

Exploring the quality of teaching and learning in Catholic Teachers' Colleges in Papua New Guinea

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Introduction

This paper will discuss three issues which were part of a study conducted in the Catholic primary teachers' colleges in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The study explores how educational change is being led in the Catholic primary teachers' colleges. These issues include the educational changes that have been implemented as part of the national education reform, the impact of PASTEP and the current leadership who are leading each of the colleges in the process of change. The structure of the presentation will commence with a brief background of the development of teacher education and the education reform. This will be followed by the presentation of each issue. The findings of my research will be incorporated accordingly to tell the story of the progress of the three colleges in effecting the reform agenda and how these changes impact on the quality of education. The paper will then conclude with recommendations pertaining to the findings of the study and how these fit into the theme of the conference.

A brief background on the development of teacher education

Teacher education has undergone considerable change and development since its inception. The development of teacher education began with the "A" course teachers in 1957 who were grade six graduates (Leach, 2004, p. 15). This "A" course for teachers was one year in duration. Then there was the progression towards the awarding of certificates to teachers who had completed grades eight and ten. This was a two-year training program. In 1991 a three-year diploma program was introduced. The students who were eligible to enroll for that program were graduates from grade ten. However, the three-year diploma program did not last long before another change was introduced to supersede this three-year diploma program. This is the current two-year trimester diploma program which came into effect in 1998. The suitable applicants to enroll for this program are the current grade 12 graduates.

The underpinning theory was that in order to improve the quality of education, there was the necessity to train the teacher well. This theory would authenticate Beeby's theory on quality education when he stated that "Qualitative changes in classroom practice will occur only when the teachers understand them, feel secure with them, and accept them as their own" (Beeby, 1979, p. 291).

Since independence in 1975, the issues of relevance and quality education have continued to be national concerns that needed to be addressed. Indeed research over the past two

decades has continued to be conducted to investigate the quality of the education delivered and received within the national education system. Upon completion, these studies then made recommendations for improvement of the national education system. Unfortunately, not all recommendations have been implemented by the National Department of Education (NDOE). This situation prompted the United Nations (UN) team to PNG in 1993 to make the following observations in their report:

The education sector has been well researched both before and after independence, and the country is awash with research papers, scholarly monographs and reports of national committees, commissions, external consultants, missions, workshops and seminars. There is no dearth of suggestions – good, bad or indifferent – and there is a high degree of awareness of the problems and constraints, but these suggestions do not appear to get translated into meaningful action. There is a wide gap between pronouncements and their implementation (UNDP/ILO, 1993).

One of those studies that had had significant impact on primary teacher education was the McNamara report (McNamara, 1989). In 1989 the McNamara report recommended among other things that there be a common curriculum for all the primary teachers' colleges and that the colleges progress towards a three-year program. The move towards the three-year diploma program came into effect in 1991 and the first graduates of this program graduated in 1993. However, the aim of having a common curriculum did not eventuate at all and about the mid-nineties they brought in an overseas consultancy team that went around the teachers' colleges to develop the national curriculum guidelines for all the colleges and that document was completed in 1998.

Education Reform

In order to fully appreciate the current national education reform, it is important to provide a brief history of the education system and its reforms. The Christian churches were the pioneers who introduced schools in PNG though the principal aim of establishing schools was for the purpose of evangelization (Smith, 1987). When the colonial administration then established schools, they too had a specific focus which was to prepare a national work force for the country. In both cases, the schools that were established in that period served foreign interests determined by the churches and the colonial administration (Louisson, 1974).

In those initial stages of development of the school system, it seemed there was no sensitivity to the local cultures and the people's needs. Yet, it was interesting to note that in 1946, Groves, the then Director of Education prepared and discussed a paper on "blending of the cultures" (Department of Education, 2000). While the issue of cultures had no place in the initial curriculum of the education system established by the churches and the colonial administration, it would appear Groves was conscious that the culture of the people was an issue that had to be addressed. Since then, there has been gradual development in the sensitivity of the education administrations which was reflected in the words of Maddock, the then Director of Education in 1973 when he wrote: "There is a

current campaign in schools in PNG to promote interest in the local culture and programs for community living, as an attempt to relate education to the real needs of the country” (Department of Education, 2000).

In 1974, a committee of Papua New Guineans under the chairmanship of the late Sir Alkan Tololo produced a draft report of a five-year education plan (Department of Education, 2003). The report recommended among other things, the use of the vernacular, education to be more culturally based, and the social and economic activities of the people to closely match the national goals (Department of Education, 2001b). When PNG received its independence, community-based education became a priority for the first six years of school. This meant that the community was to be involved in the process of education. Unfortunately, many of the ideas contained in the Tololo report were shelved in favor of a view of ‘relevance’ that meant that English was the only language of education, and training for manpower needs was the major goal.

In 1986 another committee was commissioned by the then Minister for Education to study the educational problems of the nation and propose specific policies for a wholistic form of education. The committee under the chairmanship of Sir Paulias Matane was given three months to conduct the study. The report was then published in 1986 as the Matane report or the “Philosophy of Education” (Department of Education, 2001a). The Matane report has been viewed as the “birth of the education reforms, in particular the reform of the curriculum” (Department of Education, 2001a). Since 1992, the entire education system in PNG had been undergoing a process of reform. This reform has not been fully implemented yet, in terms of both structure and curriculum. In terms of the structure, there are still considerable numbers of schools that have not fully implemented the reform. This situation was evident from my interviews with participants during my observations of the college practicum in Mt Hagen.

Structure

In general, the outcomes of the education reform would be: more relevant education, improved access to education and improvement of the quality of education (Department of Education, 2000). First, as the reform was being implemented, there were structural changes put in place. The structural reforms affected all the levels of the national education system. This meant that there would be three years of elementary education which was located within the community and the medium of instruction was in a language that the child spoke and understood. The second level was six years of primary school while the third level was four years of secondary education. At the tertiary level there were also significant changes.

The main problems with the reform thus far seemed to be: (a) not enough teachers, (b) limited number of existing teachers upgraded, (c) curriculum lagging in restructure, (d) pace of expansion too fast and (e) not enough materials. These are some of the major

factors that would need to be adequately addressed if the principal goals of the reform are to become a reality.

Educational changes in the primary teachers' colleges

At the outset, it is important to identify and list the educational changes that have been implemented in the primary teachers' colleges throughout PNG since the inception of the education reform in 1992. The educational changes included the two-year trimester program, diploma in education primary in-service (DEPI), and special education. However, in this paper my discussions will be limited to the first two programs. Each of these areas will be explored briefly to demonstrate how they have contributed to the pursuit of quality education in the training of teachers. The first change is the change from the three-year diploma to the current two-year trimester program.

Two-year trimester diploma program

Under the reform structure the three-year diploma was shortened by one year. This two-year trimester program was designed to train as many teachers quickly within a short period of time. The two-year trimester program was first trialled in Madang Teachers' College (MTC). Since MTC is the only government-run college in the country, it undertook the trial program before the other colleges followed suit. So, as an exclusive government institution, the college was obliged to implement this new policy as explained by one of the participants in the study.

With the change from the three-year to the two-year program ... It was to meet a national need so that again as a government college we must work with the interest of the nation and the nation has a shortage of teachers all throughout PNG. Some provinces are two hundred or three hundred teachers short and it was a matter of the needs of the system was such that for the greater good of the children of PNG that the country needs more teachers more quickly and so they cut the three-year program back to two-years (*MNP*).

The introduction of the change from the three-year diploma to the two-year trimester program was not readily welcomed by the Catholic primary teachers' colleges. There was evidence to suggest that two of the three Catholic primary teachers' colleges presented considerable resistance against the change from the three-year diploma to the two-year trimester program. The colleges felt the move was unjustifiable in terms of quality education. This view was supported by a representative of the Catholic Agency when he made the following comments:

I know the former principal was very much opposed to it and I know that his reasons were somewhat persuasive that there was a need to form teachers as well as teach them. And the three year program was more likely to achieve that and that

semesters enabled a lot more depth to go into subjects. So those were his reasons to opposing it and we generally supported him in that (CBB).

The change from the three-year to the two-year diploma program was mandatory. While there were strong arguments not to support the change, the primary teachers' colleges throughout the country did not have any choice but to implement the change under the NDOE directives. This prompted another participant to assert that:

The new principal probably for a lot of reasons had to go along with the rule that we had to change into the trimester and so we have done it reluctantly for those reasons. The danger is that it is a much shorter course than the former (CBB).

Thus far, the arguments presented have indicated mixed reactions to the change from the three-year diploma to the two-year trimester program. My findings indicated that while the program has been in place since 2000 in the Catholic teachers' colleges, there was evidence to suggest that staff were still struggling with the concept and had not fully adapted to the change. Furthermore, there were arguments also over the issues of quality over quantity. The colleges were producing more teachers but then the question about the quality of these graduates was another issue. The study found evidence to suggest that even the lecturers themselves were not confident about their own graduates (Clarkson, 2003).

One of the contributing factors to the issue of quality was closely linked to the time frame. Under the initial diploma program, primary teachers colleges operated in six semesters over three-year duration. However, in the current program, the colleges are now operating in six trimesters over two years – significantly reducing the duration of a semester. It is important to stress that trimesters are comparatively shorter than semesters. Regarding the duration of each semester, there was confusion among the participants on the exact number of weeks but it was between eighteen to twenty weeks duration. However, they were in agreement about each trimester being eleven to twelve weeks in duration. Besides, there was the question of how much content to be covered in each trimester to fulfill the requirements for each subject. This was another challenge elaborated by one senior executive:

The difficulty was the question of content because instead of having about eighteen weeks, we were now down to eleven or twelve weeks. That was the biggest complaint of the lecturers in the strands. So we really had to be selective in what was the core content that had to be given and so the strands did their work where respective members had to go through the content outline and select what should be taught. There was dissatisfaction of having to do away with the content that they would like to teach. In 2003 when we started this, it wasn't just the problem of content but also assessments. The problem was that the same amount of assessments was being required of the students from an eighteen week semester to

a twelve week trimester and so we realized that we needed to lessen the assessment but then there was the question of “Is that adequate?” (LRB)

The study found that the majority of staff had difficulties in trying to get through the teaching of the content and assessments within each trimester. The difficulties that the lecturers were facing could also be related to the amount of preparation that academics were provided with prior to the change from the three-year to the two-year program since the trimesters were shorter than the semesters. However, one of the participants contested this argument by making the following assertions that “I must also stress it was always a six-semester program – so with the three-years and in coming back to the two-years, we still do six semesters work” (MNP).

While there had been arguments to suggest that the program was no different to the three-year program because there was still six trimesters’ work, the study found that both lecturers and students were struggling to get lectures and assessments completed on time before the commencement of each trimester. Lecturers stated that they had as little time as one to two weeks to get all the grading of students’ work and assessments completed and then prepare the new trimester’s work. They were under so much pressure and felt quality was compromised. In the strand focus-group discussions, the participants made the following observations of the trimester program:

The trimester is short and with so many students we just teach. It is really quantity not quality that we seem to be promoting. The assessments are given but the validity of the types of assessment tasks is also questionable. This is because lecturers give assessable tasks that they can mark quickly to meet deadlines. Some students are left behind but we keep going (SLA).

Such comments were indicative of the challenges and frustrations that lecturers experienced in the implementation of this particular educational change. Apparent to all the participants was the need for adequate time to teach the course contents. Similarly, the students were also affected in the process. Here are some of their reflections on this educational change:

It is quicker and cheaper to produce teachers. However, the disadvantages are that there is a lot of pressure in the workload. There is no time to reflect on the work in order to grasp the content. Because the trimesters are shorter compared to semesters, the weak and slow learners are left behind. In the three year diploma, there was more time to cover work (SIA).

Another problem related to the education reform was that there was a limited number of existing teachers up-graded. The structural reform meant that the schools would need to have their teachers up-graded particularly in the primary schools to equip them to confidently teach the grades seven and eight curriculum. This was a critical issue that the NDOE had to address quickly.

The discussion on the change from the three-year to the two-year trimester diploma program cannot ignore the existence of the in-service component of the diploma in education primary in-service (DEPI) program. It is to this end that I will now focus the discussion.

Diploma in primary education in-service (DEPI) program

The DEPI program seemed to be a viable program in the teachers' colleges. However, the study found that only two out of the three colleges were conducting the program. One of the Principals stated that he did not take on the program because he believed that his College did not have the personnel, infrastructure and resources needed to conduct a quality program.

The other two colleges took up the challenge to conduct the program and have experienced difficulties. The difficulties are related to not having the personnel to teach the program, resistance from the staff, inadequate resources, short course duration and poor infrastructure to name a few. The need is there and teachers are eager to take up the challenge of undertaking further studies but, given the obstacles observed in the colleges, more needs to be done to improve the quality of the program.

Implementation process

Resources are important and necessary for the successful implementation of any educational change. In the change from the three-year to the two-year trimester program, nothing much changed in terms of the curriculum of the teachers' colleges. The curriculum resources and materials continued to be utilized in the teaching and learning of the two-year program. The greatest challenge though was for the staff of each strand within the colleges to decide on what must be taught and what can be left out given the short duration of the trimester system. Realistically, there was no way they could squeeze everything in the three years into the two-year trimester program. In some strands this was not done at all, which has resulted in the members of one strand making the following observations:

In preparation for the shift from the three years to the two years, a lot of content had to be cut down. However, there were very few meetings to prepare for the trimester in the college which was also the case in the strand. There were no proper organizations and decisions were made haphazardly. Introductory meetings were dominated by a few resulting in things being left to happen with no fruitful outcomes (*SJB*).

The decisions about what contents to be covered in the different strands had considerable impact on the availability of resources. My study found that the resources available to both staff and students were inadequate. The libraries in all the three colleges were limited and outdated. In the student focus group meetings, students indicated that the library needed upgrading:

The library is outdated, it needs more updated resources. We have three computers in the library for students to use but these are inadequate for all the students both the Pre-service and DEPI students. There are text books for the various subjects but not enough (S1B).

Regarding library resources and curriculum resources, there were comments made about the assistance provided by PASTEP. There was no doubt that PASTEP had contributed significantly to the colleges by providing resources, personnel and infrastructure. This was confirmed by participants of the study in the following comments.

We acknowledge the work done by PASTEP. There is an advantage of having resources produced by PASTEP which is beneficial for students. We are conscious that the national lecturers put together the materials with the assistance of PASTEP (SJB).

In general, all the participants acknowledged the huge contribution made by PASTEP to improving the resources. However, when the lecturers started using the materials, they found that the content of the resources was scanty and the quality was poor and inadequate. A lot needed to be done to improve the quality of these resources. According to some of the lecturers, they needed other text books to supplement the modules produced by PASTEP. The other problem faced by the colleges was the lack of extra funding to purchase text books necessary for quality teaching and learning. This situation prompted a key participant in the strand focus group to make the following remarks:

Alone, the resources produced by PASTEP are inadequate and therefore needs other text books as resources to be used side by side to complete the work. Prior to PASTEP coming into the PTC, we had resources ordered from overseas which were of quality. However, these books are no longer being ordered because they cost a lot and there is limited finance for such expenses. To us, this is sad because these were quality resources for use by lecturers and students (SJB).

The issue of resources for teaching and learning cannot be discussed in isolation without including the issue of finance. The funding allocations by the NDOE to the Catholic primary teachers' colleges is an important issue to be discussed because the three Catholic teachers' colleges studied and the other non-government teachers' colleges receive less funding from the government compared to the only government-funded teachers' college at Madang. The funding is based on a partnership between the Church Agency and the NDOE where the Agencies that govern these teachers' colleges have specific responsibilities while the government provides the salaries of the staff and develops the national curriculum guidelines. My study found that the issue of funding is a very fundamental component in improving the quality of teaching and learning in tertiary institutions. Thus far, this issue of funding was inadequate.

Donor funding agencies - PASTEP

The major funding donor has been AusAID through the many various projects that have been conducted in PNG. One of its major projects was the Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Project (PASTEP). One of the primary goals of PASTEP was to improve the quality of teacher education and make it more relevant to meet the requirements of the education reform agenda. In order to achieve this, PASTEP concentrated on different areas of need of the teachers' colleges including educational materials development, infrastructure refurbishment, staff mentoring and professional development (PASTEP, 2002) with the hope that these aspects would generate beneficial and measurable outcomes for the administration, academic staff and students alike.

Educational materials development

PASTEP provided workshops for staff development and curriculum resource development for lecturers in all the teachers' colleges. Lecturers were involved in producing the modules. These workshops were rated favorably by the participants. In terms of the curriculum resource development, PASTEP has provided a core curriculum supported by resources produced in modules with the national lecturers for the subjects in the five strands (Professional Development, Mathematics-Science Education, Language Development, Social and Spiritual Development and Community Development). This was a significant development for the colleges as one senior executive asserted in the following comments:

Previously we had all kinds of courses and lecturers were writing their own courses. With PASTEP, the curriculum for the primary teachers' colleges around the country had one core curriculum. Lecturers from each of the colleges worked together to work on their subject areas. The PASTEP people were seen as facilitators for the five strands which is very good because these things are now provided for anyone new entering teacher education institutions. The other good thing is that this is helpful for people transferring from one college to another. So what PASTEP has done is very good, provided resources and all the ideas are there, there is quality, and better standards. It is handy for lecturers doing cross-lecturing to find materials provided (*LSA*)

While lecturers applauded the contributions by PASTEP to the curriculum and teaching strategies, it would seem that the transfer of those skills to the reality of the lecture rooms was not realized. The reasons appeared to be related to the situation that lecturers found themselves in in these colleges whereby the availability of the resources and classroom facilities were not always conducive to quality teaching and learning. For example, the biggest problem for OLSHTC Kabaleo was the overcrowding of students. This issue of overcrowding had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. In HTTC Mt Hagen and St Benedict's Campus in Wewak, the issue was a lack of resources and this impacted on the quality of teaching and learning in these Colleges. The lack of funding

was also a key factor in the purchasing of more relevant text books and resources for the staff's and students' uses.

Infrastructure refurbishment

The infrastructure refurbishment was a significant component in all three teachers' colleges. This was because the maintenance of the college infrastructure was long overdue. However, the colleges could not carry out maintenance work on their own because of the costs involved. The college administrations had difficulties in securing adequate funding to carry out maintenance work. So the contributions by PASTEP were timely and well appreciated. However, there were other concerns raised by the college administrations and the Church Agency about the manner in which this component was conducted by PASTEP.

My study discovered that the consultation process between PASTEP and the National Department of Education with the Catholic Church Agency responsible for each of these three colleges was concerning for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was no consultation with the Catholic Church Agency. PASTEP came into the colleges, in particular HTTC and St Benedict's, and did not consult the Church Agency. The Catholic Church Agency felt left out in the infrastructure developments from the start to the end of the project in their own colleges. It is important to note that in each of these three colleges, the Catholic Church Agency had been responsible for the infrastructure developments and therefore being left out of the discussions with PASTEP in this issue was a big concern for them. A member of the Agency stated that "the Agency, meaning the bishops were never really consulted as far as I know and that is part of subsidiarity" (CBB). The National Secretary of the National Catholic Education Office always confirmed this concern stating he was not involved in the initial negotiations on behalf of the Agency.

Secondly, there were further concerns raised regarding the construction company hired by PASTEP to carry out the infrastructure upgrading in the colleges. It appeared that the quality of work carried out by the construction company had been relatively poor. The participants indicated that they would have preferred to have been consulted about the company doing the construction work. However, they were also aware that they did not have any power over the issue because PASTEP had the money and therefore could hire whoever they wanted to do their job.

Thirdly, during my data collection period which occurred at the end of the PASTEP project, two of the colleges were trying to undo the damages that had been left by the construction company. A senior executive asserted that "this was our fear when we saw it going on. We were afraid that the fixing up will end up costing us money. It really raised questions about the whole program" (LTC).

In summary, my findings highlighted the importance of establishing better cooperation and collaboration between donor funding agencies and the recipients of projects. PASTEP has definitely contributed significantly to the Catholic primary teachers'

colleges. However, the question about ownership and sustainability of these innovations seemed not to have been adequately addressed. This is perhaps one of the most important issues that needs to be dealt with when negotiating projects otherwise the entire project could be a total waste of funding, time, resources and personnel. It would seem that this is an area that PNG does not adequately address when negotiating major projects.

The role of the college leadership in leading educational change

While having quality staff in educational institutions could be perceived to be a prerequisite to producing quality teachers, it could be argued that without competent leadership in these institutions, this may not be possible. This is because good leadership is critical in any educational change (Fullan, 2001). Consequently, my study found that the quality of the current leadership in the three colleges was lacking in many areas.

Leadership is concerned with influence and being able to provide a vision for an educational institution. However, Sergiovanni states that: “Although principals are important, their mere presence does not automatically result in the required leadership being provided” (Sergiovanni, 2001). Often, circumstances prevent principals from becoming the leaders they want to be. My study found evidence to suggest that some of these circumstances included the lack of training and professional development of principals. Other areas included the lack of qualified personnel, poor infrastructures, lack of funding, and inadequate resources to effectively run the colleges. Consequently, the lack of leadership training in two of the colleges was demonstrated by the way principals pushed for the educational changes to be strictly adhered to by staff, with no sensitivity provided to accommodate the needs, values and experiences of the staff in the process.

Secondly, the manner in which leadership was exercised seemed less empowering for staff and students. There were incidents where staff were left out of decision-making processes and simply told to carry out instructions by the administration.

Thirdly, there were also situations whereby no decisions were made and the administration seemed to entertain a waiting game and were happy to let things happen. The channels of communication were mostly nonexistent between the college leadership, staff and students.

There were however, examples of positive encouragement and empowering of staff and students. In one college, systems were being created and put in place to encourage more collaboration among staff and students with the leadership. These systems proved to be successful because there was a feeling of ownership among staff.

My purpose in presenting the lack of leadership in these three colleges is to highlight the fact that there is a great need for leadership training for educational institutions. Mandated changes cannot be successfully implemented without quality personnel. The head of any educational institution must be qualified and professional trained. The people in current leadership positions should be congratulated for doing what they are currently doing with very little assistance and training from the NDOE and the Agency. However,

this situation needs to change drastically if teacher education is concerned about quality education and providing quality service to the nation within the school system.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would argue that in the pursuit for quality education, the teachers' colleges need to be empowered to conduct the mandated educational changes. In order to achieve this, the colleges need to be provided with the qualified personnel, adequate funding and resources, and infrastructures needed to conduct their programs satisfactorily. Currently they are totally dependent on the NDOE to provide these needs for them. While there could be advantages in such a system, it could also be crippling. My study revealed that because these most needed resources, personnel and funding are lacking, the colleges are struggling to provide the quality service and delivery in education that is required of them by the students and the community.

Furthermore, while donor agencies have been the key to implementing the education reform, Papua New Guineans need to be fully involved and take ownership of these projects to ensure sustainability.

Finally the mandated changes in the teachers' colleges need good leadership to lead the change and influence the staff and students to take ownership of these changes. Future leaders must be well qualified. This is an area of great need that should be addressed to ensure quality in the delivery of educational services to the students and the community at large.

Recommendations

Therefore, I make the following recommendations:

1. That the partnership between the State and the Catholic Church Agency in education, in particular teacher education, be reviewed to create better understanding between the two major partners and all the stakeholders to ensure that there is quality in the service and delivery of education.
2. That the issues of ownership and sustainability of donor funded projects be part of the initial negotiation and be given serious consideration by the National Government and donor funding agencies throughout the duration of any donor funded project.
3. That the associate-ship program for future leaders for educational institutions be revived and improved to ensure professional training is done before officers assume leadership positions. Such a program should be a priority for the NDOE and the Agency.

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