TVET in Fiji: Attitudes, Perceptions and Discourses

By

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other University or institution

____________________________
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Ni kalougata tiko. Vinaka saka vakalevu.
This thesis is dedicated to my parents,

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Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Fiji is undergoing major reforms. This study looks at the new climate of TVET in Fiji where the current government has given the green light to a new platform of TVET initiatives. This includes the newly formed Fiji National University that gives equal status to traditional and new technological professions. At the same time a broad-based secondary school curriculum with both academic and TVET subjects has been introduced. However, community acceptance of reinvented TVET has been very slow. This study is a response to this apparent lack of acceptance from the community. It focuses on the perceptions and attitudes towards TVET of students in junior secondary school. It also examines current discourses expressed about TVET by key stakeholders in the Fijian education system, including pupils, parents, teachers, education officers and the Minister for Education.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used during the fieldwork process to gather data from four case study schools from parts of Fiji, and from education stakeholders. The four theories guiding this study are: Constructivism, Social Reproduction, Post-Colonial Theory and Sociology of Knowledge. This study found that there is a mismatch between growth-oriented labour force needs and skilled capacities gained through education. Furthermore, a significant finding
related to the conditions that give rise to the habitus is that inequalities in terms of career opportunities and aspirations are reproduced by the education system especially for children from large, poor families and those who live with relatives.

Through efforts to work effectively with ‘grass-roots’ Fijian community members this study developed a new culturally appropriate methodology of ‘veivosaki-yaga’ during the focus group interviews. This study found competing viewpoints between stakeholders and between the different ways various groups of people currently understand TVET. Analysis of this contradictory data produced a discourse hierarchy and classification model which succinctly illustrates how TVET in Fiji is defined and understood differently by different stakeholders. This hierarchal model suggests possible reasons why there has been no consistent support for, and implementation of, TVET in Fiji. While there was consensus among high profile stakeholders that TVET has the potential to help Fiji meet its MDGs as well as its other developmental objectives, among ‘grass-roots’ stakeholders there was no such optimism or idealism.

In Fiji TVET has a generally negative perception in the community. In part this may be due to the diverse discourses that exist between major stakeholders such as senior government officials, teachers, parents and students. People at the top of the hierarchy associate TVET with highly paid professions and trades,
whereas those at the lower levels of the hierarchy consider TVET to be second-class education leading to low status, low wage-earning, labour intensive jobs.

Finally this study proposes a name and identity transformation from TVET to CTP – Career Training and Placement - to fulfill the vision and transformative discourse of major stakeholders and to eventually change the perceptions of the community about vocational education. CTP has the potential to be an inclusive innovative programme that aligns school subjects with career placement so that there is smoother transition between school and work for students in Fiji. In such a programme, school subjects and post-school training formerly viewed negatively as ‘TVET’ take their rightful place in the range of career-oriented study options available to junior secondary pupils and their families.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUSAID: Australia Agency for International Development
EFA: Education For All
FCA: Fiji College of Agriculture
FCAE: Fiji College of Advanced Education
FFA: Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
FIEC: Fiji Islands Education Commission
FIBS: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics
FILNA: Fiji Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIT</td>
<td>Fiji Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>FNU</td>
<td>Fiji National University</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLP</td>
<td>Fiji Labour Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM</td>
<td>Fiji School of Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSN</td>
<td>Fiji School of Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Internal Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTC</td>
<td>Lautoka Teachers College</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBBF</td>
<td>National Council For Building A Better Fiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATVET</td>
<td>Pacific Association of Technical Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCCPP</td>
<td>People’s Charter for Change, Peace &amp; Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIDE</td>
<td>Pacific Regional Initiative for the Delivery of Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBF</td>
<td>Reserve Bank of Fiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDL</td>
<td>Soqosoqo Duavatani Lewenivanua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOPAC</td>
<td>Pacific Islands Applied GeoScience Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPBEA</td>
<td>South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVT</td>
<td>Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei.</td>
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TAFE NSW: Technical and Further Education New South Wales

TAFE: Technical and Further Education

TPAF: Training Productivity Authority of Fiji

TVET: Technical Vocational Education and Training

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme


USP: University of the South Pacific

VET: Vocational Education and Training

WEI: World Education Indicators

WHO: World Health Organisation

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Bonn Declaration**: refers to the UNESCO meeting of international experts on Technical Vocational Education and Training where they declared that TVET held the key to alleviating poverty and improving the overall living conditions of people especially those in disadvantaged communities.

**Burebasaga**: One of the three traditional confederacies in Fiji. It comprises 6 of the 14 provinces of Fiji. Rewa is its principal province with Roko Tui Dreketi as its highest ranking chief.

**FNU**: refers to the newly established Fiji National University, which is primarily composed of the tertiary institution formerly known as Fiji Institute of
Technology. The new university resulted from the merger of 6 tertiary institutions in Fiji.

**Government**: refers to the Fiji Government unless stated otherwise.

**iTaukei (Fijian)**: refers to Indigenous Fijians or natives of Fiji. In the data tables the term ‘Fijian’ is used instead because this is the most widely recognised term in the community, settlements and schools.

**Indo Fijian (Indian)**: refers to people of Indian descent in Fiji. In the data tables, the term ‘Indian’ is used instead because this is the most widely recognised term in the community, settlements and schools.

**Kubuna**: One of the three traditional confederacies in Fiji with Tailevu as its principal province and Vunivalu as its highest ranking chief.

**Matua Program**: The *Matua* Program offers school dropouts and adults an opportunity to complete their secondary education.

**Matua**: In Fijian vernacular language this may be loosely translated as someone who is mature or an adult.

**Ministry of Education**: refers to Fiji’s Ministry of Education under the leadership of Minister Filipe Bole.

**Participants**: refers to all those who participated in this study as informants. This includes students, parents, teachers, community leaders and government officials.

**People’s Charter**: refers to the People’s Charter for Change, Peace & Progress initiated by Fiji’s interim government in 2008.

**Stakeholders**: this refers to Fiji government officials, school administrators, community leaders, business leaders, teachers, parents and students.

**Students**: refers to all students attending primary, secondary or tertiary institutions in Fiji depending on the context/usage of the term in the text. In
some instances the term is used interchangeably to refer specifically to student-participants of this study.

**Tovata:** One of the three traditional confederacies with 5 provinces. Cakaudrove is its principal province and Tui Cakau is its highest ranking chief.

**TVET:** refers to Technical Vocational Education and Training. In this study it is defined as preparation for employment. In a wider sense it means mental, physical and psychological preparation for a career. In the Fiji context, and in this thesis this may also be referred to as vocational education, vocational training or vocational.

**Veivosaki-yaga:** refers to worthwhile discussion. It is the new culturally appropriate methodology developed from this study during the fieldwork.