

FIJIAN EDUCATION ITS SPECIAL DEMANDS ¹

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A. Introduction

My goal in this paper is to hold up a mirror in order to see Fijian Education more clearly. I believe that the contribution that academics such as myself can make is to provide a dispassionate and objective look at facts and information. Final decision making lies fairly and squarely with the people in their roles as citizens, electors, parents and group members. The matter is of course of great importance to the Fijian people and their leaders, and vitally effects every person in this country.

B. What's Right With Fijian Education?

People looking at Fijian Education sometimes seem to focus on "problems." Some might argue that the only major difficulty with Fijian Education is that we are always trying to compare it with the education of other groups in Fiji. Certainly there are some encouraging signs. The most important of these is the recognition that it is acceptable now to focus on problems that may exist in the area, and openly to look for solutions. It is becoming widely recognized that problems must be faced to be overcome, and that effective ways must be found for all the benefits of public education to be utilized by a larger number of Fijian people.

Signs of this trend are shown in the Fiji Principals' Association choice of Fijian Education as its theme for their 1983 Conference. This paper was their keynote address. Such a concentrated focus shows a willingness to think constructively about the area and come up with viable solutions.

Another significant event I believe was a Research Seminar which was jointly sponsored by the USP Institute of Education, the Fijian Teachers Association and the Suva Institute of Educational Research which was held in November, 1979.

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(Theme of Conference "Fijian Education")

This seminar launched the FTA's Research Programme on Fijian Education for Vuli Veicuqeni. This programme saw the appointment of Mr. Joeli Nabuka as Research Officer on this project for the FTA. Mr. Nabuka is now overseas on further study, and is completing further analysis of this data. We have his specific approval for the purposes of this paper, to look at some preliminary findings from his work.

C. Is There Really A Problem In Fijian Education? If So, What Is It?

Reports on the Fijian Education Achievement Project by both Mr. Nabuka (1982) and Dr. Warwick Elley (1979, 1982A) provide a good assessment of the present status of Fijian Education. Also useful are Ethnic group reports on USP performance by Ramaiya Naidu (1981) and FSM performance by W.T. Gibbs (1981).

1. The Fijian Education Achievement Project

The Fijian Education Achievement Project used a random sample of 41 secondary schools — with separate samples for the analysis of Fiji Junior and NZ School Certificate results.

Major conclusions are summarized here from Elley (1982A) who in turn made reference to a report of the project by Nabuka (1982).

(a) The Project shows that:

- (i) Fijian students do as well as or better than non-Fijians in English and Social Science. In fact Fijians do considerably better in English in the primary school (no problem in transferring from vernacular script, as for example in Hindi and Urdu). The advantage is maintained up to USP Foundation level, but is distorted by greater dropout of Fijians after each exam.
- (ii) Fijian students do not perform as well as Indians in Science and Maths subjects at any level. Science pass rates in Fiji Junior for 1980 were 36% (Fijian) and 44% (Indian) and in NZSC 15% Fijian and 30% Indian.
- (iii) There is also a marked difference between rural and urban students. It should be noted that all of the Junior Secondary Schools are rural as are 4/5 of Fijian 4th Form Classes.

(b) National Questionnaire Surveys of Schools

Two questionnaires were administered to:

- (i) Principals
- (ii) Form Four pupils.

A random sample of 43 schools ($\frac{1}{3}$ of total number of secondary schools was taken). Of the 22 Fijian schools, 21 responded; and of the 22 Indian schools, 18 responded.

(c) Conclusions from Principals' Questionnaire

Fijian schools are:

- (i) smaller
- (ii) more remote
- (iii) have less experienced principals
- (iv) are poorly equipped in respect of science, laboratories, libraries, furniture and office equipment.

However (v) classes are smaller

(d) Significant Factors Positively Related to Fiji Junior Passes

- (i) library books ($r = + 0.39$)
- (ii) ancillary staff ($r = + 0.37$)
- (iii) adequate science labs ($r = + 0.32$)
- (iv) large classes ($r = + 0.31$)

(e) Conclusions from Pupils Questionnaire

Nearly 4,000 pupils completed the questionnaire. (1055 Fijian and 1895 Indian)

(i) Books in Home

Indian pupils have access to more story books in English (33% Fijian pupils have over 20 books; 52% Indian pupils do).

(ii) Boarders

Nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of Fijian pupils in Form 4 attend boarding schools, whereas no Indian students are boarders.

(iii) Living with Parents

Another 20% of Fijian 4th formers live away from home with relatives and friends. Thus only 48% live with their parents, whereas 89% of Indian students live with their parents.

(iv) Absence from School

Approximately 13% of Fijian students admitted to being absent for more than 10 days in the first 2 terms of 1981. Only 8.7% of Indian students said they were absent this often.

(v) Electricity in the Home

There was no difference between ethnic groups in access to electricity in the home — figure 52% for both groups.

(vi) Help with Homework

There was a small reported difference in the account of help with homework, as reported by both ethnic groups. Thus 31% of Fijians receive help "often" compared with 38% of Indians.

(f) Intensive Study of Outstanding Schools

Studied in the Project were Fijian secondary schools with a good record of exam passes, yet which do not have an "elitist" selection policy.

(e.g. Bucalevu Junior Secondary School

Ballantine Memorial School

Tailevu North School)

It would be noted that the quality and style of educational leadership in the role of the Principal was found to be a key factor. Such factors as style of leadership, personal qualities, organizational skills, willingness to delegate and consult, and to give individual counselling and assistance to both staff and students.

In my recently assumed administrative post as Head of the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific, I am conscious of the opportunity to create what I would like to call a "self-actualizing" organization, where individual staff members feel free to be the most effective professionals with their own students as is possible. Educa-

tional administrators should be in the business of creating environments for intellectual and personal growth of teachers and learners alike.

2. Studies of USP Foundation Students

Elley and Thomson (1978), (1979) used Progressive Achievement Tests to test USP Foundation students on three general skills, of reading comprehension, general vocabulary and listening comprehension. Samoan and Tongan students experience more difficulty than those from Fiji and a large number of Indian students also have low language scores.

3. Ethnic Analysis of Academic Achievement of USP Students

Table 2 from a report by Naidu (1981) sets out the position of the two main ethnic groups and "others" in 1979 average performance at USP by academic discipline.

Table 2: Performance by Discipline of Ethnic Groups at USP for 1979

Discipline	First	Second	Third
Economics	Indians	Others	Fijians
Sociology	Others	Indians	Fijians
Geography	Others	Indians	Fijians
Admin. Studies	Indians	Others	Fijians
Maths	Indians	Others	Fijians
English	Others	Fijians	Indians
Education	No marked differences		
Chemistry	Indians	Others	Fijians
Physics	Indians	Fijians.	
Biology	Both Indians and Fijians equal		

4. Fijian Performance at FSM (and USP in the Medical I Year)

Gibbs (1981) studied 62 percent of the 64 Fijian students who were admitted to the Medical I Year from 1976-80. Of the 64 admitted only 19 passed their medical course. By contrast, of the 47 overseas students who were admitted, 24 passed; and of the 82 Indians admitted, 63 passed.

The author analyses the performance of students in the Medical I Year based on their school of origin. This is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Secondary Schools of Medical Year I Students 1976-80).

School	No. Metriculating	Pass USP Year I	Fail
RKS	17	6	11
QVS	7	-	7
ACS	7	4	3
SGS	6	2	4
Lelean	4	-	4
Dudley	4	2	2
Marist	4	3	1
RSM	3	-	3
St. John's	3	-	3
Xavier	2	-	2
Labasa	1	-	1
Natabua	1	-	1
St. Joseph's	1	1	-
MGM	1	1	-
Study in NZ	1	1	Absconded

As a New Zealander myself, I am not sure how to interpret the fact that the one Fiji student who did secondary study in NZ ended up by "absconding" from the Medical I class!

- The picture that emerges is that Fijian academic performance in English and Social Sciences is as good as other groups up to USP Foundation level, although performance in Mathematics and Science areas is lower. Fijian performance remains ahead of Indian in English, and in Biology and Education there is no difference in level. In most of the other disciplines and at the FSM the Fijian performance is lower than other groups.

D. Why Are There Differences in Academic Performance Between Fijian and Other Ethnic Groups?

Given the summary picture set out in C (5) above, why should this be? Dr. Tupeni Baba (1979) and 1982 B) has provided a useful framework of categories factors which may explain levels of Fijian educational achievement in relation to other groups.

He suggests that a number of factors, while important in themselves, can be eliminated as sources of the difference. Thus research in areas such as general ability (or intelligence) and language competence has shown that Fijian and Indian scores are not significantly different (cf. Chandra, 1975A and B; Bennett, 1970, 1971, 1972; and Elley and Thomson, 1978, 1979). Nutrition and pre-school education are two other factors which are roughly equalized for both groups, and so therefore cannot be used to explain differences.

Baba categorizes some of the important variables in the following way:

1. Psychological Factors

- Motivation/aspiration
- Need achievement
- Locus of control
- Cognitive style

2. Socio-Cultural Factors

- Individualism/Cooperation
- Cultural conflict
- Tradition of academic scholarship

3. Institutional Factors

- Urban/Rural
- Facilities
- Teacher quality

Since Baba's paper, both Basow (1982B and Kishor 1982, 1982B) have showed lower levels of self-esteem in Fijians as compared to Indians. Teachers know the importance of a healthy sense of self-esteem in students for successful achievement in the classroom. Students are more able to take risks (of exposing their possible ignorance or coming up with original solutions) if they have a basic sense of confidence.

Also significant is the finding by both the above authors, of a more external locus of control among Fijians than Indians. This represents a

tendency to attribute one's successes and failures (say on a class test) to external factors such as luck or favouritism of the teacher. An **internal** locus of control is shown when one would attribute success or failure to internal factors (e.g. hard work). With an **internal** locus of control one would be seen as dependent on one's own efforts rather than external factors over which one has no control.

There is need for more research on achievement motivation in Fiji. Basow (1982B) using a 4-factor measure of achievement motivation showed that Fijians scored **higher** than Indo-Fijians on "competitiveness," particularly for males. Questions on this scale emphasize the importance of winning, doing better than others and enjoyment of competing. Fijians also score higher than Indo-Fijians on "work orientation" but the effect is only significant for females and for university students. Basow suggests that, "only Fijian students with exceptionally high work orientation scores appear to make it to university." In other research it has been shown that high "work orientation" is important to actual educational achievement, and that high competitive scores do not facilitate this.

Another line of research which has run against popular stereotypes, is the work of Stewart (1980 and 1983) where it was shown that Fijians have a lower level of belief in the general trustworthiness of people in general than do Indo-Fijians. However, work in the Solomon Islands (1983) shows that subjects there trust people seen as "close" more than people seen as "distant." This could apply to Fijians also.

With regard to motivational factors it is suggested that Fijians do not appear to value education as much as other groups. Much more research is required on motivation, as this is a key factor. What are the pressures on bright students which keep them from succeeding? Some psychologists have described what they call a "fear of success" — does that exist in bright Fijian youngsters? Perhaps experience at one of Fiji's elite schools such as RKS or QVS may reduce the sense of isolation that a bright Fijian youngster may otherwise experience.

E. Fijian Education or Education in Fiji

We have been focussing on Fijian Education, but we should perhaps remind ourselves of what Fijian youngsters share with other youngsters, of whatever race.

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow has suggested that we can think of Universal human needs in the following way:

1. The most basic are the physical needs (foods, water, shelter, etc).
2. Next are needs for a sense of love and esteem from others, and then finally.
3. A person needs to find meaning and purpose in life.

I would like to emphasize the psychological need of people to "feel good about themselves" or to have a positive sense of self esteem.

We have already noted the research studies which suggest that there may be lower levels of self-esteem in Fijians as compared to Indo-Fijians. Much of what may have to be done in Fijian Education will cost money; greater effort in this area however will in fact cost nothing, and may well have enormous benefit for all children, Fijian and non-Fijian alike. The more sure an individual feels about himself and his abilities the more willing he is to place himself in potential learning situations which may involve taking a risk. The blackboard work the pupil volunteers to do may be wrong, the teacher's question he or she answers may be laughed at by others; the object of art created may be judged harshly and so on. In each situation he or she is risking possible error or rejection.

It is quite clear from work that has been done that there is much that teachers, parents and educational administrators can do to build up a sense of confidence, competence and self esteem in the young people with whose care they are charged.

Canfield and Wells (1976) have likened the amount of a pupil's self-esteem to a stack of poker chips. Some start out the learning game with more "chips," so to speak, than others; because of their self confidence they can take the bigger risks.

Teachers I believe have a particular responsibility to make sure each child has enough "chips" to stay in the learning game, and maintain a "you can do it" attitude. Reluctance to risk failure (because of lack of self-esteem) can be manifested in withdrawn silence on the one extreme to mischievous and disruptive behaviour on the other.

Teachers (and perhaps administrators) often don't recognize the power and intrinsic superiority of praise (rather than blame) to produce be-

havioural change — the hard nosed advantage of praise is that

- (a) the person knows what it is that is to be repeated;
- (b) he feels more relaxed, confident and better able to use all of his skills after being rewarded rather than punished.

F. What Are Some of the Alternatives in Fijian Education?

Bearing in mind the specific benefit of self-esteem enhancement to both Fijian and non-Fijian youngsters alike, what other good options present themselves in Fijian Education?

1. The first option is of course to do nothing. This is a perfectly respectable option for some problems, but I feel that many in this country would argue that this option is not a possible one in this case. In fact the existing affirmative action policies are in effect a rejection of this option. The remaining categories of options relate to the 3 levels from Baba's paper.
2. Change at the psychological level. A number of the psychological factors listed are amenable to change through training and behaviour of adults such as teachers, assuming that one desires such change. Thus a child with a low sense of self-confidence, can learn to enhance this as stressed above and an individual can shift from an external locus of control to a somewhat more internal locus of control.
3. Change at the Socio-Cultural and Institutional Levels. The sociocultural factors listed by Baba may be somewhat less amenable to change. However such change is of course possible, if it is desired. It may be useful to remember that any living, dynamic culture is also continually changing. It is in the ability to blend the best from the past with the best from the future that a culture shows its vibrancy and vitality. Some observers (e.g. Griffin, 1983 and Davis, 1980) have argued that the message reaching Fijians is ambiguous — 'stick with custom' - 'change your ways.'

There is also the question as to whether the School should change to become more tolerant of group methods and project work, for example. If Fijians have a more collectivist than individual orientation, it should be possible to use teaching strategies which capitalize on this (cf. Thomas 1978 and 1982B).

Also perhaps, Fijian qualities of group loyalty could be used in peer tutoring systems — whereby brighter children help weaker ones and they then share success together.

It has been suggested to me that one of the reasons for the success of students from elite Fijian schools where a number of students are boarders is that they are thereby released from some family obligations and pressures. They are able to put in the study and homework hours because they do not have competing family obligations.

With regard to institutional factors, these have been illuminated by the interim results of the FTA survey. Fijian schools were shown in the FTA Survey to be smaller, more remote, have less experienced principals and less well equipped in respect of science, laboratories, libraries, furniture and office equipment. It would appear that if this is so, performance of pupils in the schools concerned would obviously be affected by this in terms of possible levels of performance.

4. Change could of course occur on all fronts at once — i.e. change at psychological, socio-cultural and institutional levels.

F. Conclusions

The choice of options rests squarely with the Fijian people and of course all peoples of Fiji. Organizations such as your own will have an important role in evaluating and implementing options. I hope that the sense of open exploration and willingness to confront difficult issues will continue. I would like to conclude with a Chinese proverb. As I read it, I am thinking not only of our Fijian children and young people but those from all races in Fiji:

“He who plans one year ahead should grow crops.

“He who plans 10 years ahead should grow trees.

“He who plans 100 years ahead should take care of young people.”

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