

# **Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province**

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Faculty of Education & Social Work,  
the University of Sydney, Australia,  
in partial fulfilment of the  
Degree of Doctor of Education  
2006

**For the children of Fiji,.....**

## **ABSTRACT**

At an upper level of education, especially Forms 5, 6 and 7 of secondary school and in tertiary institutions, Indo-Fijian students often perform better than their ethnic Fijian counterparts. This pattern of ethnic difference in academic performance is a long standing one, lasting over 70 years. However, both ethnic groups have been participants in the same educational system in Fiji. Educational policies have been implemented to reduce this difference.

This present case study argues that there are cultural differences of values, beliefs and practices with respect to educational achievement among Indo-Fijians and ethnic Fijians. The achievement ethic of the two ethnic groups differs. Indo-Fijian culture respects and values education highly. Generally speaking, educating children has been always the top priority of Indo-Fijian culture. They believe that education changes people for the better, and the only way to “success” is through education. Thus, Indo-Fijian parents believe that helping children to strive for academic excellence is one of the most important tasks for them. The priority attached by such parents to educational success is one of the strongest forces behind academic success.

By contrast, ethnic Fijian culture encourages children to have a strong sense of loyalty to their community and of becoming good members of their *koro* (i.e., village). Indeed, one’s total commitment to communal activities and cultural requirements is of vital importance. Although ethnic Fijian parents generally understand the importance of their children’s education and wish to support their education, ethnic Fijian communal demands are enormous in terms of time and labour. The pressure to maintain their moral and social obligations within the community tends to make ethnic Fijians spend a large amount of time, energy and money on functions such as ceremonial events and church activities, at the possible expense of providing for the formal education of their children.

These demands mean that parents are often absent from home, and unable to supervise children’s homework. Ethnic Fijian children, upper secondary schoolers, feel strong pressure from their peers within their *koro* to conform to social activities, such as attending church, playing sports such as rugby and volleyball, and hanging around in the *koro* and town. Besides, the layout of the typical ethnic Fijian home is a

more difficult environment than Indo-Fijian households for children’s study, largely due to the limited space to study independently.

The socio-cultural background of ethnic Fijians, especially their home environment including family values and priorities, is one of the major barriers to their children’s educational progress. In addition, school leadership, teachers’ expectations, colonial policies and legacies, e.g., land tenure issues, play important roles in affecting differences in the academic performance of these two ethnic groups. Consequently, the educational achievement differences between ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians are revealed substantially during the secondary and tertiary educational institutions.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my supervisor, Anthony Welch, for his assistance and advice on my work. I would also like to express my very heartfelt appreciation to the following people for their support: Ian Smith, Robert Norton and Eta Varani-Norton. My very special thanks go to Ronald Webb, John Payne and those who co-operated with my fieldwork in the Nadroga/Navosa Province, Fiji: Principals, teachers, students, parents, education officers and church pastors.

I am grateful to the Faculty of Education & Social Work at the University of Sydney for their generous financial and instrumental support, which made my fieldwork and writing possible.

Words cannot express how much I owe my mother, Setsuko, and my wife, Vineeta. Without their on-going financial struggle, support, understanding, caring and loving, my study could not have been accomplished at all.

Finally, I dedicate this small piece of research to students in Fiji who strive for academic excellence, despite their very difficult learning environments. Their diligence, effort and determination kept my research going.

**AUTHOR’S DECLARATION**

This is to certify that:

I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the <insert Name of Degree> Degree

II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

III. the thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree.

IV. no part of this work has been used for the award of another degree.

V. this thesis meets the *University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.*

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

- ACER: Australian Council for Educational Research
- CCTC: Corpus Christian Teachers’ College
- CSR Co. Colonial Sugar Refining Company
- FAB: Fijian Affairs Board
- FC: Fulton College
- FCA: Fiji College of Agriculture
- FCAE: Fiji College of Advanced Education
- FEYE: Fiji Eight Year Examinations
- FFSE: Fiji Form Seven Examinations
- FIE: Fiji Intermediate Examinations
- FIT: Fiji Institute of Technology
- FJC: Fiji Junior Certificate
- FSLC: Fiji School Leaving Certificate
- FSM: Fiji School of Medicine
- NZSC: New Zealand School Certificate Examinations
- NZUE: New Zealand University Entrance Examinations
- QVS: Queen Victoria Memorial School
- UEE: University Entrance Examinations
- USP: University of South Pacific

**INTERVIEW NOTES**

It is common that people in Fiji call ethnic Fijians “Fijians” and Indo-Fijians “Indians”. Therefore, in interview quotations in this dissertation, I used Fijians for

ethnic Fijians and Indians for Indo-Fijians.