

Examination Changes in Fiji

Gurmit Singh

Background

The Fiji government recently announced a restructuring of its public examinations (Education Gazette, 1985). The impetus for this move perhaps came directly from the decision of the New Zealand authorities to discontinue the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance examinations. Speaking on the changes in examinations during the 1985 Fiji Principals' Association Conference, the Minister for Education expressed full confidence in Fiji's capability to meet the challenge of localising all public examinations in the country, and he emphasised the independence Fiji now has to develop its own curriculum at the upper secondary level. The Minister stressed the importance of examinations and underlined the government's desire to have complete autonomy in conducting its examinations. he told the principals that:

It is important to recognise that this is the first time that we will have complete independence in determining the curricula at Fifth and Sixth Form levels of our students. It is my view and that of Government, that the people of Fiji must have the paramount say in development of our curricula. Hence it is my intention to utilize all the skills available in this country. For the first time in 1989 all our examinations will be our own. And those who like to use fashionable terms, for them I might say, we would have been completely decolonised by that stage, in educational terms. I will use local language, local experience and expertise to devise our curricula. We in the Ministry of Education and Government as a whole believe in our own people including our teachers and other professionals in their having the capacity and capability to produce suitable and relevant curricula. We have faith in you and therefore we await your response I have indicated that for the first time we will be conducting all our own examinations and we will obviously need assistance. I propose to obtain this help from wherever it is available, not discounting the emphasis on local contribution, that I have already underlined. If required we will obtain the help of the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment. Its assistance would be very welcome but let me make it categorically clear, it will not have any control over our examinations. We will be prepared to work

through our examinations. We will be prepared to work through it to enable other countries interested in using our examinations but I intend to guard jealously the autonomy that I want for this country in its examination system. I will also call on individual Fiji citizens from USP and elsewhere, some have already indicated their willingness to help. The Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry too will have an important role but its role will not be that of handing out material to teachers. Its staff will participate in curriculum preparation but they will do so in partnership with teachers in our schools. CDU will co-ordinate and assist; it will not be the last word and provide more and more material. We want to give the practitioners, the teachers in other words, in our schools, as much scope as possible. (Ali, 1985)

It is also envisaged that an independent Examinations Board will be established to oversee examinations in the country.

The restructuring of examinations

What changes are being made in the existing examination system in Fiji? Up to the end of 1985 Fiji had the following public examinations:

1. At the primary level:
 - (a) Intermediate Examination
 - (b) Secondary Schools Entrance Examination
2. At the secondary level:
 - (a) Fiji Junior Certificate Examination
 - (b) NZ School Certificate
 - (c) NZ University Entrance
 - (d) Fiji Seventh Form Examination

The two primary examinations, Intermediate and Secondary Entrance, come at the end of the sixth and eighth year of primary education respectively. The Fiji Junior examination marks the completion of ten years of schooling (up to Form Four) while the School Certificate, University Entrance and Form Seven examinations are at the end of each successive secondary year.

The envisaged changes and restructuring are briefly as follows:

1. The Intermediate will continue in its present form for Class 6 children. In future, however, candidates will receive only marks gained in each subject without pass/fail being stipulated. The examination system is to be computerized by 1987 and the examination will be held in November (instead of Term II as is the case at present).
2. The Secondary Schools Entrance Examination has been renamed the Fiji Eighth Year Examination and will continue to be offered in its present form with changes as for the Fiji Intermediate Examination i.e. no pass/fail stipulation and computerisation of the system by 1987.
3. The Fiji Junior Certificate Examination will continue to be offered with two main changes. There will be a broader range of required subjects, and the grading of results into four levels (A — D) will be reintroduced. The new programme for the Fiji Junior Certificate Examination comes into effect from 1987 in Form 3 thereby forming the basis of the restructured examination in 1988. The students in the new programme will be required to take all four subjects in Group I and three subjects from at least two of the three remaining groups — Group II, III, and IV. The grouping of the subjects is as follows:

GROUP I (Compulsory)	GROUP II (Practical)	GROUP III (Commercial)	GROUP IV (Vernacular Lang.)
English	Home Economics	Typing	Fijian
Mathematics	Typing	Accounting	Hindi
Basic Science	Woodwork	Economic Studies	Urdu
Social Science	Metal Work		Tamil, Telugu
	Technical Drawing		Chinese (after 1987)
	Agriculture		

The 1988 examination will thus be based on seven subjects. In grading students into four levels with A (over 80%), B (65 — 79%), C (50 — 64%) and D (below 50%), English and five other subjects will be considered. Students will also be required to fulfil core requirements in Physical Education, Music and Art.

4. The New Zealand School Certificate Examination will be discontinued after 1987 with no replacement examination at Form 5 level.
5. The New Zealand University Entrance Examination will be discontinued after 1988 and will be replaced by The Fiji School Leaving Certificate from 1989. The new examination will require students to take five subjects, including English, from a range of nineteen subjects. To gain a pass students must obtain at least 35% in

English and not less than 30% in any three others with an aggregate of not less than 200 marks.

6. The Fiji Seventh Form Examination will continue in its present form. The examination comprises papers in English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Economics, Accounting, History, Geography, Applied Mathematics, and Technical Drawing and Design. It is planned to include Electronics, Fijian, Fiji Studies, Creative Craft, Industrial Arts and Computer Studies from 1987.

Some comments

Fiji has a relatively large education system, with considerable experience in conducting large-scale public examinations in comparison to the other island nations of the region. It has a quarter of its population in its schools as full-time students (Annual Report, 1984, p.1). The total school roll of 176, 326 in 1984 (123, 340 primary and 47, 166 secondary) made up 25.7% of the country's population. Consequently public examinations attract large enough groups of candidates to make localisation of examinations economically viable. An indication of the numbers is given by the figures for 1984 and 1985 in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparison of Examination Pass Rates for 1984 and 1985

Examinations	1984		1985	
	No. Sat	% Passed	No. Sat	% Passed
Fiji Intermediate Examination	6,114	N/A ¹	8,142	N/A
Fiji Secondary Schools Entrance Examination	7,761	80.7	8,653	N/A
Fiji Junior Certificate	10,001	61.9	9,407	80
NZ School Certificate	7,181	43.4	7,152	42.8 ²
NZ University Entrance	4,196	33.7	4,326	32
Fiji Seventh Form Examination	342	80	262	N/A ³

1. Pass/fail not stipulated, only results given.
2. Candidates with over 200 marks in 4 subjects and over 30% in English.
3. Form Seven candidates receive pass/fail in each subject only.

It is interesting to note the fluctuations in the number of candidates appearing for these examinations: 33% and 11% increase in the two

primary examinations, Intermediate and Secondary Entrance respectively, and comparatively minor fluctuations at the Fiji Junior, School Certificate and UE levels — 6% drop, 0.4% drop and 3% increase respectively. The Form Seven examination had a 23% drop.

The increase in numbers in the primary examinations seems to be a result of the thinking shared by both the Ministry of Education and schools that these examinations are sound indicators of national standards and hence schools are encouraged to utilize them for the purpose of comparison, of maintaining standards, and as incentives for teachers and children. There seem to be no other educational reasons for retaining and promoting the Intermediate Examination.

The Secondary Entrance Examination continues to serve the selection function. However, it is also being offered now to Form II students in secondary schools to help assess the students level of attainment. Whereas in the past only Class 6 children in Fijian Schools sat the Intermediate Examination (to be selected for places in Form I in central secondary schools) it is now available to all primary schools in the country. Similarly, while the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination was previously sat only by those children in Class 8 wishing to gain entry into secondary schools at Form III level, it is now available to Form II students in secondary schools as well. A decrease in the number of repeaters at Form IV may have contributed to the drop in the Fiji Junior numbers. The drop at Form Seven is a likely effect of the revision of fees, now considerably lower, for the Foundation year at the University of the South Pacific.

Although Fiji has considerable experience in conducting public examinations, it has nonetheless had the benefit of running its system alongside an external model. Complete localisation of examinations will place greater demands on both professional and administrative competence and the skills of the people involved. Furthermore, in the long-term, reliance on an external model (in terms of examination techniques, in particular) will have to be replaced by confidence in the competence and skills of local examiners. No doubt issues pertaining to examinations will receive greater attention as parents, students, and the community get more involved in the examination system. However, it is hoped that while debate on such issues as the purpose of public examinations (especially at the primary level) and the status and acceptability of Fiji examinations here and overseas continues, the more urgent task of preparing teachers and their effective participation in the examining process will be tackled as a matter of priority.

While it is generally acknowledged that tests and examinations are an integral part of the teaching and learning processes, classroom teachers have only had a minimal involvement in public examinations. In general, examinations are set and marked externally. In such a system only those teachers invited to join subject panels have the opportunity to contribute. One would hope that while only a few can actively participate in such a system, general professional competence in assessment techniques, tests and examinations, will become much more widespread than at present. Gradually some weighting to internal assessment could be introduced and this would help in moving the examinations closer to the teachers' domain.

Besides equipping all classroom teachers with the basics of assessment techniques, the region requires urgently a pool of professionals 'majoring' in educational measurement and evaluation. Formal studies in measurement and evaluation, combined with practical experience in classroom teaching and examination administration should help in developing a group of competent personnel able to meet the demands of complete regionalisation of national examinations. A joint effort by the Ministries of Education, the University of the South Pacific and the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment would certainly help at this crucial stage of transition/development through which the examination systems of the region are passing at the present time.

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