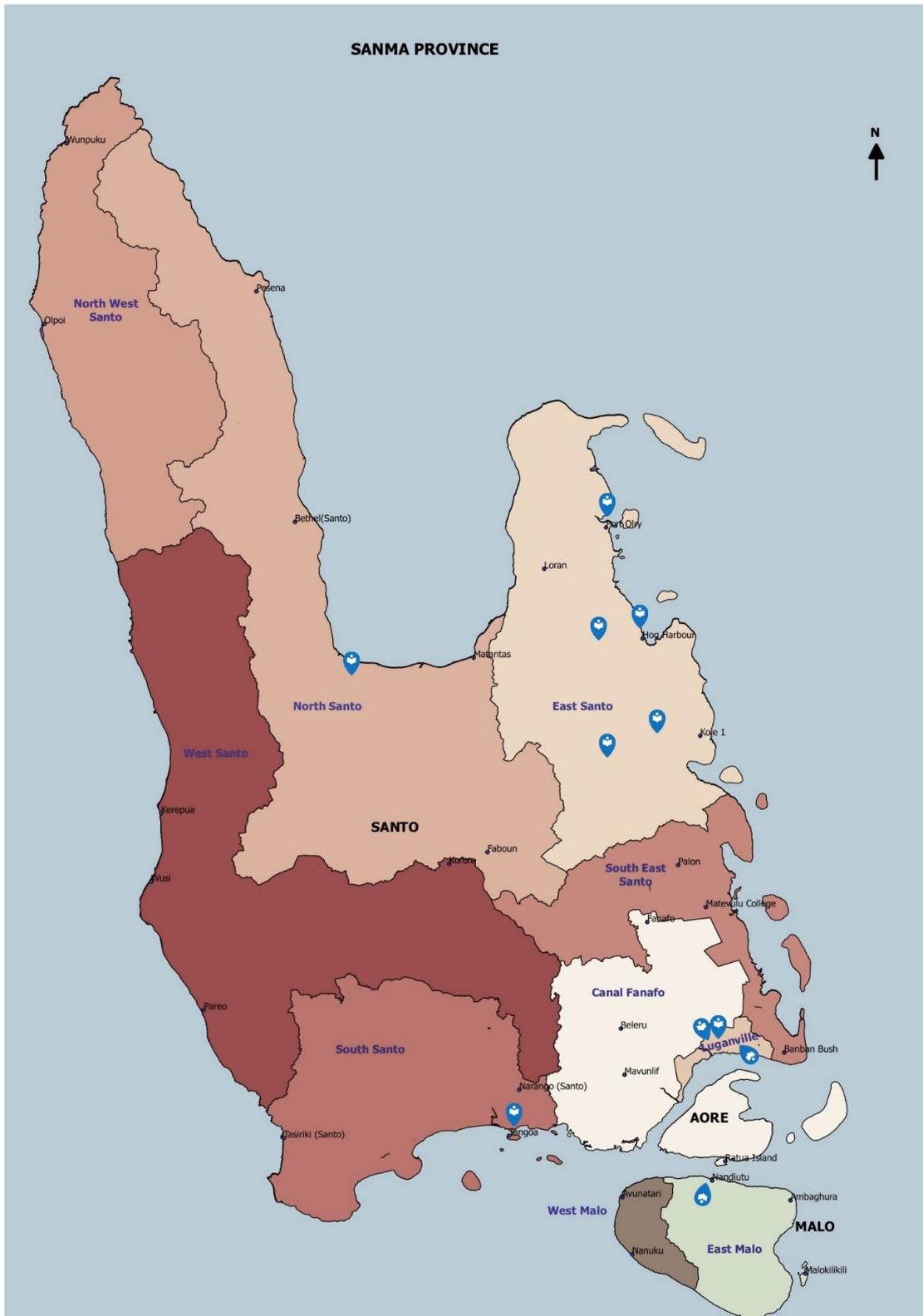
Map 1: Sanma Province. Schools represented in the study are identified by blue pin icons.
Source: Vanuatu National Statistics Office (www.vnso.gov.vu)
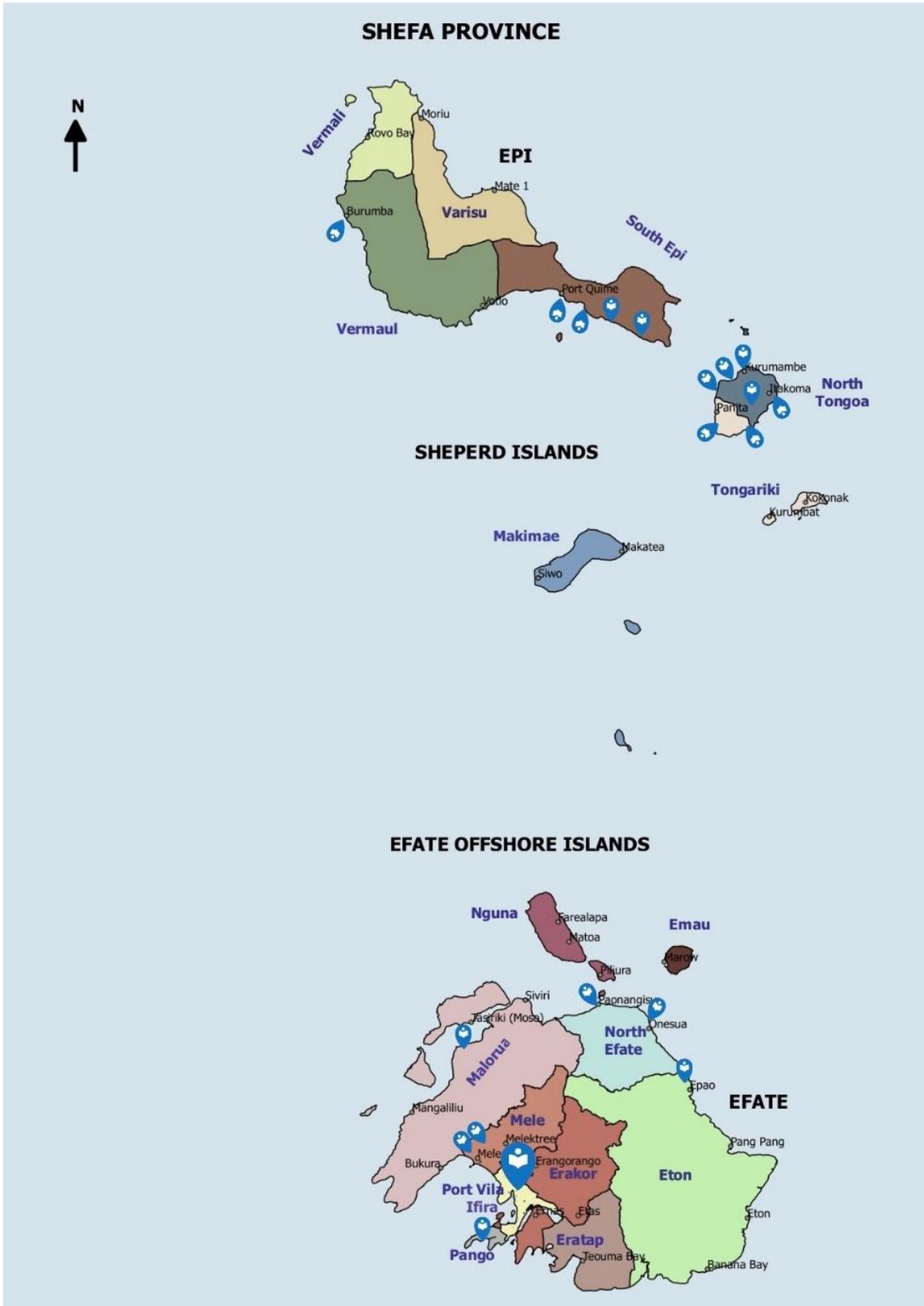
Map 2: Shefa Province. Schools represented in the study are identified by blue pin icons. For the urban area of Port Vila, only one pin is shown, representing the 19 schools included in the study.
Source: Vanuatu National Statistics Office (www.vnso.gov.vu)

Key Findings

"At home I have no study space. My house is overcrowded and there is a lot of disturbance."

(Student, Survey Respondent, urban – Efate Island, August 2020)

Part 1: Students

Almost all (98.5%) student survey respondents received the Home Schooling Package from their teacher/school. Students reported the format that HSP was received in: 97% received as a hard copy package and 9% received as an online package (6% of those students received the HSP as both hard copy and online).

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET

Of the responses to the question of whether a student has access to computers or tablets at home, only 40 students reported having access to a device.
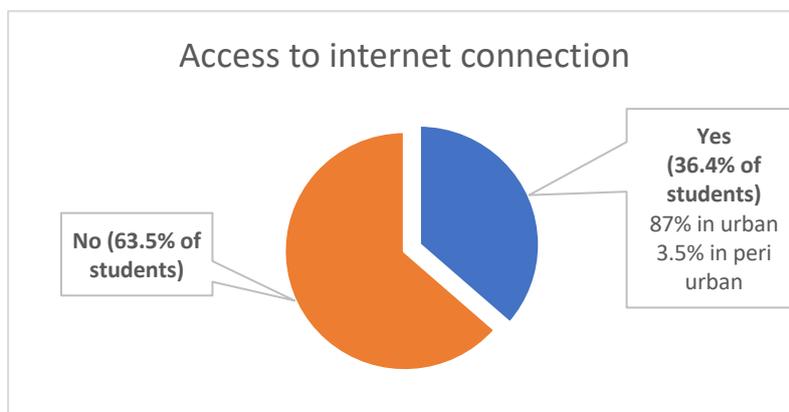

Chart 1: The proportion of students that had access to an internet connection (signal).

Despite only 40 students stating they have access to computers or tablets at home, all students were asked whether they had an available internet connection (signal) at their residence: 36.4% had and 63.5% didn't (refer to chart 1). Of those who had an internet signal, 87% were located in urban areas, 3.5% in peri-urban areas, 8.7% in rural areas and 0.5% in remote areas.

The reliability of internet access was also a critical factor, with 48.1% of respondents who had an internet signal reporting poor or very poor internet reliability and 51.8% reporting good or very good reliability. The situation is likely to be considerably worse in rural and remote areas not surveyed.

HSP EASE OF USE AND QUANTITY OF WORK
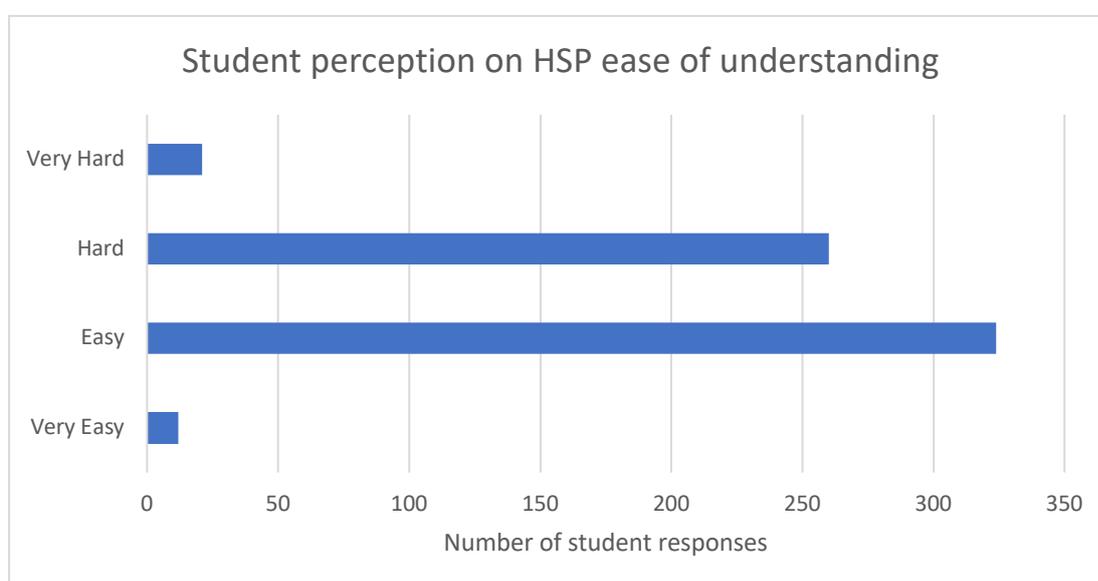
Chart 2: Number of students who thought the HSP was very easy, easy, hard and very hard to understand.

As in the chart above, students were split on whether the HSP was easy to understand with 54.5% stating it was easy or very easy to understand, and 45.5% stating it was hard or very hard to understand. Most respondents did not require translation.

Student perception on HSP quantity of work required

Category	Number of student responses
Not enough work	~13
Enough work	~295
Too much work	~308
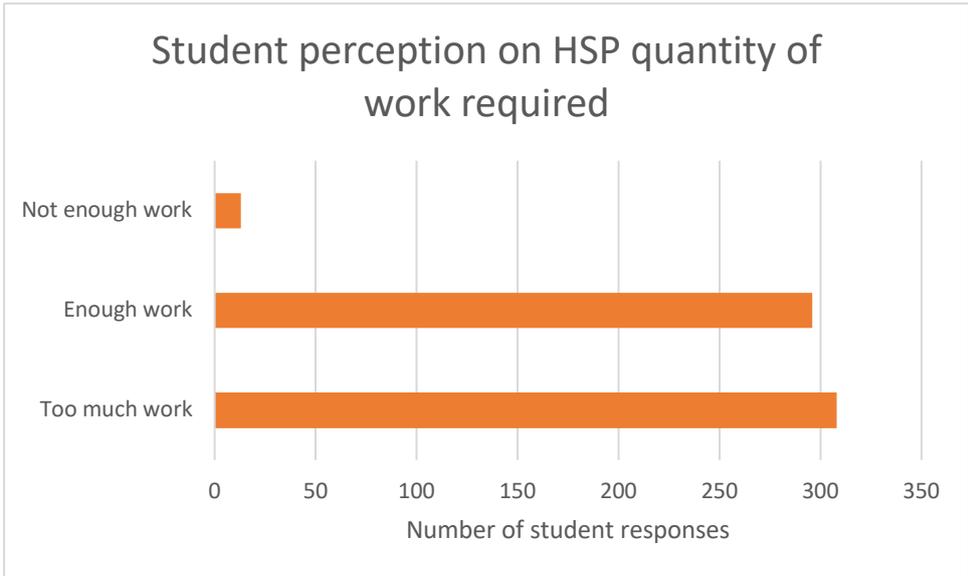
Chart 3: Number of students who thought there was too much work, enough work and not enough work in the HSP.

Students were also split over the amount of work required by the HSP, as shown in chart 3 above. Of respondents: 50% reported there was too much work; 48% reported enough work; and only 2% reported not enough work.

There was no correlation between the location of students and whether they understood the HSP, and the quantity of work.

SPACES FOR STUDY

When asked where they studied during lockdown the majority of student respondents reported finding a place to study in their house with 50% studying in their bedroom.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING
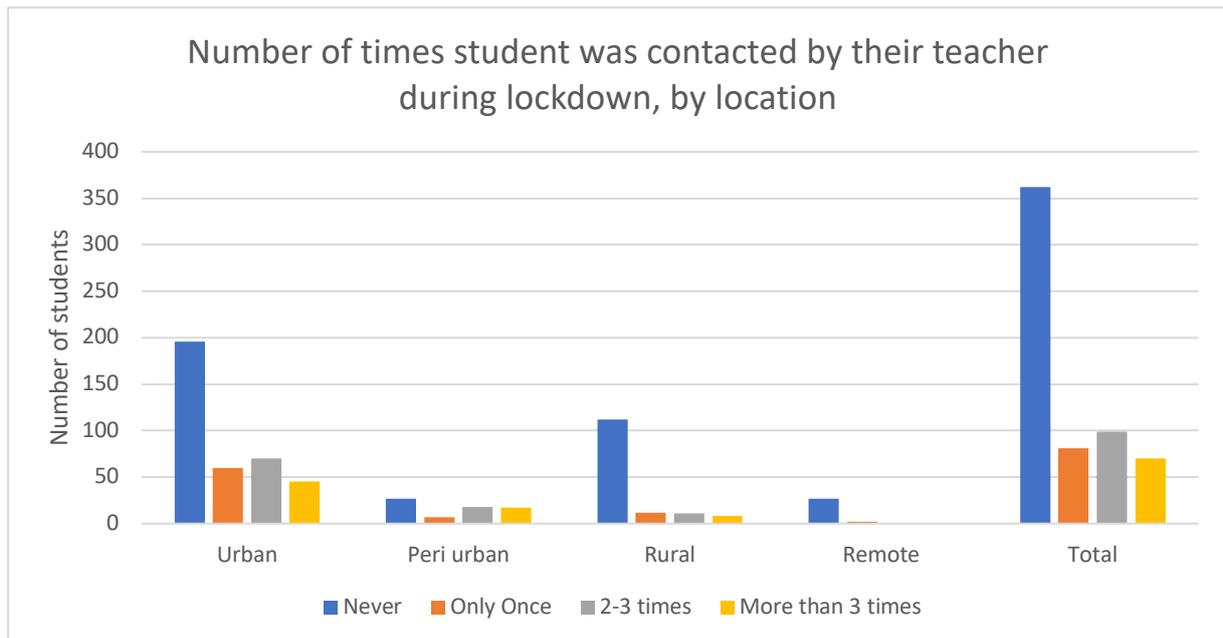
Chart 4: The number of times a student was contacted by their teacher during lockdown, presented by location (Urban, Peri urban, Rural and Remote) and the overall total (far right column series).

Of respondents, 59.2% reported that they/their family were never contacted by their teacher; 13.2% were contacted once; and 27.6% were contacted two or more times. As in chart 4 above, students in urban and peri urban areas were more likely to be contacted by their teacher than students in rural and remote areas.

Of respondents, most students/families never reached out to their teacher for support (74%).
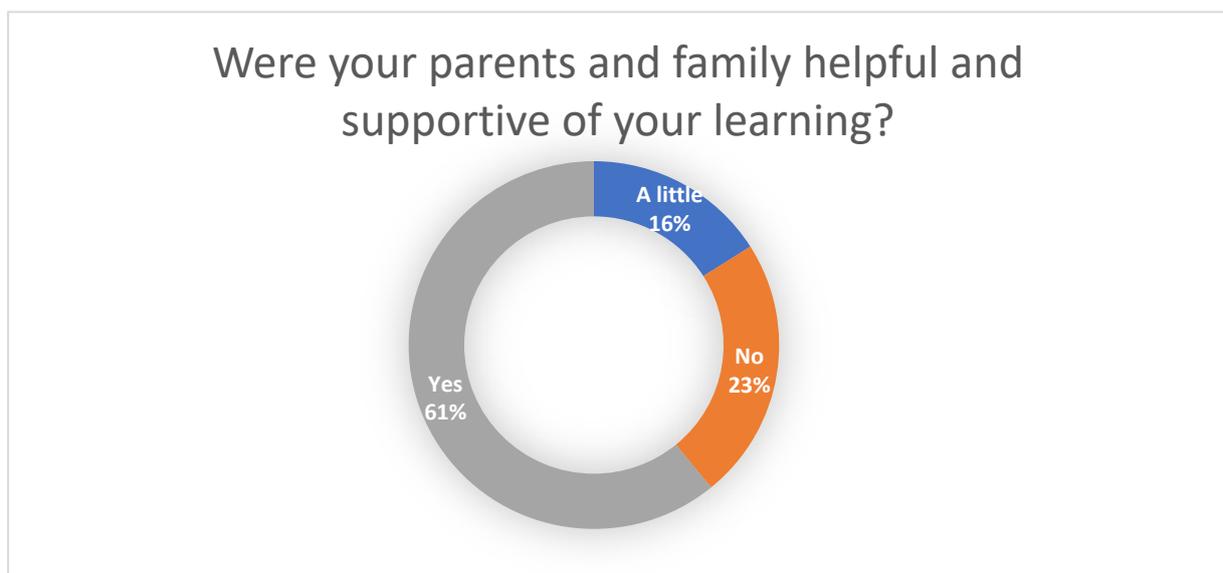
Chart 5: Students respond to the question of whether their parents and family were helpful and supportive of their learning in the HSP.

Of respondents, most received support from their parents or other family members (61%), as shown in chart 5. Parents were generally able to explain the HSP.

Students accessed support from their family mostly during the day although family members were not always available due to housework and work commitments.

FEEDBACK ON HSP WORK SUBMITTED

Of respondents, only 35.5% reported being able to complete the HSP work; 40.8% completed more than half; and the remainder considerably less.

Only half the respondents reported receiving results of their teachers' marks for their HSP work. Of those who did not receive their marks, most reported the corrections were made in class. Most respondents reported that they were happy with their marks (81.1%).

STUDENTS' EXPRESSION OF NEEDS

Overall, there was mixed response from students with some suggesting that the HSP was a positive experience, while others clearly struggled. Findings identify opportunities for further improvement such as clearer instructions.

The biggest problem appeared to be with students' ability to complete the HSP work and this may be due to any or all of the following factors:
- Too much work
- Lack of support from teachers
- Lack of feedback on their work
- Lack of computing equipment and access to the internet
- Unavailability of parents at the time they were studying

Access to computers, tablets or the internet was one of the greatest concerns expressed by respondents, and respondents were looking for more teacher mentoring (39.6%); more support from parents/family (38.8%); and clearer instructions on the HSP materials (28.7%).

A note on these findings: A gender analysis of student data was conducted. While there were more girls than boys represented in the study sample, the disaggregated data showed no significant differences between the experience of boys and girls.

Urban Case Study:
Malapoa College

Type: secondary school
Size: large (>700 students)
Location: urban, Port Vila
HSP format: online

Malapoa College implemented an online HSP via the Moodle platform. Students stated that they had to purchase internet data packages so they could login to access their Home Schooling lessons provided by their teacher. Some students said that it was too much work and the teachers didn't provide adequate support, however a Facebook chat group was set up across year levels for teachers to respond to student queries.

Of the 16 respondents representing parents and carers of students at Malapoa College, 10 (62.5%) said that the HSP workload was 'enough' and five (31.2%) said that it was 'too much'.

The major challenges experienced were that some students did not have regular access to a device or had to use their phone to access Moodle.

Creating a productive learning space at home was also difficult due to overcrowding, distractions and house work.

The positive outcomes remarked by some students were that they increased their Information Technology (IT) skills and developed independence in their learning. Many students, however, did not enjoy the experience and wanted to repeat lessons on return to school.

Dataset source: 59 student survey respondents, over 20 student participants of FGDs and 15 parent/carer survey respondents.

Part 2: Teachers

The survey data recorded 89 responses from teachers at public schools.

- Of those responding, 41.9% were teaching at secondary level, 32.3% at primary level and 25.8% in ECCE.
- Of those responding, only 33.33% teachers reported that they teach students with disabilities.
- Of those responding, 32.1% knew of school age children with disabilities in the community (not attending school).

DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE HSP

The HSP was not produced in a consistent learning format. Most teachers relied on their own approach and in many cases photocopied content and exercises from a textbook. Some resorted to showing parents how to do the work with students providing instructions on a blackboard. Only two teachers reported developing strategies to support students with disabilities, however it is not clear what the strategies were.

Based on responses, teachers produced HSP in a hard copy format. However, for many there were no funds for photocopiers, paper and toner, or fuel for generators and this made it very difficult to produce copies of the HSP. Physically distributing the HSP caused difficulties for many with high costs and hazardous journeys.

The majority of teachers (76%) reported language-related difficulties with the HSP. Classroom instruction relies more on verbal explanations and exchanges than on written language as the HSP did. Teachers reported that students and their parents, even if they could speak a language, were not sufficiently literate to work with written materials regardless of whether they were in Bislama or English.

"One of the female teachers said she prepared HSP as a 2-week plan; she went to the village nakamal (meeting house), called parents to give instructions; she gave her contact number but no parents called. The teacher thought everything was going well but when students returned to school with their HSP, it was not completed; parents only helped students with the activity book. The teacher assumed parents were probably busy."

(Participant, Focus Group Discussion, rural – Epi Island, August 2020)

SUPPORTING AND MONITORING STUDENT LEARNING

Does your school have a monitoring plan for the HSP?

NO
38%

YES
62%
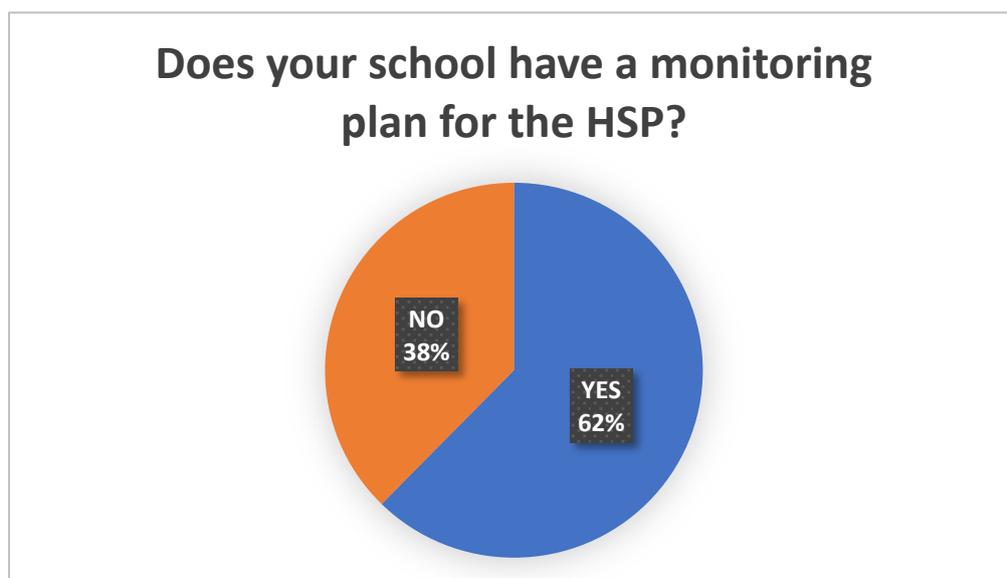
Chart 6: Responses to the survey question: Does your school have a monitoring plan for the HSP?

It appears that little monitoring or student support was possible during the HSP implementation.

Over half the teachers (62%) reported that their school had a monitoring plan for the HSP and the learning of students, however far fewer had implemented the plan. Those who didn't have a plan reported insufficient time to develop a process, lack of funds, and difficulty contacting students due to geographical distances. Teachers also reported that home-based learning had resulted in an increased workload that meant they were working on weekends and during holidays.

Only a handful of teachers were in the habit of going out into the community to mentor students and most were not provided with any allowances to perform these extra tasks. During the lockdown, only a very small number (14) of teachers had contact with students and their families. 19 teachers reported that students/parents/families contacted them during lockdown.

Teachers also reported that many students did not return or complete work, and in some cases it was clear that the work was completed by a third person.

"That is our main problem, to go out to mentor. Most teachers are working according to social distancing guidelines. There must be a proper plan to meet with students because living in town is not the same as living in the village."

(Survey respondent, urban – Port Vila, July 2020)

TEACHER NEEDS TO IMPLEMENT THE HSP

Main challenges with HSP development amongst teachers
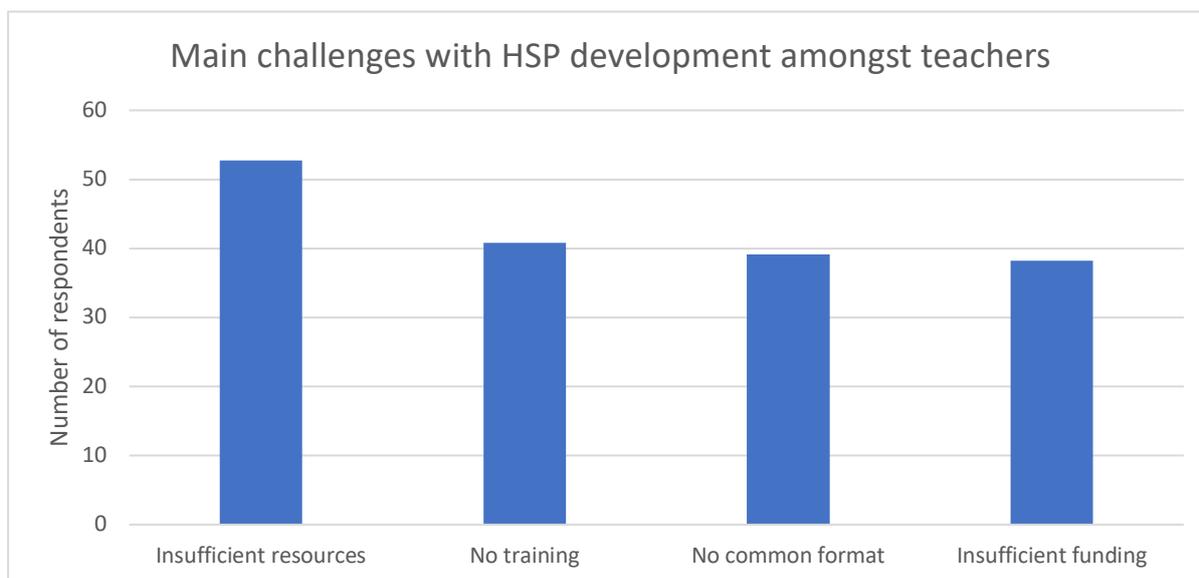
Chart 7: The main challenges experienced by teachers in developing the HSP.

Main challenges with HSP implementation amongst teachers
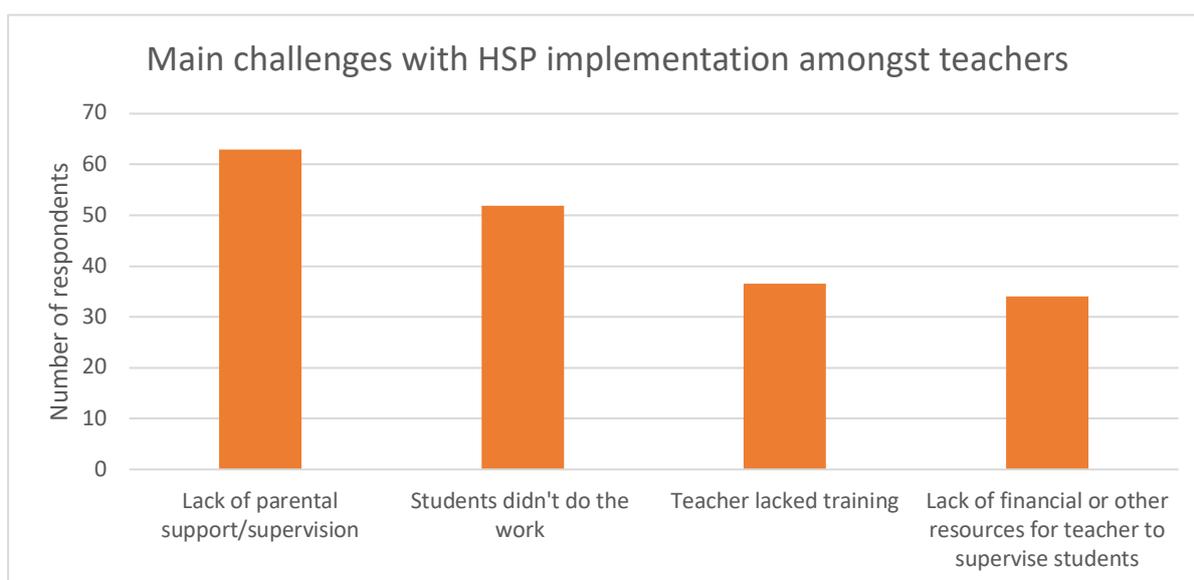
Chart 8: The main challenges experienced by teachers in implementing the HSP.

Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that more training and resources were needed to deliver an HSP.

Few teachers received guidelines or training in how to develop the HSP. There were no reports of any teachers receiving training in how to mentor students during home-based learning. Teachers also reported that parents and students needed training in how to use an HSP.

If HSP was to be used in a hard copy format then funds were needed to provide a reliable power supply, photocopying capacity, paper and toner, and distribution of materials. Funds

were also needed to support teachers in the extra time involved in providing student mentoring, supervision and following-up submission of work.

To deliver an online HSP for student learning, submission of work, and student mentoring, funds are needed to provide reliable internet access.

"Teachers reported poor treatment and no support at all from parents. Students live very far; roads are really bad and so it's hard to reach the students."

(Survey respondent, urban – Luganville, August 2020)

Urban Case Study: Santo East Primary & Secondary School

Type: primary and secondary
Size: medium (477 students)
Location: urban – Espiritu Santo Island
HSP format: hard copy

Teachers at Santo East School developed home schooling packages by photocopying full text books for students. A Facebook group was also created for students to access the HSP but many did not have internet access. Teachers felt that they had too little time to prepare the package, and then cyclone damage to the school impacted return to normal classes. Teachers also had difficulty delivering the HSP to students living on offshore islands.

Students received the HSP in hard copy format but felt that they didn't receive explanations nor feedback from teachers. Of the 12 student survey respondents from Santo East School, seven said they didn't have access to computer or tablets, and only three reported having internet access at home. Therefore, students suggested that an online system of delivery would not be appropriate, also because they don't have the required financial resources (to purchase data).

Seven of students found the HSP easy, whereas five students found it hard. Two of the students responding to the survey reported they required translation of the HSP into Bislama. Only one of the students was contacted by a teacher during the remote learning period.

Parents and carers reported that the home learning environment was not conducive for student learning. Many students studied on their dining/breakfast table.

Dataset source: 12 student and 1 teacher survey respondents, and 12 students, 6 teachers and 9 parents participating in FGDs.

Part 3: Parents and Carers
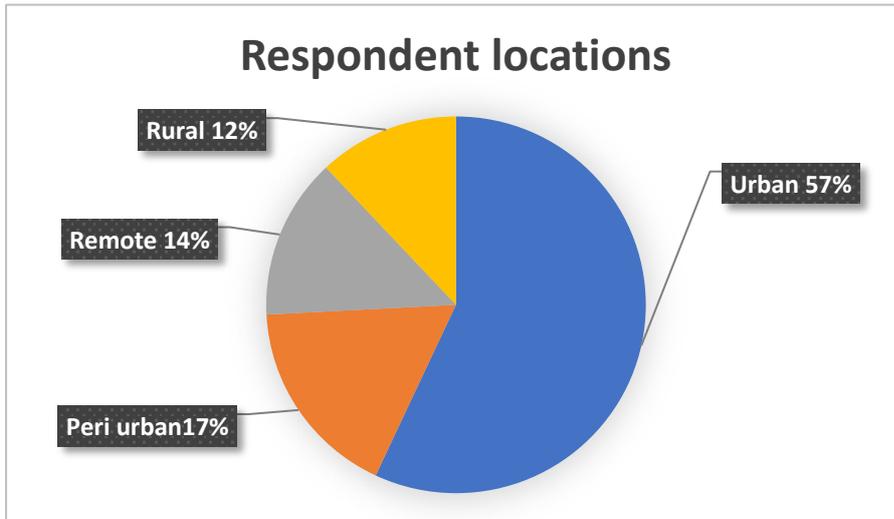
Chart 9: Location of Parent/Carer respondents.

There were 271 parent/carer respondents in total, and 232 of this number could be identified by their location: the majority were based in urban locations (56.9%), followed by peri urban (17.2%), remote (13.8%) and rural (12%).

Of the total 271 respondents representing parents and carers, 95% completed primary education, with the remaining 5% dropping out before Year 6. 26% of the those who completed primary education also completed secondary education, and 4% achieved tertiary education.
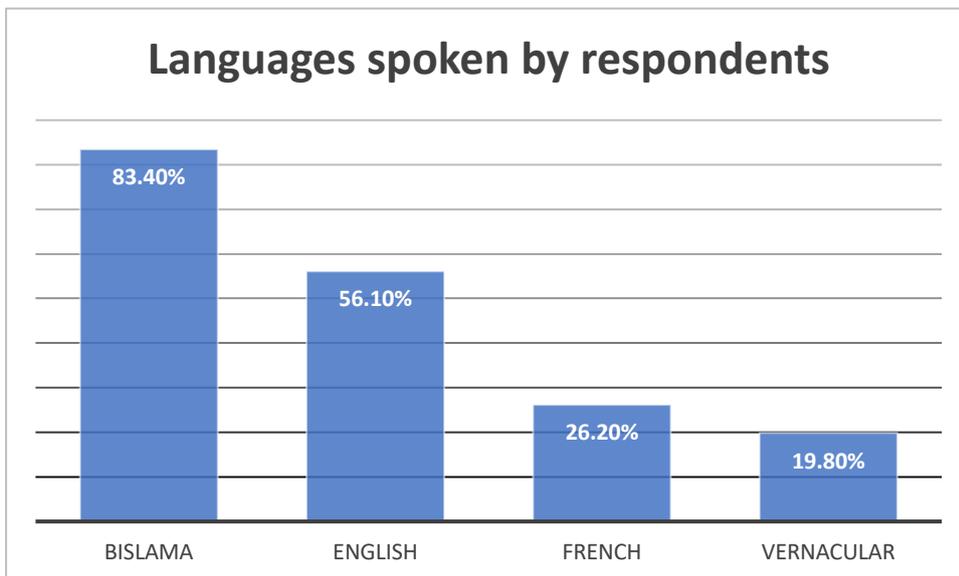
Chart 10: Languages spoken by parent/carer respondents.

The majority of parents and carers reported understanding Bislama (83.4%), followed by English (56.1%), French (26.2%) and vernacular languages (19.8%) – refer to chart 10.

EXPERIENCES WITH THE HSP

The majority of families (96%) received the HSP at home. Hard copy HSP was the only format noted.

While 45% of respondents reported having access to internet, very few participants reported having computing devices at home suitable for learning online.

Many parents/carers interviewed from rural and remote areas confirmed that they experienced difficulties in understanding the instructions of the HSP, most likely due to limited literacy.

Most parents/carers reported providing a moderate to high level of support to students with 33% spending more than three hours per day. Around 26% reported providing little or no support. Space was found in the home for students to study, mostly in the bedroom or sitting room.

Around 58% reported that the student made some attempt to contact their teacher during lockdown while very few reported attempts by the teacher to contact the student. In spite of the low level of contact, parents/carers reported that teachers were supportive of students during lockdown.

"If some parents are Anglophone (English speaking), and if one is francophone (French speaking) or can't read or write, then this is a big problem. I think that most materials should be in Bislama, especially for people living in villages."

(Community leader, Burumba School, July 2020)

*A note on these findings: the dataset for the parents/carers contained gaps where questions were either left unanswered or skipped. It is suspected that those who responded are likely to be more motivated to provide support for learning at home than non-respondents and may also have a higher education level, including a higher level of literacy.

Remote Case Study:
Port Quimi Adventist Junior Secondary

Type: secondary school
Size: small (117 students)
Location: remote – Epi Island
HSP format: hard copy

Teachers developed their own format of HSP. They felt that they did not have enough resources and with the hard copy format there is a need for increased printing and photocopying facilities at the school.

Students received the HSP in English but stated that it was not well explained to them. There was no contact between teachers and students due to limited financial support and telecommunications network connectivity problems. All students said that parents didn't understand the HSP, and that they faced distractions and noise when studying at home.

Parents/carers stated that they didn't have access to a computer or tablet at home, and no responses were recorded regarding internet access. Parents/carers were mixed on whether the HSP was easy or not for them to understand. Most parents (5 out of 7) spent at least one hour a day supporting their child with the HSP. They also reported that their child's teacher never contacted them during lockdown.

Dataset source: 4 teachers, 1 principal, 15 students and 7 parent/carer survey respondents, and 4 students participating in FGDs.

Part 4: Principals

The study sample included 22 principals, representing ECCE, Primary and Secondary schools in Sanma and Shefa provinces. Five of the principals headed urban schools, two from peri-urban schools, nine from rural schools and five from remote schools (one could not be identified). 14 of the principals reported having students with disabilities enrolled at their school.

The survey for principals asked general information about their school, and their experience implementing the HSP.

General issues identified by school principals:

1. Student non-attendance
There continue to be problems with school attendance. The majority of principals reported they were aware of school-age children not attending school. While the main reason for non-attendance cited was lack of money, there were also a range of social and cultural reasons given such as parents not believing education was important, and children being required to help either with paid work or home duties.

2. Support for students with disabilities
While most schools catered for students with disabilities, many principals were aware of students with disabilities who did not attend school. The main reasons for non-attendance included a lack of facilities to cater for students, a lack of trained teachers, and in one case a lack of awareness of the rights of people with disabilities.

3. Computing resources
There appear to be problems with access to computing resources and reliable internet coverage. 65% of principals reported that their school did not have a computer lab and around one third of principals claimed their students did not have access to laptops or tablets. 50% of principals reported they did not have access to reliable internet coverage, with the majority of these schools located in rural and remote areas. Other difficulties included computers in labs not working as a result of cyclone damage and lack of power.

WAS THE HSP FIT FOR PURPOSE?

While most principals reported that their school prepared an HSP for students, 91% reported that language was the biggest barrier to successful use of the learning materials. Parents in many cases were either illiterate or unfamiliar with the language used in the HSP. The HSP was provided offline (63.2%) and hard copy (36.8%) because students were unable to access the HSP online. In addition, HSP packages lacked consistency in their format as most principals (75%) reported that teachers preferred to produce their own format in spite of the fact that they had received no guidelines or training.

The HSP appears to have caused considerable stress for teachers as principals reported they were under pressure to develop the HSP without adequate guidelines and training, were

overloaded with work, were unable to contact students, and were concerned about students' learning and ability to progress to the next level.

Rural Case Study: Ecole publique de Katundaula

Type: primary school
Size: small (55 students)
Location: rural – Tongoa Island
HSP format: hard copy

Katundaula primary school on the tiny Tongoa Island in Shefa Province received the instruction to implement a home schooling package four days after the communication was sent by Shefa Education (provincial education authority). Internet connection is not reliable on Tongoa Island.

The school principal said there was no training given to develop a HSP; HSP was something new and the school faced many challenges in how to disseminate the HSP to parents so they could help their children at home. The school had to purchase a new photocopy machine to print the HSP for students. The format was the same regardless of whether students had disability or not.

A Y1-Y3 female teacher said she was not sure what to give to her students, but used lesson plans from a text book. She said that a lot of parents did not know how to help their children. The teacher gave her contact number to parents, but parents found it difficult to afford credit.

Of the 15 student respondents attending Katundaula primary school, all but two agreed that the HSP was easy to understand (86%). Only one student needed the HSP translated into their vernacular language. Nine respondents (60%) stated that the HSP workload was 'enough' and six (40%) stated that it was 'too much'. Students were largely not contacted by their teacher: nine respondents said 'never', two respondents said 'only once', and three respondents said '2-3 times' (one response was not recorded). Majority of students (73%) also stated that their parents either 'fully understood' or 'understood' the HSP.

Dataset source: 1 teacher, 1 principal and 15 student survey respondents, 4 teacher participants (including principal) of FGDs.

BARRIERS TO IMPROVING THE HSP

60% of principals reported that their school did not monitor the use and effectiveness of the HSP either because they had not had time to develop a process or because they lacked the funding. However, even when principals had developed a plan to monitor the HSP, not all had implemented the plan. When asked about challenges they faced in implementing the HSP program, principals reported the main barriers as lack of resources and funding, no common format, and no training. In some cases, geographical isolation added complications such as transportation and printing problems, inability to communicate with students, and damage from disaster events such as cyclone Harold and flooding.

A WAY FORWARD FOR THE HSP

Principals expressed their hopes for the future of HSP and made recommendations based on their experience. Most principals (70%) were optimistic about improving the HSP. During interviews, some principals shared their plans to develop a standard HSP for all students, and to monitor students' learning and increase use of online modules. One of the popular recommendations was that if funding is made available from MoET, parents and communities could be involved through training to support home learning.

Only a few schools appeared to have skills in fundraising activities to supplement fees and cash contributions, and some reported the difficulty to meet school expenses.

Part 5: Key Stakeholder perspectives

There were 12 key stakeholders who responded to the survey representing community leaders and provincial education authorities in urban, peri urban, rural and remote locations. Additionally, focus groups discussions were conducted with Luganville and Sanma education authorities.

DELIVERY AND UNDERSTANDING OF HSP

All participants were aware of the HSP. Six (50%) of survey respondents stated that guidelines were provided to parents to support their child's education, whereas five (42%) stated No and one was unsure.

All respondents remarked that the HSP materials and instructions were not easy to understand, especially amongst parents with varying literacy levels and language skills – for example, if materials were provided in English to a Francophone or Bislama speaking parent this proved challenging. The following case study about a French school further illustrates this point.

Remote Case Study: Navele Junior Secondary School

Type: secondary school
Size: small (139 students)
Location: remote – Big Bay, Espiritu Santo Island
HSP format: hard copy

Teachers of Navele Junior Secondary School in Santo shared their story of how the HSP was introduced. The MoET gave teachers a week to discuss and prepare for the HSP, but teachers were not very clear on what the HSP was. Teachers worked together to help one another with facilitation of learning. However, soon after the HSP program was announced, Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Harold struck Vanuatu, devastating much of Santo Island and neighbouring islands which made it challenging to properly implement the HSP.

Students reported that they received the HSP with no explanation, and little follow up support was provided – all of the survey respondents (5) stated that their teacher never contacted them during the period of lockdown. Four of the five respondents didn't receive the results from their teacher's marking of the HSP. Four of the five respondents stated that they needed more mentoring support to complete the HSP.

The principal also stated that because the language of instruction is French, many parents without understanding of French found it difficult to support their children.

There are no children with disabilities attending this school.

Dataset source: 1 principal and 5 student survey respondents, and 16 student and 3 teacher participants of FGDs.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

"The HSP is a response to disaster and most teachers are trying to figure out a way to address this disaster; it is not a permanent situation. Most communities do not have space for children to study, especially those families living in very small rented apartments. Most of the time students are struggling to study because there is not enough space, or there is too much noise, because of overcrowding in homes."

(Education authority, Sanma Provincial Education Office, July 2020)

Majority of respondents (11 out of 12) stated that there are limited conducive learning environments in the home and community for HSP. Key factors affecting student learning at home include: community events, distractions, overcrowding, housework duties.

Other key ideas expressed:
- Parents need to play an active role for HSP to work well (and so parents need to be supported).
- The community is the place for children to learn their traditional knowledge and practices, and be involved in community activities, and the school and education is seen separately to this. Therefore, the prevailing notion is that students need a classroom environment and teacher support to successfully undertake their education.

TEACHER SUPPORT TO STUDENTS

Only two respondents agreed that teachers provided adequate support to students on the HSP. Several respondents mentioned the need for increased financing for teachers, and that monitoring should happen in person.

"Our minds are focused on the TC Harold recovery and not HSP. We are worried about our homes and community recovery, and so I have not put much effort into HSP support."

(Teacher, Espiritu Santo Island, July 2020)

MAJOR CHALLENGES AND AREAS TO IMPROVE

Chart 11: Word cloud showing the key words used by respondents regarding the challenges of HSP – the larger the word, the more frequently it appeared in the data.

The most frequent challenge mentioned was the capacity and time of parents to support their children with the HSP. Secondly, the lack of finance and resources that families have available to support learning at home. Thirdly, many families have limited access to electricity and lighting.

The overarching recommendation from stakeholders is to develop a standardised format for the HSP and provide training and guidance to teachers and parents to facilitate it. Additionally, increased financing and support should be provided to the program.

Two respondents also suggested that HSP should incorporate a focus on social life in the community and learning about cultural activities, as this could be more easily supported by parents and others in the community when students are restricted during a pandemic.

An Analysis of Disability Inclusion in the HSP

The survey investigated disability inclusion in the Home Schooling Package, however analysis of the available data shows an incomplete picture. There may be several reasons for this, such as: misunderstanding of what disability means at school, community and family levels; lack of capacity and resources of teachers and schools to cater for children with disabilities; existing stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities; and/or, study sample did not target participants with experience of disability (for example, identifying teachers or parents/carers supporting children with disabilities).

Reflections on disability inclusion, and students and children with disability in the school community were recorded from participating teachers, principals, parents and carers, and local authorities. Student respondents were not asked whether they had a disability and therefore there was no analysis undertaken of the experience of students with disabilities.

- The majority of **principals** reported having students with disabilities enrolled in their school, and a third of principals reported knowing of school-age children with disabilities in the surrounding communities not attending school.
- 18 respondents in the **parent/carer** category reported their children having a disability. These disabilities ranged from physical disability, hearing impairment, vision impairment and intellectual.
- 26 **teachers** reported teaching children with disabilities, with 22 of these teachers based at urban public schools.

LEARNING STRATEGIES UTILISED FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Only two teachers reported using specific strategies to support students with disability during the HSP period. Strategies included: in-person learning, in front of the teacher because of student hearing impairment; and, focused support to students, however this was limited based on the teacher's time. Many teachers reported that there was no specific strategy used and that all students received the same HSP package and format, regardless of disability or specific learning needs.

> *"Students with disabilities fell behind in their learning. Parents are not trained to support their children with the HSP."*
> *(Teacher, urban – Port Vila, July 2020)*

Some of the key issues raised by school representatives regarding disability inclusion within the school was that there is no inclusive teacher, the facilities are not accessible and some students require a carer to be present with them. A recommendation from teachers on how the HSP could be implemented to best support students with disabilities was to tailor the package to suit the learning needs and styles of each child.

KOBLE is also aware of a radio program provided by MoET to support inclusive education in the HSP during the lockdown period, however none of the study participants mentioned this.

Synthesis

In drawing together the key findings and analyses to inform ongoing HSP program development, we return to the initial research questions that this study aimed to answer:

What is the most effective form of HSP in Vanuatu?

Overwhelmingly, the results of the survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews point to a **hard copy format** as being the most viable and accessible form of HSP, given current technology and infrastructure in place across the country. Only a handful of schools actually made use of an online format, and the reports from students were not always positive.

There was little data obtained regarding the experience of students with disability, which may indicate that many children with disabilities are not attending schools. Information on disability inclusion that was recorded suggested that tailored HSPs should be developed for students with disabilities that takes into account specific impairments and learning needs.

What support do students require for effective learning in HSP?

In light of the proposal for a single format HSP to be utilised, the key needs of students to support their remote learning experience would be:
- Clear instructions and facilitation
- Support, monitoring and feedback from teachers
- Support from parents and families to provide a conducive home learning environment

Community leaders and education authorities also suggested that appropriate facilities for learning in the home and community are essential, as overcrowding, protection issues and domestic work can inhibit student learning outcomes. In regards to the role of the home and community in HSP delivery, findings point to two streams of thought: one, that parents need guidance and support (both know-how and financial support) to be able to foster student learning from home; and the other, that in a home and community setting, parents and communities are better placed to support student learning in other domains such as social and life skills based on community and cultural practice and knowledge.

What resources do schools and teachers require to deliver the HSP?

While teachers did the best they could with the training and resources available, the production and distribution of a hard copy HSP in a short time frame presented many difficulties. Without a culture of personalised student mentoring with enabling technology, it appears that teachers could do little to monitor and support student learning during lockdown. While parents are an important resource for students, low literacy levels and lack of training in how to support learning no doubt added to the implementation problems.

To improve efficiency and reduce financial pressure on schools to produce HSPs, it is recommended that the Curriculum Development Unit develops the HSP for each year level, printing and supplying the hard copy package to schools throughout Vanuatu for dissemination to their students. Schools must be provided with adequate financial resources to be able to deliver packages to students, and provide teacher mentoring and follow up either in-person or via telephone to students.

Conclusion

In summary, this study posits three key pillars to successful HSP roll-out:

- **Infrastructure and learning materials** – ensuring that the relevant infrastructure including electricity, internet connection, technology and printed materials are available and reliable throughout communities.

- **Centralised learning design** – Curriculum Development Unit to develop the HSP and guide schools to communicate with their respective school communities, and implement the program effectively. The package should include materials relevant to student level, aligned with the national curriculum and explaining the learning objectives. In this way, the HSP package could also be used as an ongoing home schooling option for students studying remotely.

- **Teaching staff** – teachers have intimate knowledge of student level. They are therefore best placed to support students through remote supervision, facilitation and monitoring to ensure students achieve expected learning objectives. Further, teachers should be trained to monitor and support the promotion of student wellbeing and safeguarding.

KOBLE supports the idea of providing guidance to parents and carers on how they can best support their children in remote learning. However, we do not think that parents and carers should be assigned the responsibility of direct facilitation or monitoring of student study, as we recognise that parents have competing responsibilities in regards to civic commitments and economic livelihoods.

While we advocate for a single format, hard copy HSP to be developed for all students across all schools, in the event that online formats of HSP are developed in the future, local and school infrastructure and internet connectivity must be vastly improved, and students should be provided with computers or tablets, and data for internet access. Without additional resourcing and materials for remote learning, students risk falling behind in their education, which may contribute to increased disadvantage, particularly for already marginalised children.

KOBLE believes that for the HSP to be effective, the cooperation of a number of actors is essential, as well as a strong understanding of the infrastructure needed to deliver it. School authorities, teachers, parents, students and media agencies all need to understand how it works, and what their respective roles and responsibilities are.

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Annex I: Survey Questionnaires

In the interest of brevity, this section contains the list of questions asked of each survey respondent group. It does not represent the full survey instrument that included enumerator instructions and detailed answer options, as administered via Kobo Toolbox. Surveys were translated into Bislama for administration to respondents.

Group 1 – Students

- Respondent characteristics: age, gender, school name, school type, current year level
- Do you have a working tablet, laptop or computer at home?
- Do you have access to internet at home? If yes, is internet access at home reliable?
- Did you receive a HSP from your school?
- Mode of HSP {Online, Offline, Hard Copy}
- How easy was the HSP for you to understand?
- Did the teachers need to translate the HSP into another language? If Yes, what was the language used to translate the HSP?
- How would you describe the quantity of work required by HSP as compared to the time spend in lockdown?
- Where did you study during lockdown?
- How many times did your teacher contact you/parents/family during the period of lockdown?
- How many times did you/your parents/family contact your teacher during the period of lockdown?
- Were your parents/family helpful and supportive of your learning?
- Who helped and supported you the most with HSP?
- Did your parents understand the HSP activities enough to translate it for you?
- Did your parents/family have enough time during the day to help/support you? If No, why not?
- How much of the HSP activities were you able to complete as scheduled by your teacher?
- Did you receive the results of your teacher's marks for HSP? If No, why not?
- What were your fears in relation to the HSP and the lockdown period?
- What were your needs in relation to the HSP and the lockdown period?

Group 2 – Teachers

- Respondent characteristics: age, gender, disability, level of education attained, name of school teaching at, year level they teach
- What are the main forms of disability presenting in your students?
- Do you know any school age children in the community who have a disability?
- Do you know of any school age children in the community who do not go to school? If Yes, what are the reasons for non-attendance?

- Did you prepare a Home School Package for your students? If Yes, what was the form of HSP used? If No, why?
- If the HSP is online, are all students able to access and use them?
- Did the entire school follow a common HSP format? If No, how did you prepare the HSP?
- Were there any problems experienced with the language used for the HSP? If Yes, why?
- Does the school have a monitoring plan for the HSP and the learning of students? If No, why? If Yes, does the school implement the plan?
- What are the main challenges the school faced when implementing the HSP
- program?
- Does your school have enough resources to facilitate delivery of HSP? If No, what resources are required?
- Did you receive any guidelines or training to develop the HSP? If Yes, please describe.
- Did you receive any training given on how to mentor students in the HSP?
- How often do you go into the community to mentor each student?
- Were any allowances given to you to perform extra tasks in the community?
- Did you use any specific strategies or materials to support learning of students with
- disability? Please provide an example of the strategy you used.
- How many times did you contact your student/parents/family during the period of lockdown?
- How many times did students/parents/family contact you during the period of lockdown?
- What were the major concerns or challenges you faced with the HSP program?
- What do you need to better facilitate the HSP?
- Please comment on way forward to improve the HSP?

Group 3 – Parents/Carers

- Respondent characteristics: age, gender, language understood, level of education attained, employment status prior to COVID-19, current employment status, disability, relationship to child, name of school child attends, school type, child's school year level, child's disability status, school-age children at home not enrolled in school
- Do you have a working tablet, laptop or computer at home? If Yes, how many working devices in your family, suitable for learning online, are there?
- Does your child have access to internet at home? If yes, is internet access at home reliable?
- Is the cost of data affordable?
- Did your child receive HSP from his/her school? If No, why?
- Mode of HSP?
- If HSP was offered online, was it easy for you to access?
- How would you describe the quantity of work required by HSP as compared to the time spent in lockdown?
- How easy was the HSP for you to understand to translate it to your child?

- How much time did you spend supporting your child with the HSP?
- Where did your child study during lockdown?
- How many times did you or your child contact his/her teachers during the period of lockdown?
- How many times did your child's teacher contact you or your child during the period of lockdown?
- Were your child's teachers helpful and supportive during the lockdown period?
- How would you describe the quality of the HSP provided to your child?

Group 4 – Principals

- Respondent characteristics: name of school, location, school type, total student enrolment (disaggregated by gender and disability), main forms of disability
- Do you know of children with disabilities not going to school? If Yes, why are they not attending school?
- Do you know of other school age children not going to school? If s, why?
- Does the school have a computer lab?
- Do the computers in the computer lab work? If No, why? If Yes, do the computers in the computer lab connect to the internet?
- How many students have access to personal tablets or laptops?
- How many children would need to use these devices? {Tablet, Laptop, Computer}
- Is there good, reliable internet coverage in the school and school zone communities?
- Is there a reliable power supply? If No, why?
- What is the language of instruction within the school? If language instruction varies across school levels, note this down
- Did the school prepare the Home Schooling Package? If No, why? If Yes, what was the form of HSP used?
- If the HSP is online, are all students able to access and use them?
- Did the entire school follow a common HSP format? If not, how did teachers prepare the HSP?
- Were there any problems experienced with the language used for the HSP?
- Does the school have a monitoring plan for the HSP and the learning of students? If No, why? If Yes, does the school implement the plan?
- What are the main challenges the school faced when implementing the HSP
- program?
- Does your school have enough resources to facilitate delivery of HSP? (such as
- materials, postal delivery and transportation) If not, what resources are required?
- Were there any guidelines or training given to teachers to develop the HSP? If Yes, please describe.
- Was there any training given to teachers on how to mentor students in the HSP? If Yes, please describe.
- What are the major concerns or challenges faced by teachers in the HSP program?
- What do teachers need to better facilitate the HSP?
- Does the school have a way forward to improve the Home Schooling Package? If Yes, explain.

Annex II: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Group 1 – Students

- Experience with the HSP: challenges, achievements
- What support was provided to you for the HSP? (from teachers/school and parents/carers)
- What would you need to better engage with the HSP?

Group 2 – Teachers

- Who developed the HSP?
- Did you have the capacity to develop the HSP?
- What support/training do you need the better facilitate the HSP or better support students?
- What were the challenges?
- What recommendations do you have for the future of HSP?

Group 3 – Parents/Carers

- Are you aware of the HSP?
- Did you understand the HSP materials and language of Instruction?
- Did you support your child with their HSP learning?
- Any challenges you encountered when supporting your child?
- Does your child have a safe and friendly learning space and adequate resources?
- Do you think you had sufficient time at home to supervise your child with HSP?
- Do you have any recommendations for the HSP?

Group 4 – Key Stakeholders

- Are you aware of the HSP?
- Did the MoET develop any guidelines for parents to use when supporting their child at home?
- Are the HSP materials and instructions easy to understand? Is there a preferred language that should be used for the HSP?
- Do you think studying at home offers a good learning environment for school children?
- Did teachers provide enough support to your child for the HSP?
- Did teachers visit your child at home to check if he/she encountered any difficulties?
- What were the challenges?
- What can you recommend to improve the HSP?