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Contact Address
19 Vidal Vatuwaga
P.O. Box 14209,
Suva.
Ph. 3550242/9214392

Permanent Address
P.O. Box 9562
Nadi Airport
Ph. 6280604

Feb 2005
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Name of Candidate: Sanjeena Chandri

Degree: MA

Department/School: SEO School of Education

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Signed: Chandri

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Contact Address
Sanjeena Chandri
P. O. Box 14209
Suva

e-mail: s.chandri@gmail.com

Permanent Address
P. O. Box 9562,
Nadi Airport

e-mail: s.chandri@gmail.com
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY:
STUDENT DROPOUTS AND RELATED
ISSUES IN A FIJI SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

Sanjeena Devi Chandra

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

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

December, 2009.
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Signature: [Signature] Date: 4/12/09
Name: Sanjeena D. Chandra
Student ID No.: 595008108

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Signature: [Signature] Date: 4/12/09
Name: [Supervisor's Name]
Designation: [Supervisor's Title]

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my sons: Sagar Pratap Chandra (6) and Saawan Praveen Chandra (2). Thank you for endless patience, endurance and sacrifices.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Whilst it is a testament to my enduring perseverance and struggle, I firstly thank the almighty for his wisdom and strength that enabled me through thick and thin. I am also greatly indebted to a number of persons who have, in some ways, played a significant role during this challenging period of time in my life. While it is impossible to mention the names of all those persons, it is my humble duty to name some of the most important people who have made this thesis a success.

Firstly, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude, respect and affection to my supervisor Dr. Govinda Ishwar Lingam for his most generous guidance and insights to the development, processing and completion of this study. I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Huy Phan, for his initial guidance and support towards the thesis.

I also convey my gratefulness to the Case Study School (CSS) staff, management, students, parents and the community for allowing me to collect data for this research. I thank the Ministry of Education for giving me permission to conduct the research.

I am greatly thankful to the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific for supporting my study through the Graduate Assistantship Program.

My sincere gratitude to my husband, Praveen Chandra for his trust, support, patience and sacrifices. It is also important to mention the innocent sufferings and sacrifices of my sons, Sagar and Saawan, who may also have felt the impact of this journey. I also express my most sincere appreciation to my close family members for their blessings, love and care: Mr. & Mrs. Pusp Chandra (in-laws), Mr. & Mrs. Ram Nand (parents) and Mr. Ram Chandar (Dada). I thank my sisters, Shadna, Shobna and Renu for their support throughout my studies. My special thanks to sister Sangita for proof reading this thesis.

Finally, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to everybody who had provided me with any form support and guidance, and whom I have unintentionally failed to mention here.
ABSTRACT

While the issue of the student dropouts has often been raised, the factors, effects, and possible solutions have not been adequately addressed in empirical research in Fiji. This study was conducted using the three lines of inquiry: (i) Factors causing student dropout rates, (ii) Subsequent effects of student dropouts, and (iii) Strategies to help retain the students in secondary school. A rural secondary school was used as a case study to carry out the research using the mixed methods approach. It attempted to identify the student dropout issues from the perspectives of the stakeholders of a rural secondary school. The research respondents who participated in the study included the school principal, teachers, students, parents and the students who dropped out of the school.

The theoretical framework for this study was derived from the local and international literature related to student dropouts and school completion issues. Six research questions were formulated to guide the study. Quantitative data were collected using the survey questionnaire of 116 participants (students and teachers), while the qualitative data were collected using the in-depth interviews of 12 participants (4 teachers, 4 student dropouts, 4 parents). Quantitative data were analysed using the SPSS Statistical Software (Version 16) and qualitative data were analysed using the thematic and content analysis using the SPSS text analysis (Version 2.1).

In relation to the factors that cause student dropouts, the results emphasise four important contributing factors: family support, poverty, external examinations, and lack of motivation. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative results enabled the factors to be categorised under three broad sub-headings: (i) Socio-economic factors (family finance, parental support, self-perception), (ii) School and educational policies (academic achievements, school curriculum, school policies and teacher attitudes), and (iii) Geographical location and related challenges. The results indicated that for social factors, the home environment, poor parental support, family problems, and single parents were associated with student dropout. A strong association was evident between the home environment and family problems and poor parental support. It was also apparent that high academic demands and the exam oriented education system, as a whole, simultaneously made a negative contribution to students’ academic progress,
especially those in rural and remote areas. The second theme on subsequent effects of student dropouts identified a number of significant issues. Important amongst them were: (i) Social effects (e.g., crime, drug abuse), (ii) Economical effects (unemployment and poverty), and (iii) Psychological effects. The last theme on possible strategies to help retain students in a rural secondary school indicated a number of important issues: (i) Financial and moral support, (ii) Policy measures, and (iii) Vocational education.

Finally, while this study is confined to a selected Case Study School in a rural location, it is recommended that extensive research on student dropouts and related issues are investigated in a wider scale throughout Fiji. This study provides a foundation for further investigation of issues related to the student dropouts and particularly to fill the existing vacuum in the local literature on student dropouts. It will also provide the relevant authorities with empirical evidence so that appropriate measures are put in place to address student dropout issues.
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<td>CSS</td>
<td>Case Study School</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
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<td>FEYE</td>
<td>Fiji Eighth Year Examination</td>
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<td>FIE</td>
<td>Fiji Intermediate Examination</td>
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<td>FILNA</td>
<td>Fiji Islands Language and Literacy Assessment</td>
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<td>FJC</td>
<td>Fiji Junior Examination</td>
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<td>FSFE</td>
<td>Fiji Seventh Form Examination</td>
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<td>FSLC</td>
<td>Fiji School Leaving Certificate</td>
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<td>IA</td>
<td>Internal Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIC</td>
<td>Pacific Island Countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ</td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for the Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The central role that education plays in a person’s lifetime cannot be undermined and therefore, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has declared education as a basic human right for every child. According to the UNICEF, education is a proven intervention for improving the lives of all people, including children (www.unicef.org). In this light, Fiji government is committed to make education a top priority. However, a contentious issue in the society today is that despite the efforts of the government and other stakeholders towards making education more accessible to all the students, the student dropout rate is still high. Thus, this study examines the various factors responsible for the student dropouts, subsequent effects of student dropouts and possible strategies that could help reduce the student dropout rates. This introductory chapter outlines the following important issues: student dropout and related issues, aims and research questions, significance of the study and the thesis overview.

1.1 STUDENT DROPOUTS AND RELATED ISSUES

An important educational milestone for individuals is the completion of secondary education. Schools deliver a number of essential functions, important amongst them include training in general education, vocational and life skills, and socialization. However, several disadvantages are evident when individuals decide to drop out of school without completing their secondary education (Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Nathan, 2006). The decision to drop out of school is complex and relates to the individual student, his/her family, school, and the community. The decision made is personal; reflecting on one’s unique life circumstances and is part of a slow process of disengagement from school. The problem of secondary school dropout has generated increased interest among researchers, policymakers and educators in recent years.

Many researchers and educators (Auxier, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Hruska, 2005; Tavola, 2000a, 2000b; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) have recently suggested that dropping out of school is not new, but an ongoing phenomenon that exists in
secondary schools. Furthermore, research evidence indicates, for example, that retention in secondary schools is an educational challenge in most countries, ranging from very developed countries such as the United States of America, Canada and Europe to Third world countries such as Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific (Englund et al., 2008, Robertson, 2006; Rumberger, 1987; Tavola, 2000b). Similar to many other developing countries, the main shortcomings of education in the Pacific Island Countries (PIC’s) according to Thaman (2006) are: the low completion rates, high student dropout rates, and under-education. For the vast majority of secondary school students in the Pacific (as high as 75% in many PIC’s), formal education stops at year 12 when they fail to pass the entrance exam to the next level. Thus, many Pacific Island youths leave school without gaining the education they need to participate in today’s world (Jowett, 1998).

According to the Millennium Development Goal (2004) Report, the Republic of Fiji Islands has achieved its main objective and that is to have universal primary education; however, the retention rates in secondary schools are still relatively low. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is working vigorously to increase the retention rate of students in Fiji secondary schools and in the process a number of new policies such as ‘Education for All’, ‘Compulsory Education’ and ‘Education 2020’ are introduced at present. However, many would argue that these new policies are not working well enough, and this is reflective of the increasing number of street kids, shoeshine boys, child beggars, child labor, teenage prostitutes and unemployed youths that are witnessed daily. According to the recent statistics (Narayan, 2008), the survival rate of students shows that about 15% of Fiji’s children do not survive the full eight years of the primary education; furthermore, an average 75% of those who start secondary education in Fiji get to Form Six and an even lesser percentage make it to Form Seven. There is limited empirical evidence to discern the factors that are responsible for the high dropout rates in Fiji. The possible factors that have been proposed include the problems of school fees, discrimination, conflicts, poor school quality, poor infrastructure, lack of good teachers, child labour, and poverty. Although few real attempts have been made to propound the possible causes of increasing student dropouts, there is no shortage of assumption made about the possible causes of these problems; for example, parents often blame the teachers; teachers blame the Ministry, unmotivated students and poor parents; educators blame the examination-oriented school curriculum; education officials blame the teachers; and the students say that
school is boring. In Fiji and the other neighboring South Pacific countries, the public has been unaware of the severity of the dropout and the consequences often remain tragic.

Furthermore, in the South Pacific context, prior to 1960’s, it was normal for many children to complete their primary school education and then to enter the workforce for cultural reasons or to supplement the family income. However, times have changed significantly and today’s workforce demand advanced skills and qualifications. Students who do not complete their secondary education do not possess the necessary and professional skills that are required in the high skill work places (Englund et al., 2008; Harvey, 2001; Tavola, 2000a). These students seek low wage employment which, in turn, has serious repercussion on their lives and the nation as a whole. Several studies (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Nathan, 2006; Rumberger, 1987) have also reported that students who complete their secondary education have a greater financial earning potential over the course of their lives than students who dropped out of high school without the final certification. This evidence assumes that those who further their education by attending some tertiary institutions will gain a better paid job. In contrast, students who leave school early seriously reduce their future opportunities. They also often become a burden on their community. The statistics (www.fijitimesonline.com, 2 July, 2008) show that Fiji spends millions of dollars each year to either re-train the dropouts or to rehabilitate the prisoners who have not completed their secondary education.

1.2 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study reported in this thesis pertains to the social and educational issues of student dropout. The issues examined in this research involve the causes, consequences, and solutions to the low retention rates in rural secondary school. It aims to investigate the possible factors causing student dropouts in rural secondary school. It also seeks to investigate the consequences of student dropouts and the possible strategies that could be implemented to retain more students in secondary schools in Fiji. Furthermore, in relation to the aims, six research questions (RQ) were developed that guided the research study. While the research questions will be further discussed in relation to the theoretical framework in chapter 4, the following are the list of the research questions under investigation for this study:
RQ1: What are the social factors that deter rural students from completing their secondary education?

RQ2: How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school?

RQ3: How does the geographical context affect the completion of secondary education among the rural students?

RQ4: How do educational policies affect the completion rate in rural secondary school?

RQ5: What are the subsequent effects of student dropping out of school?

RQ6: What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school?

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Student dropout has been an issue of concern for many stakeholders in these recent times, given the fact that there was more awareness about the central role that education plays in an individual’s life. This research study is of much significance in the local as well as international context. First, given the limitations of the available empirical evidence in Fiji in relation to the factors responsible for the student dropouts, this study, in my view, may help to establish a premise for determining which factors are most related to variations in dropout rates. Furthermore, the findings revealed in this study will generate better understanding of the student dropout issue pertaining to the case study school as well as schools in similar context in Fiji. The research will therefore be an addition to the existing local and international literature on student dropouts.

Another significance of this study is that it will assist the policy makers and education practitioners by providing an authentic and realistic picture of the issue. It will help generate more relevant policies to reduce the student dropout rates. Finally, while this study is not an ultimate one, issues discussed here will initiate further researches in this field. After all, the final beneficiaries of student’s educational success will not only be celebrated by the students’ and their families, but the benefits of it will be reaped nationally and internationally as a whole.
1.4 THESIS ORGANISATION

This research thesis is divided into eight chapters. This chapter, chapter 1 provides the thesis overview, outlining the student dropout and related issues, aims and research questions, significance of the study and the organization of the thesis. Chapter 2 provides the geographical, socio-economical, political and educational context of the research study.

Chapter 3 presents the literature review on retention rates in secondary schools and related factors. The first theme - factors leading to student dropouts, is divided into: (i) personal-related issues (e.g. family's financial status, family social structure and parents’ educational background), (ii) school and educational policies (e.g. academic achievements, school curriculum, and school policies and teacher attitudes), and (iii) rural school location and challenges. The second theme - the consequences of student dropouts are discussed in relation to: (i) national concern, (ii) occupational and economic perspectives, and (iii) the social problems. The final theme - the possible strategies to retain students in secondary schools, is discussed in relation to: (i) policy measures, (ii) early intervention, and (iii) technical and vocational education.

Chapter 4 presents the tentative issues, research objectives and six research questions in line with the three themes. Furthermore, chapter 5 presents the discussion on the mixed methods research approach. This chapter presents the discussion of the positivism paradigm which is synonymous to quantitative approach, and the interpretative paradigm which is in line with the qualitative approach. It also incorporates the participants, instrumentation and procedure for each approach. Research ethics and the research protocol used for conducting the research are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6 presents the discussion of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Part I consists of the quantitative phase which discusses the use of the computer software program, called the Statistical Package for the Social Science, (SPSS, V.16) for data analysis of the 19 items from the questionnaire using the Cochran’s Q test, McNemar test, Friedman’s test, and Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. The summary of results from the quantitative data analysis is also presented at the end. Part II presents the qualitative data analysis using the thematic and content analysis. The use of SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys (version 2.1) is also discussed and the data...
analysis of the responses from the 12 participants together with the diagrammatic representation of the text analysis for each interview is presented. The chapter concludes with the discussion of the summary of results for the qualitative research.

Chapter 7 presents the in-depth discussion of the quantitative and qualitative results under each research question. The themes and sub-themes discussed in this chapter follow the order from the most significant findings to the least. Finally, chapter 8 presents the thesis conclusion and the implications. This concluding chapter also provides research implications and future research directions.

1.5 SUMMARY

Student dropout is an important issue that affirms empirical investigation. Accordingly, this chapter has provided the synopsis of the study. In particular, it has covered some background information pertaining to the student dropouts and related issues. The aims, specific research questions, significance of the study, and the organization of the thesis are also included in this chapter. The next chapter, Chapter 2 will focus on the context of the study.
Chapter 2

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

2.0 INTRODUCTION

School learning represents more than a late twentieth century phenomenon, existing since the inception of the common schools in the nineteenth century and circumventing compulsory education laws (Altenbaugh, Egle & Martin, 1995). At present, a majority of countries are placing a strong emphasis on education, as it is a widely believed notion that education serves to improve health, maintain high quality environment, and provide relevant resources to sustain political and economical development (Callison, 1994; Jerald, 2006). Education, according to the adaptation of the United Nations (1989) International Convention on the rights of the child, is a basic human right. However, perceptions regarding education are diverse due to the differing socio-economic, geographical, political and cultural environments of different countries. Some view education primarily as an investment in economic and social development, whereas others assume that education serves the purpose of creating a more peaceful society (Auxier, 2003; Tavola, 2000a).

More recently, there has been a shift in the education systems by different countries towards specific training and development (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Sharma, 2000) that may accommodate for the impact of globalisation, and the changing market demands for the skilled workers. Hence, priorities in education are dependent on complex and volatile factors, some of which are usually recognised and taken into considerations when planning and/or policy making in areas such as social, economic and political developments. The culture and tradition of the Pacific Islanders are unique and they influence the ways in which people perceive and interpret things. In Particular, the cultural ethos of this region instils in individuals a collective belief concerning the epistemology of knowing and knowledge (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, Phan & Deo, In press). Hence, students’ academic success in the formal education system depends on the relevance of subject disciplines and how these subjects serve the local needs. Thaman (2003) advocates that, in general, educational policies and strategies must in fact be solidly anchored in local traditions and values, and reoriented in promising new directions for the future.

Changes and trends in education are long-term phenomena which must be considered in their historical and social contexts. Educational progress, according to
the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1981), cannot be separated from the social, economical, and political institutions. To understand the concept of retention rate in schools, it is imperative to study the other related factors, such as socio-economic, political and geographical in the local socio-cultural context. This will provide some background information on the trends and reflect the causes where obstacles were faced in gaining access to education. Hence, this chapter will firstly elucidate the broader context of the Fiji Islands and then provide a synopsis context of the case study school in Nadi.

2.1 CONTEXTS OF FIJI ISLANDS

2.1.1 Geographical context

The Republic of Fiji Islands (illustrated in Figure 1), which comprises of some 110 inhabited and 222 uninhabited islands (Walsh, 2006a) is an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. The archipelago, which is 500 kilometres from west to east, comprises of two main islands; Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and other outer island groups such as Yasawas, Koro Island, Lomaiviti group, Lau, Kadavu, Tavueni, Ovalau and the Moala group. Together, they make up Fiji’s land area of 18,376 square kilometres. The larger Islands such as Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Kadavu, Tavueni and Ovalau consist of a variety of landform features ranging from high mountain peaks and rugged terrains in the centre of the mainland’s to deltas and coastal plains. The smaller outer islands are generally steep with limited area of flat land and are protected by fringing reef systems. The climate of Fiji is generally tropical and the temperature fluctuates, with November to April the warmer and wetter months, and May to October are the cooler and drier months. However, the mountain ranges in the centre of the main island, Viti Levu, and the prevailing South-east trade winds, contribute towards the different climatic conditions for the west and the south. These physical features influence the amount of rainfall within the main Island, whereby the Eastern side is generally wet as it receives the Orographic rainfall while the Western is generally drier. Moreover, this climatic variation on the mainland determines the agricultural activities for its people and therefore the lifestyle of the people.
The two main cities in Fiji are Suva, which is the Capital city and located in the East, and Lautoka, which is located in the West of Viti Levu. The total population of Fiji currently stands at 827,900 (www.statsfiji.govt.fj) with the highest percentage, 76% living in Viti Levu and 18% on Vanua Levu (Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands, 2000). The multi-racial population compositions of Fiji comprises of 57% Indigenous Fijians (referred to as Fijians in this study), 37% Indo-Fijians (also referred to as Indians), and 6% others which includes Chinese, Rotumans, and Europeans. The physical geography of the country has also influenced the distribution and the population patterns, where nucleated villages are mostly found along river valleys and deltas, coastal breaks in the reefs, hill foots (Walsh, 2006a) and along the main highways. The islandness, smallness and remoteness of many islands poses many challenges for the local people in terms of access to basic services and resources, since almost 60% of the total population live in rural areas. Hence, the combination of varied physical characteristics of the Islands has led to the slow infrastructural developments, especially in rural and remote areas.

2.1.2 Socio-economic context

The social indicators include the educational standards, heath status, food and nutrition standards, and general sanitation and cleanliness. According to the World Bank report (2006), Fiji is a middle-income country with per capita income in excess of US$2000, endowed with extensive natural resources and relatively sparse population density (http://poverty2.forumone.com). The economy of Fiji rests
primarily on sugar production and tourism, but it is increasingly becoming more
diverse. Since independence in 1970, successive governments have given priority to
equal development, economic growth and developing human resources through
expanded health and educational services. According to the Fiji National Report
(2004), economic and social change is not a one-directional process. In the past two
decades, political instability, economic downturns, concerns for law and order, a
growing pressure on the environment and social services, an eroding sense of
communal ties, and a widening gap between the rich and poor have diminished the
quality of life for many people in Fiji.

There is an increased vulnerability to poverty caused by increasing rate of
unemployment and inflation. The recent statistics show that 34% of Fiji’s population
live in poverty (Narsey, 2007b). According to the Walsh (2006b), two thirds of Fiji’s
poor population is living in rural areas and many of them do not have a reliable source
of income. Rural Indians are the poorest group in the country due to the decline in the
sugar industry, a collapse of the garment industry, and the expiring of land leases
(Narsey, 2007a). The struggling economy of the country has direct implication on the
social well being of the people. For instance, education is not a priority for the poor
people who are finding alternative means to provide their families with the basic
needs. There are two opportunity costs for sending children to school: one is to pay
for their educational cost and the other is to forgo the child’s income that could also
financial status of many families has, therefore, had an implication on the completion
of secondary education for many children in Fiji.

2.1.3 Political context

Fiji was ceded to Great Britain in 1874 and remained a crown colony for 96
years before it gained independence in 1970. After independence, the country was
governed by a multi-racial political party, the Alliance Party, under the leadership of
Ratu Kamisese Mara, a high chief from the Lau group. However, the Alliance
government’s seventeen-year rule ended in 1987 when it was defeated by National
Federation Party (NFP) and its partner, the newly formed Fiji Labour Party (FLP)
(Lal, 1997). The new government was led by a Fijian from the west, Dr Timoci
Bavadra of FLP. There were a number of protests against the government by the
‘Taukei movement’¹ which eventually accumulated to the level where there was a military coup on 14th May, 1987, led by Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, a third ranking commoner, who removed the new government from the office after six weeks. In September, 1987, there was another coup and the country was ruled by the military for the next three years until the 1990 election, which brought in a new democratic elected government.

A new constitution was promulgated, which tried its best to safeguard the interest of the Fijians in the country and gave the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) more power in the political field. It also informed that the president of the country must be chiefly ranked, and parliamentarians were divided along ethnic lines (Fraenkel, 2005). The coups of 1987 acted as a divisive for the two major racial groups in the country and since then, this issue is the forefront of most of the political debate in the country.

Fiji adopted a new constitution in 1997 which was considered most democratic in Fiji’s history (Lal, 1997). The first election under this constitution was held in 1999 which resulted in Fiji’s first Indian Prime Minister, Mahendra Pal Chaudry of FLP. His reign lasted only one year until on 19th May, 2000, a civilian coup, led by one George Speight took hostage the Prime Minister and his cabinet ministers for 56 days. This action had a catastrophic impact on all sectors of the economy which was just trying to recover from the coups of 1987. The newly appointed president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, a high chief from Vuda, appointed an interim government, led by Laisenia Qarase, to lead the country until the next election. Qarase set up his own party, the SDL, and eventually won the election to run the country until the next election in 2005. During this period, the SDL government was in constant conflict with the FLP over the multi-party cabinet issue. SDL was also becoming unpopular with the Military over its controversial bills. On 5th December, 2006, the commander of the Fiji Military Forces, Frank Bainimarama, instigated another coup. Thus, the various coups over the past two decades have highlighted Fiji’s political plight, and this has had an unbounded suffering for the majority of the people.

Hence, Tavola (2000a) stated that the socio-economic and political conditions of the country have an impact on the education system which does not exist in

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vacuum, in various ways. For instance, the socio-political effects on the education system include disruption and a temporary closure to schools, the migration of many qualified and experienced teachers, a reduction in the education budget and school grants, and the psychological detrimental effects of children, in general. This all has an impact on the quality of the education and the success of the students in completing their formal education. Finally, the high levels of unemployment and inflations also make it difficult for many poor families to afford the direct and indirect cost of education. Children from such poor families are encouraged to work in order to supplement the family’s income to obtain the basic needs for the family.

2.1.4 Educational context

The development of Fiji’s educational system over the years has been largely influenced by the political, economical and the social developments (Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands, 2000). Fiji, like any other developing country, has made impressive efforts and progress in education since 1960’s and more so after independence in 1970. Both governments and individuals give high priority to education and the development of human resources in the conviction that it will foster national unity and satisfy social justice, while at the same time contribute to the economic and social growth of their societies (Jerald, 2006; Tavola, 2000a).

Historically, formal education in Fiji was initially introduced to cater for the children of the “White men” who were working for the British government. This is not to say that Fijian children were not given any form of training. Fijian children learned through non-formal and informal educational activities where the traditional knowledge and skills were taught by the elders in real life contexts. Children emulated the adult behaviour and learned the important values and expected conduct through legends, stories and songs (Sharma, 1995; Thaman, 1992).

Prior to the independence of Fiji in 1970, the first substantive and critical review of the whole education system was established in 1968, which was named as “A Royal Commission” or “Sherlock Report” (Bacchus, 2000). Hence, the development of the education sector after independence was largely inspired by the 1969 Royal Commission Report, which identified three major areas of improvements: (i) the quality and the number of teachers, (ii) the disparity between geographical and racial groups, and (iii) the national curriculum. Some of these recommendations were
repeated in the second most comprehensive report, called the “Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands” published in 2000. The report outlined that even though Fiji has a well-established network of schools, many issues remained unsolved. Primary among them is the vast disparity in quality between rural and urban schools and the relevance of the school curriculum.

Formal schooling for the Fijian children was introduced by the Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century and the main purpose was to evangelise the locals. Reading and writing was taught so that the locals could read the Bible. Many other private schools emerged and slowly the focus changed from religious studies towards the training and obtaining of qualifications for white collar jobs (Baba, 1982; Sharma, 1995). The arrival of the indentured labourers from India in 1879 led to an increased number in student enrolment and the development of schools. Parents pressed hard to enrol their children in schools, and when this became a problem they along with the community opened up their own (Bacchus, 2000). This resulted in schools with different ethnic denominations and cultures. Overall, there was a vast increase in the number of schools in Fiji; for instance, in 1964, there were only 43 secondary schools, 73 in 1971, 136 in 1981 and 154 in 1999 (Tavola, 2000a). The controlling authority of the majority of the primary and secondary schools is dominated by committees and religious organisations (e.g., Sanatan Dharam, Arya Samaj, Muslim League and different church denominations), and a very small percentage is government owned. Table 1 shows the controlling authorities and the total number of schools in Fiji over a five year period. As indicated in the table, only 2 out of the 719 primary schools and 12 of the 162 secondary schools in Fiji are owned and operated by government, which assumes full responsibility for their recurrent and capital expenditure.
Table 1: Controlling authorities of schools in Fiji, 2002 - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Secondary schools</th>
<th>*TVET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Govt</td>
<td>Non-Govt</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>719</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*TEVT-Technical and Vocational Training  
*Govt-Government managed schools  
Source: Ministry of Education Annual Reports 2002-2006

The number of students in primary and secondary schools increased gradually over the years. Table 2 shows the changes in the number of students enrolled in primary and secondary schools from 1970 to 2005. Though the country has almost achieved its net enrolment rate in primary schools, the retention rate at secondary school level is still a challenge (Asian Development Bank, 2000).

Table 2: Roll of school students in Fiji, 1970 - 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>121,374</td>
<td>15,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>134,971</td>
<td>28,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>131,072</td>
<td>34,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>127,286</td>
<td>41,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>135,925</td>
<td>53,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>145,147</td>
<td>68,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>142,621</td>
<td>68,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>141,089</td>
<td>66,791</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education Annual Reports 2002-2006

Furthermore, Tables 3 and 4 show the enrolment rates of students in primary and secondary schools from 2002 to 2006. The table shows that there is a lot of disparity in the number of children in primary schools and the number in secondary school.
### Table 3: Primary school enrolments in Fiji, 2002 - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
<th>Class 3</th>
<th>Class 4</th>
<th>Class 5</th>
<th>Class 6</th>
<th>Class 7</th>
<th>Class 8</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>19,708</td>
<td>19,381</td>
<td>19,016</td>
<td>18,977</td>
<td>19,333</td>
<td>17,852</td>
<td>14,293</td>
<td>13,542</td>
<td>142,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>21,072</td>
<td>19,334</td>
<td>18,466</td>
<td>18,724</td>
<td>19,579</td>
<td>18,790</td>
<td>13,658</td>
<td>13,158</td>
<td>142,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19,823</td>
<td>18,154</td>
<td>18,767</td>
<td>19,226</td>
<td>19,173</td>
<td>18,312</td>
<td>15,703</td>
<td>14,706</td>
<td>143,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>19,637</td>
<td>18,672</td>
<td>17,410</td>
<td>18,271</td>
<td>18,485</td>
<td>18,305</td>
<td>15,487</td>
<td>14,822</td>
<td>141,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>18,450</td>
<td>18,029</td>
<td>18,376</td>
<td>17,985</td>
<td>18,333</td>
<td>18,529</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>14,927</td>
<td>140,129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education Annual Reports 2002-2006

### Table 4: Secondary school enrolments in Fiji, 2002 - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>*Form 1</th>
<th>*Form 2</th>
<th>Form 3</th>
<th>Form 4</th>
<th>Form 5</th>
<th>Form 6</th>
<th>Form 7</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3813</td>
<td>2953</td>
<td>15,775</td>
<td>15,250</td>
<td>13,076</td>
<td>12,523</td>
<td>3822</td>
<td>67,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>3890</td>
<td>3208</td>
<td>15,729</td>
<td>14,928</td>
<td>13,401</td>
<td>12,649</td>
<td>4373</td>
<td>68,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3149</td>
<td>3043</td>
<td>16,275</td>
<td>14,762</td>
<td>13,623</td>
<td>13,185</td>
<td>4737</td>
<td>68,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2740</td>
<td>2697</td>
<td>16,897</td>
<td>14,755</td>
<td>13,106</td>
<td>11,964</td>
<td>4632</td>
<td>66,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3441</td>
<td>3087</td>
<td>17,062</td>
<td>15,525</td>
<td>13,799</td>
<td>12,341</td>
<td>4561</td>
<td>69,816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education Annual Reports.

* Fiji’s school structure was changed in early 1970 from eight primary years to six years in primary and six secondary years. The change was not compulsory but many junior secondary schools established during that time adopted this change and had forms 1-4. Today, most of these junior secondary schools have become full secondary schools by adding forms 5, 6 and 7 (Tavola, 2000a). Forms 1 and 2 are equivalent to class 7 and 8 of the primary school and follow the same prescription.

Examination of the statistics also suggests that the ethnic proportions of students in primary and secondary schools changed during the past three decades. For instance, in 1970’s there were more Indian students in both primary and secondary schools, but this trend reversed after the 1987 coup where there was a lot of emigration and the declining birth rate among the Indians (Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands, 2000).

In 1997, the government implemented the Compulsory Education Act whereby it was compulsory for all children to attend school for the first eight years, from ages six to fifteen, whichever one came first. However, this act was not strictly enforced as there was no mechanism and/or policy to detect school truancy (Tavola,
2000a). In essence, the implication arising from this dilemma was that students could drop out of school at any time, depending on their personal circumstances.

Based on the recommendations outlined in the Education Commission Reports of 1969 and 2000, the Ministry of Education worked towards improving the curriculum for both the primary and secondary schools by making it relevant to the local needs. For example, in 1989 changes were made to the external examinations whereby the New Zealand School Certificate examination for Form 5 students was discarded and replaced by a locally set external examination called Fiji Sixth Form Exam. Table 5 shows the external examinations set at various levels by the Ministry of Education at present in Fiji. Some other major changes made include: (a) the Fiji Islands Language and Literacy (FILNA) program that was introduced in class 5 and continued up to and including class 6, replacing the Intermediate exam; and (b) the Internal Assessment (IA) introduced in Form 3 and constituting 50% of the Fiji Junior Examination in Form 4. However, despite the changes that have been made, Fiji is still not able to at present gain full independence in her curriculum development as still follows the Western Australian model.

Table 5: External exams in primary and secondary schools in Fiji

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>FORM</th>
<th>EXAMINATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Fiji Intermediate Examination or FILNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*Fiji Eight Year Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fiji Junior Certificate Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fiji School Leaving certificate Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fiji Seventh form Examination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FIE and FEYE (class 6 and 8) are not used for promotion of students into next higher class. Source: Ministry of Education Annual Report 2006.
In order to provide access and equity to education, the Fiji government has had to consider the cost of education. In 1973, for example, the government introduced a tuition-free education policy, and in the 1980s primary school education tuition cost was progressively paid by the government. In 2000 it was extended to Form 5 and by 2002 it covered for Form 6. However, education in Form 7 is still considered today as being costly and students are required to pay for all their education tuition fees, with the exception of those who are disadvantaged and are therefore qualified to apply for education remission. The government, in essence, allocated tuition grants for students based on school roll and level (Bacchus, 2000). However, per capita grants were reduced after the 2000 coup and it became difficult for many schools to survive on the government grants only. As a result, there have been other forms of school fee levied on students, for instance, sports fee, computer fee, book hire fee, and building fee. Education, in this sense, was no longer considered as ‘free’ as claimed by the Ministry of Education since there were other related costs of sending children to school. With the ever increasing high rates of inflation, schools have since then reverted to alternative means – such as fundraising in order to raise funds for capital developments and improvements in school facilities.

Moreover, based on the study recommendations made in the Fiji Education Commission Reports of 1969 and 2000, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been given considerable attention. TVET was and still is considered as an alternative route for students who are not academically minded and/or inclined (Sharma, 2000). It was first introduced in the schools in two approaches: (1) subjects like Woodwork, Metalwork, Technical Drawing and Home Economics were introduced as optional subjects in the secondary school curriculum and (2) school-based TVET programmes were established in 40 selected secondary schools (e.g., Nawacoba Vocational Centre in Nadi and Multicraft Centre at Nukuloa College in Ba) to provide a ‘second chance’ education to early school leavers or ‘push-outs’ (Sharma, 2000). Presently, as shown in Table 2.1, there are 64 schools that offer TVET programs, enabling students to develop a wide range of skills.

Overall then, Fiji has made significant progress after independence in the education sector, whereby both governments and individuals gave given high priority to education and the development of human resources. Nevertheless, education, like any other sector, is always facing unprecedented challenges that arise from globalisation and rapid technological developments. In order to keep pace with the
rapid developments in the global arena, Fiji’s education system must first lay a strong foundation on which future developments can be successfully established. The subsequent sections of this chapter explicate the geographical, socio-economic and educational context of the Nadi rural secondary school which is chosen for the case study for this research study.

2.2 CONTEXT OF THE CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL (CSS)

2.2.1 Geographical context

Nadi town is the largest town apart from the two main cities - Lautoka and Suva. Nadi lies in the Western Division of Viti Levu and is 221 kilometres from Suva, and 24 kilometres from Lautoka (See Figure 2). The total population of Nadi is around 31,000. Nadi town is famous as it is where the country’s largest International Airport is located and is also the hub for the tourist activities.

![Figure 2 Map of Nadi, The Republic of Fiji Islands](image)

The school chosen for the present study, referred to as Case Study School (CSS) in the subsequent chapters, is located 9 kilometres from Nadi town. The school is situated in the heart of the four main villages - Nasau, Mulomulo, Meiguniyah, and Salovi. Historically, there was no secondary school in the local area and the students had great difficulties travelling to urban secondary schools. As a result of this difficulty and disadvantage, the local community raised enough funds to establish a Junior Secondary School in 1977 to cater for the needs of the rural children. The
majority of the Indian students attending this school come from the four villages surrounding the school, while the Fijian students come from the villages of Yavuna and Tovatova towards the Nausori Highlands. Since there is no daily transport from the Nausori Highlands, students from there have to find accommodation with their guardians in the Yavuna and Mulomulo village in order to attend the school. The houses in the area are scattered in farmlands and transport accessibility is a problem for the majority of the people. There are limited bus services to the area and this also limits accessibility to school. Some students walk for almost 7 kilometres to reach the school as there is no fixed transport available to them.

2.2.2 Socio-economic context

The majority of the people in the CSS area engage in tourism and agricultural industries, while some are also employed in shops and factories in town. The political upheavals over the past two decades have weakened the socio-economic status for many. Many people engaged in the tourism industry consequently lost their jobs as a result of the decline in the number of tourists. The economic conditions further deteriorated due to the closure of the garment factories after the 1987 and 2000 coups. The rural community relies on sugarcane farming as their main source of income. However, the expiry of land lease for some has forced them to seek seasonal employment during the cane harvesting season, while others have started small scale vegetable farming within their housing area, or seek casual employment in order to provide needs for the family. While some people have access to electricity and government water supply, others depend on the water from wells, rivers and bore-hole. Those who do not have the electricity supply depend on hurricane lamps or their own electricity generator. The deteriorating socio-economic conditions directly influence the students’ attendance and performance at the local school.

2.2.3 Educational Context

CSS has a mixture of Fijian and Indian students and it caters for some very disadvantaged and underprivileged children. The Ministry of Education is paying tuition fee for all students up to Form 6 so the school does not charge any extra tuition fee. The school charges minimum fee for the book hire scheme. This has lessened the financial burden on parents and, furthermore, the open-intake policy of the school also welcomes students who have not fared well in the primary school. Entry into this
school is not academically screened, and students are only assessed in Form 4 and upward. Hence, the school strives to provide quality education to all students despite their social, economic, cultural or academic challenges and disadvantages.

CSS is a committee-run (non-government) school who makes sure that the school is provided with adequate educational resources and qualified staff. The feeder schools are the surrounding primary schools and the sister primary school, Mulomulo Primary School. Form 5 and 6 education was introduced in 1988 and Form 7 in 2007. The students sit for four external exams: Fiji Eighth Year examination (FEYE) in Form 2, Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) in Form 4, Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination (FSLC) in form 6, and Fiji Seventh Form Examination (FSE) in Form 7. With the high level of students dropping out of school and the unemployed youths in the local community, the school administrators and the management realised that there was a crucial need for vocational education for the rural students. Through the financial assistance provided by the Japanese Government and the approval from the Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Education was introduced in 2005. Tailoring, Catering, Carpentry and Joinery subjects are currently being offered at the vocational centre and the school plans to diversify it further in the near future.

A wide range of subjects are also offered to the students at all levels. The school has a book hire scheme where students pay a small amount of money in order to get the required text books. Since the school does not charge any additional fee, the school committee subsidises the overall cost for text books and other resources. Annual fund raising is often conducted periodically to raise money to improve the facilities of the school. This rural secondary school has undergone substantial developments over the years to ensure that underprivileged children in this area are not denied the basics of quality education. However, at present the school still faces a number of challenges in relation to student retention up to Form 6 or 7. Given this ongoing problem, it is imperative therefore to investigate the real challenges that are faced by students and the extraneous factors that may deter them from completing their secondary education.

2.3 SUMMARY

Fiji’s education system has been the result of the multiple influences of the post-colonial, colonial and the independent political, social and economical developments that exist during the past decades. The geographical location of the
different settlements and the population distribution pattern in Fiji Islands has played an important role in determining access to education and the completion rate in primary and secondary education. Contemporary education in Fiji is also the result of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of the population composition. However, changes in the social, political and economic spheres have also altered a lot of developments in the society. A major concern in Fiji’s education system is the high attrition rate, resulting in high number of ‘drop-outs’ or early school leavers (Tavola, 2000a). Local and global political and economic changes set context for the development of the country, and education has a key role to play in this process. Providing a flexible, innovative and rigorous education system is more complex than ever before. Some challenging socio-economic factors, environmental restrictions, political crisis and some educational policies have acted as barriers that impede student’s success at school (Williams, 2000) which results in a significant number of these disadvantaged students dropping out of school. To increase the retention rate of the students in the secondary schools, the crux of the problem has to be investigated in totality rather than one directional focus on financial, political or educational policy. The aim is to ensure that that student’s completed their education and are well equipped to make an effective contribution to the development of the nation. The next chapter provides local and international literature on the student dropouts and related issues.
Chapter 3

STUDENT DROPOUTS AND RELATED ISSUES

3.0 INTRODUCTION

We live in a world which is shaped by the age-specific patterns (Dorn, 1993). People, in general, are guided by contemporary age-norm beliefs whereby at the age of six they must attend school, and by early twenties most of them start with their first job, and retire from full time job by the age of sixty. However, not all the people fit or meet these expectations in life. One such example is related to the dropping out of school. In this era, education has become an integral foundation on which countries build their future. Millions of dollars are spent on the education sector throughout the world. The status quo is such that children who enrol at primary school eventually complete their secondary education. Hence, those children who do not complete their secondary education or high school are usually referred to as ‘dropouts’ (Bridgeland, Dilulro & Morison, 2006; Dorn, 1993). It is a label that is used to describe those who depart from the age-specific norm, whereby teenagers should be in school learning. The social construction of the dropout problem explicitly marks the time when secondary education became a common expectation.

Many researchers and educators (Auxier, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Hruska, 2005; Jerald, 2006) have recently suggested that dropping out of school is not new, but an ongoing phenomenon that exists in secondary schools. Furthermore, research evidence indicates, for example, that secondary school retention rate is an educational challenge in almost all countries, ranging from very developed nations such as the United States of America, Canada, Europe and Australia (Gammage, 1982; Katie, 2007; Nathan, 2006) to the third world countries such as Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific (Ali, 2007; Hruska, 2005; Mundia, 1995; Tatafu, 1997). In essence, despite the differences in secondary education systems’, dropping out is an international phenomenon.

This chapter then is concerned with theoretical examination into student drop out in secondary schools. Specifically, empirical researches pertaining to three important lines of inquiry are examined in the subsequent sections, namely: (i) the possible factors that may cause low retention rates in secondary schools, (ii) the subsequent effects of the student drop out, and (iii) the alternative strategies that may assist students to stay and persevere in their formal education. The research evidence
that I present in this chapter provides a basis for the theoretical conceptualisation that will be explained in Chapter 4.

3.1 THE CONCEPT OF STUDENT DROPOUT

Widespread concern over a commonly recognised student dropout problem appeared only in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s in the United States (Dorn, 1993). This varied for other developing countries, such as the Asia and the Pacific, who were more concerned with providing basic primary education then. However, today both the developing and the developed countries are acknowledging the serious problem of student dropout. In a number of developing countries (e.g., Asia, Pacific and Latin America), the term student “dropout” refers to students who have not been able to complete their basic education (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Tatafu, 1997; Thaman, 1994). Here in Fiji, Basic education refers to the compulsory education age; for example:

The Compulsory Education Order of 1997 made school attendance compulsory for all children from six to 15 years, or until they have completed Class 8 or Form 2, unless they are prevented from attending by unavoidable cause such as distance to school or illness or are involved in some other form of organized education. (Millennium Development Goals, Fiji national Report, Ministry of Finance and & National Planning, Nov. 2004: 28).

In contrast, the term dropout has been defined differently in many of the developed countries. For example, according to the American Educational Society, a dropout is someone who is without a high school diploma (Dorn, 1993; Rumberger, 1987; Temple, Reynolds, & Miedel; 2000). Other researchers (Kelly, 1986; Lewit, 1992; Temple et al., 2000) have not used an explicit definition to refer to dropout, but rather used words such as ‘student elimination’, ‘withdrawal’, and ‘early school leaver’, interchangeably.

By the same token, some researchers and educators have also wittingly used other terms to refer to “student dropout”. The terms have often been chosen on the basis of researchers’ own conceptualisations; for example, the term ‘early school leaver’ has been used by Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, and Godber (2001) to refer to a long process of disengagement from school (and not an instantaneous decision). Furthermore, dropout in this case is preceded by indicators of withdrawal (e.g., poor
attendance) or unsuccessful school experiences (e.g., academic or behavioural difficulties) that often begin in the early years of schooling. Likewise, the term ‘school completion’ has been preferred and used by Christenson and Thurlow (2004) as it has a positive orientation and emphasises on the development of student competencies.

Similarly, other researchers have argued that the term ‘student dropout’ has a negative connotation as it places the whole blame on the child for dropping out of school rather than looking at the dropout issue in totality. Furthermore, it has also been noted that educational and school policies are instrumental in causing student to drop out of schools. In such cases, according to Thaman (1994), these students should be referred to as ‘push-outs’. The work of Bickel, Bond and LeMahieu (1986) suggests that there is no single definition of ‘student dropout’ as they note that students who leave school before completion fall into at least three categories: (1) ‘dropout’ who consciously decide to leave school early for a variety of reasons (for example, disciplinary problems, low achievement, Pregnancy), (2) ‘push-out’ who perceive the school or its personnel as hostile and (3) ‘fade-out’, whose decision to leave school does not occur at a particular time and is a less conscious choice. Hence, the authors have recommended the use of ‘Early School Exit’ (ESE) as this term appears more comprehensive and provides a more accurate means of characterising this complex issue. Moreover, Hruska (2005) used the term “dropout” to refer to students who, for any reason except death, leaves school before graduation without transferring to another school/institution. In essence, Hruska’s definition is relatively neutral and does not infer to any particular reason as to why children drop out of school. More importantly, this definition also leaves open the different causes (personal, educational, and geographical) that may lead to children dropping out of school. On the other hand, in many of the South Pacific countries, the nature of the dropout problem is not understood well. In fact, no one knows what the high school dropout rate really is. That is because there is no consensus definition of a high school dropout, nor is there a standard method for completing the dropout rate.

Analysis of the different theoretical definitions cited suggests that in the context of Fiji, an adapted version of Hruska’s (2005) definition is best suited. For the present study then, the stipulated definition for ‘student dropout’ is as follows:
Any student who, for any reason except death, acute sickness or physical disability, leaves school before completing Form 6 without transferring to another school/institution.

Hruska’s (2005) definition has been modified for the present study as research (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Harvey, 2001) has shown, in general, that children with acute sickness and physical disability often leave school early. In contrast to their Western counterparts who have no problems, there is very little opportunity or provision in Fiji for children with sickness and physical disability. The Fiji schooling system is such that children with visual, intellectual, hearing and other physical impairments are expected to adhere to the same curriculum as normal children if they choose to stay in mainstream schools (Tavola, 2000a). Alternatively, these children may also attend one of the 17 special education schools that are set up specifically to cater them (Ministry of Education, 2006 Annual Report).

These special schools are non-government schools and, therefore, the financial management and infrastructural development depends on allocated funding that is based on donations and grants from government and non-government organisations. Many children under such circumstances do not have much choice in Fiji, particularly in rural areas where they face extreme challenges, such as accessibility and financial hardships. Hence, since there is no special provision made for these children in mainstream education, they are expected to therefore dropout of school at any point in time. This dropping out of school depends on their personal situations and it is then unequitable to compare them with the non-disabled peers who dropout. The dropouts investigated in this study then do not include those with acute sickness or physical disability as these situations are uncontrollable to some extent in the current context of Fiji.

3.2 FACTORS LEADING TO STUDENT DROPOUT

Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that there are a number of factors which contribute to student dropout, for instance, poverty (Ali, 2007; Baselala, 2005; Singh, 2007a), family problems (Amato, 1988; Jerald, 2006), parental support (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Engulund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Rumberger, 1987), geographical location (Taganesia, 2005; Tavola, 2000a, 2000b), and school and educational policies (Glenn, 2006; Jowett, 1998; Sharma, 1997;
The above factors may be classified into three major categories: (1) personal-related factors, (2) school-related factors, and (3) geographical location. These three classified categories are equally important in their concerted influences on children dropping out of school. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I will critically examine these three major categories and how they explain student drop out.

3.2.1 Personal-related factors of student dropout

Personal-related factors refer to the various family characteristics of students which, in turn, play an important role in determining their dropout status. The family characteristics may be the family finance (e.g., parents’ income), the social structure of the family (e.g., family type, parental relationships) and/or the human capital (e.g., parental education), (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996). Many researchers (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Jeynes, 2005; Dixon, 1994; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999) have advocated that existing family characteristics, such as the parents’ incomes, their levels of education, and/or the family relationship and structure may, to a large extent, influence the degree of parental involvement in children’s academic learning. More importantly, the interconnectedness between these three factors makes a unique contribution to a child’s academic success, and whether he/she will drop out of school.

In terms of the family finance, empirical research studies (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Baselala, 2007; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Steinberg, 1987) have shown that parental incomes make a direct and indirect impact on children’s academic attainments. In the study of family finance in the context of Fiji, poverty is a recurring theme that has often been discussed extensively. For example, the data indicated that 34% of the Fiji population lived in poverty, and that rural people were much worse off than their urban counterparts (Narsey, 2007b; Walsh, 2006b). In essence, this statistics highlights the discrepancies and disadvantages experienced by those who are marginalised by societies. The levels of personal incomes for many families, borderline on a state of poverty, have resulted in detrimental sacrifices that relate and concern to education.

First, family income influences affordability and, ultimately, one’s level of educational attainments; for example, high family incomes enable parents to purchase and provide their children with educational resources, pay school fees, and travel expenses. In the western context, for instance, the work of Stevenson and Stigler
(1992) showed that children whose parents invest more than just the basic requirements for schooling have more chances to become successful in academic attainments. The availability of extra money in the family may enable parents to purchase extra educational aids, such as supplementary textbooks, educational videotapes, and other educational supplies. Children from such families also spend less time helping family members with household chores as the family can afford hired labour (Dixon, 1994; Jeynes, 2002).

In the context of Fiji, the impact of family income on children’s academic learning is prevalent and poverty is rife. A number of reports (Fiji Poverty Report, 1997 & 2007; Learning together: direction for education in Fiji Islands, 2000; Save the Children Fund Report, 1998) have emphasised the significance of poverty and its effects on school dropout. For example:

There is very clear association between school dropouts and poverty. Research indicates that poverty is the principal reason children leave school, either being unable to meet the financial costs of schooling or dropping out to help support their family through menial employment. Children from families that cannot afford to send them school are at risk of becoming the next generation of disadvantaged adults (Save the Children Fund Fiji Report, 1998, p. 11).

Likewise other findings (Baselala, 2005; Singh, 2008; Taga, 2000) have highlighted the reality of Fiji, especially among those who come from low socioeconomic classes and are the poorest in the country. These studies have shown that, on average, approximately 4000 students from poor families every year drop out of schools before Form 6. In a recent newspaper article, Singh (2008) quoted the latest updated figures by the Ministry of Education on school completion which stated that:

Of those students who enrolled in Form three in 2003, only 78.5 per cent reached Form six. Of those who started Form three in 2004, only 74.9 per cent reached Form six in 2007. On average about 74.9 per cent of those who start secondary education in Fiji get to form six and a lesser percentage make it to form seven. (p.1)

Likewise, many news reports published recently (Ali, 2007; Singh, 2008, 2007) highlight the plight of many children whose families cannot afford the basis costs of education. Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands (2000) suggests, for example, that although education is tuition free in Fiji, many
families still face numerous indirect costs, such as bus-fares, uniforms, books and fees that are imposed by schools. Consequently, many children who drop out of schools early end up as adults having unqualified, unskilled jobs that pay poorly (Tavola, 2000a, 200b). Trapped in poorly paid jobs, many adults in turn look to their own children to supplement the family’s income (Tavola, 2000b). Hence the cycle of poverty perpetuates where poverty causes school dropout which, in turn, leads to unskilled and low paid jobs.

Other research studies in Western contexts have provided evidence to show the detrimental impact of the financial status of parents on children’s academic attainments. For instance, research studies in the United States (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Rumberger, 1987) have shown that the dropout rates were lower (by 30%) for students from high income families compared to those students whose families earn less. The study revealed that children who come from low socioeconomic classes drop out of school because they face financial difficulties, or have to supplement their family income by working. The studies (Jeynes, 2002; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Rumberger, 1987) reveal, in general, the advantages children from high socio-economical classes have in pursuing their studies. The work of Cheung and Andersen (2003) also suggests that often the case, existing educational curricula and technological advances favour those who come from high income families.

Secondly, research studies (Astone & McLanaha, 1991; Taga, 2000; Tavola, 2000a) have shown that the financial status of the family may also affect children’s health and school attendance, the study environment at home, and the choice of school that they attend. In relation to the issues of health and school attendance, research studies (Bobonis, Miguel, & Sharma, 2004; Kremer, Moulin & Namunyu, 2003) have found children from poor families are usually malnourished, or suffer from other health-related disorders which prevents them from attending school. Consequently, many of these children lag behind in their school work and slowly fade out of the school system altogether. In Fiji, for instance, the 1993 National Nutrition Survey and the Ministry of Health Survey in 2000 found that 16% of children aged between five and nine year old were undernourished and the majority of such cases concerned children from poor families, such as those from squatter settlements in urban and rural areas. The same survey noted the frequent occurrences of numerous health-related complaints, such as anaemia, skin infection, and diarrhoea. Poverty also
limits families’ access to medical facilities and medicine, in general (Tavola, 2000a, 200b). This, in turn, has an impact on students’ academic learning and the attendance and retention rates at school. The case of Kenyan families and Indian families in India also shows a similar pattern, where increased subsidies helped poor children to attend school daily (Kremer, et al., 2003).

It is also noted that overcrowding and poor quality housing arising from low family incomes contribute to unproductive learning environments (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Taga, 2004). This ongoing problem is faced by children daily in many developing countries. In Fiji, for instance, many homes in rural areas and squatter settlements (e.g., Jittu Estate, Wailea, Nanuku, Veidogo, Raiwaqa settlements in Suva) do not have electricity, safe drinking water or proper sanitation, making it difficult for children to study at home (Lingam, 2005; Mohanty, 2003). The 1996 Census showed that approximately a third of households in Fiji had unacceptable standards in some respect: 16.7% had no safe source of water, 33.2% had no electricity, and 31% use pit toilets. Although there is no empirical evidence at present to confirm the relationship between a lack of facilities/amenities (e.g., safe drinking water, electricity) and student dropout, some researchers (Ali, 2007; Jeter-Twilley, Legum, & Norton, 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Tavola, 2000a) have however asserted that these factors do make a contribution towards students’ academic learning and dropout rates.

The financial status at home has also been reported to influence the type of school that children attend. The Fiji context indicates that a majority of schools rely on support and school grants from the community and government to function daily (Ali, 2007; Raicola, 2007; Taga, 2000). The community partnership posits that community-managed schools depend on parents whose children attend those schools for financial support. Inevitably, poor communities have poorly resourced and badly maintained schools. The status quo in Fiji is as such that poor parents can seldom send their children to prestigious schools that charge high school levies. Consequently, there are limited choices in school selection for many of the poor families. By the same token, poorly financed schools do not have the adequate resources to cater or implement student retention policies, and therefore dropout is a common phenomenon.

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2 At the time of writing of this thesis, the 1996 statistics was the most recent. However, in late 2007, there was a national Census conducted in Fiji but the statistics were not available.
Research studies (Dixon, 1994; Jeynes, 2005; Lee, 1993; Lee & Burkam, 2003) have also shown that children’s academic learning is affected by the family structure. Family structure, according to Cheung and Andersen (2003), consists of family type and family size. Family type has two categories: (1) intact families, which consist of two natural parents, and (2) non-intact families, which consist of a single parent or a step parent (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Jeynes, 2002). Family size is defined by the number of siblings in a family (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Morrow, 1999). Numerous studies (Manning, Downing, Ostgaard, & Smock, 2005; Wen, 2005) have shown that the traditional family structure (type and size) has changed sharply over the past two decades in both the developed and developing countries. Families, in general, are getting smaller in size, as well changing from intact to non-intact, with the latter consisting of single and step parents (Chamie, 2004; Manning et al., 2005).

Some researchers (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Jeynes, 2002) have stated the existing family type, in part, influences the amount of support and involvement that parents provide for their children’s learning. The family type, in particular, determines the time and money that parents can spend on their children’s education (Deslandes, Royer, Turcott, & Bertrand, 1997; Rumberger, 1987); this in turn has a cumulative influence on children’s academic learning and attitudes, as well as their willingness to complete school.

Research studies in developed and developing countries (Blake, 1989; Powell & Steilman, 1990; Van Eijk & DeGraff, 1995), although quite limited, have produced inconclusive findings concerning the relationship between family size and academic achievement. For some, it is argued that more siblings in a family can dilute the resources and time available, which, in turn, affects the educational attainment for everyone else (Van Eijk & De Graaf, 1995). In contrast, others have provided an opposing view suggesting that siblings can, in fact, serve as a source of stimulation (Morrow, 1999). For example, Cheung and Andersen’s (2003) study in the Western context shows that children from large families have lower educational outcomes during the early years of education, but this pattern disappears later on in life when siblings are able to assist each other.

A number of studies (Astone & Mclanahan, 1991; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Rumberger, 1987) have also affirmed the important influences of family type on the educational outcomes of children. Research findings (Amato, 1988; Coleman, 1988; Corcoran, Gordon, Laren, & Solon, 1987; Deslandes et al.,
1997) indicate, for example, that children from non-intact families are less likely to complete high school than children who grow up in intact families. Furthermore, these studies have suggested that the impact of non-intact families is two folds. Firstly, the precarious financial status of single-parent families (the fact that most children live with their mothers after divorce implies that majority of the single-parent households have mothers as the controlling authority, Cheung & Andersen, 2003) prevents children from these families to complete their schooling. For instance, mother-only families are more likely to be poor (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986), and their poverty is more extreme than other groups (Bane & Ellwood, 1983). Furthermore, Dixon (1994) and Juliusdottir (1997) found that mothers from single-parent families, especially those who were poor, worked significantly longer hours each week to provide for their family’s needs. Even among single-parent families (mother with children) living above the poverty line, income insecurity is a common experience (Duncan & Hoffman, 1985; Jeynes, 2005; Manning et al., 2005). Moreover, other researchers (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Jeynes 2005) state that given economic resources are generally poor and uncertain in single-parent families many mothers have lower expectations for their children.

Secondly, the time parents spend with their children is the driving mechanism behind educational success (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Hetherington & Arasteh, 1988; Lee, 1993). Research studies (Dixon, 1994; Jeynes, 2002, 2005) have found that single parents in non-intact families spend less time in supervising and monitoring their children’s school work. In this analysis, single parents in many cases do not have spousal support and this reduces the overall level of educational support and involvement at home for children. There is evidence (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Jeter-Twilley, Legum, & Norton, 2007) to indicate that time spent with children is different in non-intact families; for example, single mothers work long hours outside the home than married mothers, and consequently have less time for their children (Douthitt, 1989). For example, the work of Astone and McLanahan (1991) involving American children in single-parent and two-parent families showed parental involvement and supervision were less among children in single-parent families than among children who lived in two-parent families.

In addition, research studies (Nock, 1988; Steinberg, 1987) have also provided evidence affirming the educational implications arising from step-parent and two-natural parent families. Research studies (Amato, 1987; Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005;
Furstenberg, Christine, Nord, Peterson & Nicholas, 1983) have shown that children are less close to their step father/mother in step-parent families. The work of Astone and McLanahan (1991) has shown that children in step-parent families do not attain or perform well academically. Largely, there are two main reasons for this poor academic performance. First, often the case, step parents are less willing to invest their time and money in their step children’s educational learning. Secondly, in a step-parent/children relationship, children often view their step parents as intruders and competitors. These children often feel neglected and lose interest in their studies, which results in early withdrawal from school (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Jeter-Twilley et al., 2007).

Finally, empirical research studies (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Renzulli & Park, 2002) indicate that the level of parental education, considered as human or social capital, can also influence children’s educational attainments in two major ways: (i) higher parental education levels provide quality education for children, and (ii) higher parental educational levels enable more parental support and involvement for children. Studies (Naylor, 1989; Renzulli & Park, 2002; Statler & Petersen, 2003) have shown, in general, that parents with low educational qualifications often have unskilled and/or casual jobs that pay low wages. Given this small return income, many parents find it quite difficult to afford and provide quality education for their children. Further examination of the research evidence (Noth & O’Neil, 1981; Rumberger, 1987; Sadowski, 1987) indicates that parents’ educational levels serve as a good basis for children to continue on with their own education. More importantly, parents’ education and qualifications help the family economically. For instance, Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji islands (2000) states:

The children of parents with low levels of education are more likely to leave school early, thus restricting their opportunities as adults, and perpetuating the cycle of poverty (p. 265).

In general then, children whose parents have low educational attainments are more likely to drop out of school early than their comparative counterparts.

Social scientists (Coleman, 1988; Hara, 1998) advocate that the level of parental education may, in part, exist in the form of social capital, which consists of norms (e.g., parental involvement, aspirations and commitment) that promote
academic success. In the Fiji context, for example, the work of Tavola (2000a) has shown that highly qualified parents have higher educational aspirations and commitment toward formal education which, in turn, help children complete their high school education. Children who are well supported by their parents and family members also show keen interest in their school work. Similar findings have also been reported in the United States, where children who leave school early are mainly those whose parents are less involved in their school work (Jerald, 2006). Research studies, consistent across America, Canada and Britain (DeGraaf, 2000; Jeter-Twilley, et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2002), also show parents who have high educational and occupational attainments are more likely to have high personal drive, expectations, and determination for their children. These attributes (i.e., personal drive, determination), in turn, have a direct impact on children’s academic learning and schooling.

3.2.2 School and Educational Policies

Several studies (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Jerald, 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2003) have found that there is no single major reason as to why students drop out of school. A number of authors (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Bridegeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Glenn, 2006; Renzulli & Park, 2002) have contended that school-related factors (e.g., low academic achievements) have an immediate effect on students, forcing them to drop out of formal schooling altogether. Furthermore school-related factors, in many cases, are manipulated by school practices and policies, such as school rules and teacher attitudes (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Glenn, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). In general, the three broad categories of school-related factors that push students out are: (1) academic achievements (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Glenn, 2006), (2) school curriculum (Dekkers & Claasen, 2001; Finn, 1989; Jerald, 2006; Thaman, 1994), and (3) school policies and teacher practices (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Jerald, 2006; Riehl, 1999, Tavola, 2000a).

In many countries, academic achievements in secondary schools have often been used by the governments, educators and employers to measure the skills and knowledge that youths have acquired (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Bridgeland et al., 2006). It is well documented that low academic achievement or academic failure in school, measured by grades, test scores, and grade retention, is associated with student dropout (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Glenn, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas,
For long, scholars (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Singh, 1997) have debated whether such exams do more harm than good. Proponents of exit exams say they improve learning and future employment by giving students and school districts better incentives to succeed. On the other hand, sceptics say the exams needlessly prevent students, who would have otherwise completed their coursework, from continuing on to the next level. According to Rumberger and Thomas (2000), involuntary school dropout is often caused by explicit and deliberate policies that involve the use of standardised exams to evaluate students’ academic success.

Since one important objective of schools is to show that tests scores are improving, one way to achieve this is to set an entry requirement benchmark that would eliminate low-achieving students. One metaphor that has often been used to describe this elimination is to refer to it as a “schools discharge students” process (Riehl, 1999). Although exams set by schools may ensure students attain specific skill competencies, a potential unintended consequence however is that it leads to an increase in student drop out (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Professor Thaman, a Pacific scholar, has argued that the Western model of assessment (Thaman, 1994) may lead to alienation for many Pacific Island students which, in effect, causes student ‘push-out’, and not dropout.

In the South Pacific context, the external exam system, also known as public exams or exit exams, acts as a qualifier for students to progress to from one level to the next. In Fiji for instance, except for the first five years of primary schooling, external or public examinations dominate: (i) how and what teachers teach students; (ii) how parents, officials in the Ministry of Education (MOE) and others evaluate teachers, principals and head teachers, and (iii) what students do and what they face in life after they leave school (Sadler, 2000; Singh, 1997). The existence of two external exams at the primary level (FIE, FEYE) and three external examinations at the secondary level (FJC, FSLC, FSFE) has been a cause of concern for many, especially when the results of these exams act as a screening process to vet students for the next

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3 Fiji Intermediate Examination (FIE), conducted in class 6
Fiji Eighth Year Examination (EFYE), conducted in class 8 or Form 2. According to the Ministry of Education, these two external exams are not compulsory and should not be used for promotional purposes.

4 Fiji Junior Certificate Examination (FJC), conducted at Form 4, Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination (FSLC), conducted in Form 6 and Fiji Seventh Form Examination (FSFE), conducted in
higher form (Tavola, 2000a). Although secondary education is viewed as a right for all students in Fiji, poor performances in external exams disqualify many from entry into prestigious secondary schools or to the next higher form (Sadler, 2000). For instance, poor performance in the FEYE does not necessarily prevent secondary admission but some schools select their students on the basis of exam score results. This selection of high achievers also helps to enhance the reputation of the school. Similarly, students who fail the Fiji Junior Certificate Examination do not qualify to progress to Form 5. Even then, some schools set their own high cut-off marks. In essence, the results of external examinations are used by many schools as a selection criterion, as well as a marketing instrument (Sadler, 2000, Tavola, 2000a).

Examination of the recent statistics in Fiji shows that there is a large drop in the number of students progressing from one secondary form to another, as well as after the results of the external examinations are out. According to the Ministry of Education Annual Report published in 2006, for example, the school rolls were as follows: class 8, 17,988; Form 3, 16,977; Form 4, 15,477; Form 5, 13,719; Form 6, 12,305; and Form 7, 4,580. These statistics are similar to those reported in previous longitudinal studies (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Robertson, 2006) that explored the relationships between secondary school exit exams and dropout rates. The results of these studies show students who drop out early, in general, obtained lower grades and test scores than those who graduated from secondary schools. For example, Glenn’s (2006) study in the United States found students who sat the secondary school exams were more likely to drop out of school than those who did not sit the exams. In another study in Chicago, Allensworth and Easton (2005) found that 81% of the students who graduated from secondary school earned good grades and did not fail any semester. The data collected from the longitudinal Youth in Transition study in Canada also revealed that a high proportion of dropouts scored an average mark of 59 or less (Robertson, 2006). Overall then, many school dropouts view low academic achievements and exam failures as a major hindrance for school continuation.

Moreover, research on academic achievements (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Slavin, Madden, Dolan, Wasik, Ross, & Smith, 1994) suggests that there is a positive association between poor literacy skills and student dropout. Study of secondary form 7. According to the Ministry of Education, these external examinations at the secondary level are compulsory and are used for promotion to next higher level and entry into tertiary institutes.
school students in the United States (Renzulli & Park, 2002) found that difficulty in reading and writing was one of the most common characteristics of student dropout. Likewise, Slavin & Madden (2001) study reinforced the finding that dropping out of school is related to a lack of reading skills. Due to poor reading abilities, students often failed in school exams and repeated failures led to dropout decision. In a recent study in the United States, Daniel, Walsh, Goldston, Arnold, Reoubssin, and Wood (2006) reported similar findings that showed poor literacy skills in the earlier school years contributed to spiralling failures and the subsequent decision for one to drop out of school altogether. Hence the studies described here indicate, in general, that children with poor reading abilities have higher tendencies to drop out of school early due to various limitations.

Research has also shown that students who do not succeed academically with good grades are often compelled to repeat their schooling. Student repetition is the result of educational policies that have been put in place to address the issues of examinations and promotion. For instance, students who did not achieve the passing marks in their examinations or could not meet other academic requirements, such as the completion of coursework are prevented from moving on to the next higher form/grade (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Renzulli & Park, 2002; Tavola, 2000). Such students are often given the opportunity to repeat the forms/grades in order to meet the academic demands for promotion. Several studies (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 2001) have found that students who repeat grades as a result of academic failure are more likely to drop out eventually. For instance, Bowlby and McMullen (2002) found in the United States that students who dropped out were five times more likely than their counterparts to have repeated primary school grades. Similarly, the studies by Rumberger & Thomas (2000) also revealed that 32% of the students who repeated a grade eventually dropped out of school altogether. Hence, the evidence gathered suggests grade repetition discourages school continuation and is seen a main factor that contributes to student dropout.

Understanding the reasons why children drop out of secondary school can also be comprehended by looking at the extent to which formal curricula influence students’ academic achievements and school completion. The definition of a school curriculum varies considerably depending on the context and one’s individual beliefs, but it is commonly defined as “a set of planned activities that the students will learn in
a given timeframe (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Tavola, 2000b). In countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada, the school curricula are broad and detailed, and districts, schools and teachers often design their own specific programmes for teaching, learning and assessment.

In contrast, in many South Pacific countries such as Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Solomon Islands, teachers are very much restricted by the national curricula and external examinations. In such cases teachers must comply with the national curricula rigidly, and deviating from these curricula would lead to disaccord between teaching and learning (Jowett, 1998; Ryan & Brewer, 1990; Tavola, 2000b). Education advocates (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Ruzelli & Park, 2002; Tavola, 2000a) have often argued that the curricula and their relevance influence students’ academic success and school completion. Research studies in this region (Baba 1982; Coxon, 2000; Ozman & Aver, 1995; Tavola, 2000a) have shown, for example, that the contents and relevance of the school curricula influence students’ levels of educational satisfaction. In this analysis, students who are not satisfied with their learning or who cannot relate learning to future employment prospects often underachieve and leave school early (Coxon, 2000; Jowett, 1998; Ozman & Aver, 1995; Thaman, 1994).

Research studies (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2003) have found that highly structured curriculum contents without flexibility create a lack of enthusiasm, a feeling of inadequacy and boredom, and a general dislike for school work that eventually lead to school dropout. The works of Jowett (1998), Tavola (2000a), and Thaman (1994) have found, for example, that many Pacific curricula are “elitist” and cater primarily for the academically minded children and not those who will never reach university or other higher institutions. Although there is no empirical evidence to discern the effects of curriculum contents on student drop out in this region, many educators (Coxon, 2000; Jowett, 1998; Tavola, 2000a; Thaman, 2003; 1994) have however advocated that there is an association between the two issues.

For the majority of the students in the South Pacific, learning involves simply the coverage of factual contents rather than the development of in-depth understanding that uses different methods of inquiry (e.g., problem solving, inquiry-based learning) (Coxon, 2000; Tavola, 2000b). Jowett (1998), a Pacific educator, has argued that for the vast majority of secondary school students here (as high as 75%), formal education stops as early as Form 4 (Year 12) as many of these students are marginalised by the academic-oriented curricula and examinations that demand high
performances. Therefore, the survival of the fittest is largely determined by the students’ ability to master the subject contents and to be able to reproduce the information in formal examinations. Those students who fail are systematically removed from the formal school system altogether.

Other studies (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Glenn, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) have shown that the school curricula also influence students’ willingness and interest to take part in their studies. From a positive point of view, for example, research (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; McNeal, 1995) has found schools that have extra-curricula activities, such as athletics and fine arts, are more likely to report lower student dropout rates. In contrast, schools that have highly structured and rigid curricula cause boredom, frustration, and lead students to disengage from schoolwork, truancy and other behavioural problems (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Jerald, 2006; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1997; Renzulli & Park, 2002). These behavioural problems, in turn, become an impetus for students to drop out of school (Newmann, Ridenour, Newman & DeMarco, 2003; Rumberger, 1995). Research in Canada and the United States (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Markow & Scheer, 2002) has shown, for instance, that students often cite uninteresting curricula as being one of the main reasons for their dropping out of school.

The relevance of the school curricula is also an issue of concern (e.g., Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Renzulli & Park, 2002). Curriculum relevance, according to a number of authors (Markow & Scheer, 2002; Ozman & Aver, 1995; Thaman, 2003; 2000), refers to the association that students make with what they learn at school to their future employment needs. Research studies (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fobih, 1987; Markow & Scheer, 2002) in the United States have found that the school curricula used, in many cases, do not cater students for the workforce or the skills that they would need for later employment. Bridgegland et al.’s (2006) study of American youths reported, for example, that 47% of the students with high GPAs cited irrelevant contents and learning as a major reason for their dropping out of school. Likewise, some researchers (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Coxon, 2000) have indicated that students are more motivated if they are able to find meaningful connections to their learning.

Moreover some Pacific educators (Jowett, 1998; Taufe’ulungaki, 2003; Tavola, 2000b; Thaman, 2003) have expressed concerns about the cultural relevance of the school curricula and, in particular, the use of English as the main medium of
instruction. These educators have argued that Pacific Island students have their own cultural beliefs, ethos and values which are unique, and these elements influence their perceptions of knowledge and knowing. However when the teaching and learning process takes place in a foreign language (i.e., English), it becomes difficult then for many of these Pacific Island students to learn and understand the contents taught.

Several researchers (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Smyth & Hattam, 2001) have recently argued that the cause of student dropout may also be related to the schools themselves. Several research studies (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) have shown, for instance, that schools themselves can have detrimental effects on students’ academic success and the dropout rates. A research study by Roderick, Allensworth and Nagaoka (2004) conducted in Chicago revealed that differences in dropout across secondary schools were simply a reflection of the students in general, and not a result of policies or practices. However, other research studies (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Roderick et al., 2004) showed that in addition to race, gender, poverty, prior academic achievements, and family background, school policies and teachers practices also matter in students’ school decision making.

There are two ways in which schools can influence student dropout (Riehl, 1999; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Firstly, schools can directly affect students through their discrete policies and decisions that cause many to involuntarily drop out of schools. These policies may concern rules regarding low grades, misbehaviour, or being overage (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1995). Since students’ results in test scores are a common measure of school performance, some schools have their own policies and entry requirements (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Robertson, 2006). In the context of Fiji, for example, some elite schools have their own admission and promotion policies that are based on students’ internal and external exam results (Subramani, 2000; Tavola, 2000a). In other Western contexts, researchers (Dietro & Cutillo, 2006; Sander & Krautmann, 1995) have also claimed that private schools, such as the Catholic schools in Canada and the United States have lower dropout rates because they select their students based on academic criteria. In other words, the school systematically discharges those students who do not meet the academic standards and criteria set. There is no provision for re-enrolment.
Other studies (Bowditch, 1993; Fine, 1991; Riehl, 1999) have suggested that schools also contribute to students’ involuntary departure by excluding and discharging ‘troublemakers’ and difficult students. In Fiji, for example, problems such as drug, alcohol, and sexual offenses are dealt with by the schools, the Ministry of Education, and the police. Here students without forewarning are suspended indefinitely or they are expelled from the school altogether; in essence, many students who commit these offenses have no choices but to ultimately drop out. Furthermore, students’ perceptions of the school environment (e.g., not a friendly place) also contribute to an increase in student dropout (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Robertson, 2006; Rumberger, 1995). For example, a longitudinal study that was conducted recently in Canada (Youth in Transition: Robertson, 2006; Rumberger, 1995) revealed that 49% of those students who dropped out indicated the school was ‘unfair’, ‘harsh’, and ‘not a friendly place’.

The second way in which schools can affect student dropout is through indirect school policies (e.g., school rules on uniform, fee and attendance) and teacher practices (e.g., attitudes and support) that promote school effectiveness (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Indirect school policies and teacher practices contribute, in general, to involuntary student withdrawal. Researchers (Englund et al., 2008; Knesting & Waldron, 2006; Raudenbush & Willms, 1995; Willms, 1992) have argued that teacher practices influence students’ academic performance and their completion rates. In particular, a teacher’s positive attitude towards those students who are underprivileged or those who have behavioural problems may, in fact, help with the school completion rate (Knesting & Waldron, 2006; Lee & Burkham, 2003). Some research studies (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Englund et al., 2008) have shown, for example, that those children who are on the pathway to failure are more inclined to continue on with their education if teachers are positive and provide good support. Two studies conducted by the University of Michigan (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkham, 2003) found that teacher-student interpersonal relationships in classes play a crucial role in helping to reduce the dropout rates of students.

In contrast, a teacher who is negative and/or has poor attitude is more likely to cause students to fail and to drop out of school altogether. The works of Dekkers and Driessen (1997) and Monsell-Davis (2000) show, for instance, that teachers’ negative attitudes displayed in classrooms increase students’ chances of developing emotional
problems and leaving school early. In line with this research inquiry, several reports (Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy, 2002; Monsell-Davis, 2000; Save the Children Fund Fiji, 1998, 2006a) have shown that children in Fiji also drop out of school because of their personal experiences relating to physical and emotional punishment. The findings published by the Family Support and Education Group (2001) highlighted the prevalence of physical and emotional abuse of children in Fiji. Likewise other forms of emotional abuse, such as shouting/yelling/growling, using derogatory terms to label students, and racial prejudices (Monsell-Davis, 2000; Pacific Children’s Program Baseline Survey, 2003; Save the Children Fiji, 2006a, 2006b) also result in lowered self-esteem and self-concept beliefs and, consequently, academic failures.

3.2.3 Rural School Location and Challenges

The literature on student dropout also suggests that the geographical locations of schools influence students’ academic learning and school completion rate (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Sander & Krautmann, 1995; Tavola, 2000a). In the context of my study, the emphasis is concerned with rural schools and their geographical locations. According to the Ministry of Education in Fiji, approximately one third of all schools in Fiji are considered as being “rural” by definition. The data indicate that 79% of the primary schools are in rural areas and, of these, 38% are in very remote areas; 52% of the secondary schools are in rural areas and 24% of these schools are very remote (Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands, 2000). The emphasis on rural schools arises from the disparity that I have noted in students’ achievements and enrolment between rural and urban schools. Researchers in the Pacific region (Bacchus, 2000; Ministry of Education, Fiji; Tavola, 2000a) have argued that remoteness and islandness of rural schools pose problems for students, such physical inaccessibility ( Baselala, 2005; Raicola, 2007; Tavola, 2000a), insufficient government grants (Johnson & Starnge, 2007; McCullough & Johnson, 2007; Tavola, 2000), and the low qualifications and experience of teachers (Kremer et al., 2003; Monk, 2007; Rumberger, Katherine, Robert, & Gregory, 1999).

The geographical nature of Fiji places has important educational implications for many rural schools, especially those that are remote or isolated on the outer

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5 According to MOE in Fiji, schools located more than 10 kilometers from town boundary are classified under rural category.
islands. Research studies in the South Pacific have often suggested that children from rural areas are more likely to leave school early than those who live in urban area (Baselala, 2005; Raicola, 2007; Tavola, 2000a). In the case of Fiji, for example, reports (Baba, 1982; Kishor, 1981; Raicola, 2007) suggest that low school completion rate is related to the physical location of the students’ homes to the school, and the remoteness of the school itself. In this analysis, one could say that low educational attainments in rural schools come about as a result of the difficulties and inaccessibility that are faced by many students living in rural and remote areas (White, 2001). Inaccessibility detracts students in rural and remote areas from completing their education because of the long hours and physical exhaustion from walking long distances (Tavola, 2000a).

The poor infrastructure of many rural schools in villages and settlements, according to Taganesia (2005), has made it hard to maintain high educational standards. Many rural and remote schools in Fiji have poor road conditions which are difficult to access, especially during bad weather. In remote areas, for instance, many students and teachers often get stranded as a result of transport problems, either by land, sea, or air. Further to this discussion, many schools in rural and remote areas often have boarding accommodation to cater for those students who are in need. At present there are 80 rural schools that have boarding facilities, catering over 4000 students in primary and secondary schools. These students, according to theorists (Bacchus, 2000; Raicola, 2007; Tavola, 2000a), face tremendous challenges and difficulties that in turn deter them from completing their schooling. Difficulties and problems may include, for example, the poor living standards, a lack of proper finance, and poor emotional support from families (Tavola, 2000a). The speculation then, perhaps, is that this boarding experience has and will have a detrimental effect on these students’ academic learning and performance.

Many schools in rural and remote areas also face socio-economical challenges and this experience in financial hardship has indirect effects on students’ academic learning (Johnson & Starnge, 2007; Kremer, Chaudhury, Rogers, Muralidharan & Hammer, 2005; Sander & Krautmann, 1995). Often the case, the socio-economic status of schools and the surrounding communities determines the availability and quality of resources that are available to students. Adequate and good quality resources help to inspire commitment and create environmental settings that are conducive to students’ learning (Kingdon, 2007; McCullough & Johnson, 2007;
Tavola, 2000a). In Fiji, for example, many rural dwellers do not have stable or reliable sources of income. They rely solely on subsistence farming and fishing and do not have the cash needed for their basic needs, less alone a proper education. Consequently, in the majority of cases the local communities have problems in helping with the maintenance and running of the school. Government grants alone are inadequate and do not provide all the necessary educational resources and materials needed (Learning together: direction for education in the Fiji islands, 2000). Insufficient government grants also hinder teachers’ performances due to the lack of adequate facilities and resources. Likewise, one could argue that the “smallness” of many rural and remote schools contributes to the difficulties and challenges faced in the maintenance and organisation of schools. In essence, given the lack thereof in government funding and the inability of the local communities to assist in this matter, many schools in rural and remote areas face consistent and constant challenges and students’ under-achievements.

A number of studies (Bacchus, 2000; Baselala, 2005; Tavola, 2000a) have also shown that many rural and remote schools in Fiji lack qualified and experienced teachers, a chronic problem that undermines the quality of teaching and learning. There is a widespread view (Johnson & Starnge, 2007; Kingdom, 2007; McCullough & Johnson, 2007; Monk, 2007) that the quality of teachers in rural and remote schools is not as high as those teachers in urban schools. In many cases, the newly graduates and the least experienced teachers are often sent by the MOE to rural and remote schools for attachment. As an example, the statistics published in 2000 (Learning together: direction for education in the Fiji islands, 2000) indicated that from 10 randomly selected rural and urban schools in Fiji, there were fewer teachers with higher degree teaching in rural and remote schools when compared to urban schools. Research in other parts of the world (Kremer et al., 2005; Monk, 2007) also shows similar findings concerning a lack of qualified and experienced teachers in rural and remote settings.

Furthermore, one of the many challenges faced by underqualified and less experienced teachers in rural school is the notion of composite classes (Lingam, 2007). Studies in Fiji (Jenkins, David & Singh, 1996; Lingam, 2008; Tavola, 2000a) have revealed that although teachers in rural schools have lower student-teacher ratio, the challenging circumstances, such as rural poverty and inadequate resource, often hinders teachers performance which ultimately leads to low student outcomes. Also,
an inevitable feature of small schools is the necessity of teaching in composite or multi-grade classes. The quality of teaching and learning is affected under such circumstances and this has direct impact on students’ performance and success at school.

In summary, the findings described previously highlight a number of issues that help to account and explain the retention rates of secondary school students in Fiji and elsewhere. Imperative to this discussion is the argument that there are different and competing factors which explain the reasons why students drop out after some years in secondary schools. Notably, amongst the important contributions that may explain this reason include personal-related factors such as the social structure of the family (Jeynes, 2002; Singh, 2008; Tavola, 2000a) and financial difficulties (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Stevenson Stigler, 1992), the school and educational policies such as existing curricula (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001; Jerald, 2006; Thaman, 1994) and teacher practices (Jerald, 2006; Tavola, 2000a), and the geographical locations of many rural and remote schools (Bacchus, 2000; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Tavola, 2000a). In this analysis, the important concern is that there are multiple and concurrent factors in the South Pacific and elsewhere that help to account for the increasing rate of student dropout.

An examination of Fiji herself suggests that there may be other unexplained factors that could describe and explain the retention rate of secondary school students. The political situation and socio-economical instability of the South Pacific region have created a vacuum that leaves many families feeling insecure and confused. The social fabrics of Fiji’s society, in general, are unsettled with so many changes happening daily. The high cost of living, the downturn of the economy, and the impact of globalisation have left many families struggling for their basic needs and survival. It is imperative therefore, that additional research is undertaken to explore other existing “forces” that could explain the problems of student dropout that we are experiencing here in Fiji.

3.3 CONSEQUENCES OF STUDENT DROPOUT

A theoretical examination of the literature also suggests that student dropout is a pressing concern not only for parents and teachers, but also for the society as a whole. Researchers (Englund et al., 2008; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Tavola, 2000b) have strongly argued, for instance, that education is associated
with good life opportunities, and those individuals who are deprived of an education are disadvantaged throughout their lives. Historically, the UNESCO IBE (1972) Report suggested that dropout is a “wasteful process” that leads to inefficiency, and a waste of scarce resources. Furthermore, the consequence of student dropout is detrimental to the government revenues (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Englund et al., 2008; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006). In this analysis, with the impact of globalisation the current workforce is dictated by technological advances and complexities that were nonexistent in past agrarian and industrial societies (Harvey, 2001). Today’s employment expectations and opportunities require a workforce that is advanced in skill development. In general, many students who drop out early do not have the required skills to assist them in the workforce. Likewise, research evidence (Katie, 2007; Hruska, 2005; Harvey, 2001; Rumberger, 1987) indicates that unemployment, arising from student dropout, is analogous to poverty and crime.

3.3.1 National Concern

The prevalence of high dropout rates not only imperils individuals’ future but also profoundly affects our communities and the nation. Student dropout became a national concern in early 1960’s when industrialised countries such as the United States, England, and Canada realised the important socio-economical implications behind this social and school problem. Several studies have since then (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Englund et al., 2008; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006) noted the repercussions of student dropout, including the loss of productive workers and the earnings and revenues they would have generated, and the higher cost associated with increased incarceration, health care, and social service. Macro-level examinations of student dropout effects have found, in general, that student dropout leads to socio-economical problems, such as lower tax revenues and increased expenditures for governmental assistance programs (Catterall, 1985; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006). In the United States, for example, the total lifetime costs incurred for each individual who drops out of high school ranged from US$243,000 to US$388,000 (Englund et al., 2008). Furthermore, the lifetime cost to the nation for each youth who drops out of school and later moves into a life of crime and drugs ranges from $1.7 to $2.3 million (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Analogous to industrialised countries, according to school advocacy groups in British Columbia, one in every seven students who drops out of school receives social
assistance within 18 months of leaving school, and 90% of criminal justice expenditures are associated with dropout. In essence research studies (Catterall, 1985; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006) have suggested that, in general, the expenditure related to a child completing secondary school education is much less than the costs that are concerned with welfare, incarceration and unemployment. Lower tax revenues are the most obvious consequences of student dropout (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Englund et al., 2008); even when students who drop out are employed, they earn significantly lower wages than those who have completed their secondary schooling. The nation as a whole also suffers when they have less-educated populaces, with the implications includes employing expatriates to work locally (Bridgeland & DiLulio, 2006; Raphael, 2004). Furthermore countries also spend extensively on social and educational welfare programs that would, in turn, cater those youths who are unemployed or/and have committed juvenile crimes.

3.3.2 Occupation and Economic Perspectives

The problems of student dropout have become an issue in terms of technological innovations and the requirements needed for the workplace. During the 1970s, obtaining a high school diploma was considered an adequate, but not an essential asset for entering the labour market in many industrialised countries. Since then, technological advances such as the INTERNET have placed strong demand for a more highly skilled work force. Today, employers are requiring that school leavers with secondary school qualifications have strong communication skills, mathematics and reading skills, computer skills, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and the ability to work collaboratively (Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, & Chapman, 2007). Consistent with this view, other researchers (Bridgeland et al., 2006) have argued that dropping out of school is a precarious decision for a student, especially in this industrialised and technological age.

Given the ongoing technological advances of our societies, it is becoming increasingly harder for young people without proper secondary school qualifications to get work. This problem, in turn, is one of the major factors that contribute to high rates of unemployment. The 2007 statistical data in Fiji indicate, for instance, that only one in every eight school leavers is able to find paid employment annually (http://www.youth.gov.fj). Furthermore, a number of research studies in Fiji have confirmed that unemployment is extremely high amongst the 15-24 age groups (Fiji
Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2008; Narsey, 2007a; Walsh, 2006). Similar statistics and situations have also been reported elsewhere; for example, in the United States, where the unemployment rate is 33% for those individuals who dropped out of secondary school in 2004-2005 (U. S. Department of Labour, 2006). Many researchers and education advocates (Katie, 2007; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) have agreed that school dropouts face an uphill battle in the labour market, their chances are slim given the fierce competitiveness of societies.

While all school dropouts are not unemployed, some researchers (Katie, 2007; Hruska, 2005; Harvey, 2001; Rumberger, 1987) have also argued that students who drop out often lack the critical skills that are essential for the labour market. Consequently, many of these dropouts limit themselves and their families by having low-skill and low-paid jobs. Research findings (Laird et al., 2007; Rumberger, 1987) have revealed that there is a great disparity between the earnings of those who drop out of school early, and the earnings of those who have higher educational attainments. For instance, currently in the United States, individuals who graduate from high school earn on average 1.5 times more than those who drop out early; likewise, individuals who hold a college degree earn 2.7 times more than those who drop out (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

In other parts of the world, especially in developing countries such as Fiji, the problem of child labour is becoming prevalent (Ali, 2007; Singh, 2007a). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child labour as any kind of work which hinders a child from going to school to complete his or her education, or which prevents him/her from developing morally and spiritually (Singh, 2007a). In other parts of the world, especially in developing countries such as Fiji, the problem of child labour is becoming prevalent (Zakaria, 2005). Many children are employed to work in factories and businesses and this, in many cases, is considered as child exploitation (http://www.unhcr.org., August 27, 2008). This problem is evident in the South Pacific, as highlighted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Director for the South Pacific, Mr. Abu Zakaria, who stated that school dropouts easily become the victims of child labour (http://www.fiji.gov.fj., June 17, 2005). This is a contentious issue; one could argue, for instance, that some children drop out voluntarily so that they could work to assist their poor families (Ali, 2007, Singh, 2007b), and likewise some children may have to enter the labour force because they
have dropped out of school altogether. For whatever reason it may be, it is sufficed to say that both school dropout and child labour are interrelated to each other.

In addition to lower lifetime earnings, dropping out of school has broader economical implications (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Rumberger, 1987). There are many challenges faced by Fiji, especially adolescents who drop out of school early. The bleak future and the limited opportunities that they face have often led to feelings of discontentment, disappointment, and yearning. The issue of poverty is ongoing and this process perpetuates without any proper solution. In itself, poverty in Fiji is rampant and has important social and economical implications; for example: providing limited job opportunities, education, housing and health services, and other related consequences.

### 3.3.3 Social Problems

Student dropout, according to scholars (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Malefoasi, 2005, Thornberry, Moore, & Christenson, 1985), also results in many social problems, such as adolescent suicide, drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, vandalism, crime, prostitution, and other illegal social activities. The situation at present in Fiji is that we have a large number of street kids, shoeshine boys, and child beggars. These children, denied of their basic rights to an education, are often labelled as ‘dropouts’ by the media and others, regardless of the factors that might have pushed them there. Dorn (1993) has argued that without the proper skills to get a job, many dropouts become destructive, anti-social, and rebellious. Further to this testament is the notion that a high proportion of these dropouts become gangsters, hoodlums, drug addicts, and single-sex parents (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2007; Rangel & Maeyer, 2008; Save the Children Fiji Report, 2006). For instance, the Save the Children Fiji Report in 2006a revealed that a lack of access to education and employment was the major reason for the large number of teenage prostitutes and street kids. Furthermore, the Fiji government online site (http://www.fj.gov.com, June 17, 2005) indicated that school dropouts engage in prostitution, sex tourism, production of pornography, and drug trafficking. Such activities are unacceptable and are harmful to the children welfare, as they destroy future potentials, family values, and cultural beliefs.

Similarly, a research study conducted in the Solomon Islands (Malefoasi, 2005) indicates that 75% of individuals, aged between 15 to 29 yrs, are depressed and
often indulge themselves in alcohols, drugs, suicide, sexual activities, and violence because they have left schools early. Further to these problems, research reports in Fiji and elsewhere have shown that there is a positive association between student dropout and criminal activities. In Fiji in 2001, for instance, about 45% of the total number of prisoners admitted to prisons either had no formal education, or only attained up to a primary school level (http://www.unafei.org). Likewise from an international perspective, dropouts make up a disproportionate higher percentage of the prison population; for instance, 75% in the United States, 87% in Canada, 70% in England, 50% Rumania, 75% in Brazil (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rangel, & Maeyer, 2008).

In summary, the evidence described previously suggests that there are serious social and economical problems that must be addressed. Analysis of evidence indicates that student drop out leads to a number of detrimental consequences, notably the loss of a productive workforce (Catterall, 1985; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006) and unemployment (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2008; Narsey, 2007a), exploitation of child labour (Ali, 2007; Singh, 2007a), and daily social problems such as adolescent suicide, drug abuse, vandalism, crime, sex, and prostitution (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rangel & Maeyer, 2008; Save the Children Fiji Report, 2006b). These issues are serious and have repercussions that may be irrevocable. One could ask then, based on this examination, whether the case of Fiji at present reflects a similar picture. Although these social and economic problems are global, issues such as inflation, unemployment, family breakdown, and the loss of morals are parts and parcels of the Pacific societies. The social fabrics of our societies rest upon individuals, especially those in schools, to have a good and proper education.

In the case of Fiji and other Pacific Island countries, there is limited evidence to discern the economic and social costs that are associated with student dropout. It is imperative that we extend previous research studies to look at the consequences of student dropout in Fiji. Potential findings arising from such ventures may provide fruitful information for those involved. In this light, there is a need perhaps to identify and to document the various effects that may arise from student dropout. Furthermore, this documentation may provide further empirical and theoretical contribution to existing literature on student dropout.
3.4 POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO RETAIN STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Student dropout is a complex social and political problem for which there is no simple solution. There are, at present, a number of practical and theoretical strategies (Bickel, et al., 1986; Dryfoos, 1990; Wehlage, 1991; Wood, 1994) that may be implemented to help students from dropping out of school. Strategies that are emphasised include: (i) Policy measures (e.g., curriculum and assessment)(Denti & Guerin, 1999; Glenn, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000), (ii) Early intervention (e.g., identifying the at-risk students and taking measures)(Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr & Godber, 2001; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004), and (iii) Focus on Technical and Vocational Education (Bacchus, 2000; Harvey, 2001; Orr, 1987; Sharma, 2000). In the case of Fiji, in particular, the emphasis has been on policy measures, taking into consideration changes made to school curricula and methods of assessment to suit the needs of local students.

3.4.1 Policy measures

An examination of the literature (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Glenn, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) indicates that policy measures have a positive influence on the rate of student dropout. A number of educators (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Ralph, 1995; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Singh, 1997a) have advocated that changes in educational policies can help increase the rate of completion among secondary school students. In Fiji, for example, policy issues such as the development of the school curriculum, public examinations, and tuition fees play an important role in students completing their secondary schooling. As I have mentioned previously, the perceived irrelevance of school curricula in many Pacific countries has contributed to many students dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Renzulli & Park, 2002; Tavola, 2000a). Consequently, a number of research studies have suggested that we address the existing curricula and their relevance to students’ livelihood (Dekkers & Claasen, 2001; Finn, 1989; Jerald, 2006; Thaman, 1994). One way to do this, as recommended (Baba 1982; Coxon, 2000; Ozman & Aver, 1995; Tavola, 2000a), is to localise many of the contents taught.

Similarly, other Pacific scholars (Sharma, 2000; Tavola, 2000; Taufe’ulungaki, 2003; Sadler, 2000; Thaman, 2003) have proposed theoretical strategies that emphasise on the need to include aspects of local cultures and languages in existing curricula. This inclusion would, in turn, be used as a vehicle to
nurture intellectual growth and knowledge. Similar sentiments have also been made elsewhere to incorporate local indigenous knowledge and culture as parts of the learning process (Hudsmith, 1992; Teese, Polesel, O’Brien, Jones, Davies, Walstab & Maughan, 2000). In addition to this inclusion, the works of Coxon (2000) and Williams and Taylor (2000) have indicated that subjects such as Physical Education, Art and Craft, and Music should be given prominent value and priority. At present, these subjects have very little weighting in schools and do not have equal standing in relation to other core subjects (e.g., mathematics).

Another policy measure that has been widely argued is the issue of assessment and evaluation. A number of Pacific Education scholars (Sadler, 2000; Sharma, 2000; Tavola, 2000a) have suggested (as with the case of Fiji) instead of having five major external examinations within a seven-year period, that we have only a 50/50 internal-external assessment model for Form 6 and Form 7. Furthermore, it is important for the well being of students in general that the external examinations in Class 6, the Fiji Intermediate Examination (FIE), and Class 8 Fiji Eight Year Examination (FEYE) be abolished altogether. Some aspects of these suggestions have been practically adopted, whereby the FIE (Class 6) has been replace by the FILNA\textsuperscript{6} program, and the 50/50 internal-external assessment (IA)\textsuperscript{7} method has been adopted for Form 3 and Form 4. It is argued that reducing terminal examinations and adopting an internal assessment will help students complete their secondary schooling.

Another strategy to help students, according to researchers (Ali, 2007; Baselala, 2005; Singh, 2007b), is to offer financial assistance. In Fiji, for instance, the MOE has made an effort to assist children by subsidising their tuition fees up to Form 6. Moreover, many non-government organisations (Save the Children Fiji), clubs (e.g., Rotary club), and business firms (e.g., banks) also provide financial assistance (in the form of scholarship) for children who come from poor families. This assistance has contributed positively towards increasing students’ attendance and participation in school, and to reduce the rate of them dropping out.

\textsuperscript{6} FILNA-Fiji Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment is a standardized test in literacy and numeracy for classes 4, 6, and 8. It was first developed and piloted in 30 schools in 2004 and implemented throughout in 2007.

\textsuperscript{7} IA-Internal Assessment, where teachers conduct 50% internal assessment through course work in Form 3 and 50% mark obtained from a standardized test in Form 4. IA was piloted in 2003 and institutionalised in 2007.
3.4.2 Early Intervention

Researchers (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr & Godber, 2001; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Jerald, 2006) have also advocated that early and sustained intervention is integral to a student’s academic success and decision to stay at school. There are promising signs that comprehensive, personalised, and long-term interventions yield positive results for students (Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2004). Analysis of the literature shows that there are various intervention programs, such as increasing parents’ involvement (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Jeynes, 2005). The focus of this intervention program is to actively involve parents in their children’s’ education by having them participate in regular reading groups, and attending school excursions and field trips (Denti & Guerin, 1999, Slavin et al., 1994). Other intervention programs may also include the school community, as a whole, conducting outreach activities (i.e., resource mobilisation) for families who live in rural and remote areas, as well as making home visits (Temple, Reynolds, & Miedel, 2000).

Other researchers (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Nathan, 2006) have suggested that early childhood education and literacy programs (e.g., kindergartens and pre-schools) also help students complete their schooling. The concept of “Early Childhood Education” (ECE) has become a mainstream acceptance, as many Pacific Island Countries believe that this early education helps lay a stronger foundation for children later on (Siwatibau, 2000). For instance, the MOE in Fiji is committed in the delivery of ECE and statistics (MOE Annual Report, 2006) have shown that there are 535 ECE centres in operation throughout Fiji by the end of 2006. In fact, the UNESCO Education Sector Report (1995) has shown that ECE and early literacy programs achieve high rates of social and economical return in both industrialised and developing countries. In terms of retention rate, Slavin et al., (1994) argue that learning literacy skills in the early years is important in helping children to stay in school later on.

3.4.3 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

There have been numerous submissions that schools should focus more on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), as these programs provide practical skills for employment purposes (Bacchus, 1988; Harvey, 2001; Orr, 1987; Sharma, 2000). Furthermore, TVET enhances students’ academic skills and them in
part to stay in school (Rasinski & Pedlow, 1994). Researchers (Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Tavola, 2000a; Thaman, 1994) have suggested that schooling, at present, prepares children more for ‘white-collar’ jobs, and exclude those who are not academically minded. Subsequently, it is important that we have TVET programs that will help and prepare those who are less able, academically, as well as allowing them to see the relevance of their learning (Jones & Mudogo, 1994).

In the context of Fiji, TVET programs have been vigorously promoted to help students learn contents and subjects that may cater for their individual needs, and enable them to continue on with their education (Sharma, 2000; Vunileba, 2006). Technical subjects such as Woodwork, Carpentry, Metalwork, Basic Drawing, Home Economics, Food Technology, and Clothing and Textiles, for example, have been introduced in school curricula, as well as in school-based TVET programmes in some schools (Sharma, 2000). Likewise, the evidence ascertained elsewhere has shown that the implementation of TVET programs in schools has helped to reduce the number of student dropouts (Orr, 1987; Rasinski & Pedlow, 1994).

In summary, a number of practical and theoretical strategies have been implemented and proposed. The problem of student drop out is complex and requires different strategies, depending on students’ needs and our expectations. Notably, I have identified a number of strategies that are effective in assisting students to continue on with their schooling. Most prevalent to the case of Fiji, at present, is the introduction and implementation of FILNA and Internal Assessment methods. However, this alternative strategy also poses a few important limitations and cannot solve the problem of student dropout altogether (Sadler, 2000; Tavola, 2000a). Likewise, the implementation of TVET programs is an alternative strategy that also serves to help students remain in schools and complete with knowledge and skills that will either enable them to get employed or to peruse further tertiary studies. Conversely, similar to the assessment methods that have been introduced, the TVET programs also have their limitations, in this case, the availability of sufficient funding for teaching equipment and resources to successfully run the programs (Sharma, 2000). For instance, it is common in Fiji that many schools offering TVET programs organise various forms of fund-raising drive in order to purchase the materials required for the practicals.

The above analysis suggests that there are limitations and that not all strategies are appropriate in the context of Fiji. As I have noted, the TVET programs that are
offered in different parts of Fiji have their implications and limitations (Sharma, 2000). By the same token, we can postulate that the strategies developed and implemented elsewhere may not be adequate or appropriate for the local context (McPartland, 1994). We need to look closely at the needs of our students and the local community, in general. Hence in order to successfully address the problem of student dropout in Fiji, it is essential that we explore the effectiveness of different strategies used in Fiji and elsewhere.

3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has overall provided a detailed review of literature concerning student dropout. The literature review has highlighted several major areas of research in student dropout, notably the cause of student dropout (Ali, 2007; Baselala, 2005; Jerald, 2006; Tavola, 2000a; Thaman, 2003, 2004) and the subsequent effects of student dropout (Englund et al., 2008; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Tavola, 2000). Serious considerations have also been made with different strategies that could help students stay in school.

Despite the voluminous body of research studies to date, there are still a number of tentative issues that warrant further research investigation. Examination may be made, for example, with the factors that cause students to drop out. The changing nature of the national economy and the overall livelihood of the people have created unlimited demands on the individual families. This, in turn, has raised a number of challenges to national initiatives and goals, such as the “Education For All” initiative. By the same token, with the limited research evidence in Fiji, there is a compelling need then for educators to use multiple methods of data collection to examine the factors that cause students to drop out of school. It would contribute to the existing literature to provide additional validation of the consequential effects of student dropout. Finally, it is imperative that we explore and verify the effectiveness of existing strategies that have been put in place to help students stay in school. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework derived from the literature.
Chapter 4
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the tentative issues concerning the student dropouts in Fiji. Discussions presented in this chapter outline the theoretical framework, research objectives and research questions that guided this research study.

4.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study, based on theoretical examination of literature in the preceding chapter, is concerned with three important research inquiries, namely: (a) the important factors that contribute to the low retention rates in secondary schools, (b) the possible effects arising from school dropout, and (c) the various strategies that may exist at present to help increase the retention rates in secondary schools. Analysis of the evidence (Katie, 2007; Harvey, 2001; Hruska, 2005) indicates that the consequences of student drop out include a life committed to crime, juvenile delinquency, poverty and unemployment; for example, as Peck, Law, and Mills (1987) indicate:

Increasingly, it is being recognized that the issues of dropping out and dropout prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting our total economic and social structure. These issues include poverty, unemployment, and discrimination, the role of the family, social values, the welfare cycle, child abuse and drug abuse. (p. 3)

Given the extensive evidence cited, one can suggest that school dropout is by no means a diminutive phenomenon. The dropout situation becomes more critical when one realises that these youths are expected to become contributing members of a society. In an era where not only a high school certificate but a university degree has become a requirement to succeed, dropouts face great challenges in finding employment. This fact, therefore, cannot be ignored, especially by the developing countries like the South Pacific Island nations. These researchers have explored several aspects of this problem including the intellectual, emotional, motivational, interpersonal and attitudinal characteristics of those who are dropouts. The plethora of studies leads one to ask why continued investigation into the area is necessary.
when there are already thousands of references available. Pandey (1973) advocates that continued research would serve at least four important purposes: (1) it would give additional reliability to the dominant factors found to cause student dropout across geographical and social conditions; (2) it would improve the effectiveness of the psychological measurements by removing sampling error, faulty items, incorrect inferences, and over-generalizations; (3) it would reveal the relationships between old and new findings; and (4) it would provide educators and counselors with up-to-date information about the retention and withdrawal of students.

It is important to note, however, that despite the voluminous body of studies cited elsewhere, there have been very few empirical studies in this area of inquiry in Fiji. At present, the issue of school dropout is a major concern for educators, stakeholders, and parents. Theoretical examination of the literature suggests that there is limited statistical data provided from the Ministry of Education and the schools to show the retention or the dropout rates of students each year. In contrast to the wide research being conducted concerning students’ pass rates, very little has been said or done to address the retention rate problems in Fiji secondary schools. Hence, this inadequacy of evidence in this area warrants further research investigation. This section outlines three major research objectives that I have conceptualised based on existing research studies, as presented in previous chapters.

4.2 THE PRESENT STATUS QUO: SOCIAL, ECONOMICAL AND GEOGRAPGICAL CONTEXT

As discussed previously, there are a number of factors that contribute to the issue of children dropping out of schools at an early age. In this analysis, research studies suggest that there are three existing factors that contribute to students’ retention in secondary schools: (1) Personal-related factors that include the home environment, parents’ educational support, and the family structure; (2) Geographical-location factors; and (3) School-related factors that include school and educational policies.

In relation to personal-related factors, the home environment is an important contributing factor that affects children’s performance at school which, in turn, determines their period of stay at school (Baba, 1982; Kishor, 1981). For instance, it has been found that students whose parents actively participate in their school learning are more likely to outperform those whose parents are less interested or not
involved at all (Astone & McLanahan, 1991, Bridgeland, et al., 2006; Tavola, 2000a). Likewise, the educational background of parents adds an important contribution to the support that children receive in regards to their education. Jowett (1998) advocates, for example, that some parent, because of their limited education or lack thereof, see little value or relevance in formal education. Consequently, children whose parents are lowly educated are more likely to receive less parental support. Finally, the type of family structure that exists in a family also plays a crucial role in the level of education that a child receives. For example, it has been reported that children from single-parent families spend less time in schools than those from two-parent families (Coleman, 1988; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger, 1987)) because there is often a financial hardship experienced by a single parent who may either not be able to afford the cost of education, need the child to work to supplement the family’s income or does not have time to monitor the child’s progress at school due to work commitment.

Further to the argument concerning personal-related factors, empirical evidence (Ali, 2007; Baba, 1999; Narsey, 2007a) has also shown that poverty in Fiji is prevalent and is one of the major factors that contribute to the low completion rate of students in schools. Poverty affects children’s performances at school as often the case there is a lack of basic educational resources that, ultimately, results from the poor home environment (Baselala, 2005). Poverty has also been featured as an important impediment in education and rural development. For example, the poor communities in rural areas have under-resourced schools as often the case, 90% of these schools are ‘committee’ structured, organised, and managed (Tavola, 2000a). This underdevelopment, in turn, influences the retention rates of students. Despite the fact that poverty is an ongoing problem in Fiji, there is yet evidence however to verify the extent to which and how this factor may contribute to the retention of secondary school students.

Pacific educators (Taganesia, 2005; Tavola, 2000a) have also recently stated that in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries, the physical location of villages and settlements in the interior of the main islands and the outer islands makes it challenging for students to have equal access to schools and educational resources per se. In the case of my personal teaching experience, I find that many of the children in the secondary school that I cited previously face tremendous difficulties and challenges; for example, many of these children have transportation problems where they have to walk long distances to get to school, and in many cases their legal
guardians offer very little support when it comes to their education. From this observation, I believe that the issue of distance and transportation is decisive in helping to explain the present retention rate of secondary school students. It is important therefore, given the limited evidence at present in Fiji, that this line of inquiry concerning geographical locations is pursued.

Finally school-related factors, in this case educational and school policies, play an important role in explaining the present status of students’ enrolment and attendance in Fiji. Examination of previous studies (Jowett, 1998; Taufe’ulungaki, 2003; Thaman, 2003) indicates that in many small Pacific Island countries, children’s formal learning and academic performances are often impeded by existing educational policies (e.g., The Fiji Islands National Curriculum and Language Policy, and the Examination Policy). One could speculate further then, whether such problems are noticeable and prevalent in Fiji. In this analysis, the policies and curricula that exist at present may, in effect, give rise and alienate many children in Fiji from formal schooling. The issue of formal curricula and their relevance in addressing the needs of children from rural areas or those who live in poverty has been discussed by a number of Pacific scholars (Baba, 1982; Jowett, 1998). The ‘perceived alienation’ of the existing formal curricula by many leads to the question then, of whether this perception could in fact contribute to the high rate of student drop out. In rural secondary schools, as evident from my personal experience, the academic nature of the various curricula makes it relatively difficult for students to accustom and sanities to the contents. Furthermore, many children find it quite perplexing and difficult to relate the contents back to their everyday experience. There is limited evidence at present in rural Fiji concerning whether and how existing curricula influence the retention rate of secondary school students.

In total then, consistent with previous evidence, the following postulations are made:

RQ1: What are the social factors that deter rural students from completing their secondary education?

RQ2: How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school?

RQ3: How does the geographical context affect the completion of secondary education among the rural students?
RQ4: How do educational policies affect the completion rate in rural secondary school?

4.3 SUBSEQUENT EFFECTS OF STUDENT DROPOUT

Research evidence (Katie, 2007; Hruska, 2005; Harvey, 2001) reviewed previously suggests that dropping out of school early adversely affects the livelihood of the children, their families, and the nation in general. As noted by Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall (1991), the number of dropouts is not really the issue. The emphasis is that the world is changing and the socio-economical fabric of societies cannot function with the low achievements of dropouts. Accordingly, Asche (1993) and Woods (2001) emphasise, the consequences of student drop out are:

1. As the pool of dropouts continues to grow, employment opportunities for them are more limited, because today’s economy requires of the labour force increased literacy, more education, enhanced technological skills, and lifelong learning.

2. The rate of engagement in high-risk behaviours such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide has been found to be significantly higher among dropouts.

3. Dropouts are more likely to depend on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives, which in turn becomes an economic encumber for the nation.

4. Long term effects could lead to low investment in the development of the nation due to reduced tax revenue for the government.

My daily experience and observations seem to suggest that Fiji, in general, is rapidly following the global trend (Jerald, 2006; Woods, 2001) in terms of having unemployed teenagers involved in drug abuse, prostitution, child labour, and shoeshine and petty crimes. Having stated this, there is still limited research investigation and documentation concerning the subsequent effects of school dropout in rural areas of Fiji. This line of inquiry has important implications for educators, policy makers, social welfare workers, and parents. In essence, given the interest into the subsequent effects of student dropout, and the need to address this issue, the question is established as follows:

RQ5: What are the subsequent effects of student dropping out of school?
4.4 STRATEGIES TO FACILITATE THE RETENTION RATE OF STUDENTS

Analysis of the literature has revealed a number of theoretical strategies that could increase the retention rate of students in secondary schools; these strategies include, for example: (1) financial assistance support (Baselala, 2005), (2) early intervention for children at risk (Jerald, 2006), (3) school policies (Ali, 2007; Thaman, 1994), and (4) vocational training and education (Harvey, 2001; Sharma, 2000). More recently, a number of researchers (Asche, 1993; Bickel et al., 1986; Peck et al., 1987) have suggested the school climate as another strategy which could be used. Accordingly, a climate that is characterised by safety and orderliness in a location that is accessible and non-threatening can make a powerful contribution to dropout prevention. Positive enhancements may also include staff in-service training that could assist teachers and others to be more sensitive, culturally.

Another strategy that has been suggested is concerned with diversifying strategies to accommodate a wide range of student needs (Asche, 1993; Orr, 1987; Wehlage, 1991). Their works explicate a common thread which run through successful dropout prevention programming is that it is student centred. It underlines the principle that no one structure or set of activities works for all students. Hence, there must be a variety of strategies and programs that needs to be innovated to cater for potential dropouts or those at risks. For example, the work of Bickel et al. (1986) and Dryfoo (1990) supports the implementation of early childhood education and kindergarten programs. These programs include, for example, the implementation of reading and writing activities, basic skills remediation, test-taking skills, self-esteem building, social skills training, and parenting skills. Learning contents in authentic contexts has also been given a high priority as this ‘relating of theories into practice’, in many cases, helps to retain students at school. Application of theoretical contents into real life practice may include the following, for example, vocational skills, job training, work study, work attitudes and habits and career counselling.

One should acknowledge that different strategies should be used conjunctively to address students’ needs and to help identify factors that could alienate many from attending schools. For example, a number of research studies (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Woods, 2001) have supported the practice of identifying potential dropouts as early as possible, and to provide intensive interventions to insure that
these problems of dropout are rectified. It has also been noted that family members should take part in the learning process to ensure that children do, in fact, stay on in schools.

In general, the strategies emphasised previously are to an extent theoretical in nature, and are not pertinent to the social and economical contexts of Fiji. For instance, many have advocated that vocational training and education in Fiji at present is a viable alternative to formal schooling, but this is expensive and beyond the financial means of many households (Sharma, 2000). What this entails then perhaps, is that it is problematic and inconclusive at present to recommend vocational training and education as a major instrumental mean to retain students in secondary schools. Students who drop out of school due to poverty, in this analysis, may be further impeded financially, and thus it is an overburden challenge to gain access into vocational training and education. Hence, in this study I propose that other strategies may also exist that could in fact help to increase the retention of students in rural secondary schools. The research question proposed then is as follows:

RQ6: What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school?

4.5 SUMMARY

Analysis of the evidence cited in the previous chapters suggests that there is limited research conducted at present in Fiji concerning the retention of children in secondary rural schools. The theoretical framework that I have developed in this chapter seeks to address a number of research issues, namely the different possible factors that could explain the low retention rate of students, the subsequent effects of students dropping out of schools, and the strategies that may be offered to rectify these problems. The findings found from these research questions would help clarify a number of issues that were identified in Chapter 3. The next chapter outlines and discusses the research methodology adopted for this study.
Chapter 5
RESEARCH METHODS AND INSTRUMENT DESIGN

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of school is the result of a long and complex process (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Dorn, 1993; Jerald, 2006). The dropout phenomenon has been researched by educators using different methodological approaches throughout the world. According to Grant and Giddings (2002), a methodology is concerned with abstract theoretical assumptions and principles that underline a particular research approach, often developed within specific scientific or social sciences disciplines. It guides a researcher’s framing and conceptualisation of the research questions and decides on the process and methods to be used later. Methodology, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), express ontology and epistemology in terms of modes of inquiry: how we know the world or gain knowledge of it. Grant and Giddings (2002) discussed the four broad paradigm frameworks which propose that methodologies are similar or different because of their underlying assumptions and values. Hence, the four main paradigms that exist in research are: (1) the positivist paradigm, (2) the interactive paradigm, (3) the radical paradigm and (4) the poststructuralist paradigm (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These paradigms, in particular, provide the philosophical stance that researchers may adopt in their studies to assist in the selection of a particular methodological design. As Kuhn (1970) advocates, the value of a selected paradigm lies in practitioners recognising its ability to address and solve a particular problem or question more successfully than others. For instance, based on the theoretical stance outlined, a quantitative approach is viewed as synonymous with the positivism paradigm, and a qualitative is in line with the interpretative paradigm.

Moreover, empirical studies can be quantitative or qualitative in nature, and the sources of information can be the students themselves, the school, governmental organisation, and the community at large. Either the impact of factors can be studied separately, or many factors can be studied simultaneously within one conceptual model. More recently, educational researchers have employed different methodological approaches to investigate various issues that are related to student dropout. Some researchers (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001; Dekkers & Driesen, 1997; Tidwell, 1988) have, for example, used interviewing strategies, whereas others (Lee
& Burkam, 2003) used correlational design to explore why some schools have high student dropout rates. To provide a more comprehensive view of student dropout in rural Fiji, the method of concurrent triangulation (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) is used in the present study. This chapter then, is concerned with a review and description of the mixed methods approach used in this study to investigate the three research issues emphasised in Chapter 4.

5.1 THE PRESENT STUDY: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

A number of researchers (Creswell, 2002, 2003; Greene & Caracelli, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003) from the fields of social sciences, humanities and psychology have recently advocated for the use of mixed methods. The use of multiple data collection originated in the social science research but was emphasised in Campbell and Fiske’s (1959) study in relation to the validation of psychological traits (Hanson et al., 2005). Although Campbell and Fiske focused on collecting multiple quantitative data, their work was instrumental for encouraging the use of multiple methods and the collection of multiple forms of data within a single study (Sieber, 1973). In the 1960’s, logical positivism and its emphasis was strongly challenged by many researchers who argued that researchers were affected by their social, cultural and political contexts, and therefore this approach could not be value-free (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the post positivist shift in thinking resulted in the emergence of triangulation, where quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed methods research) are used together to solve a particular experience of phenomenon (Grants & Giddings, 2002). Using both forms of data allows researchers to simultaneously generalise results from a sample to a wider population, and at the same time gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is under investigation. Hence, a mixed methods approach is considered as a viable alternative research method when compared to other single methodological approaches, such as a case study.

Moreover, a mixed methods approach (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003) may be defined as the collection, prioritisation, and/or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study, either concurrently or sequentially. A major advantage of using mixed methods in comparison with other methodological approaches is that it enables confirmation, cross-validation and elaboration of findings that may, otherwise, not be possible (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell,
More importantly, a mixed methods approach provides researchers with the means and premise to learn and study the world in-depth (Creswell, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Morse, 2003). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), ‘pragmatism’ is the best paradigm for mixed methods research. Pragmatism is defined as a set of ideas that are defined and articulated by people, from historical figures to contemporaries (Cherryholmes, 1992), who believe that, regardless of circumstances, both methods (qualitative and quantitative) should be used in research investigations.

In a mixed methods design, there are six major strategies: (i) sequential explanatory strategy, (ii) sequential exploratory strategy, (iii) sequential transformative strategy, (iv) concurrent triangulation strategy, (v) concurrent nested strategy, and (vi) concurrent transformative strategy (Creswell, 2003). Each strategy varies with respect to its use of an explicit theoretical/advocacy lens, the approach to implementation, priority given to each method, the stage at which the data are analysed and integrated, and the procedural notations that are involved (Hanson et al., 2005). For instance, in sequential explanatory, quantitative data are collected and analysed first followed then by qualitative data collection and analysis. In contrast, for sequential exploratory qualitative data are collected and analysed prior to the quantitative data collection and analysis phase (Creswell, 2003; Morse, 2003). Likewise, in a concurrent triangulation design quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed simultaneously, with both data given equal weighting. In the concurrent nested strategies, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed at the same time; however, more emphasis is given to one form of data then the other. While the explanatory and exploratory sequential designs and the concurrent and nested triangulation designs have paradigmatic base, both sequential transformative and concurrent transformative designs use an explicit advocacy lens (e.g., feminist perspectives, critical theory). For sequential transformative designs, either quantitative or qualitative data is collected and analysed first, depending on the needs and preferences of the researcher and unequal priority is given to each form. However, in the concurrent transformative design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed at the same time, (Hanson et al., 2005).

In the present study, a concurrent triangulation strategy is used to explore the three research objectives outlined previously: (i) factors that may lead to the low retention rate in rural secondary schools, (ii) the subsequent effects of student dropping out, and (iii) elude possible strategies to increase the retention of students in
rural secondary schools. In the present study, as illustrated in Figure 3, both qualitative and quantitative data collection is concurrent and equal priority is given to both methodological approaches. Greene, Caracelli & Graham, (1989, cited in Hanson et al., 2005) identified a number of reasons for the use of concurrent triangulation in education and social sciences research. Specifically, concurrent triangulation allows the researcher to use results in a complementarily manner (i.e., one method elaborating or validating the other method). Furthermore, the use of data triangulation enables the informing and expansion of inquiries in a research study.

In a concurrent triangulation design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed at the same time, with both data given equal weighting. Data analysis is done separately but the integration of data and findings occurs at the data interpretation stage. Furthermore, according to Blaikie (1991), the triangulation of both methodological approaches ensures reliability and validity. From 1986 to 2000, Hanson et al. (2005) identified 22 empirical studies published in various international journals that employed mixed methods, and of the six different types concurrent triangulation was the commonly used method (32%). Similarly, other researchers from other social sciences and psychology disciplines have also used concurrent triangulation in their studies (Hill et al., 2000; Luzzo, 1995). Thus, mixed methods approaches, in particular concurrent triangulation, are becoming increasingly popular and this usage is reflected in the various researches (Creswell, 2002, 2003; Greene, Caracelli et al., 1989; Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & Demarco, 2003; Hanson et al., 2005) that have been published to date.

![Figure 3 A concurrent triangulation strategy (Adopted from Creswell et al., 2005)](chart.png)
The complexity of the research objectives I established earlier makes it difficult to explore with a single methodological approach alone. In this analysis, social issues pertaining to parental resources, family characteristics, and socio-economical status that could affect the completion of secondary school education cannot be captured solely from a case study (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Beekhoven, 2004). Quantitative researches (Dekkers & Driessen, 1997; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Luyten, Bosker, Dekkers, & Derks, 2003) have provided insights evidence attesting to factors that lead to students dropping out of schools, whereas qualitative studies (Dekkers & Driesen, 1997; Tidwell, 1988) have provided more detailed insights into the perceptions of the individuals, for instance, the dropouts themselves, parents, school administrators and policy makers, on the causes of dropout, effects and possible solutions. For instance, authors (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Hernandez & Nesman, 2004) have used mixed methods to address issues pertaining to student dropout from different theoretical and methodological angles. Hence, it is argued that the deficiencies of any one particular method can be overcome by employing different methods within one study, and thus capitalising on their individual strengths. For this research study, the quantitative method will provide data on the different possible factors that may lead to low retention rates, whereas the qualitative method will provide enriching insights into the complex interdependent factors and the individual’s perception of the situation.

5.1.1 Quantitative Phase

Historically, the foundation of positivism used in the scientific world emphasised the importance of objectivity, systematic and detailed observation, testing hypotheses through experimentation, and verification (Sarantakos, 1993). According to the positivist paradigm, knowledge is discovered by people whereby this knowledge, in turn, guides professional decision making and development (Grants & Giddings, 2002). Hence, the quantitative method is an objective approach where data is controlled and measured to address and determine the causes of behaviour. Quantitative method seeks to establish, confirm, and validate relationships and to develop generalizations that may then contribute to a particular theory (Leedy & Ormord, 2005).
Furthermore, according to Hanson et al. (2005), quantitative methods based on the positivist paradigm have three distinctive characteristics: (1) they enable the testing of hypothesis and casual relationships between independent and dependent variables, (2) they ensure the issue of validity and reliability, and (3) the findings obtained may be generalized to a wider population. In simple terms, the quantitative research paradigm is designed to address the questions that hypothesise predictive or causal relationships among variables that are measured in numerical and objective ways (Newman, Ridenour, Newman & DeMarco, 2003). For instance, the variables under examination in this study are: social, economic, geographical, political and educational influences on the retention rate of students in a secondary school. It is hypothesised, for example, that these variables would affect the students’ educational achievements at school and, in turn, result in an increase in dropout rates.

Many education researchers have now began to adapt and use the quantitative research design, which at one time was mainly employed in scientific research. For instance, in an earlier study, (Bean and Creswell (1980), cited in Creswell, 2003) used a survey with college students to highlight the different factors (e.g., sociological factors, school policies and expectations, teenage issues) that contributed to their retention rates. Furthermore, quantitatively in educational research it is also feasible to use statistical methods, such as survival analysis approach (Willett & Singer, 1991) to explore educational transitions (i.e., teacher and student entry into and exit from school). Moreover, according to Kervin, Vialle, Herrington and Okely (2006):

Quantitative research designs provide precision and control in research in the research process that gives the consumer confidence in the findings. Furthermore, it allows us to examine the causes behind the effects we observe. This kind of information is important in the education context because if we want to improve aspects of school performance, an insight into the causes for those outcomes allows us to be much more confident about our design of interventions. (p. 36).

Hence, in the present study, a survey method (Babbie, 2007; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) is used to investigate and confirm the contribution of possible factors (such as the socio-economic, geographical background, and the educational policies) on the retention of students in a rural secondary school. A survey research, according to Leedy and Ormrod, (2005), is concerned with the collection of information about one or more groups of people about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes or experiences
by asking them close or open-ended questions and tabulating their answers. A major advantage of using a survey design is that there is rapid turnout in data collection, which is more economical as well (Babbie, 1990; Fowler, 2002). For the present research, a questionnaire was used to carry out the survey. In this survey, I used a close-ended questionnaire that sought to find out possible factors causing low retention rates in a rural secondary school, for example: Educational policies that causes students from rural secondary school to drop out may be: external examination, too many internal examinations, irrelevant curriculum, boring subjects or using English as the medium of instructions.

5.1.1.1 Participants

In this phase of the study, a set of self-made questionnaire was administered to one hundred and sixteen students (46 male and 70 female) from Form 4 to 7. The ages of the students ranged from 15-19 years. The composition of the students consisted of 95 Indians, 20 Fijians, and 1 other, and participation from the students in this case was voluntarily. The questionnaire was administered to students who were present in school on that day. Hence, the number of students who participated represents the number that was present on the particular day.

5.1.1.2 Instrumentation: Close-ended Questionnaire

Questionnaires are extensively used in many places, such as by the mass media, to gather data from a large number of people (Kervin et al., 2006). The administration and distribution of questionnaires can occur through a number of different methods, such as self-administering, through mails or emails, or via telephone conversation (Creswell, 2003; Kervin et al., 2006; Mertens, 1998). Each mode of administration has its own strengths and limitations. Moreover, the implementation of questionnaires can be designed in a number of ways, such as a longitudinal design or a cross-sectional. A longitudinal design in research involves the collection of data on multiple occasions. This research design provides enriching data, but at the same time can be quite time consuming and costly. In a cross-sectional design, on the other hand, information is gathered from participants on a one occasion only. The choice of the design is dependent on the research questions and the relevance of the data collected through different designs to the research topic. In the
present study, given the time limit and constraints placed I have chosen to administer the questionnaires using a cross-sectional design.

Moreover, the questionnaires used in research can be either open-ended, close-ended or a mixture of both types. Open-ended questions require the participants to respond to the questions by writing about their opinion freely in the space provided, whereas close-ended questions require the participants to select predetermined answers provided (Creswell et al., 2003). For this phase of the study, I chose to use the close-ended questionnaire type. According to Babbie (2005), close-ended questions are very popular and advantageous in survey research because they provide a greater uniformity of responses and are more easily processed (e.g., using EXCEL, SPSS) than open-ended questions. In developing the close-ended questionnaire for the present study, I used a list of guidelines set out by Leedy and Ormrod (2005). I also developed new set of questions for the survey since I did not find any relevant instruments in previous researches. In this analysis, I developed the close-ended questions based on the three themes and six research questions posed in the previous chapters. Overall, the inventories contain 19 items. The questionnaire was prepared in English, which is the main language of instruction and medium of communication in secondary schools in Fiji. The close-ended items developed and used in this study employed a rating scale (e.g., from 1 to 5); for example, “rank your answers from 1 (Most important) to 5 (Least important) for the following questions:

Social factors that cause some students to drop out from the rural secondary school may be:

a. poor parental support
   __________

b. home environment not favourable to study
   __________

c. family problems
   __________

d. single parent
   __________

e. large number of children at home.
   __________
This approach of ranking answers, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), is advantageous as it enables participants to remain neutral about a particular question. The summary of items and guided questions used for the two components of the research—qualitative and quantitative—is provided in table 5.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Possible factors</td>
<td>(1). What are the social factors that deter rural students from completing their secondary education are:</td>
<td>a. Poor family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causing low retention</td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rates in rural secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td>c. External exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. Teachers attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. Distance from home to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f. Irrelevant curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g. Lack of self motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2). How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school?</td>
<td>3. Economic problems that causes students from rural school to drop out may be:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. cannot afford to pay the school fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. cannot afford the cost of transport, school books and stationery, uniform and food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. needs to work and earn for the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. have to look after younger siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. undernourished and unhealthy due to poor diet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3). How does the geographical</td>
<td>4. Geographical location that causes students from rural secondary school to drop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location differ from their</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
context affect the completion of secondary school education among the rural students? a. lack of regular transport to travel to school. b. very difficult road conditions to travel c. unsafe to travel alone for long distances to school d. have to stay away from home (with guardians) in order to attend school e. transport is available at inconvenient times.

(4). How do educational policies affect the completion rate of students in rural secondary school? 5. Educational policies that causes students from rural secondary schools to drop out may be: a. external exams b. too many internal exams c. irrelevant curriculum d. boring subjects e. using English as a medium of instructions.

6. School policies that may cause students from rural secondary school to drop out are: a. corporal punishments b. too much homework pressure c. very strict school rules d. poor attitude of teachers and administrators e. lack of counselling for students.
2. Subsequent effects of student dropout (5). What are the subsequent effects of students dropping out of school?

8. Rural school dropouts are involved in:
   - crime
   - drug abuse
   - prostitution
   - casual employment
   - farming
   - domestic chores
   - self-employment
   - unemployed

9. Social problems created by rural school drop outs may be:
   - Stealing
   - Damaging properties
   - Fighting/swearing
   - Drug abuse
   - Disrespect of family and community members
   - Not known any

3. Strategies to facilitate the retention (6). What are some strategies that can help increase the retention of school?

14. Who should provide the most support in helping the rural students to complete their secondary education:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate of rural secondary school students</th>
<th>a. Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. School teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. The Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. The family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. The students themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Religious organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. The local community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. The support that parents can give to encourage their children complete secondary education are:

- a. Provide a better study environment at home
- b. Provide more time to study at home
- c. Provide financial support
- d. Provide emotional support
- e. Motivate and give more moral support.

Note: The above examples are for the quantitative phase
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
<th>LEADING QUESTIONS</th>
<th>PROBING QUESTIONS, (examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 1: school principal/teachers</strong></td>
<td>-How would you describe the social structure of the families in this rural community?</td>
<td>-what makes you say that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the social factors causing low retention rate in rural secondary school?</td>
<td>-How would you describe the academic standards of the students in this school?</td>
<td>-can you explain more …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-what are the social challenges that students from this rural school face?</td>
<td>-how do you identify such cases?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-how does this affect the retention of students in the school?</td>
<td>-what is the next step the school takes once the problem is identified?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-how often do such situations arise in this school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 2: student dropout</strong></td>
<td>-what is your highest level of secondary education?</td>
<td>-how many siblings you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the factors causing low retention rates in rural secondary school</td>
<td>-what was their highest level of education?</td>
<td>-employment history of the family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-can you elaborate on these….</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
-Can you explain the reasons that deterred you from completing your secondary education?

-Did you get adequate support from your family members towards your education?

-Did your family face any economic hardships while sending you to school?

-What was your role as a child to help ease the economic hardships at home?

-Did you get adequate support from your family members towards your education?

-Did your family face any economic hardships while sending you to school?

**Example 3: Parents**

1. What are the factors causing low retention
2. How many children do you have?
3. How many are attending school
4. How many have completed schooling?
rates in rural secondary school? -what were the reasons for them to complete successfully or unsuccessfully?
-school attend
-challenges faced during your times,
-compare past to present
-can you elaborate more.....

-what was your highest level of education?

-how do you assist your children at home towards their education

Note: The above examples are for the qualitative phase


5.1.1.3 Procedure

A written authorisation was sought from the Ministry of Education and the school principal before the field research commenced (See Appendix B. (1), (2) for the confirmation letter). This informing, apart from following the proper protocols, was to ensure that the targeted participants and anyone else involved were informed of the purpose of the study. During the self-administration of the questionnaire, students were seated in an exam-like setting in intact classes, and proper instruction was provided orally and in a written format. Students were also given an opportunity to ask for clarification at the beginning as well as the end of the session. The questionnaire was administered and collected within one sitting for each form and, in total, a whole week was needed. I also took precaution to make sure that there was minimal disruption to the school and students. For instance, it was not feasible to administer the questionnaires when the students were having split classes; hence, in some cases, the questionnaire was administered at mutually agreed times with the subject teachers. The field research for this phase was conducted in early November, 2007 when the majority of the students were present for their annual examination preparations. The total number of students in Form 7 was very small as Form 7 only started in that year. Furthermore, some students were absent when the questionnaire was administered and their attendance record showed that they were absent for the previous week as well. The 20 teachers were also given the same close-ended questionnaire, which they completed during their spare time and returned to me. Participation by the students and teachers was voluntary and no remuneration was given at any time during the research.

5.1.2 Qualitative Phase

According to the theoretical perspective of social sciences, the interpretive paradigm sought to understand the meaning of humanities and the meanings that people attach to their lives (Grant & Giddings, 2002). In essence, the interpretive paradigm has been equated with the qualitative approach to research. According to Cocks (1989), the interpretive paradigm considers the notion that participants for themselves discover ‘truth’ in a particular situation and, more importantly, truth must be discovered by thoughts rather than by sensory observation. In this way, the researcher does not just play back to the participants what they have been told, but interprets also the significance of their self-understandings in ways in which the participants themselves may not have been able to see.
A qualitative research approach, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), involves an in-depth exploration of a situation, where the researcher collects data and interprets it from various perspectives in order to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation. Importantly, this methodological approach aims to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of our everyday experiences. In essence, the qualitative research approach addresses the questions of meaning, interpretation, and socially constructed realities (Newman et al., 2003). Many research studies (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005; Dekkers & Claassen, 2001; Hruska, 2005), while quantitatively based, have also relied largely on the qualitative methods (e.g., conducting case study interviews) to inquire about the possible causes, effects and solutions to students’ drop out. In essence, the data that is collected qualitatively is rich in description of the people, places, and conversations that, otherwise, is not judged by statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In contrast to the quantitative approach, a qualitative approach to research is highly subjective. In this analysis, the research itself is based on the constructivism knowledge claim where the researcher’s main role is to seek understanding from discussions and social interaction (Creswell, 2003; Depoy & Gitlin, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Moreover, a qualitative approach provides more enriching and detailed information that is otherwise may not be obtained from a quantitative approach alone. The rich descriptions of the data combined with the participants’ historical background are relevant in explaining the social and cultural processes (Maxwell, 2005).

While the interpretive methodologies share assumptions concerning truth and how we can come to understand human experiences, they differ in their theoretical perspectives or the lens they use to see the world (Grant & Giddings, 2002). They focus on different aspects of experiences and use different methods to collect data and analyse it. A qualitative method, therefore, consists of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews, (2) direct observation, and (3) written documents (Patton, 1990). The data from interviews consist of direct quotations from the participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge. In the present study, an in-depth interview was used to explore three research issues: (1) to confirm the factors that could cause low retention rates in a rural secondary school, (2) to clarify and confirm the subsequent effects of student dropout, and (2) to elicit information on the effectiveness of existing strategies and alternative strategies to increase the retention rate of students in rural secondary schools. Features of the in-depth interview are discussed in the preceding paragraph.
5.1.2.1 Participants

According to Creswell (2003), the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best help to understand the problems under investigation. Hence, in this phase of the present study I used a purposive sampling procedure to select the participants for the in-depth interviews. The participants for the interview in this study included: (1) one school principal, one deputy principal, one assistant principal, and one experienced teacher, (2) four parents (\(N = 2\) Indians and 2 Fijians), and (3) four student drop outs (\(N = 2\) Indians and 2 Fijians). The four teachers identified here were chosen because they had the most number of years of teaching experience, with the first three also having direct contact with parents. The age for the student dropouts ranged from 16-19 years.

5.1.2.2 Instrumentation: In-depth interview

In approaching the qualitative phase of the research, I studied the different interview techniques that could be used to document the perceptions of school administrators, teachers, parents and student dropouts on causes of low retention rates, its consequences, and the possible strategies that could help increase the retention rates. Unlike a survey, an interview is a social interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, but not a specific set of questions that must be asked using specific wordings and in a particular order (Babbie, 2005). Rubin & Rubin (1995) describe the distinction:

Qualitative interviewing design is flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone. (p43).

Furthermore, educational and social theorists have referred to different methods of conducting an interview: (1) highly structured standardised, (2) semi-structured (also known as in-depth), and (3) unstructured informal (Esterberg, 2002; Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2004; Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The difference between each type of interview is dependent on the type of questions asked. For instance, in a structured interview, open-ended questions are developed to frame the discussion and only these questions are used. In a semi-structured interview, open-ended questions are still devised but during the interview, the interviewer is free to probe and seek clarification to ascertain additional information. Unstructured

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8 This teacher was chosen as he had the most number of teaching experience (18 years) compared to the other teachers in the school.
9 The principal, deputy, and assistant principal in this school also ‘run’ the school and offering counselling to students.
interviews, on the other hand, do not use predetermined questions and involve verbal discourse around a particular theme or issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Kervin et al., 2006; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

In-depth interviewing is used expansively by qualitative researchers as a means of data collection; for example, Hernandez and Nesman (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with Latino students, parents, community leaders, teachers, and administrators to investigate issues and strategies pertaining to Latino student dropout at the local level. In this study, a semi-structured interview was conducted. This procedure is known as an interactive clinical method, where the sole objective is for both the interviewer and the interviewee to feel natural and unconstrained in order to converse naturally. For the present study, I used a semi-structured interview approach where I followed Merriam’s (1998) suggestion; that is, in this case, the interview was guided by a list of questions and/or issues that need to be explored. Based on the three themes and six research questions posed, a different set of interview questions was prepared for the school teachers, parents and student dropouts. An example of the guided questions used for the in-depth interview for the school principal/teachers, parents and student dropouts is shown in table 5.1. In this study, the semi-structured interview questions for parents were translated in Hindi and Fijian languages wherever difficulties arose to prevent confusion, misinterpretations and impediment. This also enhanced confidence and free flow of information.

5.1.2.3 Procedure

During the interviews with the 16 participants, recommendations set out by previous researchers (Esterberg, 2002; Legard et al., 2004; Robson, 2002) regarding the different stages relevant to the interviewing process were used; for example: (1) creating an interview guide to assist in the interview, (2) creating a sense of intimacy between the researcher and the interviewee, (3) establishing and confirming a location, and (4) the use of information recording devices.

The school principal and the teachers were interviewed in the school at the time of convenience set out. The school principal was interviewed in her office on the last day of the field research as she was quite busy with her administrative issues. The teachers were interviewed in the school library after the school break off. The interview conducted with each participant was extensive and, in total, 12 days were needed to complete the whole process with the 12 participants. Interview sessions were normally organised in the afternoons for the teachers as they could not be available for long during the day. The parents
were interviewed at their homes in the evenings and on Saturdays with prior arrangements made. The four student dropouts were interviewed in the vacant school classrooms and in the playground after the school break off in the afternoon. Each interview session lasted for more than two hours and in between occasional breaks was given when the participants were tired. The student dropouts were identified using school records such as the attendance register, and were contacted through their siblings or neighbours.

The presence of a school teacher created a very formal atmosphere for the parents and student dropouts. This is due to the high perceived status and respect that is given to teachers in the Pacific culture, and even more so in rural areas. This perplexity was overcome by engaging the participants to talk and discuss about their activities during the day or week. This allowed time for the participants to settle and to feel comfortable conversing with the researcher. Furthermore, interviews can be influenced by a variety of factors that include, for example, social, cultural and linguistic variables. Therefore, according to Kervin et al. (2006), it is important for researchers to deemphasise the power relationship and this is achieved by making participants relaxed. I recorded the interviews by audio-taping and taking short notes during the interview sessions (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 1998) for the school teachers and two of the four student dropouts. The other two student dropouts and the parents did not feel comfortable having their conversations audio-taped and, ultimately, I resorted to using short form notes and abbreviations. A notebook was also kept to include personal thoughts and impressions of the participants, teachers and the school as a whole to help in the analysis and interpretation of results. Finally, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of their views, and that it would only be used by the researcher for the purpose of the present study.

5.2 RESEARCH ETHICS

The use of human subjects in research, such as the social sciences, education, medicine, criminology, and similar areas of study is becoming common (Kervin et al., 2006; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Hence, ethical implications of the research become an integral part of the research process. According to Leedy and Ormord (2005), most ethical issues in research fall into one of the four categories: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues. For this research study, entry into the school was made successfully by following the ethical guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education and the school. In order to invite participants into my research, I first had to gain their informed consent. Informed consent, according to Kervin et al., (2006), is where
information pertaining to the purpose of the research, methods, and data collection is provided in a written or oral format. In this case, first of all, a copy of the research proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Education and the school principal to seek their approval. Copies of correspondence are attached in Appendix B. Next, I sent a letter to parents seeking their permission to allow their children to take part in my research study. I also noted and took into consideration that the cultural ethos and values of the participants; for instance, descent dress attire was worn when visiting the Fijian and Indo-Fijian parents. Finally, students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without being penalised. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to all the participants.

5.3 SUMMARY

In summary, this chapter provided a theoretical outline of the mixed methods approach (Creswell, et al., 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In particular, the two main approaches (quantitative and qualitative) and their philosophical stances were examined in-depth. Furthermore, I have also provided a justification for my usage of triangulation (Creswell, et al., 2003) for the present research. Quantitatively, the participants \( N = 116 \) responded to close-ended rating scale items and, likewise, qualitatively the selected participants \( N = 12 \) took part in semi-structured interviews. Analyses of the data from the two different approaches are discussed in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part I discusses the findings of the quantitative data and Part II discusses the findings of the qualitative data in relation to the three themes: (i) factors causing student dropouts, (ii) subsequent effects of student dropouts, and (iii) possible strategies to reduce the student dropout rates.

6.1 PART I: QUANTITATIVE PHASE

Quantitative data analysis involves the process of quantification—the process of converting data to a numerical format into a machine-readable form (Babbie, 2005). For computers to process the data, information is usually translated by coding the responses. The task of quantitative coding is to reduce a wide variety of idiosyncratic items of information to a more limited set of attributes composing a variable (Babbie, 2005; Kervin et al., 2006). For instance, in the quantitative phase of the present study, the survey required the participants to write their form, age, gender, and ethnicity. Subsequently for the actual analyses, I coded the information as follows: (1) for Gender – Female = 1, Male = 2; (2) Ethnicity – Fijian = 1, Indian = 2 and others = 3. Similarly, other items on the survey were also coded; for example, where the questions required the participants to tick an answer, I coded a tick as “1” and no tick as “0”. Once the coding was completed using Microsoft EXCEL 2003, I transferred this spreadsheet to the SPSS statistical software (SPSS, Version 16). Participants’ names were coded as ID numbers to ensure confidentiality.

I used SPSS V16 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to analyse the raw input data. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I present my descriptive analyses based on the research questions that I hypothesised. Furthermore for the majority of the analyses, I used non-parametric statistical testing. Non-parametric tests are advantageous when the data under review is not normally distributed and where one wishes to analyse categorical or ranked data (Allen & Bennett, 200810).

6.1.1 FACTORS LEADING TO STUDENT DROPOUTS

For the first issue concerning factors that could lead to student drop out, I conducted a frequency test to show how students responded (Agreed or Disagreed) to the item concerning

factors that could lead to student drop out. I conducted the Cochran’s $Q$ test to determine if
the responses (Agree/Disagree) differ; this statistical test is used when the data is
dichotomous (Field, 2005\textsuperscript{11}). Cronbach’s $Q$ (with $\alpha = .05$) was statistically significant, $Q$ (6, $N = 116$) = 157.84, $p = .000$\textsuperscript{12}. To locate the source of this significance, I conducted a series
of pairwise comparisons using the McNemar test. From the results, the only comparison to
achieve statistical significance at the Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ of .0024 was between: (1) family
support and external exam, (2) family support and teacher’s attitude, (3) family support and
distance, (4) family support and irrelevant curriculum, (5) poverty and external exam, (6)
poverty and teacher’s attitude, (7) poverty and distance, (8) poverty and irrelevant
curriculum, (9) poverty and a lack of motivation, (10) external exam and teacher’s attitude,
(11) external examination and distance, (12) teacher’s attitude and lack of motivation, (13)
distance and lack of motivation, and (14) irrelevant curriculum and lack of motivation.

Analysis of the results shows 68 participants agreed that both family support and
external exams were a major cause of student drop out; only 5 participants disagreed that
neither was a problem. Sixty-seven participants agreed that family support was a major
concern, but they did not agree that teachers’ attitudes were a major factor; in contrast, six
participants agreed that teachers’ attitudes were a major concern but not the family support.
Sixty-four participants agreed that family support and not distance was a contributing factor
in student dropout. Only four of the total participants disagreed with both, family support and
distance, as factors causing student dropout. Fifty-four participants agreed that family factors
and irrelevant curriculum cause student dropouts, while 48 agreed on family support but
disagreed with irrelevant curriculum. Sixty-seven participants agreed that poverty and
external exams were factors causing student dropout, while three participants disagreed on
both. Furthermore 67 participants agreed with poverty and disagreed with teachers’ attitudes
as the cause of student dropout. On the other hand, five participants agreed that teachers’
attitudes contributed to student dropout but disagreed with poverty. Sixty-six participants
agreed that poverty and not distance as a cause of student dropout. Five participants disagreed
with both poverty and distance as causes of student dropout. Fifty-six participants agreed that
both poverty and irrelevant curriculum were major causes of student dropout. Forty-seven
participants, however, agreed with poverty and not curriculum as a major. Eighty-three
participants agreed that both poverty and a lack of motivation as the major reasons for student
dropout, whereas six disagreed. Thirty-five participants agreed that both teachers’ attitudes

\textsuperscript{12} Using Monte Carlo given the sample is large (Field, 2005).
and external exams were the causes of student dropout; in contrast, 42 agreed with external exams but disagreed with teachers’ attitudes.

Thirty-three participants disagreed that both external exams and teachers’ attitudes were important in student dropout. Moreover, while 31 participants agreed that external exams and distance were major reasons for student dropout, 46 participants only agreed with external exams but disagreed with distance. Thirty-two participants agreed that both teachers’ attitudes and a lack of motivation were major reasons for student dropout, whereas 58 participants only agreed with a lack of motivation. While 31 participants agreed with both a lack of motivation and distance, 59 participants only agreed that a lack of motivation was important in causing students to drop out. Finally, 49 participants agreed that irrelevant curriculum and a lack of motivation were important in student dropout, whereas 41 agreed with a lack of motivation but not irrelevant curriculum.

For the following analyses pertaining to social factors, economical problems, geographical location, educational and school policies, and psychological factors I used the Friedman statistical test. The Friedman test is appropriate in this case as the responses for items asked were ranked (i.e., from most important to least important).

6.1.1.1 Social factors

For the social factors, a Friedman two way ANOVA indicated that rankings of social factors varied significantly across the five social factors identified, \( \chi^2(4, N = 116) = 117.74, p = .001 \). Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted \( \alpha \) of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) home environment (Mean Rank = 4.03) and poor parental support (Mean Rank = 2.40), \( T = 871.50, z = -7.02 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r^{13} = .65 \); (2) single parent (Mean Rank = 3.40) and poor parental support (Mean Rank = 2.40), \( T = 1697.00, z = -4.73 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “average”, \( r = .43 \); (3) large number of children (Mean Rank = 3.13) and poor parental support (Mean Rank = 2.40), \( T = 2156.00, z = -3.33 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 115, p = .001 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .31 \); (4) family problems (Mean Rank = 2.03) and the home environment (Mean Rank = 4.03), \( T = 403.00, z = -8.32 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r = .77 \); (5) single parent (Mean Rank = 3.40) and the home environment (Mean Rank = 4.03), \( T = 2240.50, z = -3.22 \), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .001 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = \)
.30; (6) large number of children (Mean Rank = 3.13) and the home environment (Mean Rank = 4.03), $T = 1882.00, z = -4.21, N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .39$; (7) single parent (Mean Rank = 3.40) and family problems (Mean Rank = 2.03), $T = 786.00, z = -7.32, N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .68$; and (8) large number of children (Mean Rank = 3.13) and family problems (Mean Rank = 2.03), $T = 1349.50, z = -5.71, N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .53$.

6.1.1.2 Economical factors

A Friedman two way ANOVA indicated that rankings of economical factors varied significantly across the five factors identified, $\chi^2(4, N = 116) = 155.73, p = .001$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) the cost of transport, books, etc (Mean Rank = 2.38) and the cost of school fee (Mean Rank = 1.89), $T = 2350.00, z = -3.04$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .002$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r_{14} = .28$; (2) the need to work (Mean Rank = 2.89) and the cost of school fee (Mean Rank = 1.89), $T = 1707.5, z = -4.70$ (corrected for ties) $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .44$; (3) looking after young siblings (Mean Rank = 3.82) and the cost of school fee (Mean Rank = 1.89), $T = 785.50, z = -7.27$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 115, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .68$; (4) poor diet (Mean Rank = 4.03) and the cost of school fee (Mean Rank = 1.89), $T = 598.00, z = -7.71$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 115, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .72$; (5) looking after young siblings (Mean Rank = 3.82) and the cost of transport, books, etc (Mean Rank = 2.38), $T = 1106.50, z = -6.37$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .59$; (6) poor diet (Mean Rank = 4.03) and the cost of transport, books, etc (Mean Rank = 2.38), $T = 875.50, z = -6.93$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 115, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .59$; (7) looking after young siblings (Mean Rank = 3.82) and the need to work (Mean Rank = 2.89), $T = 1513.50, z = -5.31$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .49$; and (8) poor diet (Mean Rank = 4.03) and the need to work (Mean Rank = 2.89), $T = 1440.50, z = -5.46$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .51$.

$^{13} r = z/\sqrt{N}$

$^{14} r = z/\sqrt{N}$
6.1.1.3 Geographical factors

A Friedman two way ANOVA indicated that rankings of economical factors varied significantly across the five factors identified, $\chi^2(4, N = 116) = 12.18, p = .017$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated no significance between the five geographical factors.

6.1.1.4 Educational policies

A Friedman two way ANOVA indicated that rankings of educational policies varied significantly across the five factors identified, $\chi^2(4, N = 116) = 49.29, p = .001$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) irrelevant curriculum ($Mean\ Rank = 3.11$) and external exams ($Mean\ Rank = 2.43$), $T = 2256.00, z = -3.06$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 115, p = .001$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .28$; (2) boring subject ($Mean\ Rank = 3.69$) and external exams ($Mean\ Rank = 2.43$), $T = 1494.50, z = -5.28$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .49$; (3) English as medium ($Mean\ Rank = 3.22$) and external exams ($Mean\ Rank = 2.43$), $T = 2117.50, z = -3.55$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .33$; (4) irrelevant curriculum ($Mean\ Rank = 3.11$) and too many internal exams ($Mean\ Rank = 2.56$), $T = 2349.00, z = -2.93$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .003$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .27$; (5) boring subjects ($Mean\ Rank = 3.69$) and too many internal exams ($Mean\ Rank = 2.56$), $T = 1501.00, z = -5.28$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .49$; (6) English as main medium ($Mean\ Rank = 3.22$) and too many internal exams ($Mean\ Rank = 2.56$), $T = 2184.50, z = -3.25$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 115, p = .001$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .30$; (7) boring subjects ($Mean\ Rank = 3.69$) and irrelevant curriculum ($Mean\ Rank = 3.11$), $T = 2347.50, z = -2.94$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .003$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .27$.

6.1.1.5 School Policies

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) teacher’s attitude ($Mean\ Rank = 3.72$) and corporal punishment ($Mean\ Rank = 2.66$), $T = 1663.50, z = -4.71$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 115, p = .000$; this effect can be described as
"average", \( r = .44 \); (2) lack of counselling (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.49 \)) and corporal punishment (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.66 \)), \( T = 2062.00, z = -3.70 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .34 \); (3) strict school rules (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.18 \)) and too much homework (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.95 \)), \( T = 1891.50, z = -4.22 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .34 \); (4) teacher’s attitude (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.72 \)) and too much homework (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.95 \)), \( T = 2152.50, z = -3.46 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .34 \); (5) teacher’s attitude (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.72 \)) and strict school rules (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.18 \)), \( T = 1028.00, z = -6.59 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r = .61 \); (6) lack of counselling (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.49 \)) and strict school rules (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.18 \)), \( T = 1359.00, z = -5.66 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r = .53 \).

### 6.1.1.6 Psychological Factors

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted \( \alpha \) of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Peer pressure (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.44 \)) and lack of self-motivation (\( Mean \ Rank =3.09 \)) , \( T = 2361.00, z = -2.88 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .004 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .27 \); (2) lack of self-discipline (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.10 \)) and peer pressure (\( Mean \ Rank =2.44 \) ), \( T = 2303.00, z = -3.04 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .001 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .28 \); (3) poor attitude/commitment (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.28 \)) and peer pressure (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.44 \) ), \( T = 2152.50, z = -3.45 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .32 \).

### 6.1.2 Subsequent Effects

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted \( \alpha \) of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Prostitution (\( Mean \ Rank = 5.63 \)) and crime (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.34 \) ) , \( T =776.50, z = -7.25 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r = .67 \); (2) Casual employment (\( Mean \ Rank = 4.78 \)) and crime (\( Mean \ Rank =3.34 \) ) , \( T = 1907.50, z = -4.11 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .38 \); (3) Domestic chores (\( Mean \ Rank = 4.77 \)) and crime (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.34 \) ) , \( T = 1828.00, z = -4.22 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 115, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .39 \); (4) Self-employed (\( Mean \ Rank = 5.43 \)) and crime (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.34 \) ) , \( T = 1828.00, z = -4.22 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 115, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \( r = .39 \); (5) teacher’s attitude (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.72 \)) and strict school rules (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.18 \)), \( T = 1028.00, z = -6.59 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r = .61 \); (6) lack of counselling (\( Mean \ Rank = 3.49 \)) and strict school rules (\( Mean \ Rank = 2.18 \)), \( T = 1359.00, z = -5.66 \) (corrected for ties), \( N – Ties = 116, p = .000 \); this effect can be described as “large”, \( r = .53 \).
In looking at the other questions pertaining to the subsequent effects of student dropout, I conducted the Cochran’s $Q$ test to determine if the responses (Important/Not important) differ; this statistical test is used when the data is dichotomous (Field, 2005).

### 6.1.2.1 Social problems

Cronbach’s $Q$ (with $\alpha = .05$) was statistically significant, $Q (6, N = 116) = 44.84, p = .000$. To locate the source of this significance, I conducted a series of pairwise comparisons using the McNemar test. From the results, the only comparisons to achieve statistical significance at the Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ of .005 were between: (1) stealing and damaging properties, (2) stealing and disrespect, (3) damaging properties and fighting/swearing, (4) damaging properties and drug abuse, and (5) drug abuse and disrespect. The results indicated that 53 participants agreed damaging properties and stealing were important; only 37 participants felt that stealing alone was important. Fifty participants felt that both stealing and disrespect were important, whereas 40 participants felt stealing alone was important. Forty-nine participants felt that damaging properties and fighting/swearing were important; 31 participants felt only fighting/swearing were important. Fifty-one participants agreed that drug abuse and damaging properties were important, while 36 indicated drug abuse alone was important and damaging properties was not. Fifty-one participants agreed that drug abuse
and disrespect were both important, while 36 indicated drug abuse was important and not disrespect.

6.1.2.2 Personality

Cronbach’s $Q$ (with $\alpha = .05$) was statistically significant, $Q (6, N = 116) = .013$, $p = .000$. The McNemar test, Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ of .0024, showed significance between: (1) happy and worrying, (2) happy and angry, (3) happy and frustrated, (4) happy and depressed, (5) happy and unhappy, (6) relaxed and worrying, (7) relaxed and angry, (8) relaxed and frustrated, (9) relaxed and depressed, (10) relaxed and happy, (11) angry and depressed. The results indicated 60 participants agreed that worrying was important, while 48 stated that happy and worrying were not important. Sixty-six participants stated that happy and angry were not important, while 42 agreed that angry was important and not happy. Sixty-two participants agreed that frustration was important and not happy, and 46 stated that both frustration and happy were not important. Sixty-seven participants agreed that depressed and not happy was important, while 41 agreed that both happy and depressed were not important. Fifty-four participants agreed that happy was not important but unhappy was important, while 54 agreed that both happy and unhappy were not important. Fifty-eight participants agreed that worrying was important and not relaxed, whereas 45 stated that both worrying and relaxed were not important. Sixty-four participants agreed that both angry and relaxed were not important, while 39 stated that only angry was important. Sixty participants stated that frustration and not relaxed was important, while 43 agreed that both frustration and relaxed were not important. Sixty-six participants agreed that depressed and not relaxed was important, while 37 stated that both depressed and relaxed were not important. Fifty-three participants agreed that unhappy and not relaxed was important, while 50 stated that both relaxed and unhappy were not important. Forty-four participants agreed that depressed and not angry was important, and finally 28 stated that both depressed and angry were not important.

6.1.2.3 Attitudes of the family

Cronbach’s $Q$ (with $\alpha = .05$) was statistically significant, $Q (6, N = 116) = 48.64$, $p = .000$. The McNemar test, Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ of .0083, showed significance between: (1) worried and happy, (2) worried and angry, (3) worried and indifferent, (4) happy and angry, and (5) angry and indifferent. The results indicated that eighty-seven participants agreed that worrying and not happy was important, while 24 participants stated that both happy and
worrying were not important. Seventy-nine participants agreed that worrying and not angry was important, while 16 stated that angry and not worrying was important. Eighty-eight participants agreed that worrying and not indifferent was important, while 18 stated that both worrying and indifferent were not important. Eighty-six participants agreed that both angry and happy were not important, while 25 stated that angry and not happy was important. Eighty-two participants stated that both indifferent and angry were not important, while 24 agreed that angry and not indifferent was important.

6.1.2.4 Employment Status

Cronbach’s $Q$ (with $\alpha = .05$) was statistically significant, $Q (6, N = 116) = 48.64, p = .000$. The McNemar test, Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ of .017, showed significance between: (1) earned enough and do not earn enough, (2) earned enough and good enough wage, and (3) do not earn enough and good enough wage. The results indicated that sixty-eight participants agreed that do not earn enough was important, while 40 participants stated that earned enough was important. Sixty-nine participants agreed that both earned enough and good enough wage were not important, while 39 stated that earned enough and not good enough wages was important. Sixty-nine participants agreed that do not earn enough was important and earned enough wage was not important, while 39 stated that both do not earn enough and good enough wage were not important.

6.1.2.5 Attitudes of the community

Cronbach’s $Q$ (with $\alpha = .05$) was statistically significant, $Q (6, N = 116) = 15.80, p = .001$. The McNemar test, Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ of .0083, showed significance between: (1) stigmatize and supportive, and (2) supportive and indifferent. The results indicated that sixty participants stated that both supportive and stigmatize were not important, while 42 agreed that only stigmatize was important. Sixty-four participants stated that both indifferent and supportive were not important, while 38 agreed that only indifferent was important.

6.1.3 POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) School teachers ($Mean \text{ Rank} = 3.49$) and parents ($Mean \text{ Rank} = 1.93$), $T = 938.50, z = -6.85$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .64$; (2) MOE ($Mean \text{ Rank} = 3.91$) and parents ($Mean \text{ Rank} = 1.93$), $T = 1046.00, z = -6.50$.
(corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .60\); (3) Family members (Mean Rank = 3.73) and parents (Mean Rank = 1.93), \(T = 116, z = -7.70\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .72\); (4) Students themselves (Mean Rank = 3.41) and parents (Mean Rank = 1.93), \(T = 1338.00, z = -7.70\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .72\); (5) Religious organizations (Mean Rank = 5.75) and parents (Mean Rank = 1.93), \(T = 146.00, z = -9.00\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .83\); (6) Local community (Mean Rank = 5.79) and parents (Mean Rank = 1.93), \(T = 120.50, z = -9.08\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .84\); (7) Religious organizations (Mean Rank = 5.75) and school teachers (Mean Rank = 3.49), \(T = 559.50, z = -7.74\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 114, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .72\); (8) Local community (Mean Rank = 5.79) and school teachers (Mean Rank = 3.49), \(T = 572.00, z = -7.69\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 114, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .72\); (9) Religious organizations (Mean Rank = 5.75) and MOE (Mean Rank = 3.91), \(T = 991.00, z = -6.66\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .62\); (10) Local community (Mean Rank = 5.79) and MOE (Mean Rank = 3.91), \(T = 1091.50, z = -6.38\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .59\); (11) Religious organizations (Mean Rank = 5.75) and family members (Mean Rank = 3.73), \(T = 757.50, z = -7.32\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .68\); (12) Local community (Mean Rank = 5.79) and family members (Mean Rank = 3.73), \(T = 573.50, z = -7.84\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .73\); (13) Religious organizations (Mean Rank = 5.75) and students themselves (Mean Rank = 3.41), \(T = 998.00, z = -6.64\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .62\); (14) local community (Mean Rank = 5.79) and students themselves (Mean Rank = 3.41), \(T = 976.00, z = -6.68\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .000\); this effect can be described as “large”, \(r = .62\).

6.1.3.1 Support from parents

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted \(\alpha\) of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Financial support (Mean Rank = 3.03) and study environment (Mean Rank = 2.35), \(T = 2241.50, z = -3.22\) (corrected for ties), \(N - \text{Ties} = 116, p = .002\); this effect can be described as “moderate”, \(r = .30\); (2) Emotional support (Mean Rank = 4.01) and study environment
(Mean Rank = 2.35), T = 923.00, z = -6.87 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .64; (3) Moral support (Mean Rank = 3.61) and study environment (Mean Rank = 2.35), T = 1433.50, z = -5.45 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “average”, r = .50; (4) Financial support (Mean Rank = 3.03) and more time to study (Mean Rank = 1.99), T = 1454.50, z = -5.43 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “average”, r = .50; (5) Emotional support (Mean Rank = 4.01) and more time to study (Mean Rank = 1.99), T = 436.00, z = -8.23 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .76; (6) Moral support (Mean Rank = 3.61) and more time to study (Mean Rank = 1.99), T = 957.00, z = -6.78 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .63; (7) Emotional support (Mean Rank = 4.01) and financial support (Mean Rank = 3.03), T = 1461.50, z = -5.45 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “average”, r = .51; (8) Moral support (Mean Rank = 3.61) and financial support (Mean Rank = 3.03), T = 2354.00, z = -2.90 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .004; this effect can be described as “moderate”, r = .27.

6.1.3.2 School teachers’ attitudes

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted α of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Punishment (Mean Rank = 2.94) and understanding and patience (Mean Rank = 1.56), T = 1029.00, z = -6.60 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .61; (2) Caring and loving (Mean Rank = 3.42) and understanding and patience (Mean Rank = 1.56), T = 453.00, z = -8.19 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .76; (3) Extra support (Mean Rank = 2.50) and understanding and patience (Mean Rank = 1.56), T = 1245.50, z = -6.10 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .57; (4) Indifferent (Mean Rank = 4.58) and understanding and patience (Mean Rank = 1.56), T = 45.00, z = -9.37 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .87; (5) Indifferent (Mean Rank = 4.58) and punishment (Mean Rank = 2.94), T = 525.50, z = -7.94 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 115, p = .000; this effect can be described as “large”, r = .74; (6) Extra support (Mean Rank = 2.50) and caring and loving (Mean Rank = 3.42), T = 1390.50, z = -5.64 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be described as “average”, r = .52; (7) Indifferent (Mean Rank = 4.58) and caring and loving (Mean Rank = 3.42), T = 1065.50, z = -6.56 (corrected for ties), N – Ties = 116, p = .000; this effect can be
described as “large”, $r = .61$; (8) Indifferent ($Mean\ Rank = 4.58$) and extra support ($Mean\ Rank = 2.50$), $T = 303.00$, $z = -8.60$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .80$.

6.1.3.3 Ministry of Education

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Methods of assessment ($Mean\ Rank = 3.05$) and fee grants ($Mean\ Rank = 3.81$), $T = 2177.00$, $z = -3.39$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .001$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .31$; (2) Curriculum and subject content ($Mean\ Rank = 3.00$) and fee grants ($Mean\ Rank = 3.81$), $T = 2065.00$, $z = -3.70$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .35$; (3) Transport and book allowances ($Mean\ Rank = 2.72$) and fee grants ($Mean\ Rank = 3.81$), $T = 1660.00$, $z = -4.82$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .45$; (4) Better resources ($Mean\ Rank = 2.42$) and fee grants ($Mean\ Rank = 3.81$), $T = 1484.00$, $z = -5.30$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .49$; (5) Better resources ($Mean\ Rank = 2.42$) and curriculum and subject contents ($Mean\ Rank = 3.00$), $T = 2368.50$, $z = -2.86$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .002$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .27$.

6.1.3.4 Government subsidies

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Educational resources ($Mean\ Rank = 2.62$) and scholarships ($Mean\ Rank = 1.61$), $T = 1338.00$, $z = -5.80$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .54$; (2) Road conditions ($Mean\ Rank = 3.99$) and scholarships ($Mean\ Rank = 1.61$), $T = 334.00$, $z = -8.51$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .79$; (3) Experienced teachers ($Mean\ Rank = 3.41$) and scholarships ($Mean\ Rank = 1.61$), $T = 751.50$, $z = -7.34$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .68$; (4) Vocational schools ($Mean\ Rank = 3.36$) and scholarships ($Mean\ Rank = 1.61$), $T = 1001.50$, $z = -6.64$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .62$; (5) Road conditions ($Mean\ Rank = 3.99$) and educational resources ($Mean\ Rank = 2.62$), $T = 918.50$, $z = -6.94$ (corrected for ties), $N – Ties = 116$, $p = .000$; this effect can be described as “large”, $r = .64$; (6)
Experienced teachers (Mean Rank =3.41) and educational resources (Mean Rank =2.62), $T =1692.00, z = -4.79$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “average”, $r = .44$; (7) Vocational schools (Mean Rank =3.36) and educational resources (Mean Rank =2.62), $T =2033.50, z = -3.80$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .35$; (8) Experienced teachers (Mean Rank =3.41) and road conditions (Mean Rank =3.99), $T =2138.50, z = -3.53$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .001$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .33$; (9) Vocational schools (Mean Rank =3.36) and road conditions (Mean Rank =3.99), $T =2286.50, z = -3.09$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .002$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .29$.

6.1.3.5 Students

Follow-up pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test and a Bonferroni adjusted $\alpha$ of .005 indicated statistically significance between the following: (1) Bad influences (Mean Rank =3.28) and committed to work (Mean Rank =2.50), $T =2189.50, z = -3.35$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .001$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .31$; (2) Academic persistence (Mean Rank =3.49) and committed to work (Mean Rank =2.50), $T =1864.00, z = -4.25$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .39$; (3) Bad influences (Mean Rank =3.28) and obedience to teachers (Mean Rank =2.69), $T =2235.00, z = -3.26$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .001$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .30$; (4) Academic persistence (Mean Rank =3.49) and obedience to teachers (Mean Rank =2.69), $T =2001.00, z = -3.89$ (corrected for ties), $N - Ties = 116, p = .000$; this effect can be described as “moderate”, $r = .36$.

6.1.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall then, the results described in the previous sections show a number of important points. Responses from the participants, in the forms of Agree/Disagree statements and ranking, were analysed using the Cochran’s Q test, the McNemar test, the Friedman two way ANOVA test, and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test.

6.1.4.1 Factors causing student dropouts

In relation to factors that cause student dropouts, the results emphasise four important contributing factors: family support, poverty, external examinations, and lack of motivation. On an average, 67 participants agreed that poverty was the most crucial factor in influencing
student dropout, while family support (62 participants’ responses), lack of motivation (60 participants’ responses) and external examination (48 participants’ responses) were also featured as prominent factors in accounting for student dropout. In contrast, however, the participants agreed that the least important factors were teachers’ attitude, irrelevant curricula, and distance from home to school.

In terms of factor-specificity, the results highlight distinct differences between the social, economical, and geographical factors. The results indicated that for social factors, the home environment, poor parental support, family problems, and single parents were associated with student dropout. A strong association was evident between the home environment and family problems and poor parental support. In contrast, the number of children that exists in a family was ranked as been the least influential factor. For the economical factors, the costs of schooling (e.g., school fee, transportation, books and stationery, uniform) were ranked as been the most prevalent factor in student dropout. Poverty also related to undernourished and unhealthy students due to poor diet. In contrast, the results showed a moderate association between a need for children to look after their own siblings and a need for them to work and earn money for the family. As for the geographical location factor, there was a report of lack of regular transport, poor road conditions and safety of students that travelled for long distances.

As for the educational policies, students’ ranking indications showed a significant variation across the five factors identified (i.e., external examinations, too many internal examinations, irrelevant curricula, boring academic subjects, and using English as a medium of instruction), with boring academic subjects, external exams, and too many internal examinations ranked highly as important contributing factors. Furthermore, there was a strong association between boring academic subjects and the too many internal examinations and external examination factors. In contrasts, an average association was reported between irrelevant curricula and the use of English language as a medium of instruction. For school policies, strict school rules were ranked the highest in terms of importance, followed by teachers ‘attitudes and too much homework. Corporal punishment was ranked moderately compared to other school policies factors (e.g., poor attitude of teachers and administrators and lack of professional counselling in school). There was a strong association between strict school rules and teachers’ attitudes and lack of counselling.

Finally, for the psychological factors, peer pressure experienced by students was ranked as been the most important factor influencing student drop out. Furthermore, there were significant associations shown between peer pressure and lack of self-motivation, and
between lack of self-discipline and poor attitude and commitment to school. In contrast, low self-esteem was ranked the least important psychological factor influencing student dropout.

6.1.4.2 Subsequent effects of student dropouts

In terms of consequential effects of student dropout, crime was ranked as been the most potent effect, followed by prostitution, drug abuse, and unemployment. Strong associations were reported between crime, prostitution, and self-employment, and between prostitution and drug abuse. Moreover, average associations were found between unemployment and prostitution, and between unemployment and self-employment. In contrast, casual employment, farming, and domestic chores were ranked as activities that students were least likely to engage in. Drug abuse, stealing, and fighting were found to relate to each other statistically. On average, 45 participants agreed that drug abuse was the most crucial social problem created by dropouts, followed by stealing (43 participants’ responses), and fighting and swearing (40 participants’ responses). In contrast, the participants agreed that the least important social problem caused by student dropouts were disrespect to family and community members, and damaging properties.

As for personal feelings of student dropouts, participants indicated worrying, frustration, depression, angriness, and unhappiness as significant feelings that were experienced. On average, frustration was considered as been the most crucial feeling (61 participants’ responses), followed by worrying (59 participants’ responses), depression (59 participants’ responses), unhappiness (54 participants’ responses), and angriness (41 participants’ responses). In contrast, however, the participants agreed that happiness and relaxation were the least important personal feelings experienced. In relation to family attitudes, the participants agreed that both worrying (84 participants’ responses) and angriness (24 participants’ responses) were important reactions. The participants agreed that feeling happy or indifferent was not a significant family reaction.

As for the employment status of student dropout, earning not enough and earning just enough money to support themselves were the most prominent responses from the participants. On average, 69 participants agreed that student dropouts did not earn enough, while 39 participants agreed that just enough money was made to support themselves. In contrast, participants agreed that earning good enough money was least important in terms of employment.

Finally, in relation to attitudes from the community, stigmatisation and indifferent reactions were agreed by the participants. On average, 42 participants agreed that there was
amount of stigmatisation against those student dropouts, whereas 38 participants agreed that the community was indifferent. In contrast, the respondents agreed that supportive and sympathetic feelings were the least significant reactions from the community.

6.1.4.3 Possible Strategies

In terms of factor-specificity, the results highlight the significant rankings of the various types of support needed to reduce the student dropout rates in rural and remote secondary schools. The results indicated that support from parents was most significant compared to other strategies (e.g., school teachers, the Ministry of education, family members, students themselves, religious organisations and the local community). Strong associations were also reported between the different factors, for example – between parents and school teachers, parents and the Ministry of education, family members and parents, students themselves and parents, religious organisations and parents and school teachers and local community.

The results indicated that for parental support, the highest ranking was reported for the sound financial backgrounds of parents, followed by a good learning environment at home, more time to study at home, emotional support, and motivation and moral support. Strong associations were evident between emotional support and a better learning environment at home, emotional support and more time to study at home, and moral support and more time to study at home. There were also moderate-to-large associations between parents’ financial backgrounds and a better learning environment at home, parents’ financial backgrounds and more time to study at home, and parents’ financial background and emotional and moral support. As for school teachers’ attitudes, understanding, patience, and indifferent attitudes were important considerations when compared to other attitudes, such as caring, loving, and providing extra support. In contrast, however, using punishments and strictness were the least ranked responses. There were strong associations between being understanding/patience and using punishments/strictness, caring and loving and understanding/patience, and providing extra support and understanding/patience. There was only a small association between providing extra support and caring and loving.

In relation to the support from the Ministry of Education, the highest ranking was made for an increase in school fee grants, followed by a provision of better resources and the changing of school curricula. The least ranked responses were reported for the changing of assessment methods, and providing transport and book allowances. The results also indicated low-to-moderate associations between factors such as increasing school fee grants and
changing assessment methods, providing better resources and increasing fee grants, changing school curricula and increasing fee grants, and providing transport and book allowances to rural students. For government subsidies, the results indicated highly ranked responses between providing scholarships and educational resources, improving the road conditions and providing scholarships, providing scholarships and sending more experienced teachers to rural teachers, building more vocational schools and providing scholarships, and improving road conditions and proving better educational resources. In contrast, low-to-moderate rankings were reported for more vocational schools and sending more experienced and trained teachers to rural and remote schools. Low-to-moderate associations existed between having more vocational schools and educational resources, sending more experienced/trained teachers to rural schools and improving rural road conditions, and having more vocational schools and improving rural road conditions.

Finally, in terms of students supporting themselves in rural and remote schools, the results indicated consistent rankings for the following issues: commitment to school work, obedience to teachers and seeking extra help, staying away from bad influences and friends, and to persist academically despite socio-economic challenges. Low-to-moderate associations also existed between staying away from bad influences and friends and having commitment to school work, academic persistence and obedience to teachers, and academic persistence and commitment to school work.

6.1 PART II: QUALITATIVE PHASE

A number of analyses are available to assist in the analysis of qualitative data. In this study, two types of analyses were used to analyse the data: thematic (Esterberg, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and content analysis (Burns, 2000; Esterberg, 2002; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Unlike quantitative data analyses which assign numbers to cases, qualitative analyses focus on the potential meanings of the data (Burns, 2000; Esterberg, 2002; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that in qualitative analyses, we pay close attention to three main steps: (i) noticing the relevant phenomenon or phenomena, (ii) collecting examples to reflect those phenomena, and (iii) analysing those phenomena in-depth to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures.

In thematic analysis, I looked for emerging themes and patterns from the 12 participants’ responses. In this analytical approach, I used a two-step coding procedure that has often been used in grounded theory research (Esterberg, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) where this has involved the generation of analytical categories and their dimensions, and the
identification of relationships between the categories (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis & Dillon 2003). The two-step coding procedure involves open coding (Esterberg, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and focused coding (Esterberg, 2002; Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006). First, in the open coding step, I analysed the data micro-analytically, looking out for themes and categories that were important and relevant to the line of inquiry. Second, in the focus coding step, similar to open coding, I refined the analysis so that specific themes could be determined. Focused coding depends on the key themes identified during the open coding step and categorizing them into specific themes, because respondents have a tendency to use different terms to describe similar things. Lofland et al. (2006) state that there are three ways in which focus coding builds on open coding by: (i) usually beginning after the former is well under way and has accumulated, (ii) using a selected number of the expanding or more analytically interesting initial codes to knit together large chunks of data, and (ii) using these expanding materials as the basis for asking more focused and analytical questions.

After thematic analyses, I then used content analysis to explore the importance of particular recurring themes that were identified from the thematic analyses. Content analysis, a methodological strategy used often with both qualitative and quantitative data (Burns, 2000; Esterberg, 2002; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), enables examination of quantitative categorization, and the development and clarification of a particular theory (Millward, 2001; Wilson & Hammond, 2001). Content analysis generally involves a systematic analysis of texts where these texts may include any kind of written materials, such as books, magazines, diaries, letters, minutes of meetings, transcripts of TV programme, interview transcripts, and field notes. Interpretation of content analysis of the data may be made through the use of frequencies, a cross-break table, a chi-square analysis, or a narrative description derives from codes and themes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). In this case, I chose to use the frequency count as a basis for my content analysis. In particular, from the open and focused coding strategies, I looked at the frequencies of occurrence in the themes and categories that were identified. This quantification involved counting and comparing students’ responses.

### 6.2.1 SPSS TEXT ANALYSIS FOR SURVEYS

In thematic and content analyses, there are different PC software programs that assist the researcher with the available raw data. These programs include, for example, ATLAS.ti, Nvivo, N*udist, and SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys. For the purpose of this study, I used SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys (Version 2.1) to analyse the data collected. SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys is a text coding software that allows the researcher to analyse the open-
ended responses (i.e., interview). SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys, in particular, assists the researcher in the coding and categorization processes, where open-ended responses are analysed and “computed” as a set of phrases and sentences. In this actual analysis, the program extracts sentences, key terms, and word patterns into classified categories and themes, which then allows the researcher to look at the frequency count. The analysed results, in categories and themes, are reliable given that the processes of extraction and categorization are always performed in a consistent and repeatable manner. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I provide a detailed reporting of the thematic and content analyses that were performed using the SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys software.

6.2.2 STUDENT'S RESPONSES: THEMATIC AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

6.2.2.1 Why did you drop out of school?

Thematic and content analyses indicated four important themes: accessibility, a lack of motivation, socio-economical status, and academic failure. In terms of accessibility, students agreed that both the infrastructure of the home (in this case, electricity) (~ one response) and the difficulty in transportation (~ one response) were major reasons for their dropping out of school. With socio-economical status, I found a number of issues that were important in school dropout – in this case, a lack of support from the family (~ two responses), experience of financial problems (~ one response), financial constrains (~ one response), job to support (~ one response), schooling is not cheap (~ one response), and the cost of education (~ one response). A lack of motivation (~ three responses) and the high academic demand placed on students (~ three responses) were also reported as important reasons for student dropout. Diagrammatically, as shown in Figure 4, the results also indicated the interrelations between the four themes, with strong shared responses between socio-economical status and academic failure, and between academic failure and motivation. By the same token, there was a moderate shared response between socio-economical status and a lack of motivation. In contrast, there were weak shared responses between academic failure and accessibility and between accessibility and a lack of motivation.
6.2.2.2 Were you provided adequate support at home?

Three themes emerged from this analysis, namely: family budget, parental encouragement, and un conducive learning environment. In regards to family budget, students reported that the need for money (~ one response) was the reason for them not getting adequate support from home. For parental encouragement, I found students reported no parental support (~ 2 responses) and lack of parental support (~ two responses). With un conducive learning environment at home, I found that students reported infrastructure (electricity in this case) (~ one response), financial constrain (costly) (~ one response), illiterate parents (~ one response), and disturbances at home (family responsibilities and duties, family problems and lack of support from family) (~ four responses) as responsible for student dropout. The results in Figure 5 also indicate that there were interrelations between the three themes, with a strong shared response between parental encouragement and un conducive learning environment at home. In contrast, there were weak shared responses between family budget and parental encouragement, and between family budget and un conducive learning environment at home.
Figure 5 Were you provided adequate support at home?
6.2.2.3 *Discuss about the school and educational policies.*

The analyses reported three significant themes for this question: unfair school policies, a lack of support for disadvantaged students, and exam-oriented curricula. In relation to unfair school policies, students reported three issues – a dislike for school policies (~ one response), language difficulty (~ one response), and harsh school rules (~ one response). Under the theme – a lack of support for disadvantaged students – students indicated that the education system was unfair to disadvantaged children (~ two responses). In terms of exam oriented curricula, students reported that academic demands in learning (~ two responses) were an important educational policy responsible for student dropout. Figure 6 highlights a weak shared response between exam-oriented curricula and unfair school policies, and between exam-oriented curricula and a lack of support for disadvantaged students. However, there was no relationship between unfair school policies and a lack of support for disadvantaged students.

![Diagram of shared responses]

**Figure 6 Discuss about the school and educational policies.**

6.2.2.4 *Did you get any counselling?*

Three essential themes emerged: a lack of parental involvement for educational progress, vocational education, and academic counselling to improve performance in tests. Students reported a lack of parental support from home (~ one response), along with counselling for vocational education as an alternative path (~ one response). In terms of academic counselling to improve performance in tests, I found that academic counselling based on students’ performances (~ three responses) and reporting to the principal (~ one response) were the main forms of counselling provided to students. Diagrammatic
interpretation of Figure 7 shows that there was a weak shared response between academic counselling to improve performance in tests and vocational education.

Figure 7 Did you get any counselling?
6.2.2.5 What did you do after dropping out of school?

Thematic and content analyses indicated two important themes: casual employment and unemployment. For casual employment, students reported mainly casual labourer (e.g., employed in a local construction company or a motor vehicle garage) (~ two responses). As for unemployment, students agreed on staying at home to engage in domestic and/or farm work (~ four responses) and leisure activities, such as fishing (~ one response). Figure 8 shows a moderate shared response between casual employment and unemployment, with more respondents agreeing that they were unemployed after dropping out of school.

Figure 8 What did you do after dropping out of school

6.2.2.6 What are the effects of dropping out of school?

Analyses indicated two significant themes: crime and poverty as contributing to student dropout. Under crime, alcohol and drug abuse (~ three responses) were reported. As for poverty, students reported a number of issues: economic difficulty (~ three responses), being a casual labourer and earning very little money (~ three responses), the need for money to meet different needs (~ one response), an uncertain future (~ three responses), and tight budget (need for money) (~ one response). Figure 9 shows the strong shared responses between crime and poverty, with more respondents agreeing that poverty was a more significant effect of student dropout.
6.2.2.7 How do you feel for not being able to complete secondary education?

Three important themes emerged from this analysis: poverty, emotional disturbances, and an unpredictable future. Under poverty, students agreed that financial hardships (the need for money) (~ one response) was important. As for emotional disturbances, students reported mainly frustration and depression (~ two responses), whereas for an unpredictable future they reported having no future (~ one response), an uncertain future (~ three responses), and not having an adequate education (~one response). Furthermore, from Figure 10, the results show interrelations between the three themes, with a strong shared response between emotional disturbances and unpredictable future. Similarly, there were moderate shared responses between emotional disturbances and poverty, and between unpredictable future and poverty. However, the majority of the respondents felt that they experienced unpredictable futures after not completing their secondary education.
6.2.2.8 What plans do you have for future?

Analyses of the data indicated two important themes for this question: vocational education for skilled employment and finding employment. In regards to vocational education for skilled employment, students conferred with the importance and need to enrol in vocational schools (e.g., Ratu Navula Catering School, Mulomulo Vocational School) (~ three responses). With finding employment, students reported finding casual employment (casual labourer) (~ three responses) and providing financial support for the family (~ one response) as their plans for the future. The results, as shown in Figure 11, also indicate a weak relationship and shared responses between the vocational education for skilled employment and finding employment.

![Figure 11 What plans do you have for future?](Image)

6.2.2.9 What could have been done to help you complete your secondary education?

Six important themes emerged from this analysis: infrastructure support, better family support, friendly school environment, more relevant curricula and assessment methods, financial support, and alternative routes to learning. With infrastructure support, students reported the need for better transportation services (~ one response) and better family support (~ one response). Other ways which could also assist students in their secondary education included, for instance, a friendly school environment (e.g., students reported school rules being too harsh) (~ one response), and more relevant curricula and assessment methods. As for financial support, students reported in particular the need for financial support to assist with education (~ two responses). As for the alternative routes to learning theme, students
agreed that enrolment in vocational schools (~ three responses) and the need for more skilled based learning (~ two responses) were two ways that could have assisted them to gain some formal education qualifications before dropping out of school.

Figure 12 shows the interrelations and weak shared responses between the six themes. For instance, weak shared responses were reported between: alternative routes to learning and more relevant curricula and assessment methods; alternative routes to learning and financial support; alternative routes to learning and friendly school environment; alternative routes to learning and better family support; and alternative routes to learning and better infrastructure support. Similarly, weak share responses were also noted between better family support and financial support; better family support and friendly school; and between financial support and more relevant curricula and assessment methods.

![Figure 12 What could have been done to help you complete your secondary education?](image-url)
6.2.3 PARENTS RESPONSES: THEMATIC AND CONTENT ANALYSES

6.2.3.1 What challenges do children face at home that hinders their school achievements and progress?

Thematic and content analyses from the parents’ responses of this question indicated seven significant themes: accessibility to school, high academic demands, financial hardships, lack of self-motivation, extra responsibilities, unconducive home environment, and lack of parental support. In terms of accessibility to school, it was agreed that long distances from home to school (~ one response) were a contributing factor, especially for those students who live in rural and remote areas. In relation to high academic demands, parents agreed that too many exams (~ one response) were a challenge for rural and remote students.

As for financial hardships, the high cost of education (~ two responses) was cited. As for self-motivation, parents agreed on two issues – lack of parental support (~one response) and lack of interest in school work (~ two responses). In terms of extra responsibilities, parents agreed that home responsibilities, such as children’s “labour” at home (e.g., doing farm work for parents) (~ three responses) and other responsibilities at home (e.g., domestic chores and looking after younger siblings) (~ three responses) were major challenges faced by rural and remote children. As for the unconducive home environment theme, parents agreed on a number of issues: uneducated parents (~ two responses), too many exams and exam preparation (~ one response), family problems at home (~ two responses), lack of interest in school work due to family problems (~ one response), land tenancy problems (expiry of land leases) (~ one response), disturbances at home (e.g., visitors and extended family) (~ two responses), and lack of learning resources at home (~ one response). For the theme lack of parental support, parents agreed on the importance of: the expensive cost of educating children (~ one response), ongoing tenancy problems and how these problems diverted attention (~ one response), inadequate support from parents (~ four responses), education and lack thereof (~ one response), disinterest in children’s education (~ three responses), and financial problems at home (~ two responses).

Moreover, Figure 13 shows the interrelations between the seven themes, with the strongest shared response between unconducive home environment and lack of parental support. Strong shared responses were also noted between unconducive home environment and extra responsibilities; and between extra responsibilities and lack of parental support. Moderate shared responses were found between unconducive home environment and
financial hardships; unconducive home environment and lack of self-motivation; financial hardships and extra responsibilities; financial hardships and lack of parental support; and lack of self-motivation and lack of parental support. In contrast, weak shared responses were found between accessibility to school and unconducive home environment; accessibility to school and lack of self-motivation; accessibility to school and lack of parental support; extra responsibilities and lack of self-motivation; extra responsibilities and high academic demands; financial hardships and high academic demands; and between high academic demands and unconducive home environment.

Figure 13 What challenges do children face at home that hinders their school achievement and progress?
6.2.3.2 *What problems do you see children face in school that might cause them to drop out?*

Five important themes emerged: parental support, unfair school policies, the high cost of education, lack of learning resources, and unfair curriculum policies. It was agreed that lack of parental support (~ one response) contributed to student dropout. As for unfair school policies, parents agreed that strict school rules (~ one response), harsh school policies (~ two responses), and fundraising (~ one response) were major problems that children faced. Parents also agreed that the high cost of educational materials (~ two responses) was an obstacle that deterred children from obtaining their educational needs. Similarly, for lack of learning resources, parents agreed that lack of resources in rural and remote schools (e.g., library books and other learning resource) (~ two responses) and lack of parental support (e.g., participating in school organised activities) (~ one response) were contributing problems for children at school. For unfair curriculum policies, parents reported a number of issues, such as irrelevant curricula (~ two responses) and subjects (~ two responses), too many exams (~ two responses), language barrier (e.g., use of English as the main language)(~ two responses), and parents’ lack of knowledge (~ two responses). Figure 14 shows strong shared responses between unfair curriculum policies and the high cost of education; between unfair curriculum policies and lack of learning resources; and between unfair curriculum policies and unfair school policies. In contrast, weak shared responses were reported between the high cost of education and lack of learning resources; the high cost of education and parental support; between unfair curriculum policies and parental support; and between lack of learning resources and unfair school policies.

![Figure 14 What challenges do you see children face in school that might cause them to drop out?](image-url)
6.2.3.3 What role does distance from home to school play in student dropout?

Both thematic and content analyses of parents responses revealed four major themes: students’ safety issues, irregular attendance affecting school work, parental support in rural and remote areas, and transportation problems. In relation to students’ safety issues, parents were concerned with basic safety (in this case, girls walking alone for long distances to school) (~ one response) and the notion of traveling alone (~ one response). As for irregular school attendance, parents agreed that irregular attendance led to academic failure (~ one response); furthermore, they described other contributing factors related to the location of the school and home – inconvenient transport services (~ one response), children’s irregular attendance to school (~ one response), and children’s inability to cope with school work (~ one response). For parental support in rural and remote areas, parents agreed that lack of parental support (~ three responses), disturbances at home (~ one response), and parents’ lack of knowledge (~ two responses) were major problems. With transportation problems in rural and remote areas, parents reported on a number of issues, notably the cost of transportation (fare for public transport)(~ two responses), poor road conditions (~ two responses), rainy weather (~ one response), irregular and inconvenient transportation services (~ four responses), students walking long distances (~ one response), unreliable transportation (~ one response), inconvenient transportation running time (~ two responses), the particular mode of transport (~ one response), and poor conditions of buses (~ four responses). Figure 15 the interrelations between the four themes, with a strong shared response between transportation problems in rural and remote areas and parental support. In contrast, weak shared responses were found between: irregular school attendance and transportation problems in rural and remote areas; irregular attendance affecting school work and parental support in rural and remote areas; students’ safety issues and transportation problems in rural and remote areas; and students’ safety issues and parental support in rural and remote areas.
6.2.3.4 What are the effects of children dropping out of school?

Analyses of the parents’ response in relation to effects of student dropouts indicated four important themes: uncertain future, unethical behaviours, financial loss, and substance abuse. In relation to uncertain future, parents agreed that their children face bleak futures (~two responses) with very little prospects of employment (~one response). As for unethical behaviours, parents agreed that children have very little interest in school work (~one response), are disrespectful (~two responses), and are often worried and frustrated (~four responses). Parents also agreed that the money invested in their children’s education was a lost in terms of investment (~four responses). As for substance abuse, parents agreed that drug abuse (~two response), damaging properties (~one response), and engaging in illegal activities (~one response) were common behaviours among student dropouts. Figure 16 shows the interrelations between the four themes, with strong shared responses between substance abuse and unethical behaviours, substance abuse and financial loss, and financial loss and unethical behaviours. In contrast, weak shared responses were found between substance abuse and uncertain future, uncertain future and financial loss, and between uncertain future and unethical behaviours.
6.2.3.5 What are some strategies that can be implemented to reduce the student dropout rate?

Four major themes emerged from this analysis: community support, financial assistance, transportation, and educational policies. In relation to community support, parents felt that a greater community support was needed (~ one response); furthermore, parents agreed for more financial support, such as scholarships for poor students (~ three responses). As for transportation issues, parents agreed that more should be done in terms of providing better road conditions (~ two responses) and transport facilities (~ two responses). In terms of educational policies, parents reported the need for more interesting curricula (~ one response), implementing compulsory education to Form 6 (~ three responses), having better infrastructures to reach schools in good time (~ two responses), more relevant curricula (~ one response), scholarships for needy students (~ three responses), less exams (~ one response), and community support (~ one response). Figure 17 shows strong shared responses between financial assistance and educational policies, and between educational policies and transport. Similarly, a moderate shared response was shown between financial assistance and transport. In contrast, weak shared responses were found between financial assistance and community support, and between community support and educational policies.
Figure 17 What are some strategies that can be implemented to reduce the dropout rate?
6.2.4 TEACHERS RESPONSES: THEMATIC AND CONTENT ANALYSES

6.2.4.1 Describe the academic standard of the students in general?

Thematic and content analyses revealed two important themes to describe the academic standards of students: brain drain of academically better off students and students’ low-to-average academic status. The analysis indicated a brain drain of students from the rural and remote schools to the urban schools, especially in the lower forms (~ two responses). In terms of students’ academic status, teachers reported on issues such as average academic status (~ four responses), few above average students (~ one response), average performances in exams (~ one response), and the majority of students are below average (~ four responses). Figure 18 shows interrelations between the two themes, with a weak shared response between students’ academic status and brain drain of students from rural to urban schools.

![Figure 18 Describe the academic standards of the students in general?](image)

6.2.4.2 Socio-economic factors influencing students’ retention

Six important themes emerged: external forces, low self-motivation, education aspirations and commitment, family background and issues, the cost of education, and family financial status. In regards to external forces, teachers reported that peer pressure, in this case, bad company (~ one response) and peer influence (~ two responses), were major influences in affecting students’ retention. As for the low self-esteem theme, teachers agreed that the desire for a free life in a village (~ one response), the changing family structure (~ one response), low-to-average performances in exams due to other commitments and
priorities (~ three responses), low achievers (~ one response), and high absenteeism rates (~ one response) were common factors affecting students’ successful learning in school. With education aspirations and commitment, teachers indicated a number of factors that contributed to students’ overall performances – time spent with children at home (~ three responses), low educational aspirations (~ four responses), rural lifestyle (~ one response), short-term goals for survival (~ one response), no commitment (~ four responses), poor attitudes to education (~ three responses), high absenteeism (~ one response), and not ambitious in learning or development (~ one response). As for family background and issues, a number of important issues were reported – poor parents (~ one response), family structure (~ three responses), parents have other priorities (~ four response), family status (~ one response), unsupervised children at home (~ two responses), parents lack of knowledge on educational issues (~ three responses), rural family problems (~ one response), poor parental support (~ three responses), lack of resources at home (~ two responses), family problems (~ four responses), lack of commitment (~ one response), parents working hard to provide the family with food and cannot prioritise education (~ one response), disturbances at home (~ one response), lack of parents’ commitment (~ four responses), parents’ educational level (~ two responses), children are asked to work part time to support the family (~ one response), the expiry of land leases (~ one response), and family break-ups (~ one response). With the cost of education, teachers agreed on issues such as high educational costs (~ three responses), some students take too long to complete their education (~ one response), children are not ambitious enough (~one response), high absenteeism (~ one response), academic subjects are boring (~ one response), and the incurring cost of keeping children at school (~ two responses). Finally, as for family financial status, teachers agreed that parents’ occupations and jobs (~ four responses), low financial status (~ one response), poor parents (~ one response), and parents working hard to meet other expenses (e.g., medical expenses)(~ two responses) were socio-economic factors that influenced school completion rate.

As shown in Figure 19, the results highlight the interrelations between the six themes, with strong shared responses between educational aspirations and commitment, educational aspirations and the cost of education, educational aspirations and low self-motivation, educational aspirations and family financial status, and educational aspirations and family background and issues. In contrast, weak shared responses were found between external forces and family background and issue, external forces and educational aspirations and commitments, external forces and the cost of education, external forces and low self-esteem, and external forces and the family financial status.
6.2.4.3 Geographical context and its impact

The geographical context indicated five major themes: rural life challenges, low aspirations, unconducive learning environment, transportation challenges, and rural poverty. In terms of rural life challenges, teachers agreed that rural lifestyle (~ two responses) and rugged terrains in rural areas (~ one response) were major geographical challenges faced by students. As for low aspirations, teachers agreed that students’ inability to cope with high academic demands was related to parents’ lack of support and resources at home (~ one response). Furthermore, students were not achieving well academically because of the extensive traveling that they had to do (~ three responses), and this consequential irregular attendance caused a feeling of helplessness (~ two responses). For unconducive learning environment, teachers emphasized on the importance of missing classes (~ one response), staying with legal guardians (~ three responses), late to classes (~ two responses), dropping out of school easily (~ three responses), lack of resources at home (~ one response), long distance to travel (~ three responses), poor parents and their lack of education (~ three responses), irregular school attendance among Fijian students (~ one response), no fixed home address (~ one response), and a lack of parents’ involvement in school work (~ two responses). With transportation challenges, teachers reported a number of issues, such as the high cost of transport (~ four responses), poor road conditions (~ two responses), high absenteeism and irregular attendance (~ four responses), and irregular transport (~ two responses). In terms of rural poverty, teachers agreed that parents’ occupations were important given that most rural parents were either farmers, casual labourers, or self-
employed and did not have a fixed source of income (~ four responses). Figure 20 shows interrelations between all the five themes with the strongest shared responses found between unconducive learning environment and transportation challenges, unconducive learning environment and rural poverty, and transportation challenges and rural poverty. Moderate shared responses were found between shown between unconducive learning environment and low aspirations, and between transportation challenges and rural poverty. Weak shared responses were shown between rural life challenges and rural poverty, and between transportation challenges and unconducive learning environment. In contrast, a very weak shared response was reported between rural life challenges and low aspirations.

6.2.4.4 Educational and school policies

Thematic and content analyses identified seven important themes: teachers’ extra effort, strict school rules, irrelevant learning, high academic demands, lack of parents’ knowledge on educational developments, rural poverty, and curriculum and assessment policies. In regards to teachers’ extra effort, teachers agreed it was difficult to teach below average students (~ one response) and that teachers had to sacrifice extra personal time to support students (~ one response). As for strict school rules, demand for proper school uniform (~ one response) was reported. For irrelevant learning, teachers agreed with relevant curricula (~ one response) and interesting schoolwork (~ one response), while for high academic demands, teachers agreed that time spent with children at home was important (~ two responses). As for lack of parents’ knowledge on educational development, teachers reported poor parental support (~ one response) and lack of knowledge on contemporary educational issues (~ three responses). In terms of rural poverty, teachers reported poor
parents (~ one response), parents’ occupations (~ two responses), and the high cost of education (~ four responses). In relation to curriculum and assessment policies, teachers reported on a number of issues, such as lack of commitment (~ two responses), poor parents (~ two responses), exam pressure (~ three responses), and language barrier between the mother tongue and school language (~ three responses).

Diagrammatically, Figure 21 shows the interrelations between the seven themes, with a strong shared response between rural poverty and curriculum and assessment policies. Moderate shared responses were found between rural poverty and parents’ knowledge on educational developments, and between rural poverty and curriculum and assessment policies. In contrasts, very weak-to-weak shared responses were found between high academic demands and rural poverty, and between high academic demands and curriculum and assessment polices. Very weak shared responses were found between irrelevant learning and high academic demands, high academic demands and parents knowledge on educational developments, irrelevant learning and rural poverty, irrelevant learning and curriculum and assessment policies, irrelevant learning and parents’ knowledge on educational developments, parents’ knowledge on educational developments and strict school rules, parents’ knowledge on educational developments and teachers’ extra effort, rural poverty and strict school rules, rural poverty and teachers’ extra effort, curriculum and assessment policies and teachers’ extra effort, and between curriculum and assessment policies and strict school rules.

Figure 21 Educational and school policy
6.2.4.5 Effects of student dropouts

Thematic and content analyses indicated two major themes: poverty and social problems. Poverty included a number of issues, notably minor jobs (~ one response), low educational aspirations (~ one response), unstable future (~ three responses), staying with legal guardians (~ one response), lower job security due to low qualifications (~ one response), casual labourers (~ one response), poor parents (~ two responses) and financial hardships (~ one response). With social problems, teachers reported on nuisance in the community (~ one response), the high cost for parents (~ one response), desperate for money (~ one response), menial wages (~ one response), trouble makers in the community (~ one response), indiscipline (~ one response), teenage pregnancies (~ two responses), poor parenting cycle (~ one response), substance abuse (~ one response), suicide (~ one response), alcohol abuse (~ one response), drug abuse (~ one response), poverty cycle (~ two responses), frustrations with having poor parents (~ one response), and crime (~ one response). Figure 22 shows a moderate shared response between poverty and social problems.

Figure 22 Effects of student dropouts.

6.2.4.6 Strategies to increase the completion rate of students

Six important themes emerged here: infrastructure improvement, change of attitude towards vocational education, changing educational policies, early identification and counselling of at-risk students, government subsidies for poor children in rural schools and community outreach and awareness programs. Infrastructure improvement included no
regular transport (~ one response) and a change of attitude towards vocational education (~ two responses). As for education policies, teachers mentioned the need to eliminate external exams (~ three responses). As for early identification and counselling of at-risk students, teachers suggested some important strategies to help retain students in school, notably reducing strict school rules (~ one response), offering better counselling services (~ one response) and environment to prevent crime (~ one response). Teachers also argued that more could be done in terms of providing subsidies for poor children in rural and remote schools (~ two responses) and financial assistance (~ two responses). Teachers indicated a number of issues that could encompass community outreach and awareness programs, in particular – creating educational awareness in the rural community (~ two responses), reducing the effects of peer pressure (~ one response), changing education perceptions (~ one response), having trained counsellors (~ one response), introducing intervention programs (~ one response), educating the rural community (~ one response), changing attitude towards vocational education (~ three responses), having outreach programs for rural parents (~ one response), having guest speakers (~ one response), the teaching of moral education in school (~ one response), and parental/community awareness and literacy (~ three responses).

Figure 23 provides an overview of the different levels of shared responses between the six themes. Strong shared responses were found between the community outreach and awareness programs and changing education policies, community outreach and awareness programs and government subsidies for poor children in rural schools, and community outreach and awareness programs and early identification and counselling of at-risk students. Moderate shared responses were found between a change of attitude towards vocational educational and changing education policies, changing attitude towards vocational education and community outreach and awareness programs, and changing attitude towards vocational education and early identification and counselling of at-risk students. Moderate responses were also found between changing education policies and government subsidies for poor rural children, changing education policies and early identification and counselling of at-risk students, and government subsidies for poor rural children and early identification and counselling of at-risk students. In contrast, weak shared responses were reported between infrastructure improvement and changing education policies, infrastructure improvement and community outreach and awareness programs, and infrastructure improvement and government subsidies for poor rural children.
Figure 23 Strategies to increase the completion rate of students.
6.2.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Taken together, the thematic and content analyses described a number of research issues relating to student dropouts: factors causing student dropouts; subsequent effects of student dropouts; and possible strategies to address the student dropout problems. Results obtained from the three focus groups (student dropouts, parents and teachers) revealed significant issues pertaining to the student dropout phenomenon.

In relation to student dropout, the results indicated a number of pressing issues. First, it was apparent from the students’ responses that the combination of poor socio-economic status, lack of motivation, and lack of parental support contributed to the decision of student dropout. Second, an unconducive home environment hindered students’ academic progress which, in turn, led to low academic achievements and ultimately student dropout. Third, it was also apparent that high academic demands and the exam oriented education system, as a whole, simultaneously made a negative contribution to students’ academic progress, especially those in rural and remote areas. Fourth, students reported an absence of professional counselling but admitted that progress was monitored and academic counselling was offered. Vocational education was an alternative path that was discussed for those students who were not performing well in school. Fifth, students’ responses emphasized on unemployment and the uncertain, bleak future for many. The problems of financial hardships, crime, and poverty were a constant reminder, and many students agreed that vocational training was an option that could further their lives and others who come from rural and remote areas.

In relation to parent’s responses, five important issues emerged from the analyses. First, it was evident from the parents’ responses that a combination of family-related factors, such as an unconducive home environment, lack of parental support, and low parents’ education qualifications contributed to students’ low academic performances which, in turn, caused high rates of student dropout. Second, parents agreed that rural poverty and escalating costs of education contributed negatively towards children’s school progress in a number of ways; for instance, children were asked to ignore their studies and work on the farm and/or household chores instead. Third, some important education-related issues, such as unfair school policies, irrelevant school curricula, and exam-oriented education systems were
responsible for high student dropout. Fourth, parents reported that geographical challenges, in particular, the inconvenient transportation services and poor road conditions played an important role in student dropout in rural and remote areas. Fifth, parents agreed that there were repercussions as a result of student dropout; for example, they suffer financial loss when the children do not complete their secondary education, children experiencing uncertain futures, and dropouts cause social problems for society (e.g., crime and drug abuse). Finally, parents’ responses emphasised the need to offer financial assistance to those needy students, especially by having better transportation services and changes in the existing education policies.

For the teachers, similar to students and parents, the analyses showed a brain-drain situation with students in rural and remote areas. Accordingly, the results indicated low levels of educational commitment and aspirations among parents and their children and, in turn, contributed to school withdrawal. Although teachers agreed that geographical challenges hindered students’ school attendance and, in turn, their academic performances, it was poverty that perpetuated the cycle of student dropout. In addition to this illustration, the results highlighted three additional issues. First, the teachers agreed that many rural parents lack knowledge in areas concerning education and development, and this hindered their support to assist the children’s education. Second, teachers suggested that student dropout in rural and remote areas perpetuated the cycle of poverty and other social problems. Finally, it was evident from the teachers’ responses that changes were needed to ensure a reduction in student dropout in rural and remote areas; for example, they suggested providing financial assistance and changing some educational policies to cater for the rural and remote students.
Chapter 7
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

7.0 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the research study reported in this thesis has been from the informational sources on factors causing student dropout rates in rural secondary schools, subsequent effects of student dropouts, and the possible strategies to help retain more students in rural secondary schools. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 6, a number of data analysis methods, such as Cochran’s Q test, McNemar test, Friedman test and Wilcoxon Signed Rank test (for quantitative data) and thematic and content analysis (for qualitative data) were used in order to allow investigation of the six major research questions posed for the three themes. The use of quantitative data analyses were used to determine the rankings, frequency of the responses, and its significance level in relation to the one another. The qualitative data analyses helped to determine the analytical categories and the identification of relationships between the categories.

For the first theme regarding the factors causing student dropouts, it was hypothesized that social, economical, psychological, educational and geographical factors, distinctive in their own ways, would affect the students’ school completion to various degrees. Results indicated that socio-economic factors, school and educational policies and geographical isolation were important factors contributing to the student dropouts. Moreover, in relation to the second theme on the subsequent effects of the student dropouts, analysis of the data indicated three significant issues: social effects, economical effects and psychological effects. Likewise, for the final theme on the possible solutions to retain students, results indicated significance between the different agents of help, (e.g. between support from teachers and parents), and also within each category (e.g. under parents support, between financial support and emotional support). It was also expected that the information from this research results and the international literature, distinct although related, would combine to provide congregative information concerning the factors causing student dropouts in rural secondary schools, subsequent effects, and the possible strategies to retain students in rural secondary schools. Based on the analyses conducted in Chapter 6, this chapter then discusses the findings for each theme.
7.1 FACTORS CAUSING STUDENT DROPOUTS

The possible factors causing student dropouts in rural secondary school in this study were investigated with reference to the four major research questions:

RQ1: What are the social factors that deter rural students from completing their secondary education?

RQ2: How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school?

RQ3: How does the geographical context affect the completion of secondary education among the rural students?

RQ4: How do educational policies affect the completion rate in rural secondary school?

7.1.1 Socio-economic factors

The first research issue under investigation revealed that social and economic factors were most significant in the student dropout process. Socio-economic factors largely consisted of issues such as: family financial status, family support and self-motivational factors affecting the students’ decision to drop out of school (Figure 4). In consistent with the existing literature (Cheung & Andersen, 2003, Englund, et al., 2008; Narsey, 2007b; Walsh, 2002), this research results also confirm that social factors, in particular, the family related issues, such as, family’s financial status, parental support, family problems, and family structure are most prevalent compared to all other factors in the student dropout process. While family’s financial status has its direct link to the student dropout process, other family related problems largely relate directly and indirectly to parental support.

7.1.1.1 Family finance

Analysis of the data revealed that the financial status of the family plays a greater role in determining the students’ success at school in a number of ways. Firstly, the financial status of the parents determines the affordability of education in terms of the costs of education (i.e. school fees and stationery, transportation costs, and other related costs). Secondly, the financial status of parents also determines the learning resources and the quality of study environment parents can provide at home, which in turn affects the academic performance and success of the students. Research evidence from this study revealed that poverty is most prevalent in rural areas since
majority of the parents are either casual laborers or small scale farmers whose average income is below $5000.00 per year. The existence of poverty in the society is further aggravated by the current world financial crisis as well as the natural disasters, such as the recent flooding in Fiji. For example, feedback from Parent 1 reported that:

With the escalating costs of living every year and rising unemployment, it is becoming more difficult to send children to school, (Parent 1).

Majority of the respondents in this survey agreed that financial difficulties at home, combined with other family and educational issues, contributed them to drop out of school (Figure, 6.16). For instance, a student dropout reported that:

My parents could not afford the costs for me to repeat Form 4 and I was asked to look for a job to support my family, (Student 1).

Similarly, a response from a teacher stated that:

Parents in rural areas are too occupied struggling to get finance for the family’s basic need so the priority is to get meal for the family and meet other expenses rather than for education, (Teacher 1).

This research findings, in consistent to the findings elsewhere (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Baselala, 2007; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Steinberg, 1987), revealed that the highest dropout has been reported from students from poor families. However, in the case of Fiji, the past and current governments have tried to lower the economic burden for parents by introducing the “free-education” for all the children from Class 1 to Form 6. This policy was intended to relieve the parents of the tuition costs for their children’s education as the state pays certain grant allocation for each child at each level. The “free-education policy” however, has not fully achieved its goal of providing free education, and parents and school committee’s have often suggested that there is a higher associated costs involved in providing for the high demands of the current education. For instance, parents still bear the high costs of school stationery, uniforms, school lunch and the like. In Fiji, for instance, several recent reports in the media (www.fijitimes.com, February 13, 2008, April 25, 2008, and September, 17, 2008) have highlighted the issue of poverty affecting children’s education, whereby, many poor children who cannot afford proper lunches and bus fare are very irregular to school.
This research evidence supports the existing reports that parents find it difficult to afford the associated costs involved in sending the children to school and as one participant reports:

My parents could not afford the bus fare all the time and I had to miss a lot of classes. I was often behind in my work and I used to fail the exams as a result of being irregular to school. I was ashamed to be counselled all the time and I lost interest in my school work, (Student 2).

Feedback from the participants in this study, in consistent with the other researchers (Lingam, 2008), also revealed that the current government policy of tuition fee free is not sufficient to cover the educational costs, especially for the poor families. Therefore, it is evident that the high and rising costs of education are felt the hardest by the poor, majority of who live in rural areas.

Apart from the direct effects of poverty on the student dropouts, the analysis of the data also revealed that the children suffer indirectly from the financial challenges at home. Indirect effects of financial constraints and dropouts can be explained in terms of lack of learning resources, unconducive learning environment at home, poor infrastructure at home, and child labour. The research evidence also supports the existing findings in other jurisdictions (Dixon, 1994; Jeynes, 2002), whereby, the home study environment has a positive influence on the children’s success at school. For instance, lack of proper water and electricity, over crowding, lack of proper diet and other living conditions affected by poverty, leads to under-achievements in the academic fields at school. Academic under-achievement has also been reported as the major reason for the student dropout in this study, whose roots are directly linked to poverty. Figure 4 in Chapter 6 reveals that there is strong shared response between poor socio-economic status and academic failure. A student dropout reported that he could hardly study at home and complete the homework because he did not have electricity at home and the kerosene lamp used was not sufficient to be used by all the family members. Moreover, children from poor families are often used as a substitute labour, either on the farm or for domestic duties, while parents work elsewhere to earn their living. This research evidence also revealed that majority of the students in rural areas spend their afternoons working on the farms, cooking, washing and cleaning. These students do not get any leisure time
to relax after school and by the time they finish with their chores, they are unfit to spend quality time doing their homework or studies. A parent reported that:

Children from rural areas often have struggling life as they are expected to help their poor parents to subsidise the family income by either working on the farm or after school hour job. This gives less time for children to study as they are too tired. Majority of these children do not perform very well in their studies and slowly they fade out of the school system before completing Form 6 or 7, (Parent 2).

Similarly, research evidence also revealed that children from poor families are now encouraged to do part-time job in the supermarkets to earn for their family. Feedback from the participants revealed that this trend is getting more common among the rural students who work in supermarkets and shops in towns. This is consistent with previous findings (Ali, 2007; Barr & Naidu, 2002; Kremer, et al., 2003; Taga, 2000) which stated that child labour is a common practice in poor societies. The response from one of the teachers interviewed state:

Economic problems are one of the major struggles for the rural families and children are encouraged to work during school holidays and after school. These children lose interest in school work or cannot adjust to two different lifestyle and they are often attracted to choose to work rather than to attend school. These children are also not able to attend extra classes conducted by the teachers after school in the afternoons and during the school holidays and they are often under-achievers. Some of these children also influence others in the class, (Teacher 2).

Hence, there is a general consistency among the findings that parents’ financial status exercises a significant effect on students’ academic performances and success in school completion. This research revealed that poverty is one of the major factors affecting the student dropout rates in the rural secondary school.

7.1.1.2 Parental support

The characteristics of the home environment and the parental support, and the ways in which these interact with the learners and their learning environment have important bearing on individuals’ achievements in school. Previous researchers (Amato, 1988; Beekhooven & Dekkens, 2005; Coleman, 1988; Furstenberg et al., 1983; Hara, 1998) have indicated that the success of students is largely dependent on the parents and their home environments. While some researchers (Dixon, 1994;
Jerald, 2006; Jeynes, 2002, 2005) have indicated that the most common social factor influencing student dropout is related to the changing family structure, such as smaller families and single-parent families, this research analysis revealed that lack of parental support, generally amongst poor parents who had financial constraints, was the most significant social factor causing student dropouts in rural secondary schools. These parents’ major priority was to get the basic needs for their families rather than to commit their time for their children’s education. Majority of the rural parents were farmers, casual labourers or semi-skilled employments (e.g., carpenters, garage workers, handyman, and the like). Hence, for many, there is no fixed source of income and they depend on their daily wages for their day to day living. This financial insecurity for some is also aggravated by the land tenure problems, whereby, the farmers vacate their farms and houses once the land lease expires and resettle elsewhere at their own costs. In such cases, parents worked for long hours and they often arrived home late. Teachers stated that lack of parental guidance and supervision at home prompted some children to lose interest in their school work and these children often fail their exams and later drop out of school. One teacher during the interview also stated that:

Children were left unsupervised for long at home and as a result the children did not spend much time doing their studies and often they are either doing the domestic duties, playing till late in the afternoon or watching television, (Teacher 3).

Therefore, it is the quality time and resources, in this case influenced by the financial limitations, determine the level of support that parents could provide their children. This in turn affects the students’ level of success at school.

Moreover, it was also reported that students in rural areas who were left in the care of the guardians (for various reasons) to attend school often dropped out. It was reported that there are cases where students stayed with no fixed residential address and it was difficult to reach to parents to discuss about the child’s performances in school. Students also did not get the full support from their guardians in terms of providing for all the necessary requirements for schooling, such as school stationery, proper lunch and bus fares. Students staying with guardians also reported of doing extra work in assisting the family. One student dropout reported that:

It was very difficult for me to stay with the guardians and study as I faced a lot of difficulties like getting my bus fare and sometimes food. I was expected to do a lot
work like cooking, washing, working on the plantations and cutting firewood. I could hardly do my studies at home and I was struggling academically. As a result, I lost interest in school and decided to go back to the village while I was doing Form 4, (Student 3).

In such instances, teachers often blamed the lack of parental support for the student’s failure and dropout.

Furthermore, as stated by other research studies (Bowlby & Kathryn, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Renzulli & Park, 2002), this research analysis also revealed that parental support is influenced by the parents’ educational level. Parents’ educational background has a positive influence on the level of aspiration and motivation (Noth & O’Neil, 1981; Rumberger, 1987; Sadowski, 1987) and the home environment and resources (Naylor, 1989; Renzulli & Park, 2002; Statler & Petersen, 2003). Since many rural parents are not graduates or have completed their secondary schools themselves, they find it difficult to provide the academic support for their children at home. Parents also lacked the knowledge on the educational developments and one of the teachers reported that:

Semi-literate parents do not know much about the new developments in the school curricula so they cannot assist their children or provide them with any support at home. Moreover, low-levels of education among parents mean low paid jobs so they cannot also afford quality education for their children in terms of providing extra learning resources at home. Therefore, children’s academic performance is affected and if they do not perform academically, they drop out, (Teacher 4).

Even though the research results indicated that all the participants anonymously admitted that parental support, in particular, the educational aspirations and motivation, was influenced by the parents’ educational background, it cannot be generalized that all the semi-literate parents had low educational aspirations and less support for their children. It was also stated that some semi-literate parents struggled to provide the best support for their children’s education and they made sacrifices to meet the educational demands. Children who received a lot of parental support and guidance were more successful at school and were unlikely to drop out. Teachers reported that these parents often visited the school to monitor their children’s academic performances and ensured that a conducive study environment is provided at home. Hence, the research revealed that in terms of parental support, parents’
aspirations and motivation were more important in helping the students complete their secondary education successfully, even if they are not highly educated themselves.

Finally, research literature indicates that parental support is also affected by the changing family structure (Dixon, 1994; Jeynes, 2005; Lee, 1993; Lee & Burkam, 2003). Evidence from this study reveals that changes in the family structure occur due to rising family problems as well as the increasing number of nuclear families. The research literature suggests that although there is no direct impact of changing family structure and the student dropouts, it is commonly noted that students from broken family have a higher probability of dropping out compared to those in intact families (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Jeynes, 2002). Consistent with the existing theory, this research also revealed that family breakups, although not very common in rural areas, and the changing family structure does have a part to play in the student dropout process. Children’s studies are jeopardized when they experience family problems. Teachers reported that some children have dropped out due to family problems, such as parents’ separation and domestic violence, where children are emotionally and psychologically affected. Also, when parents separate, children are often left in the care of the mother or a relative. Firstly, these children lack the care and support from both parents. Secondly, there is a lot of financial struggle for the single parents to send their children to school and also to manage the household. A student dropout also reported that:

My parents were separated and I often had to stay with my guardians and other relatives as my step-mother ill-treated me. I was very ashamed to go to school and I was very irregular. My performance was not good in exams and I didn’t want to be counselled all the time for my poor performance. I decided to drop out of school in Form 3, (Student 4).

Moreover, the role of changing family structure, such as the extended and nuclear families on the student dropouts has received mixed reactions in this research. While some state that the presence of more nuclear families leaves children with little adult supervision when parents are busy working, extended families are also blamed for over-crowding and disturbances. One of the school teachers’ stated that:

There are more nuclear families and when both the parents are working, there is no adult to supervise the children at home and to instill values in them. These children often get into mischief and are easily influenced by their peers. Thus they lose
interest in their school work and dropout to join their peers in the village, (Teacher 4).

While nuclear families are seen by some as a drawback for the children in terms of supervision, one student dropout reported that:

I was often disturbed at home because there were many people in my extended family who also entertained visitors’ everyday for grog sessions. I did not have a good study environment at home and there was very little that my parents could do about it since it is a culturally sensitive issue, (Student 1).

While it is inconclusive to draw a line in support of different family structures contributing to student dropouts, it is however decisive that the parents support in terms of providing a conducive home environment, and their presence and care is extremely vital for children’s success at school and school completion. Overall then, while the level of parental support has been revealed to be an important mechanism for students school completion, the reasons for poor parental support is complicated and unique for every individual case. The most significant factors contributing towards poor parental support in this research is related to the limited time and resources parents can provide for their children, lack of aspirations and motivation and the opportunity that parents give to their children to study at home.

7.1.1.3 Students self-perception

The research also indicates that students’ level of aspiration and self confidence plays a vital role towards school completion. The evidence indicates that not all students facing financial and family instability drop out of school. Some students under challenging circumstances persists schooling and are successful because they have very high levels of aspirations, self-confidence and discipline. Although such cases are few, it seriously implies that students also have a responsibility at hand. It was evident from the research that some students drop out simply because they had low levels of motivation and aspiration, lacked self-confidence and were lazy. In Fiji, for instance, there are a number of government and non-government organizations (e.g., Ministry of Education, Fijian Affairs Board, Multi-ethnic Affairs, Save the Children Fiji) providing financial assistance in terms of school fee, stationery and food to the needy students so that financial hardships do not hinder students progress at school. Despite the various forms of support, students still
dropout and this research substantiates that student’s personal attitudes also play a significant role towards school completion.

7.1.2 School and Educational Policies

In relation to the educational policies, the research findings revealed that the external examinations, too many internal examinations, irrelevant curricula, boring academic subjects and using English as a medium of instruction, as possible factors affecting student dropout rates. However, internal and external examination pressure and boring school curricula were ranked the most significant compared to the other factors. In relation to the school policies, strict school rules and lack of counselling were most significant compared to other factors, such as, teachers attitude, corporal punishment and homework defaulting. The following sections will elaborate further on the individual factors mentioned above.

7.1.2.1 Academic achievements

In concurrence with the theoretical overview (Aalbersberg, 2008; Tavola, 2000a), this research also reported exam failure as the most prevalent educational related factor responsible for student dropouts. Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the central role of the examination system and the high academic demands to pass the examinations are the common cause for many students to drop out of school. It is obvious that in Fiji the productivity of the schools and the education system is largely measured by the students’ performances in the national exams (public examination or external examination\textsuperscript{15}). In fact, it is also the yardstick to measure the teachers’ performances. Schools are also ranked based on the results in the national exams, for instance, schools achieving less than 50% pass in the national examinations are classified as “Viti Group”. The performance of the teachers and the students are closely monitored and frequently visited by the ministry officials to redress the problem. The highest dropout rates are reported during the periods after the external exams in the secondary schools. For instance, in the case study school, the average total number of students in Form 4 is usually around 70, while the average

\textsuperscript{15} National examination in Fiji is synonymously used for external examinations or public examinations. These are the common examinations set by the Ministry of education and are compulsory in secondary schools for Form 4 (Fiji Junior Examination), Form 6 (Fiji School Leaving Certificate) and Form 7 (Fiji Seventh Form Examination). National Exams in primary schools are Fiji Intermediate Examination (Class 6) and Fiji Eighth Year Entrance Examination (Class 8). These exams are not compulsory and qualifying exams, which mean that the students are still allowed to proceed to next level in spite of their results.
number of student in Form 5 would be 40. With exceptions of the few students who
transfer to other schools and some who repeat Form 4, large majority of them drop out
after failing Fiji Junior Examination. Hence, education ends for many students after
their failure in the external examinations.

Performances in such examinations determine not only whether the student
can progress to the next level of schooling but also determine which school the
student attends. Generally, students attend schools nearer to their homes for the first
six years but as early as Form 1, students usually choose any other secondary school
based on their performances in the examinations. Entry into prestigious schools is
purely based on the performances in the external examinations. For instance, in Fiji
when secondary schools were established, the Secondary School Entrance
Examination (SSEF) was introduced in Class 8 in 1954 as a measure for selection of
students for entering secondary school at Form 3 level. Later on, due to the rising
demands for secondary education, the SSEF was no longer stipulated as a pass/fail
exam or a qualifier for secondary school entry, and in 1985 the name was changed to
Fiji Eighth Year Examination (FEYE). However, secondary schools now establish
their own ‘cut-off marks’, which retains its use as a medium of selection but lessens
the dichotomy between passing and failing. Rural secondary schools are often
disadvantaged because the students who perform well in external examinations in
Form 2 or Form 4 move to more prestigious urban schools to take advantage of the
better educational facilities. Hence, the small rural schools struggle financially due to
the lesser grants they receive from the Ministry as well as dealing with the
academically challenged students. In addition, the findings in this study also revealed
that brain drain of students is common in the Case Study School. It was reported by
the teacher respondents that:

Teachers in rural schools are put under a lot of pressure to produce better exam
results with the remaining students, since the exam results are exclusively used to
measure the teacher’s, pupils and the schools’ performance as a whole. Teachers in
such circumstances pressure the students to perform academically to produce better
results. The ultimate result is the dropping out of the students who cannot cope with
the high academic demands, (Teacher 4).

Hence, the reason that majority of the students attending rural schools are
academically average and below average, there is greater possibility of the rural
students to drop out of school compared to their counterparts in elite urban schools. Likewise, many researchers (Auxier, 2003; Bacchus, 2000; Sadler, 2000, Tavola, 2000a, 2000b) have also suggested that the exam-driven education system will continue to cause high wastage.

7.1.2.2 School curriculum

Consistent with the existing research literature elsewhere (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Jerald, 2006; Renzulli & Park, 2002), this research study also revealed that boring subjects and academic oriented education system are common education related factors causing student dropouts. Analysis of the research data in this study revealed that some students drop out of school because the highly academic oriented school curriculum does not interest them. One way to explain this is that in Fiji schools, the academic subjects which are examinable are given the highest priority over other subjects such as physical education, music, art & craft, and other core subjects (e.g., values, careers, computer literacy, and religion). There is also little attention given to the extra-curricular activities in schools due to time constraints in covering the academic syllabus and preparing students for the national examinations. International research in this area (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Markow & Scheer, 2002; Renzulli & Park, 2002) revealed that some schools have strengthened on the extra-curricula activities to attract more students to school, reduce student truancy and retain the students in the secondary schools. Student dropouts in this study have stated that school was boring for them since a lot of time was only used for classroom teaching and learning. Teachers also agreed that boredom at school caused by over-emphasis on the academic curriculum does not provide much incentive for those who are not academically inclined.

In addition to the highly structured curriculum, realistically teachers in Fiji also have little control over the choice of teaching strategies. Teachers are strictly guided by the prescription and curriculum for each level and they are closely monitored to comply with the content and the time frame. Therefore, teacher’s choice of teaching method is very much dependent on the availability of the time. In many cases, teacher-centered learning approach is adopted to complete the syllabus and in order to prepare the students for the examination, rote learning is practiced (Coxon, 2000; Tavola, 2000a). Students in secondary schools start to lose interest in the monotonous learning environment and they find the school more boring with the
availability and accessibility of other more entertaining and challenging activities outside the school (Tavola, 2000a). This could be related to the increasing number of reported cases of students’ truancy (www.fiji.gov.fj, 23/02/07, 22/04/08). In collaboration with other research studies elsewhere (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Ekstrom et al., 1986), this study revealed that students with poor school attendance dropped out more easily compared to those who were more punctual to school. Therefore, it can be said with a degree of certainty that the highly academic curricula leads to boredom among the students, who lose interest in attending classes, perform poorly in exams and are more likely to drop out of school.

Moreover, this research results also revealed that irrelevant curricula was not a significant factor contributing to the student dropout process. Although it is generally perceived (Markow & Scheer, 2002; Ozman & Aver, 1995; Thaman, 2003; 2000) that students will not find it meaningful and motivated to learn unless they see some personal relevance for the information, this research results indicated that there is no direct association between the relevance of curriculum and student dropout rates. In contrast, the research revealed that the use of English language as a main medium of instruction in the Fiji school curriculum has a significant influence on the students’ performance and success. In line with the existing Pacific educator advocates (Taufeʻulungaki, 2003: Tavola, 2000b; Thaman, 2003), this research also revealed that students find it difficult to cope with the language barrier and this is reflected in their examination marks. In Fiji, for instance, English language is taken as a subject from Class 1 and it is also used as the main medium of communication and instructions from Class 3 for all other subjects except the vernacular. Students living in rural areas are further disadvantaged, given the fact that majority of them do not use English language as a medium of communication at home. Additionally, they lack resources, like story books, magazines and newspapers at home to assist them to master the language better. Hence, although the prominence of English language in Fiji’s school curriculum is not directly affecting the student dropout rate, research has revealed that it does influence the students’ academic understanding, which is the key to the students’ success at school.
7.1.2.3 School policies and teacher attitudes

School policies and teacher attitudes are important ingredients for the success of students at school as these two create the positive learning environment at school. While school policies based on the academic performances and the discipline rules are some of the direct policies of discharging non-performing and trouble makers (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1995), this research has explored other policies, such as, strict school rules on uniform, punctuality and conduct, as some of the polices that create a dislike for the school. For instance, a student dropout reported that secondary school students, who are singled out constantly for not strictly adhering to the school uniform policies and the like, are more easily offended, lose their self-esteem and avoid school more often. This research also revealed that the lack of professional counselling at school to deal to with students problems contribute to some student’s early departure from school. Students have many different types’ of personal and academic issues that distracts their academic performances and self-esteem and according to the research; many respondents have agreed that when students are not given the right counseling, they lose interest in schooling.

Moreover, in concurrence with the international literature (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkham, 2003), this research also supports the notion that teacher-student interpersonal relationships in classrooms play a crucial role in helping to reduce the dropout rates of students. The research generally supports the notion that teachers need to be more sensitive and understanding, especially when dealing with poor and underprivileged students. It has been emphasised by the parents and the students themselves that they will continue to show interest in schooling and thrust for better academic performances if they are provided with a loving and caring learning atmosphere at school, rather than a threatening one. It has been revealed that students lose interest in schooling when they are subjected to intimidation and humiliation, especially when they do not perform academically well. Although the research does not expose any particular case of teacher insensitivity that directly affects student dropouts in the Case Study School, there are a number of reported cases in Fiji where teachers still unlawfully inflict corporal punishment on children (Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy, 2002; Monsell-Davis, 2000; Save the Children Fund Fiji, 1998, 2006). According to these reports, this form of punishment not only harms the students physically but causes a lot of psychological effects and causes detrimental effect on child’s success at school completion. In general then, research
revealed that teachers play a vital role in creating a positive learning environment at school which will motivate the students to successfully complete their education. On the other hand, insensitive teacher attitudes contribute to student dropouts.

7.1.3 Geographical location and related challenges

Although this study suggests that geographical location is not a significant factor causing student dropout when compared to socio-economic and educational policies, it does influence the student dropout to some extent in rural areas. While the existing reports (Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands, 2000) have highlighted that the geographical location, in the rural and interior places, poses a lot of challenges for the rural students, analysis of the data in this study also reveal that both, the students from rural areas as well as the schools located in the rural areas, influence the student dropout process. As suggested by others (Taganesia, 2005; Tavola, 2000a), findings from this study also reveal that students living in rural areas are disadvantaged due to the geographical obstruction, such as the rugged terrains, poor road conditions and isolation. In Fiji as a whole, due to the small and scattered population in rural and remote areas, there are very few secondary schools located in such areas and therefore children from several villages attend the few secondary schools near their location. As a result, many students in rural areas and remote islands travel long distances to reach school. In accordance, this study also revealed that some of the common problems faced by the rural students in reaching school on time were: irregular transport services, high costs of transportation and poor road conditions. One student dropout reported:

I have to walk for almost one hour each way to and fro school and by the time I reach home I am too tired to study, (Student 2).

Consistent to this research, there has been other recent reports highlighted in the media (www.fijitimes.com, September 11, 2000; November 17, 2009) which stated a high rate of absenteeism have been recorded amongst the secondary school students in interior of Vanua Levu because of the irregular and lack of bus services provided due to the poor road conditions. Similar cases have been reported elsewhere in Fiji, where the bus and other public transport operators withdrew their services due to the poor road conditions in the rural areas. The respondents in this research revealed that students often miss classes due to inconsistent transport services in the
rural areas. As a result, they find it difficult to catch up with their school work and ultimately they drop out.

Moreover, the location of the schools in rural areas is also a challenge in terms of the quality of school resources and school infrastructure. Although this research revealed that there is no direct influence of the lack of infrastructure and resources in the Case Study School and student dropouts, it is consistent with other reports (Bacchus, 2000; Baselala, 2005; Tavola, 2000a) that suggest that students attending rural secondary school are disadvantaged in certain ways. For instance, rural schools lack good learning facilities and resources, such as library books, well-equipped science labs, computer labs and classroom facilities. The research also indicated that some rural students choose to go to urban schools to take advantage of the better facilities, as they believe that their studies will be affected by the lack of good learning resources and facilities in rural schools. Therefore, it has been generally agreed that school resources and facilities influence students learning and performances, which in turn affects the student’s retention rates in rural schools.

7.2 CONSEQUENCES OF STUDENT DROPOUTS

The second theme of the research was investigated using the following research question:

RQ5: What are the subsequent effects of student dropping out of school?

Similar to other research studies (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Englund et al., 2008; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006), this research findings also indicated that student dropouts place serious repercussions. The major consequences highlighted in this study were social, economic and psychological. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative results supported that social problems were the most significant and it also related closely with financial and psychological effects.

7.2.1 Social Effects

Several Studies have supported the notion that student dropouts are at a greater risk of being involved in drug and alcohol misuse, violence behavior, sexual abuse and other related criminal activities (www.fiji.gov.fj, June 17, 2005). Latest crime statistics show that most offences are committed by youths aged between 16-24 years and majority of them are dropouts without any trade or skills (www.fijitimes.com)
This research finding, consistent with other researchers (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Dorn, 1993; Rangel, & Maeyer, 2008) revealed that crime and unemployment were the most significant social effects of student dropouts. Analysis of the data, as shown in Figure 6.13 reveal that some of the criminal activities that the student dropouts were mostly engaged in drug abuse, stealing, fighting and prostitution, with the highest responses reported for drug abuse. Evidence and reports published in Fiji also revealed that student dropouts are also involved in prostitution, used for tourism sex, production of pornography and drug trafficking (www.fijitimes online.com September 21, 2008; Matau, 2008; Wise, 2009, Vuruna, 2009). Feedback from the respondents also revealed that student dropouts were often seen smoking, in possession of marijuana, and alcohol abuse, which usually led to other problems, such as fighting, stealing, vandalism and sexual offences. Since majority of the student dropouts were reported to be unemployed, qualitative results indicated there is a strong association between unemployment and crime. This research results indicated that when students drop out of secondary school very early, they are ill-equipped to either find a full-time job or to be self-employed. Hence, majority of the student dropouts remain idle for quite sometime. A report in the magazine, The Island Business (September 1, 2008) also stated that large number of students who have not completed their secondary education cannot find employment partly because they have no marketable skills and or because employment opportunities are rare, it lessens their ability to find a constructive way to place themselves in their communities and society at large. Due to the idleness, the young children often get into some form of mischief and are easily lured into criminal activities by their peers. This research finding also revealed that peer pressure among the student dropouts were high and this often resulted in a lot of social problems in the rural community. As one of the participants reported:

Student dropouts are often seen in groups in the community and they are usually being held responsible for marijuana smoking, consuming spirit, fighting, swearing, damaging properties and stealing, (Parent 3).

The presence of a police posts in the rural area also confirms the high occurrences of criminal activities. A teacher also reported that the student dropouts form groups and are also a bad influence on the students who are at school since they demonstrate the
free village life that many children would want to enjoy. Hence, one of the major effects of student dropouts is the rise in social problems.

7.2.2 Economic Effects

This research finding, similar to other researchers (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Englund et al., 2008; Harvey, 2001; Nathan, 2006) also reported that economic hardships are common adverse effects of student dropouts. Economic hardships are firstly caused by unemployment. As the study reported, majority of the student dropouts are unemployed and do not earn to support themselves, they are often in financial crisis. The parents reported they suffer financial loss when their children drop out of school because the investments that they had made so far for their children’s schooling is wasted and also their children are not able to get a well paid job due to earn enough for the family. The effects of students’ dropouts have greater impact on the poor rural families since there is less opportunity to find jobs in the area. As discussed earlier, the unemployed youths are usually engaged in criminal activities and get into the grips of the law; they cause more financial hardships for their families, such as paying for compensation or law costs.

Moreover, the student dropouts who managed to find casual employment also reported that they do not earn enough to support themselves or their families. The research revealed that the kind jobs that some student dropouts managed to find included: sales boy/girl, garage workers, handyman in the construction companies, canecutters and seasonal labourers on the farm. Hence, the research respondents have unanimously reported that student dropouts cause the perpetuation of poverty that commonly exists in rural areas.

7.2.3 Psychological Effects

This research supports the notion that the bleak future and the limited opportunities that the student dropouts face have often led to feelings of discontentment, disappointment, and yearning (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Malefoasi, 2005). Consistently, this study also revealed that the feelings displayed by the student dropouts have largely been: worrying, frustration, depression, angriness and unhappiness. This is due to the fact that majority of the student dropouts face uncertain and bleak future with a high possibility of unemployment and economic hardships. Psychological instability has often led the youths to make wrong choices,
such as indulging in criminal activities (robbery, violence, vandalism) and social ills (suicide, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, and drug and alcohol abuse). Analysis of the research data in this study also revealed that families have feelings of worrying and angriness towards the student dropouts, while the community has stigmatized and indifferent attitude towards the student dropouts. In many cases, it is reported that there is lack of support from the families and the community for the student dropouts and this could be another justification for the various emotional disturbances portrayed by the student dropout themselves. Taken together then, there is a general display of negative feelings and attitudes by the student dropouts themselves, their families and the community.

7.3 POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT DROPOUTS

The final theme, that is, possible strategies that could be put in place to help reduce the secondary school student dropouts, was investigated using the following research question:

RQ6: What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school?

This study revealed a number of the important strategies, as shown in Figure 23, which could have been implemented to reduce the student dropout rates in rural secondary school. Important amongst them were: financial and parental support, changing educational policies, and more affordable/accessible vocational educational programs for rural students.

7.3.1 Educational Support: financial and moral

Since this research findings showed a strong association between family finance and student’s academic performances, the respondents largely suggested some form of financial assistances for the rural students. Since many parents are farmers or farm labourers in the rural area, they suggested for a government subsidy in terms of their children’s school stationery, transportation costs and school fees. Currently, while the government has subsidised the tuition fees, the schools still charge other forms of fee, such as building fee, admission fee, sports fee, computer fee, and the like. The schools claim that in order to provide all the adequate facilities, maintain
and improve on the existing facilities, they cannot rely on the grants provided by the government only. Hence, the schools either levy other forms of fee or execute fund-raising drives. In any circumstance, the financial burden falls back on the poor parents. Therefore, financial support was another significant tactic suggested to reduce the student dropout rates in rural secondary school.

Moreover, the feedback from the respondents also suggested that positive parental support is needed for children to pursue their educational career. It was reported that rural parents were not able to provide much educational support either because they were too occupied to work and earn for the family, semi-literate and were not aware of the educational developments, had family problems or are geographically isolated. For whatever reason, it is suffice to say that students especially from challenging family backgrounds need parental support and care to persist despite the difficulties. It has also been reported elsewhere (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Jeynes, 2005; Dixon, 1994; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999) that students who receive greater parental support succeed in their schooling compared to those who lack parental support. In such a case, it was strongly suggested by the teachers that community outreach and awareness programs would facilitate in encouraging parents and community members to be more actively involved in their children’s education. The community outreach programs will also inform the parents about the educational developments and ways in which they could work in partnership to help the children successfully complete their education. Such forums will also generate discussions on challenges faced by the students and its solutions. Therefore, it was evident from the research that a greater parental participation, which could be made possible through community outreach programs, will increase student retention rates in rural secondary school.

7.3.2 Policy measures

As discussed earlier, a number of school and educational policies (e.g., academic failure, academic oriented school curricula and language policies) have been largely responsible for the student dropouts. In relation to these educational policies, there have been a number of possible strategies that were suggested to help retain more students in rural secondary school. The most important strategy proposed in this research study was the reformation of the school curricula so that there are more balanced school activities. Currently, the Fiji school curricula are more inclined
towards academic subjects and external examinations. It was reported that this kind of curricula is biased towards academically affluent students and fails to provide equal opportunities for education to all the students. High academic demands inevitably force the academically challenged students out of the education system. Therefore, the respondents suggested that there needs to be a balance between academic, vocational and extra-curricular content in the school curricula. This will provide all the students with equal opportunities to develop according to their talents and intellects. Consistently, educational theorists (Barry & King, 1998; Bloom, 1956; Harrow, 1972; Krathwohl, Bloom & Masior, 1964) have expressed that most effective learning comprises of the three domains: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. Research elsewhere (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Glenn, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) has also shown that making the school curricula more attractive for the young means including a range of activities that helps to develop holistically. Theoretical and empirical researchers (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Ralph, 1995; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000) have also suggested that by making the school curricula more attractive reduces boredom, truancy and behavioral problems amongst the students. Moreover, the inclusion of a balanced curriculum not only provides equal opportunities for all the students to access formal education but also helps them to persist in their fields of specialization after completing secondary schools.

In addition, it has also been suggested that there needs to be changes made to the assessment methods in line with the more balanced school curricula. The national examinations are still central to the Fijian education system and the results are paramount to all the stakeholders. The orientation towards the passing of examination is frequently criticized in Fiji and elsewhere for stifling and inhibiting the teaching and learning process. The external examinations are solely based on the academic subjects and those students who fail the examinations fade out of the school system without the much needed credentials for any future prospects. In Fiji, various reports, such as the 1969 Royal Commission and the Learning together: directions for education in the Fiji Islands, 2000, have also recommended the abolition of, at least, the primary examinations on the grounds that they serve no valid education function. This research supports this notion. While many industrialized countries have abolished selection examinations for secondary school, developing countries have retained them primarily as a selection device to accommodate the relatively smaller
number of places in secondary schools. Therefore, a more inclusive approach is suggested in the formation of the school curricula and the examination system.

Finally, it was also suggested that there is a need for a professional counsellor at school to provide counselling for the students who face academic and personal challenges. It is generally observed that in many Fiji secondary schools, there is a lack of trained counsellor but often the administrators or a school nominated senior teacher acts as the counsellor. The presence of a full-time counsellor will enable the students to freely discuss their problems and sought ways to overcome them. The acting counsellors in the school mostly deal with students when behavioural problems arise and sometimes even the first time offenders are suspended or expelled from the school. Well trained student counsellors will be able to identify students at-risk and provide adequate support so that the child’s educational progress is not hindered.

7.3.3 Vocational Education

This research supports the views presented by other researchers (Bacchus, 1988; Harvey, 2001; Orr, 1987; Sharma, 2000) in relation to the second chance education provided to the students who were not academically inclined through the introduction of vocational educational in rural schools. However, this research further indicated that while vocational education was a good way to enable the student dropouts and potential dropouts another option to attain qualifications for future employment, it was not always viable for many rural students to access such centres. In such cases where the students are challenged by geographical isolation and irregular transportation, it was recommended that the introduction of vocational courses in village centres will make this program more efficient. Moreover, for the poverty stricken students, vocational education can only be accessed if there are minimal costs involved, such as fees and purchasing of practical materials. Hence, the research signifies that while vocational education is a good measure to help provide an alternate path, its efficiency could be maximised if issues such as financial support and geographical feasibility is addressed.

7.4 SUMMARY

There appears to be clusters of reasons or common responses that emerge relating to the academic environment, real life events, and a lack of personal motivation and external sources of motivation and guidance that influence the student
dropouts. Evidence from this research study in general indicated that there is no single reason why students drop out of secondary school. Respondents’ feedbacks from the study reported a combination of different reasons. For instance, while the academic performance was the central decisive factor for students to complete secondary education in Fiji, other issues such as, family poverty limits students’ affordability for educational resources, which in turn affects students’ academic performances. Moreover, students’ academic performances is also affected by the parental support, which in turn, is dependent on the parents’ financial stability, parents’ educational background and family intact ability. Geographical isolation and its challenges also impact students’ academic performances in many ways. In addition, the level of self-motivation persistence for the underprivileged students also plays an important role towards the child’s educational persistence. In terms of the effects of student dropouts, the research findings is in concurrence with the existing literature, which suggests that student dropouts limit themselves to financial and employment opportunities, as well pose serious social and economical constraints to their families, communities and the nation. Finally, the research indicated a number of possible strategies that could be implemented to help reduce the student dropouts in rural secondary schools. Important amongst them were the financial and moral support from the families and government and the reform of the educational policies to enable a fair and equitable system for students from different backgrounds.

Overall then, whatever the causes, effects and strategies of student dropouts are, it is suffice to say that in order to reduce the student dropout rates, a combined and concerted effort of all the stakeholders is needed. Hence, the final chapter will conclude by discussing the key findings, implications of this study and recommendations.
Chapter 8  
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Student dropouts have long been an area of concern for not only parents and teachers, but society as a whole. This concern is particularly relevant today as the negative consequences of dropping out of high school have increased with technological advancement (Day & Newburger, 2002; Englund, et.al., 2008). In Fiji, this problem has been prevalent for a long time but has seldom been a subject of empirical research. The present investigation attempted to identify some factors causing high student dropout rates in a rural secondary school, subsequent effects of student dropouts and possible strategies to increase the student retention in secondary schools. While the preceding chapters have provided a detailed analyses and discussion of the research findings, this final chapter provides the summary of key findings, implications of the study, recommendations and proposition for future researches.

8.1 KEY FINDINGS

The research adopted the mixed methods approach to gather, analyse and present data from the Case Study School (CSS) on the three themes: (i) causes of student dropouts, (ii) subsequent effects of student dropouts, and (iii) possible strategies to reduce student dropouts. The following key questions guided the research study:

- What are the social factors that deter rural students from completing their secondary education?
- How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school?
- How does the geographical context affect the completion of secondary education among the rural students?
- How do educational policies affect the completion rate in rural secondary school?
- What are the subsequent effects of student dropping out of school?
- What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school?
The research evidence on factors causing student dropouts has extensively identified a number of important issues. It was confirmed from the research that socio-economic factors (such as parents' financial status, parental support and family characteristics), socio-cultural factors (e.g., parental educational level and aspirations) were the most decisive in determining the students’ success and school completion. Educational policies, such as, school curriculum and external examinations also place high academic demands on the rural students. High academic demands and under-performance also had strong association with the student dropouts in rural areas, while teacher attitudes and unfair school rules are least important. Moreover, geographical factors that relate to the area of residence, for instance, urban and rural, does not directly influence the student dropout rate but contribute indirectly to the dropout process in terms of transportation, infrastructure and accessibility. Hence, Figure 24, shown below depicts the factors that emerged from the general results causing students’ dropout rate in a rural secondary school.

![Figure 24 Factors causing student dropouts in rural secondary schools](image)

Furthermore, this study also investigated the subsequent effects of student dropouts from the CSS. It was revealed that social problems, such as unemployment and crime were most prevalent among the student dropouts in the area. Perpetuation
of poverty in the rural community was a significant economical effect of the student dropouts. It was also noted that the student dropouts had negative psychological effects, such as, feeling depressed, aggressive and worried. It can be concluded that the effects of student dropouts has a vicious cycle, as in Figure 25.

![Figure 25 The subsequent consequences of student dropouts](image)

Finally, the study also explored some possible strategies that could be implemented to enable students complete their secondary education successfully. Important amongst them were: (i) providing more financial and parental support, (ii) changing educational policies and, (iii) improving the nature of vocational education in rural areas. In relation to providing more financial and parental support, it was eminent that adequate educational resources and conducive study environment at home are necessary to enable students continue with their education. In such circumstances, stable financial background is crucial. Moreover, in terms of changing educational policies, some of the important issues raised were: a balanced curriculum with a wider range of skills and activities, reviewing the examination system, and providing professional counselling. For the issue on vocational education, it was emphasized that although vocational education provides another opportunity for students to gain skills relevant for employment and self-employment, students facing financial hardships and geographical isolation were not able to benefit from the...
vocational courses currently offered at the secondary school. In addition, more courses relevant to the needs of the rural student would make vocational education a more viable option for student dropouts.

8.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the figures of the students dropping out of a single school, in this case the CSS, may not be alarming, the overall figure at the national level and the increasing detection of youth related problems in the communities does signify that student dropout is a concerning issue. In order to solve the long term problems of the society, immediate measures are crucial. Hence, the findings of this study underscore numerous important implications relevant for the various stakeholders, such as, schools, policy makers and practitioners, and the State at large.

8.2.1 Implications for the stakeholders

The findings presented in this study provide evidence for school administrators, committee members and teachers to better understand the possible factors causing students to dropout of school. It could enable them to comprehend the reality of the rural students and their struggles. As a result, rural schools would be able to take proactive measures to enable more students complete their secondary education. Teachers would become more sensitive, school administrators to be more accommodating to the needs of the rural students and the school management to move a step further to assist the underprivileged students in completing their secondary education.

The literature and the findings presented in this study could also provide a better understanding on the important role played by parents towards their childrens’ educational success. Hence the schools could design programs to reach out to the parents and encourage greater parental participation in school activities. It would then enable them to address conditions beyond school as feasible and appropriate, since students’ out-of school problems often need to be addressed before they can succeed academically. Furthermore, this study could also encourage schools to work with families, churches and other community organizations to develop a collaborative program for dropout prevention. The school would recognize that there is no one solution to this problem; risk factors are interrelated and therefore enable them to
provide a broad range of instructional programs to accommodate students with different needs.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the policy makers could also get a better picture of the reality of the student dropout problems. Hence, it would enable them to provide more support, in terms of resources and technical assistance, in rural schools to facilitate the schools successfully deal with student dropout issues. Moreover, the MOE could set policy and fund programs to prevent student dropout, and develop a national policy requiring each school system to establish a management information system that provides basic and common data on all students’ progress history so as to be able to easily identify students at risk and the factors that causes students to drop out.

It is often assumed that the curriculum designed in the city can be well implemented in rural areas, without taking into consideration the challenges of the rural students in terms of educational resources and infrastructure. The findings in this study could also assist the policy makers, such as the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), to reassess the relevance of all educational programs which reflects students’ current and longer-term social and economic interests. The study could encourage the development of new curricula and teaching strategies designed for diverse groups of at-risk students.

Finally, the findings from this study could provide vital information to all the stakeholders in relation to the factors causing student dropouts, subsequent consequences and possible strategies to reduce the student dropout rates. Since the dropout problem is a community, business, economic and a social problem, availability of the information to a wider community would generate better understanding and open avenues for assistance to facilitate more students complete their secondary education.

8.2.2 Implications for the literature

Although there is a large pool of theoretical and empirical information available in the international literature on the student dropouts and related issues, there is limited empirical evidence available in Fiji. This issue has generally been explored to a large extent in western countries, with few studies exclusively from developing countries. In Fiji, the issue of student dropout has often been addressed in a hypothetical manner when addressing problems related to youths. Troubled youths
are usually implicated as dropouts, without much emphasis made on the student dropout issue on its own. There were no explicit investigations made to explain the possible causes of student dropping out of school and its effects in Fiji. Thus, this study has added to the contemporary literature based on the empirical evidence from a case study of a rural secondary school.

8.2.3 Implications for future researchers

This research study, based on three lines on inquiry could further propel more research in each area, with wider and more detailed study. There is a prospect to conduct future researches on similar issue based on wider sample selection, as well as from different locations, such as urban or more remote schools in the outer islands. This research also provides avenues for other researchers to do comparative studies of the student dropout issues, either within Fiji, regionally, or internationally.

This research could also enable the relevant stakeholders, such as the MOE, to design and support research that informs educators and the public about those aspects of students’ experiences that determine whether or not these students complete secondary school. Such research evidence offers a rationale for dropout programs based on the significant realities of students’ lives, and for future research and design of dropout prevention programs.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

While there is no simple solution to the dropout predicament, there are clearly some measures and supports that can be provided in and out of school that would improve the students’ chances of completing their secondary education. In concurrence with other researchers elsewhere (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Rumberger, 1987; Woods, 2001), this study also supports that the following measures could be adopted to reduce the student dropout rates in Fiji:

- Record Keeping

Implement a consistent nationwide recordkeeping system that will allow school completion and dropout data to be reported on a regular basis. Schools and communities cannot adequately address the dropout problem without an accurate account of it. Schools often have little or no information about what has happened to a student who disappears. The ministry needs to build data systems that will allow
collecting and recording not only the enrollment rate but the retention rate of individual schools as well. There need to be a standard guideline created to calculate the dropout rate so that students’ enrollment but also keep a track on the completion rates for each school. The state needs to adapt to a uniform formula to calculate the dropout and completion rate in order to provide an accurate report for the public.

- **Rural teacher training**
Rural school teachers are faced with a lot of challenges. Apart from the scarcity of resources in schools, rural poverty and other social problems affecting the school and students, teachers are often challenged to handle the academically disadvantaged students. As Ryan & Brewer (1990) stated that teachers of these educational misfits must be willing to be risk takers, the teacher becomes a critical factor in helping the underprivileged and disadvantaged children cope with their challenges by arming them with strategies that will make them academic survivors. Thus, it is important that rural teachers are well equipped with adequate teaching strategies, as well as positive attitudes to handle such students.

- **Early warning system**
Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as in primary school) so that early sustainable intervention can be applied. Success in the early primary school diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. Select and train teachers to work with at-risk students.

- **Re-examination of the school curriculum and national examination policies**
Instead of the current school curricula “one-size fits all”, the ministry should develop options for students, including the curriculum that connects what they are learning in the classroom with real life experiences and with work and alternate programs designed for at-risks students.

- **Encourage parental involvement support**
Schools should raise community awareness and outreach programs to foster greater parental support and provide information to parents on the importance of a conducive learning environment at home. Encourage and support programs that motivate parents to participate at all levels of their children’s’ education.

- **Financial support**
Needy students should be identified and financially supported through various governmental and non-governmental organisations. Review the current system of
tuition for all the students as well as the grants based on the school roll. For example, rural schools usually have smaller school roll so they are entitled for smaller grants (Lingam, 2008). Similarly, the government provides tuition fee for all the students when the students from financially stable families can afford to pay their fees. In such cases, the needy students could be provided with other financial assistances, such as book or transportation allowances. Therefore, there is a need to identify and support the genuine cases that need more financial assistance.

- **Trained School Counsellor**
A provision for a trained and full-time professional counsellor to attend to students problems should also be made in all schools. Students sometimes do not fell confident in disclosing their problems to their teachers in the classrooms and as a result suffer the emotional disorder. Availability of the full-time trained counsellor will be able to provide confidence to the students to openly share their problems. A full-time counsellor will not only be able to assists the children in terms of counselling, but also sort solutions for their problems that hinder the children’s educational progress and success.

### 8.4 CONCLUSION

Given the consistency of the qualitative and quantitative data analyses, it becomes possible to accept the conclusion drawn from the results with an acceptable degree of certainty. Even though the sample was drawn from a selected rural secondary school in Fiji and the results may not be entirely representative of all the rural population in Fiji, understanding of the context of the study does enable the reviewer to make certain generalizations with considerable confidence. This is due to the fact that Fiji is a very small Island state with a small population and therefore, the nature of the problem can be easily standardized across the nation.

It is important to point that not all factors related to school dropout are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem of dropouts cannot be achieved by the schools alone. There is no one magical, quick fix solution to the school dropout problem. The problem is complex and requires a complex array of solutions. It is essential to note that while schools owe the responsibilities to their communities to do everything they can to make all children successful, parents must also do their part in raising, supporting, guiding and educating their children. It is a national problem which must be addressed by the whole society. It requires resources that go beyond.
the school; the solutions require a team approach—the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community-based organizations, and business, as well as the state government. Ultimately, it is also the responsibility of the students themselves to get the job done. Students must understand that when it comes to their education and their financial future, failure is not an option. Hence, student dropout is a national issue which warrants greater attention and appropriate action.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF RESEARCH INSRTUMENTATION

1. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: STUDENT DROPOUTS
   PARENTS
   TEACHERS
3. SAMPLE OF THE TEXT ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS FROM SPSS
   COPIED TO WORD DOCUMENT
APPENDIX A (1).

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

Research Topic: The possible causes of low retention rate, subsequent effects of school dropouts and strategies that could help increase the retention rates: Case study of a Nadi rural secondary school.

Please fill the following details before beginning to answer the questions.

Form: ________

Age: ________

Please circle ONE that applies to you from the following:

Gender: Male       Female

Race: Fijian       Indian       Others (please specify)____________
Theme 1: Possible factors causing low retention rates in rural secondary schools

Write ‘A’ if you Agree and ‘D’ if you Disagree to the following answers for question 1 below.

1. Factors that cause students to drop out of school:
   a. Poor family support ______
   b. Poverty ______
   c. External exams ______
   d. Teachers attitude ______
   e. Distance from home to school ______
   f. Irrelevant curriculum ______
   g. Lack of self motivation ______

For the following questions, rank the answers using the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Number 1 is the most important and number 5 least important.

2. Social factors that cause some students to drop out from the rural secondary schools may be:
   a. Poor parental support ______
   b. Home environment not favorable to study ______
   c. Family problems ______
   d. Single parent ______
   e. Large number of children in the family ______

3. Economical problems that cause students from rural secondary schools to drop out may be:
a. Cannot afford to pay the school fee
b. Cannot afford the cost of transport, school books stationery, uniform and food
c. Needs to work and earn for the family
d. Have to look after younger siblings’
e. Undernourished and unhealthy due to poor diet

4. Geographical location that causes students from rural secondary schools to drop out are:
   a. Lack of regular transport to travel to school
   b. Very difficult road conditions to travel
   c. Unsafe to travel alone for long distances to school
   d. Have to stay away from home (with guardians) in order to attend school
   e. Transport is available at inconvenient times

5. Educational policies that causes students from rural secondary schools to drop out may be:
   a. External exams
   b. Too many internal exams
   c. Irrelevant curriculum
   d. Boring subjects
   e. Using English as the medium of instructions

6. School policies that may cause students from rural secondary schools to drop out are:
   a. Corporal punishments
   b. Too much homework
   c. Very strict school rules
   d. Poor attitude of teachers and administrators
   e. Lack of counseling for students

7. Psychological factors that may cause students to drop out of rural secondary schools are:
Theme 2: Subsequent effects of school drop outs

Rank the answers for question 1 using numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 from the most important to least important.

1. Rural school dropouts are mainly involved (in):
   - Crime
   - Drug abuse
   - Prostitution
   - Casual employment
   - Farming
   - Domestic chores
   - Self-employed
   - Unemployed

Tick beside the answer you think is the best (you can tick more than once)

2. Social problems created by rural school drop outs may be:
   - Stealing
   - Damaging properties
   - Fighting/swearing
   - Drug abuse
   - Disrespect to family and community members
   - Not known any

3. Personality that is commonly displayed by the school drop outs are:
   - Happy
   - Relaxed
   - Worried
Angry

Frustrated

Depressed

Unhappy

4. Those student who drop out of school and have found employment are able to:
(tick one answer only):
   a. Earn just enough to support themselves and their families
   b. Do not earn enough to support themselves and their families
   c. Are earning good enough

5. The attitude of the family towards the children who school drop out of school are normally:
   a. Worried
   b. Happy
   c. Angry
   d. Indifferent

6. The attitude of the community towards the children who drop out of school is that they normally (are):
   a. Stigmatize
   b. sympathetic
   c. Supportive
   d. Indifferent
**Theme 3: Possible strategies**

*Rank the following from most important to least using numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.*

1. Who should provide the most support in helping the rural students to complete their secondary education?
   a. Parents ________
   b. School teachers’ ________
   c. The Ministry of Education ________
   d. The family members ________
   e. The students themselves ________
   f. Religious organization ________
   g. The local community ________

Rank the following answers using numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 from most important to least important.

2. The support that parents can give to encourage their children to complete secondary education are:
   a. provide better study environment at home ________
   b. provide more time to study at home ________
   c. provide financial support ________
   d. provide emotional support ________
   e. motivate and give more moral support ________

3. The attitude of the school teachers towards students in rural secondary schools should be:
   a. more understanding and patience ________
b. to be strict and use punishment when needed

c. very caring and loving all the time

d. to provide extra support

e. Indifferent

4. The Ministry of education can help the rural students to complete their secondary education by:

a. increasing the fee grants

b. changing the methods of assessments

c. changing the curriculum and the subject contents

d. providing transport and book allowances

e. providing better resources

6. The government can help the rural students to complete their secondary education by:

a. giving scholarships

b. providing more educational resources and improve schools infrastructure(buildings and facilities)

c. improving the road conditions

d. sending more experienced and trained teachers

e. providing more vocational schools

7. The students in the rural areas can help themselves to complete their secondary education by:

a. being more committed to school work

b. being obedient to teachers and seek extra help from them

c. staying away from bad influences and friends

d. persist academically even if there is financial and family problems

e. be confident and have self-esteem

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
**APPENDIX A (2).**

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**Student dropouts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1: Factors:</strong> What are the social, economical, geographical and educational policy factors causing low retention rate in rural secondary school?</td>
<td>1. What is the highest level of secondary education you have attained?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What were the reasons for you to leave school early? Can you explain these reasons in detail?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What was the attitude of the school teachers in your school towards your education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Were you happy with the content of the subjects you learnt at school? Can you explain further?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Do you think external examinations are fair indicators of student’s performances and that they should be used to promote students to next form? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. (a) How far did you travel daily to reach school and what form of transport did you use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Did the distance from home and school had any imp-act on your education? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Did anyone encourage you to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Theme 2: Effects                          | 1. What are you currently doing?  
What are the subsequent effects of students dropping out of school? | 2. How do you feel about leaving school without completing the secondary education? Can you discuss your feelings on this?  
3. How has dropping out of school affected you and your family?  
4. Do you have any future plans about returning to school? |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        | 8. Did you go to anyone for help when you were facing problems in continuing with your secondary education?  
9. Did you plan what you were going to do after leaving school early? |  |
| Theme 3: Strategies                    | 1. Were there any policies in place to restrict you from dropping out of school?  
What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school? | 2. Was there any other option for you to continue your education? If yes, why didn’t you consider that option?  
3 (a) What are some strategies that you think should be put in place by the government or the school in order to help the rural children complete their secondary education?  
(b) How will this help the rural students? |

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions

### Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Q1. What are the social factors causing low retention rate in rural secondary school? | 1. (a) How many children do you have?  
(b) How many have completed their secondary education (form 7) and how many are still school?  
2. (a) What is your highest level of educational qualification?  
(b) Do you assist your children in doing their studies at home? If you do, How?  
3. Do you think it is important for children living in rural areas to complete their education? Why?  
4. (a) What do you think about the attitude of teachers towards students who are academically weak?  
(b) How does their attitude affect the students in the school? |
| Q2. How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school? | 1. (a) What is your current occupation/job?  
(b) How many other members from your family are working to support the family?  
2. (a) Do you face any financial hardships? If you do, could you describe these financial difficulties?  
(b) Do you think financial difficulties affect children in general? What about your own children, why and how? |
Q3. How does the geographical context affect the completion of secondary education among the rural students?

| 1. (a) How far do you stay from school in terms of distance? |
| (b) How do your children travel to school? |
| (c) Do they face any difficulty in reaching school on time? What might be some of the difficulties that they face? |
| (d) Does the distance and transport affect your child’s attendance at school? |

Q4. How do educational policies affect the completion rate in rural secondary school?

| 1. Is there any school policy, such as admission, fundraising, fees; etc that you think causes students to drop out of school? If yes, which ones in particular, how and why? |
| 2. Are you satisfied with the use of English language in schools? Why? |
| 3. Do you think external exams are necessary? Why? |
| 4. If you had a choice to decide on the language and the exam policies, what would you say? Why? |

| 1. Do you think the language and contents of the curriculum and the external exams deter students from completing their secondary education in rural school? How and why? |
| 2. What are some other factors (not discussed above) that you think prevent rural students from completing their secondary education? |

Q5. What are the subsequent effects of students dropping out of school?

| 1. What activities do you think children who drop out engage in? Can you elaborate? |
| 2. What effect does dropping out of school early affects: (a) the children? |
Q6. What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are you satisfied with the current government policies, such as free tuition fee? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (a) What are some school and government strategies to support rural education that you are happy about? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) What strategy (ies) do you think needs to be changed and why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are some new strategies that you think should be put in place to help rural students complete their education?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Semi-Structured Interview Questions
### School Principal/ Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Q1. What are the social factors causing low retention rate in rural secondary school? | 1. How would you describe the academic standards of the students in this school and why?  
2. How does the family background of the students affect the completion of secondary education in this rural school?  
3. What are some social challenges that students from this school face in their homes or community?  
4. How does the home environment contribute towards the retention of students in this secondary school?  
5. What is the teacher attitude towards the academically challenged students?  
6. How does teacher attitude affect the retention rate of students in this rural school? |
| Q2. How do economic problems affect the retention of students in rural secondary school? | 1. How would you describe the economic background of the students in this rural school?  
2. How does this affect the completion of secondary education for these rural students?  
3. Is there any form of financial |
Q3. How does the geographical context affect the completion of secondary education among the rural students?

1. How does the distance from home and school affect the completion of secondary education in this rural school?
2. What challenges do students face in terms of accessibility?
3. What form of help is provided to students who face transport difficulties?

Q4. How do educational policies affect the completion rate in rural secondary school?

1. What is the school policy for the student admission?
2. (a). When and how are the students screened before they are promoted to next higher form?
   (b). How does this policy affect the retention of students in the school?
3. How relevant do you find the school curriculum to the needs of the rural students?
4. What role do the external exams play in determining the retention rate of students in this rural secondary school?
5. (a). What is the language policy in the school?
   (b). Do you think this language policy affects the learning for the rural Students? Why?
6. (a) What are some other factors, apart from the ones already discussed, that affect the retention of students in this rural secondary school?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Q5. What are the subsequent effects of students dropping out of school? | 1. What do you feel about the drop out rate in the rural secondary schools compared to the urban secondary schools? Why?  
2. How does dropping out of school affect the: (a) students themselves? (b) their families? (c) the community? (d) the nation? |
| Q6. What are some strategies that can help increase the retention rate in rural secondary school? | 1. What are some strategies that are currently practiced to retain students in this rural secondary school as to allow them complete their secondary education?  
2. How effective are these strategies?  
3. (a). What are some other strategies that you think, if put in place, will increase the retention of students in the rural secondary school? (b). Who should assist in formulating and implementing these policies and how? |
**APPENDIX A (3).**

**SAMPLE OF TEXT ANALYSIS RESULTS**

**Student Dropout Responses**

Question: Why did you drop out of school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exam failure, was not doing well at school, was ashamed to be called by the principal all the time. Had financial problems.</td>
<td>socio-economic status, academic failure, lack of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>had to stay away from home, too much work given by the guardians, could not get bus fare all the time, boring subjects.</td>
<td>socio-economic status, lack of motivation, academic failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>repeated form 4 but didn’t want to repeat form 5. Very high academic demands, too much homework and projects. No fun. Had transport problem. Morning bus was very early (6.30 am) and afternoon bus was very late (6.00 pm). Got very tired and couldn’t do any schoolwork at home as we didn’t have electricity too.</td>
<td>accessibility, academic failure, lack of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Failed FJC, parents didn’t want me to repeat as they can’t afford. Have to look for a job to support the family</td>
<td>socio-economic status, academic failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question: Were you provided adequate support at home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>parents were always busy with their work as we needed money. They could not help me with my studies as they also has not completed their secondary education. We didn’t have electricity at home.</td>
<td>parental, encouragement, in conducive learning environment at home, family budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>no, my parents were separated so I had to stay with guardians, had to do work like collecting firewood, working on the plantations, etc. Bus fare was hard to get.</td>
<td>in conducive learning environment at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>yes, my parents encouraged me to study and asked me to repeat but I could not cope. There was also a lot of disturbances at home with many relative around in the evenings most of the time.</td>
<td>parental, encouragement, in conducive learning environment at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not too much but parents told me to study but they were always busy working so I didn’t get much attention from them. I had to do a lot of work after school at home e.g. cooking, washing, cleaning n I was normally tired. I spent very little time to do my studies at home</td>
<td>parental, encouragement, in conducive learning environment at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Discuss about the school and educational policies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>too many exams and there is a lot of emphasis to pass exams all the time.</td>
<td>unfair school policies, Exam oriented curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I didn’t like the language policy (English was always given high status), very strict school rules, too much homework and when I couldn’t do I was reprimanded at school,</td>
<td>unfair school policies, Exam oriented curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3  | I don’t like the exam system, it’s not fair for disadvantaged children like those who don’t have electricity at home, or have transport problems. Also everything is too academic, no fun in learning. | lack of support for disadvantaged students, Exam oriented curriculum |

4  | too many exams and there is a lot of emphasis to pass exams all the time. |

Question: Did you get any counseling?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>no, I was only counselled to study hard and I tried but their was little support from home.</td>
<td>lack of parental involvement for educational progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>no except for homework and academic counselling . I was often absent from school and was asked to report to the office the next day.</td>
<td>academic counselling to improve performance in test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I was advised to repeat coz my form 5 internal exams marks were very low. I was advised to join the vocational school too.</td>
<td>academic counselling to improve performance in test, vocational education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>only academic counselling. i am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What did you do after dropping out of school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I stayed home for almost 6 months, unemployed. Parents were unhappy and I had to look for a job. I managed to get a handyman's position with the local building contractor. It is a casual job.</td>
<td>unemployed, casual employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unemployed, I go fishing, or work on the cassava, dalo, plantation to get food for the family I am staying with. I hang around with friends, play, etc</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I got enrolled in the vocational school but dropped out coz of transport problems and also had to help my mother to do the housework as she was sick and we has small brothers and sisters.</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I stayed home for 3 months and then got a job of a salesgirl in town. I earn $60. per week</td>
<td>unemployed, casual employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What are the effects of dropping out of school?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I earn very little ($50./week). It’s not enough for me and my family. Nobody wants to give a job because I haven’t completed my secondary education.</td>
<td>crime, poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have nowhere to go and no one to depend on so I have to make a living for myself somehow. I got into trouble with the boys for vandalising. I swear and fight too coz I get frustrated about life. I also smoke with my friends in the village.</td>
<td>crime, poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>My future looks bleak; I know I can’t get a good job coz of my education. I also get into mischief by joining my friends for drinking party etc and have trouble with my family.</td>
<td>crime, poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>cannot get a good job to earn enough, things are very expensive, e.g. the bus fare n the money is not sufficient to meet the daily demands and cost. Life is a struggle.</td>
<td>poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: How do you feel for not been able to complete your secondary education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I get very depressed about things now as I do not see a good life. Money is needed very where and I know that with my education I will not be able to earn good enough to have a good life.</td>
<td>unpredictable future, emotional disturbances, poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I feel very frustrated all the time. I don’t know what my life will be like.</td>
<td>unpredictable future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am worried but hope that I will one day get a job to support myself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I regret for not completing my sec education. I feel upset and worried too. Also I know that when I am not well educated I cannot get a well educated boy for marriage so life will always be a struggle.</td>
<td>unpredictable future, emotional disturbances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What plans do you have for future?
1. I need to support my family as my father is sickly and my other brothers and sisters are at school. I have to work and also look for a job with better pay. find employment, vocational education for skilled employment

2. I have to look for a job somewhere to earn a living; I am very young and have to do something for myself. find employment

3. If I am given opportunity to attend a vocational school I will do a course in catering coz I want to be a chef. vocational education for skilled employment

4. I wish I can get enrolled in vocational or computer schools to learn some skills for a better job find employment, vocational education for skilled employment

Question: What could have been done to help you complete your secondary education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>If there was more support at home. Less exams at school. No financial hardships</td>
<td>financial support, more relevant curriculum and assessment methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>good family support, more interesting subjects at school and skill based, not very strict school rules</td>
<td>friendly school environment, better family support, alternative route for learning, financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>better transport, interesting subjects, better study environment at home.</td>
<td>alternative route for learning, infrastructure support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>better support from parents, more relevant school curriculum</td>
<td>alternative route for learning, more relevant curriculum and assessment methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher responses**

Question: Describe the academic standard of the students in general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Average to below average but the external exam results are good as a lot of hard work and pressure is put in by teachers. However, the pass rate in external exams is not a best indicator of the academic standard of the students in the school.</td>
<td>students academic status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>average to below average.</td>
<td>students academic status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Categories</td>
</tr>
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<td>----</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1. very serious social factor causing low retention is lack of parental supervision at home. Expiry of land leases has led to many parents working in towns or away from home and children is left unsupervised for long time at home. Parents are too occupied struggling to get finance for the family's basic need so the priority is to get meal for the family and meet other expenses than to education. 2. Breakdown of family structure, nuclear and single parent families means no elders at home to supervise the kids and instil values. Children fall in the wrong company easily and dropout of school. 3. The Communal way of living for the Fijian children also has negative effects as they are early influenced by the other dropouts in the village and prefer to live a free life in the village rather than to be in the strict environment. 4. Economic problems - major struggle for the rural families, expiry of land leases, no fixed income or very little income so children do not get adequate resources at home, difficult for parents to afford bus fare, school stationery and uniform, etc. children are also encouraged to work during school holidays or after school and these children lose interest in school work or cannot adjust to two different life style (formal/informal). they are often attracted to choose to work and these children drop out easily since they find school boring. They can also influence others in the class.</td>
<td>external forces, costs of education, family financial status, low self-motivation, education aspirations and committment, family background and issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. lack of parental support. Parents give priority to other things, e.g. traditional and religious gatherings so children are allowed to participate in these activities in the village or families during school hours. They miss classes and cannot cope; they also lose interest in school work. 2. Semi-literate parents - they don't know much about the new developments in the education and they cannot assist their children or provide them with any support at home. Low levels of education among the parents means low paid jobs so they cannot afford quality education for their children in terms of resources. They have short-term goals of survival. Low family income, semi-literate parents, poor parental support and family problems leads to absenteeism and poor performance which causes student dropouts.

2. home environment not conducive to study due to poverty, lack of resources. 2. poor parental support as parents spend little quality time with their children discussing about their studies. Children are not well supervised at home and they get influenced by the peers who have left school. 3. low literacy and numeracy levels of parents. Parents are not ambitious, enthusiastic or supportive of their child's education. 4. economic background is weak. Majority are cane farmers and poor so they find it difficult to afford a good quality education. Family problems also forces some children to drop out.

3. family background and poverty. Parents are busy working to earn for their families and do not have time for their children at home. The cost of education is also rising and this makes it difficult for parents to afford all the demands of the modern education. Some parents do not have a fixed source of income so sending their children to school and meeting their educational needs are not a priority since they are more concerned about providing food and meeting the medical expenses, etc for the family. 2. changing family structure caused by family breakups leads to single parent families and nuclear families.

4. costs of education, family financial status, low self-motivation, education aspirations and commitment, family background and issues.
is lack of discipline and *values like commitment, hard work, respect instilled in children.* these have effects on the education of the child. children who have *family problems often* drop out. some families with many children also cannot afford *good education* for all the kids so the elder ones are often asked to drop out to either work and earn for the family or to look after the younger siblings.

**Question: Geographical Context and its impact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>lack of regular <strong>transport</strong> causes a lot of <strong>absenteeism</strong> among Fijian children who live in the Highlands and when they go to their <strong>village in the weekend</strong>, they can hardly return on Monday. <strong>Children</strong> also get late due to different <strong>times for their transport</strong> and miss their classes. these hold them back and they often perform poorly and <strong>slowly dropout of school</strong>. <strong>the long distance</strong> also means <strong>high bus fare</strong> so when parents <em>don't have money</em>, children stay home and miss classes. this also contributes towards dropping out.</td>
<td>transportation challenges, rural life challenges, inconducive learning environment, rural poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>long distances, poor road conditions, irregular and expensive transport cost causes a lot of <strong>absenteeism</strong> or <strong>late arrivals</strong>. These students <strong>miss a lot of classes</strong> and <strong>difficult to cope</strong>. They do not perform well in their tests so they <em>lose interest in the school work</em> and <strong>slowly drop out</strong>. walking students face difficulties during <strong>bad weather</strong> when they have to <strong>cross creeks</strong> and rivers. they <strong>miss school</strong> and when they are pressured to do well they cannot cope and dropout.</td>
<td>transportation challenges, rural life challenges, rural poverty, inconducive learning environment, low aspirations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. walking **long distances** either to catch bus or to **school**. This affects their attendance and **performance**. **Children are tired** to walk long distances or sometimes traveling **very early** in the morning and returning late in the afternoon due to the **unavailability of bus at other times** also affects children's **performance**. They spend a lot of time traveling and cannot spend much **time at home** for their studies. They cannot cope and drop out. 2. Some children who reside with their guardians due to **long distance from their home** face a lot of problems as they don't get much support from them. It is also difficult to track these children when they are absent as they do not have a **fixed address**. Parents love and care is very important for children to do well at school and if it is missing when they sit with guardians, dropout is common.

4. **Poor road conditions** during rainy weather, **unavailability of regular transport and high cost of transportation** leads to absenteeism, poor performance and dropouts. 2. Children staying with their guardians are not well supervised and are not treated well so they do not do well in their studies. It is difficult to communicate to the parents as they live far away.

**Question: Educational and School policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>the school has <strong>open policy</strong> on student intake. Form 1 students come from the feeder school and form 3 students also come from other schools. 1. Most often the cream of the students go to urban schools and the rejected ones come to this school. Some of these children cannot go further than form 3 or form despite a lot of <strong>hard work and effort</strong> by the teachers. 2. It is difficult for the children to cope with the curriculum, especially at from 3 level where they have to do a lot of tasks and projects. These children need resources and also skills in writing, <strong>speaking</strong> etc.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;lack of parental knowledge on educational developments&gt;, rural poverty, &lt;teachers extra effort&gt;, curriculum and assessment policies</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>many children cannot cope</strong> with the <strong>high demands</strong> and parents cannot afford to spend money on resources, they drop out. 3. Language policy is affecting the rural students. I agree that English should be compulsory but children in secondary school cannot understand well in <strong>English</strong> because they are often communicated in their mother tongue in the <strong>primary school</strong> so the real problem lies in the primary schools. Teachers work very hard and sacrifice their personal time and money to help the underprivileged children but sometimes they lose the battle with those who cannot cope to the outside forces such as social and economical problems at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>school</strong> has an open and flexible policy for student intake but the retaining these students become <strong>difficult as their progress</strong> is based on their performances in the exams. 2. Those who <strong>fail the exams</strong> dropout or repeat. The <strong>school curriculum is less relevant</strong> to the needs of the local students and they find <strong>schoolwork boring</strong>. 3. internal assessments in form 3 is putting a lot of pressure on the rural students and they find it <strong>difficult to meet the demands</strong> of so many tasks and projects, that they often <strong>stay away from school</strong>. when they come back, <strong>teachers pressure</strong> them to submit their work and they disappear again and eventually they dropout. 4. the language policy is also making it <strong>difficult for the rural children to comprehend concepts</strong> since they always use their mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


If they are explained in their mother tongue, they respond easily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>the children who dropout at a very early stage, e.g. form 3 or 4 become a nuisance in the community so there is a policy post next to the school to keep control of the youths who are mostly involved in drug abuse, stealing, fighting. 2. Indian girls who dropout of school are often married at young age and this can be another social problem if they cannot cope with the different lifestyle. 3. teenage pregnancies and suicide is also common among the dropouts. 4. some dropouts work as laborers on the farms or look for menial jobs. this has a lot of impact on them and their future as the rising cost of living makes it difficult to meet the cost for the family and the poverty cycle is ongoing.</td>
<td>social problems, poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>indiscipline and bad behaviors, lack of respect for the elders, less productive workers who contribute little towards the development, less income, less investment in education and poverty. The cycle continues.</td>
<td>social problems, poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
many student dropouts don't return to the farms so they look for minor or casual employment outside. They earn very little to support themselves or their families. Rural poverty is common and with low levels of education, the cycle continues.

2. the dropouts are in desperate needs of money and are also involved in crime, drug abuse. they become the trouble makers in the community.

4. substance and alcohol abuse, crime, teenage pregnancies are common due to peer pressure and frustrations of poverty.

Question: Strategies to increase the completion rate of the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1. it is important to educate the rural community on the importance of education and how it can help to better income returns in the future. This will be possible through more parental, teachers and community interaction and they have to work in partnership. 2. children need the role models in the community therefore more guest speakers to share their experiences to motivate lift the morale of the rural children towards their interest in school work. 3. vocational education is there to provide a second chance education to those who cannot cope academically but this is not easily accepted but he parents. rural children are also on the advantage side as they are often away from the urban mischief; however, there is general lack of awareness about education among the rural community.</td>
<td>community outreach and awareness programs, changing education policies, improving the infrastructure, government subsidies for poor children in rural schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1. counseling for the students and parents. 2. MOE and government intervention in assisting the rural</td>
<td>community outreach and awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
children in terms of providing subsidies for bus fare, better facilities at school. 3. adult literacy. 4. awareness and creating right attitude towards the vocational education. parents have wrong perception about vocational education which needs to change.

3

1. identify the students at risk of dropping out and they should be counseled by the qualified school counselor so that their problems are understood and measures put in place to help them complete their education. 2. MOE should provide a qualified and trained counselors full time in schools. currently, the school has an internal appointed counselors who have many other responsibilities and it makes difficult to pay attention to all the students. 3. get rid of Fact and shift compulsory education to form 5. 4. Vocational education does not solve the drop out problems so revisiting the vocational education programs and creating greater awareness will help to change the image it currently has.

4

1. proper counseling at school. 2. Outreach programs for parents and children about importance of education. 3. diversifying the curriculum by shifting the focus from academic oriented and exam-driven to include the needs and aspirations for rural and disadvantaged children. 4. MOE to assist the poor children in terms of bus fare, school stationery and uniform, etc. 5. early intervention programs for students who are at-risk of dropping out.

Parents Responses

Question: What challenges do children face at home that prevents them from completing their secondary education in rural areas

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>community outreach and awareness programs, &lt;change of attitude towards vocational education&gt;, changing education policies, government subsidies for poor children in rural schools, early identification and counseling of at-risk students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>early identification and counseling of at-risk students, community outreach and awareness programs, government subsidies for poor children in rural schools</td>
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</tbody>
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213
| 1 | 1. poverty. Many parents cannot afford the high demands of the needs at school. Children who do not do well at school are not encouraged by their parents to continue but they are asked to either help on the farm or look for a job to earn for the family. Also most of the parents are uneducated so they cannot help their children at school. Children in Fijian community are often disturbed at home as they have many visitors at home. | financial hardships, extra responsibilities, unconducive home environment, lack of parental support |
| 2 | Children from rural areas often have a struggling life as they are expected to help their parents to subsidize the family income by either working on the farm or after school hour jobs. This gives less time for children to study and they get tired too so they perform poorly in their school work or exams. the education system is such that only those who pass their exams can go further. also other problems like expiry of land leases puts more stress on parents and this has effect on children as they are disturbed and also do not get all the resources at home for their studies. | financial hardships, extra responsibilities, unconducive home environment, high academic demands, lack of parental support |
| 3 | Family problems affect children’s studies. Sometimes children are left in the care of other family members or guardians and these children do not show interest in school work. Poverty also has a lot of impact on children dropping out of school. Some parents work for long hours to earn enough money for their family and children are not provided any support at home. some children have to do a lot of work at home too. Also some children are too lazy to study hard. | lack of self-motivation, extra responsibilities, unconducive home environment, lack of parental support |
| 4 | Family problems and distance from home to school. some children are very relaxed and don’t want to work hard. | lack of self-motivation, unconducive home environment, accessibility to school, lack of parental support |
Question: What problems do you see children facing in school that might cause them to drop out?

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Children cannot cope with difficult subjects in rural schools as parents are illiterate and cannot provide any support at home. Children fail exams and this discourage them n their parents. It’s difficult to have children repeat. Language is also a problem as children in secondary school are always taught in English; it may be difficult for them to understand as it is not their mother tongue.</td>
<td>parental support, &lt;high costs of education&gt;, unfair curriculum policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>too many exams and things are very expensive for parents to affords, e.g. the school books and stationery. Children are not taught any skills in secondary schools which can help them to earn a living, for e.g., carpentry; catering, etc. they have to study in vocational school which is also expensive. too much fundraising in school</td>
<td>&lt;lack of learning resources&gt;, &lt;high costs of education&gt;, unfair curriculum policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>very difficult subjects, strict school rules and too much homework</td>
<td>unfair school policies, unfair curriculum policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>the school policies on marks in the internal exams, external exams, language, boring subjects, lack of resources, like the books. Also fundraising in school</td>
<td>unfair school policies, &lt;lack of learning resources&gt;, unfair curriculum policies</td>
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Question: What role does the distance from home to school play in student dropout?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fijian children staying in the interior villages are very disadvantaged as they cannot travel to school daily from their home. They have to stay with their relatives or guardians which is not easy. Also in some village, the transport is at inconvenient times so children miss the early morning bus. as a result, they are absent regularly n miss alot of schoolwork so they drop out coz they cannot cope with others in the class. it is very expensive to hire vans to send children to school as many parents have no fixed income.</td>
<td>irregular attendance affecting school work, parental support in rural areas, transportation problems in rural areas</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Bad road conditions. When it rains, children cannot reach school on time and sometimes there is no bus. Also the fare is very expensive so some children have to walk long distances because the parents cannot afford the bus fare.</td>
<td>parental support in rural areas, transportation problems in rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Children who live away from home have to walk long distances and it is also unsafe to let them walk alone (e.g. girls). Bus fare is very expensive and no other form of transport except the bus.</td>
<td>parental support in rural areas, students safety issues, transportation problems in rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>poor road conditions, inconvenient bus schedule,</td>
<td>transportation problems in rural areas</td>
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Question: What are the effects of children dropping out of school (on students, Families, community)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Children who drop out of school are often involved in naughty things, like stealing, swearing and being disrespectful, smoking, drinking and drugs, like marijuana. They create problems to their families coz they don’t listen to the elders and sometimes the family has to look for money to help their children get out of trouble.</td>
<td>financial loss, substance abuse, unethical behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is a big loss for the family and also children who drop out become a nuisance in the community. Like stealing, damaging properties, influencing other children, drinking, smoking and other bad habits, these children will have a bleak future coz they will not be able to get a good job that will help them to earn enough for themselves or their families.</td>
<td>financial loss, unethical behaviour, substance abuse,&lt;uncertain future&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>parents send the children with the hope that one day they will get educated and will get a good job to help the family but when they drop out, the parents are very saddened. Also the children who drop out have to look for any kind of job and sometimes they can get into</td>
<td>financial loss, substance abuse, unethical behaviour</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Parents make a lot of sacrifice to send their children to school, for e.g., work for long hours, look for food items to sell for the bus fare, but when children dropout, it is a big worry. Children also have a bleak future without good education and sometimes they are involved in crime, drug abuse, prostitution, etc

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There has to be a boarding school to help the children who are staying far from school. Also children from poor families must be provided with scholarships which also provides for their transport and book allowance.</td>
<td>transport, financial assistance, educational policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Government to help poor families whose children are at school, improve the road conditions and also reduce the exams in schools so that more children are able to reach higher forms.</td>
<td>transport, financial assistance, educational policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More support for rural children from their parents, community, school and government. The children should be counseled on how they can complete their education and also the curriculum could be made interesting and relevant to the needs of the rural children.</td>
<td>community support, financial assistance, educational policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Less fundraising in school, make education compulsory till form 6 with assistance provided to rural children in terms of transport and book allowance.</td>
<td>transport, educational policy</td>
</tr>
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Question: What are some of the strategies that can be implemented to reduce the drop out rate?
APPENDIX B: CORRESPONDENCE

1. CONSENT LETTER FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
2. APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
3. SAMPLE OF CONSENT LETTER FOR THE RESEARCH
   PARTICIPANTS’ PARENTS
APPENDIX B (1).
Ms Sanjeena Chandra,
School of Education,
University of the South Pacific,
Suva.

Dear Madam,

Re: Research Permit Approval

I am pleased to inform you that your application to do research work on the topic "Factors causing low retention rates; subsequent effects of school dropouts and possible strategies to increase the retention rate: A Case Study of A Rural Secondary School" has been approved. The approval is for the period November, 2007 to November, 2008.

You are reminded to liaise directly with the Principal of the school that will participate in your research. It should be noted that the students' school work will not be severely disrupted when the research work is carried out in the selected secondary school.

As a condition for all research approvals you must forward to us a copy of your final report as soon as it is ready. You are not to release any details, findings or results whatsoever unless the Ministry of Education has authorized you to do so. This Ministry reserves the sole right to publish your final report or an edited summary of it.

We wish you well in your research work.

Jogi Qaraniwai [Mr.]
for Permanent Secretary [Education]

cc A/DSE [P/S/AMU]
A/DAMU
Director [Secondary]
DEO [W]
Principal; Mulomulo Sec School
File: E24/2/3
TPF: 68206

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR EDUCATION
APPENDIX B (2).

University of South Pacific,
School of Education,
Suva.

Dear Mrs Chandra,

RE: Approval for Research

Approval is hereby given to Mrs S Chandra to do her Research for Masters of Arts at the above institution.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

PRINCIPAL
To Whom It May Concern

I am a research student from the University of the South Pacific. My research topic is: Retention rates in rural secondary school and related issues. I am investigating the possible reasons why student dropout out of rural secondary school, what are the effects of student dropouts and what could be done to reduce the student dropout rates. I have been given approval from the Ministry of Education and the school Principal to conduct my research at the school.

I wish to take your consent to conduct this research. The information revealed in this research will only be used for the purpose of this research study and will remain confidential. Therefore, please sign the consent form below stating your approval or disapproval. I look forward to your co-operation.

Thank you
Sanjeena Chandra

I, ________________________________ allow my child/children to participate in the research survey.

________________________
Signature