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A second chance in education: Upgrade teachers' perceptions of tertiary education in Samoa

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Abstract

A second chance in education is becoming more and more infrequent in the region. The study is the first in Samoa and makes references to existing literature on teacher upgrade. This paper investigated whether the Teacher Upgrade programme in Samoa contributed positively to teaching and learning in schooling. The programme itself is a pathway for teachers to gain a degree qualification, a rise in pay and an opportunity to hold leadership positions of responsibility at the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC). Teacher upgrade programmes have made a difference in former colonised nations' education systems. Samoa, for instance, started teacher upgrade five years ago and has witnessed improvement in its education system, particularly with students' performance and engagement. The participants in the Teacher Upgrade programme included teachers, school principals, and senior officers from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC). Qualitative data was collected through the utilisation of an indigenous research methodology—*talanoa* and *nofo*—that aligns with the lived realities of the participants. The findings highlighted teacher upgrade has positive educational outcomes for teachers in the programme. This ranged from knowledge, skills, creativity in resource making, diverse pedagogical know-how, improvement in the use and application of technology, and improvements in higher qualification and salary.

Introduction

Improvements in the education system through quality teaching would equip teachers with the latest knowledge and skills that would contribute to better education in Samoa (Beteille & Evans, 2019). Teacher Upgrade in Samoa is a programme that provided a second chance education for most teachers without a Bachelor of Education in primary and secondary teaching. This was instigated by the MESC that offered in-service teachers the opportunity to study at the National University of Samoa (NUS) under the government scholarship scheme. The programme aimed to refine and upskill teachers' knowledge and teaching expertise in the classroom. Previously, teachers in Samoa had either teaching certificates or teaching diplomas. Most of the teachers had been in the field for over 10 years or more.



The government of Samoa, through MESC advocacy, provided teachers without a degree the incentive to upgrade. In 2015, MESC, in the Corporate Plan July 2015 to June 2018 (MESC, 2015), proposed that all teachers needed to upgrade to enhance the quality of the profession and teaching in Samoa. The Faculty of Education (FOE) at the NUS was tasked by MESC to coordinate the Teachers Upgrade programme. The research study in this article investigated whether teacher upgrade had made a difference on the outcomes of teachers that had undergone the programme. The Teacher Upgrade programme in Samoa benefitted teachers not only in completing the programme but improved outcomes in their knowledge, skills, resource making, diverse pedagogical know-how, the use and application of technology, and improvements in salary and leadership roles in schools. The paper provides a descriptive account of upgrade teachers in Samoa.

Context

The actual Teacher Upgrade programme commenced in 2013 (Esera et al., 2019). Teacher Upgrade is Samoa's attempt to enhance primary and secondary teachers' qualification from diploma to degree level. MESC initiated the upgrade programme in an attempt to improve teaching and learning for both teachers and students. In its Corporate Plan Review, MESC (2015) intended to "improve the quality of teachers" (p. 12) in areas of "leadership and management, teacher performance, teaching mathematics, science and school-based programmes" (Esera et al., 2019, p. 33).

Teacher Upgrade in Samoa had been in the pipeline of MESC Education, Policy, Strategic, and Plan for some time. MESC Education Policy and Planning July 1995–2005 directed attention to the need for qualification upgrade for teachers (MESC, 1995). In 2006, MESC renewed its Strategic Policies and Plan 2006–2015, which also outlined upgrading teachers' qualifications and school buildings and environment as priority areas. Thus, in 2013 MESC started discussions with the FOE towards implementing the Teacher Upgrade programme at the NUS. In the same year teacher upgrade was officially opened for in-service teachers to enrol, and the end of 2020 was when all teachers would have acquired teaching degrees (Esera et al., 2019). This would not only benefit teachers with modern teaching knowledge and skills, but it would also provide quality learning for students. The rationale for the Teacher Upgrade programme was for teachers to improve "in both teaching and positions of responsibilities to attract and retain quality teachers and leaders in the profession" (MESC, 2018, p. 6). Teachers at all educational levels, such as early childhood education (ECE), primary and secondary, were encouraged to engage in the Teacher Upgrade programme to gain a higher degree. According to the Education Sector Plan 2019–2024, "these qualifications provide teachers with the skills they need to teach numeracy, literacy and Science at primary and secondary levels" (Education Sector Plan, 2019, p. 40).

The Teacher Upgrade programme is fully funded by MESC in an attempt to support teachers' second chance at gaining a higher teaching degree. Part of the financial support provided by MESC for upgrading teachers' qualification was secured from the ESSP (Education Sector Support Programme) fund. The main aim of ESSP is to monitor, observe and contribute to all educational areas in Samoa's education system that needed improvement (Aikman et al., 2018). ESSP funding contribution is through ongoing assistance from the New Zealand government towards priority educational areas that allow the "train[ing] [of] effective teachers and principals" (ESSP, 2015, p. 32) in schools. The financial support acknowledges that the effective education system is achieved through stable partnerships with MESC and other stakeholders in Samoa and abroad. The National Teacher Development Framework in Samoa advocated for more opportunities for teachers through ongoing collaboration between MESC, PSC (Public Service Commission), MoF (Ministry of Finance) and SFS (Sosaite Faiaoga Samoa) "to develop transparent, updated Career and Salary Structures, including information on teacher upgrade and promotions based on the Professional Standards for Samoa's Teachers" (MESC, 2018, p. 9). Many

teachers who participated in the Teacher Upgrade programme have prospects to an increase in salary and improved career advancement.

The aim of teacher upgrade in Samoa and abroad is to achieve quality teaching and learning. Teachers are given the opportunity to upgrade and capture the essence of new teaching methodologies and ideologies provided by innovative learning in order to improve educational standards at all levels. As explained by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (2019), “to improve the quality of teaching and learning is through the production of global goods” (p. 9). Some of the global goods are mainly “educational tools, products and approaches—including data, assessment tools, standard and research” (GPE, 2019, p. 9) for teachers to acquire during the Teacher Upgrade programme. Teacher upgrade is a form of professional development (PD) to refresh teaching knowledge and skills. PD is also vital in some former colonised nations like Samoa due to its educational significance to the development of quality teaching and learning. Jamil (2014) reiterated the importance of PD training in Malaysia because it would “enhance [the] teaching profession and produce highly qualified and quality teachers which will give a positive impact on education development” (pp. 181–182) ensuring qualified teachers are capable of performing their teaching role to the best of their ability.

Literature

Samoa’s education system has taken a step in improving all educational areas. MESC aspires to provide the best educational service in order to meet a higher demand in quality education. In so doing, the implementation of the Teacher Upgrade programme is intended for all ECE, primary and secondary teachers to acquire teaching degrees. Through the Teacher Upgrade programme, understanding the fundamental desire to improve teaching and learning is reinforced. Beteille and Evans (2019) concurred that “a successful teacher can make a major difference to a student trajectory” (p. 7) if teachers are fully equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills.

Samoa, as a former colonised nation, had undergone changes in its infrastructure and education. However, the longest and lingering effects culturally, socially and educationally was New Zealand’s educational influence, and more so in the country’s education system which continues to be reflected in Samoa’s education system today. This is due to New Zealand’s ongoing education support through the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZFAT) (Aikman et al., 2018). New Zealand’s contribution to Samoa’s education system is not only with the teacher upgrade but with scholarships provided to Foundation students at NUS to study at universities in New Zealand (Aikman et al., 2018).

Educational development in many countries, especially in former colonised nations, is a never-ending race. With the world experiencing knowledge explosion and many innovative techniques to add to their repertoire of existing knowledge and skills (Beteille & Evans, 2019), Samoa also does not want to be left behind. The main focus in former colonised nations like Samoa is to improve the standard of education as a way to safeguard the future of the nation. Most of the former colonised nations found in Asia, such as Singapore, China and Vietnam, have steady and well-structured education systems with qualified teachers to deliver quality classroom teaching and learning (Beteille & Evans, 2019). Well-trained teachers and ongoing professional developments target specific educational areas that need overhauling and continue to drive education systems (United Nation Education, Scientific, Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2011); Zehetmeier, 2010). Kennedy (2016) indicated the importance of PD to quality teaching and argued that “professional development can foster improvements in teaching” (p. 1), and the teacher must conform to acquire necessary knowledge and skills for quality teaching. Kennedy (2016) further attested to professional development not only to foster quality teaching but the “ultimate goal of PD is to improve student learning goals” (p. 6).

In Samoa, PD is also viewed as a mechanism to support and advance literacy and numeracy development which has beleaguered the system for years. Similarly, Smith (2015) supported the essence

of PD in the development of teacher quality and argued that PD “is a key function within school environments, and helps teachers develop into more effective educators” (p. 43). PD, as part of teacher upgrade in Samoa, provides significant educational changes in the system. Some of the educational changes contribute to amending the literacy and numeracy problems Samoa has had for a long time. It is the provision of the new educational ideologies and methodologies that teachers need to acquire to assist with tackling the problem (Supovits, 2001; Zehetmeier, 2010). In this paper, the participants indicated their interest and support of the Teacher Upgrade programme and its usefulness to their work. Some of the benefits included the chance for a higher education, salary, new knowledge and skills. Upgrade teachers from ECE, primary and secondary schools seized the opportunity to make an improvement in teaching and learning. Smith (2015) claimed “effective PD allowed teachers within schools ... to learn about the changes that would affect their teaching and in turn their students’ learning” (p. 43).

In 2020, the MESC witnessed a higher number of ECE, primary and secondary in-service teachers returning to enrol in bachelor teaching degrees. Some of the teachers were in their late 50s or early 60s; however, it did not stop them from resuming tertiary studies due to the many personal and professional benefits provided by the teacher upgrade opportunities. The Teacher Upgrade programme promoted quality teaching and learning where teachers are able to attend their classes part-time and have their tuition paid by ESSP (Aikman et al., 2018). Therefore, the MESC support for in-service teachers signalled the government’s determination to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

Due to the many social, cultural, economic and political changes in Samoa and around the world, it became a necessity for teachers to acquire modern knowledge and skills in all areas of life so students could have a better understanding of their world. Teacher upgrade has provided an avenue for teachers to improve students’ results in literacy and numeracy. According to Luamanu (2017), “teachers are required to participate in professional development” (p. 1) to advance the standard of literacy and numeracy in Samoa. In fact, “having teachers upgrade their qualifications at the NUS would contribute to improving teaching knowledge and skills across all subject areas” (Esera et al., 2019, p. 36). Teacher upgrade has proven to be an advantage for Samoa’s education system as it provides better educational opportunities for students.

Theoretical framework

Education is the key to a successful future for individuals, society and nation, and Samoa is no exception. With its limited physical resources, a progressive society is achieved through the ability to balance the entities at play, for instance, the government ministries, private, villages and non-government organisations. In this way, education transmits society’s value system which upholds the social, cultural, economic and political functions of society. As postulated by Durkheim (1957), the “educational system contributes to the survival of society” (p. 71), which can shape quality developments in any nation. All must be well managed, nurtured and advanced based on good decision making and thorough consultation.

In Samoa, *soalaupule* is a term that describes consultation of old and new ideas that are relevant to the new developments seen as beneficial to the future of the nation. The Teacher Upgrade programme was planned and implemented through a joint partnership between MESC and FOE NUS through *soalaupulega* as a way to intentionally benefit teachers, students and country. The significant value of *soalaupule* in the Samoan culture maintains that all matters should be explicated, rationalised and justified for parties to collaborate and meet their objectives. This happens in the Samoan *faamatai* setting where *matais* gather in a Samoan meeting *fale* when working and consulting through *soalaupule* issues. Davidson (1967) explained that “the individual households composing the village community were each headed by a matai” (p. 17). *Matais* are the decision makers and also the implementers of projects and

developments in the village. Tuia (2013) further added that *matais* idea of proper and better *soalaupulega* during meetings thus “bring solidarity and unification to the nation, village and family” (p. 58). In Samoa, village *matais*, church, government ministries and government are functions of society with its major goal for society to prosper and protect. However, to ensure that society sustains social, cultural, educational, political and economic stability, a good education system should embrace all.

Through *soalaupulega* between the village *faamatai*, church, general public, government and ministries, this could be consolidated. The education system has a prominent role to play in supporting the social, cultural, economic, political and educational values, beliefs and ideas of society. According to Durkheim, a society with a good industry is based on an “ideal education which conforms to the values and goals of the society” (Saha, 2001, p. 25). Therefore, functionalism continues to maintain its role as a positive function of education through the creation of social solidarity and teaching core values. In so doing, a good education system with an appropriate curriculum as well as quality teaching and learning could improve the social, cultural, economic and political standards of society. More importantly, Durkheim extended that the functions of the education system are to provide individuals with educational opportunities to enable them to find employment in order to maintain the social solidarity of society (Durkheim, 1957).

Research approach

This study utilised a Pacific indigenous paradigm, namely a Samoan qualitative research approach through *soalaupulega*. The *soalaupulega* approach is culturally appropriate and captures the benefits related to implementing the Teacher Upgrade programme, the perceptions of the Ministry of Education officers, in-service teachers and school principals. As indicated, *soalaupulega* is associated with decision making that requires communal agreement with others in order to achieve its main objective (Tuia, 2013). This is a fundamental practice in Samoa to assist with the development of outcomes that would be useful and beneficial to all parties involved. *Talanoa* and *nofo* guided the *soalaupulega*, which requires participants’ utmost respect, responsibility, honesty and reliability for the research to achieve its main objective. According to Tuia (2013), “*talanoa* is to do with telling stories (*tala*) that are spun, strung and bound (*noa*) by people’s honesty, confidence, and share political, historical, and socio-cultural interests” (p. 104). The usual practice of *talanoa* and *nofo* in Samoa is through face-to-face conversations between two or more people; a respectful practice in the Samoan cultural context. For instance, Tuia (2013) described *nofo* literally as sitting or staying. The *nofo* concept is about being present. All young and old untitled female and male adults, teenagers or children must abide by *nofo* and *talanoa* in the presence of *matais* or important people in the village.

For the researchers’ the combination of *talanoa* and *nofo* takes time to solicit and consolidate adequate feedback from participants. The utilisation of *talanoa* and *nofo* to conduct research is appropriate as the social and cultural context of the research is Samoa; therefore, *talanoa* and *nofo* is a significant part of the qualitative research methodology.

Talanoa and *nofo* research findings were utilised to appraise the responses to the research question: “How do teacher upgraders perceive tertiary education as beneficial to teaching and learning?” Research participants all agreed to partake according to the ethical guidelines of the NUS. Participants’ responses in the *talanoa* were recorded in written form so they were easily analysed. Sarantakos’ (1998) cyclical analysis process and Neuman’s (1994, cited in Sarantakos, 1998) typology were employed to analyse the data. In this way, the researcher looked for patterns in the data, such as recurring behaviours or events. After identifying the patterns, “the researcher will then interpret them, moving from description of empirical data to interpretation” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 314). The cyclical process of analysis and accompanying typology also links qualitative research to *talanoa* and *nofo* as the *talanoa* process is also one of unfolding meaning. Further, *talanoa* and *nofo* unveiled participants’ educational views and

opinions about teacher upgrade. As such, Neuman's typology method of analytic comparison was utilised to identify, determine, confirm and finalise the different views from participants.

Additionally, analytic comparison assisted the discovery of similarities in meanings and views on the teacher upgrade from the different categories of participants. After thoroughly using the cyclical process, the raw data was sorted into emerging themes which formed the basis for the findings and the discussion of the research that followed.

The focus group *talanoa* and *nofo* is the method in which the *soalaupulega*, the collective consultation process and practice was coordinated, negotiated and implemented. Focus group *talanoa* and *nofo* allowed participants to share their ideas and opinions on the research topic. Furthermore, focus group *talanoa* and *nofo*, as a qualitative research method, was used widely by the researchers to bring together a group of 8 to 10 participants in one setting for *talanoa* and *nofo* relating to the research topic. The importance of focus group *talanoa* and *nofo* was to "gather in-depth knowledge about attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and opinions of individuals regarding a specific topic" (Ali et al., 2014, p. 16). Vaioleti (2006) referred to *talanoa* as a form of "phenomenological research approaches" focused on comprehending issues pertaining to research topic for participants. As Vaioleti explained, *talanoa* is another way for both participants and researchers to have a close face to face interaction during focus group discussion. Furthermore, *talanoa* "provided a challenge or legitimation to one another's stories and shared information" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 25). Moreover, focus group *talanoa* and *nofo* is not a debate group but a setting where individuals and researchers can have direct, intensive contact with one another. It can also collect rich, in-depth data as well as for the researcher to encourage interaction amongst the participants.

The study went through an ethical clearance process with the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at NUS. This is the usual procedure that all researchers go through before permission is granted. The research application for ethical clearance is assessed and discussed by UREC members that consisted of senior academic members from NUS. In this study the ethics clearance took a month for approval due to the unavailability of the UREC members.

Presentation of findings

The research findings were captured through the utilization of *talanoa* and *nofo* between the researchers and upgrade teachers, principals and the Ministry officers. The findings revealed responses from the participants pertaining to the programme and its benefits were validated through triangulation. Findings were discussed in groups of upgrade teachers, principals and the Ministry officers. The codes to represent participants' data were constructed according to their specific positions in the education system. TU was used as a code for teachers currently in the Teacher Upgrade programme, PO referred to principal officers, and MO was a code for the MESC officers.

Focus group *talanoa* with the upgrading teachers

The findings from the upgrade teachers resulted in three themes. First, the opportunity of being awarded a teaching degree and receiving a higher salary. Participants' perspective of upgrading shifted their academic standard to persevere in studies and to work confidently on their own or with others. The second theme refers to the knowledge and skills upgrade teachers gained from completing the programme. The third theme is resource making where participants indicated its importance in their learning and its transference and application in the classroom to support quality teaching and learning.

Theme 1: Teaching degree and higher salary

Getting a teaching degree was a major hurdle for many upgrade teachers as many had not studied at higher education for years. Several viewed this as a challenge due to the fact that the programme would benefit them after completion. According to participant TU114, “teacher upgrade has given me an opportunity to get my Bachelor of Education and a higher salary”. Similarly, TU101 echoed, “I would like to get my Bachelor of Education and a higher salary to support my family.” In addition, participant TU109 indicated, “I want to get my Bachelor of Education and a good salary.” The responses from participants indicated their willingness to be part of the Teacher Upgrade programme with the specific goal to get a teaching degree and a better salary. Participant TU106 also reiterated the importance of teacher upgrade “to upgrade my qualification from a diploma to a degree and to be financially able to support my family”. The upgrade teacher participants already knew their academic goal before they started the programme. In having a teaching degree, it not only provided professional support for teachers in knowledge and skills to improve the standard of teaching and learning but also a higher salary to help their families.

Theme 2: Teaching knowledge and skill

A teaching degree is a milestone that teachers aim to achieve, as the acquisition of new knowledge and skills would support teaching and learning. The Teacher Upgrade programme provided an opportunity for teachers to gain a higher degree but also has the advantage of students being taught by a qualified teacher. Teachers’ participation in the programme targeted the country’s educational goal to ensure teachers are academically capable to educate the future generation of Samoa. According to participant TU100, “the programme has increased my knowledge and skills in teaching. I benefit from different strategies and skills, different methods and different activities demonstrated by different lecturers”. Similarly, participant TU107 explained, “The benefits of upgrading to include gaining experiences in skills and knowledge to implement the curriculum well, effective application of skills as in grouping and cooperative project work to reinforce students learning.” Further, participant TU108 indicated that

the benefit gained from this programme is reading. There are a lot of course readers and I have to read a lot. I know that the more you read the more you know and understand how to speak and write good English. Lecturers always speak English and that motivates me to speak good English.

The responses from participants reflected the nature of the Teacher Upgrade programme and how it contributed to expand new teaching knowledge, skills and ideas that are relevant to their work.

Significantly, the Teacher Upgrade programme contributed greatly to students’ classroom performance and engagement. Teachers applied new knowledge and skills to ensure that students were able to assimilate learning materials well. According to teachers involved in the teacher upgrade programme, participant TU107 stated, “Student interaction and teamwork was a positive impact of teacher upgrade.” Participant TU103 offered, “Students enjoyed communicating and interacting with others without fear. Applying methods, skills and resources from the upgrade program supported student engagement and encouraged questions without fear.” Participants’ experiences highlighted the positive impact of the upgrade training on teachers teaching and learning, improvement in their knowledge and skills as well as students’ classroom engagement. As emphasised by participant TU114, “My students have improved a lot in reading and writing as most times they are given activities to work on independently.” Teacher participation in the programme has added value to their growing repertoire of knowledge and skills. Subsequently, their academic outlook of the programme has had a positive spin off resulting in better student outcomes. Moreover, teachers’ newfound knowledge and skills have inspired them to confidently create and utilise resources from local materials.

Theme 3: Resource making

Resources are a vital part of teaching and learning; however, due to the shortage of resources in some schools, teachers are expected to find appropriate materials to supplement teaching. Some courses in the upgrade programme required student teachers to create resources from scrap, paper, foil, cans, metal, sticks, leaves, grass, plastics, rocks and so forth. Teachers' understanding and experience gained from their programme allowed them to make their own resources rather than wait for school's new supply of resources. In that way, students have the resources to extend topics and teachers are supported in teaching. As explained by participant TU106, "the benefit of this programme in learning and teaching is the application of ideas that are demonstrated in models and resources during lessons". Similarly, participant TU118 indicated that "teacher upgrade has helped me with new ideas like using rubbish from the environment to make resources that are suitable for each subject". On the other hand, participant TU116 was fascinated by the unique ideas delivered during the programme and how it had contributed to her teaching. As TU116 explained, "What I have learnt are the inimitable concepts and techniques used in Science. For example, in the science course students utilised resources from the environment to demonstrate space, the galaxy, stars, planets and the solar system." Another participant, TU100, reflected on the class activities: "The more in class activities I was exposed to the more knowledge I gained for creative resource making. I now design my own resources from local materials for the class." Moreover, participant TU103 indicated the connection between the programme and students' performance. According to TU103, "involving students in resource making and groups in play Math and Reading support efficient mathematics operations and vocabulary extension". The teachers strove to successfully complete studies, realising there are benefits personally and professionally. Creating resources is essential, as Samoa has limited resources in some schools. Therefore, the Teacher Upgrade programme has extended and enhanced materials through resource making. School principals of upgrade teachers have commended the programme for instilling in teachers the desire to be innovative, inventive and imaginative in resource making and contributing to student development. Sharing their experience with other teachers is seen as progress in the making for teaching and learning.

Talanoa with the school principals

School principals indicated their gratitude and support for the Teacher Upgrade programme for its contribution to teachers' educational development. The findings from the *talanoa* sessions with school principals resulted in two emerging themes. The first theme is improvement in teaching which principals described as an advantage to the whole school. The second theme is working collaboratively, where the teachers returning from teacher upgrade were able to assist those that did not attend the programme.

Theme 1: Improvement in teaching

Principals revealed that there was an improvement in teachers who had completed the programme. Improvements ranged from teaching preparation to administration work, such as computer use, printing, photocopying and so forth. The newfound knowledge and skills the principals mentioned were perceived as overall development to support school progress. According to participant P014,

the upgrade teachers are benefitting from the programme. They have improved in teaching strategies and have completed their classroom plans and other duties. There is a difference between the upgraders and the non-upgrade teachers. Teacher upgraders now have the opportunity to extend their knowledge and skills although there is an increase in the workload because they teach and study at the same time. There are many good changes not only in the school but also in the way they conduct work inside and

outside the classroom. They have shown they are capable of handling the work and they are also creative. For example, there is beauty in the assignments they send to Apia and I told them their work in school should replicate that.

It is the expectation of most principals that the teachers return with new ideas and methods of teaching to improve student learning. As indicated by participant P010: “I expect them to be good teachers and of a high standard.” While participant P015 indicated that “there is an improvement in Math teaching in the application of methods that were taught by lecturers at NUS. Upgrade teachers use the methods now and encourage the non-upgrade teachers to follow suit”. Principals indicated the Teacher Upgrade programme has benefitted the whole school, as seen in the positive outcome in classroom teaching and learning as well as administrative duties in school. They also stressed another vital element of the teacher upgrade was teachers’ willingness to share their knowledge and ideas with their colleagues and principal.

Theme 2: Working collaboratively

The idea of working collaboratively is a positive move and is supported by principal participants, especially with new ideas and methods of teaching and learning. Principals have indicated it is the expectation that returning teachers share their knowledge and skills with other staff and principals who have not undergone the Teacher Upgrade programme. As mentioned by P017,

Working together is very important, and that is how I look at it ever since the teachers enter the programme. There is so much sharing between teachers and parents, and teachers sharing their teaching and learning ideas with other teachers. These teachers always stay behind after school and share with other colleagues.

Similarly, participant P010 expected teacher upgraders to come back with a sound understanding of the programme to share with others. According to participant P010,

I expect them to come with a full package from the teacher upgrade programme. This would help not only me but the other teachers and the children. That’s the one thing I need them to come back with, especially the quality of teaching in terms of knowledge, ideas and teaching strategies.

All principals have one common goal, and that is for teachers in the upgrade programme to acquire full knowledge and skills on how to conduct their teaching effectively. It is also the MESC officers’ main concern for the teachers in the Teacher Upgrade programme to make good use of the opportunity in order to improve their teaching skills but also to upgrade the educational standard in schools.

Talanoa with the Ministry’s Assistant Chief Executive Officers

The MESC officers who were responsible for the Teacher Upgrade programme all said it was extremely beneficial to teachers in all areas of education. From the *talanoa* findings with MESC officers, two themes emerged. The first theme is the quality of the teacher upgrade in the educational areas that contributed to teachers’ academic stability in schools. The second theme is the teaching degree complemented by a salary increase, which motivated teachers to persevere and succeed in the Teacher Upgrade programme.

Theme 1: Quality of the teacher upgrade in all educational areas

Participants explained that the quality of teacher upgrade is vital due to its significance to educational developments in Samoa. As indicated by participant M020,

There are a lot of benefits, when we talk about quality, we are talking about everything pertaining to education such as teachers, students, resources and so forth. Therefore, we have to make sure a quality teacher delivers the learning and in return a student learns how to read, write and to become a good citizen of this country.

The Teacher Upgrade programme aimed to ensure that teachers undergoing the programme are well equipped with knowledge and skills in order to provide quality teaching and learning in the classroom. Further, participant M020 believed the knowledge brought by teachers in the upgrade programme can be utilised effectively for students' learning. According to participant M020, "I think the benefit alternately is the wealth of knowledge that's going to be shared with our students. It is not only our students but the other teachers who have not had the opportunity to upgrade". In fact, teachers who have not had the chance to do teacher upgrade are expected to work closely with teachers who now have teaching degrees. In this way, they could encourage the teachers without teaching degrees to enrol in the teacher upgrade programme. Although it is not easy for many teachers to enter the programme, the idea of having a teaching degree as well as a higher salary tends to inspire many teachers to enter the programme.

Theme 2: Higher salary

Teachers that have been teaching for some time in the schools had salaries that most found very dissatisfying. Samoa, for a very long time, had teachers teaching with a diploma, which was one reason why many teachers had very poor salaries. However, important changes as a result of the Teacher Upgrade programme provided teachers with a teaching degree as well as a higher salary. According to participant M021, "the ultimate benefit for some teachers is not necessarily the degree but the increase in their salary". Having a high salary in the Samoa education system also comes with great responsibilities where teachers must perform their duties effectively both inside and outside the classroom. Most teachers that now have a teaching degree with an increased salary also had the opportunity to apply for a higher post within the Ministry. As indicated by participant M023, "I think the salary is also very appealing to teachers and through the upgrade programme teachers with degrees are promoted." The timing of the programme in Samoa is a platform for the goal of quality education. That is for teachers to acquire quality teaching and learning, which contributes to educational development in the whole country.

Discussion

Education in Samoa has had its lows and highs, but it has been a challenge for the education system to initiate and continue programmes to support teachers and schools in facilitating quality teaching and learning. Education is considered an integral part of future developments in the country and indispensable to a forward-looking nation. Educational standards are established in order for individuals to acquire modern knowledge, skills, ideas, beliefs and values about their society and the world around them. There is an urgent demand for teachers to upgrade their teaching qualifications as an attempt to ensure a sustainable and dynamic education system to lead Samoa into the future. As Zehetmeier (2010) explained, "Teachers are necessarily at the center of reform, for they must carry out the demands of high standards in the classroom" (p. 1); the expectation is that all teachers return to the classroom with a

degree. Professional development through Samoa's Teacher Upgrade programme has significantly contributed to students' classroom performance and engagement and also benefitted teachers (Esera et al., 2019). Supovits (2001) argued, "High quality professional development will produce superior teaching in classrooms, which will, in turn, translate into higher levels of student achievement" (p. 81). This is vital and necessary in former colonised nations for teachers to maintain high teaching standards for students to learn better by the use of effective learning materials and asking questions when they are confused. In so doing, a good education system helps to maintain higher standards of teaching and learning for the country to survive socially, culturally, economically, politically and educationally. Samoa, a former colonised nation, is in the midst of post colonisation where everything pertaining to the wellbeing of the country must be formally restructured to maintain its proper functions. Tuia (2019) articulated the postcolonial standpoint in Samoa's educational situation as "the process of recontextualising and restructuring Samoan cultural values to coincide with social, cultural, economic and educational global changes" (p. 51). The Teacher Upgrade programme that is currently underway in Samoa is fulfilling the postcolonial mantra that acknowledges the education system has to be aligned with the essence of global changes for educational improvement.

Quality teaching is a major educational goal in all developed and developing countries. In Samoa quality education is mandated by MESC "to promote quality and sustainable development in all aspects of education and culture to provide choices to everyone" (UNESCO, 2011, p. 3). It targets the need for teachers to be well equipped with knowledge and skills to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Moreover, teachers teach students and without them the system could face difficulties because they are the mainstay of the system. Therefore, in order to maintain educational stability and sustain quality education, MESC and other stakeholders as well as world organisations must *soalaupule* appropriate educational strategies and policies that best represent social, culture, economic, political and educational values, beliefs and ideas of countries and individuals. Tuia (2013) elucidated consultation (*soalaupule*) for "decisions and practices are viewed as having respected the opinion of others and where outcomes are accepted as just" (MESC, 2006, p. 38). In postcolonial Samoa its education system attempts to follow the trajectory direction other nations are pursuing due to the rapid global changes. That is, the "post-colonial era has contributed to the incorporation and acceptance of different value systems, and a way of life that demonstrate elements of universality in disparate systems" (Tuia, 2019, p. 51). Further, it will continue to make educational improvement in Samoa for the betterment of the country. As a result, the Teacher Upgrade programme has provided greater benefits to Samoa's education system by improving the standard of teaching and learning in education.

Conclusion

The Teacher Upgrade programme, an additional educational development in Samoa, has assisted the growing demand for quality, efficiency and sustainable education. The education system in Samoa has managed to make comparable strides in its development due to stakeholders locally and internationally. Stakeholders and MESC have collaborated and *soalaupule* as to what is best and made decisions on appropriate strategies and policies to fulfil educational functions to satisfy the social, cultural, political and economic needs of the country. The teacher upgrade programme has contributed in many ways to maintain and sustain quality education in schools. Through teacher upgrading of knowledge and skills in teaching and learning, student performance is greatly enhanced. In fact, teachers' experience in the programme has contributed immensely to teaching pedagogies and developments for more fun, interesting and challenging activities for student learning. By this, the programme in essence has made a difference in teaching and learning in schools. Further, the function of society also depends on the effectiveness of the education system to uphold societal norms, values and beliefs. The study has identified that the education system has directed its attention towards improving teaching and learning

through the Teacher Upgrade programme. Teachers, school principals and MESC officers have applauded the successful implementation of the Teacher Upgrade programme, its contribution to teaching and learning as well as teachers' development professionally and personally. Collaboration on the programme between MESC and FOE at the NUS has successfully graduated teachers with teaching degrees at both secondary and primary schools. The benefits of the programme have had an impact on teachers, students, schools and the education system. Samoa's goal, similar to the global world is to achieve quality education to safeguard the functions of its nation such as the social, cultural, economic, political and educational ideas, values, and beliefs systems.

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