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**The perceptions of Fijian Secondary School Students on the Effects of Cultural, Religious
and Family Obligations on their Academic Performance**

By Kelera Nawele

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Education

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DECLARATION

The work submitted in this thesis is original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material therein has not been submitted, either in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other university.

Endorsed by the Supervisor

Kelera Nawele

May 2006

Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate

ABSTRACT

This supervised research project examines the perceptions of Fijian secondary students regarding the impact of cultural, family and religious obligations on their academic performance. It documents the experiences and perceptions of forty five Fijian students from three predominantly co-educational Fijian secondary schools in Suva.

The study attempts to understand the challenges and problems most Fijian students are faced with at home.

The research method used was action-research through the use of document analysis through questionnaires and semi-structured, conversational, reflective interviews.

The theoretical and conceptual basis of this study was drawn from international and national literature on cultural values in relation to academic performance. Literature review supports the notion that in some societies like Fiji, more emphasis on cultural values and activities are placed ahead of educational needs and aspirations.

The important findings of the study are:

- Students agree that cultural obligations have negative impacts on their academic achievement;
- Cultural obligations contribute to Fijians under-achievement in schools; and
- Cultural obligations like cultural activities, religious commitment, attitude, urban poverty and living away from home are factors that affect the academic progress of Fijian students.

The study concludes with important implications for parents, care givers and members of our community as well as suggestions for further research.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
MOE	Ministry of Education
MYF	Methodist Youth Fellowship
USP	University of the South Pacific
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In this supervised research project, I examined the perceptions of Forms four, five and seven Fijian students regarding the impact of cultural, family and religious obligations on their academic performance. The study was carried out on students in three predominantly co-educational Fijian secondary schools in Suva.

Much has been said about how culture has been an impediment to Fijian success in education (Puamau,1999). **Culture** is a concept that has been defined by differing authorities. (Nabobo, 2000; Riley, 1985; Ninnes, 1991; Taufe'ulungaki, 2000). For the purpose of this study, Thaman's (2003:3) definition of culture will be used as it relates closely to this study . She stated:

“Culture is a way of life of a people that includes their language, accumulated knowledge and understanding, values and beliefs”.

In the Pacific Islands, culture is conceptualised locally as shared values and beliefs and ways of doing and behaving. From the above perspective, it can be said that Fijians are inundated with traditional and cultural obligations. Thus traditional Fijian communities place much more importance on communal obligations to the *vanua* and religious commitment. In addition, cash contributions towards the church frequently take priority over contributions to schools (Tavola,1991). Commitment of this nature has often been cited as a contributing factor to the shortfall of family budget and consumes a lot of time. However, time and finances

are important resources that could be usefully diverted towards school work and children's studies.

This study focused on the possible effects of cultural, family, and religious obligations on the overall performance of Fijian students in schools. As noted above the study was carried out on students in three predominantly co-educational Fijian secondary schools in Suva. These schools cater mainly for students residing in the suburbs of Suva namely: Nabua; Lami; Raiwaqa; Raiwai; Vatuwaqa; and along the Suva -Nausori corridor. Most of these students are from the two main islands in Fiji namely Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Those students who come from the rural areas live with their relatives in Suva while others reside with their parents.

1.1 Background of the Study

Academic performances of Fijian students have been the subject of public concern and open discussion for quite some time in Fiji. The issue has been raised in the Upper and the Lower Houses of Fiji's Parliament. It has also been discussed in many meetings of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC). The media has paid it a fair amount of attention. But despite the overall improvement of Fijian academic performance over the last decade, a wide variety of complex social, economic, cultural and political factors continue to affect Fijian academic performance.

Many variables contribute to the relatively low academic achievements of the

Fijian students. Amongst these are low self-esteem, geographical isolation, poor health due to poor nutrition, absenteeism, lack of proper classrooms, laboratories, text books, library books, well-trained teachers, poverty in the home and communities, and an inability to prioritise education and cultural conflict. For example, Fijian students are usually not given the time and space they need to study at home because of a social function or church meeting that takes place in the home. Furthermore, the Fijian people have a lot of cultural obligations that consume a lot of their time and resources. To what degree are these cultural obligations interfering with the academic achievement of Fijian students? This researcher believes that through this research, findings will reveal the answers to the above.

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the different variables affecting Fijian academic performances. While researching Affirmative Action and Racial Inequalities in Fiji Education, Puamau (1999) states that in addition to the disadvantages associated with location and home background factors, her informants identified some cultural factors as impediments to the success of Fijians at school. She states that a poor attitude towards education is one such impediment. Puamau attributes one of her claims to Fijians being underachievers because of the low priority they place on education. In addition, Speed (cited in Puamau1999) is alleged to have argued that the traditional way of life requires that social functions such as deaths and weddings take precedence in their lives, even for the more educated ones. Puamau summarises Speed's statements as follows:

“...they are doing badly in school because of our traditional way of life...because Fijians are never taught the importance of education. We never really appreciate, never connect why education is important and vital, some don't apply it. Even for reasonably educated Fijian parents, there is still a question mark there. We don't devote enough time for our children...our social calendar is more important - the “oga”, “solevu” so education comes as a low priority.” (cited in Puamau, 1999:161)

Speed is reported to have claimed that rural school committees often do not function as effectively as they should. She is alleged to have said that the low priority placed on education by the parents and the community therefore does not make conditions conducive for good teaching and learning. (cited in Puamau, 1999)

Another prominent academic, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) of the University of the South Pacific (USP), Dr. Esther Williams, in opening the USP-UNICEF jointly organised Early Childcare Regional Workshop stated that cultural obligations are keeping the parents away from the home and preventing them from taking care of their children and providing them with the quality care that their children are entitled to (Williams, June 2004).

So much can be summarised from the above on how Fijians continue to place a lot of importance on social events and cultural, family and religious obligations but maintain a very blasé attitude towards education. It could be suggested that this might have contributed to the lacklustre performance of Fijian students and a contributing factor to their poor academic achievement.

1.2 Study Rationale

Even though studies have been carried out to investigate the psychological, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic factors, parental expectations, availability of resources and other variables affecting Fijian academic performance, yet to be investigated is the effect of cultural, family and religious obligations on the Fijian students' academic achievement.

This study was important because it would make a significant contribution to our understanding of students' perceptions of the relationship between participation in these obligations and their academic performances.

I am interested in this issue because as a teacher who has taught in rural schools for a number of years, I have always felt that rural students can perform better if they were provided with the opportunity to do so and the support from their families. As an indigenous Fijian, I feel that there are often times when we do not value education instead place cultural obligations ahead of it. I have often wondered how much effect this has had and will continue to have on the performance of Fijian students. This study will be an ideal opportunity for me to discover and affirm whether these assumptions are justified or not.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study aimed to:

1. find out the Fijian students' perceptions of whether or not participation in

cultural, family and religious obligations affect their academic performances;

2. identify specific cultural, family and religious obligations that is perceived to be particularly detrimental to academic performances; and
3. suggest ways in which students can participate in their cultural, communal, family and religious obligations with very little impact on their academic performance.

1.4 Research Questions

Using the narratives and stories of the forty five Fijian students, this study focussed on following key questions as addressed by the students' expressed opinions:

- I. What is the Fijian secondary school students' perception of the effects of cultural, family and religious obligations on their academic results?
- II. How are cultural, family and religious obligations contributing factors to Fijian students' non-achievement in schools?
- III. What specific cultural, family and religious obligations are perceived by secondary school students to negatively affect their academic performance?
- IV. How can they fulfil their cultural, family and religious obligations without neglecting their academic responsibilities?

1.5 Criteria for Selecting the Research Sample

A total of forty five Fijian students in Forms four, five and seven were selected from three Secondary Schools in Suva. The three schools were referred to as SCHOOL A, SCHOOL B and SCHOOL C. The participants were selected on the basis of their race, gender and academic performance. Of the forty five, fifteen were from SCHOOL A, fifteen from SCHOOL B, and the rest from SCHOOL C. Of the fifteen from each school, there were eight males and seven females. The students were carefully selected with the assistance of their respective teachers.

1.6 Background of the Schools where the Research Sample were selected from

The schools are urban co-educational secondary school with a predominantly Fijian population. These schools cater mostly for Fijian students living in the Suva suburbs.

A significant number of the students living temporarily as dependents with their distant relatives in the urban areas are from outlying islands as well as the interior of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The rest of the students live in the surrounding areas or are from villages around the Naitasiri and Rewa Province.

School A

SCHOOL A is located in the Nabua area which is approximately 3 to 4 miles outside of Suva City. The school was established in 1960 as a response to the 1956

Fiji Education Report which revealed that while approximately 28,000 Fijian children were in primary schools, only 439 students attended post-primary schools. The school receives aid from the Fiji Government. Its controlling authority is the school's Board of Governors. Its recurrent budget is made up of school fees, grants received from the Government and the generous financial support of parents.

School B

SCHOOL B was initially established as a Demonstration school for trainee teachers from the University of the South Pacific to undertake their teaching practice. At its inception in March 1976 it started with only three classes. But today the school has forms 3 to 7 and currently caters for students from various parts of Fiji as well as children from other Pacific Islands living in Suva.

School C

SCHOOL C is located in the upper Nabua area. It was established in 1972 to cater for the children from nearby settlements. SCHOOL C is a committee run school and is currently owned by the community. It is managed by the School Board of Governors and headed by the Principal, Vice Principal and Assistant Principal. In the late 1980's, the Vocational section started for those who wanted to take Light Engineering, Carpentry and Joinery. In 1990, there were some changes and School C was restructured. Modifications for the school were made and now it has classes from forms 3 to 6 and a Cooking and Tailoring section was also established. The school introduced seventh form this year due to the increase in the number of students and the availability of funds provided by the Ministry of Education.

In Fiji the quality of a school is often judged by the performance of its students in external examinations such as the Fiji Junior Certificate [FJC], Fiji School Certificate Examination [FSLC] and the Fiji Seventh Form Examination [FSFE]. The table on the next page shows the results for school A and school B and school C over a 5 –year period.

External Examination Pass for School A, School B, and School C : 2000 - 2004.

External Examination Results					
Fiji Junior Certificate					
	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
School C	71%	78%	81%	65%	67%
School B	64%	82%	92%	82%	80%
School A	94%	86%	91%	94%	94%
Fiji School Leaving Certificate					
School C	25%	34%	40%	41%	38%
School B	51%	43%	50%	42%	42%
School A	48%	50%	50%	42%	38%
Fiji Seventh Form Examination					
School C	49%	-	-	-	-
School B	82%	52%	51%	46%	50%
School A	77%	77%	35%	43%	38%

Source: MOE Examination and Assessment Section

The table above seems to indicate the close relations between the performances of students at the three schools. Some contributing factors could be the similarity in the socio-economic backgrounds of the students, poorly resourced libraries and laboratories as well as the interruptions to the daily school programs because the schools are venues of socially organized events or other extra curricular activities. Apart from these it was important to obtain the thoughts and views of the students on these issues.

1.7 Methodology

In this study, I attempted to understand the impact of cultural, communal, family and religious obligations on academic performance from the perspectives of indigenous Fijian students in forms four, five and seven in the three secondary schools in Suva.

The main approach I utilised to obtain data was the reflective-conversational, semi-structured interview, to enable the students to describe their perceptions and beliefs in their original “voices”. A list of probing questions was used to stimulate the discussion. The nature of the discussion focussed on reflective and critical analyses of the experiences of the students. In my view, this approach was the most appropriate for in-depth study that was sensitive to the context of Fijian cultural obligations.

The study also adopted a biographical approach whereby students were given the

opportunity to critically reflect on their experiences on how cultural obligations affected their academic performance. I carried this out through the *talanoa* sessions. Capell (cited in Ravuvu1987:214) describes *talanoa* as “to chat together; to tell stories; to relate something; to chat to someone; to chat together; to chat about a story, account, or legend”. The *talanoa* sessions were appropriate because it was a more natural way of discussing and reflecting on experiences in a traditional Fijian context. In my view, this approach provided the students with an opportunity to freely talk about their experiences.

In regards to the documentary study, I looked at the documented information of the schools and the Ministry of Education on the academic records of the three schools. I was also guided by the literature and previous research studies relating to this topic.

1.8 Key Concepts and Definitions

The following concepts are defined, for the purpose of this study as

- i) *Duguci* - the presentation of whales tooth and kava roots to the bride’s father seeking his consent for his daughter’s hand in marriage.
- ii) *Sevusevu* - kava roots presented to guests by guests or hosts or vice versa as a token of good will and respect by both parties.
- iii) *Veisiko* - visitation to relatives and friends where money, food and gifts are given.
- iv) *Soqo ni mate* - all activities related to death rituals. It involves a lot of time,

money and feasting.

- v) *Vakamau* - all activities related to marriage. Involves a lot of time, money and feasting.
- vi) *Bulubulu - soro* -to admit ones guilt by offering yaqona or *tabua* (whale's tooth) to the injured party and to ask for forgiveness.
- v) *Tevutevu* - presentation of household items for the newly wedded couple by the parents.
- vi) *Tunudra* - a ceremonial feast normally offered on the fourth night after the birth of a child to the midwife and others involved in the birth.
- ix) *Roqoroqo* - offering of gifts to a new born child.
- x) *I koti* - a ceremonial feast to mark the cutting of a child's hair for the first time.
- xi) *Vakabogi va* - fourth night ceremonial feast in relation to life crises such as birth,marriage, death, initiation, or puberty. It can also be done on the tenth and hundredth night.
- xi) *Vakasenuqamuqa* - ceremonial feast to celebrate any important achievement normally someone who has been away for a long time such as studies abroad.
- xii) *Vakamamaca* - presentation of traditional gifts to a person on his or first visit to a place.
- xiv) *Bulu yava* - kava drinking ceremony to mark a visitor's departure.

- xv) *Kau ni mata ni gone* - presentation of gifts by a child's paternal relatives to the maternal relatives on a child's first visit especially for the eldest child to his or her mother's village.
- xvi) *Cultural obligations* - has been defined for the purpose of this research as those duties that we as indigenous Fijians feel obligated to, the nation, (*matanitu*) the church, (*lotu*) and the land, (*vanua*). It is clear from the data that the Fijian way of life revolves around the land, the church, and the nation. Cultural obligations include household chores like house cleaning, laundry, cooking, babysitting, and managing the household when parents are away. It also includes religious activities like attending church services, bible study meetings, choir practices, prayer meetings, youth meeting and traditional obligations like weddings, death related activities, visitation, the arrival of a new baby, cutting of hair and so on.

1.9 Organisation of the Thesis

The next chapter briefly reviews some of the available literature on Fijian Education. The first part provides an overview of various studies on Fijian Education. The latter part examines the various factors impacting and shaping Fijian Education.

Chapter three explains the research design used in this study. It describes the methodology employed, the data collection methods used, the research process, ethical issues associated with the research, the analysis of the data, and the

limitation of the research design used.

Chapter four discusses the major findings of the study, especially in relation to what is available in the literature on Fijian Education.

Chapter five contains the conclusions, implications of the findings and some recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

Chapter Two focused on providing an explanation of the rationale for the methodology used and provided a definition of it as well as the selection of the target group. It also tried to establish the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter Three focuses on the various literatures that have been written on aspects of the subject matter that is dealt with in this research.

A literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers. In writing a literature review, the main purpose is to convey to the readers what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic and what their strengths and weaknesses are. These reviews provide and guide one to a particular topic. It gives an overview of the topic. For professionals, they are useful reports that keep them abreast with what is current in the field. For scholars, the depth and breadth of the literature review emphasises the credibility of the writer in his or her field. Literature reviews also provide a solid background for a research papers investigation. These reviews play a significant role in this research for it will support and reinforce the findings of the research. It will also give accreditation on the work produced.

This section summarises some of the available literature on Fijian education. The first part is an overview of various studies on Fijian education. The latter part examines the various factors impacting and shaping Fijian education.

Fijian education has been the focus of educational discussion for the last three decades. A number of studies have identified powerful internal and external forces impacting, influencing and reshaping Fijian education. Some of the internal forces that have overarching impact on Fijian education are provincialism, cultural and home background, the influence of the church, the lack of economic and political security of the country, the dearth of strong leadership and limited resources.

2.1 Cultural Values

One of the most influential contexts in which individuals develop their own values and beliefs is their culture (Smith, 2000). Cultural values and beliefs are normally internalised through their socialisation process (Eisenhart, 2001) and through interaction between individuals and their communities (Krause, Bochner & Duchesne, 2003). Cultural values change slowly, they are not held to change like fashion. Values are supposed to endure over a long period of time. They give intensity, stability, direction, order and predictability to all aspects of one's life (Smith, 2000). According to Hofstede (2001), values are an attribute of individual as well as collectivizes and a value is defined as a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others. Values have to do with what members of the society believe are good. But they are different from preferences. Preferences can be individual matters, whereas values are likely to

reflect a whole culture's interpretation.

Pepitone (1994) defines beliefs as:

Relatively stable cognitive structures that represent what exists for the individuals in domains beyond direct perception or inference from observed facts. More particularly, beliefs are concepts about the nature, the causes and the consequences of things, persons, events and processes. Beliefs are social constructions that are part of a culture and have guided the socialisation of those who share that culture and more or less adopted what is already there in the culture.
(Pepitone 1994:140)

It is, however, briefly noted that there are some individuals who do not achieve highly in their own culture. But, these individuals may strive more in different cultural environments, after they are culturally re-socialised in their new cultural environments to some extent. Thus, it could be hypothesised that cultural factors, specifically cultural values and beliefs in education, are probably major predictors of ethnic Fijian academic “success” and “failure”. The research has focused on individuals’ perceptions on values, beliefs and practices in affecting achievement, which are the basis for the different interpretations placed on achievement in different cultures (Levinson and Holland, 1996; Maehr and McInerney, 2004). It is crucial to examine how values and beliefs are related to individuals’ performances and achievements from across-cultural perspective. In other words, what achievements are children culturally expected to value via social support, especially from their trusted others such as parents, siblings, relatives and elders? Stewart (1983), for instance, has claimed, ethnic Fijians do not appear to value education as much as other groups such as the Indo-Fijians. If so, what motivates ethnic Fijians?

Puamau (1999), in her study of Fijian education, identifies a host of factors that contribute to Fijian achievement. She categorises the factors as: socio – cultural; institutional; psychological; historical; structural; and spatial disadvantage. Under socio-cultural factors, Puamau highlights the influence of the home background, income levels, parental support, ethnicity, gender and class. She also discusses a number of factors often considered as contributing to poor achievement such as the impact of the church, the community, the lack of an education ethic, the low value placed on education, and excessive yaqona drinking. Many of these are similar to those identified already by Tierney (1970) and Dakuidreketi (1995), confirming the problems facing Fijians in education.

Similarly, the work of Baba (1982) and Dakuidreketi (1995), on Fijian education also identifies a number of factors contributing to the achievement and under-achievement of Fijian students. These include socio- economic, political and cultural factors, institutional factors, structural factors and psychological factors. Cultural factors include the home background, gender, student, the land, the church, cultural conflicts, and the community.

In relation to the socio-cultural research domain, Tierney (1971) concluded from his ethnographic study on rural Fijian students that cultural explanations for the low academic achievement of the rural Fijian students lay in these areas: lack of privacy in the home, lack of desire for competition due to society preference for

cooperative individuals, lack of mobility, and pressure for conformity.

A 1988 study by Save the Children Fund Fiji identified some factors causing high attrition rates. These include financial problems, family pressures and obligations, lack of parental guidance and commitment to children's education, violence in schools, school admission policies and peer pressure.

Ethnic Fijian culture expects children to develop a strong sense of their loyalty to *vakaturaga* in *vanua* ethos. *Vanua* is of vital importance to understand their cultural values and beliefs. The term refers to the land area with which a person or a group is identified (i.e., the totality of an ethnic Fijian community). The land is a source not only of identity, but also of strength, insurance and livelihood (Nabobo, 2001). *Vanua* also refers to a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another. According to Ravuvu (1987), the term embodies the ethnic Fijian values and beliefs which people of a particular locality have in common. "It includes their philosophy of living and their beliefs about life in this world and in the supernatural world" (Ravuvu, 1987:15). Life on earth (*vuravura*) is closely tied to spiritualism and supernatural: nature and the heavens. Thus, ethnic Fijians have a tendency to understand that one's inappropriate behaviour or sorcery of some kind causes one's illness. Therefore, an appreciation of the cultural *vanua* is the key concept for one's action and thought. In addition, *vakaturaga* (i.e., the chiefly manner) is probably the most important concept among ethnic Fijians, which refers to action and personal

characteristics befitting the presence of a person of high status, such as a chief and her/his representatives and counterparts. Hence, those who are *vakaturaga* in behaviour know their place in the community and act appropriately. People comply with their various social obligations, their service to others and respect for those who have defined authority over them. In particular, the practice of respect is an important aspect of the *vakaturaga* concept. *Vanua* also refers to a group, whose members relate socially and politically to one another.

Practically speaking, one's involvement in communal activities in the village, such as preparation and attendance at ceremonies like funerals and weddings, is of great importance in order to express one's appreciation for *vakaturaga* in the *vanua* ethos. Ceremonies highlight critical points of ethnic Fijian life: initiation of the young into their communities, marriage, repair of ruptured relationships and death (Ravuvu, 1987). It often takes two weeks to conduct the funeral ceremonies, and it takes even longer to get things done for a wedding, including long term preparation for that occasion-sometimes it takes nearly a year. This includes cultivating gardens, raising pigs, cattle and so on. To ethnic Fijians, ceremonies are essential in providing fulfillment, identity, co-operation among themselves and others. Also, one's participation in ceremonies maintains one's social links, status and recognition. It is one's expression of genuine love, care, support and concern for her/his fellow men. Ravuvu (1988) has explained that the ethnic Fijian ideals of sharing are embodied in such terms as *veivuke* (giving a helping hand), *veinanumi* (consideration for others), *veilomani* (being loving

and friendly to others) and *yalo vata* (of being the same spirit or cooperation). Therefore, “apart from those who are directly involved or formally informed of any happening, many others who casually know about the occasion or accidentally come across it often feel obligated also to participate” (Ravuvu,1987, p.330). Ethnic Fijian attitudes towards loving and caring for each other develop their sense of generosity, co-operation, solidarity and harmonious social relations. Weddings, deaths, the birth of a new baby, and visitation are some of the cultural obligations that take place in the home.

2.1.2 Family Obligations.

Conversely, Indo- Fijian parents have a tendency to place pressure on their children to excel academically. Indo-Fijians urge their children to place school work first, ahead of housework, jobs and social activities, in particular, even including those sponsored by the schools. Parents and elders expect their children to do well academically. Accordingly, parents constantly remind their children to think of themselves as being as good as anyone else. Furthermore, parents and elders often say to their children (Nabuka, 1983): “Obey your teachers!” “Do your school work!” “Stay out of trouble!” “You are there to learn!” “Keep trying harder!” “Keep pushing yourself!” .Unfortunately this is not common among indigenous Fijian parents. The importance of personal investment in education has traditionally not been a high priority: instead, maintaining communal solidarity has been heavily emphasised (Ravuvu, 1987).

2.1.3 Home Environment

Most research that have been conducted in the area of cultural influences on academic achievement generally investigate the influence of the students' cultural background and achievement motivation on their academic performance. Almost all the participants perceived that there were three categories of obligations that affected their academic performance. Nabuka (1984) investigated the influence of home background variables on the achievement of Fijian and Indian students. He found that among the home background variables that were significant in their descriptive interrelationships were: distance of the school from student's homes; allowance for homework; number of books in the homes; number of books read; father's/guardian's level of education; student's job aspirations; availability of text books; and place of student's residence.

Nabuka further analysed these variables and included help for homework, student's education aspirations, and the importance of passing examinations. He found that the four home background variables that were most important in discriminating between Fijian and Indian students were: place of student's residence; number of storybooks in the home; father's/guardian's level of education; and availability of text books to students.

He also found that Indian students have more story books and text books available to them than their Fijian counterparts, and this he concluded, may be responsible in

part for their better achievement results. In addition to this he reported that Fijian schools have poorer library, science equipment and general school facilities than those of Indian schools.

Puamau (1999) in her research on Affirmative Action for Fijian education reported that many of her research informants had identified some deficiencies in the home background of indigenous Fijians to account for their poor performance in school.

Quoting a senior academic on the cycle of disadvantage associated with low socio-economic status, “we have a vicious circle situation...On average, unfortunately, Fijian students come from lower socio-economic background or homes with much less money for books, for study space that perpetuate itself in their lack of achievement” (Puamau 1999: 2). Puamau also reported that many of her informants argued that while indigenous Fijian parents may have educational and career aspirations for their children but may not know how to facilitate school success. This had negative influences on their children’s performances in school.

Puamau quoting Adi Litia Qionibaravi, the then chief accountant at the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, who states that:

The way our home is structured, we don't provide for facilities to enable our children to study and parents also do not know or do not understand that they have an important role to play in our children's education like assisting the children, making sure that they do their homework....be there to answer their

questions...make sure that they attend school interviews. Attend fundraising for the school and things like that. (cited in Puamau 1999:157)

Sir Len Usher [cited in Puamau, 1999:157] endorses this viewpoint. He states:

I think one of the problems...is the general way of life. It's very difficult for children to study in the evenings because in most village houses, the light is not very good and also there is very little privacy...With grog sessions going on, it's very difficult for children to study or do their homework. The general way of life does not make it easy for children to study or do homework. The general way of life does not make it easy for children to spend a lot of time in study except when they are actually in school. In addition to this, weddings, deaths, a new baby is born, visitation are some of the cultural obligations that takes place in the home. (cited in Puamau 1999:157)

Another home background factor identified by a few is in terms of a conflict of values between the indigenous Fijians student meeting the needs required for success at school, on the one hand and the demands placed on the child in the rural area to carry out daily chores on the other. Dr Nii-Plange (cited in Puamau 1999), an expatriate from Ghana who was a former Head of Sociology at USP observes that “the young kid in school becomes a victim of this conflict because more time is allocated for him to do other things than to do what he really needs to do to get through in the school system.”.

In sum, then, home background factors considered to be impediments to the educational progress of indigenous Fijians students are: low socio-economic status; little or no formal education on parents' part and the kinds of priorities that parents have for their children. The ignorance of poorly educated indigenous Fijian parents on what is needed to facilitate the educational needs of their children has been particularly emphasised by some informants.

Another interesting point emerging from Puamau's research on Fijian education is that the distinctions between rural-urban and Fijian-Indian ethnic divisions are not as clear-cut as people think. In other words, the demarcation between rural and urban is not as strong as some informants have made them out to be. This is borne out in the sense that rural indigenous Fijians are a heterogeneous group as are those in urban centres. Similarly, the homogeneity that is accorded to Indo-Fijians by some informants in terms of the disadvantages they face is not borne out in the data. As the informants have pointed out, socio-economic class and level of education reached are far better indicators of how children will do at school than whether one lives in the urban or rural area or whether, indeed, one is indigenous Fijian or Indo Fijian.

In terms of psychological studies, Basow (1982) and Kishor (1981, 1983) have concluded that Fijians have lower levels of self concept and a more external locus of control than Indians. Kishor also found that Fijians valued education less than Indians and had less academic motivation.

Studies have investigated variables interfering with Fijian academic achievement. Besides, typical ethnic Fijian home situation is a difficult environment for children's study. Ethnic Fijian homes are usually crowded, have little privacy, and this often deprives children of the time and space to study (White, 2001). Thus, children's concentration on their work is often distracted. In particular, adolescents who become more independent and need

their privacy (Peterson, 1996) might find it even more difficult to study at home. That is, the socio-cultural background of the ethnic Fijians is a disadvantage in children's educational progress.

2.1.4 Yaqona Drinking

Yaqona drinking is important in ceremonial Fijian culture and social gatherings but excessive consumption of yaqona is becoming a problem. It absorbs income as well as removes fathers from the family. In both the rural and urban areas, for instance, if people come to visit, the adults will drink grog and there will be no place for the students to study, particularly since many low socio-economic status indigenous Fijians live in one or two room houses. In this instance, the main living area will be taken up by adults drinking grog. In the rural area, the only good light would most likely be used for the grog session thus depriving the student of the best light for study purposes.

Many teachers in the rural areas also become participants in excessive yaqona consumption, thus resulting in their reduced effectiveness in their professional work. Instances have been cited where teachers leave classes unattended while they drink yaqona. Jenkins and Singh (1996) noted that yaqona has the ability to sap energy and support listlessness and there can be little doubt that it substantially inhibits performance of duties in non-traditional professional environments, including the civil service and teaching.

The excessive drinking of yaqona as well has been identified as another impediment on Fijian education. Excessive drinking of yaqona by indigenous Fijian adults has been identified by some informants as a major social problem that impedes the social and educational development of the indigenous Fijian community. Participants have expressed that drinking of yaqona at home limits their movement in the home.

Mosese a form seven student admits that he normally wakes up early in the morning to attend to his homework whenever there is a grog drinking session at home. He does not have a study table and they live in a small house. Drinking grog takes place about three times a week at home whenever they have a bible meeting, a youth meeting or a family get-together.

2.1.5 Parental Involvement

The crucial role Fijian parents play in the academic achievement of their children is highlighted in a number of studies, including those by Dakuidreketi (1995), Ahart Ali (1998) and Sofield (1983). Mere Tora, Acting Principal Education Officer responsible for secondary education, cited in Puamau (1999), also argues that Indigenous Fijian parents value education but lack the knowledge of how to meet the educational needs of their children. She maintains that indigenous Fijian parents definitely value education. Their problem is that “they are ignorant” and “need to be guided...to have the attitude to be able to give that support” (T19:15).

Puamau [1999] reported that data from her research seems to advocate that indigenous Fijians parents who have not received much formal education let their cultural and social obligations take precedence over the education of their children. In relation to this Puamau concluded that while many Fijians might value education their lack of formal education disables them from knowing what is required to facilitate the educational needs of their children. Puamau reported that a senior academic suggests that “Fijian parents, on the whole lean more towards the school and say that is the responsibility of the school for my child to achieve and it is not my responsibility”. (T50:2).

Bessie Ali, a former principal of Yat Sen Secondary School emphasised the need for a change in attitude displayed by parents .She argued that it boils down to this day-to-day detail that somehow we have to reinforce. There have to be somehow more educational programmes for them about daily routines, what to do for their children when they are at home with them for the first five years because those are the most important years....I believe there should be less emphasis on fundraising and more on advising parents what to do, how to improve children’s performance (T18:1-2). Jitoko (2003) supports the above view. He maintains that lack of commitment to education by parents and the general community has been seen as the major problem facing Fijian education in Fijian schools. In addition to this, Veramu (1990), working within an ethnographic paradigm, found that rural Fijian students had low self-esteem and that their parents did not seem to be committed to their children's education.

A number of researchers have also highlighted the crucial role played by Fijian parents towards their children's education. Bole (1975) attributed the poor performance amongst the Fijian children to lack of association between family, learning environment and school performance. His study also highlighted that Fijian parents generally lack the vision and direction of what they wish their children to become later on in their lives.

The data obtained from various researches on this issue all highlight the important need for Fijian parents to give their children's education the attention it deserves in order to improve their academic performance. What is also emerging from the discussions is the importance of having educated parents because education is self-supporting and self-sustaining. If parents are educated they will adopt a new set of values and system altogether and ensure that their children are also educated.

The various research on this topic all highlight that many low-income, inadequately educated indigenous Fijians do not understand the conditions that are essential at home to assist their children become better achievers, such as: providing time and privacy to study; placing the educational needs of their children as first priority; buying school books; attending teacher-parent evenings; and so forth.

2.1.6 Cultural Influence

While researching Affirmative Action and Racial Inequalities in Fiji Education,

Puamau (1999) reported that in addition to the disadvantages associated with location and home background factors, her informants identified some cultural factors as impediments to the success of Fijians at school. She stated that a poor attitude towards education as one such impediment. Puamau attributes one of her claims, that Fijians are underachieving, to the low priority they place on education. Speed is alleged to have argued that the traditional way of life requires that social functions such as deaths and weddings, take precedence in their lives, even for the more educated ones. Speed identifies the *yaqona* as “the curse of the Fijian society” when it is used excessively in both the villages and urban areas. In relation to the Fijian tradition, Puamau summaries Speed’s statement as follows:

“ They’re doing badly in school because of our traditional way of life...because Fijians are never taught the importance of education. We never really appreciate; never connect why education is important and vital so we don’t apply it. Even for reasonably educated Fijian parents, there’s still a question mark there. We don’t devote enough time for our children... Our social calendar is more important - the oga, and solevu so education comes as a low priority.”

She is alleged to have said that the low priority placed on education by the parents and the community therefore does not make conditions conducive for good teaching and learning.

Puamau ([1999) also quoted from statements made by Ted Young, the then General Secretary of the Fijian Teachers’ Association on the effects of culture on education. Young stated that while non-Fijian communities have concentrated on the educational development of their children, as this is a central concern for them,

Fijians have tended to place priorities on social, cultural, and religious obligations. These commitments will not go away overnight, as they are part of the Fijian way of life.

Bole (1972) on the other hand, highlights the importance of values, Fijian culture, self esteem, poverty and concepts of knowledge as the influencing factors in achievement. To succeed, one must adapt and accept change and be able to live and work within a changed and changing environment. While culture and the Fijian way of life have often been blamed for Fijian underachievement, Kishor and Sofield (1983) argue that more accurate and more empirical studies are needed to clarify the extent to which cultural ways develop and affect the cognitive processes of Fijians. This is essential if a clear picture is to be obtained. In addition, more research needs to be undertaken on the relevance of Fijian values and culture to the current education system.

Tierney (1970) examined the framework on the academic performance of Fijian students. He suggested that for Fijians to succeed, education must be culturally inclusive. He further argues that while the Fijian way of life promotes togetherness and is communally oriented, a positive support from the parents, villagers and community at large is imperative to assist Fijian education.

2.1.7 Religious Commitment

In many Fijian families, education is ranked a low priority in comparison to the church and the land. Many Fijian families devote a great deal of time, effort,

money and commitment to the work and responsibility of the church but not as much to the school and the educational welfare of their children. This competition of allegiance between the church and the education of children puts many parents in a dilemma, and the church often emerges the winner. This is an unfortunate situation, as the church and the school can complement each other. Also with greater commitment and direction, the promotion of a strong education ethic can be developed.

Whatever the denomination, the church occupies a central position in the lives of many Fijian families. Today many Fijians contribute to church activities in a big way and in many cases more than they would for their own family needs and education. Contribution for a new church or a preacher's home will always take precedence over the raising of funds for school textbooks and school buildings. It is a well known fact that Fijians give beyond their means to build big churches. They enjoy these communal activities and spend more time on church business than with their children. Indeed, it can be argued that the church influences, and in some instances, dictates the way many Fijian people live. Fijians are known to respect and follow whatever is directed by the church in terms of their religious obligations, their moral beliefs and learning, family commitments and other undertakings.

An agency that has been identified as impeding the educational progress of the indigenous Fijians is the church, particularly the Methodist Church. For

instance, Ratu Mosese Tuisawau (cited in Puamau , 1999) argues that the demands by the church impinge on educational priorities of indigenous Fijian parents who “have a vague notion about what education might mean for the children” . In his view, “a factor that moulds this kind of attitude comes in from activities generated by church leaders so a lot of time is used up because of church activities”. For him, church directives “grip the minds of parents in a very significant way and take away the kind of attention that they should be giving, focussing,...for the future of their growing children”. (T53:3) A more extreme view is taken by a senior educator at USP who maintains that “the church has become the biggest exploiter of Fijians” in the sense that “they have taken a lot more resources from the Fijians and the church now plays almost an opium kind of role” (T11:13).

A similar view is taken by Pratap Chand (cited in Puamau, 1999) the General Secretary of FTU. Chand believes that indigenous Fijian parents are too involved in church activities in terms of time and money which can be detrimental to their children’s academic performance. He refers to this as “over-churching”. To emphasise the hold the Christian church has on indigenous Fijians, Dr Ahmed Ali compares it with what the Indo Fijians underwent in the indentured labour system during the period of colonial rule. He notes, “The Indians went through the sub-imperialism of the CSR company and that oriented them to success in this world and the Fijians went through the sub-imperialism of the Methodist church which prepared them for salvation in the

next world”.(T2:14)

This is similar to what Josevata Kamikamica observes about the church. In his view, the church does not encourage the valuing of education. As he puts it:

If we hear sermons in the church, they run down education. Na vuli, qori e na sega ni vakabulai keda. Na vakabulai keda ga o Jisu. But we all know that God has also called us to understand his creation. That is so we can make better use of what is available to us. (T16:7).

The Fijian phrases here are translated as “Education will not save us. Only Jesus can save us. We all know that only Jesus can save us.” Kamikamica in this instance is referring to the notion that the Methodist Church seems to generate resignation on the part of the followers that their children’s education is unimportant. Religion is more important. This seems to negate the Protestant work ethic which the Roman Catholic Church is renowned for. According to Adi Kuini Speed, we must not treat different Christian denominations as a homogenous entity. As she puts it:

...Catholics (who) attend the Catholic schools...tend to do better than the rest...because of the emphasis on education within their social community in terms of the congregation and the teaching ...this rubs off from the parents to the children so they work as a team. Whereas in the Methodist church, my church, this does not happen. Our social calendar is more important, where we are going to meet next Sunday, who we are going to entertain, where they are from, can you get some food...(T32:11)

Reverend Dr. Ilaitia Tuwere, President of the Methodist church in Fiji, endorses Kamikamica’s view by stating that “education is power” and “whoever is educated has power in today’s society “. (cited in Puamau, 1999: 178). He goes on to say that “the church should be a liberating force in Fijian society “, in every area it should be a liberating force in Fijian society“, in every area

including education.

He notes:

It should not run its business as usual...just preaching and things like that. We should attempt to interpret the faith so that it becomes a living force addressing the realities of the day, what our children are facing and that is what should be happening to the church. And we should be honestly asking ourselves as to what aspect of culture is inhibiting progress and growth and we say "this is the weak part of our culture "as well as affirm those aspects of culture that encourage growth and progress. (T12:3)

Truancy has also been raised as a contributing factor for the under-achievement of Fijians. Many factors are identified as contributing to a child's absence from school as raised by Kishor. These are usually economic, social and cultural. Some students miss school because there is no money to pay for their school fees. Others miss school because there is no money for their bus fare or lunch. Children fail to attend school because of family, social or cultural commitments.

Esther Williams, DVC at the USP, provides us with an insight into how indigenous Fijian parents in urban areas value education in the same way that Indo Fijians and the Chinese community do, whereas indigenous Fijians in rural areas would value the church above all else. In many Fijian families, education is ranked a low priority in comparison to the church and the land. Many Fijian families give a great deal of time, effort, money and commitment to the work and responsibility of the church and not as much to the school and the educational welfare of their children. The competition of allegiance between the church and the schooling of children puts many parents in a dilemma, and the church often comes out the winner (Puamau, 1999). This is an unfortunate

situation, as the church and the school can complement each other and with greater commitment and direction, the promotion of a strong education ethic can be developed.

Commitment to the church by ethnic Fijians is very strong. The church generally has three functions: It provides ethnic Fijians with a place to socialise and to have a religious service. It facilitates the exchange of information like social events and issues and thirdly it encourages interaction and communication between people from different communities, since different provincials come to attend a church, even from a distance.

One's participation in ceremonies and church activities enhances one's total commitment to communal expectations and requirements. Moreover, one's contribution to the Christian church, commonly the Methodist church is the most obvious manifestation of ethnic Fijian *vanua*. Even among ethnic Fijians who live in metropolitan centres abroad such as Sydney, adhering to a religion is of vital importance. Over 92% of the ethnic Fijians who live in Sydney are practising church members in Sydney (Stanwix and Connell, 1995). Fijian Methodist Choirs from Sydney and even Melbourne are often represented in the Annual Methodist Choir Competition held in Fiji every August. This seriously indicates how Fijians are committed to church obligations.

Participants confirm that the whole family participates in church activities. The

children attend Sunday school before they join the rest of the congregation in the main church service which normally ends at about midday. The afternoons are also booked for village or provincial meetings and members look forward to attending because it encourages socialisation, facilitates the exchange of information and issues and encourages interaction and communication between people from different villages. The whole of Sunday is devoted to the church. Even during the week there are also weekly prayer meetings, bible study, choir practice, women's fellowship, men's fellowship, youth meetings and even visitation.

2.1.8 Attitude

Another factor that has been identified as contributing to Fijian underachievement is the idea that too much security leads to complacency. An evidence of this, Ratu Mosese Tuisawau, Rewa High Chief and former Member of Parliament, argues that too much security is a demotivator and does not encourage individuals to work hard in school.

As he puts it,

The non-Fijians mainly the Indians are raised in an environment where their minds are suffused with ideas of security...whereas in the Fijian koro,, there is generally an attitude of laissez faire, why worry about the morrow...where the preservation of cultural values is more important than the future of the young.(T53:3).

In sum then, indigenous Fijians are perceived to lack the appropriate attitudes that lead to success in education. One way that this is manifested is in the prioritising of their daily lives. It would seem that education is not viewed as the number one priority in their lives. This is frightening as it cuts across lack of

formal education and low socio economic status. This is exacerbated by the obligations and demands of indigenous Fijians by their traditional leaders, kinship community and the church.

2.2 Urban Poverty

Tuisawau (cited in Puamau1999: 166) in her case-study research into the indigenous Fijian urban poor and the reasons for low retention at school reported that children could not do their homework because they could not afford the text books. This would lead to other factors and eventually they would drop out of school altogether.

Another effect of poverty was the lack of privacy in the home. The students did not have enough space because they lived in cramped conditions with other members of the household. Yet another effect of poverty was the problem of bus fares. If there was no money available for bus fares to school, the student would miss a lot of school and eventually would be too far behind to catch up (Tuisawau cited in Puamau 1999:166).

Tuisawau asserts that the economic status would determine the quality of the home environment because [this], in as far as provisions for study are concerned, would determine whether the students can do the back-up at home or will determine whether the students can have access to education where it has been offered (cited in Puamau1999). Tuisawau adds that for indigenous Fijians who are poor and live in the urban area, their inability to attend school is seen to

lead to a lot of absenteeism which progressively becomes worse to the point where the students simply drop out of school.

2.3 Living Away From Home

Many indigenous Fijian students are sent to semi-urban schools for a post primary education because of many reasons and a major one being the non availability of schools in their areas. As a result children often live with their relatives in urban centres.

There is a general belief that the children who are sent to lodge with their relatives in urban centres to pursue a secondary education, generally find that their adapted home circumstance is not conducive to producing good results in schooling because of the tendency by their relatives to consider their educational needs of secondary importance (Puamau, 1999). Young commented that children become an additional problem to the host families. He points out that: “a lot of rural parents....send their children to ... live with their relatives and really, it’s quite difficult for their relatives in Suva, Lautoka, and Nadi They are not policed, nor monitored very well. Time is not given to them to spend on their school work. Relatives use them as house girls...Urban families meet the usual problems and when these relatives come to stay with them, they become an additional problem”.

Puamau (1999) also takes account of Khan’s view in her research. Khan argued

that indigenous Fijian girls are considered a burden on the family they were living with. He adds that they were expected to do housework at home and all the other errands.

On the other hand Nabuka found that most of the Indian students are well distributed among their nuclear families suggesting the value of education to them. Education became a joint family venture, and siblings reside with their older brothers and sisters, who are often better educated than the parents, in order to be more successful at school. Nabuka also discovered that Indo Fijian students reside with the better educationally qualified members of the family. In contrast, Fijians, who achieve less well in school reside mostly with their less educated parents/guardians.

2.4 Aboriginal Students

In a research carried out by Malcolm and Rochecouste (2002) on Aboriginal students and the likely problems indigenous students are faced with in higher education show that these students also have a distinctive pattern of participation in higher education. They tend, in comparison to other groups, to begin later and to take longer to complete their studies (Encel, 2000), to be more likely to enrol in external or mixed mode, and in bridging courses or undergraduate studies (Encel, 2000, Schwab, 1996). They have lower graduation rates and are more likely to withdraw from higher education if they see their community links being threatened (Scwab, 1996).

The presence of indigenous students in higher educational institutions can be

seen as evidence that they value the benefits of higher education and the culture of which it is a part (Bourke 1994). However it does not indicate that they are prepared to leave their own culture behind. This has come through as one of the strongest findings in a recent review of studies of indigenous student literacy in higher education (Malcolm and Rocheccouste, 2002). Of particular importance among students was the adjustment to tertiary study. Most students recalled a period of adjustment, tantamount to culture shock, when entering university. They saw it as a totally different world from anything previously experienced. This included the need to adjust to a new set of power relations which placed the white man up there in charge, black woman down there and “at first (I) did not feel confident because of the authority figures but in the second semester it was okay” . The power imbalance was particularly disconcerting for one student, “I felt that there was no room for negotiation. I felt shame, felt at the other end of the scale”. (The term shame, in the context of Aboriginal English, refers to a complex of feelings experienced by Aboriginal people when they sense unwelcome prominence before the group).

Other students claimed that they had to adjust to non-Aboriginal learning styles which often focused on the imparting of decontextualised theoretical knowledge instead of the Aboriginal way of story telling and drawings or learning from real life experiences was expressed. In fact some students claimed that they felt compelled to adopt non-Aboriginal learning styles when a lecturer did not seem open to accommodating students from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The study also revealed Aboriginal students' discontentment on the new education system that was provided to them and the adequate recognition of indigenous knowledge. Indigenous students felt that their own contributions and perspective in the face of intransigent negative stereotyped was described by one student as similar to pushing into a strong head wind.

The study also commented on the failure to understand and acknowledge Aboriginal diversity. Participants found that there was a tendency to treat all Aboriginal students as the same and not to acknowledge the diversity which exists within Aboriginal society and which is fundamental for connection to the land and to all communication between Aboriginal people. Finally, participants expressed concern about the treatment of Aboriginal knowledge, and particularly the knowledge of Aboriginal elders. They felt that the views of white anthropologists were not always correct or appropriate

A research conducted by Peter Ninnes on the Solomon Island Students' Perceptions of Appropriate Behaviours for Success in Schooling also commented the significance of culture in learning. Knowledge is not something which results from one individual to another. Rubinstein (1981) referring to the Maloese society (in northern Vanuatu) notes that the legitimacy of knowledge was directly related to the standing in the community of the individual imparting the knowledge. Knowledge could be divided, shared and transferred

by most powerful men to their successors.

Traditionally, education is a holistic process, not confined to a narrow range of academic subjects. Kemelfield (1980) reports that in Upe, North Solomons, education was the responsibility of all members of the community and combined basic knowledge, practical skills, and moral training with an emphasis on interdependence and cooperation.

2.5 Maori Education

Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. They are of Polynesian origin and constitute approximately 15% of New Zealand's population (Bevan-Brown, 2000).

In 1996 a new national Special Education Policy (SE2000) was introduced in New Zealand. Bevan-Brown's responsibility in the project was to investigate the adequacy of special educational services offered to Maori learners with special needs. The feedback from over one thousand principals, teachers, teacher aides, special educational professionals and parents has revealed a multitude of barriers to providing culturally appropriate, effective special education services to Maori learners.

When the principals, teachers and teacher aides were asked what factors limited their ability to provide a culturally appropriate service, the 'top five' barriers mentioned were:

1. Financial hardship of parents and *whanau* (extended family);
2. Low parental expectations;
3. Lack of parental support and involvement;
4. Shortage of teachers and special educational professionals with Maori language and cultural knowledge;
5. Insufficient funding from Government.

(Bevan-Brown, 2000)

These all present very real challenges to providing adequate and effective services. Parents may not be able to afford hearing aids or glasses, they may be working long hours and not have the time to hear their children's reading at night or attend meetings. In some homes the books and games that reinforce learning are not available and transport to special services such as speech language therapy is beyond the means of some parents. The issue of financial hardship is particularly pertinent to Maori parents as, similar to many ethnically diverse groups in other countries, in New Zealand Maori are socially and economically disadvantaged.

Summary

The socio-political, economic and cultural factors are important when considering the state of Fijian schools and schooling. Improvement in education cannot be seen in isolation. For Fijians, the family, values, the community, the church, the *vanua*, and the concept of time and silence are central to life. They are part of a whole. According to Ravuvu, for Fijians, the land, sea and forests are an extension of the self and all part of one large community. This is how Fijians view the world.

Students' achievements, therefore, are the results of many factors. Although it is difficult to determine the precise impact of these factors on the achievement of students, the fact remains that many Fijian children growing up in such difficult environments may not have the opportunity to get out of this situation and be doomed to a life where circumstances do not support their development and learning.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the research design and the research process for this study. They are derived from Action -Research, a method of data collection characteristic of Qualitative Research. The study involved forty five Fijian secondary school students from forms four, five and seven in three secondary schools in Suva.

This chapter consists of a discussion of the major characteristics of Action Research, semi structured, conversational, reflective interviews, document collection, and the reasons for using these methods of information gathering, as well as consideration of ethical concerns.

3.2 Action Research

Action research has grown considerably in popularity in the last two decades and has been accepted as a legitimate form of research. Literature on this research methodology indicates that it has been employed in curriculum development, professional development, and institutional improvement and policy development. Action research is usually conducted by teachers, administrators, or other educational professional for solving a specific problem or for providing information for decision making at the local level” (Wiersma,

2000:11).

The importance of teachers as action researchers was noted by Stenhouse when he popularised the idea of the teacher as a researcher, the classroom as a laboratory and students as a part of a “scientific community” (Stenhouse, 1979). Many have developed an orientation towards blending research with practical experience. This orientation is reflected in a belief that the “professionalisation of teachers will be best achieved through the adoption of a critical / revisionist or reflective / revisionist approach to change in educational practice, charging practitioners to engage in the research of their own practices and the experiences of those with whom they work, as a basis for improvement” (Elliot 1991, Hopkins 1985, McNiff 1998, Winter 1989 cited in Tickle, 1994: 5).

3.3 Characteristics of Action Research

Kemmis and McTaggart, distinguish action research from the everyday actions of teachers by claiming that:

“It is not research done on other people. Action research is research by particular people on their work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others. Action research involves people in theorizing about their practices- being inquisitive about circumstances, action and consequences and coming to understand the relationships between circumstances, actions and consequences in their own lives” Kemmis and McTaggart 199:2

Kurt Lewin is often regarded as the originator of action research. He describes action research as a spiral of steps that proceeds from planning to action to observation and finally to reflection. Lewin originally formulated action research for social problems but educationalists have borrowed much from it

(Lewin, 1946). Following from this (Altrichter, 1988) argues that by investigating a situation the action researchers are deeply implicated in, they also scrutinize their contribution to this situation and, consequently, their own competency and self - concept. This is what gives action research rigor and seriousness (cited in Schratz, 1993:50). On the other hand, Carr and Kemmis (1986) espoused that action research is a theoretical exploration into reflective practice and epistemology in education. The authors view action research as a method that can produce transformative practice in contrast to positivist or interpretive research methods, a view supported by McNiff (1993) who equates action research with praxis and self -development. Action research, McNiff suggests, closes the gap between teaching and learning, and link pedagogy to practice. Winter (1987) on the other hand promotes a reflexive type of action-research, one which also treats context sensitively. Practitioners are the ones that usually undertake action research because they are involved in the process through active participation (Mallick and Verma, 1999: Elliot, 1981). In addition to the above the use of action research varies with time, place and setting. The research is usually situational, collaborative, participatory, and self evaluative (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000).

The benefits of an action research approach in education is emphasized by Troyna and Carrington (1990) who state that:

it provides invaluable data on the influence of situational constraints such as school ethos, phase, type, ethnic composition and it serves to remind researchers of the varied institutional constraints under which teachers currently work" cited in Mallick and Verma, 1999:93.

The notion of reflection is central to action research, be it reflection -in - action, reflection - on - action, or critical reflection (Morrison, 1995). This is so because the researcher, and the participants who are the practitioners in the action research, are part of the social world that they are studying. Schon describes the concrete course of such reflection-in-action through vivid metaphor 'reflective conversation with the situation', (Schon, 1983:21) whereby the competent practitioner must be open to the unintended consequences of his/her experiment. Therefore the practitioner must hold a kind of 'double vision' (Schon,1983:23) while experimenting, implying that the practitioners will be reflecting on their experience and participation on cultural obligations all throughout the research process. Reflexivity, as noted earlier, is central to action research because the researchers are also the participants and practitioners in the research, as they are part of the social world they are studying. Schon (1983, 1987) argues strongly that systematic reflection is also an effective way for practitioners to learn.

3.4 Reasons for Choosing Action Research

For this study, I chose action research because I thought it was the most appropriate method. Action Research was appropriate to this study because it aimed to help those people who are directly concerned with the situation under research, to articulate, validate and develop their views and to propose appropriate action to improve the situation they work in.

In this study, I evaluated and reflected on my role as a Secondary school

teacher. Closely associated with this was the aim of improving my practice, a better understanding of that practice, and an improvement in the situation in which the practice is carried out. Action research is a useful way of doing research if one is a practitioner who wishes to improve one's understanding of that practice. My choice of methodology also took into consideration the fact that I too would benefit by conducting [an action] research on a topic which has direct and obvious relevance to my practice as a secondary school teacher.

3.5 Selecting Participants

Fifteen participants were chosen from each of the three secondary schools. Eight boys and seven girls were selected from each school. The students were in forms four, five and seven. The students were given a questionnaire to answer. The fifteen students who were interviewed were selected from their responses on the questionnaires. They were carefully selected after I had read through their responses in the questionnaires with the assistance of their respective teachers was also sought. Their selection aimed at a representative sample based on ethnicity, gender, academic performance as well as their socio- economic background.

3.6 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual understandings of the study are derived from international and local literature on indigenous education. Several works on Fijian education have provided theoretical foundations and conceptualisation to this research. Most of these advocates emphasise a host of factors that

contribute to Fijian achievement (Baba 1982), Dakuidreketi (1995), Nabobo (2001), Puamau (1999), Ravuvu (1987), Stewart (1983), and Tierney (1971]).

These are:

- socio-cultural;
- institutional;
- historical;
- structural; and
- spatial disadvantage.

The data presentation is guided by the four main research questions, which were:

- I. What is the Fijian secondary school students' perception of the effects of cultural, family and religious obligations on their academic results?
- II. How are cultural, family and religious obligations a contributing factor to Fijian students' achievement in schools?
- III. What specific cultural, family and religious obligations are perceived by secondary school students to negatively affect their academic performance?
- IV. How can they fulfil their cultural, family and religious obligations without neglecting their academic responsibilities?

3.7 Questionnaire

Questionnaires may be designed to gather either qualitative or quantitative data.

A well-designed questionnaire that is used effectively can gather information on both the overall performance of the test system as well as information on

specific components of the system. Questionnaires are a way in which data can be gathered from a potentially large number of respondents. Often they are the only feasible way to reach a number of reviewers large enough to allow statistical analysis of the results. In this research questionnaires were used to gather objective data through the use of closed questions format questions (Refer to Appendix 1). It was important to ask background questions only in the questionnaire given to students because I wanted to solicit personal information in relation to my topic of study. Questionnaires were given to all the students in forms four, five and seven in all the three schools.

Students were then selected for interview based on their responses on the questionnaires. Each respondent received the same set of questions phrased in exactly the same way. Questionnaires are, thus, supposed to yield more comparable data than do interviews. In many ways the interview and the questionnaire are similar. Both attempt to elicit the feelings, beliefs, experiences, or activities of respondents. There may also be as structured or unstructured as the situation demands.

3.8 Interview: Semi Structured Interview

The primary method of data collection was through a semi-structured, conversational interview. Semi- structured interviews are guided conversations where broad questions are asked, which do not constrain the conversation, and new questions are allowed to arise as a result of the discussion. This is different from questionnaires and surveys which contain very structured questions that

leave no room for digression.

A semi-structured interview is therefore a relatively informal, relaxed discussion centered on a predetermined topic. It is usually best to conduct such interviews in pairs with one person doing the interview and the other taking detailed notes. Semi-structured form of interview, “the one most favoured by educational researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling” (Wragg,1978).

The process of a semi-structured interview involves the interviewer presenting the context of the study and its objectives to the interviewee or interview group. Even though I had a set of questions prepared, they were fairly open questions, allowing the interviewees to express opinions through discussion. Questions were generally simple, with a logical sequence to help the discussion flow. I was mindful of the interview context and used sensitive listening and sensitive questioning. I used my experience as a teacher in judging responses, recording the interview and self-critical reviewing at the end of the interview. Wragg (1978) argues that “a skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feeling”. The way in which a response is made (the tone of the voice, facial expression, hesitation etc.) can provide information that a written response would conceal. These interviews usually lasted an hour.

The primary method of data collection, through a semi structured, reflective-conversational in-depth interview, enabled the students to describe their

perceptions and beliefs in their original voices”. Ruddock (1993:8) explains that “voices” are different from dialogue in that they are “more emotive, more disembodied, more disturbing.” He explains that “voices” can operate at different levels. One level can be representation of individuals or groups who have been denied the right to contribute or not to be heard and these “voices” address our conscience. At another level, “voices” remind us of the individuality that lies beneath the surface of institutional structures whose routine pushes us to work to “sameness” rather than to respond to difference. Using “voices” in a qualitative research according to Ruddock (1993) is important because firstly it suggests that researchers should set out to help outsiders and insiders understand what goes on in the school by giving weight to those who may otherwise be passed over namely, the minorities in the school. Secondly, it also suggests the need to check out the extent to which the schools’ stories about themselves allow for and reflect authentic and important differences of perspective and experience. Thus a list of probing questions will be used to stimulate the discussions. The nature of these discussions was focused on reflective and critical analyses of the experiences of the students. In my view, this approach was most appropriate for an in - depth study and is applicable to the context of Fijian cultural obligations.

The study also adopted a biographical approach whereby students were given the opportunity to critically reflect on their experiences on how cultural, religious and family obligations had affected their academic performance. This

was carried out through the *talanoa* sessions. Capell (cited in Ravuvu, 1987:214) believed that *talanoa* sessions will be appropriate because it is a more natural way of discussing and reflecting on experiences in a traditional Fijian context. In my view, this approach provided the students the opportunity to talk freely about their experiences. Interviewing is a “good way of accessing people’s perceptions, definitions of situations and constructions of reality and it is one of the most powerful ways of understanding others” (Punch, 1998:74). Interview techniques “also offer researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researcher” (Reinharz, 1992:19).

A semi-structured interview provides opportunities for both the interviewer, and, (in this study) the research participants, to express their feelings, clarify particular issues and ask probing questions in areas that seem appropriate in the context of conversation (Robson, 1993). In this context a more equal balance in the research relationship arises because the researcher and participants become co-creators of data (Burns, 1999). As mentioned earlier, the strengths of the semi structured interview are flexibility, adaptability, co-creating of data and a non-hierarchical approach, allowing the researcher and the participants to be more self-reflective and responsive to the interview.

3.8.1 Open Ended Questions in a Semi Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview contained semi structured questions. As stated by

York (1998:40), “semi structured interview is one with predetermined questions with an open-ended format that are asked of all respondents in the same manner.” In a semi-structured interview, open-ended questions provide the interviewer with greater freedom and less restriction (Kadushin, 1990). An open-ended question is one which allows the participant to answer in his/her own words. This allows the participants to feel as if they are partly in control of the interview. By asking open-ended questions, the interviewer portrays her genuine interest in what the participant has to say regarding the topic of study. Open-ended questions provided the avenues for the participants to introduce relevant information, ideas and concepts which I did not think of during the question selection.

York (year of publication, page number) also provides guidelines one should follow when conducting a semi-structured interview. The first is to be aware of your own predispositions about the subject under study. This involves self awareness so that the interviewer does not focus on personal views and interests. The second is to engage the interviewee in the validation of your notes. Here, it is necessary for the interviewer to clarify his/her notes so that there is little room for misinterpretation. The third is to seek evidence which confirms or disproves your initial impression whereby the interviewer should recognise themes that are prevalent throughout the interview process. The fourth is to engage in note taking methods that place minimal burden upon your memory. It is important to acquire note taking skills so that one can analyze the

interview in an accurate manner. The interviewer should review these notes shortly after the interview has taken place because after a few days you may not remember what the notes mean (York, 1998).

According to Kadushin (1990) there are many advantages to asking open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. One advantage, as mentioned earlier, is that open-ended questions allow the participants to introduce significant material that the interviewer may not have thought about. Open-ended questions give the participant the freedom to answer in a variety of ways. The response may be verbal or the interviewer may use direct observation of the participant's non - verbal cues for example gestures, body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Open-ended questions are more likely than closed -ended questions, which are used in quantitative analysis, to provide, "information about the interviewee's feelings and intensity of feeling and are more likely to provide information about the interviewee's explanation on his attitude and behaviours" (Kadushin, 1990: p.183).

Semi-structured type of interview is one which researchers use to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation. It can also be used to explore interesting areas for further investigation. This type of interview involves asking informants open-ended questions, and probing wherever necessary to obtain data deemed useful by the researcher. As in-depth interviewing often involves qualitative data, it is

also called qualitative interviewing. Patton (1987:113) suggests three basic approaches to conducting qualitative interviewing:

i. The informal conversational interview

This type of interview resembles a chat, during which the informants may sometimes forget that they are being interviewed. Most of the questions asked will flow from the immediate context. Informal conversational interviews are useful for exploring interesting topic/s for investigation and are typical of 'ongoing' participant observation fieldwork.

ii. The general interview guide approach (commonly called guided interview)

When employing this approach for interviewing, a basic checklist is prepared to make sure that all relevant topics are covered. The interviewer is still free to explore, probe and ask questions deemed interesting to the researcher. This type of interview approach is useful for eliciting information about specific topics. For this reason, Wenden (1982) formulated a checklist as a basis to interview her informants in a piece of research leading towards her PhD studies. She considers that the general interview guide approach is useful as it "allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study.'

iii. The standardised open-ended interview

Researchers using this approach prepare a set of open-ended questions

which are carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of minimising variation in the questions posed to the interviewees. In view of this, this method is often preferred for collecting interviewing data when two or more researchers are involved in the data collecting process. Although this method provides less flexibility for questions than the other two mentioned previously, probing is still possible, depending on the nature of the interview and the skills of the interviewers (Patton 1987:112).

3.8.2 Reasons for choosing semi structured interview

Conducting research involves a number of decisions on what methodology is appropriate for the study. For this study, I chose to conduct a semi-structured interview with the forty five participants after carefully reading and analysing the questionnaires that were given to all forms four, five and seven in the three secondary schools. I had also decided to use semi structured interview as the main method to collect data for the study since an interpretative approach (qualitative in nature) was adopted for the investigation. The central concern of the interpretative research is understanding human experiences at a holistic level. Because of the nature of this type of research, investigations are often connected with methods such as in-depth interviewing, participant observation and the collection of relevant documents. Maykut & Morehouse (1994:46) state that:

“the data of qualitative inquiry is most often people’s words and actions, and thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behaviour“.

The most useful ways of gathering these forms of data are participant observation, in-depth interviews, group interviews and the collection of relevant documents. Observation and interview data is collected by the researcher in the form of field notes and audio taped interviews, which are later transcribed for use in data analysis.

3.8.3 Questioning techniques

Individuals vary in their ability to articulate their thoughts and ideas. With good questioning techniques, researchers will be more able to facilitate the subjects' accounts and to obtain quality data from them. Current literature suggests some questioning techniques. Cicourel (1964) reflects that 'many of the meetings which are clear to one will be relatively opaque to the other, even when the intention is genuine communication.' Accordingly, it is important to use words that are sensitive to the respondent's context and world view. To enhance their comprehensibility to the interviewees, I ensured that questions asked during the interview were easy to understand, short and devoid of jargon.

Patton (1987:124) points out that interviewers often put several questions and ask them all as one. He suggests that researchers should ask one thing at a time. This will eliminate any unnecessary burden of interpretation on the interviewees. During the interview I took special care to avoid the 'machine gun approach' and asked one question at a time. Patton (1987:122-3) stated that researchers should ask truly open-ended questions. Truly open-ended questions

do not pre - determine the answers and allow room for the informants to respond in their own terms. For example, “What do you think about your parents’ involvement in the religious obligations they participate in?” “What is your opinion of the traditional and family duties which you are required to attend to?” The questions asked during the interview were open -ended questions which allowed the interviewee to think of their answers before answering.

Cohen and Manion [1994:277] stressed the importance of sequencing the questions. This refers to using a special kind of questioning technique called ‘Funneling’, which means asking from general to specific, from broad to narrow. I started off the interview with general questions before I asked more focusing questions.

Patton [1987:125-126) placed emphasis on probe and follow up questions The purpose of probing is to deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired. During the interview this was done through direct questioning of what had just been said, for example, “Could you say something more about that?”; “Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?; “Do you have further examples of this?” Alternatively, a mere nod, or “mmm,” or just a pause can indicate to the subject to go on with the description. Repeating significant words of an answer can lead to further

elaboration (Kvale 1996:133).

Throughout the interview, the researchers should clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewee's statements to avoid misinterpretations on their part. Kvale (1996:135) suggests that researchers may use question like 'Is it correct that you feel that....?'; "Does the expression....cover what you have just expressed?" to allow the interviewees to confirm or correct what has been interpreted by the researchers.

I ensured that deep questions were avoided. These may irritate the informants, possibly resulting in an interruption of the interview. Cicourel (1964) agrees that "the respondents may well feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep."

During the interview I encouraged a free rein but ensured that I maintained control. I was prepared to let the interviewees 'travel' wherever they like, but I kept a rough checklist of ideas or areas I wanted to explore. Palmer (1928:171) suggests that proficient interviewers should always be in control of a conversation which they guide and bend to the service of their research interest. This was achieved, for example, by respecting the informants' opinions, supporting their feelings, or recognising their responses. This could also be shown by my tone of voice, expressions or even gestures. In addition, Kvale (1996:128) suggests that 'a good contact is established by attentive listening,

with the interviewer showing interest, understanding, and respect for what the subjects say’.

He continues, ‘good interviewer allows subjects to finish what they are saying, lets them proceed at their own rate of thinking and speaking.’(148)

In addition to questioning techniques, there are other factors which may have an impact on the interview. Cohen and Manion (1994:286) cite Tuckman’s (1972) guidelines for interviewing procedures, as follows:

At the meeting, the interviewer should brief the respondent as to the nature or purpose of the interview (being as candid as possible without biasing responses) and attempt to make the respondent feel at ease. He should explain the manner in which he will be recording responses, and if he plans to tape-record, he should get the respondent’s assent. At all times, an interviewer must remember that he is a data collection instrument and try not to let his own biases, opinions, or curiosity affect his behaviour.

3.8.4. Conducting the Interview

I was fortunate to have the support of the school principals of the three schools. I used the Counsellor’s room when I interviewed the participants from School A. In School B, I used the school’s Conference Room to interview the participants because it was big and spacious. The assistant principal of School C allowed me to interview my participants in her room.

The interviews were conducted in Fijian as well as in English because I wanted to ensure that I had gathered the information I needed for this research. The use of a tape recorder further assisted me to record accurately the information revealed by my informants. I also made sure that throughout the interview,

consistency was maintained. At the start of each interview I explained to the participant the purpose and objective of the study. I also made it clear what use would be made of the data they provided and thanked each one for participating and sparing important time to share their views, before the research questions were clarified. Finally I emphasised the issue of confidentiality.

A list of probing questions was used to stimulate the discussion (Refer to Appendix 2). The nature of the discussion was focused on reflective and critical analyses of the experiences of these forty five Fijian secondary school students. Reflection was invoked in different ways: in expressing their views, in evaluating events that take precedence in the home front and relating them to school priorities.

I used attentive listening, and other verbal and non-verbal signs of attention, to keep my informant talking for about 45 minutes. In this way the informant appeared to talk freely. I think that having someone listen carefully to your every word, and show every sign of interest and familiarity is an affirming experience.

The informants also responded actively to the discussion, since most of them were frustrated with the type of lives they led everyday. It must be borne in mind that almost all of the participants lived with either their relatives or with their parents in an extended family environment. At the end of each discussion I

repeated the guarantee about anonymity, and thanked the informant enthusiastically.

The informants also responded actively to the discussion, since for most of them this was the first opportunity to express their opinions on how we value traditional, family and religious obligations. All interviews began in the same open-ended way. I wanted to make sure that the information I collected was contributed freely by the informants. I did not want it to be determined by the questions I asked. As the interview progressed, the probes increased in number and detail in order to allow the data and interpretations placed upon it by my informants to lead me deeper into the study.

3.8.5 Advantages of the Interview

The interview has a number of advantages. First it is flexible and applicable to many different types of problems. It is flexible in the sense that the interviewer may change the mode of questioning if the occasion demands. If responses given by a subject are unclear, questions can be rephrased.

The interview is also useful in obtaining responses from young children or illiterates. Responses from such persons must be obtained orally rather than in written form.

The flexibility of the interview is also advantageous to respondents. Highly

structured pencil-and-paper instruments do not allow respondents the freedom to enlarge upon, retract, or question items presented to them. In an interview the respondent has the opportunity to ask for further information.

A third advantage of the interview is its usefulness in collecting personal information, attitudes, perceptions, or beliefs by probing for additional information. Inconsistent or vague replies can be questioned.

Another advantage of the interview concerns motivation. Almost all interviews attempt to develop rapport between the interviewer and the respondent. Once the respondent accepts the interview as a non threatening situation, respondents are more likely to be open and frank. This openness adds to the validity of the interview.

3.8.6 Disadvantages of the Interview

Interviewing is time consuming. The actual interview itself will vary in length [Robson, 1993]. Anything going much over an hour may be making unreasonable demands on busy interviewees, and could have the effect of reducing the number of persons willing to participate which in turn may lead to biases in the sample that you achieve.

In certain circumstances it can be increasingly difficult to obtain co-operation from potential interviewees. In addition, all interviews require careful

preparation, which takes time. Arrangements to visit; securing necessary permissions from relevant authorities, confirming the arrangements with the interviewees, rescheduling appointments due to unforeseen circumstances; these need more time.

3.9 Ethical Issues

For my purposes, ethics is defined, following Canvan (1977:10) “as a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others”. Ethical concerns were addressed in this research, mainly because I felt a certain responsibility, not only to my profession in my quest for knowledge and the pursuit of the “truth” but also to the participants upon whom I depended for this study (Cohen.et. al., 2000). I took into consideration the possible effects of my research on the participants. I respected their dignity as human beings, and tried to protect their real identities. Strachan (1997) had expressed the need to address issues of confidentiality and anonymity in order to assume the trust of those being involved in a study. The process of informed consent was also important. It was sometimes difficult at the writing stage, where some participants’ comments were very sensitive but worth making. Part of the research strategy was to build on cooperative relationships among research participants and hopefully contribute to their further development (Altrichter 1990).

I attempted to comply with these criteria by emphasizing ethical codes, which I made clear to participants at the beginning. The ethical principles of negotiation

“control” and “confidentiality” were of central importance to the study. Action research allowed the researcher and the research participants to be in control, the ethical principle being the need to ensure that the research was not ‘hijacked’ by external persons (Altrichter, 1993). The participant’s rights to privacy were protected through the promise of confidentiality. This meant that although the researcher knew who had provided the information or was able to identify participants from the information given, she would in no way make the connection known publicly.

It was important that I respected the students’ rights to privacy as well as the integrity of the families of the participants. The principal means of ensuring anonymity in this study was not using the names of the participants or any other means of personal identification. Fictitious names were used. As Aronson and Carlsmith contend, “the very impersonality of this process is of great advantage ethically because it eliminates some of the negative consequences of the invasion of privacy” (Aronson and Carlsmith, 1969:33).

In this research, the issue of confidentiality was made explicitly to participants and they were assured that their names would not be quoted in the reports. Confidentiality involved a clear understanding between me (researcher) and the participants concerning how the study data would be used.

In accordance with the above research ethics I sought the approval of various

people before I could conduct any discussions with the students. Approval was obtained from the School Principals of the schools which the students attended. I also needed approval from the students themselves who were to be the focus of this study.

To protect the privacy of the participants I transcribed the tape recorded interviews. The participants have been identified through the use of fictitious names rather than their original names. The information obtained is reported using the “portraits style”, using the original “voices” of the research participants. Individual portraits serve to illustrate the perceptions of the Fijian secondary students. In the case of reporting, direct quotations from research participants’ voices are used. As Jean Ruddock (1998) contends, “there is a need for the researcher to respect the original voices of the people involved and let them speak for themselves by using the rich density of meanings of the direct quotation (of the authentic voices) in capturing vividly and succinctly what might only be expressed dully and less economically in the researcher’s own words. Furthermore, it was also important for the study participants to hear their voices in print. Action research is a research paradigm that allows for people’s voices to be heard. On the other hand I was aware that what was said was sometimes not easy to hear because it made me feel uncomfortable. In this study I tried to exercise good judgment and considered ethical issues.

3.10 Document Collection

I also collected some documents from the Ministry of Education (MOE) to compare the academic results of the three schools and if they have something in common in relation to the effects of cultural obligations and academic performances. Documentary evidence was considered to be an important source of data that might help validate the interpretation made in the study (Earlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen 1993; Holloway, 1997). Researchers carry out documentary analysis to obtain information, which can not be derived through direct observation, or questioning. Some have argued that data obtained from document analysis can be treated in the same manner as those derived from interviews or observations (Erlandson et al, 1993).

3.11 Data Analysis

Wiersma (2000:202) has argued that data analysis, (in qualitative research) if conducted soon after data collection began, helps as a check on working hypotheses as well as unanticipated results. The report of this study is descriptive in nature and contains little technical language, the emphasis being on describing the phenomena (perceptions of Fijian students) and their contexts, and, on that basis, interpreting the data.

Qualitative research often produces large quantities of descriptive information from field notes and interviews. Field notes were organized and synthesized at

this point. To establish the rigor necessary for more reliable and stable results, a formal system of data analysis was employed. Following Huberman and Miles, two analysis techniques of the Delphi-type study, were employed to interpret the data: namely “clustering” and “noting patterns or themes” (Huberman and Miles, 1984: 219). Huberman and Miles (1984) contend that the researcher attempts to understand a phenomenon better by grouping, then conceptualising objects that have similar patterns of characteristics. The analysis strategy, “noting patterns or themes”, has assisted the researcher in the process of data articulation in this research. Huberman and Miles (1984), in discussing this strategy, stated “when one is working with text, or less-well organised displays, one will often note recurring patterns, themes, or ‘Gestalts’ , which pull together a lot of separate pieces of data. Something ‘jumps’ at you and suddenly makes sense (Huberman and Miles 1984:216).

In this study, the students’ reflections, ideas and comments were tape recorded. Data obtained through the interviews have been organised under the research questions for better and clear communication:

1. What are the students’ perceptions of the effects of cultural obligations on their academic results?
2. How is cultural obligation a contributing factor to Fijian students’ achievement in schools?
3. What specific cultural obligation is perceived by students as negatively affecting their academic performance?

4. How can they fulfill their cultural obligations without neglecting their academic responsibilities?

During my discussions I shared with them my experiences at home as a young child, attending to the cultural, religious and family obligations which my parents were very much part of and this assisted in drawing out a lot of details from the informants. I also shared with them my experiences of staying with my relatives in Suva when I come for the holidays and weekends and this also assisted in eliciting a lot of details from the informants. Field notes and diary accounts were kept as a way of recording some events and my own reflections on them. I also used a tape recorder to record discussions when discussing to ensure correct interpretations and recording of information.

From the discussions, it was obvious that some participants believed that participating in cultural and religious obligations had taken away a lot of their time that they felt should be devoted to school work. This was evident in their responses to the questions asked.

Summary

After a close analysis on Action Research it was possible to conclude that using action research was most appropriate because it was a blend of practical and theoretical concerns which is both action and research. Consequently through the study methodology, I was able to theorize and reflect on my experiences as a teacher.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three attempted to draw attention to the literature that has documented factors which contribute to the low or mediocre performance of Fijian students in the academia arena. It also drew on the literature which attempted to throw light on the seemingly under-achievement of the Aborigines and Maori student. In this chapter I will endeavor to discuss the findings of this research.

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of Forms four, five and seven Fijian students' regarding the impact of cultural, family and religious obligations on their academic performance. The study was carried out on students in three predominantly co-educational Fijian secondary schools in Suva. The data collected was obtained from the reflections of forty five Fijian students who are currently attending school in these three urban Fijian dominated secondary schools in Suva.

Of the fifteen students selected from each of the three schools, seven girls and eight boys were from School A, eight girls and seven boys from School B and the remaining fifteen from School C. Most of these students live with their extended families, and have migrated to Suva from the outer islands and the inland of Viti Levu to live with their relatives because of the difficulties they

face at home due to the lack of proper school facilities.

The reflections of these students confirm the findings of most studies (e.g. Tierney, 1971; Kishor, 1981, 1983 & 1984; Elley, 1982; Nabuka, 1983 & 1984; Sofield, 1983; Stewart, 1982, 1983;; Tavola, 1991; Thaman, 1998; Nabobo, 1994; Dakuidreketi, 1995; Bole, 2000) that explain succinctly the effect of cultural values, beliefs and practices in affecting academic achievement. The stories of most students reflected opinions, feelings, disappointments with their parents and other relatives because of the pressure they are often put through.

The framework for this study consists of four main questions, namely:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the effects of cultural obligations on their school work?
2. How is cultural obligation a contributing factor to Fijian students' achievement in schools?
3. What specific cultural obligation is perceived by students as negatively affecting their academic performance?
4. How can they fulfill their cultural obligations without neglecting their academic responsibilities?

Data presentation will follow each question.

All forms four, five and seven students from the three schools were given a questionnaire to answer. Fifteen students from each school were interviewed

and they were picked from their responses to the questionnaires. They were carefully selected after reading through their responses with the assistance of their respective teachers. Their selection aimed at a representative sample based on ethnicity, gender, academic performance as well as their socio- economic background.

4.2 Research Question 1

What are the students' perceptions of the effects of cultural obligations on their academic performance?

Fijian culture encourages children to become good members of their community. It is vitally important that one gives his/her total commitment to communal activities. Fijian parents squander a large amount of time and money making contribution to ceremonies and church, at the expense of their children's education.

The students were asked to reflect on the effects of cultural obligations on their school work. The participants all agreed that cultural obligations has had some impact on their academic performance.

4.2.1 Family Obligations

The participants agreed that there are so many domestic chores that they are expected to tackle at home when they returned from school. Almost all the participants admitted that they had to clean the house, wash the dishes, wash

their uniforms, are sent on errands and also look after their younger siblings after school. Some admitted that their mothers could not wait for them to reach home because they had to attend to other commitment.

One student commented that apart from attending to household chores she was also expected to look after two of her younger sisters who attended primary school. As a result she was tired most of the evening and could not spend more time studying at night.

The home background factor identified by the students in terms of a conflict of values between the indigenous Fijian students meeting the needs for success at school, on the one hand and the demands placed on the child at home to carry out daily chores, on the other. Plange (cited in Puamau 1999), observed that “the young kid in school becomes a victim of this conflict because more time is allocated for him to do other things than to do what he really needs to do to get through in the school system”. This argument is reflected by two students who live with their parents and did not have enough time to do their school work. They usually have family meetings. They also had monthly village meeting followed by a family feast and grog drinking that usually ended very late at night. In addition they had a list of daily chores to complete and in most instances they found it impossible to handle the work pressure at school. Jokimi (not his real name) explained that he lived with his mother who was a house girl. They belong to the All Nations Church. As the only male in the family he was expected to see that all the household chores were done as well as attend to

the gardening. His mother was often tired when she returned from work. This affected his studies.¹

Many indigenous Fijian students are sent to urban schools for secondary education due to many reasons. A major one is the non-availability of schools in their areas. As a result, children often stay with their relatives in urban areas. Young [cited in Puamau 1999] commented that these children become an additional problem to the host families and time is not given to them to spend on their school work. The relatives exploit them as house girls.

Students who lived with their relatives reported that cultural obligations affected their school work adversely. One of the students mentioned that she did almost all household chores like washing, sweeping, mopping, and cooking. She did not have a study table and had to wait for an empty space to write because they always had a lot of relatives and visitors at home. Another student, Vatemosi, shared his experience by stating

I live with my aunt at Waiqanake and attend school in Suva. My school work is backlogged because of the numerous activities that my aunt's family is engaged in and I am obliged to attend to. This includes wedding, funerals, church activities which in fact leaves me with no choice but to participate with the rest of the family. It is even harder because I reside with relatives and not my family. My parents live in the interior of Macuata and have never visited me because of financial difficulties and the unreliable transport facilities in the neighbouring area. I wake up at four a.m. and catch the six o'clock bus to Suva. I then board another bus to get to school. I wish I could be enrolled in a boarding school because I want to concentrate ON my work. There are a lot of disruptions and other duties that I am required to do and this has had far reaching effects on my school work. Because of family obligations I am engaged in I hardly have time to do my homework. Sometimes I am too tired to complete my work at night because of the heavy duties I am required to do. Travelling

¹ Full text can be found in Appendix 3

early in the morning too strains me and I often feel sleepy at school and as a result I find it hard to concentrate.

Vatemosi also admitted that his aunt has a very casual attitude towards school. While he was concerned with his school work, he really did not have many choices but prays that he could be enrolled in a boarding school so that he could get away from living with relatives. It is hard because parents do not contribute financially all the time and sometimes he did odd jobs like paid house boys. Dili also experienced similar problems.

I live with three other sisters who also attend school in Suva with our aunts' family in Raiwaqa. Our parents live in one of the outer islands and seldom visit us because of the difficulties in traveling and the cost it involves. I must admit that our school work is greatly affected because of the time and the nature of activities we are obligated to attend to at home. We have no choice but to comply with the activities because we are living with relatives.

Dili also states that her involvement in cultural duties at home has often affected her school work. Another respondent reported that she lived with her grandmother and her family took a lot of interest in participating in cultural, family, and religious duties and these activities do drain away resources.

Puamau quoting Qionibaravi, states that :

The way our home is structured, we don't provide for facilities to enable our children to study and parents also do not know or do not understand that they have an important role to play in our children's education like assisting the children, making sure that they do their homework...be there to answer their questions...make sure that they attend school interviews. Attend fundraising for the school and things like that [Puamau 1999:157].

Students who live away from their parents shared this view.

Another respondent stated that she lived with her grandparents in Wainibuku. Her parents live in their village in Bureta, Ovalau. Her mother was the only one in paid employ while her father farmed and tried to sell his produce to assist her

mother procure their basic needs. Her bus fare was being paid for by an uncle who sent money in weekly. She had two roles to play. First she tried to organise herself for school and in the afternoons she was responsible for the cooking, cleaning and washing. Because she had young cousins, she attended to all the household chores before dinner. Her grandparents were sickly and her aunt worked in a garment factory with menial salary. She tries to complete all the household chores so she could have time to complete her homework. She was often tired and sleepy by the time everyone retired to bed. Her father visited her twice a term.

Another home background factor identified by a few in terms of a conflict of values between the indigenous Fijians student meeting the needs required for success at school, on the one hand and the demands placed on the child to carry out daily chores, on the other.

Young (cited in Puamau,1999), compares Fijian parents to Indo-Fijian parents and states that, Indo- Fijian parents have a tendency to place pressure on their children to excel academically. Indo-Fijians urge children to place school work first, ahead of housework, jobs and social activities, in particular, even including those sponsored by the schools. Parents and elders expect their children to do well academically.

Accordingly, parents constantly remind their children to think of themselves as

being as good as anyone else. However, this seems to be the opposite with Fijian parents.

Students were asked to reflect on parental support regarding their school work. One respondent reported that there was no support from home. She did not have time to do homework. In most instances there was no money and sometimes no lunch prepared for her. The only thing that she made sure she had was a blue pen to use.

Education is still among the least priorities for some families and school work was always incomplete. More time was devoted to other things that do not relate to school work. Students were asked to reflect on communal activities at home and Koka acknowledged that they had regular visitors at home. Each time a visitor came there was a welcome ceremony and the grog drinking and serenading would go on till the early hours of the morning. The noise is disturbing making concentration very difficult.² Radini explained that she too was given a lot of responsibilities at home after school. She had to prepare the meals, complete the laundry and was too tired to study at the end of the day.³

In comparison, Indo -Fijian parents and elders often say to their children (Nabuka, 1984) “Obey your teachers!” “Do your school work!” “Stay out of trouble!” “You are there to learn!” “Keep trying harder!” “Keep pushing

² Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

³ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

yourself!” .Unfortunately these are not common entreaties among indigenous parents. When asked about how their families value education the students’ offered these explanations.

One respondent clarified that her family was ignorant of the importance of education and thus it is not prioritised. A lot of time was directed towards cultural and religious needs. This reflects what Ali [1999] said about the dire need for a change in attitude displayed by parents. She believes that there should be more educational programs for them about daily routines and what to do for their children when they are home. Ali also emphasises the need for a reduction in fundraising activities and more on advising parents what to do, and how to improve children’s’ performance. Jitoko [2003] also maintains that the lack of commitment to education by parents and the general community has been seen as the major problem facing Fijian education in Fijian schools.

Puamau [1999] reported that many of her informants argued that while indigenous Fijian parents may have educational and career aspirations for their children yet do not know how to facilitate school success. This has had negative influences on their children’s performances in school.

One particular respondent espouses this view. He lives with his parents at home and cultural/religious/community activities took precedence over other things. His parents were busy organising and attending to these commitments thus

neglecting to support him by providing him with the time to attend to his school work. His parents sometimes referred to school work as second priority. Some of the activities that took place in his home disturbed his study program.

Another respondent mentioned that her father was the traditional leader of their clan in Suva and all cultural, religious and family functions were held in their home. The home was always full of family members and it was their duty to host these people.

One respondent in particular stated that he was fed up with attending to cultural duties because his school work was often neglected. Pounding of grog and entertaining relatives in his home often took place about three times a week. He was required to help when there was a function at home. Sute expressed the same sentiments. He described his situation as one with a family that was too busy with their work. Money was diverted to other activities whereas some of that money could be more usefully spent paying for a house girl⁴. Rita gave an account of her situation. She explained that she lives in Makoi with her parents and has a lot of responsibilities. She is expected to do all the household chores, the laundry as well as prepare the meals. All these are done when she returns from school. At times carrying out these tasks are not possible because there are too many people who are a disturbance and distraction in the house.⁵

⁴ Refer to Appendix 3

⁵ Refer to Appendix 3

Another respondent lived in a two bedroom home in Valenicina in Lami. His family spent more time and money attending to family/cultural and religious commitment but not on education and did not have a proper table where he could do his homework. Sometimes he could not work because the house was full. . He cooked every day. He planted cassava, dalo and vegetables in the weekend. He also cleaned the house and the compound. He was often tired at night and could not find enough time to study because he was engaged in other commitments.

Mac and Lu noted that they lived with their parents and were expected to do all the household chores which included doing the laundry, cleaning the house, assist with preparation of refreshments for the church cell meetings. They are often too tired to study after that. But if they still have enough energy to study, they are unable to because there are too many visitors in the house.⁶

Most participants found it hard to concentrate because by the time they had the chance to study they were too exhausted or sleepy. Thus their school work was adversely affected.

The participants all agree that they had to attend to too many domestic chores when they returned from school. They admitted that they had to clean the house, wash the dishes, wash their uniforms, were sent on errands and also looked after their siblings or young relatives after school.

⁶ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

In sum, then, besides the cultural obligations, home background factors are also considered to be impediments to the educational progress of indigenous Fijians students are: parental support, low socio economic status, little or no formal education on parents' part and the kinds of priorities that parents have for their children. The ignorance of poorly educated indigenous Fijian parents about what is needed to facilitate the educational needs of their children has been particularly emphasised by some informants. This endorses Bole's [1972] argument in relation to Fijian parents. He attributed the poor performance amongst the Fijian children to the lack of correlation between family, learning environment and school performance.

4.3 Research Question 2

How are cultural and religious obligations contributing factors to Fijian students' achievement in schools?

Cultural Values

Indigenous Fijian culture expects children to develop a strong sense of their loyalty to *vakaturaga* in *vanua* ethos. The *vanua* is of vital importance to understanding their cultural values and beliefs (Nabobo, 2001). *Vanua* also refers to a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another. According to Ravuvu (1987), the term embodies the ethnic Fijian values and beliefs which people of a particular locality have in common. Therefore, an appreciation of the cultural *vanua* is the key concept for one's

action and thought. . Hence, those who are *vakaturaga* in behaviour know their place in the community and act appropriately. People comply with their various social obligations, their service to others and respect for those who have defined authority over them. In particular, the practice of respect is an important aspect of the *vakaturaga* concept.

To ethnic Fijians, ceremonies are essential in providing fulfillment, identity, co-operation among themselves and others. Also, in participating in ceremonies one maintains one's social links, status and recognition. It is one's expression of genuine love, care, support and concern one for her/his fellow men. Weddings, deaths, a new birth, visitation are some of the cultural obligations that takes place in the home (Ravuvu, 1988).

The reflections by the respondents indicated the various reasons why these cultural, religious and family obligations affect their performance. Because of the way the society is structured indigenous Fijians cannot evade their obligations.

One particular respondent commented that he sometimes missed school because he had to help at home especially when there was a death. My father expected me to pound heaps of grog and serve the people who attended the function. Grog drinking during death sometimes ended in the morning and because the function was held at home he was obliged to take part. Even if he went to school

the following morning he was exhausted and sleepy. Thus he cannot concentrate on his school work. Death rituals normally take a week. Parents spend a lot of time and money on these types of activities. Sometimes the respondent did not attend school because of a lack of bus fare. He blamed the cultural, family, and community commitments as deterrents to his academic progress.

For the indigenous Fijians one's involvement in communal activities in the village, such as preparation and attendance at ceremonies like funerals and weddings, is of paramount importance. It is a way of one's appreciation for *vakaturaga* in *vanua* ethos. Ceremonies highlight critical points of ethnic Fijian life: initiation of the young into their communities, marriage, repairing of ruptured relationships and death (Ravuvu, 1987).

It often takes two weeks to complete the funeral ceremonies, and takes even longer to get things done for a wedding, including long term preparations for that occasion sometimes taking almost a year. This includes cultivating gardens, raising pigs, cattle and so on. The students reported that cultural activities like that consume a lot of time and finances which can be diverted towards their school requirements. Jokimi (2005) explained that whenever there was a death he had to take a whole week off school to help with the funeral. He would pound a large amount of grog. This involvement disrupted his studies. Raba notes that

I had to miss school on a few occasions last term to assist relatives during family deaths. My duties during the occasion included washing plates and pots, cutting meat and vegetables, assisting with the bulk shopping, baking

pies and cakes, serving food and tea. In most cases we hardly slept because we had to make sure that every visiting relative attending the condolence gathering was well looked after. Everyone visiting should be well fed. That was important and it also reflected the immediate families' commitment to the deaths. A lot of gossips can surface if there was insufficient food during the funeral.

Ravuvu (1988) has explained that the ethnic Fijian ideals of sharing are embodied in such terms as *veivuke* (giving a helping hand), *veinanumi* (consideration for others), *veilomani* (being loving and friendly to one another) and *yalo vata* (of being the same spirit). Therefore, “apart from those who are directly involved or formally informed of any happening, many others who casually know about the occasion or accidentally learn of it often feel obligated also to participate” (Ravuvu, 1987, p.330). Ethnic Fijian attitudes towards loving and caring about each other develop their sense of generosity, co-operation, solidarity and harmonious social relations. Rita maintains that

I have no choice because I live with my relatives. Whenever there was a death I felt obligated to help in the cooking, shopping, cleaning up. The hosts were obliged to look after every one and this certainly added load to those who were serving. Dinner was served from about six in the evening and did not stop until midnight.

A few students mentioned that they were fed up with having to sacrifice their time to attend to cultural obligations at the expense of their studies. Vatemosi longs to attend a boarding school so that he will not be faced with the same difficulties. He has to live with his uncle who has accommodated him all this time.⁷

The importance of personal investment in education has traditionally not been a high priority: instead, maintaining communal solidarity has been heavily

⁷ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

emphasised (Ravuvu, 1987). Students' openly related their frustrations with the way their parents were splurging money on other things and not on their school needs.

One in particular noted that a lot of their family budget was spent on grog, cigarettes and food for the visitors. He reckoned that this was unnecessary spending. In most instances, they had to forego some of their school needs because of a lack of funds.

4.4 Research Question 3

What specific cultural, family and religious obligations are perceived by Fijian secondary school students to negatively affect their academic performance?

Cultural obligations, for the purpose of this research is defined as those duties that indigenous Fijians feel obligated to uphold especially those to the confederation (*matanitu*), the church (*lotu*), and the land (*vanua*). Our life revolves around the *vanua*, the church and the confederation.

Yaqona drinking is important in ceremonial Fijian cultural events and social gatherings, but excessive consumption of yaqona is becoming a problem. It absorbs income as well and takes fathers away from the family. The excessive drinking of yaqona too has been identified as another impediment on Fijian education.

Yaqona Drinking

A common problem raised by most participants was that yaqona drinking takes place in most of the homes every night. Several informants have referred to grog drinking by the adults taking precedence over the educational interest of the child.

The excessive drinking of *yaqona* has been identified by the students as a major impediment on their education. Excessive drinking of *yaqona* by indigenous Fijian adults has also been identified by some informants as a major social problem that hinders their educational development. In relation to this Williams (2004) stated that cultural obligations are keeping the parents away from the home and preventing them from taking care of their children and providing them with the quality care that is their entitlement. Sute explains that

When we had visitors at home my parents call us for extra duties. For example, grog was normally served as a sign of respect for any visitor or relatives. I took part in the pounding and mixing of yaqona and sat till very late at night serving the visitors. Staying up late made us lazy the following morning at school.

Sir Len Usher (cited in Puamau, 1999) endorses this viewpoint. He argued that one of the problems was the general way of life. It was very difficult for the children to study in the evening because in most village houses, the light was not very good and also there is very little privacy. He went on to say that with grog sessions going on, it was very difficult for children to study or do their homework. Sir Len Usher was implying that the general way of life does not make it easy for the children to spend a lot of time in study except when they

are actually in school.

This supports the findings of Save the Children Fund in 1988. They identified some factors causing high attrition rates. These included financial problems, family pressures and obligations, lack of parental guidance and commitment to the children's education. When asked to reflect on how drinking of grog at home affects their school work, the students reflected that there was a lot of grog consumption in their homes. Qori explained that

In the weekends there is a lot of drinking of kava at home. Visitors frequent our home and most of them are our relatives. When there is a grog session at home there tends to be a lot of noise. I find it hard to organise my time well because there is so much to do and these duties consume a lot of time and energy. It is difficult for me because I am living with my relatives.

Some also expressed that drinking of yaqona at home limits their movement in the home. Tuisawau, (cited in Puamau 1999) had noted that students did not have enough space because they lived in cramped conditions with other members of the household. Maciu (2005) in drawing from his experience concurred with Tuisawau's statement. He said that yaqona drinking in his home was noisy and took up a lot of space leaving very little room for him to study. As he is one of the youngest ones in the home, he is sent on errands to buy cigarettes, grog and 'chasers' for the grog drinkers. He is also expected to pound the grog. These grog sessions take place almost every other day.⁸

Another respondent mentioned that there were always visitors and relatives at home. He was usually told to organise tea or grog drinking. Sometimes yaqona

⁸ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

drinking ended very late. At times his work was not up to date. Whenever he had time to study he was too tired and could not concentrate on his work. He believed that cultural activities did not only take up too much of his study time but it also disturbed his mind and his ability to concentrate.

Several informants referred to grog drinking by adults to be taking precedence over the educational interest of the child. In both the rural and urban areas, for instance, if people came to visit, the adults would drink grog and there would not be a place for the students to study. For those who lived in one or two bedroom houses, the main living area would be taken up by adults drinking grog. In rural areas, it was evident from the students responses that the only good light would most likely be used for grog session, thus depriving the student of the best light for study purposes.

Religious Obligations

In many Fijian families, education ranked a low priority in comparison to the church and the land. Many Fijian families donate a great deal of time, effort, money and commitment to the work and responsibility of the church and not as much to the school and the educational welfare of their children. The competition of allegiance between the church and the schooling of children puts many parents in a dilemma, and the church often comes out the winner (Puamau, 1999). This is an unfortunate situation, as the church and the school can complement each other and with greater commitment and direction, the promotion of a strong education ethic can be developed.

Commitment to the church by indigenous Fijians is very strong. The church generally has three functions: it provides ethnic Fijians with a place to socialise and to have a religious service; it facilitates the exchange of information like social events and issues; and thirdly it encourages interaction and communication between people from different communities, since different provincials come to attend a church service, even from a distance.

Some participants confirm that the whole family participates in church activities. The children attend Sunday school before they join the rest of the congregation in the main church service which normally ends at about midday. The whole of Sunday is devoted to church. Even in the week there are also weekly prayer meetings, bible study, choir practice, women's fellowship, men's fellowship, youth meetings and even visitation .Lily one of the participants recounts that

My family has prayer meeting every Monday from 8,00pm to 9.30pm. Every Wednesday we attend the Charismatic prayer meeting. I am also a member of the choir and choir practice is held daily from 7pm-8pm. My whole family are members of the choir. My mum spends a lot of time and money on cultural duties and neglect school work. As a result sometimes fees are not paid on time while some never paid at all. I believe that cultural and religious obligations do take up a lot of our time. I want to pass at the end of this year, and I object to the idea of participating in family duties because it does affect my school work.

Meri (2005) notes that their prayer meeting is held on Tuesdays with the youth meetings scheduled for Fridays. She had to use the kitchen as a study room because their house is small or she has to wait until the living room is vacant. Her father sends her fees to her aunt but this is sometimes used for other

purposes rather than for her fees as intended originally.⁹

One respondent reported that he had no time to study in the weekends. He attended youth meeting, prayer meeting followed by tea party on Saturday evenings. There were two sessions of church service on Sundays. By the evening he was too exhausted to do any school work.

In addition, a respondent living in Raiwai with her mother said that religious activities were regarded as important in her family. Weekly bible study took place on Thursdays. They also had weekly church service on Wednesday. A lot of family meetings are also held at their home on other days.

Chand, (cited in Puamau, 1999), is of the view that indigenous Fijian parents are too involved in church activities in terms of both time and money which can act to the detriment of their children. He refers to this as “over-churching” .The students’ responses support this argument: Alitia one of the respondents endorses this idea. She elaborates that she is in the Sunday choir and that they are expected to practice every afternoon. As a member of the MYF she is also expected to attend the weekly meetings. She attends bible study on Fridays. On Wednesday she attends their cell meetings which is followed by tea and socializing. Sundays are devoted to church services. They have fortnightly youth meetings. She hardly has any time during the weekends to study because of these church activities and agrees that they are not helping in her school work

⁹ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

at all.

One's participation in ceremonies and church activities enhances one's total commitment to communal expectations and requirements. Moreover, one's contribution to the Christian church, mainly the Methodist church is the most obvious manifestation of ethnic Fijian *vanua* [Ravuvu, 1987]. This misguided commitment is reflected in these students' responses. As Rita notes:

We are Methodists. Every Tuesday prayer meeting is held at home. This is followed by tea and grog drinking. During supper the members like to share and tell stories. It is like a social night again. Parents sit around and discuss almost everything and anything.

Oripa added that:

Every Wednesday the family attends group meetings where we study the bible, sharing and prayer meeting and it is sort of compulsory for the family to attend. This takes place from 7pm - 8.30pm. Choir practice is held twice weekly from 7.30 - 9pm. People enjoy visiting our small home and grog drinking is held at home about twice a week and it finishes very late. I have no study table and I have to wait till the house is empty to attend to my homework and many times I go to school without having completed my homework.

One student reported that she lived with her relatives in Suva and spent most of her productive time participating in religious activities. When there was a prayer meeting at home she baked food for refreshments and prepared tea that was normally served after the meeting. Drinking tea consumes a lot of time as women love to tell stories and catch up since it was about the only time they are free for those kind of get together. She was often late to school because of staying up late.

Similar comments were made by another student who lived with his parents in Nakasi. His parents were active church members and church meetings were held

at their home weekly. The bible meeting takes about one hour proper and the women and children are served with tea while the menfolk enjoy their grog. The grog session normally ends in the early hours of the morning. They are often not able to complete their homework because they are tired. At school they find it difficult to concentrate because half of the time they are dozing off to sleep.

Dili, referring to a similar experience explains that:

My participation in the home and church activities has often consumed a lot of time and energy. As a result I have not been able to complete my assignments on time. I was always late with my work and had a lot of trouble in trying to update my work. At times my teachers have penalised me for outdated work. With English projects which were part of my course work, I scored poorly due to late submission of my work. In addition, I had developed poor rapport with my teachers which left me at a disadvantage.

Whatever the denomination, the church takes a central place in many Fijian families. As Radini reported she devoted a lot of time attending to cultural and religious obligations. Her parents encouraged her to join the church choir which normally practiced on Mondays and Thursdays. Cell meetings are held on Wednesdays while Sundays were spent in church to attend morning and evening services.¹⁰

The students' responses revealed their families' ranking of priorities and note that education figured quite very low in comparison to the church. Their families expended a great deal of time, effort, money and commitment to the work and callings of the church but not as much on the school and the educational welfare of their children. Many families contributed to church activities in a big way and in many cases more than they would for their own

¹⁰ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

family needs and education. The students' experiences relate to what Stewart (1983) espoused. He claims that Fijians do not appear to value education as much as other ethnic groups such as the Indo-Fijians. This supports Tuisawau's [cited from Puamau, 1999] argument where she maintains that the demands by the church impinge on educational priorities of indigenous Fijian parents. In her view, church directives 'grips the mind' of Fijian parents in a very significant way and take away the kind of attention that they should be giving to their children. Thus, Fijian parents have a vague notion about what education might mean for the children.

Summary

The participants unanimously agreed that their participation in the cultural and church obligations has adversely affected their academic performance. They agreed that the sole reason for their work not being up to date was the fact that they have been engaged purely on other activities apart from their studies and they found it difficult to be on par with their lessons. The activities include: prayer meetings; Choir practice; youth meetings; youth rallies; church service; Sunday schools; bible studies coupled with village meetings taking place at home; wedding preparation; death in the family; or neighbourhood visitation; birth of a new baby; and many more had a detrimental effect on their academic performance.

4.5 Research Question 4

How can they fulfill their current cultural, family and religious obligations without neglecting their academic responsibilities?

Some participants expressed that they would be able to improve their academic performance if they attended a boarding school where they would not be required to attend to cultural and religious obligations that they were expected to participate in at home. Others noted that there should be a decrease in their participation in these activities if they were to progress in their academic work. Some students were trying to cope with their home situation.

However, some students indicated that participating in cultural, religious and family obligations did not affect their studies. The reasons for these were varied. Some articulated that they had proper study rooms. Two of the students stated that they were exempted from taking part in cultural, religious activities during weekdays. The students also indicated that their studies were being closely monitored by their parents.

One student who lived with his parents commented that cultural obligations do not affect his school work. He also participated in church and cultural/ family obligations. However his parents were moderate in their involvement. Prayer meeting took place from 7.00pm to 9 pm once a week. They attend to other obligations in the weekend. If the function was held in the weekdays the

children were exempted from it. Other students noted similar experiences. The following students had similar experiences. Samu, Wainisi and Magi (2005) explained that though they participated in religious and cultural activities it however did not affect their academic performance. They had their own study area and were given the time and space to attend to their studies.¹¹

Summary

The students' responses affirm that cultural, religious and family obligations are the basis for creating obstacles to the academic progress of Fijian students. Cultural factors, specifically cultural values and beliefs in education, are probably major predictors of ethnic Fijian academic "success" and "failure". Parents need to be educated to understand the important value of education and to be aware of the fact that students must be given the right to education and that includes the right to study and be given the freedom to choose between participating in cultural obligations or focussing on their school work. Stewart (1983), for instance, has claimed that ethnic Fijians do not appear to value education as much as other groups like Indo-Fijians. If so, what motivates ethnic Fijians?

4.6 Implications of Findings and Recommendations

4.6.1 Implications of Findings

In this section I will discuss the implications of the findings of this research for

¹¹ Refer to Appendix 3 for full text

the education of ethnic Fijians.

The data on perceptions of the Fijian students reflect a conflict of values between the student meeting the needs for success at school, on the one hand and the demands placed on the child at home to carry out daily chores and participate in other obligations on the other.

The students become victims of this conflict because more time is allocated for him/her to do other things than to do what he really needs to do so as to be successful in school.

Secondly the way Fijian families' homes are structured whether they are physical structures or the daily organisations of the homes are not conducive for the students to be able to devote quality time to their studies.

Thirdly, parents also do not know or do not understand that they have an vital role to play in their children's education like assisting the children, making sure that they do their homework....be there to answer their questions...make sure that they attend school interviews and so forth.

Fourthly many indigenous Fijian students are sent to the urban schools for post primary education due to the non-availability of schools in their areas often become additional problems to the host families. They are also not given time to

spend on their school work instead are usually burdened with housework and other obligations placed on them by the host families.

Fifthly the students all agreed that the sole reason for their work being tardy is the fact that they have been occupied with other activities outside school work and they find it challenging to be on top of their studies. These activities include: prayer meetings; choir practice; youth meetings; youth rallies; church service; Sunday schools; bible studies coupled with village meetings taking place at home; wedding preparations; death in the family or neighbourhood; visitation; and birth of a new baby have a disadvantageous effect on their academic performance.

4.6.3 Recommendations

Indigenous Fijian parents' educational and career aspirations for their children should be matched with their knowledge of how to facilitate school success.

They need to allot a great deal of time, effort, money and commitment to the educational welfare of their children. They also need to reassess their commitments so that they place more emphasis on the needs and educational aspirations of their children rather than on cultural and religious obligations.

Parents need to be educated so that they understand and appreciate the important value of education and to be aware of the fact that students must be given the right to education and that includes the right to study and be given the

freedom to choose between participating in cultural obligations or focusing on their school work. Fijian families' ranking of priorities needs changing. Education needs to rank higher than other social obligations. Fijians need to value education as much as other ethnic groups such as Indo-Fijian.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Conclusion

The concept of culture is a widely debated topic and there is no universal agreement in its definition. Many studies have been carried out on Fijian people's priorities and interestingly they all conclude that education is not a top priority. In this study, majority of the participants indicated that their participation in cultural obligations has a negative impact on their academic performance.

A majority of the participants agreed that their participation in cultural obligations has a negative impact on their academic performance. Yaqona drinking is also part of the Fijian traditional ceremony. However, the excessive amount consumed today by many people is increasingly becoming a problem to many. This is particularly true of those who have become addicted to the drink.

All the students agreed that cultural obligation contributes to their underachievement at school. Their participation in these religious and cultural obligations is unavoidable. It is interesting to note that since parents are the role models in a family unit, the students who were interviewed have confirmed in their mind that religious and cultural obligations are a priority even though they know that they have unconstructive effects on their lessons.

The research data also indicates that traditional Fijian communities place more importance on communal activities and commitment to the '*vanua*'. This includes a time-honoured belief system of mutual respect and obligation, whereby each person knows their place in the hierarchy. The study also shows that Fijians continue to place a lot of importance on social events and cultural obligations but maintain a very casual attitude towards education. It could be suggested that this might contribute to the lackluster performance of Fijian students and a contributing factor to their poor academic performance.

Most of the participants agree that their participation and involvement in cultural, domestic and religious duties consumes much of their time, energy and resources. They also revealed that at home they are given all the tasks to carry out. After school, they have the responsibility to cook, wash, clean the home, baby-sit and even manage the home while the parents go out. It can be said that some of them have two roles to play. On the one hand they are trying to cope with schoolwork while on the other they are like house girls/houseboys. In most instances the students are worn out and have very little energy left to focus on their school work. Except for three participants, the rest agree that the sole reason for their work not being up to date is the fact that they have been occupied with other activities besides school work and they just find it difficult to be on top of their school work. This is a telling indication of the value most parents have towards education. One wonders why their parents even send them to school in the first place.

The study also notes that few of the participants want to be enrolled into boarding schools so that they can get away from family, religious and cultural duties. There are a lot of disruptions and other duties required of them to do and this has had far reaching effects in their school work. At least the boarding school environment will allow them to concentrate on their school work. They will also have a better chance of passing and can then pursue tertiary studies if they wish. Boarding schools are free from disruptions and the students can enjoy the freedom of learning without any disturbances from the home, church and the *vanua*.

One's involvement in communal activities in the village, such as preparation and attendance at ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, religious activities is of importance. However some students openly related their frustrations with the way their parents were expending money on other things but not their school needs. The study also reveals that parents splurge money on weddings and death related activities at the expense of children's education. This holds true for religious obligations too. Adhering to their religious affiliation is of vital importance even among ethnic Fijians living abroad in metropolitan centers such as Sydney. Fijian Methodist Choirs from Sydney and Melbourne are often represented at the Annual Methodist Choir competition held in Fiji. The Annual Methodist Church *solu* competition accumulates almost a million dollars, discounting the expenses incurred for traveling, food, gifts, new clothes for the

choir and their daily needs during the week long church meeting and carnival. Participants have commented that at times they have to forego some necessities because their parents are duty bound to raise money for the church. Therefore, considerable pressure for maintaining their moral obligations within the community tends to make ethnic Fijians spend extravagantly in time and money on ceremonies, at the expense of their freedom of choice and their children's education.

The students' responses reveal their families' view of education is very low in comparison to the church. Their families contribute a great deal of time, effort, money and commitment to the work and obligations of the church but not as much on the school and the educational welfare of the children. They also added that many families contribute to church activities in a big way and in many cases more than they normally would for their own family needs and education. It is interesting to note that religious obligations expend the most time, energy and resources as highlighted by the informants. Fijians believe that one's participation in ceremonies and church activities enhances one's total commitment to communal expectations and requirements.

However, this researcher believes that there should be a balance between participating in these cultural, religious obligations and Fijian academic performance. For instance, the amount of time spent in carrying out all the traditional death and wedding rituals usually takes one or two weeks but could

be reduced to a week. There should be a serious re-evaluation of how Fijians respond to cultural duties. The participants also suggest that there should be a decrease in their participation in these activities if they are to advance academically.

The students also stress that there is a serious conflict between cultural obligations and educational obligations. While they are concerned with their school work, parents do not seem to be worried about how they are coping and whether they require assistance or not. It is commonly accepted amongst Fijians though it is unsaid that cultural obligations take precedence over everything else.

The informants also revealed at the platonic level, that they are aware that participation in church and cultural obligations have a harmful effect on their academic achievement but at the emotional, spiritual and practical level, they cannot exempt themselves from participating in religious and cultural obligations and academic obligations. However, the point needs to be stressed that it is an imperative need for balance and moderation. Any activity that necessitates too much time and resources spent at the expense of other needs will have an unfavorable effect in the overall development of the student. So when all is said and done, the spiritual needs of the students are met in their participation in church obligations while their emotional needs to belong and a sense of identity and family is met in cultural obligations and their intellectual

needs are met in their participation in study requirement.

Social support such as parental involvement and understanding of children's education is essential in order for children to strive for academic "success". On the other hand, ethnic Fijian culture expects children to have a strong sense of loyalty to their community. It is crucial for them to become good members of the community (i.e. the village). Therefore, one's involvement in communal activities is of vital importance. Thus children's schooling is not considered of prime importance in ethnic Fijian thinking but cultural values and practices are.

5.2 Limitations to the study

Firstly this study was limited to only three Fijian dominated urban schools. It could have included more Fijian dominated schools. It could have also included Fijian students from Indian dominated schools for comparison purposes.

Secondly the perceptions and experiences from Fijian students in boarding schools could have been obtained to compare and contrast with those who stay at home.

Thirdly the researcher could have interviewed successful Fijian students in various schools to obtain some success stories about 'best practices' in Fijian education.

Lastly the perceptions and experiences of parents and teachers could have been included to add more depth to provide alternative explanations to Fijian students' performance at school.

5.3. Areas for Further Research

A lot more research is needed in a number of areas. A more specific research can be carried out to focus on successful Fijian students. The study will enlighten the readers especially Fijian parents as to why some students perform well at school and the findings could be used as a learning guide for Fijian parents because students are our most valuable resource and every effort should be made to guide, build and develop them.

Secondly, there can be a comparative study of Indo-Fijians and Fijian students examining the factors contributing to their academic achievements.

Thirdly, there can be a comparative research on Fijian students who live with their parents and those who live away from their parents.

Lastly this research has laid the basis for a more in-depth study to document the students' perceptions on the internal and external forces that impact and influence their academic achievement.

This research has been an immense learning experience for me in that I have been

able to gain a deeper and a better understanding of a variety of issues that confront the Fijian students I teach in the classroom. Through this improved understanding I hope to upgrade my practice as a teacher in Fiji classrooms.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Na Taro

1. Yacamu Ruarua _____
2. Na nomu Yabaki _____
3. Vakatedegede ni vuli o sa yacova tiko

4. Na yaca ni nomu Koro kei na yasana

5. Na vanua ko vakaitikotiko kina

6. Na vale nei cei o vakaitikotiko kina

7. E lewe vica na lewe ni nomu matavuvale?

8. E lewe vica e tiko I vale e cakacaka tiko?

9. E rau cakacaka tiko na nomu I tubutubu

10. Na I tavi cava soti o dau vakaitavi taki iko kina e vale ni suka na vuli e na veisiga ? Biuta e dua na I toqa e na yasa I koya e donu vei iko
 - Teitei
 - Sasamaki
 - Vakasaqa
 - Talai
 - Meimei vei ira na gone

E so tale na I tavi o dau vakaitavi taki iko kina e sega ni volai tiko e cake

11. O dau vuli lesoni e na veiyakavi

Io _____
Sega _____
Ena so na gauna _____

12. Kevaka e sega, vola mai na vu ni sega ni levu na nomu dau vuli leseni i vale. Wilika na ka e volai tiko i ra qai toqai ira e donu vei iko.

- Sega na vanua ni vuli leseni
- Vakaitavi vakalevu e na ogaoga vaka Lotu
- Vakaitavi e na lose yaqona
- Vakaitavi e na gunu yaqona
- Sega ni rawa ni vuli leseni vakavinaka ni caka tiko na sara reitio yaloyalo e vale
- Wawale e na oca ni cakacaka ni suka e na vuli
- Vakaitavi e na ogaoga ni koro

E so tale na ka e vakaleqa na nomu vuli leseni ka sega ni volai tiko i caka _____

13. Mai na nomu nanuma ga vakataki iko, vola na veisau cava me caka mo rawa ni dau vulica kina vakavinaka na nomu vuli leseni i vale. _____

Appendix II

Interview Questions

1. Na cava soti na i tavi o dau vakaitavitaki iko kina e vale
2. E vica vei iratou na I tavi oqo, o nanuma ni sa rui tavi bibi se levu
3. E vica na balavu ni gauna o dau taura mo vakaotia kina na veicakacaka oqo.
4. E bau dau vakayacori e vale e so na soqo ni matavuvale, soqo ni lotu se bose raraba.
5. A cava soti e dau nomu itavi e na gauna dou caka soqo kina e vale
6. E dau levu na gauna ni nomu vuli lesoni ni suka na vuli, e na veibogi ? Vakacava e na mua ni macawa ?
7. A cava na nomu rai e na i lavo ka dau vakayagataki e na veisiqo vakaoqo.
8. Na cava na nomu rai, ni o vakadutaitaka na gauna o vakaitavitaki iko kina e na veisoqo oqo kei na nomu gauna ni vuli lesoni.
9. O vakadinadinataka ni veitavi, veisoqo e dau caka mai vale, e vakavuna tiko na nomu sega ni qarava vinaka tiko na nomu vuli lesoni.

Appendix III

- Jokimi *I live with my mother who is a house girl. We belong to the All Nation church. I assist my mother at home. After school I know that my responsibility is to ensure that all household chores are attended to since I am the only male in the home. I weed the vegetable garden and plant cassava. I go to the shop to buy groceries and also cook dinner because mum is often tired after she returns from work. All these affect the time I had for studying.*
- Koka *We almost have visitors every now and again and every time there is a visitor, a family welcome ceremony takes place. I cannot avoid taking part in it. It signifies that the family welcomes you in the home. This is followed by grog drinking and sometimes serenading. The noise is always disturbing and I sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on my studies.*
- Radini *I am given a lot of responsibilities at home and after school. I clean the house, cook the evening dinner and wash my sister's school uniforms. I can study at home but by the evening I am very tired and sleepy and cannot seriously study.*
- Sute *My family members are too busy with their own work and my father is also busy with his own work. He also states that more money is being diverted to all other activities. Part of this money could pay a house girl to at least clean and cook so he can fully concentrate in his work.*
- Rita: *I live in Makoi with my parents. I have a lot of responsibilities. First I do most of the household chores. After school I help mum clean up the house, cook dinner about four times a week and wash the clothes. I spend about two hours cleaning the house and doing other duties when I return from school. I'm always tired in the afternoon having to attend to all the duties I am required to do. At times I cannot complete my work because I am too tired or the house is full of people and there is a lot of disturbance which is so distracting.*
- Mac *I live with my parents. I also attend to family obligations like small scale gardening, cooking and so forth. Church Cell meetings are held every Wednesday from 7.00pm to 9pm. Tea follows the prayer meeting and I assist the others prepare tea, wash up. I also mix the grog for the men after the cell meeting. I do not have a proper study desk and I wait for the visitors to go*

home before I can seriously do some school work. We also have TV and at times it disturbs my study programme. I do not start my studies until 11pm because the house is small and there are always many visitors

Lili: *My family has prayer meeting every Monday from 8,00pm to 9.30pm. Every Wednesday we attend the Charismatic prayer meeting. I am also a member of the choir and choir practice is held daily from 7pm-8pm. My whole family are members of the choir. My mum spends a lot of time and money on cultural duties and neglect school work. As a result sometimes fees are not paid on time while some never paid at all. I believe that cultural and religious obligations do take up a lot of our time. I want to pass at the end of this year, and I object to the idea of participating in family duties because it does affect my school work.*

Raba : *I had to miss school on a few occasions last term to assist relatives during family deaths. My duties during the occasion included washing plates and pots, cutting meat and vegetables, assisting with the bulk shopping, baking pies and cakes, serving food and tea. In most cases we hardly slept because we had to make sure that every visiting relative attending the condolence gathering was well looked after. Everyone visiting should be well fed .That was important and it also reflected the immediate families' commitment to the deaths. A lot of gossips can surface if there was insufficient food during the funeral.*

Lu *I live with my parents. I do all the household duties. These include washing of clothes, cleaning the home, cooking of dinner, scrubbing of bathrooms and so forth. Because we live in the police barracks we are required to take extra care in our homes. Police home inspection always motivate the family to spend a lot of time in cleaning the house as well as the compound .Weekly bible study takes place on Wednesdays from 8pm-9pm. I have four sisters and I have a lot to do at home after I return from school. I cook the food, help mum clean the home. My mother depends a lot on me. There are two other students who also study at home and there is lack of study space. There are light restrictions and I face a lot of problems having to manage the home after school. I cannot afford to concentrate on my studies because I have a lot of responsibilities and cannot manage my time well. I am often exhausted and my energy is drained making it impossible for me to focus fully on my school work.*

- Jokimi *When there is a death they practically take the whole week and even though I still attended school I was required to help at home after school. I sometimes pounded enormous amounts of grog and also took part in the grog session. These activities distracted and disrupted my academic progress.*
- Vatemosi *I really want to attend a boarding school because I will not face the same difficulties I am faced with now. I have no choice since I live with my uncle and I do appreciate the fact that at least my uncle has been able to accommodate me all this time.*
- Dili: *My participation in the home and church activities has often consumed a lot of time and energy. As a result I have not been able to complete my assignments on time. I was always late with my work and had a lot of trouble in trying to update my work. At times my teachers have penalised me for outdated work. With English projects which were part of my course work, I scored poorly due to late submission of my work. In addition, I had developed poor rapport with my teachers which left me at a disadvantage.*
- Maciu *Yaqona drinking at home is noisy and there is not enough room for me to study. Because I am one of the young ones I am sent to the shop to buy cigarettes, grog, lollies for the elders. I also pound grog and this kind of activities takes place almost every second day.*
- Meri: *Prayer meeting with our church groups is held every Tuesday from 7.00pm to 9pm. Youth meeting takes place on Fridays from 6pm to 9pm. I do my homework in the kitchen because the house is small and I have to wait for the living room to be vacant so that I could do my homework. My father sends my school fees to my aunt. At times my school fees have been used to meet cultural and religious demands when there is not enough money.*
- Aliti: *I am in the Sunday choir and we have their practice every afternoon from 4.30m - 5.30pm. I am also in the MYF and we have our weekly meetings from 5.30pm - 6.15pm and they also have our bible study on Friday evenings. Cell group meets every Wednesday from 8pm-9pm followed by tea and a chat. We sometimes break up about 11pm. Sunday is devoted to church, Sunday school meeting from 8.30am -9.30pm. Church proper starts from 10am - 12pm. Church afternoon from 4pm-5.30pm. Youth meeting is also held fortnightly at home where I also take part. In the weekend I have no time for my studies*

because when I finally find time it is very late at night and I am very sleepy and tired. I agree that these type of commitments do affect my school work.

Oripa *I devoted a lot of time attending to cultural and religious obligations which has sometimes affected my studies. My parents encouraged me to join the church choir and choir practice was held on Mondays and Thursdays from 4.30pm-6.00pm. Cell meetings were held every Wednesday from 7.30pm-9.00pm. Sunday was spent in church. 6am - 7am morning prayer meeting in church. 9.00am-12.00pm Sunday church service, 4.00pm-6.00pm evening church service.*

Samu *Even though I also took part in cultural and religious activities at home my studies were not affected. I always attended church activities but I was always given the space and time to attend to my studies.*

Wainisi *Even though I do not study a lot because of my home responsibilities these duties do not affect my academic performance. I had my own study table and communal, cultural, religious and family obligations do not affect my studies.*

Magi *I live with my uncle's family. My parents do not work. I assist my aunt with household chores. Even though I took part in both religious and traditional obligations they do not affect, my studies. I have my own study table at home.*

Appendix IV

Letter to the Request to School Principals

Lot 38, Nakauvadra Road
Delainavesi
Lami
10th June, 2006

The Principal,
.....
.....
SUVA

Dear Sir

I am a Post Graduate Student at the University of the South Pacific and I am conducting a research on the Effects of Students Involvement in Cultural Obligations. I write to request your kind approval for me to distribute questionnaires to the students of your school as well as interviewing selected students.

The research will firstly include the filling of questionnaires by the sample population and later on in-depth interviews with the selected participants. I am aware of the importance of addressing confidentiality and anonymity in order to assume the trust of those involved in the study.

I thank you so much and I hope that you will afford me your kind approval.

Yours sincerely

Kelera Nawele Yalidole

Appendix V

Students' Involvement in Cultural, Religious and Family Activities:

Activities	Number of students affected
FAMILY OBLIGATION [Household Duties]	45
YAQONA DRINKING	40
RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT [Prayer meeting, church activities]	40
CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT [Births, weddings, deaths] * These activities normally last 6 to 7 days.	35
Total number of students interviewed	45

- Out of the 45 students interviewed only three students indicated their study time was not affected by the activities listed in the table.