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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY:
CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING QUALITY BASIC PRIMARY EDUCATION IN FIJI

by

Rishi Chand

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Education

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School of Education
Faculty of Arts and Law
University of the South Pacific

July, 2011
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Statement by Author

I, Rishi Chand, declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published, or substantially overlapping with material submitted for the award of any other degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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The research in this thesis was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Mr. Rishi Chand.

Signature
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife: Vanita Chand and two lovely daughters: Nikansha Chand (14) and Pritansha Chand (11). Thank you for your endless patience, endurance and understanding.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I achieve another milestone in my pursuit for higher academic qualification, I wish to put on record a few words of appreciation to the Almighty and some individuals who have given me encouragement, assistance and guidance through my study.

Foremostly, as this study was a testament of my enduring perseverance, struggle and juggle between my career and family commitments, I thank the Almighty for his wisdom and strength that enabled me to complete yet another educational journey.

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I am also indebted to my loving wife, Vanita Chand, for her trust, continuous moral support, encouragement, patience, assistance in typing and sacrifices. I wish to share my achievement with her as she was always a pillar of strength to me. I also express my appreciation to my close family members for their blessings: Mr and Mrs Shiu Chand (parents), Mr Rajesh Chand and family (brother), Mrs V. Singh (mother-in-law) and Veena Singh.

Finally, I also sincerely thank all my close friends and work mates for their blessings and encouragement that enabled me to achieve my goal.
ABSTRACT

To date, education was only seen as a fundamental human right. However, due to rapidly changing national, regional and international challenges, it has also become a vital human need (UNESCO, 2008). This in turn, calls for quality educational provision at all levels starting from early childhood. Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2006) cautioned that a child denied the right to quality primary education is deprived not only as a child but also becomes handicapped for life. This is true as education builds on human capabilities. It lays the platform for life-long learning, development of personality, character and talents and for a prosperous life (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotomalala, 2003).

This research explored the challenges towards providing quality basic education in Fiji. For the purpose of the research, a rural and an urban primary school were used as case study schools. A qualitative research methodology was considered suitable for the study. Data gathering instruments involved open-ended questionnaires, informal interviews and non-participant observation to search for answers relating to the following research themes:

1. ‘Education for All’ in the Fijian Context;
2. The over-arching challenges to achieving quality basic education; and
3. Strategies for overcoming these challenges.

The research respondents were two Headteachers, two managers (1 from each school), six teachers (3 from each school), twelve students and parents (6 from each school). The data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The first theme on EFA in Fiji depicted the stark reality. The participants at school and community level had no knowledge of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the underlying Education for All (EFA) concepts, which emphasize quality education at all levels. The Ministry of Education places a lot of emphasis on quality basic education and has also formulated policies, as discussed in Section 2.4, to promote quality basic education in all primary schools. However, the lack of awareness of these by the participants has hindered their efforts in promoting quality education. The second theme identified the following challenges that impeded the quality of education delivered in the case study schools. These were:
• Pedagogical challenges;
• Institutional challenges;
• Human Resource challenges;
• Financial challenges;
• Social challenges; and
• Technical Resource challenges.

The results indicated that Pedagogical and Human Resource challenges had direct impact on the quality of education delivery, while the others indirectly influenced the quality of teaching and learning taking place in the case study schools. Based on these findings, this study reveals that attaining equity and access to quality basic education in the case study schools still remains a distant dream.

The final theme on possible strategies to overcome these challenges suggested a number of simple and practical ways such as:

- having visionary leaders at all levels of governance;
- inclusiveness and equity and, thus, the need for scaling up and targeting of hard-to-reach, disadvantaged groups;
- focusing on results and outcomes by calling for a steady attention to quality and support to education delivery levels in schools and classrooms as much as possible;
- sustainability of schools through self-help income-generating projects;
- schools to get into corporate involvement with businesses and other communities; and
- having stronger social network between schools, parents, community and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Finally, while this research tried to understudy a rural and an urban primary school, it is further recommended that extensive and indepth research on the impact of the challenges emerging from this study is further investigated on a wider scale throughout Fiji. This study provides a foundation for further investigation on each of the EFA goals and contributes to the local literature. It will also provide relevant stakeholders with empirical evidence on the progress and drawbacks towards attaining EFA goals in Fiji. Based on these findings, appropriate measures can be put in place, at least, to get a step closer to achieving quality basic education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Declaration</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Exhibits</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1.0 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Background

1.3 Statement of the Problem

1.4 Purpose of the Study
   1.4.1 Research Objectives
   1.4.2 Research Questions
   1.4.3 Dissertation Elements

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.6 Assumptions

1.7 Limitations

1.8 Definitions

1.9 Organization of the Study

1.10 Summary

## 2.0 GENERAL BACKGROUND OF FIJI AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Context of Fiji Islands
   2.2.1 Location and Geographical Features
   2.2.2 Population
   2.2.3 Economy
   2.2.4 Political Context

2.3 The Background of the Education System in Fiji
   2.3.1 Ownership of Schools
   2.3.2 Distribution of Schools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3</td>
<td>Primary Teacher Training</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4</td>
<td>Classification and Stages of Schooling</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>EDUCATIONAL POLICIES</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1</td>
<td>Education Fiji 2020</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2</td>
<td>Education For All – 2015</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3</td>
<td>Suva Declaration – 2005</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.4</td>
<td>Ministry of Education Strategic Plan – 2006 – 2008</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.5</td>
<td>Fiji Islands National Curriculum Framework</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>THE ‘EDUCATION FOR ALL’ CONCEPT</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY EDUCATION</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>PURPOSE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN FIJI</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS IN FIJI SINCE 2000</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.1</td>
<td>Pedagogical Challenges</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.2</td>
<td>Institutional Challenges</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.3</td>
<td>Human Resource Challenges</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.4</td>
<td>Financial and Economic Challenges</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.5</td>
<td>Social Challenges</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.6</td>
<td>Technological Challenges</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>RATIONALE AND SELECTION OF METHOD</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>Orientation of Method</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.2 Challenges Faced By Teachers

5.4.2.1 Classroom Level Challenges
5.4.2.1.1 With Students
5.4.2.1.2 With Teaching and Learning Resources

5.4.2.2 School Level Challenges
5.4.2.2.1 Leadership, Administration and School Policies
5.4.2.2.2 Teacher Support
5.4.2.2.3 School Culture and Composition of Students
5.4.2.2.4 School Infrastructure and Facilities
5.4.2.2.5 Co-curricular Activities
5.4.2.2.6 Fundraising

5.4.2.3 Community Level Challenges
5.4.2.3.1 Geographical Location
5.4.2.3.2 Management and Parental Support
5.4.2.3.3 Living Styles and Standards

5.5 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

5.6 WAYS OF ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

5.7 SUMMARY

6.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.2 UNDERSTANDING QUALITY EDUCATION

6.3 CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION
6.3.1 Pedagogical Challenges
6.3.1.1 The Present Curriculum
6.3.1.2 Teaching and Learning Strategies
6.3.1.3 Language of Instruction
6.3.1.4 Workload and Expectations
6.3.1.5 Class size
6.3.1.6 Teaching and Learning Resources and Facilities

6.3.2 Institutional Challenges
6.3.2.1 Geographical Location and Climate
6.3.2.2 School Buildings and Classrooms
6.3.2.3 School Sanitation

6.3.3 Human Resource Challenges
6.3.3.1 Teachers
6.3.3.1.1 Knowledge of Subject Matter
6.3.3.1.2 Teacher Commitment
6.3.3.1.3 Teacher Attitudes
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHT</td>
<td>Assistant Head Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELS</td>
<td>Basic Education and Literacy Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPE</td>
<td>Basic Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Curriculum Development Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPE</td>
<td>Council of Pacific Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Extra Curricular Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCAE</td>
<td>Fiji College of Advanced Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEYE</td>
<td>Fiji Eighth Year Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIE</td>
<td>Fiji Intermediate Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTRB</td>
<td>Fiji Teachers Registration Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANA</td>
<td>Literacy And Numeracy Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FJCE</td>
<td>Fiji Junior Certificate Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSLC</td>
<td>Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNU</td>
<td>Fiji National University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMR</td>
<td>Global Monitoring Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HT</td>
<td>Head Teacher</td>
</tr>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCF</td>
<td>National Curriculum Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Framework for Poverty Alleviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

2.1 - Controlling Agencies and Ownership of Schools………………………………20
4.1 - Summary of Participants……………………………………………………………82
4.2 - Summary of Selected Schools……………………………………………………85
4.3 - Community Survey………………………………………………………………87
5.1 - Composition of Students…………………………………………………………101
5.2 - School and Classroom Facilities…………………………………………………102
5.3 - Teaching and Learning Resources………………………………………………103
5.4 - Student Attendance………………………………………………………………116
5.5 - Teacher Absenteeism – School A………………………………………………129
5.6 - Workbook Submission by Teachers…………………………………………….131
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The Four Pillars of Education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>A Framework for Understanding Quality Education</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Pedagogical Challenges</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Institutional Challenges</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Human Resource Challenges</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Financial and Economic Challenges</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Social Challenges</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Conceptual Framework for Quality Basic Education</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Flowchart Showing Research Steps For This Study</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The Research Process</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Data Collection Process</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Data Analysis Flowchart</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Quality – Key Actors and Processes</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Curriculum Emphasizing Specific Goals</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF EXHIBITS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 - World Declaration of Education for All........................................34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 - Characteristics of Quality Education...........................................38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 - Poverty Level in Fiji.................................................................59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 - Interview Extract – Lack of Professional Development.....................99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 - Interview Extract – EFA Workshops................................................105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 - Interview Extract – Management’s Concern Towards Children’s Education...107</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 - Interview Extract – Problems with Non-Readers..............................115</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 - Interview Extract – Teaching and Learning Resources............................118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 - Interview Extract – Teachers’ Views on Their Leader..........................120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 - Interview Extract – Impact of Poor Toilet Facilities.........................123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 - Interview Extract – Fundraising.....................................................124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9 - Interview Extract – School Locations (Urban)....................................125</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10 - Lesson Observations.................................................................132</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

‘Education is the master key that unlocks human potentials in every sphere of life. It is a force for good in the world and a powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world’ (Nelson Mandela).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is envisaged that primary education is a foundation upon which life-long education can be built (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotomalala, 2003). The basic literacy and numeracy skills, which are essential components of quality education, are taught in primary schools. In this light, the Fiji government is committed towards making education a top priority (Ministry of Education, 2003). However, despite all efforts, there are many challenges towards attaining quality basic education (Field, 2006). Therefore, this study explores and examines the various challenges faced by stakeholders in their efforts to provide quality basic education in the selected primary schools in Fiji.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the study. It begins with the background of the study and moves on to highlight the problem statement. It further states the purpose of the study and lists the research questions. It also highlights the significance of the study, provides stipulative definitions of some frequently used terms and lists the assumptions and limitations of the study. It concludes with an outline of the organization of the remaining sections of the study followed by the chapter summary.

1.2 BACKGROUND

‘Being educated adds value to a person’s life, whether young or old or rich or poor’ (UNESCO, 2008: 30). As such, education is seen instrumental in the pursuit of development at personal, family and community levels, as well as, at macro-levels of the nations, regions and the world (UNESCO, 2006). In light of the significance embodied in education, people all over the globe expect schooling to help children to develop creatively and emotionally and acquire skills, values and attitudes necessary for them to live productive lives and become responsible citizens.
This expectation was outlined and reinforced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights some fifty years ago. The declaration proclaims that education is a basic human right and is a prerequisite for a better social, economic and personal life. Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child express strong and detailed commitments towards education. They highlight that education should allow all children to reach their fullest potential in terms of cognitive, emotional and creative capacities (United Nations, 1989).

Article 28 of the Convention states the child’s right to education and the nation’s duty to ensure that primary education is made free. In Article 29 of the same Convention, the nations are requested to recognize that education should be directed at developing the child’s personality and talents, preparing the child for active life, fostering respect for basic human rights and developing respect for the child’s own cultural and national values and those of others (United Nations, 1989).

Consequently, every child should leave the education system with all the skills they need to live in tomorrow’s society. These skills include language and literacy skills, mathematical skills and social skills. Ketele (2004) views these skills as the platform required for adjusting to social and working life and upon which life-long education can be built. Therefore, this fundamental platform of life needs to be established in primary schools. UNESCO (2006) further emphasizes that a child denied the right to a quality primary education is deprived not only as a child but also becomes handicapped for life.

Based on the importance placed on education by all countries, in 1990, the United Nations Development programme (UNDP), UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank sponsored a conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, at which government and non-government representatives from more than 100 nations arrived at a global consensus on an expanded vision of basic education. Conference participants committed their countries and institutions to six goals (Appendix 1) for improvements to basic education. The second of these goals was ‘access to and completion of primary education for all the
world’s children by the year 2000’ (UNESCO, 2000: 4). This goal commits nations to provide primary education of good quality.

In the decade that followed, the progress was disappointing (UNESCO, 2000). At the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, representatives from more than 180 nations found that millions of children, mostly girls, still had no access to primary education; millions of adults were still illiterate, gender discrimination continued to permeate education systems and quality of learning still fell short of the needs of societies. Most Pacific Island Countries, including Fiji, signed a Framework for Action that pledged improvements in all aspects of the quality of education (UNESCO, 2000).

The World Education Forum in Dakar did not only emphasize the need to achieve education for all, but also noticed the need to improve the qualitative dimensions of education. The Forum made a commitment to improve all aspects of quality education to achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes for all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (Dakar Framework for Action, Article 7 by UNESCO, 2000).

In 2001, the United Nations (UN) and other international agencies responsible for the EFA movement reviewed the situation and reiterated that in the developing world today it was unacceptable that millions of primary school-aged children were denied the chance to go to school. This disastrous situation made them reaffirm the importance of education and they restated the new EFA goals, notably elimination of educational disparities at all levels by 2005 and completion by all children the full course of primary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education has a challenging agenda. Paramount among these is the provision of quality basic education as it instils language, literacy, mathematical and social skills (Ketele, 2004). Ketele views these skills as a basis for further education and training. In his view, ‘quality education’ is process-oriented and outcome-based. It involves providing a high standard of education involving a variety of teaching and learning strategies to suit the
needs of all learners. It also encompasses planning, implementing, evaluating and providing feedback to the learners of the teaching and learning process. Ketele’s (2004) definition of ‘quality education’ is used throughout the study.

However, despite the importance accorded to education, the state of the World’s Children’s Report indicates that over 130 million children in developing countries, including the Pacific, are illiterate, of which more than 60% are girls (UNESCO, 2004). This is an indication that a large proportion of school-aged children are deprived of their right to quality basic education.

Based on these reports (UNESCO, 2006; 2002; 2000), there appear to be a lot of disparities and inequalities in education in developing countries which impedes them in achieving quality Basic Primary Education (BPE). This is evident in Fiji as day-by-day more and more children drop out of school and are either found on streets, in villages, fall victims of child labour or are involved in unwarranted criminal activities (Chandra, 2009).

This gives the stakeholders a mammoth challenge of combining and balancing effectiveness, efficiency and equity in the education system. Therefore, the pressing challenges that hinder the delivery of quality basic education need to be further explored and examined so that some meaningful strategies can be implemented to make quality education accessible to all.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of this study was to explore the challenges in achieving equity and access to quality Universal Primary Education (UPE) or Basic Primary Education (BPE) in Fiji.

1.4.1 Research Objectives

Given the research evidence pertaining to the challenges to achieving quality universal primary education, the present study aimed to investigate qualitatively the following research objectives. These were to:
(i) examine the ‘Education for All’ situation in Fiji.
(ii) justify the need for achieving quality universal primary education in Fiji.
(iii) identify the emerging challenges that hinder quality basic education.
(iv) explore strategies for addressing these challenges.

1.4.2 Research Questions

Given the purpose of the study, the key research question that guided the study is ‘What are the challenges or barriers to achieving equity and access to quality Universal Primary Education (UPE)?’ Six further questions supported and guided the study focus. These were:

1. What does ‘Education for All’ mean in the Fijian context?
2. Who is responsible for promoting EFA in Fiji?
3. What commitments are shown by the government and other stakeholders towards providing quality basic education in this country?
4. Why is there a need to provide quality basic primary education in our country?
5. What are the challenges in providing quality basic primary education in Fiji?
6. What are some of the ways of addressing these challenges?

1.4.3 Dissertation Elements

This dissertation comprises a summary from related literature on the ‘Education For All’ concept, the over-arching challenges to achieving equity and access to quality basic education in Fiji and on practical strategies in overcoming these challenges. The research methods utilized to collect data were open-ended questionnaires, informal interviews, non-participant observations and document analysis.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Based on earlier researches (Lewin, 2006; Ketele, 2004; Bruns, et. al., 2003), there is a rationale to suggest that providing quality basic education should be one of the top priorities of any state or government. However, while many countries are striving to achieve quality basic education in primary schools, the pace is too slow (UNESCO, 2006). It is also foreseen that at such a slow pace, many countries are at risk of not achieving this
goal at all due to numerous country-based challenges which they encounter. Therefore, this research study is significant for many reasons.

Foremost, schooling is the principal route for acquiring reading, writing and numeric skills (UNESCO, 2006). However, too many pupils leave school without acquiring minimum literacy skills. They live without the basic knowledge and skills to make informed decisions and are unable to participate fully in development of their communities and societies (UNESCO, 2006). This situation could be attributed to the lack of quality basic education offered to the children. Quality is believed to be equally vital as this creates the conditions that promote learning and child’s harmonious development. Quality basic education prepares students to take the initiative and draw upon their knowledge and skills to solve real-life problems (UNESCO, 2006). Therefore, as a developing nation, it is essential for Fiji to redirect and optimize its resources towards achieving quality education at all levels, starting from early childhood.

Quality is also embodied in holistic education and it is vital for many reasons (UNESCO, 2005). It prepares a child for life, not just academically to pass examinations and attain a good job, but more importantly, to inculcate values and develop character that will enable him or her to participate fully in society. However, I believe that, although policies are in place, our society is failing to offer holistic education at the primary level. Research studies by Chandra (2009), Lingam (2009) and Birdsall, Levine & Ibrahim (2005) have revealed high school dropout rates, increasing anti-social behaviour of school-aged children, increase in child labour and lack of concern shown by the younger generation about their families, environment and communities. Consequently, this research study aimed to explore the stumbling blocks that hinder the provision and attainment of holistic education by different stakeholders in primary schools.

Furthermore, the existing local literature (Pongi, 2006) suggests that the credibility of the country progress report on ‘Education for All’ is questionable. Therefore, this research study aimed to give a clearer picture of the progress in achieving universal primary education in the selected primary schools in Fiji. While researches have been conducted in Australia, New Zealand and African countries, there is very little evidence of any such research conducted in the Pacific, including Fiji. There is very limited thorough study of
individual ‘Education For All’ goals in Fiji. Only reports have been provided on the progress of EFA goals in Fiji to the EFA forum meetings. Therefore, this research focuses particularly on Goal 2 of the ‘Education for All’ Action Programme. I have purposively focused this research on primary education as it is at this level the fundamentals of education are taught and also is regarded as a route for further education and better life (Bruns, et. al., 2003).

Moreover, the findings arising from this empirical study may add additional insights regarding the challenges faced in Fiji’s primary schools in their endeavours to achieve quality universal primary education. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the ‘ground realities’ in terms of the nature of challenges, which teachers, parents, students, school Heads and school managements face to achieve access to quality universal primary education. The findings from this research will be helpful to make informed decisions about the improvements that need to be made to provide quality education.

It is also envisaged that the findings through these research objectives and questions will be of great significance to the teachers as they will add to teachers’ practical and theoretical knowledge by creating awareness of how to tackle these challenges practically in their everyday professional work. As such, the findings from this research may inform teachers how to reassess their teaching and learning strategies and be mindful of the diverse capabilities and backgrounds of students under their care. Besides this, the findings can become a ‘tool kit’ for them to promote inclusive and conducive teaching and learning environment in their classrooms.

Additionally, the findings arising from this research may also educate the parents about their roles and responsibilities in their child’s/children’s education. Earlier research (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004) indicates that parents and guardians have often left the educational aspects of their children to the teachers and schools. Some of the reasons they identified are that most parents are too busy with their work and have other social commitments in life, have huge financial constraints, or are single parents. Their perception is that education for their children is the responsibility of the teachers and schools. Therefore, the findings will help to clarify their perception that they are active partners, and not passive, in fostering quality basic education. Their participation will also give them an
opportunity to freely express some of the difficulties they face in sending their children to school, and provide an opportunity for them to reflect on these challenges and explore ways to minimize their effects on their children’s education.

The concept of ‘Education For All’ demands that all stakeholders of education work together to combat the ever-increasing social problems existing in our society. This is more so because based on earlier evidence (Birdsall, Levine & Ibrahim, 2005) many school-aged children drop out of school at primary and secondary level due to bad behaviour and indiscipline such as drug abuse, sexual harassment, street fights and robbery, and this problem is getting worse day-by-day. Many primary school-aged children are found on streets, in villages, engaged in child labour or involved in unwanted criminal activities. Some are surrounded by the vicious cycle of poverty and end up begging, while others have family or personal problems (Banks, 2002).

Therefore, the findings from this study may enlighten the different stakeholders of education on the significance of providing quality basic education and retaining school-aged children in schools through guidance and proper counselling so that they become productive and contributing members of their society. As such, the findings from this research will help strengthen the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders and help to develop a collegial working relationship amongst them. Apart from this, the challenges identified from this research may be helpful to the Ministry of Education and school administrators in policy making, practice and revision of rules and guidelines regarding the achievement of universal primary education in Fiji in an attempt to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Apart from this, as a parent and educator, it is my personal wish and desire to see our children get quality basic education, which prepares them for life even if they are unable to continue with secondary or tertiary education due to some unavoidable circumstances. They should become contributing members of this modern and challenging society.

Finally, the findings from this research study may also add to the existing literature about the challenges to achieving equity and access to quality basic education in primary schools. It may also provide some incentives to future researchers to further examine the progress and the challenges towards achieving the other EFA goals in their respective countries.
1.6 ASSUMPTIONS

Most countries in the world are striving to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2005). Achieving universal participation, however, depends fundamentally upon the quality of education available. Parents make judgements about school quality when investing in their children’s education. Keeping these in mind, this research study is based on the following assumptions:

(i) Education, apart from being a basic human right, has also become a basic human need to survive in this global era. It is indispensable for human capacity development and poverty eradication. It is needed to promote economic growth, create employment opportunities and foster civic participation and personal development.

(ii) Universal Primary Education is also the basic education, which is essential in a child’s life.

(iii) There is a need to provide quality basic education to all children in order for them to lead productive lives.

(iv) An exam-oriented education system is a ‘killer of creativity’ in teachers and students, which impedes the qualitative dimension of the entire education system.

(v) There are many challenges still existent in our society that hinder the provision of quality basic education and research in this area is lacking. Consequently, there is a need for studies to be conducted in the area of ‘providing and attaining quality basic education in Fiji’. The ‘ground realities’ need to be explored and examined from an insider’s perspective so that the findings are more relevant and meaningful in the Fiji context and beyond.
1.7 LIMITATIONS

The following conditions may have hindered the outcome of this research study in terms of validity and generalizability:

(i) The researcher is part of the primary education system. His familiarity with the system and prior knowledge may have served as a limitation to the acquisition of responses. However, conscientious efforts were employed to minimize any effect on the quality of the data and the interpretation and analysis of information gathered. It was through triangulation the researcher established the validity of the findings. Validity, in this case, refers to the extent to which the results obtained in this study can be generalized to a wider population, that is, beyond the study itself.

(ii) Only two schools were selected for this study. As such, it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study to all primary schools in Fiji. The results may not be applicable to all the schools. However, in order to obtain a certain degree of generalizability and reliability, schools from two different settings were chosen. A rural multi-grade school and an urban straight class school were selected for this study. This helped to attain a certain degree of credibility in the findings.

(iii) The observations of teachers and students were conducted during lesson hours so I had to seek the Head teacher’s and the respective class teacher’s approval. Some class teachers may have felt uncomfortable while their lessons were being observed and their actions and strategies may not reflect their everyday behaviour. However, through informal interviews, their behaviour was justified and validated.

1.8 DEFINITIONS

The beginning of the new millennium has demanded that all stakeholders re-look at the quality of education provided in their countries. There is a pressing need to re-direct education in the path that fulfils the needs and aspirations of our young children. This study
explored some of the challenges that influenced the progress of achieving quality basic education in case study schools. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is appropriate at this time to provide preliminary stipulative definitions for the terms that are used frequently throughout the study. Necessary steps were taken to apply these concepts consistently throughout the study.

**Access:** means every child has the right and is given the opportunity to attain quality education (UNESCO, 2003).

**Basic Primary Education:** refers to the whole range of educational activities taking place in formal, non-formal and informal settings of a primary school to meet the basic learning needs of learners. This includes the basic literacy, numeracy and social skills, knowledge of the environment, health, citizenship issues and character building. Basic Primary Education is regarded as the platform for further education, especially, secondary education. In Fiji, Basic Primary Education requires eight years of primary schooling (UNESCO, 2002)

**Challenge:** is used synonymously as difficulties or hardships or problems, which we face in providing quality education for our children (UNESCO, 2003).

**Education For All:** is a specific term coined by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. It means learning for all. It focuses on the acquisition of basic skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to participate effectively in personal, social and economic life. It means closing the ‘advantage’ gap by making the children of the poor and disadvantaged achieve the same levels of learning as more advantaged children (UNESCO, 2003).

**Equity:** means every child has equal opportunity to education with all fairness and justice. It is providing free, fair and equal learning opportunities to all learners (UNESCO, 2003).

**Holistic Education:** means ensuring that everybody leaves the education system with all the skills they need to live in tomorrow’s society. These are: (i) skills relating to learning language, (ii) mathematical skills required for social and working life, (iii) social skills including elements of general knowledge, basic science, and awareness of environmental, education, health and citizenship issues (iv) character development with positive moral and
ethical attitudes. These skills are considered the minimum basis required for adjusting to social and working life and upon which life-long education can be built. It is also believed that quality education is a prerequisite to holistic education (UNESCO, 2002).

**Quality Education:** is the education that best fits the present and future needs of learners. It should equip the child with all the knowledge and life skills, attitudes, perspectives and values to cope up in their lives. It is process-oriented, skill and outcome-based. It refers to how well the students are taught and whether they are fully prepared them for the next level of education. It involves providing a high standard of education involving a variety of teaching and learning strategies to suit the diverse learning needs of students (Ketele, 2004).

**Quality Education For All:** means enabling all children to master the basic skills required for living in society (fitting in to society and pursuing their development there) and ensuring that those who can and want to continue their education may do so. This means that education system managers and teachers must be attentive to all children regardless of gender or social, geographical, ethnic, religious or other background. This requires focusing special attention on children with the greatest learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2005).

**Stakeholders of Education:** refers to individuals, groups or organizations that have vested interest in education. They are also referred to as ‘Partners in Education’ and play significant roles supporting the education system of a country (UNESCO, 2002).

**Universal Primary Education:** means every child, regardless of his/her colour, culture or creed, is given the opportunity to complete the full course of primary school. That is, a child should be provided with quality basic education in primary schools (UNESCO, 2002).

### 1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This chapter provided an overview of the study. The next chapter, *Chapter two*, is a description of the general background of Fiji and its education system. It also highlights some of the functional policies that are in place, which relate to the provision and attainment of quality basic education in Fiji.
Chapter three is the literature review and begins with an overview of the EFA Action Programme since its inception in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. This is followed by exploring and examining the various challenges faced by countries in achieving EFA goals and, in particular, Goal 2, which relates to the provision of quality basic education. In doing so, a number of international with local literature were reviewed.

Chapter four details the research design developed and utilized for this study. It explains the methodology used and provides justification for the choice of the various research techniques. It also discusses the background of the participants, describes the data analysis procedure and highlights the ethical issues considered while carrying out this research study.

Chapter five is the analysis of results and presents the results in a narrative form while making reference to information gathered during the fieldwork.

Chapter six summarizes and discusses the main findings of the research study and makes references to relevant literature.

The final chapter, Chapter seven, draws conclusions from the findings and discussion of the study. It also highlights some implications that this research has for education in Fiji. The chapter concludes by stating some practical suggestions that can be implemented in Fiji for the betterment of the education of children. And lastly, some directions for future research studies on this topic are suggested.

1.10 SUMMARY

Based on the recommendations in the Dakar Framework for Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as, in a number of other international conventions, it can be concluded that everyone has the right, not only to receive education, but also to receive education of high quality. Internationally, education is a fundamental right. It provides children, youth and adults with the power to reflect and make choices and enjoy a better life. It breaks the cycle of poverty and is the key ingredient of economic and social development.
The quest to achieve EFA is fundamentally about empowering children, youth and adults to gain the knowledge and skills they need to better their lives and to play a role in building more peaceful and equitable societies. This is why focusing on quality is an imperative for achieving EFA. As many societies strive to universalize basic education, they face the momentous challenge of providing conditions where genuine learning can take place for each and every learner. A quality education system must manage to provide all children and young people with a comprehensive education and with an appropriate preparation for working life, life in society and private life. This should be achieved without distinctions of any kind, such as those based on parent’s income, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, focuses on the general background and existing education system of the Fiji Islands.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 GENERAL BACKGROUND OF FIJI AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

‘All facets of life in this world are shaped by the geographical context in which we live and education is no exception’

(Pacific Forum of Education Ministers, 2006)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it will highlight the context of this study. This context includes the geographic, economic, political and social features which directly influence the policy, practice and provision of education in Fiji. The second part of this chapter provides an insight into the past and present education systems in Fiji and focuses on some of the prevalent educational policies in relation to EFA.

2.2 CONTEXT OF FIJI ISLANDS

2.2.1 Location and Geographical Features

Fiji is located in the tropics of the southern hemisphere. It lies on the 180 degrees meridian where the dawning of each new day begins. It is positioned in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. Over 332 islands, scattered over a wide expanse of seawater, make the Fiji group with a total land area of just over 18,272 square kilometres. Fiji enjoys a tropical South Sea maritime climate without extremes of heat and cold. However, the islands lie dispersed in an area vulnerable to natural catastrophes. The whole Fiji group is occasionally traversed by tropical cyclones and hurricanes, mostly confined between the months of November to April every year, and suffer tidal waves, excessive rain and flooding and earthquakes. Some of the smaller islands are particularly susceptible to rising sea levels. These factors are impediments to the overall development of the country.

Its geographical features coupled with its isolated position in the Pacific Ocean make its location a major challenge in the provision of education to its children and people (Tikoisuva, 2000). Like other small island states, the issues of islandness, size and
remoteness are also variables that impact upon the delivery of education in that external aid by major funding institutions sometimes bypasses Fiji, as well as other Pacific Island countries (Bacchus & Brock, 1997).

2.2.2 Population

There have been considerable changes in the demographic structure of Fiji's population since 1987. Moderately high fertility rates and migration have played a strong role in the population structures and distribution of Pacific Island Countries and Fiji is no exception. Migration has played a more prominent role in Fiji. Sustained migration from Fiji Islands followed political developments of the past decades (Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Fiji is populated principally by Fijians (the Indigenous people), Indians (often called Indo-Fijians), Europeans, Part-Europeans, Chinese and other Pacific Islanders. The Fijians and the Indians form the majority population while the others are classified as minority groups. Fiji's 1990 constitution guarantees all people the freedom of expression to observe their own religion, organize and participate in their own cultural and religious activities. All people also have the freedom to send their children to a school of their own choice. Together with the two major races, the minorities have also contributed significantly to the economic, social and educational development in Fiji.

Today, some Indo-Fijians have been displaced by the expiration of land leases in cane-producing areas and they have either migrated overseas or have moved to urban centres to earn a living (Lingam, 2009). This has resulted in a decline in the Indo-Fijian population. As a result the Indo-Fijian people only constitute 37% (Bureau of Statistics, 2008) of the total population, although they were the largest ethnic group from the 1940s until the late 1980s. This development has had some negative repercussions on the delivery of quality education in Fiji, especially, in urban centres. This is so because their movement to urban centres has resulted in an increase in urban school population and this has put pressure on the schools’ existing resources and facilities. Therefore, when schools become under-resourced and over-populated, the quality of education delivery is affected as the best can not be offered.
Moreover, notably, there has also been a significant increase in the urban population and a reduction in the overall Indo-Fijian population, particularly in rural areas. The increase in the urban population has increased the pressure on basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, schools, and educational resources and facilities.

The most recent population census was taken from 17 to 26 September 2007. It has been noted that the total population has increased from 715,375 in 1986, to 775,077 in 1996 and 827,900 in 2007. The 2007 census results indicate that the indigenous Fijian population in urban areas has increased by 49,427; population for Northern and Eastern division decreased by 8909 and 1696 respectively; the Indo-Fijian population in rural areas decreased by 36,708; and the population for the Central and Western division increased by 43,236 and 20,192 respectively (Bureau of Statistics, 2008). This statistical analysis depicts further upsurge in the total population, which adds pressure on the provision of educational services to the children of Fiji.

2.2.3 Economy

The economy of Fiji is considered to be more diversified and developed than that of most South Pacific Island countries (Tikoisuva, 2000). However, the political developments since 1987 have seen some decline in the exports and a down-sized labour market. Fiji’s economy is mostly dependent on agriculture and tourism. Textile industry also drove Fiji’s economy for many years. Today, it is primarily agrarian, with subsistence farming on a village level still an important way of life for much of the population.

According to National Council of Building a Better Fiji's (NCBBF) Nation and Economy Report (2007), Fiji’s economy has competed ineffectively in globalized markets. The sugar industry is suffering from quality concerns, poor administration and phasing out of the preferential price agreement with the European Union beginning in 2006 and 2007. Although the European Union has promised a large amount of financial aid to the deteriorating sugar industry, the political situation has become a barrier and assistance is only expected with a return to democracy (National Council of Building a Better Fiji, 2007).
Further crippling the economic situation of Fiji, its major trading partners, Australia, New Zealand and United States have placed targeted trade and travel sanctions, which have resulted in stressful trade relations. They have justified their action by pointing out that Fiji does not have a democratically elected government. However, in order to stabilize the economy and diversify the exports, Fiji has pursued closer relations with a number of Asian countries, including Peoples’ Republic of China, Korea and India.

2.2.4 Political Context

Fiji gained independence on 10 October 1970 and became a member of the Commonwealth. Beginning from this day, all the people of Fiji set out with high hopes on a road to build a new nation that would be peaceful, tolerant, culturally vibrant, and provide a prosperous future for each of its citizens; a country that would not only be an integral part of the international family of nations but also demonstrate ‘the way the world should be’ (Government of Fiji, 2007: 2). For a good seventeen years after the independence, Fiji was a parliamentary democracy. The post-independence politics was dominated by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and his Alliance party, which commanded the support of the Fijian chiefs with leading elements of the European, Part-European and Indian communities (Tikoisuva, 2000).

After some relatively peaceful times, Fiji came into limelight on 14 May, 1987. This day saw the beginning of the vicious coup cycle when the democratically-elected Bavadra-led Labour Party government was overthrown from power by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. On 23 September, 1987, there was a second coup by the same person and this eventuated in Fiji being proclaimed a Republic. As a result of these coups, Fiji lost her place in the Commonwealth and had to struggle to regain the lost trust and establish herself within the Commonwealth realm.

While Fiji was still whirling from the effects of the first two coups, on 19 May, 2000, a civilian coup was staged by an ethnic Fijian nationalist, George Speight. This time again, the Labour Party Government led by Mahendra Chaudhry was overthrown. The helm of the government was then given to Laisenia Qarase by the military and the Great Council of Chiefs. He led the country till 2006.
The Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, Frank Bainimarama was disgruntled by some racist policies of the Qarase government and a stand-off between them eventuated. Consequently, on 5 December 2006, the President dissolved the Parliament paving the way for the military to take over. The commander was appointed the interim Prime Minister by the President on 4 January 2007 and since then he has been leading the interim regime in Fiji by a decree. However, while efforts are being made to recall elections and return Fiji to a parliamentary democracy, there are numerous hurdles curtailing this.

An analysis of the political situation in Fiji for the last thirty-seven years is indicative of the fact that developments, progress and prosperity are stagnating with widespread poverty, repeated coups, racial intolerance and brain drain (Government of Fiji, 2007). Disappointingly, all these have serious consequences on the country’s education system and the basic infrastructure. For instance, the political instability caused a disruption and temporary closure to schools, migration of many qualified and experienced teachers and reduction of school grants and aids by government and non-government organizations. It also caused job losses to many parents resulting in their inability to meet the direct and indirect cost of education of their children. As such, children were forced to stay home or even encouraged to work in order to supplement the family’s income to obtain the basic necessities for the family. All these had an impact on the quality of education provided in schools.

The next part of this chapter looks at the education system and some of the educational policies relating to ‘Quality Basic Education For All’ in Fiji.

### 2.3 THE BACKGROUND OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FIJI

#### 2.3.1 Ownership of Schools in Fiji

Since Fiji gained its independence status in 1970, the education system in Fiji has evolved gradually, much for its betterment. Analysis of Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel (2000) depicts that Fiji’s education system is a complex one. This is so because the schools and the education systems have been set up under the guidance and administration of
various religious and community organizations, namely: Christians, Hindus (Sanatans, Sangams, Arya Samajis, Sikhs), Gujrat Education Society, Muslims Institutes and others as shown in Table 2.1. This is an indication and testimony of the ever-increasing demand for formal education by the community.

**Table: 2.1 Controlling Agencies and Ownership of Schools in Fiji**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controlling Authority</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Technical &amp; Vocational Education Training</th>
<th>Teacher Training</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>26</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Committee</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cripple Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andhra Sangam</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Fiji Blind Society</td>
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<td>Fiji Gospel Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiji Muslim League</td>
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<td>Fiji Sugar Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fijian Affairs Board</td>
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<td>Gujrat Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macuata Muslim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodist Church</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private/International</td>
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</table>
Regardless of this complexity and diversity of ownership, Fiji is proud to have a high degree of community participation in the delivery of educational services. This is viewed as strength of the system and needs to be maintained. Therefore, considering the diversified ownership of the schools and the educational system, one can conclude that Fiji’s education system is a blend of cross-culture, multiracialism and inter-denominational experience. This feature makes it distinct from the rest of the world.

This diverse ownership does not mean that the government has nothing to do with the education sector. The government, through its Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts and Youth and Sports, has an overall control in running of all schools and looking after the school’s statutory affairs. The Ministry for Education, Science and Technology is responsible for the administration and management of educational policies and the delivery of educational services. It provides the curriculum framework, policy guidelines and directions and qualified teaching personnel that support all schools in the delivery of quality education for students (Lingam, 2009). The Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture & Arts and Youth and Sports is also charged with the responsibility of ensuring that standards in education are met and maintained and that the human, physical and financial resources allocated to the education sector are justifiably directed, expended and monitored.
2.3.2 Distribution of Schools

To date, there are a total of 736 primary and 160 secondary schools in Fiji. Of the 736 primary schools, 249 are in the Western, 162 in the Northern, 118 in the Eastern and 207 in the Central Division (Ministry of Education, 2009). These schools are scattered through the urban, rural (10 – 20 Km from town boundary) and very remote (more than 20 Km from town boundary) areas of the Fiji Islands. Nearly 80% or about 588 of the primary schools are classified as rural of which 38% or about 223 are located in very remote areas (Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel, 2000: 77). These small schools are graded by MoE as ED6D schools with the school roll ranging from 10 – 150 students and having a sanctioned staffing of 4 or less.

It is further highlighted in this report that 77% of the rural and remote schools are co-educational and offer multi-grade schools which offer dual-class teaching. Due to the geographic locations and transport difficulties some remote schools are compelled to offer boarding facilities where children as young as six years old become boarders. The implications of remoteness and geographic factors are explored in Chapter 5. The Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel (2000: 83) identified that multi-grade or dual-classes as one of the key obstacles to improving the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools. Such classes are mostly present in small rural and remote schools. These schools are poorly resourced with young and inexperienced teachers.

On the other hand, 20% of the 736 primary schools are classified as urban (less than 5km from towns) or semi-urban schools (from 5km – 10km from the towns or cities). These are normally large schools with a student population ranging from 150 to 900. They are graded as ED5E, ED4C, ED3C, ED2C and ED1B schools. These schools offer straight class teaching with some having two or more streams per class. While most large schools are co-educational, a few are also single sex schools. The schools in urban areas are easily accessible by different modes of transport.

2.3.3 Primary Teacher Training

The government through its MoE is responsible for providing and training primary school teachers. These teachers are trained at the Fiji National University (FNU), formally known
as the Lautoka Teachers’ College (LTC). They undergo a three year training programme whereby they learn about the primary school curriculum, teaching and learning strategies and undertake elective courses in physical, religious and moral education. After the completion of the three year course, they obtain a Diploma in Primary Teaching.

Apart from FNU, two private Christian organizations, Corpus Christi Teachers’ College (CCTC) and Fulton College also provide three-year teacher training. The former is run by the Catholic Church and the latter is managed by the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Their intake is primarily for its own church members and includes students from other Pacific countries. They also obtain a Diploma in Primary Teaching at the completion of their training.

Trainee teachers at these three institutions are usually trained to teach straight classes. They are not specifically taught how to teach multi-grade classes. It is through the experience out in the schools, they learn how to handle multi-grade classes. Unfortunately, just fresh from the college, these young and inexperienced teachers are sent to rural and remote areas, where multi-grade or dual class teaching is done for which they are not prepared for at all.

Currently, all teachers have to register themselves with the FTRB and FTRB only registers trained teachers. Without registration no teacher is allowed in the classroom. In other words, teachers with the required teacher training can teach in Fiji. The practicing teachers are also encouraged to further their academic qualification by doing in-service courses or degree courses from universities in Fiji.

2.3.4 Classification and Stages of Schooling

The schools in Fiji are classified as Elementary, Primary, Secondary, Vocational and Tertiary. In Elementary School, children below the age of six (6) are enrolled. This is also referred to as the Pre-School and provides Early Childhood Education (ECE). For ages six (6) to thirteen (13), children attend Primary School and complete their formal education up to class eight (8) or Form II. Children in Fiji spend eight years in primary school. Prior to 2010, students sat for two (2) external examinations; Fiji Intermediate Examination (FIE) in class six (6) and the Fiji Eighth Year Examination (FEYE) in class eight (8). However,
as from this year, 2010, a new form of assessment called Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA) has been introduced in primary schools for Classes 4, 6 and 8. The FIE and FEYE will be totally phased out of the primary school system.

After successful completion of primary education, there is a transition to secondary school where students mostly of ages fourteen (14) to eighteen (18) years are enrolled. During their secondary education, students sit for three external examinations and their promotion to the next level is dependent on the results of these examinations. In form four, students sit for Fiji Junior Certificate Examination (FJC) while in form six, they sit for Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination (FSLC) and in form seven, they do the Fiji Seventh Form Examination (FSE). Above these ages, students either go to a vocational school or attend a tertiary institution such as the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji National University (FNU) or the University of Fiji.

Although the tuition fees from Class 1 to Form 7 are paid by the government, education in Fiji still remains an expensive affair. The increase in the prices of text books, uniform, transport, food and the focus on fundraising activities in schools have been a concern to many parents and many feel that the cost of quality education is becoming expensive day-by-day (Lingam, 2009).

Finally, there are also major concerns regarding equity, equality and access to quality educational services for all children in this country. Coupled with these concerns is a pressing need to provide relevant and responsive education for all school-aged children. All these issues have resulted in the education system being overhauled where new policies are being formulated and new reforms taking place to effectively cater for the educational needs of its students.

### 2.4 EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

This section looks at some of the educational policies that are in place to-date in Fiji, which relate to ‘Quality Primary Education’. The educational policies discussed briefly are:

1. Education Fiji, 2020
2. Education For All, 2015
3. Suva Declaration, 2005

2.4.1 Education Fiji, 2020

The report on *Education Fiji, 2020* (Ministry of Education, 1999) was developed to give a clear focus and direction for education in the Fiji Islands. It was a blueprint to promote the very best education for all the children of Fiji and help create a more forward-looking and productive society. The vision for *Education, 2020* for Fiji is to promote a quality education and training system that is responsive to Fiji’s changing needs. It encompasses and stresses the need for quality education at all levels in Fiji.

This document sets out the objectives and proposed outcomes of Fiji’s educational development over a period of 20 years. The objectives provide a focus for the major activity areas in education such as, improving quality and relevance of education, and educational facilities; and the outcomes describe the desired results by the year 2020, providing a reference point against which the education sector can measure its success. Although this document established the platform for achieving EFA in terms of quality, equity and equality, it was shelved away in 1999 and the Qarase-government instituted an Education Commission, which compiled a report entitled: *Learning Together: Directions For Education In Fiji Islands* in 2000.

The Commission's focus was on how to prepare young people for active and productive lives within a context, which faces rapidly changing national, regional and international challenges. This report recommended that the provision and quality of all educational content and delivery needed to be reviewed.

2.4.2. Education For All, 2015

Education For All, 2015 was endorsed by the EFA forum and approved by the Minister of Education on 26 November 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2007). The rationale behind this policy document is based on the six EFA goals (Appendix 1), which are:
1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;

4. Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

(UNESCO, 2006: 3)

The EFA – 2015, Fiji Action Plan prioritizes these goals according to Fiji’s needs. The updated priority list from the Synthesis of the Pacific Education for All Action Plans – 2004 and the EFA Coordinators’ Workshop held in Nadi, Fiji in April, 2005 are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>EFA Goal – 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EFA Goal – 4</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>EFA Goal – 2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>EFA Goal – 5</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>EFA Goal – 6</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>EFA Goal – 3</td>
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</table>

(Council of Pacific Education, 2006: 13)

EFA Goal 2, which has been prioritized third in this policy document, primarily forms the basis of this research study. It extends, specifically, to find the challenges in achieving quality primary education in the case study schools in Fiji.
Education For All, 2015 is a comprehensive policy document and lays down the strategies as well as indicators for attaining access and equity in children’s education in primary schools in Fiji. It emphasizes that all children in Fiji should be enrolled and have completed basic education by the target year 2015.

2.4.3 Suva Declaration, 2005

In 2006, the Ministry of Education launched the *Suva Declaration*. This policy document was formulated from the MOE’s Strategic Plan 2006 – 2008. This document proposes to educate the child holistically for a peaceful and prosperous Fiji. The *Suva Declaration* outlines the direction for education in Fiji for a span of ten years, 2006 – 2015 and identifies seven major national goals, which are:

**Goal: 1**  
Children in Fiji need to be provided with educational experiences that will cater for their interests and aspirations, as well as, preparing them to be competent in a rapidly changing world. Thus, the need for education to adopt a broader social vision with the child at its centre.

**Goal: 2**  
Education should holistically develop and inculcate in every child the fundamental ethical, moral, spiritual, social and democratic values.

**Goal: 3**  
In developing the curriculum, it should be ensured that it is aligned to the holistic development of the child.

**Goal: 4**  
The school is central to the teaching and learning process so a safe environment that enhances the effectiveness of schools should be developed.

**Goal: 5**  
Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) will be given greater prominence in the education system as it will play an important role in the development of the future for the children in Fiji.

**Goal: 6**  
The development of human resources will give priority to the training of both teachers and administrative staff.

**Goal: 7**  
The communities play a vital role in the development of education in Fiji so they should be empowered and strengthened.

(Ministry of Education: Suva Declaration, 2005: 2)
The central focus of this document is the ‘child’ as the first four of the seven goals relates to the child’s holistic education.

2.4.4  Ministry of Education Strategic Plan, 2006 – 2008

From the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel Report (2000), the Ministry of Education has stipulated two strategic plans to-date. The first one was the Strategic Plan 2003-2005 and the recent one is the Strategic Plan 2006-2008, which was launched on 20 April 2006. Both these documents realize that quality basic education is the key for building a peaceful and prosperous Fiji. In launching this document, the Permanent Secretary for Education, Ms Emi Rabukawaqa emphasized that:

……the child is at the heart of everything we do in education. Our mission is to nurture and mould the child, equipping him/her for life in a challenging, vibrant and developing economy.

(cited in Ministry of Education Annual Corporate Plan, 2006 - 2008: 4)

In achieving this, Rabukawaqa (2007) further emphasized that improvements are urgently needed in the quality of education delivery (Ministry of Education Annual Corporate Plan, 2006 - 2008: 4).

The Strategic Plan 2006-2008 is aligned to the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2005-2007 and specifically highlights the issues of quality, access, inclusive education, gender, equity and disadvantage in the community. There is an emphasis on providing equal opportunities for education to all. This is emphasized in objectives 1 and 2 of this document. These are:

Objective: 1   To provide relevant and responsive curriculum which develops in the students knowledge, skills and attitudes required to enhance their quality of life and contribution to society.

Objective: 2   To develop students who respect others, appreciate Fiji’s multicultural heritage and are responsible, informed and involved citizens of both Fiji and the world.

(Ministry of Education Strategic Plan, 2006-2008: 6)

It is worth noting that in these two objectives, changes which have an impact on education such as: demographic, social, economic, environmental and technological changes are
considered and anticipated impacts of these changes and challenges have been used as a starting point for the development of the objectives and outcomes for education in Fiji in future.

2.4.5  **Fiji Islands National Curriculum Framework (NCF)**

The Ministry of Education’s NCF (2007) articulates the philosophy behind schooling in the Fiji Islands. This document provides a holistic view of schooling and gives directions to schools, which need to be reflected in their culture, organization and curriculum. It reflects the UNESCO four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (Figure 2.1).

The NCF (2007) stresses that education in Fiji Islands is tailored to support the learning and development of positive attitudes in all children and students and empower them with firm foundation of knowledge, skills and values in order to maximize their potentials to meet the challenges of living in a dynamic Fiji and in the global society. The NCF (2007) document highlights that education should make students informed, creative, responsible and productive citizens contributing to a peaceful, prosperous and a just society. In other words, the NCF supports a quality basic education.

Education in all schools in the country should contribute to the spiritual, intellectual, cultural, social, emotional, aesthetic and physical development of students through which they will grow into healthy, happy and caring citizens. They will be committed to:

- cultural, multicultural, and religious understanding and tolerance;
- harmonious living;
- global co-existence; and
- the promotion of environmental sustainability.

(Ministry of Education – NCF, 2007: 7)
2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has reviewed the context within which education in Fiji is designed and developed. In doing so, it has looked at the geographical features including location and climate, the people, economy, politics, policy directions and the education system prevailing in the Fiji Islands. It is a fundamental belief and a reality that education can not be seen in isolation and, therefore, is part of these complex dimensions of the context in which it is based. Education in Fiji should reflect the demands of the local, regional and the
global economy. It should also focus on the enhancement of the distinctive values, morals, social, political and cultural heritages of the Pacific’s unique context.

The *Education Fiji, 2020, Education For All, 2015, Suva Declaration, 2005, Ministry of Education - Strategic Plan, 2006-2008* and *the National Curriculum Framework, 2007* are the prospective policy documents formulated that have emphasized improvements in the educational standards and quality in Fiji. However, practically, the success of the propositions in these documents needs to be determined and effective strategies have to be developed, contextualized and implanted in the realities of the nation. The success of countries with flourishing economies and prosperous citizens rests on education (UNESCO, 2004).

The next chapter, Chapter 3, presents the review of literature associated with the ‘Education for All’ concept and the challenges obstructing the achievement of quality basic education. From the literature, a conceptual framework is also drawn and adopted for the present study.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Education is, in some ways, a mirror of society and at the same time a factor influencing its development so the challenge is to maintain the best quality for the present and future” (Fredriksson, 2004).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide a descriptive as well as critical analysis of the literature relating to the topic ‘Challenges to Achieving Quality Basic Primary Education in Fiji’. In doing so, the concept of Education For All (EFA), its inception and the progress towards achieving it are revisited.

It is worth mentioning at the outset that only a few research papers (Lingam, 2006; Thaman, 2006) and reports (Council of Pacific Education, 2006; Pongi, 2006; Senibulu, 2000) on this topic are available locally in Fiji. It is evident that only general reports on ‘Education For All’ (EFA) are compiled by the Ministry of Education. There is hardly any evidence of research being conducted on individual Education for All goals and, in particular, regarding challenges in achieving quality Basic Primary Education (BPE). Therefore, the validity and the reliability of these reports is something that can be challenged and debated, although it is not the prime purpose of this research. Therefore, further investigation on this topic is needed to explore the barriers to access and equity to quality basic education, which would add to the local literature.

However, at international level, researches have been conducted on this topic in Africa, Asia, United Kingdom and United States. Apart from this, Education for All Global Monitoring Reports (EFA-GMR) have also been published by UNESCO since 2000, with the latest report in 2008. Therefore, these literatures are used as a source for reviewing the relevant information on the following:

- the Education for All concept (EFA);
- achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) in a changing world;
• the concept of quality education;
• Universal Primary Education (UPE) status in Pacific Island Countries;
• purpose of primary education in Fiji;
• educational improvements in Fiji since 2000;
• the challenges towards achieving quality universal primary education.

Based on the review of literature, a conceptual framework is derived and presented towards the end of the chapter (Figure 3.7).

3.2 THE ‘EDUCATION FOR ALL’ CONCEPT

In March 1990, the World Conference on Education For All, in Jomtien, Thailand, adopted the World Declaration on Education For All, which stated that ‘everyone has a right to education’ (UNESCO, 2000: 3). This conference also recognized the setbacks suffered by the education systems of many developing countries during 1980s and proclaimed a commitment to meeting the basic learning needs of every citizen in every society (Exhibit 3.1).

However, a decade later, in April 2000, five international agencies: UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank jointly convened the Dakar Forum where they reaffirmed the Jomtien perspective on Education For All and adopted a Framework for Action. During this forum, the participants expanded their definition of Education For All and re-evaluated the goals (UNESCO, 2002).
Exhibit: 3.1 World Declaration On EFA

Article 1 of the World Declaration on Education for All adopted at Jomtien defined the purpose of EFA as meeting basic learning needs:

1. Every person — child, youth and adult — shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time.

2. The satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own, ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld, and to work for international peace and solidarity in an interdependent world.

3. Another and no less fundamental aim of educational development is the transmission and enrichment of common cultural and moral values. It is in these values that the individual and society find their identity and worth.

4. Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training.


At this Education Forum, 164 governments, 35 international institutions and 127 non-government organizations adopted the Dakar Framework For Action, promising to commit
the necessary resources and effort to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive system of quality education for all (UNESCO, 2008). Fiji was also one of signatories of this Action Plan. All the participants endorsed a comprehensive vision of education, anchored in human rights, affirming the importance of learning at all ages and emphasizing the need for special measures to reach the poorest, most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged groups in society (UNESCO, 2008).

The Dakar Framework for Action reaffirmed the prominence of national governments in the expansion of educational opportunities. This report clearly states that ‘the heart of “Education For All” activity lies at the country level’ (UNESCO, 2000: 4). It is mainly the government’s responsibility to formulate and implement plans of action for ‘Education For All’ (UNESCO, 2005; 2006), integrate ‘Education For All’ plans in their Country Development Plans and develop creative partnerships with the civil society and generate dynamic co-ordination and support from the international community (Clemens, 2004 cited in UNESCO, 2008; Bolton, 2006).

According to Education For All Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2008: 13), ‘the concept of “Education For All” meant much more than the expansion of the existing formal school systems to foster economic growth through the spread of basic cognitive skills’. It implied reflection on the nature and purpose of education in each society and stressed that ‘education should be based on the equal and real needs of the children’ (Clemens, 2004 cited in UNESCO, 2008: 14).

More so, the Director UNESCO, Apia Office, Dr. Pongi (2004) and Bruns et. al.(2003) emphasize that the quest to achieve ‘Education For All’ is fundamentally about empowering children, youth and adults to gain knowledge and skills they need to further their education in order to better their lives and to play a contributing role in building more peaceful and equitable societies, that is, quality basic education.
3.3 ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

Research studies (UNESCO, 2006; 2007; 2008; Mehrotra, 1998) have pointed out that Universal Primary Education (UPE) agenda rests on the belief that public policy can radically transform education systems in a society within a few years, given adequate political will and resources. These studies also depict that this belief extends not only to the provision of basic facilities for formal primary schooling, which several developing countries have been able to dramatically expand over short periods, but also to subtler aspects of the school systems such as working relationship between teachers, pupils, parents and the teacher-pupil ratios.

Moreover, the global prospect for achieving Universal Primary Education or Quality Basic Education by 2015 is also influenced by the other diverse and inter-related factors such as demography, urbanization, migration, health, and economic and political systems. UNESCO (2006) and Pongi (2006) have stated that changes in these areas, combined with global climate changes, have important consequences for a government’s resource allocation which, in turn, has a direct effect on the quality of education provided to children. The impact of these changes on the quality of educational outcomes is discussed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, while the expanded commentary on the Dakar Framework For Action states that achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 is a realistic and an achievable goal, doubts have been expressed concerning the 2015 target (UNESCO, 2000). An analysis of the Education For All Global Monitoring Reports by UNESCO (2006; 2007) indicates that although the world has made significant progress towards achieving Universal Primary Education since Dakar Framework for Action was developed in 2000, the progress has been uneven. Specifically, the Education For All - Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2008: 41) states that ‘many countries are nearer to achieving Universal Primary Education but still not close to it in terms of quality’. This implies that, as societies strive to universalize basic education of good quality, they face the momentous task of overcoming some strenuous challenges of providing conducive environments where genuine learning
can take place for each and every learner. It is, therefore, important to focus on quality since it is imperative for achieving Universal Primary Education (UNESCO, 2005).

The next section focuses on the concept of quality education.

3.4 THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Quality cannot be seen as a static concept. It has become a dynamic concept, which is rapidly evolving over time relative to context, learners and the circumstances surrounding them (UNESCO, 2003: 1). As a result, the quality dimension of education is being emphasized in ‘Education for All’ and Millennium Development Goals of many countries (UNESCO, 2005). According to Delors (1996: 120), ‘a greater focus on quality is desirable everywhere, even in countries where all children are enrolled in basic education’.

Moreover, ‘quality’ in education is given so much prominence as it is seen as one that best fulfils the present and future needs of learners in diverse circumstances and prospects (UNESCO, 2004; 2003; Delors, 1996). It is based on the four pillars of learning (Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2) and embraces the development of every learner’s potential. Earlier studies (UNESCO, 2005; 2004; 2003; Synder, Fredriksson & Taube, 2004) have supported this by highlighting the essential characteristics that fulfil quality education (Exhibit 3.2).

An analysis of studies (Snyder, Fredriksson & Taube, 2004) categorically reveals that the focus on ‘quality’ has become the centre of education discussion and is, therefore, given extensive prominence now due to the fact that education in the last decades has developed towards lower quality where children have completed primary school without attaining the basic communication, literacy and arithmetic skills. While this has become an inspiring challenge for each and every country, numerous factors need to be considered (Figure 3.1) to attain quality education.
Exhibit: 3.2 Characteristics of Quality Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality education:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. supports a rights-based approach to all education endeavours. Education is a human right, and therefore, quality education supports all of the human rights;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. is based on the four pillars of education – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be (Delors, 1996);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. views the learner as an individual, a family member, community member, and a global citizen and educates to create individual competencies in all four roles;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. upholds and conveys the ideals of a sustainable world – a world that is just, equitable, and peaceful, in which individuals care for the environment to contribute to intergenerational equity;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. takes into consideration the social, economic and environmental contexts of a particular place and shapes the curriculum to reflect these unique conditions. Quality education is locally relevant and culturally appropriate;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. is informed by the past (eg. indigenous and traditional knowledge), is relevant to the present, and prepares individuals for future;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. builds knowledge, life skills, perspectives, attitudes and values;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. provides the tools to transform current societies and to more sustainable societies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. is measurable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(UNESCO, 2005:2)

Research studies, mentioned earlier in this section (UNESCO, 2005; 2004; Snyder, Fredriksson & Taube, 2004), have highlighted some of the factors that need to be accounted for in order to promote quality education in primary schools. These studies argue that learners do not come to the classroom equal. Their diverse characteristics, socio-economic background, gender, disability, race, ethnicity and health create inequalities among them. Therefore, the planning of teaching and learning strategies should be inclusive, needs-based and revolve around the learners (Serpell, 1993).

Furthermore, studies (Lewin, 2006; Ketele, 2004; Bruns, et. al., 2003) have shown that education tends to strongly reflect the values and attitudes of individuals and societies. Therefore, the context in which the teaching and learning is taking place has an impact on quality. The context influences the inputs of the whole education process. These inputs include material resources such as: textbooks, teaching aids, library books and human resources such as teachers, their approaches and attitudes, and the administrators. Thus, this research study then aimed to investigate whether these findings were consistent in Fiji’s
schools and the extent to which these factors (context, learner characteristics, inputs and processes) impede quality education.

Figure: 3.1  A Framework For Understanding Quality Education

3.5 UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Since 2000, all the countries, which adopted the Dakar Framework For Action, have reported a progress in primary school enrolment rates, although only slightly by 2.7% over
the last decade (Pongi, 2006). Despite the progress in the enrolment rate, weaknesses do persist within the Pacific Island Countries education systems. An analysis of Education For All Global Monitoring Reports by UNESCO (2006; 2005) depict alarming figures on dropout and repeating, and basic numeracy and literacy rates. There is substantial evidence from across the region that a large number of youths, from as low as 11 years of age, leave school without adequate life skills and are unable to either further their education or gain employment.

Pongi (2006) and the Pacific Islands Regional Millennium Development Goals Report (2004) suggest that there is a high level of hidden illiteracy resulting in a significant proportion of children completing primary school but still lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. This was evident from the Pacific Islands Literacy Level Test, introduced in 1994 as part of the Basic Education and Literacy Support (BELS) project. A review of the success of the BELS Project was conducted in the year 2000 and the results indicated that about one third of the students across the region had hardly achieved any of the basic literacy and numeracy skills (Pacific Islands Regional Millennium Development Goals Report, 2004).

The BELS Programme was also introduced in Fiji, however, there is no evidence of reporting and monitoring its progress in Fiji despite the effort and resources expanded and unfortunately the recent changes in the hierarchy of the education system have seen the demise of the BELS Programme. While the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA) has been introduced, there is very little feedback and backup training programmes for teachers to effectively implement it in schools to enhance the quality dimension of Fiji’s Education System.

Providing Universal Primary Education that effectively addresses both societal and individual needs is a challenge across the region (Pongi, 2006; Ketele, 2004). To this effect, in 2001, Education Ministers Forum on ‘Education For All’ Millennium Development Progress Report by UNESCO (2004), identified an urgent need to address the provision of education to deliver better quality outcomes. In this forum, a number of areas in the education system where improvements were needed were identified. These included:
• economic constraints;
• competence and confidence of teachers;
• relevance of school curriculum to Pacific Island cultures;
• quality and relevance of teaching materials, teaching methods and learning styles;
• school management and culture;
• relationship between education providers and stakeholders;
• quality of school buildings and sanitation;
• assessment procedures; and
• difficulties posed by large distances and remote communities, which result in high service delivery costs.

(Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2006: 37)

These factors are clear indications of the depleting state of existing Pacific Islands’ education standards. It sends alarming signals to all stakeholders in the education system. However, Fiji has taken a positive step towards addressing these problems and is currently reforming and restructuring the educational goals, objectives and the curriculum. The subsequent sections outline the revised purpose of primary education in Fiji and some of the major educational developments since the signing of the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000.

3.6 PURPOSE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN FIJI

According to Fiji Islands National Curriculum Framework (NCF) document by Ministry of Education (2007), the purpose of primary education in Fiji is to develop all children to their full potential by offering them the essential basic skills, knowledge and attitudes they will need in society, that is, quality basic education. It states that primary education in Fiji is aimed to build on the education provided at early childhood level and will continue to address the emotional, cultural, intellectual, physical and spiritual needs of all students. It further aims to prepare students for life in the Fiji Islands and ensure that they begin to understand their place in the world as members of a global community.
Primary education in Fiji is designed to prepare students for education at secondary level as well as for life, encouraging them to develop their individual abilities, interests and skills. Children with disabilities may need special educational intervention in order that they benefit from all that education has to offer. The National Curriculum Framework also states that primary education in Fiji will promote a love for learning and the values, virtues and moral dispositions we as a nation advocate and strive to uphold.

3.7 EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN FIJI SINCE 2000

Over the years, there have been a number of developments and emerging trends with important implications for the shape and direction of education in Fiji. Part of this development was the provision of compulsory primary education to all school-aged children. Fiji is committed to the goals of ‘Education For All’. In light of this, the Fiji government has developed many policy documents as highlighted in Chapter 2. The goal of these documents is centrally concerned with equality, equity and access to quality education at all levels.

The Ministry of Education’s Strategic Plans 2003-2005 and 2006-2008 set out the vision, mission and strategies which would be engaged to support educational development in Fiji. These documents are aligned to the government’s Strategic Development Plan 2020, which outlines the country’s twenty-year development plan. The plan provides direction and guidance to all the partners in educational provision regarding the priorities for educational action needed to achieve quality basic education. The document also highlights some of the challenges, which are to be tackled to provide ‘Education For All’.

In addition to this, in the year 2007, the curriculum developers within the Ministry of Education developed the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in an endeavour to achieve quality primary education in Fiji. This document sets out the philosophy and structure for curriculum from early childhood to Form seven. There is evidence that this document has tried to re-align the national curriculum to suit the real needs of children in Fiji and a notable inclusion in this document is getting and retaining all school-aged children in the school system through an inclusive curriculum. However, in the NCF document, there is only superficial emphasis on the quality aspect of education. The reform
suggested in NCF is yet to be implemented in all schools in Fiji as currently, only workshops are being conducted around the country. The success or failure of this document is yet to be realized.

Despite all these developments, one of the greatest challenges facing the education sector is to ensure that children leave primary school well equipped with skills and understanding to become responsible and informed members of our society. To achieve this goal, we need to have a ‘world class system’ of education and an improvement in the quality and delivery of education at all levels is essential. Sustained efforts are made through these documents to provide children with equity and equal opportunity to achieve their personal best and the opportunity to attain scholastic success.

The task of providing quality Basic Primary Education in Fiji is mammoth but the government is committed to doing its best to inject resources into the education sector in order to relieve the financial burden on parents. The six goals adopted commit the country, with the support of their EFA partners (UN Countries) to improve all aspects of quality education. The benefits of early childhood, literacy and life-skills programmes largely depend on the quality of the contents and the quality of the teachers. Primary and secondary education, the central planks of most education systems, is expected to ensure that all pupils acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible citizens.

The State of the Nation and Economy Report by National Council of Building a Better Fiji (2007: 12) states that despite Fiji being on track to meet the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goal 2, that is, achieving universal primary education, primary school and net enrolment rates have decreased since 2000. This trend is more prevalent among the indigenous community. The 2004/2005 Employment and Underemployment survey found that ten percent of children aged five to fourteen years were not attending school (National Council of Building a Better Fiji, 2007: 12), owing to the financial burden experienced by parents in sending their children to school as well as the reduced incentive to do so as many school leavers cannot find jobs or do not have appropriate skills.
The next section of this chapter highlights the challenges or difficulties that all stakeholders of education face in providing and achieving quality basic primary education.

3.8 CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Analysis of reports (UNESCO, 2008; Pacific Islands Regional Millennium Development Goals Report, 2004) shows steady progress in access to all levels of education in the Pacific when measured in terms of enrolment and completion rates. However, as education systems have expanded rapidly, countries face more complex and more specific challenges. Field (2006: 1) states that:

…education in the Pacific is a ticking time bomb, a story of failure. The symptoms readily visible are failing literacy, high dropout rates and schools simply unable to cope up with even the most basic teaching needs.

Therefore, providing quality basic education that effectively addresses both individual and societal needs is a challenge across the Pacific region (Field, 2006). Hence, the following sections discuss the challenges prevalent in countries around the world that hinder the provision of quality basic education in primary schools.

3.8.1 Pedagogical Challenges

Pedagogical processes lie at the heart of day-to-day teaching and learning. Whilst analysis of ‘Education For All’ Global Monitoring Reports by UNESCO (2008; 2007; 2006; 2005; 2004) emphasize the dynamics of the teaching and learning process and state its objective to achieve universal primary education by 2015, they also highlight a number of pedagogical hurdles (Figure 3.2) that need to be addressed to successfully achieve this goal.
Some of the typical challenges prevalent in these reports relate to the contents of the curriculum, the teaching and learning strategies used by teachers, their choice of language and the language policy, teaching and learning materials, learning time of students, classroom environment, class size, subject balance and feedback provided to students. In relation to these issues, Bacchus & Brock (1997: 51) state that:

…many countries have found it easier to continue with inherited notions of what is worthwhile knowledge than to respond to new curriculum imperatives based on local needs and indigenous interpretation of culture.

As such, learners’ individual and immediate needs, which are essential to cope in their diverse environments, are ignored.

Further, a report compiled by the Council of Pacific Education (COPE) on Indigenous Pacific Education in 2006 highlighted that most curricular frameworks in the Pacific are irrelevant and out-dated. The report also stated that the Pacific curriculum is too overloaded and exam-oriented. It has been a trend in Pacific countries to keep on adding new innovations without the corresponding will to reduce or remove those found to be outdated.
As a result, teachers face huge time constraints to cover the curriculum and, if they are able to do so, quality teaching and learning are compromised.

This view is further supported by Thaman (2006) and Taufe’ulungaki (2002). They emphasize that education provided in schools in the Pacific is often culturally undemocratic in that it does not take into consideration the ways in which Pacific children socialize, learn and communicate with one another. This definitely raises questions about the quality of learning taking place in classrooms with diverse ethnic populations. While Lawton (1975) states that the school curriculum for any country should be ‘the selection of the best culture’ and Wylie (1970) describes curriculum as ‘like a tripod with one of its legs in the past, one signifying the present and one in the future’ (cited in Thaman, 2006), the choice of the contents of the curriculum and the implementation of these contents in the Pacific is a real challenge’ (Lingam, 2006).

In addition to this, UNESCO (2008) highlights that classroom practices, such as, teaching and learning strategies, influence knowledge transmission and acquisition. In the Pacific, as highlighted by Thaman (2006), traditional teaching and learning methods are mostly used, which include the ‘chalk and talk’ strategy. She emphasizes that a more discovery-based learning is required to bring about quality learning outcomes, which would enable learners to acquire basic skills, such as literacy, in the early years of schooling.

Furthermore, research studies (Fredriksson, 2004; Ketele, 2004) have revealed that language of instruction plays a key role in attaining quality education. In support of this, earlier studies (Heyneman, 2006; Montagnes, 2001; Fuller & Clarke, 1994 cited in UNESCO, 2008) found out indigenous children in Mongolia, Ethiopia and Latin American countries are less likely to enroll in primary school and more likely to repeat grades because the medium of instruction in schools is foreign to them and, as such, they are vulnerable to education discrimination.

Taufe’ulungaki (2000) states that the language in which children are taught daily, especially in the first six years of primary school is one of the major obstacles towards their learning in the Pacific. Learners, being taught in a language they do not understand,
in our case is English, makes it very difficult for them to cope with their academic work hence, they drop out before finishing primary school. In Fiji, while there are efforts to make vernacular compulsory in all primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2008), this is yet to be accomplished.

Taufe’ulungaki (2000) also highlights that language is a leading factor that is greatly affecting children at primary school level especially when children are very young and still in the process of learning to learn. Given this evidence, there is a rationale to further investigate the consequences of the language used in classrooms and the language policies prevailing in primary school in Fiji.

Additionally, recent research studies (Abadzi, 2007; Bonnet, 2007; O’Malley, 2007 cited in UNESCO, 2008) reveal that there is significant loss of teaching and learning time and insufficient use of classroom time. All these are indications of poor education quality, with detrimental effects on learning outcomes. According to these studies, in many countries, whole school days are lost due to teacher absenteeism, in-service teacher training workshops, strikes, political upheavals, natural disasters and the use of schools as polling stations, examination sites or evacuation centres. These findings are also applicable to schools in the Pacific as the circumstances stated above are evident in many Pacific island countries, including Fiji. Therefore, this research study aimed to build on and extend to explore and explain how quality teaching and learning outcomes are affected in such situations.

Moreover, the impact of class size on quality education has been highlighted in Education For All Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2007) and Gilbert (1995). While the belief that small class sizes are better is widely held today (UNESCO, 2007), Gilbert (1995) states otherwise. His study revealed that small classes aren’t necessarily better. In fact, what goes on in the classroom matters more than the size of the class. While these contrasting findings may have been due to a number of factors such as the context of study, availability of resources and student attitudes, it is worth investigating this issue further. It is expected that the findings from this study will shed more light on this issue and clarify people’s perceptions on class size as a variable towards quality basic education.
Pongi (2006) specifically states that the above issues have direct bearing on the learning outcomes of the learners, who are at the heart of the teaching and learning process. While these reports (UNESCO, 2006; 2005; 2004; Bruns, et. al., 2003) mostly relate these challenges to African countries, this research study investigated the extent to which these issues are hindering the progress of attaining quality primary education in Fiji.

3.8.2 Institutional Challenges

The notion of improving a school in its totality, as distinct from strengthening individual inputs and processes, has gained ground worldwide. So far, although there is not enough evidence about the direct impact of school autonomy on learning outcomes, broad agreement exists that certain conditions are needed if quality primary education is to be improved (Mukudi, 2004). Research studies conducted around the world (Cohn & Johnson, 2006; Birdsall, et. al, 2005; Mehrotra, 1998) indicate that geographical location and the climate of the school affect the level and quality of education. According to UNESCO (2005) and Booth, Singh, Wilson and Lingam (2000), to achieve quality universal primary education, unprecedented refurbishing and building of classrooms is needed in many countries including the Pacific (Figure 3.3).

In these studies, there is evidence to suggest that no matter where you live, school location and the weather conditions contribute to a child’s access and attendance to primary education. Long travelling distances to and from school and severe weather conditions make school attendance erratic and force children to remain at home (Birdsall, 2006). While these studies highlight the impact of location and climate on attendance of students, there is nevertheless a rationale to further investigate how these two factors influence human, financial and material resourcing of the schools, which in turn impact on the overall quality and quantity of education.
In addition, research studies conducted by Bella and Mputu (2004) and Davies (1999) cited in UNESCO (2008) have identified that unsafe, overcrowded and poorly equipped schools with inadequately trained teachers contribute to poor quality learning and school dropouts. Other studies support these findings, example, Schargel & Smink, (2001), World Bank (2002), revealing that retention and learning are hampered when pupils attend schools in dilapidated or overcrowded buildings, in noisy or unsafe environments, or in classrooms that are poorly ventilated or sanitized.

In African countries, the education infrastructure is substantially below par and in a deteriorating state and it is alarming to note that, in these countries, half the female dropouts in primary school are due to poor water and lack of separate latrines and washrooms for girls (UNESCO, 2008). This situation affects their attendance, which in turn affects quality education. This situation is also a stark reality of Fiji’s education system (Pongi, 2006).

At the Commonwealth Education Ministers Regional Review Forum in 2005, it was revealed that, in Fiji, many schools are in shocking condition (Council of Pacific Education, 2006). Boarding facilities and teacher accommodation are bad and toilets
inadequate, with no running water or electricity. Classrooms are unpainted and have deteriorated. In some cases there is limited supply of chairs, tables and blackboards and the furniture does not suit the student's age and class. This dreadful state of schools is not only evident in rural areas but also in urban areas due to overcrowded classrooms and lack of concern by relevant responsible authorities (Ministry of Education, 2007).

These studies and reports indicate that, for quality learning to take place, schools must be accessible for learners and have facilities that ensure a healthy learning environment. Clean water and adequate sanitation are also vital. In the Pacific and, especially in Fiji, most rural schools have very poor building and sanitation facilities (Lingam, 2006; Senibulu, 2000). Therefore, the impact of lack of these facilities on quality education is detrimental.

Therefore, given the limited literature on this issue, this study then aims to investigate and explain whether the school location, state of school buildings, access to schools, classroom sizes and conditions, school culture and the sanitation of schools really pose a threat to achieving quality basic education in Fiji.

3.8.3 Human Resource Challenges

While Field (2006) and Schein (1983) have identified lack of access to quality education, financial limitations, cultural attitudes, low expectations and weak professional leadership as issues that are at the heart of problems of Pacific education systems, Field (2006), in adding to the above list, highlighted lack of facilities, resources and inadequate supply of qualified and experienced human personnel as major obstacles in attaining quality education in most schools in the region. This lack puts strain on the human resources within education systems all over the world (Field, 2006).

Human resource challenges mostly deal with Ministry of Education staff, teachers, school leadership and stakeholder participation at school and community level (Figure 3.4). It was highlighted at the Vanuatu Workshop held from 29 June to 3 July (2006), that most countries in the Pacific are constrained by human resource development (Council of Pacific Education, 2006). For example, a number of established positions in certain sections of the Ministry of Education are not filled due to unavailability of qualified people and, as such,
there is high staff-turnover and every time there is a workshop, new incumbents attend. This lack of continuity surely affects the work relating to ‘Universal Primary Education’ and Fiji is no exception in this case (Lingam, 2006).

**Figure: 3.4 Human Resource Challenges**

According to Fredriksson (2004) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1999), teachers occupy the central place in the teaching and learning process and they have a great bearing on the quality of education. In addition to this, Pongi (2006) highlights that improving the quality of education depends largely on the quality of its teaching force and how well-prepared and committed they are to improving the quality of education. ‘Teachers can either make or mar a child’s life’ (Bruns, et.al., 2003: 96). Therefore, the teaching profession should be made attractive to them with incentives, motivation, better working conditions and training (Fredriksson, 2004) in order for teachers to become enthusiastic about teaching.

However, in Pacific Island countries, lack of teacher incentives and poor working conditions have affected the quality of education. According to Field (2006: 1), 'teacher morale in the Pacific is low'. This low morale is the result of a number of factors including the low status accorded the teaching profession, low pay, poor educational resources, poor housing, and large class sizes. In most of the Pacific Islands, there is high teacher turnover.
with many teachers leaving the teaching profession completely. There is a teacher shortage and untrained or poorly trained teachers are used in fragile island states like Papua New Guinea and the Solomons (Field, 2006; Pongi, 2006; Bacchus & Brock, 1997). This situation is also prevalent in Fiji due to wage freeze, non-payment of Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA), poor infrastructure and declining respect accorded to teachers by students, parents and community.

Moreover, teachers are reluctant to go into rural areas. In Papua New Guinea the annual allowance given as an incentive for rural teachers is usually less than it costs to travel to urban areas to collect one’s fortnightly pay packet. It is also revealed that many rural schools may not be able to offer a full curriculum given that the subjects taught are determined by what the teacher is competent in teaching and the constraints arising out of understaffing (Field, 2006).

In light of the above issues, Pongi’s (2006) lead paper report presented at Council of Pacific Education’s (COPE) Roundtable Conference in Nadi, Fiji Islands (August 21-23) highlighted the need for more better trained teachers to achieve quality primary education in the Pacific (Council of Pacific Education, 2006). He expressed his concerns on the lack of teacher training and development, teacher education, teacher exclusion from making educational policies, teacher quality and quantity and teacher remunerations. In addition to this, Thaman (2006), at the same conference emphasized the essentiality of teacher commitment and stakeholder participation in achieving quality basic education in primary schools in Fiji.

Furthermore, analysis of studies conducted in Asian and African countries (Snyder, et.al., 2004) revealed that ‘teachers need to have professional freedom, teacher education and professional development’. According to these researchers, these needs are of crucial importance in developing quality in education and to effectively disseminate knowledge and skills to students. They also highlighted that professional freedom does not mean that the teacher can do whatever he or she likes, but the teacher who knows the students is the person best equipped to decide which methods to use in order to create an optimal learning situation.
Thus, it is important in this context to recall Article 61 in ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the status of teachers:

...the teaching profession should enjoy academic freedom in the discharge of professional duties. Since teachers are particularly qualified to judge the teaching aids and methods suitable for their pupils, they should be given the essential role in the choice and adoption of teaching materials, the selection of text books and the application of teaching methods, within the framework of approved programmes, and with the assistance of the educational authorities (UNESCO, 1996).

Further analysis of these studies (Fredriksson, 2004; Snyder, et.al., 2004) depicts that teacher education and professional development of teachers are key guarantees of quality education and must be linked to all phases of teacher education and educational research. An analysis of these studies shows that, in order to improve education of teachers’ worldwide, education authorities, governments and non-governmental organizations must ensure that teachers receive good initial teacher education, which contains four components: methodology, pedagogy, practice and curriculum areas.

Several studies (Fredriksson, 2004, Snyder, et.al., 2004; Cantrell, 2003; Capitan, 1980) have found that the quality of teachers was one of those factors which made a difference between high-performing and low-performing schools. Therefore, it was highlighted that special attention should be accorded to teacher working conditions, as well as, in-service training needs and support of teachers. Field (2006) further emphasized that such a development would support progress towards empirical learning instead of memorizing and rote learning, which is still practised in many schools even today.

Since teaching is a life-long process of learning and human knowledge is always expanding, there is always a risk that the teacher will repeat the same kind of instruction each year (Haycock, 1998). Therefore, as the above studies have highlighted, there needs to be greater emphasis on the improvement of access to teacher resources so as to empower teachers to positively influence the teaching-learning environment of children. The extent to which academic freedom and teacher education are provided to teachers in Fiji needs to be further investigated. While the above literature has failed to look into teacher-attitudes and attributes, this study aimed to explore how these aspects influence the quality of education provided to students.
Additionally, Lewin (2006) and Booth, et. al. (2000) highlight the need for professional school leaders, including head teachers and principals who can lay the foundation and lead by example towards the achievement of quality education in their schools. Their studies also depicted that some colonial and authoritative school leaders still exist today. Such school leaders find it difficult to engage with other stakeholders such as parents, communities and donors to get educational aid and discuss their concerns regarding the quality and quantity of education in their schools. It is also an enormous challenge to get them out of their comfort zones and change their mindset in order to improve the education system.

In Fiji, Ministry of Education’s specially assigned nine member taskforce team in its mid-decade report has stressed that there is a lack of vision and enthusiasm by some Principals and Head teachers, which has hindered academic progress of students (Ministry of Education, 2008). This claim provides a ground for further investigation to be carried out in order to find the real impact of such school leaders on the teaching and learning process taking place in classrooms.

Furthermore, it has been revealed that school heads do not carry out accurate and fair reporting on staff, which negatively affects the performance of teachers. When a fair report is prepared, shortcomings can be identified and corrective action taken. In the absence of such authentic reports or data, it is assumed that things are fine until a third party, such as external exam results, shows otherwise. It is, therefore, important that school heads be proactive and use appropriate assessment tools to continuously monitor the performance of all teachers. They should ensure that syllabus is covered effectively and subjects on the timetable receive their fair share of attention. School heads should also closely monitor marking of exercise books, assignments and projects to promote quality learning in their schools (Ministry of Education, 2007).

3.8.4 Financial and Economic Challenges

One of the major remaining impediments to access to primary schools and other facilities which provide opportunities for basic learning is the financial cost to households, schools and governments (Sherman & Poirier, 2007 cited in UNESCO, 2008). In many low-income countries, children are pushed out of school at an early age by education costs and
insufficient family income. In Africa many poverty-stricken children are not enrolled in schools because of the cost factor (UNESCO, 2005). There are many costs associated with education (Figure 3.5). For instance, good inclusive education involve costs-for adapting curricula, training teachers, developing materials and making schools accessible (Bruns, et. al., 2003).

**Figure: 3.5  Financial and Economic Challenges**

Studies around the world have also revealed that costs contribute to a child’s lack of access and attendance to primary education. High opportunity costs are often influential in the decision not to send children to school. For example; an estimated 121 million children of primary-school age are being kept out of school to work in the fields or at home (UNICEF, 2004). For many families in developing countries, the economic benefits of primary schooling are not enough to offset the opportunity cost of attending schools.

The Education For All - Global Monitoring Report (2008) has reported that there are many households all over the world which cannot cover the expenses that are associated with a child’s education. This report highlights that lack of money and economic problems are main reasons for children dropping out of school. Many studies (Deininger, 2003 cited in
UNESCO, 2008; Mukudi, 2004; Boyle, Brock, Mace & Sibbons, 2002) cited fees as a major obstacle to access to basic education.

According to these studies, school fees can be very expensive, especially for poor households. In rural areas in China, families dedicate as much as a third of their income to school fees (Peverly, 2005). Sometimes the cost gets too expensive and the families can not support their children’s education any more, although average statistics cloud the issue. China has 108.6 million primary school students, with a one-percent dropout rate, but experts doubt these figures because the dropout rates in rural areas appear much higher (Peverly, 2005). Although the relationship between school fees and attendance is not perfectly clear (Peverly, 2005), there is evidence to suggest that cost is a factor that contributes to a child's access and attendance to primary education in both rural and urban schools.

However, according to Ministry of Education (2007), Senibulu (2000) and Fiji Islands Education Commission Report (2000), education in Fiji is tuition free. While per capita grants are provided by the government, still some schools charge school fees. School fees, now widely required, are a huge burden for low-income families, particularly those with more than one child. These reports have also stated that the economic pressures on governments, particularly the need to carry out public sector restructuring programmes, and the inability of low-income families to afford school fees are affecting children’s education (Field, 2006). A parent’s affordability of school fees is a challenge in most Pacific Island countries.

It is evident from these studies that households constrained by finances perceive education as less important (Boyle, et. al., 2002) and tend to invest less in children’s education. Accordingly, financial constraints force parents to give differing treatments to their children. Boyle, et. al., (2002) and Dreze and Kingdon (2001) cited in UNESCO (2008) found out that when there are preferences to be made on who should attend school, girls are usually at a disadvantage.

Apart from this, Lingam (2009) and Pongi (2006) also highlight that a number of schools in Fiji engage in fundraising activities which, to most parents, are unaffordable. During
fundraising activities, the teaching and learning time of children are used. In some instances, where carnivals are organized, schools remain closed for a couple of days. The result is that quality teaching and learning time, which should have been used to teach students, is wasted and never recovered. Other costs which are highlighted in previous reports are transportation costs to schools such as bus, taxi or van fares, and costs associated with buying of school uniforms, bags and learning materials. All these costs have direct influence on school attendance and access to quality education.

Finally, Pongi (2006) states that progress towards attaining quality basic education in Pacific Island countries is seriously constrained by financial resources. Pacific ‘Education For All’, as well as their national plans, are funded from the National budget, by aid funds from donors such as Australia, New Zealand, JICA, European Union and loans from Asian Development Bank and World Bank. All donors have their own priorities that they require to be reflected in the use of their funds and so the priorities in education plan cannot be followed. To what extent these funds filter down to the primary schools has yet to be investigated.

3.8.5 Social Challenges

Research studies (Lewin, 2006, Ketele, 2004; Bruns, et. al., 2003) show that teaching and learning take place in a social and political context. According to these studies, a conducive social context of the school is one of the key dimensions for boosting learning outcomes. However, Schein (1983) has revealed that organizational weaknesses of schools are increasingly pointed to as a major cause of low attainment of quality primary education in many island and less developed countries. Related to these social challenges are poverty, poor health of learners, population growth and urbanization, family structure and size and students’ discipline (UNESCO, 2008; 2005) (Figure 3.6).

Research (Lopez & Smits, 2007 cited in UNESCO, 2008) has indicated that households in rural, remote or scattered communities, or those located great distances from urban centres, tend to be poorer and more socially marginalized than other groups, with less access to good quality basic education. These studies have highlighted that poverty significantly reduces the likelihood of school participation.
According to Narsey (2009) and State of Nation and Economy Report (SNE) (2007), the poverty level in Fiji is of great concern. The stark reality of the poverty level and the poor living conditions of many in Fiji is portrayed in Exhibit 3.3. This report reveals that poverty has drastic consequences for the education of children.

**Figure: 3.6 Social Challenges**

Moreover, poor households are at risk of entering the medical poverty trap whereby they cannot afford to treat their ailments or they borrow beyond their means to cover health expenses (DeVos, 2006; Boyle, et. al., 2002). As a result, children are forced out of school into child-labour or remain as dropouts. Children from these households are often subjected to discrimination, social exclusion and poor or no access to basic education at all (UNICEF, 2004). It is, therefore, evident from these studies that children from poor households, whether urban or rural, attend school less than children from more affluent homes.

Furthermore, researches (UNESCO, 2008; 2007; 2006) have shown that poor health and undernourishment affect a child’s capacity to learn. Among health concerns are infectious diseases, which have a devastating impact on school systems worldwide. In African
countries, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB are having detrimental effects on the education systems (UNESCO, 2008). These diseases have direct bearing on the child and problems associated are increased absenteeism, dropout or even death. While these diseases are not so common in Fiji, there are other infectious diseases prevalent here such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, H1N1 (Swine flu), cancer and measles.

Exhibit: 3.3 Poverty Level in Fiji

(State of the Nation and Economy Report, 2007: 14)

This study also aimed find out the impact of these diseases on quality education in Fiji. The above reports have highlighted that in many countries, where health and nutrition problems are successfully addressed, children seem to perform better in schools. Therefore, given this evidence, it is imperative to investigate further as to how health and nutritional problems affect the quality of teaching and learning taking place in primary schools in Fiji.

In addition to these health issues, population growth and urbanization are also found to be impediments to quality education. This is so because they put stress on educational resources and tend to use up a greater chunk of finance (Field, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1998). Population increase and urbanization lead to high teacher-pupil ratios and this has negative consequences on the delivery of quality education (Lingam, 1996). Accordingly,
this affects the delivery of education, increases pupil-teacher ratio and reduces both the quantity and quality of education provided.

Moreover, research studies (Lewin, 2006; Ketele, 2004) have indicated that urbanization continues at a rapid pace worldwide, with fastest growth in least developed countries. These studies reveal that there is substantial migration for education purposes. Therefore, establishing urban schools to accommodate the children of rural and international migrants and of slum dwellers, and to give them access to the educational mainstream, is becoming a challenging issue. Additionally, the challenge of integrating these students into multi-ethnic societies puts pressure on school systems to include and respect ethnic and other minorities. Although urban areas have more public infrastructure than rural areas, notably clean water and sanitation, and generally have more schools, such services are at risk of being overrun as urban population and density rise.

Further, analysis of Education For All-Global Monitoring Reports by UNESCO (2008; 2007; 2006 & 2005) shows that the composition, structure and size of families have been shifting from large, extended, rural-dependent families to small, nuclear and urban families. Marks (2006) highlights the negative relationship between family size and type, discipline and academic achievement of primary school children in Australia, United States, New Zealand and Britain. It is prevalent in his research that children from large, divorced, single-parent, teen-aged parents and reconstituted (with step-parents) families tend to have more discipline problems and show lower and poorer academic attainments in schools. This is so because larger families have fewer material resources available for each child and they have less time to spend on each child. Therefore, children's educational needs are not fully met and consequently their academic performance is affected.

Change in household structures also offsets the enrolments of children in primary schools in developing countries, in that children in intact families with both parents and with additional family members have a higher probability of being in school (DeVos, 2006). Further studies (UNESCO, 2008; 2007) suggest that students whose family backgrounds and peer groups have ideals close to those promoted by their school tend to demonstrate greater learning outcomes and achieve higher levels of cognitive skills than others.
However, these reports have failed to highlight the direct impact of the family structure on the quality of education. As such, this study also aimed to explore and explain this issue through qualitative research methods.

Besides all these factors, student discipline has been a point of concern among educators and psychologists all over the world (Banks, 2002). This is so as the beginning of the new millennium has brought a new set of behaviour problems in many students all over the world (Grogan & Kaylor, 2000 cited in Smith, 2005), and according to Arbuckle and Little (2004), the issues of anti-social, disruptive student behaviour and student discipline are of continuing concern to individuals within the fields of psychology and education, more now than ever before. More and more children from troubled, chaotic homes are bringing well-developed patterns of anti-social behaviour into school. These disciplinary problems waste a lot of teaching time, affect learning of all students, as well as, ruin their own chances for scholastic success and a successful life (Arbuckle & Little, 2004).

At home, Banks (2002) states that parents should show a unified front towards the discipline and education of their children through proper parenting and guidance. According to Marks (2006) and Arbuckle and Little (2004), parenting is the task of raising children and providing them with the necessary materials and emotional care to further their social, emotional, and cognitive development. From the review, it is worth noting that in the hurried pace of today's society, disciplining children is one of the most important yet difficult responsibilities of teachers and parents and Margaret (2005) states that there are no shortcuts to it if one wants to achieve academic success in life.

Margaret (2005) and Abisamra (2000), through their qualitative research conducted with parents of primary school students in Australia and United States, highlight that the most powerful disciplinary tool which teachers and parents have at their disposal is the trusting and caring relationship with their children. Their research shows that increased parental and teacher involvement with children at home and at school harnesses discipline and attendance, improves student learning and contributes to higher achievement scores in academic subjects. On the contrary, failing to be understanding, caring and supportive stifles self-reliance and impedes their learning (Abisamra, 2000).
Thus, tackling disciplinary issues has become one of the major challenges in schools. According to Margaret (2005), Nieman, Calgary and Sarah (2004), Porter (2004), Walker, Ramsey and Gresham (2004), Rodriguez (2003) and Abisamra, (2000), tackling disciplinary issues in schools should be done with great care, understanding and professionalism to enhance diversity, inclusivity and academic success. These studies propose that in order to overcome the social problem of indiscipline, a 'guidance approach' needs to be employed.

However, if children are punished, more complex social problems emerge in school. Marks (2006) identifies the negative consequences of punishment. Children become rebellious, show resistance, retaliation, anxiety, delinquency and truancy. According to Polaha (2004) and Rodriguez (2003), punishments have negative psychological effects on children. These include shame and low self-esteem. According to them, children feel dehumanized when punished and feel low about their performance, which leads to their withdrawal from learning activities. These consequences are counter productive in the academic lives of children as they tend to hate school.

The above social challenges are also evident in Fiji, where social conflicts (for example, poverty; discrimination on gender and ethnic issues; increase in diseases such as typhoid, leptospirosis, dengue, HIV/AIDS; and rise in criminal activities) and political conflicts (for example, the coup culture, racial discrimination, power struggle, increase in corruption and nepotism cases) have risen rapidly. These social and political challenges have shaken the foundations of the education system, not only inflicting physical destruction but also causing trauma and fear among parents, teachers and children (Ali, 2007; National Council for Building a Better Fiji, 2007). As such, this research study aimed to give a deeper insight into how these challenges have impeded the access to quality basic education for the children in Fiji.

3.8.6 Technological Challenges

Undoubtedly, technology's offerings to education have increased dramatically in recent years (Becker, 2000) and today's profuse heterogeneity of emerging technology has transformed the daily lives of many (Wenglinsky, 1998). According to Dede (1995), the need for new technologies in teaching and learning will only continue to grow stronger and
faster. Despite its dawning and educators’ misgivings about its potential, the information age could become an era of great convenience, providing unmatched feasibility for the discovery and exchange of information, exploration, communication, learning and teaching (Becker, 2000).

New technologies such as computers, internet, scanners, overhead projectors and copiers hold promise to empower learners with more control over their learning process through self-paced, self-regulated learning at any time or any place. An analysis of the above studies (Becker, 2000; Wenglinsky, 1998; Dede, 1995) illuminates the benefits of using computers as teaching tools. According to the authors, with the aid of technology, many teachers can take students beyond traditional classroom limits, creating virtual environments to experiment and explore. Technologies like computers are particularly helpful because they can be used for higher-order thinking and problem-solving tasks, encouraging students to explore and learn by discovery.

Each of the above studies mentioned in this section also highlights the importance of Michael Fullan's observation that the more powerful the technology becomes, the more indispensable good teachers are (Fullan, 1998). When these teachers integrate inquiry-based learning and true technology together, there is a synergy created that really boosts students’ learning (Becker, 2000). However, while better technologies enhance learning (UNESCO, 2006), access to technologies is highly uneven in many countries. For instance, in the Pacific, Niue is the only country which has introduced ‘one laptop per child (OLPC)’ initiative (Rodgers, 2008: 16). Niue is also the only country in the world to have 100 percent saturation of laptop per child. According to the Director General of COPE, Dr. Jimmie Rodgers (2008: 16), ‘a laptop per child would be a student’s companion for life and provide a library to the world’.

Although there is very limited Pacific literature available on this issue, the Education For All Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2006) indicates that technical assistance in terms of policy drafting regarding Education For All, data management, information collection, reporting and retention, Education For All progress monitoring system and drawing logical connections between Education For All goals and National plans remain a challenge for most of the countries in the world. The above report suggests that institutional
capacities in terms of quality and quantity of people, and having systems in place also hamper the smooth implementation of educational plans.

According to Pongi (2006), adequate technological facilities and expert personnel are needed for training other people (teachers, Ministry staff), providing accountability of funds flows to various education sectors and monitoring the progress of Education For All goals. As such, technical assistance helps to strengthen the knowledge and skills of those responsible for, managing education sector reforms. It may apply to such fields as teacher training, textbook and curriculum development, school management and harmonizing aid.

It is evident in Pongi’s (2006) study that close links and causality can not be easily demonstrated in the Pacific. In spite of the fact that increased participation, inclusiveness and investment in education are observable within the Pacific countries, it is difficult to provide reliable statistical evidence due to data collected at country level not being effectively accumulated and collated at regional level to ensure accessibility.

Given the lack of data and not having effective monitoring systems, it is interesting to note that some of the reports provided by the Pacific countries on the progress of ‘Education For All’ goals may be biased towards actions and achievements following the Dakar Guideline (Pongi, 2006). In addition to this, the above studies have not specifically highlighted the level of technical assistance provided in Fiji to achieve quality basic education. These studies have revealed that there is a lack of technical assistance mostly at administrative levels, namely, Ministry of Education officials and its counterparts.

These studies have also failed to explain the extent of technical assistance provided at Primary school level to teachers and students to achieve quality learning outcomes in basic education. While it is assumed that lack of technical and technological assistance impedes learning outcomes at all levels, these studies have failed to highlight its impact on the quality and quantity of education in primary schools. Therefore, it is pertinent that the level of technical assistance provided in primary schools in Fiji (if any) and its impact on attaining quality basic education be further explored and explained.
3.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure: 3.7 Conceptual Framework for Quality Basic Education

[Diagram showing quality basic education framework with nodes for Pedagogical, Financial, Institutional, Technical Resource, Social, Human Resource, Institutional, and EFA.]
Figure 3.7 illustrates the conceptual framework for the study. This is derived from the review of literature and it demonstrates the challenges that hinder the provision of access and equity to quality basic education.

3.10 SUMMARY

The analysis of the relevant literature in this chapter indicates that quality basic primary education is crucial for national economic and social advancement. This is so because primary education develops the capacity to learn, to read, to acquire information and to think critically about that information. It is also a gateway to all higher levels of education that train scientists, teachers, doctors, and other highly skilled professionals that every country, no matter how small, rich or poor, requires. This indicates the significance of access and equity in providing quality basic primary education in any country.

Attaining quality basic primary education is a goal that all the developing countries are committed to achieve by 2015. While Fiji has adopted six Education For All goals in its National Strategic Plan and has made Goal: 2 (Universal Primary Education) as one of its Millennium Development Goals, still a lot of groundwork needs to be done in terms of access, provision, equity and quality of basic education if it is to come somewhere near to achieving this goal (UPE) by 2015. There still remain many challenges that need to be addressed practically with vision and conviction from all stakeholders of education. The review of literature for this exploratory study has identified some challenges, namely, pedagogical, institutional, human resource challenges, and financial, social and technological challenges.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, outlines and discusses the research methodology adopted for this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 METHODOLOGY

‘Qualitative studies are like the nets of the deep sea explorers. They may pull up unexpected and striking things for us to gaze on.’

(Barton & Lazarsfeld, 1969 cited in Burns, 1997: 13)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The overriding purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research design used in this study. It describes the main techniques undertaken to conduct this research in a qualitative mode. This chapter also provides the justification for the selection of sample, instrumentation and the procedures utilized. The important ethical issues which were considered while conducting this research are also highlighted in this chapter. The whole chapter is divided into four parts:

a. rationale and selection of method;
b. orientation of method;
c. research design; and
d. research process.

4.2 RATIONALE AND SELECTION OF METHOD

As highlighted in Chapter 1, this study has eventuated from my personal experience and observations of the many school-aged children who have dropped out of school and are either found on streets, in villages, or engaged in child labour or are involved in unwanted criminal activities. Moreover, from the outset of this research, it became evident that although education has become a need to survive in today’s changing and challenging world, it has remained a privilege for few and providing quality education for all is far beyond current reality (UNESCO, 2003). This finding has given me a greater incentive to really explore the challenges which hinder the provision of quality basic education in a small-island state like Fiji.
According to Burns (1997: vi), ‘education is a complex process’. It influences, affects and involves the interaction between people, processes and policies. There are so many things we intend to investigate and wish to know and the only safe way to produce knowledge, in which we can put our faith, is to conduct a systematic educational research. Stenhouse (1980) describes educational research as a systematic research that provides knowledge or adds to the understanding of existing knowledge, which is of relevance for improving the effectiveness of education.

4.2.1 Orientation of Method

The research objectives and the research questions as outlined in Chapter 1 influenced the choice of research methods to be used in this study. The responses to these research questions were presumed to be more subjective than objective. Thus, a more humanistic and investigative paradigm was deemed necessary. This research attempted to gather information and evidence that would reveal the multiple realities that hinder the provision of quality basic education to children. As such, the research objectives and questions were aimed towards critical inquiry and meaning and emphasis was on contextual findings rather than gaining empirical knowledge.

The study was designed to specifically explore and examine feelings, views, actions, attitudes and seek suggestions and advice from various groups of people who are, either directly or indirectly, involved in the education sector. The basic goal of this study was to discover patterns which emerge after close observation, careful documentation and thoughtful analysis of the major challenges that impede the provision of quality basic education in Fiji.

Therefore, a qualitative research design using a case study approach was chosen, with the major purpose of being descriptive and exploratory. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1995) and Boyle (1994), a qualitative research, which began to gain recognition in the 1970s, is one of the two major approaches to research methodology in social sciences. Creswell (1994) cited in Denzin and Lincoln (1994) further describes a qualitative research as ‘an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a
complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in natural settings.’

Qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern human behaviour. It involves ‘investigating participants’ opinions, behaviours and experiences from the informant's point of view’ (Burns, 1997: 291). It focuses on ‘how individuals and groups view, experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences’ (Struwig & Stead, 2001: 15). In this case, it would be related to their own experiences and views on achieving access and equity to quality universal primary education. Simply put, Taylor (1994) cited in Burns (1997: 397) emphasizes that ‘a qualitative research investigates the “why” and “how” of the surrounding circumstances’ hence, the need is for a smaller and focused sample.

Moreover, this research study falls into a qualitative research profile satisfying the eight main characteristics of all qualitative research endeavours. These are:

1. Qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry process conducted in the natural setting as a direct source of data.
2. Qualitative research is exploratory and descriptive.
3. Qualitative research views ‘human-as-instrument’. The researcher is the key instrument for data collection.
4. Qualitative research has emergent design flexibility. It is dynamic and has openness to inquiry as understanding deepens or situations change.
5. Qualitative research is concerned with process rather than product. It has a holistic perspective as the whole study is understood as a complex system.
6. Qualitative research is an ongoing inductive analysis and creative synthesis of data. Theory is grounded in the data collected with an open mind, not an earlier theory to be proven.
7. Qualitative research has ‘context sensitivity’. It emphasizes many aspects of social, historical and physical context.
Qualitative research is ‘empathic’. It tries to take the view of other person through introspection and reflection, yet be non-judgmental.

(Adapted from Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

These features of a qualitative research methodology were taken into consideration while designing the research questions. It also guided the researcher in planning and conducting the research and analyzing the findings.

Additionally, the case study approach to this research is adopted because of lack of empirical research on the topic ‘Challenges to Achieving Quality Basic Education’ in the Pacific region. Since this approach is more exploratory in nature, valuable first-hand information on the research topic could be obtained from the informants’ points of view as they themselves were the subjects in the case study. Apart from this, extracting first-hand information was possible since the researcher is personally in contact with the activities and operations of the case, reflecting on, and revising ‘meanings’ of what is going on (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hughes (1980) goes on to describe a case study as an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decisions to focus on the inquiry around an incident, event, process or organization. It is much more than the description of a phenomenon as it is concerned with the interaction of factors and events.

Earlier Education For All Global Monitoring Reports have indicated a progress in achieving quality universal primary education using mixed methods approaches, more qualitatively inclined, but these studies were conducted in Africa, America and Britain. Thus, this research uses a purely qualitative approach to investigate whether the findings here are consistent with those done by other researchers around the world.

Further, the case study method involved in this research study enables an in-depth examination and understanding of the challenging issues relating to the provision of quality basic education to the children of Fiji. As a result, the case study enables a real, rich and deep data (Hughes, 1980) to be collected, which are more comprehensive. It also provides a sharpened understanding of the existing challenges, which the grass roots people encounter daily in their lives to ensure that their children have equity and access to quality basic education.
Besides all these factors, one of the initial purposes of this research study was also to gain a total or complete picture of the challenges people face in providing holistic education starting from the primary schools so that children can lay a solid platform for a peaceful and prosperous future for themselves. According to Stainback and Stainback (1988) cited in Merriam (1988: 18), ‘a holistic description of events, procedures and philosophies occurring in natural settings is often needed to make situational decisions, and case studies, either single or multiple, make this possible’. This was another influencing factor which justified the choice of a case study approach undertaken for this research.

In addition to this, further exploration of the research topic was needed due to the lack of empirical research conducted in the Pacific region. As such, variables were not easily identified and theories were not available to explain situations which affected people’s lives, hence, a more discovery and exploratory approach was necessary. As a result, the case study of two schools provided detailed information on the topic. In this research, the findings accurately reflect people’s perceptions, whatever they are. The findings were helpful in corroboration as they ‘increased the understanding that the challenges faced by the participants were genuine and required concerted efforts from all stakeholders in order to achieve quality basic education ’ (Stainback & Stainback, 1988 cited in Merriam, 1988: 18).

The following section looks at the research design and the major research techniques employed to gather information regarding the ‘challenges to achieving quality basic education in Fiji’. It also tries to justify the choice of methods.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a qualitative case study research design. The overall research design used to conduct this research study is discussed in detail in this section. It includes the sampling procedure, participants and instrumentation.

Research design is the structure of the research, which entails the investigator’s overall strategy for answering the research questions (William, 2006 cited in Marshall and Rossman, 1995). It provides the glue that holds the research project together. The choice of an appropriate design was a vital decision that had to be made as it guided the whole
research process. It showed how all the parts of the research project: samples, participants and the data gathering methods, worked together to address the central research questions.

The framework followed in conducting this study is primarily based on the outline provided by Wiersma (1986) but had to be adapted to suit the specifics of this particular study. The outline is shown in Figure 4.1. As evident from the flowchart, the whole process was divided into three main phases of pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and post-fieldwork. Many times these phases over-lapped as the previous processes had to be re-visited for confirmation purposes.

*Figure: 4.1  Flowchart showing research steps for this study*

(Adapted from Wiersma, 1986)
For the purpose of this study, the main techniques used for data collection were: a) open-ended questionnaires: b) open-ended interviews of teachers, students, school heads, parents and school managers: c) non-participant observation of students’ and teachers’ teaching and learning approaches and: d) analysis of Ministry of Education policy documents in schools. These techniques were deemed suitable for this research because such techniques ‘permit access to individual meaning in the context of ongoing daily life’ (Burns, 1997: 292).

4.3.1 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a method for the elicitation, recording and collecting of information (Kirakowshi, 2001). It contains a list of questions or statements to which the individual is asked to respond to in writing. The response may range from a checkmark to an extensive written statement (Wiersma, 1986).

For this research study, an open-ended or unstructured questionnaire (Kirakowshi, 2000) was used as a tool to start off the process of discovery of the difficulties which stakeholders in education face to provide quality basic education in primary schools in Fiji (Appendices 10A and 10B). Questionnaires were only administered to teachers and parents. According to Burns (1997), open-ended questionnaires are good if the research is exploratory in nature or where the responses are difficult to give in numeric codes.

The questionnaire used in this study contained a list of open-ended questions (Burns, 1997: 473). Struwig and Stead (2001) describe open-ended questions as those that encourage people to talk about whatever is important to them. They help to establish rapport, gather information and increase understanding. Open-ended questions invite the respondents to tell their story in their own words (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The questionnaires included three types of questions: Factual-Type Questions, Opinion-Type Questions and Attitude Questions (Kirakowshi, 2000).

Factual-Type questions were used to obtain facts or observable information such as: number of years of teaching experiences and qualifications of teachers and Head teachers, existing home and school facilities, the difficulties each of them faced in providing quality
education and the nature and number of workshops they attended in relation to quality Universal Primary Education.

Opinion-Type questions tended to ask the respondents about what they thought how they felt about something or somebody. For such questions, there was no right or wrong answer. These questions encouraged respondents to come up with divergent thoughts (Kirakowshi, 2000). The responses were validated through observations and interviews. Some opinion-type questions included: participant’s views on the teaching and learning facilities at home and at school, what quality education meant to them and whether it is being provided in schools, their views on the curriculum and the improvements it needed.

Attitude-Type questions attempted to get respondent’s personal attitudes towards situations and individuals. That is, how they viewed the different situations. This type of questions gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their feelings based on their lived experiences (Kirakowshi, 2000). In this research, respondents’ attitudes towards schooling, school leadership, quality of education and the nature of challenges people face in getting educated were explored and examined.

Open-ended questionnaires deployed to gather initial or preliminary information, allowed the respondents to reply to questions in their own words by explaining the good, bad and real experiences, and the surrounding circumstances that led to such experiences (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Since the same participants were to be interviewed later on, allowing them to fill in questionnaires gave them a taste of the questions and removed fear and embarrassment, which would have resulted from direct contact during interviews. Finally, ‘questionnaires saved a lot of time and proved to be less expensive than conducting interviews alone and the responses provided a basis for conducting interviews’ (Burns, 1997: 482).

4.3.2 Interviews

The interview method of research, typically, ‘involves a face-to-face meeting, in which the researcher or interviewer asks an individual a series of questions’ (Wiersma, 1986: 179).
According to Burns (1997), there are three types of interviews which researchers normally use. They are ‘structured’, ‘semi-structured’ and ‘unstructured’ interviews.

However, for the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviewing (Appendices: 11A – 11E) has been adopted. Wiersmsa (1986) refers to unstructured interviews as open-ended interviews or in-depth interviews. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) cited in Burns (1997: 330) define open-ended or unstructured interviews as ‘a face-to-face encounter between the researcher and the informant directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words’.

This particular research technique was used for this study because it provided an opportunity for the participants to construct their own responses rather than selecting from a set of options. Open-ended interviews also provided further flexibility, in that, it allowed me to pursue the responses with the participants and ask for an elaboration or redefinition of the responses when they appeared incomplete or ambiguous. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to look at the challenges in achieving universal primary education from different perspectives by collating the views of different interviewees. The interviews created flexibility in responses and allowed for individual variations. That is, the participants were free to respond to the questions in whatever way they liked as they were not restricted by pre-ordained choices.

Open-ended interviews were chosen to be an appropriate method of gathering data as this research required information concerning interviewees’ personal beliefs, considered opinions and insights. Open-ended interview called for elaboration, built into questioning, provided sufficient flexibility to capture insights that may otherwise have been lost with the imposition of rigid questionnaires or structured interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Furthermore, the nature and the type of participants also influenced the research technique adopted. Firstly, it emerged that primary school students would have found it difficult to complete questionnaires, so interviews were seen as appropriate so the students could answer questions verbally. This form of data collection provided them an opportunity to respond in the language natural to them. Secondly, parents were also more comfortable with open-ended interviews as this was informal and conducted as a free-flowing conversation. Personally sitting down with them and interviewing made me feel part of
them, their culture and their family. This reduced their seeing me as an intruder or outsider. Hence, they felt free to provide responses in a collegial atmosphere.

Finally, because ‘an interview is a social encounter’ (Wiersma, 1986: 181), the respondents responded to the questions in a socially acceptable and desirable way. Through social encounter, understanding of the living style, social and financial status and participant’s culture deepened. This, in turn, helped to develop relationships, particularly trust, between the researcher and the researched. Yin (1994) emphasizes that through building of relationships comes access to more critical and personal data of respondents.

4.3.3 Non-participant Observation

The next major technique used to collect data was through ‘non-participant observation’. Burns (1997) describes ‘non-participant observation’ as ‘recording actions and behaviour of individuals as they occur in their natural settings without interference or involvement’. Merriam (1988) further emphasizes the role of a researcher by stating that the researcher is present at the scene but does not interact or participate. This method of data collection emphasizes the researcher’s role as a dispassionate recorder. An ‘observation record sheet’ was used to record all the observations (Appendix 8).

The rationale behind choosing ‘non-participant observation’ as a method of data collection was that ‘it portrayed behaviour, which was purposive and expressive of deeper values and beliefs’ (Burns, 1997: 316). It made it possible to record behaviour and actions as they occurred in specific activities. Besides this, ‘non-participant observation’ led to a deeper understanding of circumstance and issues than questionnaires and interviews because it provided knowledge of the context in which events occurred and enabled me to see the actual participation of the students and teachers in the research study. For example, during group work, children were engaged in discussions and actions revealing their natural 'self'. It also showed the teacher’s role in reality. These observations illuminated reality and practicality and gave a true picture of their attitude, behaviour and ability to achieve quality learning.

It was also anticipated that some participants, especially students, would not feel too confident or comfortable with interviews. This was considered because of the fact that they
were to be interviewed by a teacher, that is, the researcher himself. There could have been a possibility that they would have responded in such a way to please the teacher. Therefore, to avoid this conscious feeling and psychological conflict, ‘non-participant observation’ technique was employed to obtain reliable and real data. In other words, findings from non-participation observations were used to complement support and add more value to the findings from the questionnaires and interviews.

4.3.4 Document Analysis

The final strategy utilized to collect data was through document or policy analysis. According to Flaitrons (2001: 16), ‘document analysis is the act of examining a set of documents or policies that are used to support specific goals and objectives of an organization’. In this research study, Ministry of Education (MoE) policy documents such as ‘The Strategic Plan, 2006-2008’, ‘Suva Declaration, 2005’, ‘Education 2020’, ‘Education For All (EFA), 2015’ and the Fiji Islands National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2007 were critically analyzed. These are Ministry of Education’s circulating documents, which are readily available in schools.

In doing so, Ministry’s policies on ‘quality education for all’ have been analyzed. Policy analysis gave an insight into the Ministry of Education’s commitment towards providing access and equity in order to achieve quality basic education to the children of Fiji. Policy analysis allowed me to examine the practicality and relevance of strategies put in place by the Ministry of Education to achieve quality basic education and promote education for all in Fiji. It also provided an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the expected outcomes have been achieved in the schools in this study and the effectiveness of the strategies highlighted in these documents.

Moreover, the policy analysis method was pertinent as a means of supplementing data or information obtained by interviews and observations. As such, in this research study, analysis of Ministry of Education policy documents added more authenticity, credibility and meaning to the information obtained from other sources. It illuminated the Ministry of Education’s efforts, as well as, highlighting the issues or challenges it faced to provide quality basic education to the children of Fiji.
Finally, policy analysis did not really create problems with ethical issues, unlike interviews and observations, where several ethical issues (as explained later in this chapter) had to be considered during the process of choosing samples, participants and conducting the field study. Policy analysis proved advantageous as it saved valuable time in terms of travelling, waiting for approvals from participants for conducting interviews and was also financially viable.

4.4 SAMPLING

The importance of sampling is very well articulated by Burns (1997: 75) as he states that:

…it’s almost impossible to carry out everyday life and business if we did not employ sampling in our decisions. A customer examines the fruit on display and using this as a sample, decides whether to buy or not. A teacher samples the increase in learning among the students by an examination, which only tests a part of that learning.

The concept of sampling involves taking a portion of the population, making observations on this smaller group and then attempting to generalize the findings to a larger population (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). They further state that ‘generalization’ is a necessary scientific procedure, since rarely is it possible to study all the members of the defined population.

According to Burns (1997) and Wiersma (1986), there are two types of sampling involved in educational researches. They are ‘probability’ and ‘non-probability’ sampling. Probability sampling method is one in which every unit in the population has a chance of being selected (Wiersma, 1986: 263). This sampling method is generally appropriate for quantitative research, which involves numbers and statistical data.

On the other hand, a non-probability sampling involves the selection of only those participants from a population that the researcher is interested in studying. The samples are selected based on the subjective judgments of the researcher (Burns, 1997: 292). He further states that non-probability sampling is particularly useful in exploratory research, using qualitative research methods where the aim is to find out if a problem or an issue really exists. Therefore, since this is an exploratory study, ‘non-probability’ sampling has been utilized. In particular, purposive sampling strategy has been used to gather data. That is,
only those participants were selected who would serve the real purpose and objectives of this research study. The selection process of the participants is discussed in Sections 4.4.1 to 4.4.1.5.

Purposive sampling was chosen for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. It was primarily for convenience in terms of finding time for observations and conducting interviews. The participants were easily approachable as they were from a known locality. Since, the case study involves a rural and an urban primary school in two different education districts, purposeful sampling provided an in-depth study of a few participants who were able to provide meaningful information to fulfil the aims and objectives of this research (Section 4.4.1). The choice of only two schools for this study was influenced by Spradley (1979) who highlights that multiple cases dilute the overall analysis. He further emphasizes that the more the cases, the greater the lack of depth in any single case.

The purpose of choosing schools from different districts was to discover some possible concepts regarding the challenges to providing quality basic education in Fiji and investigate in future studies which would help to generalize the findings to the whole population or a larger sample. They were purposively selected to provide supportive and complementary results as they represented different geographical locations (urban and rural) (Table 4.2). This enabled the researcher to explore the challenges to achieving quality basic education from two different perspectives, which was helpful in comparing and contrasting the findings. It provided a ‘window of opportunity’ to establish whether the same or similar challenges are persistent in primary schools regardless of their locality and classification. Apart from this, conducting observational studies in these schools was convenient, manageable and financially viable.

4.4.1 Participants

This case study used multiple sources to gather information and to allow for triangulation and collaboration of findings in order to improve reliability and validity. Therefore, this study comprised four sets of participants who were purposefully selected. Simple random sampling method was used to select the participants. The selection process for each of the
participants is discussed in Sections 4.4.1.1 to 4.4.1.5. Also, Table 4.1 at the end of this section provides a summary of the participants.

**4.4.1.1 Headteachers**

As mentioned earlier, this research involved a case study of two primary schools. Therefore, the Headteachers of both these schools were verbally approached to participate in this study. They agreed without hesitation, however, they requested if they could be interviewed only. The formal request (Appendix 5) and their approval (Appendices 6A and 6B) followed later. They somewhat hesitated to questionnaires citing their busy work schedule with the preparation of end-of-year activities. The choice of these two Headteachers was viewed as important because, as the heads of the institutions, they had first-hand knowledge and information about their respective schools, staff, students, parents and the management. As a result, valuable information relating to this study was obtained from them.

**4.4.1.2 Teachers**

A total of six teachers were selected from both schools used in this study. Three were from School A and the remaining three were from School B. For the three teachers selected from each school, one was from lower primary, one from middle primary and one from upper primary. For the purpose of this study, lower primary comprised classes 1 to 3; middle primary comprised Classes 4 to 6; and Classes 7 and 8 made the upper primary in both the schools. Since this research study involves ‘universal primary education’, it was deemed appropriate to choose a teacher from each level in the primary school so that a thorough knowledge of the nature of the challenges existent at all the levels could be explored and examined.

**4.4.1.3 Students**

Students were vital participants of this research as the whole study was centred on their education and learning. Keeping this in mind, a total of twelve students were selected for interviews and observations. The twelve students comprised six from each case study school. All the students selected were from the upper primary. Class 7 and 8 students were purposely selected as they represented the end stage of the primary school and had gone
through the whole primary education system, thus giving them more experience of student life than the rest of the students. They were also considered mature students and were expected to respond maturely, independently and freely during the interviews. These students were randomly selected as described below.

School A had one stream of Class 7 and two streams of Class 8, therefore, two students, a male and a female were picked from each stream, giving a total of 6 students. For each of the three streams, the names of all the boys and girls were written on separate pieces of paper and put into two separate boxes, one for boys and one for girls. Then, from each box, only one name was picked. Thus, I had a gender-balanced sample of three male and three female students from School A.

However, since School B was a multi-grade school, Classes 7 and 8 were taught as composite classes offering dual class teaching. In this case, the names of boys and girls from both the classes were written on separate pieces of paper and put into two separate boxes, one for boys and one for girls, but each box contained students from both classes. Then, from each box, three names were picked, hence, giving a gender-balanced sample of six students.

Through this process, the researcher was able to get a sample of twelve students to participate in this study. For maintaining anonymity, all these students were given number codes from 1 to 12. Students from School A were coded 1 to 6, while students from School B were coded 7 to 12.

4.4.1.4 Parents

Selecting parent participants for this study was not difficult. They were purposely chosen and, as such, they were the parents of the twelve student participants. These parents were given questionnaires to complete in English (Appendix 10B) and then were interviewed (Appendix 11C) to get a deeper insight into the challenges they actually face in sending their children to school to get quality education.
4.4.1.5  School Management

The managers of School A and B were chosen to be part of this research study. Managers were chosen ahead of the other committee members because they play a vital role by being the public face of the school and provide an important link between the parents and Headteachers, and between the school and the controlling authority (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Table: 4.1  Summary of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers From 2 Schools</td>
<td>Informal interviews, non-participant observations and questionnaires (teachers)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 2 Head teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) 6 Class teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students From 2 Schools</td>
<td>-Interviews</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 6 rural school students</td>
<td>-Non-participant observation and interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) 6 urban school students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. School Managers (2)</td>
<td>Informal interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1-Rural school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) 1-Urban School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Parents</td>
<td>Informal interviews and questionnaires</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 of rural school students &amp; 6 of urban school students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, for reasons of confidentiality, the schools selected were coded A and B. The urban school was coded A, while the rural school was coded B. Details of the selected schools are discussed in the next section.
4.5 BACKGROUND OF SELECTED SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

It is fitting, at this time, to provide some background information on the selected schools. The information discussed was obtained from a number of sources. These included Head teachers, teachers, students, parents, school magazines, as well as, my personal experience, observations and field notes taken during school visits. Table 4.2 at the end of this section provides a summary of the schools used in this research. The fact that both the schools chosen are Indian schools, which are run and managed by Indian communities, is not an oversight by the researcher. They were purposely selected. The choice of the schools was influenced by the researcher’s convenience regarding accessibility to schools and participants in a quick and inexpensive way. The researcher also had some prior knowledge of the context of the schools and this helped in gathering as much information as possible.

In Fiji, there is a preconceived idea by almost everyone that all Indian schools have better infrastructure, educational facilities and resources (Qarase, 2005). There is also an assumption that all students attending Indian schools have better academic achievement as compared to students attending Fijian schools. This belief was clearly portrayed by the previous SDL-led government as it developed policies such as ‘Affirmative Action’ programme and the ‘Education Blueprint’ for indigenous schools (Qarase, 2005). Therefore, the choice of two Indian schools showed whether these assumptions were supported as this study aimed to highlight the challenges which Indian schools face in achieving quality educational provision.

4.5.1 School A

According to Ministry of Education’s school classification system, School A is an ED5E co-educational school, with a roll of over 300 students. Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 provides a detailed breakdown of the school roll by gender and ethnicity. It falls in the Central Division of Fiji. School A has a total of 10 teachers and offers education from Kindergarten to class 8. School A consists of single streams per class and offers straight-class teaching.

The school is run by a Hindu religious organization (Ramayan Mandali). This Ramayan Mandali manages two other schools in the Nausori district. School A falls within a range of 3 kilometres from Nausori town and is classified as an urban school. Although the school is managed by a Hindu religious organization, the ethnic composition of both staff and
students is multi-ethnic, with almost half the population comprised of Indians and the rest being Fijians. The school also maintains a good gender balance.

Students from, as far as, Tailevu (Korovou) and Lami attend this school. The school places great emphasis on Indian values and Hindu prayers are recited every morning and afternoon. Non-Hindu students are also given the opportunity to observe their own culture once a week during religious teachings.

The school caters for all students irrespective of their academic ability, economic status and cultural background. To some extent, it can be classified as a disadvantaged school in terms of the family background of students and educational resources. Students, mostly, from poor families with very low income or no regular income, broken-up families, single-parent families and squatter families attend this school.

In this school, the management provides the buildings, classrooms, furniture, toilets and pays electricity and water bills. It does not provide any other teaching and learning materials such as textbooks and so forth. This is mainly because of their poor financial status. Materials become the Head teacher’s, teacher’s and the parent’s responsibility.

It has also been noted that discipline is a problem in this school, however, with concerted efforts from all the staff, it is kept under control. Students and teachers maintain a healthy and respectful relationship. Students at the school interact freely with others of different ethnic groups and this was seen in the classroom and during breaks.

4.5.2 School B

School B is an ED6D co-educational school with a total roll of just over 100 students (Table 5.1). It is a committee-run school and falls in the North-Western side of Viti Levu. This is a small multi-grade school which offers dual and multi-class teaching. According to Lingam (2007), a multi-class is a situation where two or more-year groups are taught in one classroom by a teacher. In School B, normally dual class teaching is done except for Vernacular lessons where a teacher has to teach four classes per session. The school is located in a cane farming settlement, about 30 kilometres away from Vaileka Town, towards Korovou and is categorized as a rural school. Although it has a small population, it
is truly multi-racial. It consists of students of two major races: Indian and Fijian. Indians form about two-thirds of the total population.

The school is run by a local school committee, which is elected every year during the school’s annual general meeting. The management committee has the responsibility of providing the basic infrastructure of the school. The parents as well as the whole community place great emphasis on the education of the children. Even though parents are mostly farmers, they try to meet all their obligations towards the school. For example, some of the poor parents, who could not afford to pay a sum of $200 towards the construction of a new classroom, had contributed a certain tonnage of their sugar-cane approximately equal to the sum required. This clearly shows the sacrifice made to ensure that the basic school facilities are up-to-date.

This school provides education to the children of its own locality, which has about 50 households. These school places great emphasis on Indian values, however, the Fijian children also get a chance to practise and learn about their own culture. Discipline is not a problem at this school and it is maintained through flexible and informal relationships between the staff and students. There is free and easy interaction between students of the different ethnic groups both inside the classroom and outside. The school also places great emphasis on co-curricular activities and gardening is one of them. The annual prize giving ceremony is a major event in the school’s calendar. It is a night function and becomes a festive occasion as cultural dances and dramas are performed to entertain the parents and other members of the community. The management takes this opportunity to do some fundraising.

Table: 4.2 Summary of Selected Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Urban Primary school. Situated 3km from Nausori town along Princess Road. Children from as far as Korovou and Lami attend this school.</td>
<td>Rural Primary school. Situated about 30 km from Vaileka town towards Korovou along King’s Highway. Caters for children from the locality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>ED5E – Straight Class school</td>
<td>ED6D - Multi-grade school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Hindu Religious organization (Ramayan Mandali)</td>
<td>Committee – run school appointed annually at the AGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Composition</td>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Composition</td>
<td>Co-educational</td>
<td>Co-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>10 teachers in primary with 1 kindergarten teacher and 1 full-time clerk/typist</td>
<td>4 teachers only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership team</td>
<td>1-HT, 1-AHT</td>
<td>1-HT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>National (MoE)</td>
<td>National (MoE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams Administered</td>
<td>Internal – 3 termly exams and Mid-Year &amp; Annual. External – FIE (Class 6) and FEYE (class 8) till 2009. LANA for classes 4, 6 &amp; 8 from 2010.</td>
<td>Internal – 3 termly exams and Mid-Year &amp; Annual. External – FIE (Class 6) and FEYE (class 8) till 2009. LANA for classes 4, 6 &amp; 8 from 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-curricular Activities</td>
<td>Sports – soccer and netball to participate in Inter-Primary Competition.</td>
<td>Sports, Girl Guides, Gardening, Scouting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.5.3 Community Survey

Having selected the two schools, it was seen necessary to conduct a community survey in which these two schools were located. The community survey helped to provide a deeper understanding and give a clearer picture about the population, their living styles and standards and the means of earning a living, as all these have serious impact on the access to quality education. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the community survey.
Table: 4.3  Community Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community A</th>
<th>Community B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of community</td>
<td>Semi-urban and multiracial</td>
<td>Rural Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Households</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Families</td>
<td>Nuclear/ Single-parent</td>
<td>Mostly extended (few nuclear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Families</td>
<td>Nuclear: 5 – 6 members</td>
<td>More than 6 members per family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single-Parent: 3 – 4 members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Casual labourers/ vegetable farmers/ jobs in towns</td>
<td>Small-scale sugarcane farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Income</td>
<td>Salaries and wages selling vegetables</td>
<td>Sugarcane proceeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Standards</td>
<td>Poor to Moderate mostly</td>
<td>Poor mostly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6  INSTRUMENTATION

The instruments used to gather information were questionnaires (Appendices 10A and 10B), interview questions (Appendices 11A – 11E) and observational record sheets (Appendices 8 and 9). The questionnaire and the interview forms consisted of a list of open-ended and prompting questions, to which the respondents were required to respond to. There were seven sets of questionnaires and interview questions as highlighted in Table 4.3. Some questions were thought out and prepared before-hand while others were probing questions, formulated and asked as the interviews progressed. Open-ended questions were asked so that the respondents became more of an informant.

The observational record sheet was in a tabulated form showing the type of classroom activity and the behaviour observed for each activity. It also recorded the teaching and learning strategy employed by the teacher. Apart from this, a camera was also used to take
photos of students during hands-on activities in the natural context. The photos supported the observational data.

With the permission of the interviewees, a voice recorder was used to record all interviews. This was to ensure that all important information was on hand during transcription. Recording interviews was advantageous because it reduced the risk of losing information. The exact words of the informants were recorded. This would have been impossible if responses were written only.

### 4.7 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Research process is the series of steps undertaken by the researcher to answer the research questions. In this research study, the research strategy involved conducting case studies of two primary schools in Fiji. The sources were as diverse as students, teachers, parents, managers, and personal knowledge and experience. Figure 4.2 outlines the research process being adhered to in this study. During the process, an issue was selected. Questions relevant to the topic were formulated, relevant information on the topic was located, collected and reviewed, and the information found was evaluated.

**Figure: 4.2 The Research Process**

![Diagram of the research process]

(Adapted from Wiersma, 1986)

The whole process was divided into three phases. Phase one comprised the pre-fieldwork, phase two involved fieldwork and phase three comprised of post fieldwork. Each of the phases is discussed at length in the next section.

### 4.7.1 Phase One – Pre-fieldwork

Once the research topic, objectives, research questions were formulated and USP’s approval was obtained (Appendix 2), a letter was sent to the Ministry of Education informing them about the research study in the respective case study schools (Appendix 3). In the meantime, another letter was sent to the two Head teachers seeking their approval to
conduct research in their schools. It accompanied the supplementary information about the research (Appendix 7). It took about a week for the Head teachers to respond.

As soon as the permission of the Head teachers was granted, students and teachers of School A were sampled. This was impossible for School B because of distance and time. Then, upon receiving their consent, a courtesy visit was made to both the Head teachers. During this visit, the nature, method and purpose of the research was verbally conveyed to them. They were thoroughly informed about the time it would consume and the observation and interview procedures that would be engaged. The participants of School B were sampled during this visit.

At the same time, a date was set for the Head teachers to be interviewed. Permission was also sought to pay informal visits to the selected teachers and students in order to brief them on the research study. Together with this, a ‘Consent Form’ (Appendix 12) and ‘Supplementary Information’ (Appendix 7) sheet was hand-delivered to the teachers and students. The students were also given ‘parental consent form’, which was to be signed and returned to the researcher (Appendix 13). The selected students were requested to deliver the ‘supplementary information’ and ‘consent forms’ to their parents. This was to seek their parent’s approval to be part of the research.

Participants from School B were requested to return the completed forms to the Head teacher, who then sent them to the researcher by mail. This provided ample time for the parents, teachers and the manager to decide on their participation. Almost the same procedure was followed to convey information to the participants of School A. However, the completed consent forms from teachers and students were personally collected, while the parents sent theirs through their children. Once the consent was obtained from all the desired participants, fieldwork began.

4.7.2 Phase Two - Fieldwork

Phase two comprised of fieldwork and this began towards the end of Term 3, 2007 and continued in 2008. The fieldwork consisted of four main methods of data collection. They were questionnaires, observations, interviews and document analysis. Figure 4.3 at the end of this section shows the order of the data collection process.
4.7.2.1 Questionnaires

This was the first component of the fieldwork, however, it was only for the teachers and parents of both schools. The questionnaire was designed to ascertain personal views on the current education system and its relevance and importance. It was developed around the issues regarding challenges and difficulties they faced in providing quality education to their children. The questions evolved around the basic research questions (as stated in Section 1.4.2 in Chapter 1).

The questionnaires were hand-delivered to the teachers and parents of School A. They completed and returned them personally to the researcher. However, due to distance and the amount of travelling, the questionnaires for participants of School B were posted to the Head teacher. He then assisted in distributing them to the respective participants. The teachers and students of School B were requested to post the completed questionnaires separately in order to maintain confidentiality of their responses.

4.7.2.2 Non-Participant Observation

Non-participant observation involved teachers and students only. A total of twelve lesson observations were done for the teachers. Each teacher-participant was observed twice during the study and the students were simultaneously observed as well. Once the responses from the questionnaires were received and analyzed, important areas which related to behaviour, actions and hands-on activities were observed. In particular, the teaching and learning strategies, evaluation and assessment methods were observed. The major purpose of observations was to support and reinforce the findings from the questionnaires, making it more valid. This was seen as certain behaviours, such as, the degree of teacher-pupil interaction, gestures and movements were best understood through observations in naturalistic settings.

‘Observation record sheets’ (Appendices 8 and 9) were used to record everything observed during the lesson. After completion of the ‘observation sheet’, issues which needed further exploration and examination were investigated by conducting interviews.
4.7.2.3  **Interviews**

The interview schedule was established around a number of key themes, informed by literature and the research questions. The interview questions centred around the difficulties which each one of the participants encountered in the process of either attaining or providing quality education. These questions were established from the responses obtained from the questionnaires and observations. The responses which required deeper explanation and clarification were framed into open-ended interview questions.

All interviews were conducted in a relaxed and collegial atmosphere which allowed for joint explorations by the researcher and the interviewee about the challenges encountered in achieving quality basic education. Prompting or probing questions, such as mini-tour, extension and example questions, were asked to get an in-depth first-hand knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to achieving quality education. Elaboration and clarification probes (Patton, 1990) served to clarify responses and obtain detailed information.

The whole interview was recorded on a voice recorder. At the end of each interview, the recorder was played to cross-check the quality of recording and also to enable the interviewees to listen to their responses and voices. Once they were satisfied, the whole interview was transcribed. These transcriptions were given to the interviewees for them to acknowledge that they were the same as the recordings. After listening, reading and understanding the recorded interviews, they signed an agreement form, which gave me permission to use their responses for the research study.

4.7.2.4  **Document Analysis**

Document analysis involved examining and analyzing Ministry of Education policy documents. The documents critically studied were:

1. The Strategic Plan, 2006 – 2008
2. The Suva Declaration, 2005
3. Education, 2020
4. Education For All, 2015
Ministry’s policies regarding quality and basic education were sighted, studied and recorded. This information provided a picture of the level of commitment the ministry has towards attaining quality basic education. The information obtained through policy analysis was used to triangulate the questionnaire, interview and observation findings.

**Figure: 4.3 Data Collection Process**

4.7.3 **Phase Three – Data Analysis**

Qualitative data comes in various forms (Sally, 2000). In this study, data sources were open-ended questionnaires, informal interviews and non-participant observation. With these many data sources, Sally (2000) further states that data analysis is the most complex and mysterious of all phases of a qualitative project. Therefore, in order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, thematic analysis was carried out. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within data. It organizes and describes data in rich detail. Such an analysis was used to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected information (Strydom & Fouche, 2002). Figure 4.4 at the end of this section describes the data analysis process.

In this research study, relevant data from various sources were collected and transcribed. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to this process as familiarization with data. During this process, all the data were read and re-read in order to extract meaning and understanding.

Following this, data were coded using colours where different colours were used to highlight different ideas. For example, in this research, ‘orange colour’ was used to denote ‘pedagogical challenges’, ‘green colour’ was used to highlight ‘institutional challenges’ and so on. The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as data are organized into meaningful groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
After the coding process, all relevant information relating to each potential theme was collated. This stage of data analysis is also referred to as searching and reviewing for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In reviewing themes, minor themes, which did not have enough data to support them, were dropped while some smaller themes were combined to form one major theme. Themes were identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences. The responses from participants were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experiences regarding the difficulties they faced in providing and attaining quality basic education in Fiji.

The final phase of data analysis was producing a report. This included the final analysis and write-up of the report. In this phase, a concise, coherent, logical and non-repetitive summary with vivid examples, which compellingly highlighted the challenges to achieving quality universal primary education in Fiji, was produced.

While carrying out the data analysis process, the major focus was on identifying the persisting challenges that hinder the achievement of quality primary education based on lived experiences. Considerable attention was also directed to the social context surrounding the schools under study. There was great emphasis on understanding the social world from the point of view of the participants. This was done to maintain validity, and reliability of the data obtained from various sources. In this case, validity means the credibility of the findings and the degree to which it can be applied to a larger population and reliability is the consistency, dependability and accuracy of the findings in different contexts.

**Figure: 4.4 Data Analysis Flowchart**

(Figure adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)
4.8 ETHICAL ISSUES

Research ethics were duly observed while carrying out this research. Firstly, this research study would not have been possible without the USP’s approval and consent. Therefore, the first ethics observed was to obtain the consent from the USP’s Postgraduate Committee (Appendix 2). They approved the ‘Intent’ and the ‘Proposal’ of this research. Following this, the Ministry of Education was informed (Appendix 3) about the research study. This process was necessary as the research involved schools, students and teachers who fell under the Ministry’s jurisdiction. The approval of the Head teachers of the case study schools was then sought (Appendices 6A and 6B). Their consent provided access to visit their school, interview teachers and students and study their official school records.

The other ethical issues, which were likely to arise, were that of confidentiality, cultural issues and freedom of choice and expression of a participant’s views. It was also ethically and morally sound to inform the participants correctly about the purpose of the research study. In this regard a letter of consent (Appendices 12 - 13) and supplementary information (Appendix 7) were provided to each participant. They highlighted the research procedures, its benefit and their right to withdraw. Participants were at liberty to be a part of the study at their own choice without any pressure. The participants were also at liberty to withdraw from the research study after they had heard their recorded interviews and seen the transcriptions.

According to Burns (1997), providing this information to the participants makes the situation clear and provides a degree of proof that the person was informed and consented to take part in the research. However, participants were not allowed to withdraw after they had signed an agreement on the transcription that their views were correctly transcribed and that they allowed the researcher to include their views in the research, with confidentiality.

As for the student participants, before they were interviewed, a written consent from their parents was obtained as these students were only between twelve to fourteen years old (Appendix 13). Since the interview included some of the home background and cultural aspects of the family, parents were required to give permission for their child to be interviewed.
Being a male researcher, female participants also had the privilege of having someone to accompany them during the interview, especially, if it was done after school hours. In this case, the school Head teacher's approval was sought. Students were also at liberty to be interviewed at their homes with their parents. Above all, each participant’s cultural views, taboos and restrictions were observed at all times. Care was also taken to avoid questioning about their personal and private lives, and their sacred places and spaces of worship were never invaded.

Each participant had the right to privacy. They decided on what ‘aspects of their personal lives, attitudes, habits, eccentricities, fears and guilt were to be communicated’ (Burns, 1997: 21). The general strategy used for protecting privacy was to use codes to represent individuals. At the end of the interviews, each participant was thanked and acknowledged for their responses and availability.

Finally, while presenting the data, it was ensured that ‘complete’ and ‘accurate’ information was presented. That is, interviews were transcribed exactly as recorded or said by the participant. Great caution was also taken to avoid presuming or assuming something that was not stated directly by the participant. At no point during data presentation was the participant’s identity released.

4.9 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the approaches and techniques undertaken in designing and conducting this study. It discussed the descriptive nature of the research and established how a flexible and purposeful sample design was employed to explore and examine the real problems surrounding the students and the stakeholders in promoting and achieving quality basic education in the selected primary schools in Fiji. The approaches used to gather information were open-ended and questionnaires, in-depth, exploratory and open-ended interviews; and non-participant observations.

The above qualitative methods employed in this study typically produced a wealth of detailed data from a relatively small sample. These methods allowed for ‘depth and detail’ and ‘real and rich’ information through direct quotations and careful description of situations, events, interactions and observed behaviours. The whole research process was
carried out in three phases: pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and post-fieldwork. At times, these phases overlapped considerably, creating a greater flow in the actual research process. Thematic analysis was viable for this study because there is no intention to draw any numerical analysis; however, the findings were envisaged to be descriptive, exploratory and explanatory in nature.

Finally, at every stage and process of data collection, a good judgment, creativity and analytical intellect were utilized to maintain credibility, reliability and validity. The human factor was the greatest and fundamental strength of the whole inquiry process and analysis.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, presents the findings of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

‘Quality is the essence of teaching and learning process’ (UNESCO, 2008)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in preceding chapters, this study sets out to explore and examine the challenges faced by different stakeholders in providing quality basic education in the selected primary schools in Fiji. As such, this chapter presents the findings of the research study. The data were collected using a qualitative case study approach, with the major purpose being descriptive and exploratory.

The whole chapter is in three parts. The first part presents the findings related to the respondent’s perceptions of the current education system and of the existing educational resources and facilities in their schools. The second part dwells on the significance of quality basic education for all and the final part of the chapter highlights the challenges faced by the stakeholders in providing quality basic education. It also encompasses some practical and meaningful strategies for addressing the challenges. All the three sections include sub-themes.

5.2 CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the two schools were selected for ease and access. While the controlling authorities and locations were different, both schools were multi-ethnic in terms of student and teacher populations. Major features of the two schools are exhibited in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4, while the composition of the school rolls is highlighted in Table 5.1 in this chapter.

In this section, respondents’ views on their school’s current education system and the existing educational resources and facilities are deliberated. These deliberations are of significance as the findings lay the platform in identifying the difficulties faced by teachers
and parents, which, in turn, become determinants towards providing quality basic education in the two selected schools.

5.2.1    Education System

Participants of both schools seemed discontent with the current education system. The most commonly held belief was that the education system in their schools was too exam-oriented and over-loaded with abstract knowledge, whereby the slow-learners were at a disadvantage. One of the teacher participants from School A stated that:

…there is always a rush to cover the syllabus and prepare children for exams. As such, rote learning supersedes holistic education since patterns are drilled to achieve the pass rates for the satisfaction of the pressure groups.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

In addition to this, the parent participants raised their concern about the lack of co-curricular activities in both the schools. This is depicted in the following response:

…students need to be trained and developed in all the domains which are essential to produce useful and worthwhile citizens. There is a need to develop divine virtues and values of human life, as well as, skills education including gardening, music, art and craft, sports and fishing. These skills ought to be an integral part of the education system.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

5.2.2    School Leadership

There was a consensus that a more democratic, unbiased and honest leadership is essential for better efficiency and effectiveness of the institution. Respondents from School A seemed dissatisfied and frustrated with their leadership style. According to them, their leader was a dictator who hardly listened to the views and opinions of the staff. This was highlighted by a teacher. He stated that:

…the leadership is of a very low standard. The Head teacher and the Assistant Head teacher fail to make good decisions and because of this other teachers and students suffer. Teacher’s views are never taken into consideration in decision making regarding duty allocations, choice of prefects and on other important school functions. He imposes duties without consulting the staff.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
Respondents from School A also raised concern that due to the dictatorial leadership style, teachers were not getting enough support professionally and thus, were not giving in their 100 percent towards the teaching and learning process. The end result was that the students suffered. This can be clearly seen from an interview extract given in Exhibit 5.1 below.

**Exhibit: 5.1  Interview Extract – Lack of Professional Development**

On the other hand, respondents of School B seemed quite appreciative and encouraged by the leadership of their school. According to them, their school followed a democratic leadership style where views and suggestions were always welcomed and decisions were always made through consensus for the benefit of students, teachers and parents. The teacher participants of School B also indicated that their Head teacher always sent them to attend workshops and meetings to enhance their knowledge. Professional development sessions at school level were also organized and individual teachers conducted different sessions on educational issues. In this school, every staff and student had equal access and opportunity.

**5.2.3 School Culture**

The response on school culture was from two perspectives. Firstly, it was about the working relationship between the staff, students and the parents and, secondly, about the religious activities held in school.
Respondents from School B admitted that they had a healthy working relationship with the Head teacher, teachers, parents and students. In this school, everyone was supportive of each other. However, for School A, it was different. Respondents indicated that due to the Head teacher’s bias, some teachers and parents did not have healthy working relationships. A teacher participant from School A stated in her questionnaire that:

…there is lack of social and academic cohesion among our staff. I feel there needs to be a lot of professional cohesion whereby teachers understand each other, as well as, the academic expectation of the different class levels.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Regarding the second perception of school culture, findings in both the schools were similar. Since both schools were managed by Indo-Fijian authorities, mostly Hindu cultural occasions were observed. These include *Holi*, *Diwali*, *Ram Naumi* and *Shri Krishna Janmasthmi*. Upon inquiry during an interview regarding the reasons for not observing the religious functions of other cultures, one of the participants revealed that:

…it is the directive of the school management. They are the ones who established this school so they want their aspirations and needs to be fulfilled.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

### 5.2.4 School Background and Composition

As mentioned earlier, both schools are multiracial schools. School A mainly consists of Indians and Fijians while School B also has a small population of Rotumans. A detailed background of the schools is portrayed in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4. From Table 4.1, it can be summarized that although the demographic location and the size of schools are dissimilar, both share the following commonalities:

- both schools are Indian schools managed by Indo-Fijian authorities;
- both have a multiracial population in terms of students and teachers;
- both schools have their outcomes measured through exams; and
- both are disadvantaged schools in terms of finances and resources available.

In what follows next is a more detailed information on the school composition. Table 5.1 presents a breakdown of the school roll.
While being diverse in ethnicity, it was also highlighted by the participants that both schools contained students of different ability levels. According to them, a lot of them were below average students and this was one of the setbacks towards providing quality education. For instance, in School A, one of the respondents stated that:

…I teach class 7 and in my class, there are 12 non-readers. These students become a hindrance in providing quality education.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Respondents from School B highlighted that:

...being in a rural setup, and a farming community, majority of the students enter the system with knowledge, experience and attitudinal behaviour typical to the rural style of life. They have little exposure to the outside modern world and move at the pace they are often exposed to in the villages. Poor family backgrounds and illiterate parents feed the school with children similar to the knowledge possessed by ‘a toad in a well’. These students have very little or no confidence. They lack initiative and self motivation.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
5.2.5 School and Classroom Facilities

At a glance, it was visible that the building and infrastructure was there but the other facilities that enhance learning in terms of furniture, equipment and teaching-learning aids was lacking. Table 5.2 details the school facilities at both schools.

Table: 5.2 School and Classroom Facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Quarters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>According to the teachers, there is a need but no effort is taken by the management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Generally good but floor needs re-plastering. Poor ventilation and rooms need to be more spacious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet Block</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Needs upgrading of water cisterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office /Reception Area</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hidden location. Needs to be in front and easily accessible to all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Room</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Needs renovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Part of kindergarten is used with very little space and obsolete books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Block</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Newly built.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Needs resurfacing and grass needs to be planted. Too muddy to use during rainy weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackboard</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Needs painting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer/Printer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not functioning. Needs repairs. Only used by HT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplicator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Damaged (not in use)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A closer look at the schools indicated that the facilities need major renovation and maintenance. For both the schools, finance was the main issue, which was highlighted by the Head teachers and the managers. However, the attitude of school leaders towards school facilities was of great concern to the teachers, students and parents.

As far as the teaching-learning resources were concerned, in School A, most of the stationery and teaching aids were provided by teachers themselves. They either bought at their own expense or borrowed at their own risk. However, for School B, the management took this responsibility after being advised by the Head teacher. The Head teacher was at liberty to purchase these needs from canteen funds with proper documentation. Table 5.3 below shows the availability of these resources.

**Table: 5.3 Teaching-Learning Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chalk/Duster/Ruler</td>
<td>School (once a year)</td>
<td>Written requests required to obtain them.</td>
<td>School (once a year)</td>
<td>Easily acquired from the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Guides</td>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Not all classes have all the guides. Teacher’s use their own effort to get them.</td>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>All classes have all the guides. HT provides in each class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationery</td>
<td>Teachers buy themselves.</td>
<td>Not all teachers make effort in having all the stationery.</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Provided at the beginning of each term or upon request.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptions</td>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Teachers borrow from others or get from CDU at their own initiative.</td>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>HT provides in each class after acquiring from CDU.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes & School Organization Records, 2008
A closer look at Table 5.3 shows that only the basic resources were available in the schools. A lot more was required by the teachers to enhance research-based teaching and learning, the essentials of quality education. For instance, my observation showed that basic teaching-learning resources such as Diene’s Blocks, world-map and globe, chemicals such as hydrochloric acid, iodine solution and litmus paper for experiments, blackboard compass and protractor and thermometer were not available in School A. It was also noticed that classrooms had very old and only a few charts on the walls.

5.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION

This section examines teachers’ perceptions on the EFA concept and its goals. It also highlights their views on quality education.

5.3.1 Education For All Concept

Respondents’ views and knowledge on the EFA concept were seen as necessary in order to gauge their understanding of providing quality education to children at primary school level. It was envisaged that a good understanding of EFA concept and its goals should put teachers and parents in a better position to foster quality basic education.

However, through field study it was revealed that neither the teacher-participants (including the Head teacher) nor the parents had any knowledge of the Dakar Framework for Action and the EFA concept adopted by Ministry of Education. The interview extract given in Box 5.2 is an indication of the lack of teachers’ knowledge on the expectations of the Dakar Framework for Action Programme.
**Exhibit: 5.2 Interview Extract- EFA Workshops**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I:</th>
<th>Have you attended any workshop regarding EFA?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td><em>I was never sent to attend any one by my Head teacher.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>Do you have any knowledge whether a workshop was organized ever?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td><em>Not one that I was aware of.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>In your view who should be responsible for organizing these workshops?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td><em>Definitely the Ministry of Education.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes, 2008

However, while the teacher participants did seem to show some stipulative understanding of EFA, they were unaware of the six goals. Their interpretation of EFA was:

- providing equal opportunities in education;
- making education available to all people; and
- making everybody learn in schools- learning for all.

In response to the question on whether they were promoting EFA in their schools, they said that with whatever facilities they had they were trying their best to do so. My observation showed that teachers were just carrying out their normal classroom teaching, hardly engaging children in group activities and discussions. There was hardly any evidence of research based learning.

### 5.3.2 Concept of Quality Education

All the participants realized the importance of quality basic education. There was a consensus among all the respondents that quality education is essential to survive in today’s changing and demanding world.

In response to their understanding of quality education and its importance, some of their perceptions were:
…quality education is not just knowing how to read and write. It is more than that. It is about bringing up a child to become a worthwhile citizen of a country and knowing and understanding about the happenings around him/her locally or abroad.
(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

…quality education refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills and development of positive attitudes, which leads to preparing worthwhile, useful and civilized citizens who contribute towards the development of self, families, communities and the nation.
(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

…quality education is essential for a decent, peaceful and harmonious society.
(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

The above views about quality education are well summarized by one of the parents.

…quality education is that education which will prepare my child for the future.
(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

From the responses, it was also evident that all the respondents measured or associated ‘quality education’ with success in exams. Their views indicated that quality is there when a school has high pass rates in internal and external exams.

My observation also indicated that people in both the communities were more inclined towards exams because their assessment of the school is based on exams. This observation was further supported by the Head teacher of one of the Schools. He said that:

…I have noted that some parents have brought their children to this school because they saw the results have been better here as compared to the neighbouring schools. They feel that their children would be getting quality education in this school.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Moreover, participants’ views on whether quality education was promoted in their schools were sought. While the student participants showed not much understanding of the ‘quality concept’, parents and teachers of both schools did not hesitate to point out that their schools were not well-facilitated, administered and resourced to provide quality education to students.
Parent and teacher participants of both the schools simply said ‘no’ in response to the above question. They highlighted many reasons for this, which are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

In addition to this, participants also expressed their dissatisfaction with their school managements in regards to providing quality education. Exhibit 5.3 shows the management’s attitude towards children’s education.

**Exhibit: 5.3 Interview Extract - Managements Concern Towards Children’s Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I: How much importance does the management place on education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R: <em>I think they have lost focus on quality education, although they keep on harping about quality education all the time.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: What makes you say so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: <em>They are moving into business. They want to make money out of school.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: What effect does this have on children’s learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: <em>Their focus is on money and children are used as commodities to achieve their goals.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes, 2008

### 5.4 CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION

This section of the chapter dwells on the difficulties faced by the learners, teachers, parents and the school management in providing quality basic education. It focuses on the day-to-day challenges faced by them in their homes, communities and in their schools. In order to maintain the originality and essence of the information, all effort was made to present the findings from the participants’ perspective. However, personal experience and observations were used to triangulate, support, extend and justify the participants’ responses relating to the concepts issues and challenges. The first part of this section looks at the difficulties encountered by the learners in acquiring quality education. It begins by highlighting the challenges they faced at their homes, followed by the difficulties at school level.
5.4.1 Challenges Faced By Learners

5.4.1.1 At Home

As highlighted in Table 4.2 in Chapter 4, the socio-economic status of families in both the communities is not financially sound. Consequently, there was a general concern among the student participants that poverty was one of the factors that impeded their education. They revealed that due to lack of finances available to them, it was difficult to meet their daily learning requirements. This included textbooks, exercise books and writing stationery. To further support this claim, my observation also revealed that an average of 4 students in every class had only one exercise book to write notes for all subjects. They also relied on other students to share their text books, colours and pens.

Secondly, due to poor economic status, it was difficult for families to provide the basic necessities of life. A class survey in the case study schools revealed that an average of four students per class per day either did not have breakfast or brought no lunch to school. These students often felt embarrassed to share others’ food. It was also noted that those who shared others’ food were asked for favours in return such as doing duties and homework for the lunch-givers.

Additionally, it emerged that poor learning facilities at home also hindered quality education. Four student participants from School A and five from School B indicated that they did not have electricity at their homes. According to them, they used kerosene lamps or benzene lights to study at home and at times they also had to put up with candles. One of the students stated that:

…due to poor lighting at home, I am not able to complete my homework and study well. My eyes and head start paining so I have to stop and go to bed.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Another student mentioned that:

…as soon as I reach home from school, I start doing my homework. I avoid doing studies at night because I don’t have electricity.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
Upon inquiring whether she was able to complete her work before dark, she stated that:

… if I can’t, I go to school and in the school I copy from my friends.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

My observation showed that the poorer families tried to minimize the costs of buying kerosene or benzene by having only one lamp lit in the house and sending children early to bed without realizing whether their school work was complete or not.

Thirdly, student participants also highlighted that other learning facilities such as study tables and chairs were lacking at home. This forced them to either sit on the floor or lie on the bed to study or complete their homework. As a result, they were stressed out and lost interest in studies. They were also demotivated to go an extra mile to uplift their knowledge and skills.

In addition to this, the size of the family and its composition were also deterrent factors, which hindered quality basic education. One of the students pointed out that she lived in an extended family comprising grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, brothers, sisters and cousins. According to her,

… just keeping and safeguarding my bags, books, pens and pencils was impossible so even thinking about having a peaceful environment at home to get best education is beyond imagination.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

She specified the difficulties that she faced to study at home in such family environments. These were:

- the younger siblings damaged the learning materials;
- the younger ones often cried and made a lot of noise;
- the other members (especially uncles, aunts and cousins) became inconsiderate and tend to watch T.V. or see movies while she was studying;
- family conflicts often arose when grievances were raised by parents so to avoid quarrels, she had to tolerate the intolerables; and
- uncles and aunts entertained friends at home on school days so the entire home environment changes. It becomes non-conducive to learning.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
Moreover, from the field study it emerged that lack of parental and family support and guidance at home made learning more stressful and unenjoyable. The diverse situations that made parents alienate their children are listed below.

- The parent’s work commitments. One of the students from School A said that:

  both of my parents work. My father is a casual carpenter and my mother works as a house girl. They leave home at 6.30 a.m. and return from work after 6.30 p.m. in the evening. They get busy with the housework and are not able to help us.

  (Source: Field Notes, 2008)

- Parents become too tired after work so when they reached home, they were under mental pressure. This was indicated by one of the students from School B. He said that:

  …my father is too committed to farm work. During harvesting season, he has to encounter many gang-related conflicts. When he comes home, his mind is occupied somewhere else. At times he finds noise and children nuisance at home so we try to keep away from him.

  (Source: Field Notes, 2008)

- Uneducated or poorly educated parents were unable to guide or assist when children needed help in schoolwork.
- Parental conflicts saw children and their school work being ignored. Children did not get enough encouragement in education.
- Parents and family members were overly engaged in family or village commitments.
- Parents prioritized community obligations and neglected children’s education.
- Parents overloaded children with house chores such as washing, cleaning, cooking, helping on farms and looking after younger brothers and sisters.

5.4.1.2 **At School**

It was highlighted by the students that, the greatest determinant of quality education was the quality of teachers in the school. This mainly encompassed: teachers’ personalities, attitudes and the nature, method and means of teaching, interacting and approaching students. This research study has revealed that students were distracted from learning and classroom activities when teachers were harsh, rude and inconsiderate about their needs,
feelings, values and aspirations. According to the students, they tried all their best to avoid unwelcoming and unfriendly teachers. One of the student participants stated that:

…I hate staying in a classroom which has rude and unfriendly teachers. Such teachers make me forget more than remembering what I have learnt.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

In response to the question of whether such teachers were (are) present in both the schools, students bravely responded and said that there was no shortage of such teachers in their schools. They also pointed out that the older female teachers and the male teachers were (are) usually stricter and harsher.

Secondly, the student participants also pointed out that some teachers had an unappealing and uninteresting way of introducing and presenting the lessons. One of them said that:

my teacher only uses the textbook and the blackboard to teach. We are hardly allowed to work in groups and never sent to investigate things outside the classroom.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

She further said that:

…we are given a lot of notes to copy from the textbook. Hardly, these notes are checked and discussed. There are also times when many students never complete their notes.

(Source: Field Notes, 2007)

Moreover, students also stressed that they encountered difficulties in understanding the explanations given by the teachers. Students admitted that concepts like ‘fractions’, ‘area’, ‘perimeter’ and ‘volumes’ in Mathematics, ‘social, physical and environmental changes’, ‘globalization’ and ‘pollution’ in Social Sciences, health related issues and experiments in Basic Science should be explained and emphasized in Vernacular. According to them, teachers hardly used Vernacular to explain these concepts. Vernacular was only used during vernacular lessons. To support this, one of the participants specifically stated that:

…even the level of English teachers use is sometimes beyond our understanding.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
Furthermore, student participants also highlighted that the class teachers often paid very little attention to the slow-learners. During lesson observations, it was seen that teachers mostly focused their attention on the brighter students while the weaker ones were often ignored. Teachers mostly directed questions to the brighter students. Even if the slow-learners raised their hands to respond, they were either ignored or given very little response time to explain or fully express themselves. Comments such as ‘go and learn’, ‘poor answer’, ‘not good’ or ‘find the answer yourselves’ were made by teachers during lessons. The slow-learners were also not given enough time to copy notes from the board. The notes were even rubbed off before everyone could finish writing. Students who could not finish writing were asked to copy from the brighter students’ books. Through observations it was evident that teachers followed the pace of brighter students while teaching.

One of the student participants stated that:

…teachers usually referred to the weaker students as good for nothing or nil by brain students.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

In addition to this, participants of exam classes (Class 8 students) felt that they were too overloaded with work to be done in school and at home. Sometimes teachers expected them to complete two or three past year exam papers per night. According to them, although they somehow managed to complete by staying awake late at night, quality effort was not put in as they saw it as a task to be completed and not a skill or knowledge to be mastered.

It has also been highlighted by the student-participants of both schools that teachers were still inflicting corporal punishments. These teachers used sticks, leather straps and even slapped students for:

- not completing their notes on time;
- giving wrong answers;
- poor hand-writings;
- indiscipline;
- failing in tests;
- late arrivals; and
- not having class stationeries.
According to the students, apart from inflicting pain, they were also humiliated and dehumanized in front of the class. This lowered their self-efficacy, confidence and self esteem, thus, resulting in numerous negative consequences in learning such as:

- losing interest in studies;
- increased absenteeism;
- truancy;
- delinquency;
- resilience;
- hatred; and
- rebellious attitude towards teachers, school and education.

Apart from this, it was also diagnosed by the students that some teachers were racists and their lack of support, motivation and individual assistance distracted them from learning. One of the participants raised his concern by saying that:

…it in my class, there are some pet-students of teachers. They are always favoured among the rest.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

This student further went on to say that:

…these favoured students often took advantage of the teacher’s attitude and indulged in bullying, showing superiority complex, prejudice and discrimination against the poorer, weaker and disadvantaged students. They would not even lend their books or assist when others are absent.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

He also pointed out that:

…it if the other students are grouped with such inconsiderate and high-headed students, they are often isolated, ridiculed and demoralized by their unsupportive and unco-operative behaviour and mean attitudes.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

When questioned on how these circumstances or situations affected their learning, students said that such attitudes and behaviour derailed their learning efforts and desires.
Additionally, students also raised their concern about being disturbed by other teachers during teaching hours or in-between lessons. According to them, they were called to:

- attend to their younger brothers and sisters for sharpening pencils, finding rubbers, sharpeners and rulers for them, taking them to the toilets and cleaning them;
- do errands for them like going to the shop to buy grog, cigarettes and phone cards, buying vegetables from the neighbours and getting mails from the managements office located at high school;
- clean their lunch containers and dishes;
- fetch manure from the nearby Crest poultry farm; and
- supervise their classes when they are out on short leaves.

There was a general consensus among the students that these disturbances seriously affected their learning.

Besides this, the location of the classroom, overcrowding in the classroom and the seating arrangement were also some of the factors highlighted by the students, which detracted them from quality education. In relation to this, one of the student participants from School A stated that:

…my classroom is just next to classes 1 and 2 rooms. These children make excessive noise so learning in our room becomes difficult and stressful. Children in my class find it hard to concentrate on lessons when the infant classes start shouting, yelling, jumping or even when they sing.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Another student pointed out that:

…my classroom is overcrowded with students and furniture. This causes congestion, restricts movements and limits group activities. At times I have to bear the sweaty and smelly students, especially, after lunch everyday when the boys come in after playing.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Not only this, one student also stated that:

…due to lack of space in the classroom, our desks extend right to the back wall and I am one of the students sitting at the back.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
According to this student, her teacher was often inaudible and she also found difficulty in reading whatever was written on the board. Finally, students also stressed that poor toilet and water facilities and lack of resources such as library books prevented them from attaining quality education.

In what follows next are the challenges faced by the teachers in delivering quality education to the students of the selected schools.

5.4.2 Challenges Faced By Teachers

It is evident from the research that teachers too face numerous challenges in delivering quality education in primary schools. As such, this section highlights the difficulties they face in providing quality education. The challenges are prevalent at three different levels; classroom level, school level and community level.

5.4.2.1 Classroom Level Challenges

5.4.2.1.1 With Students

Firstly, it was evident that teachers were concerned with the type of students they had in their classes. According to them, there were non-readers at Classes 7 and 8 levels and this affected their efforts to deliver quality education. The interview extract exhibited in Exhibit 5.4 indicates the difficulties faced by teachers with non-readers.

**Exhibit: 5.4 Interview Extract- Problems With Non-Readers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I:</th>
<th>What can you say about the type of students you have in your class?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>There are students of different abilities but there are 12 children who are non-readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>That’s a big number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>Yes, these children are so bad that they cannot even identify articles like ‘a’, ‘the’ and ‘an’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>What could be the reason behind having so many non-readers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>It’s not because they don’t have the ability but their foundation was not built.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>What do you mean? Can you elaborate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>They were not taught properly at lower level and were allowed to proceed to other classes. Someone is not doing the work and their work is not being monitored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes, 2008
One of the participants further clarified the problems he faced with non-readers. He said that:

…having so many non-readers in the class makes teaching hectic and stressful. A lot of teaching and learning time is wasted if special attention is provided to these students. Other students are ignored.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

He further stated that teaching such weak students created communication problems. According to him, these students needed to be taught or explained in vernacular at all times, which was impractical as he does not know the Fijian language.

Together with non-readers, there were also slow-learners in every class. According to the teacher-participants of both the case study schools, these groups of students hardly completed their written work on time and they could not wait for them because they would lag behind in coverage of syllabus. Teachers also highlighted that the slow-writers would not submit their books for marking.

Secondly, this research also revealed that poor attendance is also an impediment to quality education. Teachers highlighted that student absenteeism was rife in their schools. For School A, student’s attendance for Terms 2 and 3 in 2008 was analyzed and the findings are presented in Table: 5.4.

**Table: 5.4 Student Attendance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>0-5 days</th>
<th>6-10 days</th>
<th>10-15 days</th>
<th>15+ days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
In response to the question regarding reasons for increased absenteeism, teachers stated that students stayed away from school:

- when they did not do their homework or due to incomplete notes;
- due to negative attitudes towards school and studies;
- due to the lack of importance placed on education by parents; and
- fear of being disciplined.

However when the same question was posed to the students their reasons included:

- being sick;
- being afraid of teachers for not completing homework;
- not interested in studies-boring lessons;
- no bus fare and transport problems;
- wet uniform;
- no breakfast and lunch;
- parental conflicts; and
- home circumstances including looking after younger siblings, religious functions and village activities.

Upon seeking further clarification on the reasons for not doing their homework, students said that they either did not understand the concept or they were too overloaded with work.

Apart from this, teachers also raised their concern regarding the lack of teaching and learning materials among students. It was evident that some children did not have the required textbooks, exercise books and writing materials with them. According to the teachers, while there were some genuine cases, few students took advantage of this situation as they took it as an opportunity for not completing their work in school and at home. Such negative attitudes of students caused frustrations among the teachers.

5.4.2.1.2 With Teaching and Learning Resources

There were strong revelations by the teachers that lack of basic teaching and learning resources in their schools thwarted their efforts in providing quality education. For
example, for making charts and other teaching aids, vanguard sheets, pental pens, cellophane and newsprints were not available in their school. According to one of the participants, she had to engage in a long channel of communication before she could actually acquire these materials. She even confessed that at times it became too frustrating to even think of asking for these materials from the office and this resulted in her teaching without charts and teaching aids.

Apart from this, other essential resources that were not present in their schools were:

- blackboard compass and protractor;
- Diene’s Blocks for teaching ‘Decimals’ and ‘Fractions’ in Mathematics;
- chemicals and apparatus for conducting science experiments;
- library books and research materials;
- sporting gear like balls and nets; and
- gardening tools.

The interview extract given in Exhibit 5.5 highlights one of the teacher’s experiences and consequences she has to encounter due to lack of teaching and learning resources in her school.

**Exhibit: 5.5  Interview Extract- Teaching and Learning Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I:</th>
<th>Do you have all the required teaching and learning resources?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>We don’t have enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>How do you manage then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>We have to find it ourselves, or borrow or beg for it. Sometimes we have to go across to high school and borrow from them. It wastes a lot of teaching and learning time and it’s not easy to ask always. Sometimes it becomes embarrassing and also people don’t want to give things. They turn their back on you. Sometimes we don’t do experiments and proceed with the lessons only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes, 2008

In addition to this, one of the teachers also suggested that her school should have computers, photocopiers and T.V. sets. According to her, ‘these aids can help teachers to change and fine tune their teaching modes to make learning more enjoyable and meaningful’ (Field Notes, 2008).
Above all, teachers also mentioned that big class sizes were also a barrier to providing quality education. One of the teachers said that:

…having 40+ students in a class limits movement. It becomes difficult to provide individual attention to the slow-learners and sometimes they are left struggling on their own. Marking books and monitoring their work becomes an awful task.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

5.4.2.2 School-level Challenges

This section dwells on the challenges faced by teachers at school level.

5.4.2.2.1 Leadership, Administration and School Policies

Teacher participants of both schools admitted that a democratic and visionary leader is required to foster quality education. Teachers of School B were content with their leadership style and the support they continually received from their Head teacher. This can be depicted as one of the participants enthusiastically stated that:

…we have a very supportive leader. He guides us and helps us to be professionals.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

However, teachers of School A expressed their dismay at the kind of leader(s) they had and their administration of staff and school. Exhibit 5.6 elucidates the teachers’ perspectives of their leader(s).
Our school leadership is a problem. This is especially with the H.T, AHT and ETs. They do not work out things or make decisions collectively. Sometimes they do not know what one is saying so the teachers, students and parents get the wrong information. Many a times, there is communication breakdown. The school H.T does not practise what he preaches. He is a dictator. He just imposes duties on teachers without consulting them. The staff is totally excluded from any decision-making. For activities such as Children’s Day, Library week celebrations and Prize-Giving Functions, there is a jumble up of things because of their differing views and this spoils the whole show. The channel of communication is not followed in our school. The H.T mostly uses the typist to convey school business to other teachers, which becomes annoying. Our leaders have neither taken any staff development sessions to enhance learning in class nor has the H.T sent his staff to attend workshops. There is always a fear in him that if teachers are away attending workshops, he will have to supervise their classes. The recruiting criteria of the H.T are disappointing as he enrolls children at a very late stage of the year. These children are either dropouts from other schools or those who have been expelled from other schools due to indiscipline.

Source: Field Notes, 2008

5.4.2.2.2 Teacher Support

There was a genuine concern among the teacher-participants about the lack of support and encouragement they got from other teachers in their school. According to one of the participants, ‘it is not only the moral support that is lacking from colleagues but also there is a lack of academic cohesion between different class levels’ (Field Notes, 2008). She further clarified her statement by stating that:

…teachers of different levels do not understand the academic expectation of the next level. They fail to see the linkage to the next classes.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008).

In saying so, she pointed out that:

…teachers stay in their classes with their own set of ideas for a number of years. They do not want to bring in the new ideas into their teaching and learning process.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008).
5.4.2.2.3 School Culture and Composition of Students

Both schools being multiracial, multicultural conflicts were quite obvious. However, the minority group tolerated silently but this was detrimental to the positive developments in an educational institution. Although cultural conflicts occurred unconsciously, educational progress was hindered as it brought about unhappiness, suspicion and hatred among teachers and students.

In relation to this, one of the participants emphasized that while cultural harmony is desirable in a multiethnic school, it was missing in his school, especially among the teachers. He further stressed that a dynamic and harmonious school culture is highly dependent on the type of leadership the system is exposed to. He specifically stated that ‘at present a lot of dishonest and unwarranted activities such as drinking yagona, smoking, not attending to classes, combining classes to make themselves free and misuse of resources, exist in his school’ (Field Notes, 2008).

According to him, such situations never created a positive school culture and, as such, affected the whole school environment. This, in turn, derailed teachers’ efforts in providing quality education.

5.4.2.2.4 School Infrastructure and Facilities

While the teachers admitted that the basic infrastructure in terms of buildings, classrooms and toilets were in existence, its sizes, conditions and appearance were non-conducive to providing quality education.

Firstly, teachers were disillusioned with the fact that their classrooms could barely cater for the big number of students in their classes. According to one of them, ‘the congested classrooms with students and furniture deterred their efforts to provide quality education’ (Field Notes, 2008). She further stated that:

…students have to sit in a squeezed manner. There is lack of space for group activities and presentations so the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ method of teaching is engaged.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
Hence, it was evident from the responses that buildings and classrooms needed to be more spacious, better ventilated and more secure. One of the teachers said that ‘the heat in the classroom was unbearable at times so teaching and learning was affected’ (Field Notes, 2008).

Secondly, insecure gates, doors and windows led to school break-ins whereby students’ and teachers’ teaching and learning materials were either damaged or stolen. This not only proved costly to them but also demoralized them and made them feel detached from education.

Moreover, teachers of both schools mentioned that their schools had poor sanitation in terms of water supply and toilet facilities. The Head teacher of School B expressed his concern regarding poor water supply. He said that:

…almost every day I have to send a teacher and some boys up the hill to clear the water pipes at the catchment. During dry weather, there is no water in the taps and during rainy weather, the pipes get blocked and dirty water runs down the taps.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

In response to how this affects education, he stated that:

…the effect filters down to children’s education as the teaching learning time is wasted up on the hills repairing pipes and by the time they return, its either late afternoon or children become too tired to concentrate on studies.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

The dirty and poor water supply was also prevalent in School A as it experienced water cuts on school days whereby schools had to be closed and children sent home.

The poor water supply also contributed to filthy and unhygienic toilet conditions. The foul smell from the toilets was unbearable during my visit to School B. The effect of this on children’s education has been highlighted by the Head teacher in Exhibit 5.7.
Apart from this, teachers also faced difficulties in providing quality education as their school did not have:

- a well-resourced library where children could do research and enjoy reading books;
- a science laboratory and essential apparatus and chemicals were unavailable; and
- adequate sporting facilities such as playing gear and equipment.

### 5.4.2.2.5 Co-curricular Activities

According to the teachers, they were not taking co-curricular activities such as scouts, guides, gardening and Red Cross due to lack of:

- initiative and emphasis on co-curricular activities by leaders;
- parents and teacher support; and
- resources and facilities.

In addition to this, one of the participants stated that:

…my interest in scouts is dying and I was really disappointed when my Head teacher did not allow any of his staff to attend the district scout meeting, which was held in my own school.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)
5.4.2.6 Fundraising

There was a grave concern among the teachers, parents and students regarding the increasing number of fundraising activities carried out in schools. Adding to their frustration, the teachers said that these activities were carried out during school hours, engaging students. Exhibit 5.8 shows how fundraising affected quality education.

Exhibit: 5.8 Interview Extract- Fundraising

I: Do you have fundraising in your school?
R: Yes, we have a lot of fundraising activities in our school. At times, we are asked to have ‘bring and buy’ every week.
I: For how long you have been having fundraising in this school?
R: For so many years since I started teaching in this school but I don’t know where the money is going.
I: What is the impact of fundraising on students’ education?
R: It affects students learning badly. Their attention is diverted elsewhere and a lot of quality teaching and learning time is wasted. For example, on days we have ‘bring and buys’, the whole day is wasted. After this, we have to rush and catch up with the lessons.

Source: Field Notes, 2008

5.4.2.3 Community-level Challenges

This section highlights the challenges faced by teachers at community level. These challenges deal with the geographical location of the schools, parents’ and management’s support and their attitude towards education, their living styles and standards and their religious and social obligations towards school and children’s education.
5.4.2.3.1 Geographical Location

As revealed in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4, both schools have different geographical locations. School A has an urban setup while School B is situated in a typical rural community. It has been highlighted by the participants that the location of the schools had some dubious effects on children’s education. The interview extract in Exhibit 5.9 shows how an urban setup distracts students from education.

Exhibit: 5.9 Interview Extract - School Locations (Urban)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I:</th>
<th>How would you describe the location of your school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>It is in an urban area. It is a walking distance from town and major centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>Does the location of the school have any effect on children’s education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>Most students are aware of the impact of urban drift and the temptation over their studies. Many become victims of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>Can you explain further?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>E.g. Truancy, loitering in town, visiting friends without parent’s approval, playing billiards and going to movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:</td>
<td>How does it affect education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>They miss school and even if they are in school, their minds are out in towns or streets, not on studies. They themselves choose to be deprived from quality education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes, 2008

In addition to this, teachers from School B stated that the rural setup of their school was a big disadvantage to the students and teachers. This was so because the houses within the locality and the feeder villages were scattered. Accessibility to schools was a problem. Students had to walk long distances along muddy and slippery paths between cane fields and cross creeks to reach school. At times their uniform, bags and books got wet and dirty. Children often arrived late to school and, as such, missed crucial morning lessons. Likewise, they reached home late in the afternoon feeling exhausted. Teachers further stated that in such circumstances, students’ attendance during adverse weather was affected which, in turn, resulted in children missing school and the lessons.
5.4.2.3.2 Management and Parental Support

Participants of both schools expressed their concern regarding the lack of support from the school management and the parents towards providing quality education. According to the teachers, only a handful of parents were supportive of their children’s education while there were many who left the education of their children totally to the school and the teachers. This has been clearly stated by the Head teacher of School B. He stated that:

…the many parents are aggressive and not supportive of their children’s education and the good things we do in the school. This is due to the personal differences with other people or management or the teachers. At times they make their own decisions at home or have preconceived views of school and teachers. This lowers the morale of teachers, which affects the quality of teachers’ input in the teaching learning process.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

He further stated that:

…the when parents are called to discuss their child’s school performance or any discipline-related problems, they do not turn up to school but they have time to go around in the community asking other children or parents about things happening in the school.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

This negative attitude of parents was a serious issue as some parents were not willing to cooperate. During the field research, it was also noted that parents often said that at home their children could read and write. However, the case was opposite in the school. It was revealed that there were some parents who told their children to inform them or the Head teacher when teachers disciplined them for any misconduct. According to one of the teachers, some parents search for excuses to confront the teachers during Parents’ Day (Field Notes, 2008). She said that such confrontations did not bring any positive change in the child. Instead, the child becomes more resilient towards the teacher and schoolwork.

Another revelation from the research was that there were a number of parents in both communities who failed to provide the basic learning necessities such as textbooks, exercise books, writing stationeries and lunch. A class-based investigation revealed that in nearly all classes, there was an average of 6 students who did not have the required learning
materials. It was also alarming to note that six class 8 students of School A had only one exercise book to do all the written work. Upon inquiring about the reasons for not having an exercise book for each subject, one of the students said that ‘this is what I get from my parents and when I ask for more books, they tell me to borrow from my friends or neighbours’ (Source: Field Notes, 2008). Upon inquiring from the class teacher, he said that:

…their parents seemed not interested in the education of their children as their previous class teachers have also encountered the same problems.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Apart from this, another teacher-participant clearly stated that:

…these are the parents who do not show any sign of concern towards their children’s schoolwork. They just dump their children into the school, whatever happens is the teacher’s responsibility.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008).

In addition to this, there were also concerns raised by the teachers of School A regarding the school management’s lack of concern for quality education. This was revealed by the AHT of one of the schools:

…the management support is pathetic at this point in time. They are negligent towards children’s education. Their priorities lie elsewhere. They have monthly meetings with big plans but no action.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

In response to the question: ‘How much importance does the management place on education?’ one of the teachers replied that:

…I am certain that they have lost focus on quality education. They are moving into business. They want to make money out of school rather than injecting resources into the school to uplift the quality of education provided in the school.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008).

When asked as to what they expected the management to do, the teachers responded that they should:

- know the teachers, show concern about teachers’ grievances regarding quarters and its safety and security;
- provide a safe and well-sanitized buildings and classrooms;
- supply basic teaching resources and aids; and
• acknowledge teacher’s efforts.

5.4.2.3  Living Styles and Standards

This field study has revealed that majority of students in both schools came from families which were below the poverty line. Some were children of farmers, casual labourers, fishermen or wage earners. As such, their living styles and standards were not so good. Many families in both communities were struggling to make ends meet. As a result, education becomes an expensive affair for them. According to one of the participants:

…meeting educational costs like fare, fees, uniforms, fundraising, books and bags and food costs is difficult in these hard times.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

The effect of poor lifestyles and standards was felt in schools as a teacher-participant stated that:

…families below the poverty level fail to meet their social obligations towards their children. They fail to provide children with basic necessities of life causing much discouragement towards education as it affects children’s attendance, morale, initiative and eagerness to learn.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

It was also highlighted by the participants that the poor living standards led to unhygienic living styles. According to one of the teachers, children from poor homes often displayed dirty habits and anti-social behaviour (Field Notes, 2008). She said that these children were often left unattended in regards to personal cleanliness. They usually came to school with long and dirty fingernails, overgrown and undone hair, had nits and lice, sores and dirty outlook. According to her, such students were not only disturbing but also distracted other students and teachers in the classroom which, in turn, spoiled the whole teaching and learning atmosphere.

In addition, many families in the community resided in squatter settlements. This was prevalent in Community A. Therefore, children mixed with all sorts of people. This resulted in extensive peer pressure. While they learnt some good things, there were many who got exposed to unwarranted activities such as smoking, stealing, child abuse, being used as drug trafficking agents and bullying. Such antisocial and disruptive behaviour spilt
into the school system and classrooms. Hence, teachers wasted a lot of time disciplining these students.

5.5 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

It was evident from the responses that there were different sets of challenges faced by students, parents, teachers and schools in providing quality education. Additionally, it was also observed that teachers’ attitudes, attendance, preparedness, commitment and knowledge of subject matter played crucial roles in determining the quality of education delivered to children.

A notable observation was the high level of absenteeism among the teachers. Table 5.5 indicates the number of days teachers of School A were absent from duties.

Table: 5.5  Teacher Absenteeism- School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(No. of Days)</td>
<td>(Till end of Term 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15 (Including 12 days workshop)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>94 (Including 84 days Maternity Leave)</td>
<td>11 (Including 3 days workshop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>89 (Including 84 days Maternity Leave)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Replacements for Teachers 5 and 8 were sent by the MoE after 3 and 4 weeks respectively while no one replaced Teacher 9. During their absence, Teacher 4 and to combine and teach Teacher 5’s class, Teacher 7 combined and taught Teacher 8’s class and Teacher 10 had to teach Teacher 9’s class. Therefore, Teachers 4, 7 and 10 did dual-class teaching. However, when replacements for Teacher 5 and 8 came, it took some time for them to settle down and familiarize themselves with the school environment and students whom they were going to teach. One of the replacement teachers commented during a staff meeting that:

…getting to know the students’ learning abilities, determining ‘what’ and ‘how’ to teach them, gaining trust and earning respect of the students took few weeks.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

It was also noted that teachers of School A were very inconsistent with their arrival and departure times. Some of them arrived as late as 10.30a.m and departed as early as 2p.m. Teachers took advantage of the laxity of the school Heads. They were the ones who set this trend and other teachers followed. This resulted in teachers coming to school unprepared for the new day’s lessons since they hardly stayed behind in the afternoons to prepare for next day’s lessons. Information on hand showed that teachers were inadequately prepared in advance to effectively facilitate the teaching and learning process. This was evident through their late submissions of workbooks and lesson notes. Table 5.6 shows the inefficiency of three selected teachers in submitting their workbooks to A.H.T. for checking in Term 1, 2008.
Table: 5.6  Workbook Submission by Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Required Date for Submission</th>
<th>Date submitted to A.H.T by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21/01/08</td>
<td>4/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24/01/08</td>
<td>4/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>31/01/08</td>
<td>4/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>07/02/08</td>
<td>11/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14/02/08</td>
<td>15/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21/02/08</td>
<td>22/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>28/02/08</td>
<td>29/2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>07/03/08</td>
<td>6/3/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14/03/08</td>
<td>18/3/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>21/03/08</td>
<td>20/3/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>28/03/08</td>
<td>28/3/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>03/04/08</td>
<td>4/4/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>10/04/08</td>
<td>10/4/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>17/04/08</td>
<td>18/4/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Notes, 2008

Communiqué with the A.H.T. and my observation revealed that she checked and initialed the workbooks on the same day they were submitted to her.

There were also sickly and ageing teachers present in the school. There were two teachers in School A who were above 56 years of age in 2008 and the number of leaves they took was alarming (Table 5.5). The most disturbing fact was that their classes were often left unsupervised with very little teaching. These students were normally asked to work on their
own with limited or no guidance at all. The school did not have replacement teachers when teachers went on short leaves.

Additionally, it was also noticed that teachers prioritized their personal commitments first then came students and their education. For instance, a senior teacher in the School A stated that:

…I try to do my family and personal business first before coming to school. Even if I am late, I don’t need to worry because the Head teacher and A.H.T. also do the same.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

Besides this, the same teacher was also on record for taking leaves to attend all funerals and community functions during teaching hours. It was also noted that sometimes the school Heads were also unaware of the teacher’s whereabouts until being informed by students.

Apart from this, during lesson observations, it was evident that teachers lacked the knowledge of subject matter. Exhibit 5.10 highlights the observations made during class visits.

**Exhibit: 5.10 Lesson Observations**

| A class 7 teacher could not explain the name of the virus that causes AIDS. |
| In another class, a Basic Science experiment involving a reaction between hydrochloric acid and coral was not explained in detail. The teacher explained that during the reaction, coral erodes and a colourless gas is given out. Other observations such as the test for the gas, its name and its harmful effects on everyday life and the environment were left unexplained. |

Source: Field Notes, 2008

Moreover, there was no evidence of teacher rotation in School A. There were teachers in the school who had been teaching the same class for more than 10 years. Teachers preferred to remain in the same class for years because they were non-receptive to change and innovations. They used the same teaching and learning strategies and aids, timetables, scheme of work, exam papers and copied from previous year’s workbooks. There were
teachers in the School A who had established their comfort zones and objected to any sort of disturbances.

My personal experience and observations also indicated that there were teachers with negative attitudes towards students, education and the school. Aspects of racism and prejudice towards students of other cultures were also diagnosed from what the teachers uttered and in their actions and mannerisms. The ‘why should I do’ attitude was prevalent in some senior teachers. For example, during a discussion on providing lunch to all students on World Food Day Celebrations, one of the female teachers uttered bluntly ‘Why should I cook and feed others?’ During other discussions on ‘Ratu Sukuna Day’ and ‘Holi’ celebrations, there were comments passed such as ‘let the Fijian teachers organize’ or ‘let the Indian teachers do it’ and even one teacher went on to say ‘why teach other cultures in a Hindu school?’

5.6 WAYS OF ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

While identifying the impediments of quality education, participants also proposed some ways of addressing them. Their responses indicated that there was a need for:

- a committed and concerted co-operation from all stakeholders of education;
- dedicated, enthusiastic and visionary leaders;
- adequate availability of teaching and learning resources;
- regular guidance, advice, counselling and positive reinforcement to students;
- a changed positive attitude towards education from students, parents, teachers and school heads;
- better incentives and continuous human resource developments; and
- an inclusive, culture-oriented and need-based curriculum.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

5.7 SUMMARY

Data collection was encouraging as all the respondents completed and returned the questionnaires. Participants also co-operated well during informal interviews. The findings obtained from questionnaires, informal interviews and general observations were collated,
categorized and presented in three parts. The first part looked at the existing education system and the quality and quantity of educational resources and facilities present in both the schools. The findings portrayed that both schools were inadequately facilitated in regards to infrastructure, sanitation and teaching and learning resources.

The second part of the chapter focused on the importance of providing quality basic education. Responses indicated that respondents had limited knowledge and awareness on the concept of quality education and its significance as outlined in the Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (2000). Their lack of knowledge on quality education affected their roles, responsibilities and obligations towards providing quality education to students. There was very little evidence of creativity and research-based teaching and learning taking place in the classrooms.

The final part of the chapter identified and explained some of the real challenges that people at ground level faced in providing quality basic education. These challenges were prevalent at three different levels namely; classroom level, school level and community level. There were great concerns from all sectors of the community about the quality of education provided in the selected primary schools. The information gathered from the research study showed that the major factors that contributed to poor quality education was the quality of preparation, teaching strategies employed by teachers, their attitudes, unavailability of teaching and learning resources and the lack of monitoring by the school Heads and absenteeism.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, discusses the findings of this study.
CHAPTER SIX

6.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

‘To achieve quality learning, quality teaching must take place.’ (Darling-Hammond, 1998)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examined the challenges faced by different stakeholders in providing quality basic education in two selected primary schools in Fiji. Hence, this chapter discusses the research findings presented in Chapter 5 derived from the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, school managers and personal experiences and observations. This chapter aims to provide a thematic analysis (Brown & Clarke, 2006) of the results as guided by the conceptual framework (Figure 3.7) outlined in Chapter 3.

Discussions are categorized and presented under two major themes:

- Understanding quality education and
- The challenges towards achieving quality education.

In particular, the discussion focuses on various challenges faced by each of the stakeholders at home, school and community level in their quest to provide and achieve quality basic education.

6.2 UNDERSTANDING QUALITY EDUCATION

Delors (1996) emphasized that a greater focus on quality is desirable everywhere, even in countries where all children are enrolled for basic education. However, understanding quality education has been an area of concern all over the world (UNESCO, 2005). As a result, this study has further established that understanding what determines the quality of education is a prerequisite to any individual or institution for making policies and choices that will secure better learning for students.
The research findings indicate that all the participants realized the importance of quality education. It has also been established that quality is the essence of the teaching and learning processes and more importantly, the learners are at the heart of this process. Figure 6.1 takes into account the major stakeholders and factors affecting quality education, which have emerged from the findings. It presents a comprehensive vision, encompassing issues of access and the key actors in the education process.

Figure 6.1 signifies that learners are the core or the nucleus of any education system. They are the ones who should be the greatest beneficiaries of the teaching and learning process. The teachers, who are in constant touch with the students, then facilitate and consolidate the process. They are the ones who play the central role of imparting quality knowledge and skills to the students. They act as change agents while the school Heads act as a link between the school system and the Ministry of Education, parents as well as to the outside community who play supplementary roles. All these stakeholders have enormous roles to play in the delivery of quality education.

**Figure: 6.1 - Quality-Key Actors and Processes**
However, respondents’ understandings of ‘what quality is’ and ‘what it entails’ is much different from what is prescribed in the literature. Research studies (Snyder, et. al., 2004; UNESCO, 2005; 2004; 2003) have given a holistic meaning of ‘quality’ which apart from academic achievements also encompasses values, attitudes, behaviour and skills (Figure 3.1). While some participants acknowledged and possessed some knowledge of this meaning, there were a few who equated ‘quality education’ with the pass rate or success in exams. To these people a 100 percent pass rate in exams indicated that a school provided quality education and had quality teachers. This perception of the teachers, parents and the community, as well as, the pressure from the school Heads and management compelled individual teachers to focus solely on preparing students for exams. In doing so, the teachers overlooked the holistic meaning of ‘quality’, which includes attitudes, behaviour, skills and human values (UNESCO, 2005)

This study also confirms that teachers’ and parents’ limited understandings of the essence of ‘quality’ is due to their lack of knowledge about the EFA goals and the expectations of the Dakar Framework for Action programme formulated in 2000 by the United Nations (Figure 3.1). Initially, it was envisaged that an understanding of EFA concept and its goals would equip teachers better to deliver quality education (UNESCO, 2003). However, this research has revealed that none of the informants had any knowledge of the EFA concept and its expectations (Exhibit 5.2). As a result, ‘quality’ in totality has been misunderstood and efforts towards attaining this have been swayed or diverted.

Therefore, this study establishes that there needs to be a lot more awareness about the concept of quality education so that all the stakeholders realize and fulfil their roles, responsibilities and obligations. Together with the participants’ limited scope of understanding about the concept of quality education lie more strenuous challenges at ground level, which hindered the delivery of quality education in the two selected schools. These challenges are discussed in the following section.

6.3 CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION

Figure 6.1 has revealed the actors involved in the education process. From this, it is clearly established that students, teachers and parents are the major determinants of quality
education. The evidence from the present study supports the findings of UNESCO (2008; 2007) that providing quality education is not plain sailing. As such, these stakeholders encounter numerous challenges in their daily endeavours.

The following sections examine and discuss the challenges prevalent at the two schools selected for the study. It begins by discussing the challenges faced by the teachers and students inside the classroom and then moves on to other challenges outside the classroom.

6.3.1 Pedagogical Challenges

This study supports the assertion of UNESCO (2004) that pedagogical processes lie at the heart of day-to-day learning and, as such, determines the quality of education provided in the schools. At the same time, this study also examines and discusses the underlying challenges impeding the daily teaching and learning process in the selected primary schools (Figure 3.2).

6.3.1.1 The Present Curriculum

This study explored the nature and the contents of the curriculum as one of the determinants of quality education. It demands students to be taught the knowledge and skills encompassed in the curriculum. Therefore, this study establishes that the contents guide the extent, depth and quality of education provided to learners.

Review of relevant literature (Field, 2006; COPE, 2004; Bacchus, 1997) has revealed that many countries around the world, including the Pacific, believe in and tend to inherit curriculum contents from other countries and, hence, have failed to respond to new curriculum imperatives based on local needs and aspirations of learners in their own context. This assertion is in contradiction to the findings of the present study. The findings showed that Fiji’s primary school curriculum had been too exam-oriented till 2007, however, reforms are taking place to make it responsive to the needs of the learners (Ministry of Education, 2007).

It is evident that after the completion of the Fiji Islands Education Commission Report (2000), there has been concerted effort by Ministry of Education to localize the primary
school curriculum. An analysis of the curriculum, prescriptions, student’s texts, teacher’s guides and education gazettes reveal that the curriculum for Classes five to eight has been revised and the contents are responsive to the needs of the learners. However, this reform took more than 5 years. This study further notes that the curriculum for the remaining classes are in the process of being revised through the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) taskforce (MoE Strategic Plan, 2008; NCF, 2007). There is enough evidence in these documents that focuses on developing learners’ skills, knowledge and character, which are the fundamentals of quality education.

This finding supports Bolton (2006) and Field’s (2003) school philosophy statement that a school curriculum should be based on the continuous and holistic development of children as they proceed through different levels in primary school. Therefore, quality education reinforces that the needs of a child should be the focal point of the curriculum and the achievement of a child’s specific goals should become more important as he proceeds through the primary education system as shown in Figure 6.2.

**Figure: 6.2 Curriculum Emphasizing Specific Goals**

![Diagram showing the child as the centre with specific goals from Class 1 to Class 8]

This model suggests that as learners progress through the primary school from Classes 1 to 8, their specific needs have to be identified, reinforced and developed. Therefore, the curriculum should be more need-based and outcome-oriented at all levels of the primary school. This is the vision of the *Education Fiji, 2020* policy document. It emphasizes that Fiji should have a curriculum that promotes quality education and training system which is responsive to the changing needs of the learners as they progress through primary school. *Education Fiji, 2020* also stresses the curriculum should prepare learners for the different
contexts they live in. This significance is also specified in Objective 1 of the MoE Strategic Plan (2008:6).

Figure 6.2 also shows the change in emphasis of what a responsive curriculum prescribes, which, in turn, fosters quality education. While participants, especially the teachers, acknowledged and appreciated the above curriculum reforms and agreed that it is aimed at promoting quality education there were still certain areas of concern, which were obstacles to providing quality education.

The COPE (2004) report highlighted that the Pacific curriculum is over-loaded and exam-oriented. While the findings of this study support that the curriculum is over-loaded, it does not support the claim that it is exam-oriented. This study establishes that it is the expectations of parents, students and the community that has compelled teachers to take the exam-oriented approach towards delivering the contents of the curriculum.

However, Section 5.2.1 in Chapter 5 provides enough evidence to support COPE (2006) findings presented in Section 3.8.1 in Chapter 3 that the present curriculum is too over-loaded and congested with facts and knowledge. It was noted that there was a trend by curriculum developers to keep on adding new ideas, theories and innovations to the existing curriculum without a corresponding will to remove those found to be obsolete or out-dated.

The recent inclusion of Literacy, Numeracy, Conversational Hindi and Fijian Language programme is a notable example of promoting quality education. It enhances students’ communication and mathematical skills and knowledge. It prepares children to live harmoniously in Fiji’s multi cultural society (NCF, 2007). However, while designing and implementing these programmes, the curriculum developers have failed to remove any portion of the existing Vernacular, English and Mathematics.

As such, this research has examined the consequences of the curriculum being overcrowded and, thus has explored that:
teachers face huge time constraints to effectively and efficiently impart the required knowledge and necessary skills to the students within the given time frame. Therefore, the quality of education delivery is compromised;

• there is a high level of boredom, exhaustion and misunderstanding among students as to which of the skills or knowledge is of greater importance or relevance to them; and

• character building and teaching life skills are totally ignored.

The findings presented in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.4.1.2 in Chapter 5 illustrates the above consequences.

### 6.3.1.2 Teaching and Learning Strategies

While the MoE policy documents, example, Strategic Plan (2008); NCF (2007) and Suva Declaration (2005) calls for culturally democratic, harmonious and co-operative teaching and learning strategies to be used by teachers, this study has revealed that the teaching methods employed by teachers do not cater for all learners in the classrooms. As such this study supports the concern by Thaman (2006) and Puamau and Teasdale (2005) that the mode of knowledge transmission in Pacific schools is still traditional and culturally undemocratic. The findings of the study showed that teachers mostly used the rote learning strategies in their classrooms as highlighted in Section 5.4.1.2. They either lectured in the classroom or instructed students to copy notes from the textbooks or blackboard. Students pointed out that such teaching methods were unappealing and uninteresting ways of introducing and presenting lessons.

This study has also revealed that such teaching and learning styles failed to capture students’ interest. The reason for this was that the whole teaching and learning process in the classrooms lacked constructivism and discovery-based approach, which UNESCO (2008) and Lingam (2007) claim to be the ingredients to bring about quality learning outcomes.

As a result, the whole essence of teaching and learning process was destroyed since children’s specific learning needs and their rate of learning were not taken into
consideration. Therefore, this study establishes that the traditional teaching and learning method impedes quality education by limiting students’ thinking and reasoning abilities, restricting creativity and compelling them to become dependent and passive learners.

6.3.1.3 Language of Instruction

The present study supports the earlier findings of Fredriksson (2004) and Ketele (2004) that language of instruction used in schools plays a key role in attaining quality education. However, there is evidence to say that language problems still exist in the two selected schools and is cited as one of the impediments of quality education.

This study revealed that the medium of instruction and communication in Fiji schools is English, which is a foreign language. Student participants raised their concern that they encountered difficulties in understanding certain concepts in Mathematics and Science subjects. They indicated that English as a medium of instruction makes it difficult for them to cope with their academic work and would prefer explanations in Vernacular for better understanding and learning (Section 5.4.1.2).

However, the findings reveal that there were teachers present in these two schools who did not know the language of the other culture (Section 5.4.2.1.1). This not only affected their teaching but also their normal day-to-day communication with children of other races. Additionally, the level of English used by the teachers for explanations was at times beyond the comprehension of the students. This further aggravated their learning difficulty. Hence, this study has found that language policy and its usage is a challenge to providing quality education.

6.3.1.4 Workload and Expectations

While the literature studied failed to highlight the impact of workload and expectations on quality education, this research study has unveiled that huge workload of students and high expectations of teachers, parents and the school managements hinder the achievement of quality education in primary schools.
It is evident from the finding that in the classrooms, teaching and learning is totally exam-focused. Even though nowhere in the curriculum is it stated that teachers should prepare children for exams only, the expectations of teachers, parents and the community is entirely on high pass rates in internal and external exams. Class observations showed that teachers were so engrossed in preparing students for exams that they lost focus on the holistic development of children.

The results portray that there was always a rush among external-exam class teachers, especially among class 6 and 8 teachers, to cover the syllabus in order to have ample time left before the exams to teach past exam papers. In this rush, teachers overloaded students with work to be done in school and at home. One of the student participants stated that:

…teachers usually asked them to complete pages and pages of notes or complete at least three past year exam papers per night at home.

(Source: Field notes, 2008)

In addition to the stress this huge amount of work caused, this study indicated that quality effort was not put in by students (Section 5.4.1.2). Merely, they saw the work as a task to be completed rather than a skill or knowledge to be mastered. Therefore, without quality effort, there was no quality learning.

This research also highlights that in the hurried pace of teaching, the slow learners were left behind struggling on their own. They were deprived of individual attention since their weaknesses were left unidentified. The consequence of ignoring their learning needs and interests was that they continued to lag behind in studies till they totally gave up and felt detached from school. This resulted in increased absenteeism, truancy and hatred for school. Hence, if children stayed away from school, they lost greatly on education. Even for the brighter students, their interpersonal, attitudinal, social and moral skills still remained untapped because of the lost focus on quality holistic education by teachers and parents. These students normally became passive learners since little or no opportunity was provided to them to discover and learn for themselves.
6.3.1.5 Class Size

The review of literature has revealed mixed findings about the impact of class size on quality education. UNESCO (2007) indicates that class size is a variable to quality education while Gilbert (1995) has found that it is not the class size that matters but what goes on in the classrooms matters the most. However, this study supports the findings of UNESCO (2007) and has established that in the case study schools the class size influenced the teaching and learning process.

Table 5.1 shows that School B has a small population with smaller class size as compared to School A. The findings have shown that teachers of School B were more comfortable with their teaching. They were able to utilize a variety of teaching and learning strategies and were able to pay individual attention to students’ learning needs. In other words, teachers who had smaller classes to teach were able to spend quality time with their students.

However, in School A (Table 5.1), the class size was big with a higher student-teacher ratio. The findings presented in Sections 5.4.1.2 and 5.4.2.2.4 in Chapter 5 indicate that big class size proved to be an obstacle towards providing quality education. It has been established that big class sizes restrict movements of teachers and students in the class due to lack of space. Therefore, the teaching and learning becomes teacher-centred as group work becomes difficult to administer and monitor. It was evident from the field study that teachers did most of their teaching from the blackboard or from their table. As such, children were deprived of learning on their own through discussions and discovery.

Additionally, due to the given time frame for different subjects, teachers were unable to provide individual or group assistance to slow learners. Findings from this study indicated that these learners were often left behind struggling on their own. Providing individual attention consumed a lot of teaching time in a big class and if teachers tried to do so, they often fell back in their coverage. This research also revealed that teachers gave priority to covering syllabus rather than focusing on the quality and quantity of learning taking place in the classrooms.
There was very little evidence of ‘assessment for’ and ‘assessment of’ learning taking place. Therefore, specific learning needs of individual students were neither identified nor addressed. This was mainly due to the over-loaded curriculum and the expectations of school Heads, parents and the community. There was also a fear among teachers that if the syllabus was not covered, they would be questioned by their superiors. Hence, due to the fear of time loss, teachers avoided providing individual attention to students in huge classes.

Moreover, marking of children’s exercise books and continuous monitoring of children’s work becomes a difficult task in big classes. This was particularly evident in School A, especially in classes 7 and 8, which had more than 40 students each. Children’s exercise books were left unmarked and these were the students whose work was either incomplete or not done at all. There was very little, if any, indication of consistency and continuity in books being checked by teachers. However, this research has also diagnosed that weaker students always evaded handing in their books for inspection and teachers often forgot or overlooked these evaders while marking the pile of books (Section 5.4.2.1.1). As a result, these students took full advantage of the stressful situation of their teachers, hence leaving their work incomplete and unchecked.

Therefore, this research establishes that big class sizes stifle teachers’ efforts to continuously check students’ work (Section 5.4.2) and this hinders quality education as:

- teachers were unable to assess the effectiveness of their own teaching and find out what the students had grasped and what they found difficult;
- teachers were unable to provide a feedback to individual students on areas of difficulties that needed more attention;
- remedial measures were ineffectively designed and taken; and
- huge class size led to poor class control, indiscipline and behaviour problems. Controlling the class and disciplining students took up a lot of quality teaching and learning time.
6.3.1.6  Teaching and Learning Resources and Facilities

This study supports the findings of UNESCO (2006; 2005) and Bruns, et. al. (2003) that schools constrained with teaching and learning resources faced a mammoth task of delivering quality education. It is evident from this research (Section 5.4.2.1.2) that both the schools lacked basic resources such as:

- vanguard sheets, brown paper and newsprints for making charts and using for group work;
- teacher’s texts, handbooks and prescriptions;
- chemicals and apparatus for science experiments;
- blackboard compass, protractor and Diene’s blocks for mathematics lessons and
- library books and research materials to do research work.

While research is scarce on how teachers should use these resources in classrooms, such materials make a marked difference to the quality of teaching and learning (Field Notes, 2008). For example, subject prescriptions are recommended teaching tools to achieve desired goals. The teaching and learning strategies, course contents, processes, attitudes and values, concepts, skills and modes of assessment are all explicitly outlined in the prescription.

Most importantly, the aims and objectives give direction to the quality and quantity of teaching and learning to take place, a decision necessary before taking the first step on an educational journey. Likewise, teacher’s guides also provide strategies for teaching and time allocation for different topics. Therefore, these are tools that can guide both experienced and inexperienced teachers to plan, implement and evaluate the teaching and learning process and at the same time ensure that quality education is delivered to the learners.

Likewise, due to lack of science equipment and chemicals, teachers were unable to conduct experiments, the practical part of the lesson. They resorted to explanations, which were full of abstract knowledge. This led to children being deprived of ‘hands-on’ activities and there were instances when they copied notes without any understanding.
This study also highlights that research is an integral part of quality education. However, to carry out researches, a well-equipped library with reference books, encyclopedias, journals, magazines, computers and internet services should be available for both teachers and students. Unfortunately, none of these materials were available in both the schools.

Moreover, it was also evident from this research that not only teachers but students also lacked basic teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, exercise books and writing materials (Section 5.4.1.1). As such, these students did not do their homework and their work always remained incomplete.

Since these resources are essential requirements of teaching and learning process, it becomes hard to imagine how quality education can be provided without them. There is also evidence from this research that even the teachers lacked initiatives to improvise or borrow these resources (Exhibit 5.5).

### 6.3.2 Institutional Challenges

#### 6.3.2.1 Geographical Location and Climate

This study supports the findings of Birdsall (2006), Cohn, et al (2006) and Mehrotra (1998) that geographical location of the school and climatic conditions affect the level and quality of education delivered to children. Table 4.1 indicates the different locations of the selected schools. It is established that both urban and rural set-up had their own set of problems, which had direct impact on children’s education.

School A is located in an urban area, near to a major town. Exhibit 5.9 highlights the impact of urban drift and the temptation to neglect one’s education. The social atmosphere of towns and cities becomes so attractive to children that they start playing truancy. They choose to loiter in towns with friends, visit friends without anyone’s approval, go to movies or even end up in billiard shops. On many occasions, these children were caught by police who either escorted them to school or informed the Head teacher.

These unwarranted activities were one of the causes of increased absenteeism as highlighted in Table 5.4, increased discipline problems and huge wastage of time in dealing
with such students. It was also noted that in School A, there were some habitual class evaders. Even if these children were in school, it would be only their physical presence.

School B is in a rural area and according to the participants, due to the rural set-up they too faced many difficulties in providing quality education. This research (Section 5.4.2.3.1) has revealed that houses are scattered in villages and children have to travel long distances along muddy tracks between sugar-cane farms and bushes. They also have to cross creeks and rivers while coming to school. There were also instances when children reached school in wet and dirty uniforms. This caused a lot of discomfort to them and they remained psychologically disturbed throughout the day, which immensely affected their education.

In addition to this, the long distances took up a lot of travelling time. Children often arrived late to school feeling exhausted and hungry as well. They often missed the crucial morning lessons and teachers hardly went back to re-teach these lessons. They were also subjected to ridicule and embarrassment by teachers and other students. Likewise, children also reached home late in the afternoons. After doing some household chores, they were again too tired to complete their homework or concentrate on revision.

Children not only arrived late to school but also remained absent during adverse weather conditions as the creeks and rivers got flooded and tracks became too dangerous to use. All these proved great obstacles to quality education as children felt detached from studies.

6.3.2.2 School Buildings and Classrooms

It is evident from this study that both the schools had basic infrastructure in terms of school buildings, classrooms and toilet blocks (Table 5.2). However, it was revealed that the size and condition of the classrooms was non-conducive to quality learning. Particularly, in School A, the sizes of the classrooms were too small to cater for huge class sizes. It was found that the classrooms were so congested with furniture and students that students had to sit in squeezed manner. The lack of space in the classrooms restricted children’s movements and discussions for group-based activities.
In addition to this, in over-crowded classrooms, the heat was sometimes unbearable, which affected the teaching and learning process because students became restless and teachers became uncomfortable (Section 5.4.2.2.4). Apart from this, when children re-entered the classroom after recess and lunch breaks, the whole classroom atmosphere changed. The unbearable smell of sweat in an over-crowded classroom made the whole teaching and learning process an awful experience. They wished for the day to end quickly in order to be out of the classrooms. In such an atmosphere, they lost concentration on the classroom teaching and learning.

There was also evidence of insecure gates, doors and windows in both schools. This led to break-ins and thefts. Incidents were reported whereby teachers’ and students’ teaching and learning materials were damaged and stolen (Section 5.3.2.2.4). This instilled fear in students and they tended to evade school. Such incidents also proved costly as the lost materials needed to be replaced and if they failed to do this, their education was affected. As such, students usually felt demoralized and detached from education.

Therefore, the findings discussed above support UNESCO (2008) and Lingam’s (2006) assertion that quality learning is hampered when students attend overcrowded and unsafe schools.

6.3.2.3 School Sanitation

This study supports the findings of Ministry of Education (2007) and COPE (2006) that in order to accomplish quality education, a clean, safe, healthy and conducive learning environment is essential. These reports have highlighted the dreadful state of school facilities in both rural and urban areas.

While School A only experienced occasional water disruptions, School B was poorly sanitized in regards to water supply and deplorable toilet conditions (Exhibit 5.7). The water cuts in School A resulted in school closures and students being sent home. This was frustrating to teachers as they missed lesson coverage so they tried to rush to cover the lessons. To students, they missed out on normal lessons and even though teachers rushed to cover these lessons, quality learning was hard to attain.
In School B, learning was seriously affected due to poor water supply and toilet facilities. The Head teacher of School B indicated that:

...everyday I have to send a teacher and some boys up the hill to clear water pipes at the catchment or to lower the pipes in the pond to allow water to flow into the school tank.

(Source: Field Notes, 2008)

This had serious implications on teaching and learning since a lot of useful time was spent on hills repairing pipes and by the time they returned to school, it was either too late or too tiring to concentrate on classroom work. It was also evident that while a teacher was out repairing pipes, the remaining students were left on their own. Although class supervision was done, it was minimal and there was no teaching and learning taking place (Section 5.4.2.2.4).

Literature (UNESCO, 2008; UNESCO, 2003; UNICEF, 2004) has revealed that in African countries half of the female dropouts in primary school were due to lack of separate latrines and washrooms for girls. It is stark reality of their education system. Although this study showed that there were separate toilets and washrooms for males and females, the conditions were very bad, especially in School B. They were filthy and unhygienic. This was mainly caused by poor water supply as exhibited in Exhibit 5.7.

Firstly, the foul smell was too unbearable for students to concentrate on their lessons. During field study, students were seen covering their noses with handkerchiefs while working in their classrooms. Secondly, the field study showed that students could not run around with bottles of water to clean themselves after visiting toilets. Such situations did have an impact on learning. This study showed that when a child had stomach-ache and needed to visit the toilet to relieve him/herself, he/she tried to suppress the nature’s call as he/she found it uncomfortable and embarrassing to run around with bottles of water and clothes in his/her hands. As such, with a painful stomach, that particular child was never able to concentrate on his studies no matter how hard he tried.
6.3.3 Human Resource Challenges

Research literature (COPE, 2006; Lingam, 2006) has demonstrated that the high staff turnover at Ministry level hampers the work relating to quality education. However, these personnel are not in direct contact with students. Their interaction with individual students is almost at zero level. Therefore, this study has indicated that the human resource challenges prevalent in the two selected schools mostly relates to the quality and the number of teachers, the school leadership and school management.

6.3.3.1 Teachers

There is extensive literature about the roles, responsibilities and importance of teachers in the education system. There is a widespread belief that quality teachers are needed for quality education (Bruns, et.al, 2003) and this study does not dispute this finding.

However, this study shows that teachers in the selected schools had full professional and academic freedom regarding the choice and selection of teaching and learning strategies as demanded by Snyder, et.al (2004) and UNESCO (1996), they lacked initiative to be innovative and creative in disseminating quality knowledge and skills to children.

While this study revealed that there was a teacher shortage in School A leading to big class sizes, it was also established that teacher commitment and preparedness, their attitudes towards the profession, attendance and punctuality, knowledge of subject matter and the level of professional development were key factors which determined the quality of education delivered to children. The impact of each of these is discussed below.

6.3.3.1.1 Knowledge of Subject Matter

The research findings presented in Section 5.5 in Chapter 5 indicate that two teachers observed and studied had only superficial knowledge of the subject matter and neither did they prepare themselves in advance for the lessons. Exhibit 5.10 provides further evidence to suggest that teachers were unprepared for the lessons and lacked the required knowledge and skills to provide quality education. The level of explanation provided by teachers during and after the lessons was vague and incomplete. Exhibit 5.10 also indicates that
teachers failed to refer to Teacher’s Guides where all the relevant explanations are given in detail. Their lack of thorough subject knowledge leaves students with only partial knowledge. As a result, whatever had to be taught remained incomplete and this deprived children of quality education.

6.3.3.1.2 Teacher Commitment

Thaman (2006) emphasized the essentiality of teacher commitment in achieving quality basic education. However, this study revealed that teachers in the selected schools lacked commitment towards their work.

Firstly, this was evident in the teaching strategies they used. During the field study, it was seen that rote learning superseded the constructivist approach to teaching and learning. While literature (UNESCO, 2005) indicates that a lesson or lessons should have balanced sets of aims, developing cognitive, creative and social skills, this was lacking in the lessons observed. The lessons lacked relevant aims and objectives describing what learners should have learnt by the end of the lesson.

The findings also indicate that teachers failed to integrate and promote value-based education. There was no inclusion of values, both global: respect for human rights, the environment, peace and tolerance, and more locally defined values such as cultural diversity in their daily lessons.

This omission shows the teachers’ lack of commitment towards retaining subject balance in promoting basic literacy and arithmetic skills, as well as, global and local values associated with citizenship, democracy, human rights education and culture. All these form the fundamentals of quality education as it builds knowledge, skills and character.

Secondly, this study also shows the presence of non-readers in each class (Exhibit 5.4). It was alarming to find that non-readers still existed at classes 7 and 8 levels when they were on the verge of completing primary education and transiting into secondary schools. Research literature (UNESCO, 2006; 2005) has emphasized that central to the core curriculum is the teaching and learning of reading as it is a critical tool for the mastery of
skills and knowledge from other subjects. It also emphasizes that reading must be considered a priority area in efforts to improve the quality of basic education, particularly for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, this study reinforces that it is essential to teach reading skills to students and supports that it is one of the best predictors of longer term quality learning achievement.

However, this study showed that neither the class teachers nor the school Heads were committed to identifying the non-readers at lower levels and teaching them reading skills. There were no commitments to instil reading skills and lessen the number of non-readers reaching upper-primary.

In addition, teachers’ lack of commitment towards providing quality education was also seen in their inappropriate use of instruction time. This was evident as teachers prioritized their personal affairs, arrived late in classrooms, took longer recess and lunch breaks, and departed earlier than mandated.

Teachers also took full advantage of the leniency of the school Heads and often went to the shops, banks and to pay bills in town during lesson hours. During their absence from the class, children were left unsupervised. By doing this, teachers wasted children’s valuable learning time, hence, depriving them of quality education.

Moreover, the findings presented in Table 5.6 in Chapter 5 are also an indication of teachers’ lack of commitment and advanced preparation of their lessons. The table indicates that only one of the teachers submitted his workbook on time while the other two did not. On occasions there were delays of up to a month. Such delays showed that there was a lack of prior planning regarding which lessons were to be taught on different days and at different times.

In primary schools, workbooks have to be prepared a week in advance. This enables the teacher to update him/herself with the required knowledge of subject matter, to decide on the best teaching and learning strategy to be used, prepare teaching and learning aids and collect the required teaching and learning materials to familiarize him/herself with the
concepts and skills to be mastered by learners and design exercises for evaluation purposes. However, Table 5.6 provides evidence of poor preparation and planning. This resulted in poor quality input and lack-lustre performance from teachers causing enough boredom and confusion among students to demean their enthusiasm to attain quality education.

6.3.3.1.3 Teacher Attitudes

Literature (Field, 2006) highlighted that teacher morale in the Pacific was low due to low pay, less recognition, lack of resources and guidance from superiors. However, this study has found that low teacher morale resulted from the negative attitudes of teachers towards students, school and the profession. The ‘why should I do’ attitude was prevalent in senior teachers in School A. This bred racism and prejudice towards students of other ethnicities and this directly influenced ‘what’ and ‘how’ they taught in and out of the classrooms.

For example, the unwillingness of teachers to organize and observe cultural activities in the school indicated their lack of concern to impart knowledge and empower children about the significance of cultural values and beliefs (Section 5.5). The importance of observing and educating children about their own as well as other’s culture is that it instils morals, respect and discipline. These are essentials of character building and civic education, which are ingredients of quality education.

Additionally, this study also revealed that teachers usually neglected slow learners in the class. They even tagged these students as ‘good for nothing’ or ‘nil by brain’ (Section 5.4.1.2). While literature (Bruns, et. al., 2003) suggests that the most important feature in the school experience of any child, but particularly in that of the slow-learning child, is the attitude of the teacher, this study indicates that teachers were normally suppressive rather than supportive of their learning abilities.

It was evident from the study that they usually set the slow-learning children aside to mature on their own excluding them from structured learning situations and enriching experiences. Such insensitive attitudes lowered children’s self-esteem and they felt that they would never make progress in academic life. They felt completely disempowered and detached from learning.
6.3.3.1.4  Teacher Attendance

This study indicated that teacher absenteeism was rife in one of the selected schools. Table 5.5 shows the number of days teachers were absent from duties. While literature (Field, 2006; Pongi, 2006) suggest that teachers are usually absent due to low pay, poor educational resources or for personal reasons, this study establishes that the major cause for the increased absenteeism was ageing and sickly teachers (Section 5.5). The direct impact of teacher absenteeism on quality education is quite substantial.

Firstly, for teachers taking maternity and in-patient leaves, there were late substitute teachers. This caused disruption to the regular flow of classroom events. It was revealed that students found difficulty forming meaningful relationships with replacement teachers (Section 5.5). Even though these teachers tried putting in their best efforts, they were not able to implement long-term instructional strategies of a regular teacher to whom the students had already been accustomed. It was also obvious that the substitute teacher’s lack of detailed knowledge of students’ skill levels makes it difficult to provide differentiated instruction that addresses the needs of individual students.

Secondly, the instructional intensity is radically reduced when a class teacher takes short or long-term leaves. For example, in School A, when the class teacher was away for one or two days, usually another class teacher was asked to supervise the class. Due to the big class sizes, it was impossible to combine two classes and accommodate them into one room. Therefore, the supervising teacher usually lost the instructional focus and concentrated on controlling the discipline and ensuring that there were no accidents in the other class. In reality, no teaching and learning took place during a teacher’s absence.

Finally, teacher absences from school had a negative impact on quality education by inhibiting attempts by school Heads to implement consistent teaching and learning practices across classrooms and grades, and to collaborate on improving the quality of education. This was evident as the supervising or replacement teachers took time to know different students, classroom environment and the expectations of individuals and the whole school.
6.3.3.1.5 Professional Development

Literature (Darling-Hammond, 1998) suggests that professional development is a valuable tool in improving teacher competency and quality and can have an impact on children’s education. Haycock (1998) and Wenglinsky (2000) discovered that quality of education is improved when taught by a teacher who had continuous professional development sessions.

Regarding the professional development of teachers, this study has discovered some stark realities. The first reality was the school Headteacher’s failure to empower his own teachers through school-based staff development sessions (Exhibit 5.1 and 5.2). Staff meetings were only conducted at the beginning of each school term, whereby teachers were only briefed on their duties and exam dates. The second reality was the failure of school Heads to initiate and encourage other teachers to conduct any professional development sessions. The third reality was the failure of school Heads to send their teachers to attend seminars or workshops organized by Ministry of Education. Circulars did reach the school but were kept in the office.

Many times teachers did come to know about these organized workshops through colleagues from other schools but then it was too late. Finally, teachers were not motivated and, thus, lacked initiative to professionally develop themselves at their own expense by taking up courses from University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji National University (FNU) or from the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji (TPAF).

In addition, there was no evidence of class rotation or teacher rotation. It was discovered that three teachers in School A had been teaching the same class for 12 years. The Heads failed to realize that teacher rotation was one of the best forms of helping teachers to develop professionally. By changing classes, teachers become aware of the curriculum expectations of different levels and, thus, can adapt to curriculum reforms enhancing improved education. However, this study supports Bayard’s (2003) assertion that by having stagnant teachers, there is always a risk that they will be stuck to old tricks, repeating the same kind of instruction every year.
While the purpose of professional development is to empower ‘self’ and ‘others’ on teaching and learning methodologies, pedagogy, practice and curriculum areas so as to address the ever changing needs of the learners, this study revealed that teachers failed in their quest to professionally upgrade themselves. Therefore, lack of professional development hinders the provision of quality education. It restricts teachers’ abilities to examine teaching from the perspective of learners who bring diverse experiences and frames of reference to the classroom.

### 6.3.3.2 School Leadership

Birdsall, et. al (1990) view leadership as a combination of special traits or characteristics that individuals possess and that enable them to induce others to accomplish tasks. This research showed that Head teachers and AHTs of School A were neither very effective leaders nor appropriate role models for other teachers and students (Exhibit 5.6).

From the research study, it was evident that HT and AHT have different leadership styles. The leadership style practised in School A was bureaucratic. This is a top-down model, rooted on the notions of classical bureaucracy. This style was evident during staff meetings and while communicating official business. This style adopted one way communication whereby teachers played a reactive role of implementing the decisions made by the Head teachers. However, the Head teacher of School B practised democratic leadership style and paid attention to teachers’ concerns regarding students’ education. This motivated the teachers to do well in their classrooms.

Besides this, there was no documentary evidence to show that curriculum implementation in the classes was closely monitored. The records kept in School A were minimal, official records were incomplete, information displayed on organization boards was outdated and there was no evidence of any research on important aspects affecting students’ and teachers’ teaching and learning process.

In addition to this, the schools did not have any system in place to ensure that teachers were actually undertaking their teaching responsibilities faithfully. There was no means to gauge whether the children were actually making progress in developing their knowledge, skills
and character. Any monitoring and assessment undertaken was for the purpose of compiling official reports. It was not intended to gauge student learning.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this study goes on to show that school leaders were not giving adequate professional guidance to new and inexperienced teachers who were on the staff (Section 5.4.2.2.2). This was evident in School A. Teachers were often left on their own to get teaching and learning resources, seek materials like prescriptions, teacher’s guides and science apparatus and chemicals from nearby schools. Hence, the issue of quality learning was not given much emphasis (Exhibit 5.5).

Such attitudes and characteristics of school leaders became demotivational factors to teachers and students.

6.3.4 Financial and Economic Challenges

This study supports the findings of UNESCO (2008), Pongi (2006) and Taufe’ulungaki and Johannson (2005) that lack of finance and unstable economic activities deny children access to quality education. There is evidence to support that education is an expensive affair for parents of the case study schools (Sections 5.4.1.1 and 5.4.2.3.3). These sections highlight that most of the parents in the selected community live below the poverty line and they struggle to cope with:

- travelling costs;
- food costs;
- uniform costs;
- school fees;
- costs for learning materials; and
- fundraising activities.

These costs have huge impact on children’s education and many times the access and quality of education are compromised (Narsey, 2009). The effects of each of the costs are discussed below.
6.3.4.1 Travelling Costs

Travelling costs such as bus, taxi and van fares mostly affected students of School A. The study showed that students travelled long distances to school. Due to the poor financial status of parents, providing daily fares for all siblings in a family was almost impossible. Therefore, there were choices made about who will travel by bus, who will walk to school and, most disastrously, who will stay back at home. It is evident from this study that poor financial situations forced parents to take these actions.

As a result, children’s punctuality and attendance to school were seriously affected. It was obvious from observations, interview and questionnaire responses that children who walked to school usually arrived late, sweating and exhausted. They missed the morning lessons and were left with no choice but to catch up in their own time. The exhaustion deviated their minds from studies, demotivated them to participate in classroom and outdoor activities and often left them more worried as they again had to walk back home in the afternoons.

Children who stayed at home due to the unavailability of fares totally missed the day’s education. When they returned to school they felt disillusioned and depressed as they had already missed the previous day’s lessons and to catch up on the coverage becomes a nightmare for these students.

6.3.4.2 Food Costs

This study showed that the present economic situation makes it difficult for the parents to provide well-balanced, healthy and nutritious meals for their family every day (Section 5.4.1.1). An average of 4 students in every class either did not have a good breakfast before coming to school or did not bring lunches to school. This was mostly common among the indigenous children. They revealed that their parents could not afford to provide for all their meals. Children who did not have breakfast before coming to school often felt dizzy, sick and weak in school. They found it hard to concentrate on lessons in the classroom, were unco-operative during class discussions and hesitated to participate in outdoor activities as they felt weak and sick.
Although, during lunch, children were asked to share their lunch with the unfortunate ones, children without food felt embarrassed to eat other’s food. This study also showed that students who normally gave their food to the unfortunate ones often demanded favours in return, such as doing their homework, classroom duties, toilet duties or they bullied and abused the receiving children (Section 5.4.1.1). Such situations existed in both the case study schools. It was obvious from observations that the poorer children were compelled to indulge in wrong-doings by the more well-off students and when caught by teachers, they were subjected to punishment. This lowered their morale and self-esteem towards school and education.

It was also evident from this study that due to increasing food costs and the parents’ inability to provide meals, children often resorted to absenteeism. Parents also became helpless and they asked their children to stay home. As a result, children were deprived of basic education.

6.3.4.3 Uniform Costs

Although the review of literature (Field, 2006; Boyle, et. al, 2002) does not show any direct relationship between uniform costs and quality education, this study has revealed that children not coming to school in uniform were often ridiculed by fellow students, scolded or reprimanded by the school Heads and the teachers. Their argument was that it is a school rule for children to come in school uniform and all students should abide by this rule.

However, they failed to realize that uniforms are not a requirement for quality learning to take place. This attitude of teachers and children often detached the poor children from school and education. Even if children were in school, continually subjecting them to embarrassment demoralized and demeaned their efforts to achieve quality education. Consequently, there is increased absenteeism and truancy which were obstacles to providing quality education.

6.3.4.4 School Fees

This study supports the findings UNESCO (2008) and Boyle, et. al (2002) that school fees can be very expensive, especially for the poor households. It is cited as one of the
deterrents to access to quality basic education in Fiji (Lingam, 2009). This study showed that both the schools levied school fees not per household but on the number of children attending schools. It was thirty five dollars per child. Therefore, each child attending school from a household was levied thirty five dollars. It was found that from each household about two to four children attended school so paying thirty five dollars for each child became too expensive for parents.

Non-payment of school fees had direct impact on children’s education. During this study, it was observed that children who failed to pay school fees were called out in assemblies and letters sent to their parents with specific deadlines. Calling out names in front of the whole school caused disgrace and put students in embarrassing situations.

In cases where parents failed to pay the school fees by the given deadlines, their children were sent back home and asked to get their parents to school. In this situation, where parents did not have the money to pay the fees, the children were asked to stay home until money was borrowed from neighbours or from community members. As a result, children missed school and on quality education.

6.3.4.5 Cost of Learning Materials

This study showed that providing all the required learning materials to children is very expensive and parents found it hard to buy all materials as demanded by class teachers. Sections 5.4.1.1 and 5.4.2.3.3 highlight the consequences of poverty on education. It unveils that poverty led to unaffordability of basic learning materials. It was evident that children’s learning was seriously affected when they did not have the required textbooks, exercise books and other stationeries.

Without learning materials, students could not complete their homework and were deprived of book-based examples, diagrams, explanations, notes and references. As such, they only relied on what their teachers taught them or what they could see from their classmates’ books. A deeper understanding, which they would have acquired by referring to textbooks, reading notes, studying diagrams and doing exercises, was impossible to attain.
6.3.4.6 **Fundraising**

The level of fundraising activities carried out in both the case study schools was disastrous towards achieving quality education. Exhibit 5.8 in Chapter 5 illustrates the effect of fundraising on children’s education. It was highlighted that fundraising activities were usually carried out during school hours. It wasted a lot of quality teaching and learning time as children were fully engaged on the days they had their ‘bring and buys’. Their attention got diverted from studies. Their mood changed and the whole classroom atmosphere became non-conducive to learning.

Apart from this, children who were unable to get things from home to sell and raise money, stayed absent for a few days, at least a day before and a day after the fundraising day to avoid questions from teachers. By being absent for so many days, they miss out on whatever little teaching and learning was done.

6.3.5 **Social Challenges**

This study supports the findings of Lewin (2006), Ketele (2004) and Bruns, et. al (2003) that in countries, especially least developed countries, there are many social challenges that impede the access, provision and attainment of quality basic education. Some of the social challenges evident from this study are:

- student attendance;
- relationship between teachers and heads;
- corporal punishments;
- favouritism;
- disturbances by other teachers and classes;
- parental and family support;
- family size, living styles and standards.

This research showed that these challenges caused organizational weaknesses, limiting access to quality basic education. The impact of each of the above challenges on quality education is discussed below.
6.3.5.1 Student Attendance

Table 5.4 in Chapter 5 illustrates students’ attendance for School A. From this table, it is evident that the school experienced poor student attendance. The reasons for increased absenteeism are well articulated Section 5.4.2.1 in Chapter 5. However, it is worth reiterating that students stayed away from school because of:

- incomplete homework;
- lack of interest towards studies;
- fear of teachers and other students;
- lack of fare, lunch, learning materials or uniforms; and
- parental conflicts and other home circumstances.

Hence, it is also evident that significant factors related to absenteeism were the relationships they had with teachers and peers, unavailability of basic school materials and students’ own attitudes.

Consequently, as mentioned in the earlier sections, due to increased absenteeism, children totally missed out on the day’s learning activities and when they returned to school, they found it hard to cope with the lessons. This study also showed that the classmates were hesitant to lend their books, unwilling to assist in exercises and tended to neglect those who were absent from school (Section 5.4.1.2). This, in turn, made the absentees more depressed and desolated from education.

Additionally, teachers also felt frustrated with absentees as it affected their daily teaching. At times, they were unable to continue with their normal lessons, especially when a new topic or concept was to be introduced or when an experiment had to be done. This affected the children who were present in the class as they were deprived of learning new ideas or concepts on that particular day.

Therefore, absenteeism caused intellectual damage to students by lowering their academic standards resulting in low subject grades, as well as making them feel withdrawn from classroom and outdoor activities. It also led to frustrations and low morale problems experienced by teachers and other students in their quest to achieve quality education.
6.3.5.2 Working Relationship Between Teachers and Students

This study indicates that the relationship between teachers and the school Head was not very encouraging in School A and this affected the whole teaching and learning process (Exhibit 5.6). The senior teachers, in no way, tried to assist and guide the new and inexperienced teachers on how to handle, motivate and teach students with differing learning abilities. It was also highlighted that the senior teachers stagnated in their own classes with their own set of ideas. Some were in school for more than a decade. They stayed in the same class and were resistant to change. Through observations, it was noticed that they stuck to their old teaching styles. They also discouraged the new teachers from experimenting with new ideas and methodologies.

Due to the unhealthy social relationships between teachers, there was a lack of moral support and academic cohesion between different class levels. As highlighted in Section 5.2.3.1, it was obvious that teachers of different class levels did not understand the academic expectation of the next level. They failed to see the curriculum linkage to the next level. Therefore, their teaching and learning was misdirected and misfocussed. It was not aligned to what was expected in the next class.

The relationship between teachers and Heads was also not promising in School A. This was particularly due to the authoritative style of leadership practised in the school. Teachers seemed discontent with decisions of the school leaders and often retaliated by wasting time in the classroom, arriving late to school and not fulfilling their professional obligations faithfully. As a result, this study established that a top down authoritative relationship demoralized teachers, which affected their teaching. This, in turn, victimized students’ education.

6.3.5.3 Corporal Punishments

There is extensive literature on the effects of corporal punishments on students’ academic achievements. This study supports the work of Marks (2006), Polaha (2004) and Banks (2002) that punishments have negative psychological effects on children’s education. It
was evident from observation that teachers of both schools resorted to corporal punishments as a means of disciplining students (5.4.1.2).

It was revealed that apart from pain, students felt humiliated and were dehumanized. This would lower their self-efficacy, confidence and eagerness to stay in school and learn. Students felt withdrawn from all school activities and tended to hate school, play truancy and rebel towards teachers. This research establishes that such attitudes, triggered by corporal punishments, proved counter productive in academic lives of children. Some may have even opted out of school due to corporal punishments.

6.3.5.4 Favouritism

Studied literature has failed to highlight the impact of student favouritism by teachers on the learning of other students. However, this study has shown that teachers favoured some students in their class and this influenced their attitude towards other students (Section 5.4.1.1).

It was evident from the findings presented in Section 5.4.1.1 in Chapter 5 that the ‘pet-students’ took advantage of their teacher’s leniency and indulged in bullying, showing superiority complex, prejudice, racism and discrimination against the poorer, weaker and disadvantaged students. During field study, it was obvious that if these students were grouped with the teacher’s favourite students, they were often isolated, ridiculed and demoralized by their unsupportive and unco-operative behaviour and mean attitudes of favoured students. Therefore, this study establishes that such attitudes and actions of ‘pet-students’ derailed the learning efforts and desires of the other students.

6.3.5.5 Disturbances by Other Teachers and Classes

This study has also revealed that children’s education is hampered by the disturbances caused by other teachers and classes. This has been highlighted in Section 5.4.1.2 of Chapter 5. It has emerged that during lesson hours other teachers called the senior students to:

• take care of younger brothers or sisters, finding stationeries for them, taking them to the toilets and cleaning them;
• do errands for them like buying grog, cigarettes and phone cards from the nearby shop or for buying vegetables from the neighbours or for running to the managements office to get mails;
• clean their classrooms, lunch containers or to put up charts;
• fetch manure from the nearby Crest Poultry farm; and
• supervise their classes during their absence and short leaves.

It was obvious from this research that when students were out of their classes doing errands or attending to younger siblings, their teachers continued with the lessons. Therefore, the disturbed students had to struggle and catch up with the lessons in their own time. This study establishes that during such disturbances, students lost a lot of learning time and were deprived of quality education.

Additionally, the location of classrooms for exam classes also affected students’ learning. This research has found that Class 8 and Class 6 classrooms were located beside the kindergarten and Classes 1 and 2 rooms. These infant classes made a lot of noise so learning became difficult and stressful. While the younger children enjoyed singing, yelling, jumping, the exam-class students found it hard to concentrate on their lessons. The teachers also found teaching annoying and stressful.

6.3.5.6 Parental and Family Support

While supporting the assertions of Marks (2006) and UNESCO (2005-2008) that family size, structure and composition are important determinants of children’s education, this study has further established that parental roles, their commitment and the family support played influential roles in children’s education. It is evident from this study that there was a lack of parental and family support, which made children’s education stressful (Section 5.4.1.1).

The reasons cited for this were work-related stress, poorly educated or uneducated parents, parental conflicts, over-engagement in village activities, prioritizing community obligations rather than children’s education and being insensitive to children by overloading them with household chores.
Students highlighted that they always looked forward to the assistance, guidance and support of their family members and when they did not get the support, they felt depressed and detached from education and school. They often missed school pretending to be sick or if they went to school, they showed rude behaviour, were reluctant to participate in learning activities and often isolated themselves from the rest of the students. Their mind was always pre-occupied with the situations at home. Their mental disturbances made learning difficult.

### 6.3.5.7 Living Styles and Standards

As discussed earlier, many families in both the communities were entangled in the poverty trap and thus were unable to provide for all the educational needs of their children. To these families, education is an expensive commodity. Therefore, their unaffordability towards children’s education compels them to rate education as second to meeting the basic necessities of life. Such situations of families lowered the children’s self-esteem. These children also start thinking on the same lines and fail to recognize the importance of education. This study showed that they became irregular attenders at school. Even if they were in school, they seemed not to be bothered about their studies. They had low morale, lack of initiative and a dampened eagerness to learn.

It was evident from this research that poor parents showed very little concern for their children’s education. It was revealed that poor parents had very little education themselves, hence, they failed to realize and emphasize the significance of quality education for their children. This was evident as they hardly went to school to meet the teachers and discuss their children’s performance at school (Section 5.4.2.3.2). They often alienated themselves from school activities. Usually, their children were left on their own without any motivation, guidance and incentive to perform better in schools.

Apart from this, it also emerged that poverty led to unhygienic living conditions. They had poor water and toilet facilities. They lived in shacks with one room only. This was the only space where they slept, cooked, ate, studied and entertained visitors. Therefore, children were exposed to each and every activity that took place in the house. There was no privacy
at all for children and adults. This research showed that children from poor homes, without basic living facilities, often displayed dirty habits and anti-social behaviour. They turned up to school with dirty uniform, unclean faces, long and dirty fingernails and long and undone hair. This was so because they were mostly left unattended in regards to personal cleanliness. Their parents also took very little interest in their hygiene. One of the teacher participants stated that:

…having dirty students in the class is not only disturbing but also distracted learning of other students.

(Field Notes, 2008)

Therefore, it is established that the presence of students with dirty outlooks in the classroom affected the whole teaching and learning process.

In addition to this, poverty forced many families to reside in squatter settlements. This was prevalent in Community A. Hence, children from these families interacted with all sorts of people. Section 5.4.2.3.3 in Chapter 5 highlights that such children were exposed to unwarranted activities such as, bullying, smoking, child abuse, drugs, stealing and sexual activities. When these children came to school, their disruptive and anti-social behaviour spilt into the school system and into classrooms, causing a lot of disciplinary problems. This forced the teachers to spend a lot of valuable time disciplining such students which, in turn, affected the learning of all students in the class.

6.3.6 Technological Resource Challenges

Fullan (1998) and Dede (1995) have emphasized the vitality of true technology in the teaching and learning process. Their findings reveal that better technologies enhance quality education. However, UNESCO (2006) states that access to technologies is highly uneven in many countries and Pongi (2006) highlights that new sprung technologies such as computers, internets, scanners, overhead projectors, copiers and printers are lacking in most primary schools in the Pacific.

This research indicated that both the case study schools lacked these technologies (Table 5.2). Becker (2000) and Wenglinsky (1998) stressed that technology empowers teachers
and learners with more control over their teaching and learning process through self-paced and self-regulated learning at any time or at any place. Lack of technology in these schools did not empower teachers to vary the teaching and learning modes. Without these technologies teachers could not take their students beyond their traditional classrooms, thus, crippling them to create virtual environments to explore, experiment and examine real-life occurrences.

It was also evident that there was no form of technical assistance provided in these two schools by any of the stakeholders. As such, teachers and students had to limit their teaching and learning to the four walls of the classrooms. It was very difficult for the teachers to bring the ‘outside world’ to the children inside the classrooms and challenge the higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. More specifically, students and teachers depended on surface knowledge while doing subject-based research projects. Lack of technology in schools failed to strengthen students’ knowledge, skills and character.

6.4 SUMMARY

The data presented in Chapter 5 were analyzed and discussed in this chapter. The discussions also took into account the findings and lessons learnt from the literature review to confirm the findings of the current study.

Through this research study, it has been established that the path to attaining quality education is very challenging. It involves many stakeholders and demands concerted efforts from each of them. Along this path, there are numerous hurdles that impede the provision and attainment of quality education. These are:

- pedagogical challenges;
- institutional challenges;
- human resource challenges;
- financial challenges;
- social challenges; and
- technological resource challenges.
This study revealed that these challenges existed right from homes to schools and to the communities. The impact of each of these challenges on the provision of quality education was also explored and examined. The fieldwork findings, relating to the provision of quality education, showed that there is a considerable gap between the relevant policy and practice. It was evident the Ministry of Education has formulated many policies towards improving the quality of education in primary schools, however, the implementation of these policies in schools depended on school leadership and the teachers.

This study also explored the roles, responsibilities, commitment and attitude of various stakeholders, particularly the teachers, school Heads and parents, in providing quality education and showed that they were unaware of the EFA concept and as such have failed to fulfil their roles and responsibilities required in the provision of quality education. Therefore, this study confirms that, at present, attaining quality basic education in primary schools in Fiji is far from reality. Hence, the required commitment and the right attitude are needed from all stakeholders.
CHAPTER: 7

7.0 CONCLUSION

‘Quality education is education in totality’ (Field Notes, 2008)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In today’s changing and challenging world, education has become a vital human need. It is therefore important to lay a strong platform of quality education early in children’s lives, whereby they are able to master the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary for lifelong education. However, the quest to achieve quality education for all is obstacle-laden in Fiji. Hence, the present investigation attempted to identify some of the over-arching challenges that impede the provision of quality education in primary schools in Fiji. While the preceding chapters have provided a detailed analysis and discussion of research findings, this final chapter provides a summary of key findings, implications of the study, recommendations and propositions for future researches.

7.2 KEY FINDINGS

It is reiterated that this study adopted a qualitative case-study approach to gather, analyze and present data on the four research objectives: (i) EFA progress and commitment in Fiji; (ii) the need to provide quality primary education; (iii) the challenges towards providing quality primary education; and (iv) possible strategies for addressing these challenges. The following key questions guided the research study:

1. What does EFA mean in the Fijian Context?
2. Who is responsible for promoting and providing EFA in Fiji?
3. What commitments are shown by the government and other stakeholders towards providing quality basic education in this country?
4. Why is there a need to provide quality basic education in primary schools in this country?
5. What are the challenges in providing quality basic primary education?
6. What are some of the ways of addressing these challenges?
This research highlights the significance of providing Quality Basic Education (QBE) in primary schools. It is evident that QBE is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for life-long learning and human development. It revolves around the four pillars of education: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; and learning to be. QBE is also seen as one that best fulfils the present and future needs of learners in diverse circumstances and prospects. These reasons justify the need to provide QBE in all primary schools.

While this research has highlighted a number of developments towards compulsory primary education to all school-aged children such as, transport assistance, text book assistance and tuition free education, it has also identified a number of challenges at ground level. It was confirmed from the literature and this research, that people at ground-level, especially parents, students and management are not aware of the existence and significance of the EFA concept. However, teachers had their own interpretation of the EFA concept. According to them, EFA meant ‘learning for all’ in schools. While realizing that EFA also means providing equal educational opportunities to all students, they failed to realize that ‘quality’ is the essence of education and is embedded in the EFA concept. As such, their efforts towards providing quality EFA are minimal.

Apart from this, the following challenges have emerged from the research that hinders the quality of education provided in primary schools. Firstly, has been the quality of school leadership: leadership style, values and aspirations and teachers: their commitment, attitudes, educational level, professional development and attendance that have directly influenced the quality of education provided in schools. In this study, it was established that unethical and dictatorship leadership style and negative teacher attitudes were great impediments towards providing quality education.

While it has been established from this study that the government is putting in all efforts to make the present primary curriculum responsive to the needs of the learners, the teaching and learning strategies utilized by teachers to implement the contents of the curriculum are undemocratic. The holistic development of children has been out of focus and more emphasis has been given to academic demands. Individual learner needs have been
deprioritized. All efforts are towards the coverage of syllabus and preparing students for exams.

It was also established that lack of basic teaching and learning resources were also contributing factors that greatly affected the quality of education delivery. Besides this, geographical factors that relate to the area of residence, for instance, rural and urban, do not directly influence the quality of education delivery but contribute indirectly to the process in terms of transportation, infrastructure and accessibility.

Moreover, it was also confirmed from the research that socio-economic factors (such as parents’ financial status, parental support, family size and structure), socio-cultural factors (e.g. parental educational level, interest, attitude and aspirations) were equally decisive in determining the quality and level of education their children attained.

Added to this, social challenges, such as poverty, crime, peer pressure, living styles and standards, corporal punishments, student attendance and favouritism also contributed to the process of poor quality of education delivery and attainment. These social problems had negative psychological effects, such as low self-esteem, lack of resilience, aggressiveness and a feeling of detachment from studies.

Furthermore, lack of technologies such as: computer, internet, OHP, copiers and printers in schools also affected the quality of education provided. Lack of these facilities had disempowered teachers to promote self-paced and self-regulated learning. Absence of these technologies had restricted teachers to take their students beyond the traditional classrooms, thus crippling them from creating virtual environments to explore, experiment and challenge higher-order thinking and develop problem-solving skills.

It is evident from this research that QBE is not provided in the case study schools. This is due to the lack of awareness and understanding about the existence and significance of EFA goals and the concept of quality by the stakeholders. More so, the numerous challenges: Pedagogical; Institutional; Human Resources; Financial and Economic Resources; Social; and Technological made the provision of QBE difficult.
Finally, the study also explored some possible strategies that could be implemented to address the challenges encountered in providing quality education. Important amongst them were: (i) a committed and concerted co-operation from all stakeholders of education; (ii) dedicated enthusiastic and visionary leaders; (iii) adequate availability of teaching and learning resources; (iv) regular guidance, advice and positive reinforcement to students; (v) a changed positive attitude towards education from students, teachers, parents and school heads; (vi) better incentives and continuous human resource developments; and (vii) an inclusive culture-oriented and need-based approach towards the teaching and learning process.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This is an exploratory study that was aimed to examine the challenges faced in primary schools in providing quality education. Numerous obstacles have emerged at ground-level. In order to address them, immediate measures are crucial. Hence, the findings of this study underscore numerous important implications relevant to various stakeholders - school-heads, policy makers, teachers, parents and students.

7.3.1 Implications for the Stakeholders

The findings presented in this study indicate that the stakeholders: school Heads, teachers, parents and students were unaware of the EFA concept and its significance. Therefore, this study calls for a greater awareness on EFA goals, especially relating to the provision of quality basic education. The policy-makers and practitioners should try their best to reach the people at ground-level and become aware of the stark ground realities, especially the difficulties faced by parents in sending their children to school.

A deeper understanding of the purpose and importance of quality basic education would empower them to take a more proactive approach towards education. Parents would be able to view education from a wider perspective, that is, for holistic development and realize its importance rather than having a narrower academic-oriented view of education. If this perception of parents is not changed, they will never value education in totality and little effort will be put in to send their children to school.
Moreover, school leaders and teachers need to change their approach and attitude towards the teaching and learning process. This study has found that their commitment and effort towards education are questionable. This was seen in the dictatorship style of leadership, increased absenteeism of teachers, poor planning and preparation, lack of initiative and the unwillingness to help new and inexperienced teachers. This study forecasts that if this trend continues, providing quality education will remain unrealized. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to become more sensitive to the needs of the children, school administrators to be more democratic and accommodating to the needs of all students and the school management to move a step further to assist the underprivileged students in attaining their life-long dreams of quality basic education.

Furthermore, the literature and the findings presented in this study could also provide a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents and guardians towards their children’s education. Literature (Walker, et. al., 2004) has stated that parents have often left the educational aspects of their children to teachers and schools. This study assists in clarifying the parents’ perception and the need to make them active partners in their children’s education. Thus, this study calls upon the school administrators and management to design inclusive programmes and reach out to the parents and encourage their support and participation in school activities.

This research would also help the Ministry of Education and the policy makers to get a better picture of the difficulties faced by teachers, parents and students in providing and achieving quality education. The findings of this study would be helpful to Ministry of Education and the curriculum developers in policy making, practice and designing curriculum contents of primary schools. The challenges highlighted in this study would enable them to provide more support, in terms of resource allocation, technical assistance and continuous professional development for teachers. It may also guide them to revise the curriculum and remove the out-dated contents. A sound tracking system and continuous feedback from schools and parents on the progress of education in schools need to be established.
Finally, the findings from this study could provide vital information to all the stakeholders in relation to the challenges of achieving quality basic education. Since education has become a fundamental need in today’s demanding and challenging world, availability of any information for its improvement to the wider community would develop better understanding and open avenues for further consultation, assistance and facilitation of quality basic education.

7.3.2 Implications for the Literature

From this study, it was evident that very few empirical researches have been conducted on the EFA goals, especially, about the challenges towards providing quality basic education in primary schools. EFA Global Monitoring Reports by UNESCO have been compiled and published to show the country-progress report on EFA goals. However, there is hardly any evidence of in-depth research being conducted on individual EFA goals. In Fiji, apart from the EFA progress reports, there is limited, if any, empirical evidence of research being conducted on EFA Goal No.2.

Curriculum reforms have been carried out but the challenges in implementing the contents and achieving the desired outcomes have really been investigated. There is no explicit research being undertaken to explain why students leave primary schools without acquiring the basic literacy and numeracy skills - the fundamentals of quality education. Therefore, this research aimed to explore and examine the challenges towards achieving quality basic education. The findings of this research would give a direction for improvements and would become a platform for further studies to be conducted on this topic. Hence, this study has added to the contemporary literature based on the evidence from a case study of an urban and rural primary school.

7.3.3 Implication for Future Researchers

Through this research, numerous challenges in achieving quality basic education have emerged. The impact of these challenges on the quality of education delivered needs more in-depth research using a much bigger sample and, probably, with another research approach. As the core function of the schools is to deliver quality education, it would be interesting to find out whether all students in the school actually receive quality education.
This research also provides avenues for other researchers to do comparative studies of the penetrating challenges, which parents, teachers and schools face in providing quality basic education in Fijian schools and Indo-Fijian schools. The findings of these studies would validate and add to the findings the present study.

As mentioned earlier, this research has identified many challenges towards providing quality basic education. Future researchers could always pick on any one of these challenges and conduct an in-depth study on it. These findings could initiate the relevant stakeholders to design programmes that inform the people at ground level on how to overcome the difficulties that hinder the delivery of quality basic education.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has identified many challenges that have derailed the efforts of teachers and parents in providing quality education at all levels. It is also understood that solutions to all these problems cannot be found over-night. However, concerted efforts from all stakeholders would get Fiji a step closer to attaining quality basic education. Therefore, this study proposes the following:

7.4.1 Curriculum Reforms

While Ministry of Education has embarked on curriculum reforms by introducing basic literacy and numeracy programmes, it should try to remove irrelevant parts of the present primary curriculum to avoid it from getting too over-loaded. If it fails to do so, the implementation of the new literacy and numeracy programmes would not be very effective due to time constraints and the rush to cover-the syllabus. Apart from this, a continuous tracking system should be put in place to gauge the effectiveness of new curriculum reforms. Constant feedback needs to be obtained from schools and regular workshops need to be organized to equip school heads and teachers to better implement new programmes in schools. It should also create awareness among the parents on any changes brought about.
7.4.2 **Schools**

Schools should have policies and practices in place to ensure that all school-aged children in the community are in school. It should build a human network with the school management and the community at large such as: parents, community leaders, business houses and non-governmental organizations. Building such networks would enhance increased social interaction. This, in turn, would enable the schools to relay their difficulties and seek genuine assistance in terms of human, financial and physical resources, which would be helpful in promoting quality education.

In addition, school heads and teachers need to continuously upgrade themselves professionally and keep abreast of the innovations in the education system. In particular, school heads should adopt an inclusive approach in decision-making regarding the teaching and learning process. They need to allow teachers to attend Ministry of Education organized workshops and have regular and meaningful professional and staff development sessions in school.

Teachers can promote mutual understanding and effective learning through the development of interactive and co-operative learning styles that are familiar to the children and which are culturally appropriate. The teachers in the classrooms in all Pacific Island countries must be literate in the cultures of the children in their class. Genuine and deliberate effort is needed, both at the systems level and at the classroom level to improve the teaching instruction. It is also important for teachers to change their beliefs, attitudes and approaches to understand their students better.

7.4.3 **Community Support**

Schools should raise community awareness and outreach programmes to achieve greater parental support and provide information to the parents on the importance of providing continuous support and guidance to their children at home. They should also be encouraged to provide conducive learning environment at home to enable their children to do home study willingly and peacefully. With the help of the parents, the schools would be able to do community scanning and get all school-aged children into the school systems.
Moreover, all efforts need to be made to gain sustainability of schools through self-help income-generating projects that can take the burden off the parents. There should be an incentive scheme to reward schools that can demonstrate sustainability in their income-generating.

Finally, schools should get into corporate involvement. There should be a proactive partnership between the schools and businesses. For instance, companies making arrangements for the sale of snacks, drinks, books and stationery, for which schools receive a certain percentage of the sales as commission. There can also be schemes set up where parents purchasing from supermarkets, hardware shops and other outlets can transfer points allotted from the sale price to the schools. With these points schools can purchase essentials like library books, sports equipment and other relevant teaching and learning materials.

7.5 SUMMARY

Quality basic education is a fundamental building block of a child’s lifelong education. It lays a strong platform for further education and ensures that a child leaves primary school fully equipped with the required literacy and numeracy skills, which would enable them to succeed in secondary and tertiary schools. Given the consistency of qualitative case study research method and data analysis utilized for this study, it becomes possible to draw conclusions and accept the findings with an acceptable degree of certainty. The main focus of this study was to examine the challenges to achieving quality basic education in Fiji.

Numerous challenges were identified in the study (e.g. pedagogical, social, financial, institutional, human and technical). There is no one magical, quick fix solution to overcome these challenges. They are complex in nature and require genuine support and efforts from everyone, that is, from Ministry of Education, schools, parents and the community at large. I believe that sustained effort is at the heart of achieving quality education at all levels. Leaders need to put appropriate strategies in place, implement reforms and programmes within strategic education sector and national development plans and adequately fund primary education. Parents also need to understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities towards their children’s educational needs.
Together with these changes, it is ultimately the responsibility of the teachers and students to get the job done. They must also understand their roles, responsibilities and expectations of the wider community. Teachers need to be faithful in their duties when it comes to teaching children. They must ‘walk the talk’. Students must be hard working and show commitment towards studies and, above all, must realize and value the significance of education in their lives. Hence, all stakeholders must work together towards eradicating or minimizing the effects of the challenges identified in the study.

Finally, achieving quality basic education in the selected primary schools in Fiji remains a distant dream. It is envisaged that the findings from this study would certainly prompt the various stakeholders to take some proactive measures in order to address these challenges and move a step closer towards achieving quality basic education.
8.0 REFERENCES


185


UNESCO (2007). *Education For All Mid-Decade Assessment and Mid-Term Review: Asia and the Pacific.* Bangkok: UNESCO.


9.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1  The Dakar EFA Goals

Paragraph 7 of the Dakar Framework for Action defines the EFA goals that governments, organizations, agencies, groups and associations represented at the World Education Forum pledged themselves to achieve:

1. expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

2. ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

3. ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;

4. achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for adults;

5. eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

6. improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

I August 2007

Mr Rishi Chand
P.O. Box 11784
Suva

Dear Mr Chand

I am pleased to inform you that the School of Education Postgraduate Research Committee has approved your Research Proposal. The following were resolved:

Topic: “Challengers To Achieving Quality Universal Primary Education (UPI) In the Fiji Islands”

Supervisor: Dr Govinda Lingam

You may contact your supervisor on 322311 or e-mail him on govinda_i@usp.ac.fj

I wish you success.

Yours sincerely

Dr Achim Sharma
Associate Professor and
Head - School of Education

cc: Dr Govinda Lingam
Appendix 3  Letter Informing MoE About Research Study

P.O Box 11784
Suva
04/09/07.

The Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Education,
Suva.

Dear Sir,

Re: Conducting Research In Schools

I wish to inform you that I am a Master of Arts student at the University of the South Pacific and currently writing a major thesis using a qualitative approach, which is to be submitted to USP as a requirement for the Master of Arts in Education programme. In this approach, I am supposed to conduct interviews with parents, teachers, students and other stakeholders of education.

The topic for this research study is “Challenges in Achieving Quality Universal Primary Education in Fiji”. This research is carried out under the supervision of Dr. G. I. Lingam of the School Of Education, Faculty of Arts and Law at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji.

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine some of the prevalent challenges that we face in our primary schools to effectively foster quality basic education. In doing so, this study will try to examine some of the difficulties faced by the educators and the community at large. The results of the study will enable us to have an in-depth understanding on this topic.
I have selected Saraswati Primary School, Dilkusha, Nausori and Madhuvani Indian School, Rakiraki as the case study schools. To gain access and conduct the research in these two schools, I would seek the written approval of the Head teachers of the respective schools and forward it to the Ministry in the due course.

The above primary schools are in the Nausori and Ra Education District, respectively. Attached please find the USP's approval letter.

Yours faithfully,

__________________
Rishi Chand (Mr.)

(ID. s89877260)
Appendix 4   MOE’s Acknowledgement and Response

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

YEAR OF BREAKTHROUGH

Dear Sir/Madam,

Acknowledgement

Your correspondence regarding [REASON] has been received and marked to [DEPARTMENT] for action.

You should receive a substantive reply within two weeks, and if not please contact the officer named above.

Yours faithfully,

B. Locq (Mrs)
for Permanent Secretary for Education

[ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS]
Appendix 5 : Request for Approval from School Heads.

P.O Box 11784
Suva.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission To Conduct Research In Schools

I am currently conducting research for my Masters thesis titled “Challenges to Achieving Quality Universal Primary Education in Fiji” at the University of the South Pacific. I would like to seek your approval to carry out the research in your school.

The research would initially consist of interviews of students and teachers in your school. Observations would also be employed to gain further insights on the teacher’s and student’s views. Discussions would also be held with the management committees on their views on the topic.

You are assured that complete confidentiality of the data gathered in this investigation. Only my supervisor (Dr. G. I. Lingam) and I will see the data. Identity of teachers, students and the school community will not be made public.

I will be happy to discuss any concerns you may have about your teachers’ and students participating in the project. I can be contacted by telephone on 9910961 (mobile).

Attached please find the USP's approval to conduct the research.

I am looking forward to your favourable response and consideration in taking part in this project.

Yours faithfully,

Rishi Chand (Mr.)
Please fill in the form below and indicate with a tick in the box whether or not you accept my request to conduct my field study at your school during my visit.

I, ______________________________ , T.P.F ________, Headteacher of ___________________________________________________ School

Signature…………………………    Date……………………..

☐ accept your field study to be conducted at my school.

☐ do not accept your field study to be conducted at my school.

(You can either post this, hand deliver or contact me on mobile 9910961 to confirm your acceptance)
05.09.08

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

I hereby give permission to Mr. Rishi Chand to conduct his Research in my School to complete his Masters Thesis.

I wish you all the best in your studies.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Mr. M. Kumar (H.T.)

Mr Rishi Chand,
P.O. Box 11784,
Suva.

Dear Sir,

Re: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated 8th October, 2007 requesting to conduct a research at Madhuvani Indian School.

I hereby give you approval to conduct your educational research at the school. The school will also allow you to have access to its historical records in order to facilitate your work.

Looking forward to your presence at the school.

Yours Faithfully,

[Signature]

Mr Atsandra Kumar
HEAD TEACHER (Actg)
Title of Study

‘Challenges to Achieving Quality Basic Education in Fiji’.

Introduction

Access to quality education is today viewed, not only as a basic human right, but also as a fundamental human need which is extremely essential for constructing globally competitive economies and democratic societies with a liberated populace. Ultimately, education builds “human capabilities” - the essential and individual power to reflect, make informed choices, seek a voice in society, and enjoy a better life. Yet, literature reveals that the world remains far from the core of ‘Education For All’ (EFA) goal- quality Universal Primary Education (UPE). Despite the importance accorded to education, the state of the World’s Children’s Report indicates that over 130 million children in developing countries, including the Pacific, are illiterate (UNESCO, 2006). This shows that a large proportion of school age children are deprived of their right to quality basic education.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and remedy some of the prevalent challenges that we face in our primary schools to effectively foster quality basic education. In doing so, this study will try to examine some of the difficulties faced by the students, educators, parents and the community at large. The results of the study will enable us to have an in-depth understanding on this topic. It is envisaged that the findings from this research would be beneficial to almost every stakeholder of education including students, parents, teachers, policy makers, administrators, and donor agencies. It is also anticipated that the “ground realities” about the challenges in achieving quality universal primary education in Fiji will be identified and brought to the attention of all the stakeholders of education so that some meaningful solutions can be found and implemented without delay.

Procedure of the Research

It is with the Ministry of Education's approval to carry out this research in Fiji, that I now have forwarded this letter of consent and the accompanying description of the study. Please note that ministerial approval of this study is a general approval to carry out this research within the
education system in Fiji. Hence, this research study proposes to investigate the challenges of achieving quality universal primary education in Fiji through a qualitative research approach. As such, a case study of a rural and an urban primary school would be conducted. The major techniques used to gather information will be non-participant observation and unstructured interviews of students, teachers, parents, school administrators, Ministry of Education officials and other stakeholders. Apart from this, Ministry of Education’s policies on EFA would also be analyzed. Participation in this study is totally within your discretion.

**Interview**

The interview will be carried out at the venue and time convenient to the participant. I would like to ask the permission of each participant to record the interview. The interview is planned to follow at least one week after each participant has received the consent form. It is planned that each interview will be of about one and a half to two hours. It would be conversational in nature whereby questions will be asked and responses given. Each participant will be given a transcribed copy of the interview. Participants are free to make changes to the transcription before it is included in the write-up. It is hoped that the participant would have studied the interview questions provided with the consent form and have fair knowledge of what is expected.

The names of students, parents, teachers and the details of the context will be changed during transcription. Again, the same effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality.

**Non-Participant Observation**

Students will be observed on specific classroom activities and their actions, behaviour and contributions towards group work will be recorded on the observation sheet. Photographs will be taken to support these observations.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity of Subjects**

Every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality and to protect each participants anonymity. However, please note that other educators will have access to the research results. Codes will be used to replace names, locations and other likely characteristics. These will be carefully chosen and will only be known to myself. The raw data will only be seen by my supervisors. All codes, interview tapes, transcriptions and any other form of raw data will be disposed by myself once my thesis has been accepted by the University of the South Pacific.
**Procedure to Withdraw**

There are two other stages throughout the study where participants can choose to withdraw. Participants can withdraw from the study before the interview is scheduled or after reading the transcription. However, you are bound by the research procedure that once you have signed the agreement form for your views to be included in the research study, you would not be allowed to withdraw.

**Conclusion**

I believe that due globalization and increasing need for quality basic education of students in schools, an enormous pressure is being put on all stakeholders in order for them to remain focused on quality basic education in primary schools. With your participation, it is hoped that we will have a better understanding of the various difficulties that need to be addressed and some practical solutions towards achieving this goal.

Rishi Chand *(Investigator)*
## Appendix 8 General Observation Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/Lesson To Be Observed (Description)</th>
<th>Teaching/Learning Strategy &amp; Materials used</th>
<th>Student Participation</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes Achieved</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
### LESSON OBSERVATION RECORD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Area</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Comment / Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Lesson Plan - Clear and Detailed Statement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Links with previous work</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pupil and Teacher activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Lesson sequence</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Range of Focus for the lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Means of Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Introduction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Getting attention and interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Linking lesson to previous work</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Making objective clear</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Quality of Communication</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use of appropriate language</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Voice variation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clarity and pace of delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Non-verbal</td>
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<td><strong>4. Organisation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Distribution</td>
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<td>- Pupil</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dividing, redressing, affirming</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Class Management</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Organisation of lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clear instructions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Control</td>
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<td><strong>6. Teaching Aids</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Blackboard writing</td>
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<td>- Blackboard use</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Visual (HP, video, audio)</td>
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<td><strong>7. Assessment</strong></td>
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<td>- Variety of methods for diagnostic achievements</td>
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<td>- Feedback of pupils</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Awareness of objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>8. Teacher-Pupil Relationship</strong></td>
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<td><strong>9. Knowledge of Subject</strong></td>
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<td><strong>10. Nature of Activities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Appropriate role of pupil and teacher</td>
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<td>-mail activities</td>
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<td><strong>11. Provision of Range of Abilities</strong></td>
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<td><strong>12. Maximising Learning - Attitudes, approaches, or practical work</strong></td>
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<td>- Ask questions</td>
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<td>- Initial activities</td>
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<td>- Develop student awareness</td>
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<td>- Assess Potential</td>
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<td><strong>13. Methodology</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Demonstration</td>
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<td>- Organisation of pupil activities</td>
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<td>- Distribution of teaching materials</td>
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<td>- Safety</td>
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<td><strong>14. Conclusion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Appropriate conclusions, summary</td>
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<td>- Making follow-up action</td>
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<td><strong>15. Overall Quality</strong></td>
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<td>- Improvement of the lesson as a whole</td>
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<td><strong>16. Further Comments</strong></td>
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<td><strong>17. Recommendations</strong></td>
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(Signed by) Supervising Officer Officer Date
Appendix 10A  Questionnaire for Teachers

1. For how long have you been teaching in this school? Briefly explain your qualifications and teaching experience.

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2. What are your views on the
   • school facilities,

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   • education system,

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   • school culture,

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   • leadership,

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   • parent’s support,

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   • type of students / abilities / background

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   • classroom facilities

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• teaching-learning resources

3 What further improvements would you like to see in each of the items listed above to provide quality education?

4 Are you currently undertaking any course of instruction from tertiary institution? Give details. What do you intend to achieve from this?

5 What are your views on the teacher training programme that you attained at the training institution? Discuss in terms of quality and quantity.

6 Did it prepare you well on how to approach the teaching/learning process and to deliver quality education to the children under your care? How?

7 What are some of the pre-service and in-service workshops or training programmes have you attended in your so many years of teaching?
8 Who organized these workshops?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

9 What were the learning outcomes or what did you achieve from these workshops?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

10 What kind of feedback did you receive? Was your participation acknowledged in anyway? Explain.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
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11 How did you implement the knowledge and skills gained from these workshops in your daily teaching and learning process?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

12 Explain what do you know or understand about Education For All and its goals?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

13 Did you attend any specific workshop on this? Explain.

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

14 In your view, what is quality education? What are some of the requirements of quality education?
15 To what extent you think the present curriculum aims to achieve quality basic education?

16 How can the contents of the curriculum be further improved? What specific items you would like to be included in the curriculum if it is to be quality-oriented?

17 How is your school trying to implement or promote these goals?

18 How are you (as a teacher) trying to promote/provide quality education to your students? Explain your response in relation

  • to the teaching and learning approaches you use,

  • content delivery method,

  • providing feedback to students,
• assessment methods,

• teaching/learning materials you use

• relationship with students and parents

• teaching /learning time

• considering learner capabilities

• attention provided to students with special needs

• improving teaching-learning environment
19. Why do you think quality basic education is important? How does it help a child later in life?

20. What are some of the qualities a teacher should have in promoting quality basic education?

21. What are some of the learner characteristics necessary to achieve quality basic education?

22. From a teacher’s point of view, do you think we are providing quality education to the children? Explain.

23. What are some of the challenges you face at classroom, school and community level that hinders your effort to provide quality education? Explain with relation to each of the following.

Classroom level - with students
- teaching facilities

- attendance

- lunch

- teaching/learning aids

- classroom environment

- classroom facilities

- distance and transportation costs
- language and communication

- cultural affiliations

- attitudes

**School level** - teacher support

- school leadership/administration

- school policies

- school culture
- geographical location

- school composition

- school sanitation

- school buildings

- fundraising

- co-curricular activities

Community level - parent support and their attitudes
management support

economic status and activity

living style

religious affiliations

social obligations

level of importance placed on education

How do you tackle these challenges?
25 From your point of view, do you think that Fiji would be able to achieve quality UPE by the year 2015 as outlined in the Dakar Framework set in 2000? Justify your answer.

Thank you so much for your valuable time and effort.

God Bless You.

Rishi Chand (Mr)

(M. A. Ed.) - Student Investigator
1. How much importance do you give to your child’s education? Give reasons.

2. Why do you think your child should get educated?

3. Do you think your child is getting quality education in the school?

4. What is quality education?

5. How can you help your child to get quality education?

6. What are the learning facilities you provide to your child at home?

7. How do you think these facilities help your child’s education?

8. How else can you improve your home study facilities for your child?
9. How often do you check or supervise your child’s homework or studies?

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10. What kind of relationship do you keep with your child’s class teacher? How often do you meet with him/her to discuss about your child’s performance in school? Do you get regular feedback from the teachers about your child’s progress?

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11. What are some of the major difficulties you face in sending your child to school? Explain each of them.

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12. What are some of the ways you overcome these difficulties to ensure your child is not deprived of quality education?

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13. What are some of the human, social and financial costs associated with your child’s education? How do you overcome them?

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14. What are some of the areas of the education system you would like to see improvements done? Why do you think so?

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15. What else should be taught in primary schools to prepare students for future?

16. Do you think that after primary education, your child will be able to cope up with the secondary and tertiary education? Explain.

17. If your child drops out after primary school, do you think he/she would have learnt the skills and knowledge necessary to survive on his/her own?


19. What advice do you have for other parents and children about their education?
Appendix 11A  Interview Questions for Headteachers

A. EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

1. As the Head of this school, what are your views on the
   o Existing school facilities (what improvements would you like to see)
   o Present primary curriculum (what improvements would you like to see)
   o Quality of education provided in this school (what improvements would you like to see)
   o Teachers of this school
   o School management and their support
   o Type of students and the school population
   o Parents’ background and their financial status
   o Level of assistance you get from parents, MOE and the community (what improvements would you like to see)

B. EDUCATION FOR ALL CONCEPT

1. Ministry of Education has adopted *Education For All* concept in its action programme. What does EFA mean to you?
2. Have you attended any workshop on promoting education for all in your school? What were they?
3. How did you implement the skills and knowledge learnt from these workshops in your school?
4. How was the implementation of the knowledge and skills from the workshop monitored? Who monitored these?
14 Who are responsible for promoting Education For All in this country?

C. QUALITY EDUCATION

1. What does quality education mean to you?
2. What are the key elements of providing quality education?
3. Who are responsible for promoting quality education in your school? Describe their roles and your expectations of these people.

4. What are some of the strategies you have put in place in order to provide quality education in your school?

5. Why do you think quality basic education is important to a child?

6. In your view, how important is primary education?

7. How does it help a child in his/her life?

8. What are some qualities/knowledge/skills/attitudes/behaviour teachers should possess to provide quality education to students?

9. What kind of awareness have you created amongst the parents and the community regarding education of children in the locality?

D. CHALLENGES

1. What are some of the challenges you face as an administrator in providing quality education to children in your school? (Discuss challenges in relation to school facilities, finance, fees, fundraising, students, parents, management, community, teachers, MoE, donors)

2. What are some of the strategies you have put in place to overcome these challenges?

3. What further improvements would you like to see in your school to improve the quality of education provided to students?

4. What skills and knowledge do you expect your students to have acquired before they leave primary school?
Appendix 11B  Interview Questions for Teachers

1. For how long have you been teaching in this school?

2. What are your views on the
   - school facilities,
   - education system,
   - school culture,
   - leadership,
   - parent’s support,
   - type of students / abilities / background
   - classroom facilities
   - teaching-learning resources

3. What knowledge do you have on the MDGs?

4. Explain what do you know or understand about *Education For All* and its goals? Did you attend any specific workshop on this? Explain.

5. In your view, what is quality education? What are some of the requirements of quality education?

6. To what extent you think the present school system aims to achieve quality basic education?

7. How is your school trying to implement or promote these goals?

8. Goal No. 2 deals with providing quality basic education. In your view, what is quality education?

9. How are you (as a teacher) trying to promote/provide quality education to your students?

10. What are some of the qualities a teacher should have in promoting quality basic education?

11. What are some of the learner characteristics necessary to achieve quality basic education?

12. What are some of the challenges you face at classroom, school and community level that hinders your effort to provide quality education?

12. How do you tackle these challenges?
Appendix 11C  Interview Questions for Parents

1. How much importance do you give to your child’s education? Give reasons.
2. What do you do to see that your child is educated properly?
3. Do you think your child is getting quality education in the school?
4. What are the learning facilities you provide to your child at home?
5. How often do you check or supervise your child’s homework or studies?
6. What are some of the major difficulties you face in sending your child to school?
7. What are some of the ways you overcome these difficulties to ensure your child is not deprived of quality education?
8. What are some of the human, social and financial costs associated with your child’s education? How do you overcome them?
9. Do you think that after primary education, your child will be able to cope up with the life ahead of him?
10. If your child drops out after primary school, do you think he/she would have learnt the skills and knowledge necessary to survive on his/her own?

If yes, how?

If no, why?
Appendix 11D
Interview Questions for Students

1. What is education and why do you want to get educated?
2. What are some of the difficulties/problems you face at home that affect your learning?
3. How do you overcome these difficulties?
4. Explain the effects of each of the challenges on your education?
5. What are some of the difficulties/problems you face at school that affect your learning?
6. How do you overcome these difficulties?
7. Explain the effects of each of the challenges on your education?
8. Do you think you are getting quality education? Justify your response.
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>For how long have you been managing this school? What is your working relationship with teachers, community and the ministry?</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>What challenges are you facing in regards to providing good facilities to the teachers and students?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>What kind of assistance do you provide to teachers in terms of teaching learning materials? Do you budget for this?</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>What kind of assistance and support do you provide to the disadvantaged students?</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>How much emphasis does your management give to the education of students in your school?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>How is your school financed?</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>How much building fees do you charge to the students?</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Do you organize fundraising activities in the school?</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Who all are involved in these activities?</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>How are these funds used?</td>
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Appendix 12  Consent Forms

After reading the supplementary information, I fully understand what this study is about. On this basis, I agree to participate in the project.

I agree that:

• He can observe me in my carrying out of normal duties and responsibilities.
  Yes/No

• He can interview me during the course of the study.
  Yes/No

15. My interviews will be audio recorded.
  Yes/No

I understand that I am free to stop participating in his project for any reason at any time. I also understand that I will be given the chance to listen to my interview replay. At that time, I can change or withdraw any comments I might have made during my interview.

I give consent for my views to be included your masters thesis with the understanding that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times.

I shall be available for an interview on __________________(day), the ________________(date) of _____________________ (month), 2008 at _______________ (time) at _______________ (venue).

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Signed: _______________________________ Date: __________________________

Contact______________________ Address:
_____________________________________________________________________

Signed by Researcher: ___________________ Date: __________________________
Appendix 13   Parental Consent for Student's Interview

This research study also involves student interviews, and since your child has been chosen to be one on the interviewees in this case study, I need your approval to interview your child. The child will have his/her choice of the venue and the time of the interview and will also be free to be interviewed in your presence if they wish. Please complete the consent form below giving your approval/disapproval and return it to me through your child.

..............................................................................................................................................

I, ______________________________(name) parent of ________________________
(student's name) of class ____ do allow / not allow my child to participate in this research study.

Signature: ___________ Date: _________________