

Full Length Research Paper

Making learning and teaching a richer experience: A challenge for rural Fijian primary schools

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The purpose of the study was to determine teachers' perception of the availability and adequacy of resources for the provision of a richer learning and teaching experience to children in a rural Fijian primary school. Analysis of the data gathered from the teachers shows the school to be in dire need of such resources as textbooks, science materials, library books, sports equipment and curriculum materials for creating stimulating opportunities for children and teachers. The study findings have implications not only for the quality of schooling provided to the children in rural areas but also for teachers' professional work and the funding criteria adopted by the principal stakeholder in funding small rural schools. The implications are likely to be relevant, too, for education provision in small schools located in remote rural areas of other jurisdictions, especially in developing contexts.

Key words: Remote/ rural school, quality education, funding, resources, rural education.

INTRODUCTION

Many factors, apart from teachers, are internationally recognized as enabling the learning process. One other significant factor is school resources, for example, teaching and learning materials, and physical infrastructure and facilities (Barrett et al., 2007; Chiu and Khoo, 2005; Hanushek and Wobmann, 2007; UNESCO, 2004, 2008). This illustrates the apparent growing awareness among educators and international organizations that teachers alone, no matter how well-prepared they are, may not be able to provide an enriching learning and teaching experience to children, and thus reliance on them alone may inadvertently have a negative impact on the pupils to reach their full potential. Unless complementary action is taken with the provision of school resources such as good-quality, up-to-date textbooks, infrastructure and library facilities, limitations of children's learning could continue, especially in rural areas, where access to alternative resource sites like community

libraries or ICT is more limited (Fiji Islands Education Commission, 2000). The quantity and quality of school resources are essential components of schools in all areas of the country in order to drive a stimulating learning experience of the children. Since the statistics indicate that most primary schools in Fiji are located in rural areas, research is warranted to determine the availability and adequacy of school resources for ensuring their pupils an enriching learning experience.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The input of various critical resources has a significant impact on the quality of educational provision (Barrett et al., 2007; Chiu and Khoo, 2005; EdQual, 2010; Fiji Islands Education Commission, 2000; Ishumi, 1984; UNESCO, 2008). The research by EdQual (2010), a

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Programme Consortium in the UK, has shown that the interaction of the school and three enabling environments—policy, the home and the community—contributes toward achieving education of a good quality. As highlighted by EdQual (2010), the creation of enabling environments requires a correct mix of inputs and processes that interact to produce optimal learning outcomes. From this evidence, stakeholders and others with a vested interest in education need to assess their priorities for investment in the interest of achieving good quality education. The present study focuses on one of these environments (the school) looking specifically at the matter of resources.

The school environment—physical, psychological and cultural—is crucial because it is here that the interaction of all the inputs together determines and ‘plays out’ the educational process. Besides well-qualified teachers, inputs such as curriculum materials supporting teaching and learning, library books, buildings and facilities are needed to support and extend the work of the teachers, thus contributing to better learning outcomes. The Education for All (EFA) campaign and the Dakar World Conference on Education, however, confirmed that the basic quality of educational facilities is in urgent need of improvement and this affects teachers in the teaching and learning process (UNESCO, 2004, 2008). Under the influence of market ideology, we are pushed to think of schools as quasi-business enterprises. In this model, with suitable and high quality inputs we can improve the production process, that is, the teaching and learning process, and in turn improve the product, children’s learning outcomes. Conversely, without adequate inputs of suitable quality, surely the teaching and learning practices would be adversely affected.

As far back as the 1960s, Connell (1962) stressed the necessity for relevant teaching resources and physical facilities for the provision of a high quality education for children. Weinstein (1979) strongly supported the view and perceived that a high quality of materials and equipment in schools had a positive impact not only on the work of the teachers but also on children’s school work; the provision of educational resource materials can encourage children to learn independently. Several other researchers have highlighted the significance of suitable resources—and by implication, the support they can give teachers—in improving children’s learning outcomes (Fuller, 1987; Fuller and Heyneman, 1989; Lee et al., 2005; Michaelowa, 2001; Velez et al., 1993; Wobmann, 2003). At the same time, children would find learning more meaningful to them provided the required resources are effectively utilized (Hanushek, 1995). The availability of materials and well-equipped classrooms can boost a lot of interest in the teaching and learning of different curriculum areas, not least in the teaching of science subjects. In fact, for all subjects, the necessity for making relevant materials such as textbooks and other curriculum materials available to facilitate teaching and

learning was demonstrated (Hanushek, 1995). With suitable resources available, the range of stimulating activities can be organized to extend children’s understanding of various concepts taught in the different subject areas and enable children to grasp the concepts and ideas more readily.

Of particular significance is the school library. Already in the 1960s, Connell (1962) pointed out the need for well-resourced library facilities for all educational institutions. Stocks should include materials such as books appropriate to all ages of children, as well as catering for the professional needs of teachers: encyclopaedias, journals and newspapers would all fall within the desirable range. Good library resources can contribute enormously to the teaching and learning process (Cass, 2007; Connell, 1962; Hodges, 2007; Rainey, 1999), just as poor or inadequate ones can detract from it. Suitable materials and physical facilities have the potential to help teachers in their instruction; children, in response to better resources and better instruction, would both understand better and profit from all aspects of school work, as it would be more meaningful to them.

For the teachers, appropriate facilities and resources can have a positive impact on their effectiveness. Barrett and his colleagues (2006) cautioned against the ramifications, at different levels of schooling, of reduced resource support. The implications are particularly grave at the primary school level of formal education for it is here that we need to lay a strong foundation on which all subsequent learning will build.

Booth et al. (1998) surveyed pre-service teachers in the Bachelor in Teaching programme of Wollongong University to determine their perceptions of teaching and learning contexts they encountered in their three-week overseas practicum. Participants’ responses relating to their experiences in Fiji indicated deficiencies in the quality of teaching spaces and educational resource materials. Typical comments include:

Rooms are bare and lacking visual stimulation. Old texts and aids. Several places did not have a borrowing system in the limited library.

Poor or inadequate resources are the most discouraging aspect of the classroom ... the room was enclosed and there was no space to perform any activities other than general chalk and talk/teacher-centred strategies (Booth et al., 1998, pp. 3–4).

Limitations of this sort are virtually certain to have adverse effects in the provision of enriching learning experiences to the children. Alloway and colleagues (2004) made the comment, with reference to regional Australia, that students in rural schools are educationally disadvantaged compared to their urban peers. Certainly, the judgment applies equally to the situation described in these student observations. The case for addressing rural

and urban inequalities in education seems strong.

Furthermore, a study of high-performing primary schools in Fiji showed that among other characteristics, these schools were adequately resourced (Singh, 2001). Chiu and Khoo (2005) found likewise that students with more resources have more learning opportunities. In fact, it seems clear that lack of resources can adversely affect the educational process at all levels of schooling. This may well be the major contributing factor for the poor learning outcomes of rural children in Fiji that Narsey (2004) reports. Some researchers argue that even within the context of allowing for multi-class teaching arrangements, teaching could be made more effective, provided there is an abundance of educational resource materials for school work (Cornish, 2006; Thomas and Shaw, 1992). Abundance of resource materials could, for instance, help the teacher busy with one class or group to engage the 'other' children in meaningful educational activity not relying on having the teacher as the centre of attention. Learning allows scope for both sharing and independence, for being shown the way and for being set on the path.

In similar vein, Little (2001) suggests that effective teaching in schools with multi-grade teaching arrangements requires a range of suitable resources that teachers can use to make a positive difference in children's learning experiences. Availability of a range of teaching and learning resources can help promote independent study and allow teachers to use an inquiry-oriented approach to teaching and learning. Otherwise, teachers in such schools will continue to use the transmissive mode and discourage or ignore the development of lifelong learning skills. The Fiji Education Commission report reaffirms that teachers in many classrooms in Fiji schools continue to use transmissive teaching strategies; lack of teaching and learning resources has been cited as, among other reasons, a significant contributing factor to the reluctance to abandon this mode of teaching (Bacchus, 2000).

According to the report of the Fiji Islands Education Commission (2000), the provision of the most basic resources, particularly for rural schools run by local school management committees, is simply inadequate in areas such as toilet facilities, classroom conditions and poor furniture. In addition, the report goes on to say that textbooks were either outdated or not available in sufficient numbers in some rural schools. Outdated textbooks limit students' access to substantial up-to-date subject content knowledge in comparison with their counterparts who can have access to more advanced and most recent publications (Cohen et al., 2003). In a study conducted by Prosser (2006) in one of the three high schools in Kadavu Island, Fiji found that school resources, such as textbooks, chalk, and paper were inadequate and at times non-existent. Even school furniture was lacking and students had to sit on the floor. The high levels of unemployment and minimal household income was cited as a contributing factor towards these

problems (Prosser, 2006).

To enhance the quality of education it is essential to improve the basic teaching materials and general school environment. Increasing access without ensuring the provision of quality teaching materials and a suitable learning environment will not improve our societies, as was pointed out by a special rapporteur of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, Mr Kishor Singh (2012). In this regard, contemporary governments have the legal obligation to ensure children in all areas of the country receive education of good quality.

The teaching and learning process, the riverbed of children's learning experience, can be severely affected by the lack of suitable resources. Some evidence suggests that unavailability of teaching and learning resources for school work can make some teachers more likely to skip certain lessons. In his study relating to teaching in Fiji, Muralidhar (1989) found teachers skipped certain topics in Basic Science because of lack of suitable resources. Yet better exposure and understanding in order to make sense of all that is included in the curriculum demands suitable resources. ICT, if appropriate use is made of it, can contribute more and more toward expanding what children learn (Rubagiza et al., 2011) though provision of good ICT services is problematic in much of rural Fiji. Thomson's (2002) study of schools and children in disadvantaged areas in Adelaide, South Australia, indicates that they also face problems with school resources and these deficiencies similarly have negative impacts on how and what children learn. Teachers in such schools were expected to do more, yet to do so with only limited resources and support coming from the government and the community the schools serve. Clarke and Wildy (2011) report that rural schools in Western Australia are faced with distinctive challenges. In short, there can be little doubt that lack of resources adversely affects the teaching and learning process; the link between the availability of reasonable quality facilities and resources, on the one hand, and student learning experience on the other, is very strong (Barrett et al., 2007; Hanushek and Wobmann, 2007; UNESCO, 2008).

This brief survey of some of the literature captures the need for schools to be well-resourced and provides some insights into the topic. The use of creative and stimulating pedagogies is possible, provided teachers are afforded the back-up of suitable teaching and learning resources, whose availability is one of the several factors on which effective teaching practices depend. Not only can such resources enhance independent learning; they can also encourage teachers to use a variety of pedagogical approaches in their teaching. Additional benefits lie in the promotion of deep learning and better understanding of the lessons. By the same token, a poorly resourced school benefits neither teachers' work nor the children's learning experience. Better school infrastructure and abundance of suitable material resources serve to

empower teachers and also support making positive changes to classroom instructional practices. From the point of view of providing an enriching educational experience that will contribute towards pupils' all-round development, the provision of high quality school resources is patently close to the top of the list, if not paramount. This is reason enough for investigating the availability and adequacy of resources in Fiji's rural schools.

Aim of this study

The study reported here was undertaken to explore the state of rural primary schools in Fiji with regard to the availability and adequacy of resources that are assumed to allow enriching learning experiences to flourish. One central research question drove the study: Are there any gaps in the present provision of resources that may compromise the quality of schooling made available to rural children?

Significance of the study

Generally, most of the literature on schools is based on research undertaken in well-resourced and staffed schools in developed countries (Harber and Davies, 1997) and not much is documented about schools in developing contexts. Since research literature on education in small island states is not yet abundant (Crossley et al., 2011; Sanga, 2012) the findings can be seen as bricks in the building of local and international literature on rural education. Information and insights into the availability and adequacy of resources for teaching and learning in rural schools emerging from this study should be helpful to the Ministry of Education in formulating appropriate policies relating to resources in schools. Consequently, the findings may propel the government to look for ways to resource rural schools adequately, to give them the basis for enriching their pupils' educational experiences. In addition, the findings may act as a catalyst for other researchers to undertake research on issues relating to rural education in developing contexts, perhaps propelling them to explore issues relating to the other two environments mentioned—policy, and home and community—and their contribution to pupils' educational experience.

Study context

Fiji is a developing nation in the Pacific with a population of almost 850,000, a population size that puts it in the small state category (Bray, 1991; Crossley et al., 2011). When compared to other small island states in the Pacific, Fiji may be regarded as having a growing economy, though its political record in the last quarter-century has

made that claim rather volatile. Politically, the country was under British colonial rule for 96 years, achieving independence in 1970. During the early days of independence the country enjoyed what superficially seemed an extremely stable political climate. This, however, was short-lived as coups, four within two decades (1987–2006), tarnished Fiji's image internationally. The unstable political climate has affected all facets of people's lives, one result being a brain drain of skilled people, notable among them well-qualified and experienced teachers. Another setback has been the limitation of funding assistance from (primarily Western) aid agencies, a disapproving donor reaction to military government; the dire effects of this have been felt in developments in education as well as other sectors.

Fiji's geography means the population is unevenly distributed. Likewise, primary schools are scattered throughout the country, to favour greater equity of access, but most rural schools have small student populations. In the case of Fiji, the Ministry of Education has provided a guideline relating to schools which are classified as rural. The guideline states that a rural school is one that is: 10–20 km from a town boundary; equal to or greater than 20km from a town boundary; and very remote. Based on these criteria, there are about 560 rural primary schools in Fiji and 38 per cent of these are in very remote locations (Fiji Ministry of Education, 2011). Due to their rural setting, these schools are disadvantaged in many ways such as in terms of communication and transport services as well as the quality of teachers posted to these schools (Tavola 2000). Despite the location, rural school children also deserve quality primary education.

All school-age children have the right to education. Even though the Compulsory Education Act of 1997 is not enforced, the rising demand for education from the parents has led to an impressive level of enrolment in primary schools. For administering primary education, the country is divided into nine education districts, centralized in the Ministry of Education in Suva, though most of the primary schools are owned and run by non-government organizations, such as school committees and various socio-religious organizations.

It is noteworthy that the partnership between the government and the non-government organizations in the management of schools is a healthy one. In a general sense, community involvement in and ownership of schools has been described as a 'double-edged sword' in that it can lead to variation in the quality of education provided (Bessell, 2009), particularly in rural communities with poor economic background (Bouck, 2004; Narsey, 2008). In Fiji, the government supports all schools with per capita grants and fee-free grants. Table 1 sets out the current fee-free grants to primary schools on the basis of student population, a grant structure put in place in 1994 and still standing in 2012. Inflation has meant that this grant, never prodigal, is now inevitably insufficient and

Table 1. Fee-free grants to primary schools (FJ\$).

Schools with 10 to 49 pupils	\$3,500 p.a. per school
Schools with 50 to 99 pupils	\$4,000 p.a. per school
Schools with 100 to 149 pupils	\$4,500 p.a. per school
Schools with over 150 pupils	\$30 per pupil per year

Source: Fiji Ministry of Education, 2011.

schools have to raise money to cater for varying needs (Lingam, 2009; Prosser, 2006; Tavola, 2000).

Overall, the Ministry of Education's roles include administration, registration and auditing schools, subsidizing tuition, curriculum development, examination provision, training, licensing and placement of teachers, and provision of grants for buildings (Johnson, 1996).

METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative case study research design (Burns, 2000; Yin, 1990). Nevertheless, some quantification was also incorporated. In the current study the phenomenon was school resources vis-à-vis rural primary schools in Fiji.

Data collection was primarily by means of a survey questionnaire and interviews. An integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection "generally allows greater depth of understanding and insight than what is possible using just one approach" (Roberts, 2004, p. 110). The former was devised to determine the perception of teachers ($N = 52$) in a sample of 13 rural schools on their level of satisfaction with the availability of resources. The sample size was based on Cohen and Manion's (1994) suggestion that for statistical analysis, a minimum sample size of 30 is desirable (p. 89-90). The selection of schools was based on education ministry's criteria for classifying rural schools. On the basis of the researcher's work experience in the Fiji context and the literature reviewed, a list of resources was provided to the respondents and they were asked to rate each on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = very poor; 5 = excellent). Then for the latter, one of the schools surveyed was chosen for the case study and by means of the semi-structured interview teachers were probed further on some of the responses to the questions posed in the survey, in order to gain further insights and greater depth about resources in the school (Osbourne and Gilbert, 1980).

The use of the two methods of data collection is based on Burns's (1998) suggestion that people's rating responses can be compared with their account, using interviewing, of what they said. Also, as Creswell (2009) reports, this method of collecting quantitative data first followed by qualitative data helps refine, elaborate or extend the quantitative result. He further states that 'the straightforward nature of this design is one of its main strengths' (Creswell, 2009, p. 211). In the same vein, Burns (2000) states that the use of different methods of data collection would complement each other and at the same time ensure that any weakness of one method may be overcome by the strengths of the other methods. Thus the information from the interviews complements the data obtained from the survey. The head teacher of the case study school consented to provide necessary cooperation to gain access to the data needed for the study, the school's name is withheld in the interests of confidentiality and the anonymity of the teachers is ensured. The following are the interview questions:

1. How does provision of resources compare with the ideal that you

would like to have if given the chance?

2. Are there any serious gaps in the current provision of physical resources or funding?

3. What priority do the local people give to the claims of the school on its financial and other resources?

4. What do you have to say with regard to the provision of curriculum materials supplied by the Curriculum Development Unit [of the Ministry of Education] to support teaching and learning activities in the different subject areas?

5. Are there any multi-media resources that you use in your teaching?

Data analysis

Low-tech (that is. manual) methods were used for the analysis of the data collected (Creswell, 2012; Vulliamy and Webb, 1992). The quantitative data yielded indicative frequency counts, which were then analyzed using a common statistical mean and standard deviation (Creswell, 2012; Cooksey, 1984). Qualitative data were analyzed according to relevant themes that emerged as the data were scrutinized (Patton, 1990). Also, this enabled constant comparative analysis of data (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Where appropriate, representative comments are used from the interviews, taking the lead from Rudduck's (1993: 19) suggestion that 'some statements carry a remarkably rich density of meaning in a few words'.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The summarized findings are presented under the headings, quantitative and qualitative data. Under the first, Table 2 displays statistics of teachers' ratings of resource provision in their respective schools. A brief background of the school prefaces the qualitative section, followed by analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the case study school.

Quantitative data

The summary of the quantitative data on school resources is presented in Table 2.

The results in Table 2 show that the ratings for almost all of the resources were below a mean of 3.0 and were categorized as negative. School furniture was the only resource rated positively (mean = 3.8) by the teachers of the schools surveyed.

Qualitative data

Setting the scene

The case study school was established in the 1990s. It is a remote school located about 30 kilometres from the nearest urban centre. A four-wheel drive vehicle is needed during bad weather to negotiate the 10 kilometres from the main road over the gravel surfaced road to reach the school. In dry weather, the road is dusty and bumpy. The school, which serves the people of four

Table 2. Summary of quantitative data (N=52).

School resources	Mean	Standard deviation
School building	2.0	0.79
Classrooms	1.9	0.78
Staff room	2.3	0.79
Library	1.9	0.78
Teaching Aids	2.0	0.77
Curriculum materials	1.9	0.85
Reference material	1.0	0.87
Furniture	3.8	0.77
Gardening tools	1.0	0.85
Science equipment	1.3	0.90
Sports equipment	1.7	0.87
Toilets	2.0	0.77
Multi-media	1.0	1.00

Table 3. Student distribution.

Composite class	Number of children
1 and 2	15
3 and 4	18
5 and 6	15
7 and 8	20
TOTAL	68

villages, is owned and managed by a committee of local people. Children attending the school are mostly from families of low income, some of whom depend on the sale of copra for their livelihood; generally, the people in these villages rely on subsistence farming for sustenance.

Classified as a small, non-government school, this four-teacher school with a student population of 68 (teacher: pupil ratio of 1:17) includes classes 1 to 8. Each teacher is responsible for two classes. The distribution of students in each composite class is shown in the Table 3.

The head teacher is also tasked with teaching, apart from carrying out administrative duties. All the teachers in this school were trained at the then government-owned primary teachers college, the Lautoka Teachers' College, and they all hold a Primary Teacher's Certificate and this grants them qualified teacher status (QTS). The holder of the certificate is recognized as a qualified teacher to teach children who are in Classes 1 to 8 at the primary school level.

In this school all the teachers live in the school compound and all are civil servants whose salaries are paid by the government. All teaching in the school conforms to the Ministry of Education prescriptions and guidelines. In this centralized education system, teachers generally depend on the central authority for the provision of teachers' guides, pupils' workbooks and even teaching

aids that they prescribe.

Responses

Typical responses to the question relating to the current provision of resources and the ideal that they would like to have if given the chance, are:

The resources provided are insufficient to enhance effective learning and teaching (T01/2013).

The resources provided are not enough. To use some resources students have to pay, for example for photocopying and printing. Not all the textbooks are provided and most of the time students have to share textbooks (T02/2013).

Limited resources as to what is expected to be provided to the students in order to attain education to the right standard (T03/2013).

Overall, the provision of resources is poor . . . all the basic resources needed in classroom teaching should be provided before concentrating on other matters (T04/2013).

In terms of any serious gaps in the current provision of physical resources or funding, the responses include:

Yes, there is a big gap in the provision of resources. The funding provided by the government is not enough (T01/2013).

Yes, I believe the money should come to the head teacher, who could use the money to buy all the resources we need (T02/2013).

Yes, serious gaps . . . not enough money to purchase the resources (T03/2013).

Yes . . . in one case there was no paper to print the test papers for the end of term test (T04/2013).

With regard to the priority the local people give to the claims of the school on their financial and other resources, typical opinions are demonstrated in these responses:

No priority, as the community around the school is not rich enough to provide financial help to the school . . . even through fundraising we cannot raise enough money (T01/2013).

Very little priority . . . local people are trying their best to make ends meet. The current economic situation has left the majority of the locals in a very difficult financial

position (T02/2013).

Local people always try their best to meet their own needs [requirements] and school resources are second to them (T03/2013).

They cannot afford school resources as they are subsistence farmers (T04/2013).

In relation to the provision of curriculum materials supplied by the Curriculum Development Unit to support teaching and learning activities in the different subject areas, the comments include:

No. The Learning Records have not reached the school up till now and this is the end of term one. Thus Curriculum Development Unit fails to supply all that we need (T01/2013).

The provision of materials is slow . . . they do not reach the school on time and it affects teaching and learning (T02/2013).

They do not supply adequate resources . . . for example, books have to be shared (T03/2013).

They are very slow in sending the materials . . . sometimes they do not reach the school (T04/2013).

In terms of multi-media resources for teaching, the teachers' responses include:

We do not have multi-media. No computers here for teachers and students (T01/2013).

Due to financial problems . . . we do not have multi-media. There is a need for multi-media resources as it would help maximize children's learning (T02/2013).

There is no multi-media resource. The school leader and the management need to look into this (T03/2013).

Children need to be exposed to multi-media resources [so that] effective learning and teaching can take place (T04/2013).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the quantitative data shows that the teachers consider their schools poorly resourced, exhibiting a minimum standard in school resources. The means for most of items are below 3.0 (Table 2). Across the board, the schools are seen to lack a wide a range of physical facilities, equipment and teaching and learning resources. The status of the library in the case study school, for instance, is assessed as poor; it lacks library

books and those available are out-of-date or in poor condition or both. A library should be a place well resourced, with current information and ideas to improve children's education (Cass, 2007; Hodges, 2007; Rainey, 1999) but this is far from being the situation in the 13 schools surveyed. Lack of library resources impinges not only on the work of the teachers but also on children's school work.

Teachers' feedback about resources in the case study school is explicit; their paucity is bound to limit active learning and restrict the development of pupils to their full potential (Alloway et al., 2004; Chiu and Khoo, 2005; Fuller and Heyneman, 1989; Lee et al., 2005; Michaelowa, 2001; Velez et al., 1993; Wobmann, 2003). Children need, for example, to conduct science experiments to engage fully in the lessons (Weinstein, 1979) yet the shortage of materials is particularly evident in science and what is available is of poor quality. The lack of textbooks means the children are allowed to use them only while in school, severely hampering any homework activities that the teachers intend to assign.

Physical facilities fare no better: classrooms, staff room, library and toilets are of poor quality and if Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations specifying required standards were to be strictly applied, the school would have to be closed. Staff quarters, toilets and school buildings are old and need maintenance. Indeed, it was found that the parents and teachers themselves carry out certain maintenance work at the school because of the school's poor financial position. Since the school is bounded by the poor village communities who rely on subsistence living, this illustrates their inability to contribute towards improving educational facilities and resources (Prosser, 2006).

All teachers point out the need for more, and quite basic, resources in all areas, particularly in the form of appropriate books, curriculum materials for all subject areas and sports equipment. Furthermore, without a healthy budget the school cannot afford to purchase computers for the children. Access to computers is vital in the contemporary world of work but all children at the case study school miss out on this experience (Rubagiza et al., 2011). With its remote location, the school does not have a power supply so electronic access to information is not possible. Also, no multi-media are used in teaching and learning.

The increase in the per capita grant in the 1990s was a positive sign but it appears that it has had no positive impact on the school because the fee-free grant was also small. This is reflected in the feedback from the teachers. No doubt inflation and the devaluation of the Fiji dollar play some role in this. The community the school serves is financially poor and they have difficulty in meeting their own basic requirements. As is the common experience everywhere, the support for the school in terms of resources is heavily influenced by the economic background of the parents and the community at large

(Bacchus, 2000; Chiu and Khoo, 2005). Inflation has eroded the government grant to rural schools to the point where it is insufficient to run these schools effectively. Schools in the urban centres tend to be supported by a relatively rich community whereas in the rural areas most communities are subsistence farmers. For example, a study on the analysis of poverty in Fiji pointed out that a large number of people, of whom a vast majority is in rural areas, live in poverty (Narsey, 2008). These rural communities simply cannot afford to provide additional financial support to their schools. The recent review of Fiji's education system clearly pointed out the disparities between rural and urban primary schools in relation to financial support (Fiji Islands Education Commission, 2000). Despite government's supporting grants, all schools still find it necessary to levy all other sorts of fees, such as for sports, stationery, buildings, examinations and admissions, in order to keep the schools operating (Lingam, 2009). Here Bessell's (2009) comments about the introduction of variation in standards remain as pertinent today as when they were made.

Overall, the school is not properly resourced to maximize children's learning potential. There is concordance between the quantitative and qualitative data. This illustrates that the teaching staff are not unaware of the unsatisfactory level of resources available at the school, nor are they complacent about it. The serious gaps in the provision of suitable resources jeopardize teachers' ability to be effective in facilitating teaching and learning processes especially in a multi-grade teaching arrangement. They point out that the provision of an enriching educational experience relies on adequate resourcing: a well resourced library, nice classrooms, appropriate books, science materials and equipment, computers, reading materials for all classes, teaching aids and curriculum materials suitable for multi-grade teaching, and sufficient science equipment. This reaffirms the findings of Little (2001) on the importance of resources for a stimulating learning experience.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Availability of resources for teaching and learning is recognized as vital in providing more and better learning opportunities to children. Without suitable resources, it is difficult for teachers to implement the curriculum effectively to improve what and how well the children learn. A poorly resourced school will discourage and frustrate teachers in their school work and have a negative impact on children's learning. The search for other sources of financing could help in purchasing more resources. Many countries in the Pacific region have made tremendous progress in the quantitative expansion of their education systems; but qualitative improvement has not kept pace with quantitative expansion (Singh, 2012). The scarcity of resources has been especially prejudicial to the quality of education in remote schools.

Without adequate support to the disadvantaged groups, especially those feeding into the rural schools, full and enriching satisfaction of their developmental needs is unlikely. Education stakeholders would, therefore, do well to heed the observation of Ishumi (1984) and more recently of EdQual (2010) that for significant improvement of children's education, high-quality inputs into schools are imperative. In recent times, teachers at all levels, but especially at the primary level, are being pressured increasingly to improve children's learning achievements, and yet, paradoxically, they are hampered by limited and scarce resources for carrying out the teaching and learning process (Booth et al., 1998; Chiu and Khoo, 2005; Thomson, 2002). This could well be the prime cause of poor academic performance of rural children (Narsey, 2004).

The data analysis presented here clearly suggests that under existing conditions, the case study school is unlikely to be able to provide an education of reasonable quality to its pupils, let alone one that could be termed an enriched or enriching experience. The limited range and quality of resources is pinpointed as a major cause for this dismal situation. The principal stakeholder, in this case the Ministry of Education, must provide more support to rural schools, which will otherwise remain locked in to disadvantage in comparison with their urban counterparts. The government, in its formulation of education plans, must focus more attention on rural education in order to see that all students achieve success, regardless of their location. The study findings imply as well that further research on various issues relating to rural education in other developing contexts in the Pacific region and beyond would create and extend a valuable broader knowledge base to underpin policy formulation for rural education.

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