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Wind in the Sails or Captain of the Va'a?

The Influence of the Global Education Agenda in the Samoan Education System

A research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore the influence of an international education agenda, particularly through the Education for All goals and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, on the education system of Samoa. The findings of the research indicate that the priorities of the Samoan education policy are closely related to this second Millennium Development Goal, in particular with regards to access to education. Samoan education policies also relate to the emerging Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) when addressing educational quality. The emphasis on international goals is problematic as these goals do not take into consideration the context or culture-specific needs of the country, but rather reflect a combination of various underlying theories such as rights-based approaches and economic theories. The involvement of donors in the education system of Samoa was found to be strongly influenced by MDG 2. It also became evident that donors give priority to their own interests and their funding can easily change as priorities in development shift. This research has also found that there is an indigenous education agenda being constructed by rich academic discussions about the goals and purpose of education in the Pacific. These discussions are reinforced by selected regional initiatives, such as the Re-thinking Education Initiative and the Pacific Regional Initiative for the Delivery of basic Education (PRIDE). Pacific education experts point out the importance of education being culturally relevant, as the current system is perceived as an alien force, and describe how, by its nature, the education system imposes incompatible values on the children of the Pacific. The Samoan education system was found to set its own course, while also incorporating international goals, donor priorities, the national level priorities and ideas presented by Pacific authors on education.

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"Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom…"

(Bahá'u'lláh, 2005, pp. 259–60)

My research is inspired by the knowledge that all individuals have great potential, and that education is the means to reveal this potential and allow communities to flourish from the valuable contributions of all its members. This research project is dedicated to the young people of the Pacific Islands. The joy, humility, perseverance in the face of adversity, spirit of selfless service, eagerness to learn and true friendship that I have enjoyed in working alongside so many young Pacific Islanders is such a blessing. Education will always be my passion, because of the transformation that it can facilitate in allowing the "gems" of potential to shine through.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asia Development Bank
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
EFA	Education for All
ESP II	Education Sector Plan II
FBEAP	Forum Basic Education Action Plan
FEdMM	Forum Education Ministers Meeting
FPICs	Forum Pacific Island Countries
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IDTs	International Development Targets
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MESC	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Development
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PILNA	Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PRIDE	Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of (basic) Education
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
RPEIPP	Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for Pacific People by Pacific Peoples
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPBEQ	Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Quality

SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPECA	Samoa Primary Education Certification Assessment
SPELL	Samoa Primary Education Literacy Level Tests
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations

Glossary

Fa'asamoa	Referring to the 'Samoan way of life'
Va'a	Traditional sailing ship or canoe of Samoa
Matai	Samoan Elder, Leader, Chief
Kakala	Tongan word for a flower garland
'ainga	Extended family unit in Samoan

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