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## Outcome-based education with special reference to the International Education Agency in PNG

Karaho-Teoti Asimi

### Abstract

This article reflects upon, compares and contrasts the decisions made by critics and advocates of outcome-based education (OBE) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Introduced in 2003, a government decision decided to abolish the OBE approach in 2013. The International Education Agency (IEA) schools in the country have successfully implemented OBE, which is deemed to have failed in schools run by other agencies. The author elaborates on IEA characteristics which contribute to successful educational outcomes.

**Key words:** outcome based education, curriculum, International Education Agency

### The issue

Since its introduction in 2003, the outcome-based education (OBE) system in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been hotly debated by students, parents, teachers, educational stakeholders and educational authorities. Even politicians have been vocal, which resulted in a 2013 review of outcome-based education and recommendations for its replacement. The debates encouraged researchers, scholars, business oriented groups, educationists, advocates and critics from the national and international community to share their views. As a consequence, this has attracted a myriad of views ranging from one extreme of the spectrum to the other; those who support outcome-based education versus those who do not support it. Typical of opponent views is that of Corney Alone (2009), who described OBE as 'a colossal blunder and a grand scam'. He further claimed that this educational model was unsuccessful in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands and South Africa.

In Papua New Guinea Vision 2050 (National Strategic Plan Taskforce, 2009, p. 34), it states, 'It is imperative that OBE is immediately replaced'. The Prime Minister was obligated to listen to the concerns of parents, students and teachers and instituted a commission of enquiry to review the concept of outcome-based education. On January 22, 2013, the National Executive Council (NEC) established a Task Force and appointed a panel of experts to investigate the nature of the challenges and problems experienced in the implementation of the OBE system. The NEC decision was in response to wide-ranging public comment from a variety of stakeholders such as teachers, parents, school administrators, church agencies and academics, over several years, on the implementation of the OBE curriculum. It is anticipated that the findings of this Report will justify phasing out outcome-based education and provide recommendations for its replacement.

### **International Education Agency**

The International Education Agency (IEA) of PNG Ltd is a company owned by shareholding. The company owns and operates 20 schools in Papua New Guinea and is a company limited by shares. The company shares are held only by School Associations. Where the IEA owns and operates a school, the School Association holds one share. In line with its mission statement, the IEA provides quality education to both Papua New Guineans and expatriate students. Since education is their core business, they strive to be a powerful learning organization which monitors and reflects global developments in educational best practice. By contrast, outcome-based education system is seen as a failed concept that has been implemented in Papua New Guinea as claimed by critics. On the other extreme, outcome-based education has been very successful in the International Education Agency (IEA).

Why is it so that outcome-based education concept has miserably failed in the state schools and very successful in the International Education Agency system schools? What is the difference causing this huge disparity between two extremes of education service providers? Were there studies of the OBE concept carried out before implementing it? Were there considerations of the demographic aspects of the country before consolidating this concept, now that ongoing support mechanisms are fading away? Were there sufficient funds budgeted to cater for teaching resources, upgrading of school facilities and up-skilling and training of facilitators?

### **Outcome-based curriculum**

The PNG National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2002) defines outcome-based curriculum as a tool to be able to identify the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that all students should achieve or demonstrate at a particular grade in a particular subject. The outcome-based education is designed to facilitate self-learning approaches and to show student progress based on the 'outcome' of learning skills. Institutions or schools are responsible for setting relevant, criterion-based outcomes, where assessment focuses on individual skills and performance. In a traditional education approach, student skill levels are determined by completing text books but the approach of outcome based education would rely solely on the individual efforts of a student and not on their comparative success to other students.

In the Papua New Guinean education system, the outcome-based curriculum identifies what students can demonstrate as a result of adhering to the national syllabuses developed for early childhood to Year 12. Outcomes that students are expected to achieve are identified in the subject of study. Each outcome has a list of indicators that identifies knowledge, skills and values learnt by a student. Teachers are encouraged to use the outcomes and indicators to plan and prepare their programs and lessons. These identify the learning steps to be completed in order to achieve the learning outcomes.

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Outcome-based education was introduced in Papua New Guinea in 2000 with the first syllabuses published in 2003. The stated outcomes intended to make education more accountable for meeting the real needs and aspirations of the people of this country. Most people expected the education reform to bring new changes into the curriculum such that it identifies the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that all students would achieve or demonstrate at a particular grade in a particular subject as reported by John Iromea in the *Solomon Star News* (26<sup>th</sup> September 2012). Sadly, this high expectation did not eventuate as anticipated.

### **Methodology**

A collective summary of reasons for the failed outcome-based education identifies that the Government of Papua New Guinea accepted and implemented the outcome-based education without considering aspects of adequate facilities, relevant teaching and learning materials, and trained specialist teachers to teach the content of newly introduced subjects. The lack of knowledge and understanding of the implementation process was a contributing factor to the failure of OBE.

Papua New Guinean educational experts believe that the real problem is to do with lack of relevant resources and support mechanism to aid facilitators or teachers prepare their lessons well. Teachers and facilitators lacked the ability to understand how they can translate the theory and philosophy of outcome-based education into practical action in their instructional planning, teaching and assessment of student learning. Roy Killen (2000) emphasised the need for understanding of the underpinning premises and principles of OBE during the implementation process. Consequently, educator, Michael John Uglo (*Ed Now*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013) claimed that a lot of teachers are teaching the curriculum the traditional way or as they would do in the old system.

It can be argued that critics of outcome-based education in Papua New Guinea had not done sufficient research to justify and verify their reasons to abolish the OBE curriculum. They should first understand what outcome-based education is, its intended purpose and the use of its technical vocabulary. Before making comparisons of outcome-based with that of overseas countries, why cannot those peddlers look within the country and see the success of OBE in other Education service providers like the IEA?

Additionally, researching the experiences other countries faced with the failed outcome-based education cannot be juxtaposed on that of Papua New Guinea. Culturally, we are very different in our social context, attitudes and behaviours, morals, values and beliefs. However, I cannot discount that some counties may have similar experiences to our country, nonetheless in PNG we still are very different as far as culture is concerned. Within our country and with further clusters of over 800 cultures, it would be unthinkable to impose a standard global culture of educational philosophies.

### **IEA and literature review**

The IEA philosophy is to provide a broad and balanced curriculum designed to promote intellectual, creative, personal, physical and recreational skills and understandings. The curriculum fosters an appreciation of the natural and social environments and encourages a sense of responsibility towards these. Within this curriculum, schools have considerable freedom in the development of teaching and learning programs designed to meet the needs of individual students. The design of the curriculum culminates into Lawrence Kohlberg's (1958, 1984) stages in the process of moral development in that, building on the work of Jean Piaget, it examines the development of an individual from childhood through to mature adulthood.

The success of the IEA curriculum embraces Kohlberg's theory of moral development of;

a description of a journey from self-interested preoccupation with self to a concern for the well-being of all and, the development of independent thought and questioning of the morality placed upon by social groups such as family, religion, peers, employers and government.

The IEA further provides clear directions through its mission statement and strategic plans and is committed to participatory decision making processes at all levels of the organization. Parents, the community, principals and teachers have significant roles to play in the ongoing consultation process which underlies all decision making. Because of its diversity and commitment to meeting individual needs, decision making about the implementation of plans is, as far as practicable, devolved towards those who must implement the decisions. Adopting utilitarian standards in an organizational context, policy guidelines and good decisions promote the general welfare more than any other alternative. Utilitarianism does not impose to accept rules, policies or principles without substance. It is a test of their worth against a set standard of utility. Similarly the IEA embraces consensual decision making and formulates benchmarks which employees work towards and measure themselves against.

Principles of social justice and equity are valued throughout the IEA. There is a strong concern for the welfare of all who participate in assisting the IEA to achieve its mission. The IEA strongly affirm that learning in schools must be child centered and focused upon the achievement of each individual student's potential. Teaching programs should reflect an understanding of the stages of development through which children pass. It should ensure that each child's new learning is founded firmly in a learning environment that is comfortable and caring so that students can enjoy their education and can learn from the challenges they face without fear or negative consequences. Like the structural contingency theory (Donaldson, 2001), there is a set of demands or expectations, in this case from parents that are imposed on the organization that must be met if the organization is to survive and be effective. The IEA works in partnership with its stakeholders, especially parents, to achieve its long-term outcomes.

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Students in IEA schools are provided with opportunities to develop an ability and readiness to cope with change, including ease of transition for those moving to other countries. Towards this end, schools offer a range of curricula. These include IEA's own, developed to combine relevant PNG learning with experiences provided in a range of Western countries. In addition, a number of imported curricula are offered to cater for students who intend to further their studies beyond PNG. Understanding cross-cultural circumstances and organizational culture in influencing leadership is desired more than ever before. As a measure of quality and to be globally competitive, the IEA embraces international curricula and there are systems in place to validate these curricula such as audits and moderation of the International Baccalaureate (IB), Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the International General Curriculum for Secondary Education (IGCSE) from the United Kingdom (UK). This brings IEA to the international platform being a provider of quality education.

Students are assisted to develop strong self-concepts so as to promote responsible independence and moral autonomy. They learn to appreciate the value systems implicit in national cultures, and to recognize the need for tolerance and understanding. The maintenance of close communication with the child's home is a major objective for the school. This acknowledges the important role played by the parents, families and the broader community in the total education of the child. Parents must be involved in the identification and monitoring of the needs of their children.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) argued that moral requirements are based on a standard of rationality. Moral philosophy addresses the question, 'What ought I to do?' Kant's theory supports the IEA approach that parents, when they act from duty and supporting their children's education, are making decisions of moral worth. Kant also stressed on the importance of motivation and of acting on principle. Parents in the IEA are acting on principle or out of moral conviction because they are morally motivated. Kant's theory is perhaps the link to this success with parents in the IEA.

The IEA make every effort to employ the best possible teachers as it acknowledges that its teachers are by the most important resource schools have for guaranteeing quality. Recognizing the vital importance of teacher in-service programs in school, the IEA is committed to the provision of opportunities for each teacher's professional growth and development. Undoubtedly, an ethic of care approach is visible with teachers of the IEA because as employees, they are interdependent upon others, like colleagues, students, parents and stakeholders for their individual identity and wellbeing. It further claims from this approach that teachers as sole models have a moral obligation to consider the needs, desires, values and well-being of those with whom they relate.

### **Discussion and analysis**

'The quality of an educational system can be judged from at least three perspectives: the inputs to the system, what happens within the system and the outputs from the system' (Killen, 2000). Outcome-based education did not

succeed in PNG because of the absence of the three perspectives and if they were implemented, it was not done well. Inputs to the system focus on finance, resources, infrastructure and others. Why weren't the inputs adequately considered? By contrast, new concepts that have been agreed to using a consultative approach in the IEA are disseminated as information to everyone. In the broader PNG context, there was not sufficient awareness for students, teachers, parents and stakeholders about outcome-based education. This very crucial part of the implementation process was not well done.

The extent of awareness of the OBE reforms was to a select group of people and not the masses that had a vested interest in this new concept, OBE. Perhaps this can be seen as a form of psychological egoism, where the OBE curriculum developers were motivated by self-interest. The reasons could be economically driven to the benefits of the peddlers of outcome-based education. One can also assume peddlers of this concept could be testing their research work of a system that would eliminate the educational woes of this country.

The ethical aspects of disseminating awareness were inadequately considered. 'The capacity to perceive and be sensitive to relevant moral issues that deserve consideration in making choices that impact others' is an aspect stressed by Petrick and Quinn (2004). This also links with Kant's belief that 'All human beings have absolute worth in and of themselves and thus should be treated with dignity and respect'.

The IEA has a cultural perspective of its curriculum that embraces the beliefs, morals and values of the people, the land and environment in which they work. This has been very successful because the organization owns and operates twenty schools in the nineteen provinces of the country. The schools are owned by parents that are represented as an association and on the school board. Decisions about the school will be of interest to every parent and they make consensual resolutions.

## Conclusion

The International Education Agency curriculum has always been an outcome-based education. Whilst the IEA affiliate with other international curricula, our teaching pedagogies emphasize outcome driven mechanisms. The IEA believes that as students, we all learn differently and that teachers and facilitators should provide strategic teaching and appropriate methodology to impart knowledge and skills to students at their level of understanding.

The IEA has been an advocate of outcome-based education and we continue to build that rapport since its inception. Outcome-based education has grown rapidly and with maturity in our system. The IEA has five key outcomes and we believe that students who are educated through our school from elementary to year twelve are able to accomplish the outcomes. The attributes are for each student to:

- ***be self-directed*** - one who is self-confident, has high self-esteem and personal integrity with a positive vision for self and future

- **communicate effectively** – one who conveys and receives information, instruction, ideas and feelings appropriately and effectively in arrange of different, cultural, language and social contexts
- **behave ethically** – one who exhibit appropriate morals, manners and virtues in a range of social and cultural settings and a sense of their own spirituality
- **work collaboratively** – one who develops good relationships with others and works in cooperative ways to achieve common goals
- **analyse and solve problems** – one who accesses a range of information sources appropriate to the resolution of complex issues and applies strategies with accuracy and thoroughness.

These five key outcomes set the pillars of our curriculum that continues to grow from strength to strength and into maturity. The IEA curriculum is revised every five years and has been very successful.

The Department of Education could have done more to work in partnership with the International Education Agency and learn from its experiences and success with outcome-based education. As a way forward, Spady (1994) shared his views on the three perspective of judging quality education. A review on finances, resources and infrastructure would be the first corrective measure. The processes, organizations, control and delivery of education and training constitute the operations of the system forms the second phase and the focus on the products or results of education forms the final phase. In 2013, the OBE Exit Report of the task force was accepted by Government and the community anxiously waits to see what the future will hold. Meantime, the IEA will continue to offer its outcomes based curricula.

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### **Author**

Karaho-Teoti Asimi comes from the Mortlock Island in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. He holds a Diploma in Secondary Teaching, a Bachelor's Degree in Education specializing in Mathematics and Computing and is currently undertaking the DWU Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. Karaho-Teoti is the Human Resource Team Leader and Executive Officer to the Executive Director of the International Education Agency of PNG Ltd. He has been a teacher, Head of Department and Deputy Principal of a government agency school before joining the International Education Agency (IEA). Karaho-Teoti has twenty-two years of teaching experience in education. Email: [kasimi@iea.ac.pg](mailto:kasimi@iea.ac.pg)