

## **Alignment of Teacher Education Programs with the National Curriculum Reform Agenda: The University of Goroka Experience**

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### **Abstract**

Any massive curriculum reform specifically at the national level would certainly require changes elsewhere for effective implementation. This paper examines to what extent the University of Goroka (UOG) as a prime secondary and tertiary teacher education institution is aligning itself to the national curriculum reform agenda. It identifies two areas for discussion; the latest developments in managing education reform at the University level and case study on its impact among the Bachelor of Education (BEd) inservice teachers.

### **Introduction**

Undoubtedly, the colonization and acculturation process from stone-age to computer revolution entails a significant challenge for Papua New Guineans. Explicitly the persistent wave after wave of social, political, economic, technological and educational changes continue to have profound impact upon people's lives. In the process, apart from the empowerment of politicians, bureaucrats, elites, entrepreneurs, engineers and doctors alike with immeasurable blessings of varying degrees, in parallel insurmountable problems from juvenile delinquency to anarchy continues to haunt Papua New Guinea's development, enabling various agents of the national government to address them. The National Department of Education, as an agent for accommodating change, is duty bound to help solve the escalating societal problems.

Thus, many attempts were made over the years, however the Matane Report and the Education Sector Review 1991 have become the most significant pillars of the current education reform commencing in 1992. The educational philosophy document calls for all sectors of the schooling system from elementary to universities to reinforce Integral Human Development whilst the Education Sector Review Report acknowledge and provide the policy framework for structural and curriculum reforms. Curriculum reform at the elementary and primary is in transition while transformation at the secondary level has begun in 2004, largely funded by AUSAid. The University of Goroka predominantly trains secondary teachers and thus possesses responsibility to align itself to the national secondary curriculum change.

### **Review of the Literature**

Recommendation 23 of the Ministerial Committee Report stated boldly that all Institutes of Higher Education should take account of the philosophy of education based on Integral Human Development (IHD) and become committed to its implementation (Matane 1986:49). The report also highlighted significant fragmentation and compartmentalization of the secondary curriculum and called for integrated curriculum approach. The Education Sector Review of 1991 whilst acknowledging and consolidating the Matane

Report, further reinforced (recommendation 24) that the Goroka (UPNG Goroka Campus then) and Waigani Campuses of the University of Papua New Guinea should work more closely together to implement the recommendation in the Asian Development Bank report of a balance between subject knowledge and pedagogical skills in per-service lower secondary training (NDOE 1991:24). Recommendation 28 further stated that more effort be put on providing greater and more relevant subject-matter specialization in the BEd. (Inservice) programmes (NDOE 1991:24).

The recommendations from the Matane Report and the Education Sector Review Report have significant implications for the University of Goroka, a fully fledged university as of 1997. Both reports call for implementation of the educational philosophical goals in practice and the reforming of the academic programs towards preparing teachers who are highly knowledgeable, skilled and efficient in their teaching. Concerning the implementation of IHD, Yoko's research appeared to indicate a high level of lack of congruency between educational philosophy, policy and practice (Yoko 2000). Given the nature of academic orientation, the educational philosophical goals such as equality, respect, responsibility and socialization were implemented in an ad hoc manner depending on the context of faculties, programs and courses.

However, as far the education reform is concerned, the University of Goroka became conscious of its responsibility and proposed changes in the teacher education programs. The 2000 Handbook stated that:

The Education Reform in Papua New Guinea is gaining momentum, as community schools are upgraded to grades 7 and 8, and Provincial High Schools are upgraded to grades 11 and 12. Producing teachers for these new courses present challenges and opportunities, both quantitative and qualitative. Not only must increase number of teachers be trained for the upgraded schools, they must be given a higher level of subject content in order to teach the higher grades (UOG 2000:8).

In recent years, to accommodate the reform both the undergraduate and postgraduate programs as well as the intake of students has increased and consolidated.

### **University Wide Approach to Curriculum Reform**

The adoption or adaptation of the national education reform agenda appears to be slow in pace with the secondary curriculum development. The National Research Institute (NRI) and the University of Goroka were involved in reviewing of the lower secondary curriculum at the beginning of 2004. The review report was approved in principle by the Secondary Board of Studies in November 2004 which has now given impetus to the writing of nine approved subject syllabi beginning of 2005.

To acquaint UOG academics to the secondary curriculum change, CRIP personnel provided an inservice program in February 2005 outlining the rationalization and progress of the reform, and Outcomes Based Education (OBE). A follow up debriefing

workshop was held in March conducted by Dr Yoko, Dr Mel and Ms Ogoba in which most academics attended and received sixteen different documents about the education reform. The academics requested copies of the National Curriculum Statement and the National Assessment and Reporting Policy that were then printed and distributed to them. However, most faculties and departments do have these copies as well as the lower and upper primary syllabi from the twenty boxes received from Curriculum Development Division (CDD) and distributed in 2004.

Another inservice workshop was conducted by Sue Lauer and Shantha Jacob from CRIP in June-July 2005 for a week. Apart from the broad based workshops for all academics covering a wide range of topics from objectives versus outcomes to managing curriculum change, sessions were held in faculties and departments based on their specific needs.

Broadly speaking, information about the education reform appears to be gradually filtering through the University. Some faculties and programs, for example, Science Faculty is already developing its courses based on OBE.

### **Faculty of Education Approach to Curriculum Reform**

The Education Faculty with two Departments, namely Educational Foundations and Curriculum and Teaching offers various undergraduate and postgraduate programs across the University. The courses offered to the preservice students include: Introduction to Educational Psychology, Introduction to Guidance and Counseling, and Introduction to Inclusive Education. In particular, the Philosophy and Curriculum in Education course covers different philosophies underpinning curriculum encompassing the Matane Report and the education reform issues in general including OBE.

Within the inservice two year program, students study in the following programs, strands or specializations:

- Educational Administration
- Curriculum Studies
- Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counseling
- Sociology and Comparative Education
- Special Education

Depending on the nature of the different programs, issues related to the education reform are integrated into the courses as appropriate. For instance, the aspects of gender equity and equality are covered in a course called “Gender and Leadership” offered in Educational Administration. Issues related to inclusive education are adequately accommodated in Special Education strand. Curriculum related issues are being reinforced in courses such as: Curriculum Development, School Based Curriculum Development, Philosophy and Curriculum in Education, Curriculum Relevance and Innovation, Community Based Curriculum Planning and Development, and Educational Policy and Curriculum Practice, under Curriculum Studies specialization. However, due to the nature of distinct courses with their own characteristics, the education reform content may not be approached holistically. Thus, a course entitled “Education Reform

in a Contemporary Society” is now being initiated that will cover all aspects of educational change, with either a deductive or inductive approach, i.e. focusing from other countries to PNG or vice versa.

## **A Case Study of Implementation of the Curriculum Reform Content**

### ***Introduction***

A high powered delegation from NDOE led by Dr Pagelio visited the University of Goroka in 2001 and challenged academics to integrate the various aspects of the curriculum reform into the teacher education academic programs. Thus, attempts were made in 2002 onwards to accommodate some aspects of education reform into the curriculum studies specialization courses. This case study reflects strengths and limitations of the delivery as perceived or experienced by the second year BEd inservice students.

### ***Methodology and Methods***

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used, as appropriate to process and analyze the questionnaire data. Particularly the likert-type items were tabulated and statistics calculated using percentages whilst the open-ended responses were processed using content analyzes technique. The questionnaire and document collection methods were applied to gather the necessary data.

### ***Subjects and Sampling***

Eighteen second year Curriculum Studies Specialization students, referred to as ‘the universe’, completed the questionnaire. This group was deemed to be knowledgeable about the content covered so far in the different courses within their nearly two years of study.

### ***Measures***

The questionnaire contained three sections: biographical, likert-type items and open-ended responses. Specifically the first six likert-type items attempted to examine the extent to which they knew or did not know about the education reform prior to coming to the University of Goroka. The next five items tested to what extent they have become knowledgeable or not about the educational change. Two example of each are illustrated below.

(1) Prior to coming to the University of Goroka, I knew about the structural reform well.

1 = None, 2 = Limited, 3 = Highly knowledgeable, and 4 = Not Sure

(2) Whilst studying at the University of Goroka, my understanding of structural reform has increased.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Disagree, and 5 = Strongly Disagree

For the purpose of analysis in relation to the five statements, they were condensed to three categories: Agree, Undecided and Disagree whilst for the six items, the None to Not Sure items were maintained.

### ***Findings***

#### ***Biographical Data***

Thirteen males and five females, 88 percent above thirty plus years old, responded to the questionnaire. Ninety four percent of the respondents had taught in reformed primary schools while six percent taught in a non reformed school. Table 1 illustrates the grades taught.

Table 1. Grades Taught

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Upper Primary (6-8)	12	67
Lower Primary (3-5)	2	11
All Grades (3-8)	3	17
All Grades (1-6)	1	5
<b>Total:</b>	18	100

Of the 18 teachers, 67% taught in the upper primary (grades 6-8) while many were involved in the lower sector of primary schooling. This may imply that those teaching in upper primary are more determined to have further study for professional development.

Although teachers taught all the different subject areas, many were engaged in Mathematics and Science followed by Personal Development. The least taught subject area was Arts. This group of teachers taught in many different schools throughout Papua New Guinea.

#### ***Understanding of Educational Reform Prior to UOG Study***

In the context of structural reform, 67% percent of teachers had limited knowledge, 22% were highly knowledgeable and 11% not sure about the structural reform in Papua New Guinea. It appeared that those involved in reformed schools had some idea about the structural reform. When asked about the purpose of the structural reform, 6% had no clue, 64% limited knowledge, 24% knowledgeable and 6 % not sure. The data appeared to indicate that those engaged in reformed schools were not fully knowledgeable about why structural change was introduced. A student concurred that:

I was not fully aware of the education reform but had a bit of knowledge through the provincial inservice and by looking at the reform structure. However, about the aim of the education reform I had no idea at all.

In the context of curriculum reform, Table 2 depicts the degree of understanding about the educational change.

Table 2. In depth Understanding of Curriculum Reform

1	2	3	4	Total	Percentage
29	59		12	17*	100

\* 1 incomplete response.

It appeared that vast majority of the teachers have not fully understood what the curriculum reform entails. Regarding the extent to which students knew the reasons for curriculum reform, 24% had no firm knowledge, 70% limited knowledge and 6% knowledgeable. Again, it seemed that the purpose of the curriculum reform has not been well grasped by teachers. A teacher stated that:

No. I was not fully aware of the education reform prior to coming to the University of Goroka. Not much awareness was done about the curriculum reform and also not enough inservices were conducted.

When asked how they came to know the education reform, there was mixed reaction. Teachers had learned about the education reform in many ways including inservicing, during teaching experience and through the media. Furthermore, the majority of the teachers (64%) had limited knowledge about the curriculum reform documents, 24% were not aware of the various documents and 12% were not sure. This may imply that various reform documents are yet to reach schools.

### **Level of Understanding About the Education Reform Whilst at UOG**

Ninety four percent indicated that their understanding of the structural reform has increased whilst 6% disagreed. However, the purpose of the structural reform is still not fully understood by majority of the teachers. Meanwhile, Table 3 shows the degree of awareness about the curriculum reform.

Table 3. Fully Aware of the Curriculum Reform

Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Total	Percentage
61	17	22	18	100

Whilst 61% seemed to be aware of the curriculum reform, interestingly 17% undecided and 22% disagreed. This may reflect the unstable or inconsistent level of understanding among the teacher population. Another teacher highlighted that:

Through the courses I am beginning to acquire some understanding but since it is a new concept I will need to learn more, for example, the actual

syllabuses, programming etc. The concept of outcome (OBE) is yet to be understood properly in relation to practice in the classroom.

Relating to accessibility of curriculum documents, seventy eight percent agreed that they have received some copies of the curriculum materials, 6% undecided and 16% disagreed. The most common materials gained by students included:

1. National Curriculum Statement
2. National Assessment and Reporting Policy
3. Curriculum Writer's Handbook
4. Outcomes Based Education by William Spady
5. Curriculum Development Handbook (UOG)
6. School-Based Curriculum Development Handbook (UOG)
7. Educational Policy and Curriculum Practice Handbook (UOG)
8. Curriculum Relevance and Innovation Handbook (UOG)
9. A Philosophy of Education for Papua New Guinea

When asked if content about the education reform is adequately covered in the Curriculum Studies specialization program, 50% disagreed, 6% undecided and 44% agreed. It appeared that more education reform content should be included in the courses offered in this particular program. One student concurred that:

I recommend that additions to the courses be considered regarding the implementation of the teaching and learning materials. We need content that will also help us to inservice teachers in the field on how to use the reform curriculum syllabuses.

Another student commented that:

I am in the process of getting myself fully aware of the education reform in Curriculum Studies strand and so when I complete this study, I should comment well on this. To be frank and precise, I am still unsure of this as yet.

This implies that the process of understanding what the education reform entails is not yet well articulated in the teacher education programs as well as those studying the field. However, teachers also indicated that some aspects of the education reform were adequately covered in the following courses.

1. Philosophy and Curriculum in Education
2. Introduction to Curriculum Theory and Practice
3. Curriculum Development
4. Community Based Curriculum Development
5. School-Based Curriculum Development
6. Educational Policy and Curriculum Practice
7. Curriculum Relevance and Innovation

When asked how the national education reform agenda could be effectively managed at NDOE and UOG levels, various suggestions were made. A teacher said:

All the education reform materials which are being developed at the Curriculum Development Division should be sent to UOG for student teachers to read and understand how to use and implement them when they go back to the schools. Student teachers should have in depth knowledge about the content of the (reformed) curriculum to inservice teachers at the school.

Another teacher reiterated that:

I suggest NDOE should give the reform inservice package program to UOG so that it can provide inservice to both primary and secondary inservice teachers within its two year program. This can be incorporated with other courses which the University is currently running.

Yet another teacher echoed that:

NDOE should liaise with UOG on the importance of implementing the current curriculum and fund field teachers (BEd Inservice) to update their content knowledge. NDOE should make funds available for inservice and workshops to be conducted by UOG lecturers at primary schools to help teachers in darkness.

One student said that “NDOE should make it a priority to sponsor more field teachers who are resistant to adapt to changes and have them on salary”, whilst another commented that “NDOE initiated the reform and should work closely with UOG to make sure adequate training is provided for teachers for effective implementation”.

## **Conclusion**

The data appeared to reveal that there is an existence of teething problems in relation to implementation of the education reform at different levels of the National Education System. The University of Goroka is in the process of aligning its teacher education programs congruent with the national education reform agenda, however more needs to be done. There is need for inclusion of a course that would deal directly with education reform issues. Furthermore, any curriculum reform content covered within the Faculty of Education and other faculties should be approached in an integrated manner so that it is presented in a holistic manner.

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