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Educational Reforms and Implications on Teachers' World of Work: Perspectives of Fijian Primary Teachers

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Abstract: This preliminary study reports on educational changes and its impact on primary teachers' world of work in Fiji. Data were gathered from 38 primary teachers, using a questionnaire of Likert scale items and open-ended questions aiming to identify the intensity of the changes that have occurred in their work. The data analysis reveals the educational reforms as having intensified the work of teachers. In this regard, the principal stakeholder needs to be mindful of cumulative ongoing changes, to avoid any serious ramifications for teachers' workload and in turn children's learning outcomes. Teachers themselves highlighted the need for future changes to include more opportunities for continuous professional development to enable them to cope well with new demands of work. Implications of the study's findings are also pertinent to other developing contexts such as those in the Pacific region and beyond because of ongoing transformations occurring in education systems worldwide.

Keywords: educational reform; teachers' workload; work intensification; teacher's world of work; Fiji.

Introduction

The manifold reforms that education systems across the globe are undergoing are bound to have a profound impact on teachers' professional work especially their workload (Madden, Wilks, Maione, Loader & Robinson, 2012). As always with transformations in education, relevant authorities need to be mindful of any ramifications on teachers' workload and children's learning outcomes. The numerous large and small-scale reforms occurring in contemporary times throughout the world of necessity involve unlooked for changes for teachers: their roles and functions become more challenging and demanding as they have to respond more effectively not only to the systemic changes but also to the radically changing nature of learners of the 21st century (Darling-Hammond, cited in Hall, 2009). Proponents claim that the success or failure of these changes depends on whether teachers are sufficiently conversant with them and also whether they possess suitable coping mechanisms such as skills and knowledge to make them a significant part of the reform processes (Delors, 1996; Kerr, 2006). In this regard, ongoing professional development of educational staff at all levels deserves considerable attention, now

more than ever before: in effect, they too must learn to learn (Schechter, Sykes, & Rosenfeld, 2004). They must sharpen their skills and acquire relevant knowledge if they are to have any chance of keeping pace with the ever-changing work demands, lest educational organisations fall far short of achieving their visions and missions (Butt, & Gunter, 2005; Cardno & House, 2005). In light of the ever-changing contextual environment and the unfolding reformative responses in education, this preliminary study reports on how primary teachers' perceive the severity of the changes in their work and workplace in Fiji, a small island developing state in the Pacific region.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical platform for this study is built on the ideas of Braverman (1974) and Fullan (2007) whose researches are relevant and applicable to the current study which focuses on change in teachers' world of work. Fullan (2007) proposed a comprehensive framework for conceptualising change. The framework involves an interaction among three broad categories of factors emanating from characteristics of change (need, clarity, complexity, quality/practicality), local characteristics (district, community, principal, teacher), and external factors (government and other agencies). Within the whole context of education in any jurisdiction, the lack of consideration of the interplay of these factors can lead to complexities that can adversely affect the workload of the teachers and in turn implementation of any reform agenda. As aptly pointed out by Fullan (2007; 13), “[business firms and schools] are facing turbulent, uncertain environments, but only schools are suffering the additional burden of having a torrent of unwanted, uncoordinated policies and innovations raining down on them from hierarchical bureaucracies.” (Fullan, 2007: 13). Since an education system is connected in multi-faceted and complex ways to the wider social environment in the nation in which it operates, understanding the ecology of the setting is also necessary for the success of any planned change in education (Levin, 2001). The idea of plucking reforms from one system and exporting them holus bolus to another is not advisable as all systems are different in many ways (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Segedin & Levin, 2012). Thus transplanting reforms to other nations and unquestioningly implementing them in ways that are insensitive to the receiving ecology, such as not being culturally specific, can lead to failure of the reform initiative.

In addition to Fullan's (2007) factors of conceptualising change, the present research also considers Braverman's (1974) ideas associated with workers in capitalist society as important in better understanding inner workings of educational reforms on teachers' world of work. As stated by Braverman (1974: 96) “The working life of the vast majority in capitalist society is dominated and shaped by the needs and interests of the capitalist class. Primary among these interests is to expand, to maximize profit. It is this aspect which dominates in the mind and activities of the capitalists, into whose hands the control over the labour process has passed”. This situation equally applies to teachers in certain educational contexts. In this case, Braverman (1974) advocates the need to analyse teachers' work in terms of both the *content* of what teachers do and *control* in the sense of why they do what they do and who decides what they do. Because of a driving need to modernise and improve education, the employer may impose various reform initiatives and teachers would be expected to implement them as part of their workload. At times with little investment in up-skilling teachers, the employer could demand more from teachers, such as to keep pace with the rapid process of change. Apart from determining what teachers should do, the employer could employ subtle ways to control the work of teachers. The work of

teachers, therefore, is not only dominated but also shaped by the needs and interests of the employer.

Teachers' work is not framed on the basis of some abstraction but is continually shaped and reshaped by various factors including historical, ideological and sociopolitical ones (Smyth, 2001). Teachers may have considerable autonomy in determining their day to day classroom practices but they do still have to operate within the power structures of the schools, local authorities and state within which they operate and function (Stevenson, 2007). This demonstrates that teachers in fact have limited control over the content of their work and as such they could easily be overloaded with work imposed by external powers such as the employer and in the case of the small island states in the Pacific it is the education ministry.

The inevitability of change in education demands that education systems strategise well in order to respond effectively to various changes happening within and outside them. However, an inter-play of key imperatives—noticeable among them being characteristics of change, local characteristics and external factors—ensures that it is not easy to implement changes. The influences of multiple factors simultaneously or even individually complicate the effective implementation of any change particularly, the potential of any change may not be fully realized if teachers' workload is not given the attention it deserves.

Leads from the Literature

It is widely acknowledged that the growing complexity of education systems in the contemporary era has placed greater pressures for accountability in all dimensions of teachers' professional work. Several researchers have highlighted that the role overload, complexity and tension teachers are experiencing arise from introduced educational reforms (Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Cardno & Howse, 2005; Stevenson, 2007; Sungalia, 1990). To illustrate the range of changes occurring in teachers' work and in turn their workload, researchers in developed countries have framed relevant themes such as intensification and accountability. As far back as the 1990s, for instance, Hargreaves (1994) in North America, Boyle and Woods (1996) in the United Kingdom, and Mander (1997) and Seddon and Brown (1997) in Australia have all commented pertinently about the fast pace of change occurring in teachers' world of work.

Hargreaves, for example, (2003, 1994) highlights the impact of globalisation, restructuring and market driven systems of education provision together with the changing world climate in learning and teaching in North America. Likewise, in Australia, Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock (2000) identify various changes, particularly work intensification, that exert considerable pressure on teachers in their work settings. The case is similar in the UK (Boyle & Woods, 1996; Stevenson, 2007). In short, the growing complexity and ever-changing demands of teachers' work is well documented in most of the developed countries of the world.

A recent OECD (2006: 95) commissioned report finds 'educational reforms have broadened and deepened teachers' roles'. Likewise, Sloan (2007) points out that the changes have increased schools' expectations, which in most jurisdictions has entailed enlargement of the work of teachers, especially in the areas of greater responsibility and accountability. Several scholars attribute the pressure for change to a variety of contexts—political, social and economic conditions—and these have an impact on educational systems in all settings (Ball, 2005; Ingersoll, 2003; Kerr, 2006; Schratz, 2003; Smyth, 2001). Such changes can considerably increase teachers' workload and inadvertently affect their performance. Given that effective

implementation of assessment policies will lead to enormous work load issues, it is conceivable that teachers would spend more time on the documentation aspects of assessment which can have an impact on learning and teaching activities. This view is well supported by Morrow (2007: 9) who states that in practice “teachers are driven to such frenzy about ‘assessment’ and ‘portfolios’ that they have little time to teach”.

The literature on change, apart from documenting the changes occurring, debates the relative importance of the coping reactions versus the resistance strategies employed by teachers in the face of successive top-down, management-driven changes (Ingersoll, 2003). In recent years rapid and substantial educational reforms have swept through not only developed countries but are also gaining momentum in developing countries (Stevenson, 2007). For example, in Solomon Islands, a Pacific small island developing state, some of the education reforms included school development planning, teacher appraisal, curriculum, and assessment (Lingam, 2014). Such changes require up-skilling of the teaching force in order to improve their professional knowledge and skills—already all too often at a regrettably low level—to ensure they keep pace with the continuous reforms in their work. This is crucial: teachers in the service without any professional upgrading are unlikely to cope well with the myriad of changes overtaking them.

Undoubtedly the aforementioned changes, challenges and external pressures warrant the provision of suitable continuing professional development opportunities for teachers (Bush, 2007; Wong, 2004). Similarly, Crow (2006) affirms that in light of the complex changes occurring within schools and the changing environment of schools, the probable obsolescence of knowledge and skills will necessitate on-going training and learning for teachers. Such considerations lead Lumby, Crow and Pashiardis (2008) and Bush (2008) to emphasise the significance of continuing professional development for teachers in all contexts, but more so in developing ones, in the interest of their performance as teachers and for raising the standard of children’s learning outcomes. To rely solely on a fixed deposit of knowledge and training can no longer satisfy the complex nature of the teaching enterprise and the changing roles of teachers in contemporary times. This is particularly important for Pacific countries such as Fiji, where scant attention is paid to in-service training of teachers (Tuimavana, 2010).

The view that Taylor, De Guerre, Gavin & Kass (2002: 353) expressed about school leaders—that ‘global challenges now occurring, demand approaches to training that are profoundly different from those that have served well in the past’—state the case equally well for all serving and novice teachers. Such pressuring demands for reforms in education require highly skilled and well-prepared teachers with the necessary tools in continuing to provide enriching learning experience to the children. Otherwise teachers may be seen to be lacking in desired skills and knowledge (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008).

This review of the literature illustrates that in most jurisdictions the content of teachers’ work has increased considerably and at the same time, various stakeholders’ expectations always keep on changing and at the same time rising (Smithers & Robinson, 2001). With reference to transforming education systems, governments argue about their commitment to modernise education (Ozga, 2002). In the process, and perhaps with too little foresight, teachers’ workloads have increased and intensified (Selwood & Pilkington, 2005). Without any suitable coping mechanisms, including relevant professional development, such changes can become a nightmare rather than a pleasant dream for most teachers (Campbell & Neill, 1994). In view of this, principal stakeholders would do well, as they control the work of teachers, to find Braverman (1974) and Fullan’s (2007) notions for implementation of any change initiative worthy of consideration.

The Study Context: Fiji

Fiji, whose two largest islands are Viti Levu (about 10,429 km²) and Vanua Levu (about 5,556 km²) is a scattered group of some 330 islands in a vast area of the tropical southwest Pacific Ocean. Its flanking neighbours to the west are New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, beyond which lie Papua New Guinea and Australia. Wallis, Tuvalu and Samoa complete the circle to the north and Tonga to the southeast. The most recent census report of 2008 put Fiji's multiethnic population at 837,271 (Ministry of Education, 2009). The two major ethnic groups—indigenous Fijians (iTaukei) and Indo-Fijians (or Indians)—easily outnumber other minority groups—Rotumans, Chinese, Europeans and other Pacific Islanders as well as several mixtures of these. Under the current administration all people who live in Fiji are formally and legally known as Fijians.

This multiracial and multicultural nation includes several of the major religions of the world. The diversity of religions and ideologies is a source of social and cultural richness, though difficulties can occur with regard to respecting the rights and meeting the needs of all citizens. This is particularly problematic for the Ministry of Education, charged with modernizing and delivering education programmes that satisfy all these groups while at the same time trying to preserve vitals aspects of culture and traditions.

In Fiji most schools can trace their origin, and still owe their existence, to the initiatives of Christian missions, especially in the British colonial period from 1874, and later to various socio-religious organisations by 1900. Even now, the majority of the secondary and primary schools are owned by socio-religious organisations and local communities. For example, government currently owns only 12 secondary schools. More recently, government grants to all schools, hitherto minimal, have increased considerably. However, Fiji depends on financial assistance from multilateral agencies and development partners to carry out improvements in education (Bacchus, 2008).

Although most schools are operated by non-government organisations, they all follow the ministry's policies and curricula, while the school management boards are the bodies responsible for the maintenance and development of school facilities (Lingam, 2009). The multiplicity of ownership of schools contributes to major differences in the standards of school facilities and resources and places a huge burden on families of low socio-economic status, especially those living in rural areas and solely reliant on subsistence farming. Furthermore, the marked differences in schools and settings are exacerbated because teachers and school heads are often expected to carry out a variety of roles in addition to the core business of teaching (Cardno & Howse, 2005). The Ministry of Education is responsible for the administration and management of education policy and delivery of educational services. (Policy concerning external examinations has been under scrutiny in recent years and currently the Ministry is reverting to an insistence on more external exams, after a brief fling with classroom-based assessment, which was still in place at the time of the study: firm central control is proving a hard grip to loosen.) The ministry provides the curriculum frameworks, policy guidelines and directions, and recruits pays all teachers, with some of the prescribed text books that support all schools in the delivery of education for students. This centralisation is seen as some measure of quality control—as well as simply unqualified control—over the education provided.

In Fiji's case, the distribution of schools has profound implications for the provision of education of a good quality. Geography poses constraints on accessibility in that many rural schools are isolated either by virtue of being on more distant islands or of being located in the

rugged inner terrain of the larger islands. The wide demographic distribution increases transportation and communication difficulties and costs, adding to the challenges the Ministry faces in providing supervision and support, and administering and evaluating various services to schools in remote settings. This implies the need for professional teachers and school heads who are highly competent and inner-directed, and able to provide a high quality of service to the school community, regardless of their location and the plethora of changes occurring in education. It is essential that the Ministry attend much more carefully to teachers' world of work and their professional needs, with the ultimate aim of supporting them to become more proficient in the core business of learning and teaching to ensure a meaningful and enriching learning experience for all children. Teachers are the front line but they should not be thrown in as unarmed pawns.

Significance of the Study

In developed contexts there is much wider and deeper discussion on a range of policy questions and several studies have been carried out on teachers' work and how well teachers are coping with these changes (Haber & Davies, 1997; Stevenson, 2007). Despite the rapidity of changes occurring in school work in the Pacific region, there is still distressingly little empirical literature looking at the effects of these changes on teachers' day to day work. This leaves the decision- and policy-makers in a virtual vacuum, with a lamentable paucity of knowledge and little guidance on what is teachers' workload, let alone informed discussion on what their work could be at its best. Since information on teachers' workload in this region is a major void, it warrants the urgent attention of educators and scholars interested in teachers' professional work to undertake research to provide sound empirical evidence for influencing policy and practice effectively. This study is a contribution in a small way towards this end. The study can also be seen as helping to build up local and international educational change literature in a variety of ways.

It is envisaged that the outcomes of the current study may stimulate extensive discussion in schools and in different specialised units of the education systems in Fiji and beyond such as, the curriculum development, examination and in-service units. For the in-service section, the findings would prove useful and helpful in terms of designing and mounting suitable short in-service programmes to improve and extend teachers' skills to ensure they cope well with changes in their work. Potentially, too, the study could provide useful information and insights to the employer to aid the formulation of appropriate policies relating to teachers' workload and professional upgrading. The findings may also help teacher education providers to revisit their programmes with the view to strengthening them further to cater for the rapidity of changes occurring in the teachers' arena of work. Perhaps it may influence them to look for ways in which they can prepare teachers better for the task of continuing to provide meaningful educational experience to the children.

As well as providing valuable insights into the current situation of teachers work, the outcome of the study may act as catalyst for other researchers to undertake further studies on varying issues relating to teachers' professional world. Such studies are vital not only in Fiji but also in other developing jurisdictions within and even beyond the Pacific region.

Purpose of the Study

The study reported here was undertaken to explore the impact of educational reforms on primary teachers' work milieu. As a preliminary investigation, it is guided by one fundamental research question: *What are the primary teachers' perceptions on the introduced educational reforms in their work and what changes they would like to see in future?*

Method

Participants

Since this was a preliminary investigation, the researchers considered it methodologically suitable to purposefully select four primary schools, one from each education division. A total of 38 primary school teachers participated in the study and all of them were classroom practitioners and did not hold any administrative position in the school. This sample size exceeds Cohen and Manion's (1994) minimum sample size of 30 for statistical analysis and as such was considered more than desirable. Also, Merriam's (2009: 105) advice that it is not so much the number that matters; the 'potential of each participant to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon' was taken into account as being equally important. In the same vein, Patton's (2002: 246) suggestion that 'specifying a minimum sample size based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study' was considered. All of these teachers in the sample were experienced professionals with an average teaching experience of 12 years. Teachers' educational background ranged across 55 per cent having a certificate in primary teaching, 30 per cent a degree, and 15 per cent a Postgraduate Diploma in Education.

Ethics Approval

As part of research ethics, consent was sought from Education Ministry and later from the respondents about their willingness to participate in the study. Assurance was given that the data collected were only for the purpose of research and would be treated in a way that protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As well, they were briefed that they could refuse to participate at any point during the research and even could decline to answer any question with which they were uncomfortable. It is noteworthy that all the teachers (38) of the four primary schools agreed to participate in the study and the return rate of the completed questionnaire was 100 per cent.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since this was a pioneering study, a mixed research methodology was employed using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the intensity of educational changes on teachers' world of work. This method was considered an appropriate starting point and also an effective means of gathering data (Burns, 2000). Smyth's (2001: 10) useful suggestion that 'work, organisation and change ought to be considered *from the vantage point of those who live and experience it*' (emphasis added) was considered in the design of the

study. Therefore, selection of participants to be part of this investigation was restricted to teachers as they are better placed to provide valuable insights on the research question posed.

The questionnaire consisting of both open and closed-ended questions was designed to gather data in three stages. In the first part, the participants were required to provide information on demographic details such as their initial training and teaching experience. The second part consisted of a list of possible changes that the researchers identified and the teachers were asked to rate each change on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 being lowest intensity and 5 being highest intensity. Prior to responding, teachers were explained that the low intensity and high intensity referred to small and heavy increases respectively in their workload. The third part of the questionnaire asked them to comment on any four major changes that they felt had most impact on their work. Data collected from this qualitative section, provided additional and relevant insights concerning the changes in teachers' work. This part of the questionnaire provided ample opportunities for the participants to express their views on what changes they expect to see in future in light of the current changes in their work.

In terms of data analysis, the quantitative data were analysed using common descriptive statistical analysis techniques, in this case means and standard deviations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The statements having means of above 3.0 were categorised as overloading the teachers' with work and those below the mean of 3.0 were rated as having a minimum impact on their work. On the other hand, the qualitative data collected were analysed using a thematic approach using open coding, axial coding and selective coding for the development of themes (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). As a result, five themes emerged from the responses using constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Findings

Quantitative Data

The feedback obtained from the teachers' reveals a consciousness that a significant change has taken place in their work. The analysis of the quantitative data (Table 1) demonstrates a perception of the magnitude of change in teachers' work. From the list of changes provided, the teachers reported the following seven (as indicated by the high mean scores) as having a substantial increase on their workload: school-based assessment; documentation; monthly review of staff, inspection; school curriculum; community awareness programme; and school strategic planning.

Changes experienced in world of work	Mean (N = 38)	Standard deviation (SD)
School-based assessment	4.8	0.33
Documentation of student performance	4.8	0.26
Monthly review of staff performance	4.6	0.55
Inspection	4.6	0.33
School curriculum	4.4	0.39

Community awareness programme	4.2	0.44
School strategic planning	4.1	0.45
Professional development activity	2.4	0.66
Co-curricular activity	2.4	0.54
Teaching method	2.3	0.46
Counselling students	2.2	0.47
Homework plan	2.1	0.36
Facilities and educational resources	2.0	0.45

Table 1: Intensity of changes in Fiji primary teachers' world of work

Qualitative Data

Additionally, when asked to list and comment on four of the major changes experienced in their work, the majority of the teachers pointed out, in descending order: school-based assessment, documentation, inspection, school planning, and community awareness programme. **School-based assessment.** School-based assessment demands relevant knowledge and skills to prepare suitable assessment tasks for children. The analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data pointed out assessment as a major change in their work practices. The new assessment system was introduced after the two examinations at the primary level—the Fiji Intermediate Examination and Fiji Eighth Year Examination—were abolished by the Ministry of Education in 2010. The new assessment system at the primary level includes classroom-based assessment (CBA) and classroom assessment tasks (CAT), which teachers described as very demanding and consuming too much of their time. The teachers' feedback indicates that they were asked to do more work even though they had limited knowledge and skills on this type of assessment. The following are some of the typical comments from the teachers about school-based assessment:

We need to conduct nine Classroom Based Assessments per year (three per term), six short tests (2 per term) and three internal examinations (one per term). This is too much in terms of preparation and takes up valuable teaching time (Ronald).

There is a drastic change in school assessment. Previously, there were external examinations but the Ministry of Education has done away with them. The CBAs and other internal assessments have increased the workload of teachers and this is affecting the classroom teaching (Pinto).

Because of the school-based assessment introduced by the Ministry, teachers have less preparation and teaching time. This is too much for us to cope (Bobby).

Documentation. In terms of documentation, all the teachers (100 per cent) reported that they were faced with a lot of paper work in their day to day work. The following sample of responses demonstrates this change in their work practices:

Documentation of students' performance in all subject areas since the introduction of the new assessment. The Ministry is focusing on documentation of all assessments conducted. Teachers are required to document children's performance with all activities done in the classroom and at the same time they need to keep them up to date (Pushpa).

We are preparing about 27 folders and submitting them weekly to our supervising officers. We get less time to teach the children (Doci).

Teacher performance. Changes in teacher performance, such as through inspection and monthly review, are other major changes in the ethos in which teachers conduct their work. Teachers' work is inspected by both Internal School Review Inspection (ISRI) and External School Review Inspection (ESRI) teams, carried out by the head teacher and staff from the District Education office respectively. Special templates are designed for these and the requirements are substantial, with a focus on four major domains: students and learning, leadership and management, community and partnership, and learning environment. Some of their responses include:

It puts pressure on teachers because a lot of documentation needs to be done and files to be prepared (Shane).

They [Inspectors] do not focus of children's learning but only on documents (Nenny).

Not clear and demands too much from the teachers ... very surprising that different officers expect different things (Kala).

School curriculum. All of the teachers (100 per cent) pointed out that several changes that have taken place in school curriculum are heavily affecting their workload. The following sample of responses demonstrates this:

Thematic approach is new to teachers ... no clear direction and training on the curriculum (Lala).

We thought the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) will set out everything. This is not the case, we teachers have to unpack, decide the subtopics and sub-strands based on the learning outcomes (Permal).

School planning. School planning requirements in Fiji are for a school strategic plan, an annual plan and an individual work plan. All the teachers expressed the phasing in of new planning activities as a major change in their work. School strategic planning is about developments that schools would like to see happening over the course of a few years. The Ministry of Education provides some specific guidelines on the basis of which the schools are supposed to prepare their school strategic plans. Based on the school strategic plan, teachers are required to prepare their annual plan and in turn, their individual work plans. All these plans are to be constructively aligned to the Ministry's own plan. The following typical comment from a teacher reflects their thoughts about the introduction of various planning activities that have been made mandatory by the Ministry of Education:

Planning is good but we are new to this kind of planning and also it seems it is hardly followed ... strategic planning should involve all stakeholders (Kuku).

Future Changes. With respect to what teachers would like to see happening in future in accord with the changes occurring in their work, the analysis of the responses indicates the need for more professional development opportunities (100 per cent), consideration of reduction in their workload (100 per cent) and proper planning for change (87 per cent). With respect to professional development some of the typical comments are:

More training is needed when something new is introduced. For example, when the National Curriculum Framework was introduced only one teacher from each school was provided training. This is not enough (Nannu).

More training and also prepare specialist teachers for primary schools (Mac). Conduct more workshops to train teachers before implementing any change in curriculum (Sonu).

All of the teachers expressed the need to reduce their workload, and in particular, the paper work. The following comments reflect this:

Reduce documentation so that more time is devoted to teaching and learning (Pinky).

Paperwork should be reduced to encourage teachers to spend more quality time with children in learning and teaching (Kaikai).

With respect to planning for change, most of the teachers (87 per cent) emphasised the need for proper planning before any change is introduced into the education system. Otherwise the change will be implemented on ad hoc basis and managing and coping with the change will be challenging for teachers. Some of the typical comments included:

Proper planning is required in future...consultation with us and other relevant stakeholders is important (Betty).

Changes should be brought about after carrying out proper research (Tara).

Plans should be in place for professional development to help teachers cope with any change (Pama).

Discussion

The study explores the intensity of changes in teachers' work in Fiji, a small island developing state in the Pacific. The analysis of the quantitative (Table 1) and qualitative responses illustrates the perceived intensification of the workload of teachers flowing on from the stream of reforms in education. For example, changes to assessment procedures, teacher performance, curriculum content, and non-instructional duties such as documentation have increased and intensified teachers' workload simply by extra work that was not previously required.

With regard to assessment, the results indicate that a key problem facing teachers is in the implementation of school-based assessment activities. A valuable explanation for this could be that since most of these teachers underwent their training a long time ago, they may not only have limited knowledge on recent trends in educational assessment but may also possess a narrow conception of the very nature and purpose of assessment. Without sufficient preparation on assessment for learning, teachers may well struggle with the task, which will have adverse effects their pupils' learning. Assessment is a significant feature of most education systems, including Fiji's, and it would have been better if a properly managed and validated system of school-based assessment was in place. Teachers need to be professionally ready first before implementing such an initiative (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008). Without a change in their mindsets, the shift to assessment for learning was obviously going to be difficult to achieve. Assessment, especially authentic assessment, plays a pivotal role in learning and teaching.

Even though the school strategic planning seems to encourage a bottom-up approach, without provision of professional support teachers will lack understanding and also may fail to

realise that planning of these three types (strategic, annual and individual work plan) are all an integral part of the advancement of education in any setting. The dismal finding here is consistent with the findings relating to School Improvement Planning in the Republic of Marshall Islands (Pallotta & Lingam, 2013).

In order to implement the changes in the curriculum effectively, it is necessary for teachers to have both content and pedagogical knowledge. For this to happen successfully, teachers need to be professionally prepared to use the thematic approach and other associated changes in curriculum content, to ensure delivery and children's learning are not compromised (Tuimavana, 2010). In relation to documentation, too much paper work can frustrate teachers in their work and adversely affect their time for teaching (Morrow, 2007). It is easy to sympathise with some of the teachers' complaints that since hardly anyone bothers to scrutinise all the documentation in detail, it becomes a futile exercise. Since more attention is now paid to teacher inspection, it is natural for teachers to be intensely concerned about the evaluation of their performance and as such they appear to be preoccupied with work that is to be inspected (Derrington, 2011).

The responses on professional development, workload and proper planning for change mirror Fullan's (2007) framework for conceptualising change and Braverman's (1974) notion of analysing teachers' work. Unless all the essential factors for change are considered seriously, effectiveness and efficiency of schools and the entire education system could be affected. For instance, the views expressed by the teachers for more professional development opportunities are consistent with the views of other scholars before any change is mandated (Bush, 2007; Crow, 2006; Lumby, Crow & Pashiardis, 2008; Wong, 2004). Teachers need clarity on the change initiated so that they are better equipped to manage the current changes or any other planned educational change for development. In fact, improving teachers' professional knowledge and skills to keep pace with the ever-changing reforms in all dimensions of school work is crucial. Fiji, touted as the hub of the Pacific, is not necessarily the hub of up-to-the-minute educational change, nor are remote Fijian schools rightly perceived as other than small backwaters in terms of advances in education. Without any plans for continuously updating the capacity of the teacher workforce it is unlikely for education systems to be responsive to the constant state of change in every aspect including education. Lack of training of teachers cannot be other than a hindrance to effective implementation of any educational change.

Furthermore, when all the changes are looked at, it becomes abundantly clear that they were *imposed* on the teachers by the education ministry through centrally driven policies. Such practices appear also to be a common feature in some other jurisdictions, as reported in the literature (Braverman, 1974; Ingersoll, 2003; Stevenson, 2007). There appears to have been a relentless succession of initiatives from the education ministry and teachers have had to be responsive to a greater range of demands cascading from some high level in the administrative hierarchy. This top-down, management initiated and driven change together with increasing emphasis in policy directions as reported in the literature (Ingersoll, 2003) is also evident in the findings of the present study. The top-down approach to changes in teachers' work makes teachers feel as mere functionaries of decisions made at another level remote and divorced from the ground realities of teachers' work place. Such a bureaucracy dominates and stifles other professional matters that should be left to the professional group, in this case the teachers' group. Teachers' responses aptly capture their thoughts on the intensity of these changes in their work and the continuation of such practices can all too easily produce unintended detrimental consequences such as feeling helpless and frustrated.

In contemporary times schools should become centres of change, with support and commitment from the central level. In fact a lot can be drawn from the wealth of experience of teachers in the field and also teacher educators from higher education providers. In light of the centrality of teachers in children's education, creation of suitable forums and institutional frameworks where they can freely air their views on all aspects of education can contribute towards building a sustainable community of professional practice. Teachers as professionals should be involved in the process of introducing change as this will help them in redesigning their work, rather than leaving it in the hands of those who are more remotely involved in their work at the school level (Braverman, 1974; Ingersoll, 2003; Stevenson; 2007). Without teachers having a voice in the change process, it is unlikely that all the stages of implementation process will be enhanced, as they are the key players in any educational change agenda (Fullan, 2007).

Overall, teachers' considered responses aptly capture their thoughts on the intensity of these changes in their work, especially in the areas of assessment, curriculum, documentation, teacher performance and school strategic planning. The findings here lend support to the findings of several empirical studies (Boyle & Woods, 1996; Hargreaves, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003; Mander, 1997; Seddon & Brown, 1997; Smyth, 2001; Stevenson 2007) and also the more recently commissioned OECD (2006) study. The phasing in of these changes has definitely enlarged as well as intensified the work of primary teachers in Fiji and the findings are consistent with other well documented studies such as of Bell and Stevenson (2006), Sloan (2007), Smyth et al. (2000), and Valli and Buese (2007).

Conclusion

The standardised-driven reforms by central policies in Fiji's education system seem to have inadvertently overloaded teachers with additional work. As illustrated in the literature, increase in teachers' workload is a common feature in developed countries. This study too has shown that teachers' work in Fiji has intensified in its response to keep pace with the ever changing needs and demands of the 21st century. The forces of globalisation and modernisation seem certain to gain momentum and catalyse more changes in education in future, with further impacts on teachers' work.

Since teachers are the key ingredients in children's learning, it is important that they are engaged in the change process and also attention is paid to their capacity building. If teachers are bombarded with sweeping changes in their work without any attention to human capital development then their lack of preparation is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of school work. In ignorance of the why and how of the changes being imposed on them, teachers may struggle to cope with and implement the changes successfully. In this regard, Braverman (1974) and Fullan's (2007) framework deserves careful consideration in any initiative for change. Each one of the broad categories together with individual factors therein needs to be carefully addressed before any change is phased in. As mentioned earlier, if significant factors such as local characteristics particularly, teachers and their workload are overlooked, adverse effects are prone to occur at the implementation phase of change.

The study, albeit small in scale, was representative of the Fijian primary school teachers' community. It has thrown up useful insights on some potentially relevant information about educational reforms and teachers' work in a small island developing state in the Pacific. Since this is a preliminary study, more in-depth and large scale empirical inquiries are essential to

determine the types of changes, teachers' capability to develop mechanisms for coping with changes in their work settings. Undertaking such studies should help not only to generate useful information but also to provide deeper insights into teachers' engagement with changes in their world of work. Such sound empirical evidence can then help influence policy and practice. The principal stakeholder such as the employer and the educational practitioners will become aware of the broader and inclusive role of schools in relation to effective management of educational change.

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