



# Commercial Activity in Pacific Education

Anna Hogan, Greg Thompson,  
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## Education International

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# 1. Introduction

This research has been commissioned by Education International, in partnership with the Council of Pacific Education (COPE) – a regional organisation of education unions from the South Pacific and a sub-branch of Education International – to map the trends of privatisation and commercialisation in education throughout the Pacific Islands. Union leaders and union members from COPE affiliated unions, including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu participated in this project. The study recruited participants from these nations to provide a preliminary understanding of education reform in COPE-affiliated systems and schools, and the impact this has on schools' and teachers' work. This is a scoping study, and as such, we have not designed narrowly focused research questions and consequently, cannot provide in-depth analysis of the data collected. Instead, the purpose of scoping studies is to document the available data to suggest areas for further investigation and action.

## 1.1. Global Education Reform Movement

There has been significant academic research into the privatisation of schooling around the world (e.g. Ball, 2012, Burch, 2009, Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, Picciano and Spring, 2013, Au and Ferrare, 2015). The changing relationship between public schools and private actors should be understood as a substantial shift in the ways that nation-states understand and organise their responsibilities to their citizens. This shift has been perhaps most visible in important areas such as health, education and emergency services. While privatisation has been well researched, and many cautionary examples proffered, attention has been directed to commercialisation in schooling (Ball and Youdell, 2008, Lingard et al., 2017) as another important factor to consider in the context of this restructured state.

The emergence of commercialisation and increased involvement of large private corporations in public schooling is an example of what Sahlberg (2011) has called the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). GERM is typified by reforms of schooling systems that privilege standardisation, competition, the use of corporate management models to run schools and encourage the rise of test-based accountabilities (Sahlberg, 2011).

Typically evident in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England, Sweden and the United States, concern is being expressed that this reform agenda is also starting to impact on Pacific Island nations. One effect of these reforms can be a restructuring of the education system often typified by new accountability relationships between government and schools, new employment conditions for teachers and principals and the adoption of education policies from other contexts. New accountability regimes are often set in place as schools are granted more autonomy to achieve centrally set targets. Testing of numeracy and literacy has been a common accompaniment of these reforms with accountability framed in a top-down, test-based manner. League tables of school performance made public is also often part of this change scenario. These restructurings can potentially open up spaces for commercialisation and privatisation in and of schooling.

### ***Definitions***

It is important to note that commercialisation and privatisation are two distinct, yet often related, social phenomena in the provision of public services. Hogan and Thompson (2017) have proposed the following definitions:

**Privatisation** is the development of quasi-markets through institutional and policy structures that privilege parental choice, school autonomy, competition between schools and venture philanthropy, often with the state regulating for public accountability. It happens *to systems and schools*.

**Commercialisation** is the creation, marketing and sale of education goods and services to education systems and schools by external providers. It happens in systems and in schools as opposed to happening *to systems and schools*.

In this project, the focus at one level is on understanding the effects of education reform that privileges commercialisation and privatisation in COPE nations' and the impact this is having on teachers' work.

## **1.2. Education in the Pacific Islands**

Limited research has been conducted to date on the extent of education privatisation and commercialisation in developing nations, particularly those with established public education systems. The aim of this study is to collect scoping data to document and understand the extent of this restructuring in eight COPE nations, that is, the extent to which GERM is being put into effect



in the schooling systems of the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

While each of these nations is distinct, with their own heritage, culture, legislation and policy, there are also some similarities across them. Research on educational issues across the Pacific Islands tends to document a list of problems that relate to the region's geography, climate, cultural diversity and economic standing (Thaman, 2015). Others relate to the structure of the education system itself, and how access to basic education is uneven across the region, particularly for girls, the very poor, those with special needs, minority groups and those living in remote areas (Forlin and Chambers, 2011). Furthermore, there are few post-secondary education providers with a narrow scope of offerings across the region, and those that do exist are reliant on donor funding for many of their quality assurance activities (DFAT, 2019). More pointedly, Sharma, Loreman and Macanawai (2016) observe challenges in working conditions for teachers, with large class sizes (excess of 40 students), poor resources, deterioration of teacher salaries, resulting in low morale and poor student outputs. Sharma et al. (2016) suggest that while some nations are working to address these issues through school zoning practices, building more classrooms and hiring more teachers, these activities are constrained through the limited funding available to schools and school systems.

AusAid—Australia's aid program—argues that education in the Pacific Islands is supported by a range of development partners (DP) including local and international NGOs, UN agencies and bilateral and multilateral agencies, with Australia's DFAT and New Zealand's MFAT providing a larger portion of DP support:

**In 2017-18, DFAT committed AUD 207 million to Pacific education (including both bilateral and regional programming); MFAT, NZD 21 million (including both bilateral and regional programming). Both DFAT and MFAT provide significant ongoing support to USP and EQAP. The operational costs associated with UNESCO's 2017-18 Pacific education programme is USD 0.5 million, and UNICEF provides USD 3.5 million. The World Bank is executing an USD 8.5 million regional programme funded by GPE. The ADB has a USD 18.4 million program in the North Pacific, and it has also provided a USD 19 million loan to USP. (DFAT, 2019)**

This DP support is, in part, governed by the Pacific Regional Education Framework (2018-2030), which promotes a human rights approach to



education that “seeks to empower Pacific Islanders to fully enjoy, without barriers, the benefits of education” (p.6).

It is in this spirit that we worked with participants of the Pacific Islanders in this research project. While the issues and challenges faced by the region should not be overlooked, we seek to gain the perspectives of teachers and principals currently working within the Pacific Island school systems to explore the trends that emerge from their understanding, and hope that this scoping research can support EI, COPE and the educators of the Pacific Islands.

## 2. Summary of findings in relation to GERM

This scoping research identifies that, like many jurisdictions around the world, COPE nations are embarking on significant reforms to their education sector. Also, like many nations that embark on education reform agendas, the impact and consequences of these reforms often remain hidden. What this report demonstrates is that the reformist zeal that Sahlberg (2011) identified as GERM is impacting schooling in the Pacific Islands, albeit within the unique context of each nation. Sahlberg (2011) identifies six features of education reform principles that have been employed to try and improve the quality of education. We discuss each of these in relation to the Pacific Islands in the following paragraphs.

The first is the *standardisation* of and in education. Like elsewhere in the world, COPE nations seem to now focus on education outcomes, as evidenced by centrally prescribed curricula and testing of students. Further research is required on how each system is designing and delivering their curriculum and how they access resources for teaching and learning.

The second feature is an *increased focus on literacy and numeracy* where skills in reading and mathematics become central to education reform strategies. Sahlberg (2011) argues that this focus is mostly due to the acceptance of large-scale international student assessments like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as these tend to determine perceived success of students, teachers, schools and entire school systems. Currently, Pacific Island nations do not undertake PISA, nor do they sign up for PISA for Development. Yet, the establishment of the Education Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), "mandated to develop education quality in the Pacific" whose "efforts are dedicated to literacy and numeracy, assessment, curriculum development, qualifications accreditation and research" (EQAP, 2019) suggests that education in the Pacific Islands is still turning its focus towards greater literacy and numeracy in schooling. EQAP is supported financially by the Australian Government, New Zealand Aid Programme and UNESCO, is a programme within the Pacific Community (SPC) – an international development organisation owned and governed by its 26 country and territory members – and is also a member

and represents the Pacific in the steering group of the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific region (NEQMAO) – an initiative run by UNESCO. Currently, EQAP conducts the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), and also provides a range of support, advice and services around leadership, policy, assessment, curriculum, teaching and learning, qualifications recognition, and ICTs. For example, with ICTs, EQAP provides custom built applications, consultancy services and software (including applications that help with administration, assessment, analysis). All these activities suggest there is global influence on COPE education systems, and a move towards further standardisation across these systems. Indeed, it would be worth following the role of EQAP and national legislation shifts into the future.

The third trend is to *teach to predetermined results* which Sahlberg (2011) defines as searching for “safe and low-risk ways to reach learning goals” that “minimize[s] experimentation” and “reduces the use of alternative pedagogical approaches” (p.178). He makes the point that experimentation is necessary for creativity and innovation in schools, and without this freedom teachers can feel de-professionalised. This project did not collect data that would suggest teachers are constrained in pedagogical innovation. Rather teachers felt they lacked the skills and training to design and implement innovative pedagogies. Throughout the survey participants reflected that they needed further training in behaviour management strategies and inclusive pedagogies. We do note that some interview participants in Fiji observed that there was some pressure to teach to the test given the recent change in examinations and would suggest that this is worth exploring further on a system level across COPE nations.

The fourth characteristic is the *transfer of innovation from corporate to the educational world* where education policy and ideas are borrowed from the private sector. Sahlberg argues that ideas bought in from outside the educational system undermine elements of successful reform, particularly in relation to the enhancement of an education system’s own capability to maintain renewal. Perhaps the most striking issue in this regard is the use of short-term contracts for teachers throughout the Pacific Islands. As explained previously this is a policy informed by New Public Management (NPM) which is a business-style managerialism that aims to render the public service more effective (Clarke, 2004). As Christensen and Laegreid (2007) assert, the assumption of NPM is that market-oriented management will lead to greater cost efficiency and improved success for governments. In the case of Fiji, for example, the Ministry believes that placing teachers on contracts is a way to drive up education training and qualifications which is in the best interest of students and the school system more broadly. Despite this intention,

participants in this project clearly identified that short term contracts were detrimental to their performance, citing issues of professionalism, wellbeing and reduced likelihood to attract and retain teachers in the profession. There is an issue with under-qualified teachers in COPE nations, but further investigation is necessary in ascertaining how best to address this issue in a way that recognises the distinct challenges faced in the Pacific Islands and that works productively with teachers and school systems to address the needs for further training.

The other point Sahlberg (2011) makes with the increasing privatisation of education is that these reforms are often driven by international development organisations and private venture philanthropy as they “look for general remedies to poorly succeeding education reform movements” (p.178). While participants in this research made some reference to international organisations and aid agencies involved in their education systems it seems necessary to further investigate the role and influence of philanthropy in COPE systems. Our perception is that philanthropic involvement and influence changes in intensity across different nations as the tax status and public expenditure available for education changes.

The fifth element is the adoption of *test-based accountability policies* in which school performance and raising student outcomes is linked to accrediting, inspecting and ultimately, rewarding or punishing schools. Again, this feature does not seem as apparent in the Pacific Islands. Our theory is that more focus is being cast on the teacher workforce – and seeking to punitively improve this – before attention is turned to schools. This is partly due to the lack of a standardised test that ranks the quality of schools, and partly due to the well-recognised problem of under-qualified teachers. As the OECD (2014) argues, a high-quality teaching profession is vital in ensuring high-quality student outcomes. Thus, in the Pacific Islands it seems that the focus on improving the system-wide accreditation of teachers is through their qualifications and training and subsequently rewarding (contract extension and improved pay) or pushing them into compliance (one-year contract). This seems to be the first step in working towards improved student outcomes as described by this feature of the GERM.

The sixth feature is the *increased control of schools* in which there is a drive to collect data to identify and target low-performing schools. Related to the above point, we would argue more focus is directed at auditing and evaluating the skills of teachers and policies have sought to increase control of teachers and place them under stricter accountability mechanisms. However, we also argue that further research is required in understanding assessment policies and related accountability policies at the system level of all COPE nations.



GERM has clearly had consequences for teachers' work in the Pacific Islands. On the one hand, it has been able to emphasise some guidelines to improve the quality and effectiveness of education systems, including access to schooling for students, putting more focus on curriculum and assessment for learning and strengthening the training of the teacher workforce. However, on the other hand, it has strengthened logics of privatisation that assume explicit targets for teachers (and students in the case of PILNA) are the most effective way to improve COPE educational systems.

## 3. Research process

### 3.1. Aims

This study collects scoping data to document and understand the extent of education restructuring in eight COPE nations, that is, the extent to which GERM is being put into effect in the schooling systems of the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. With this understanding it is possible to gauge whether privatisation and commercialisation are prevalent in COPE school systems.

### 3.2. Research methods

#### *Instrument*

This project adopted a 2-stage design.

**First**, a short survey instrument was designed. The survey contained 13 open-ended questions that included participant demographic information (country, position, years teaching, and work status as well as the number of students enrolled at their school), and perceptions of the challenges they face in their schools, current working conditions, education policy decision-making and reform trajectory, the role of international organisations and private sector organisations and finally their hopes and fears for the future of their school systems.

Surveys were disseminated to principals and teachers in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa by teacher union officials (from the Cook Islands Teachers Institute (CITI), Fiji Teachers Association (FTA), Fiji Teachers Union (FTU), Tonga's Friendly Island Teachers Union (FITU), Kiribati Union of Teacher (KUT), Solomon Islands Teachers Association (SINTA), Vanuatu Teachers Union (VTU) and Samoa National Teachers Association (SNTA). Each union was asked to recruit 15 participants (teachers and principals) from their union membership. The survey was conducted as a paper and pencil format to ensure that infrastructural issues (internet accessibility) did not preclude participation.

**Second**, semi-structured interviews were conducted with union officials in Fiji, including representatives from the FTA, FTU and the Association of University Staff of the South Pacific (AUSPS) and education bureaucrats. The 6 participants interviewed in Fiji enabled us to ascertain some insight to the reforms that have been implemented in the Fiji education system and the ambitions/effects of these reforms. In the collection of interview data, each participant was provided with information about the study and informed consent was collected prior to involvement. Interviews were of approximately 45 minutes to one hour in duration and were conducted using an interview guide developed by the researchers, which sought to examine key organising features of public education provision in that region. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, online using Skype or over the phone. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. In ensuring participant anonymity with this small sample size, we do not provide any identifying characteristics (e.g. name, gender or organisation) in the reporting of the results and refer to each participant as Interviewee 1 through 6.

### Sample

In a preliminary project like this, the appropriate strategy is to select those who are most likely to have insights into the issue/problem/phenomena under investigation. This is known as a purposive sample. It is likely that those working in education ministries, teacher unions, school leaders (i.e. principals), classroom teachers and classroom assistants will have the most insight, therefore they constituted the participants in this project. While we initially advised using a repeat sample across each nation, the limitations of the study (detailed below) meant that we only conducted interviews in Fiji. In total, there were 82 survey participants from eight COPE-affiliated unions in the Pacific Islands and 6 interview participants from Fiji.

### Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted on survey data and interview data. Thematic codes were established via both an inductive and deductive approach with initial codes created from a typology of the provision of public schooling (see Mockler, Hogan, Lingard, Rahimi & Thompson, 2019). This typology consists of four typological dimensions of control, access, funding and teaching, each of which comprises a number of related components (see Figure 1). Using this typology allowed us to identify key components of education privatisation and commercialisation that has been informed by literature. In control, for example, the typology suggests that overall control, ownership, hiring authority, regulation, legal basis

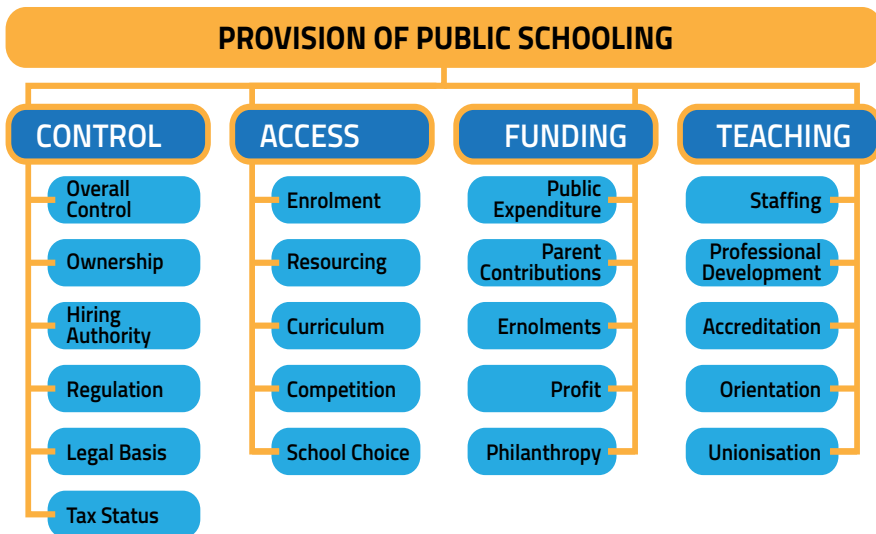


and tax status all play a role in delineating ‘publicness’ of a school system. However, not all of these components emerged in the data. Instead, we present an analysis informed by the typology under the broader organising themes of control, access, funding and teaching, and where possible, have grouped data under related components.

The survey data were first digitised (from the paper version) and then three researchers worked independently to develop a list of emergent themes. Each researcher initially coded a small number of surveys ( $n=10$ ) and then compared to check for consistency in labelling. The coding of the survey data was completed with internal discussions to ensure agreement in the qualitative analysis (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Emergent and existing codes were reviewed and refined into the broader themes of control, access, funding and teaching and this updated codebook was then applied to the thematic analysis of the entire survey data set.

Similarly, interview data were coded through a negotiation process amongst researchers. Initially, a small number of semi-structured interviews ( $n=2$ ) were coded by each researcher independently and then compared to check for consistency in labelling. Thematic codes were established via both an inductive and deductive approach with initial codes created from the survey code book. Researchers then identified and coded emergent themes from the data within the broad themes of control, access, funding and teaching.

**Figure 1.** Mockler et al. (2019) typology of public school provision



### **3.3. Limitations**

There are a number of limitations of this study that impact the generalisability of the findings. Some of the limitations were anticipated, and others were the result of unanticipated challenges that emerged during the study. We state each limitation clearly below in the acknowledgement that these provide an opportunity to make suggestions for future research that focuses on education systems in the Pacific Islands.

#### ***Methodology and timeframe of the project***

Given the limited timeframe of this project and the need to collect data from 8 COPE nations, we planned a methodology that relied on the recruitment of union officials in each nation to conduct field work (e.g. collection of survey data) on our behalf. There was no opportunity to provide face-to-face training, and we were reliant on union officials printing and administering the survey instrument to principal and teacher union members. Union officials were supplied with a digital survey instrument, information on the project and instructions to collect informed consent prior to administering the survey. On completion of the survey, union officials scanned and emailed the survey back to the research team and were instructed to destroy the originals. Further limitations regarding the survey are discussed in the relevant section below.

#### ***Infrastructure issues***

Establishing and maintaining contact with each union official was difficult. We had email contacts for union officials, but could not guarantee consistent communication avenues often due to inadequate internet access. Given these infrastructure issues it was decided that rather than attempting to conduct interviews with union officials and education bureaucrats in each nation, only Fiji would be targeted, as we had a member of the research team based in Fiji.

#### ***Access***

Some union officials reported difficulties in accessing the required number of survey participants. For example, in some contexts schools are spread across geographically diverse regions, with travel between villages being difficult or taking too long. This means the sample of participants from most nations do not include remote and rural-based school personnel.

Future research might consider employing a specific sampling strategy to account for a broader range of perspectives.

### ***Fluency in language***

Union officials also reported that some of the participants found the survey questions difficult to understand given their fluency in English. Indeed, research has suggested that there are distinct varieties of English across each of the Pacific Islands (see Biewer, 2007). Thus, future research should consider trialing the survey in each national context and ensure questions are modified for local understanding.

## 4. Survey results

### 4.1. About the survey

The aims of the survey were as follows:

1. To survey educational professionals affiliated with COPE across the Pacific Islands regarding their perceptions of the privatisation and commercialisation of their school systems;
2. To gather evidence of the types of education policy reforms that are being undertaken across Pacific Island school systems;
3. To gather evidence regarding the concerns that education professionals affiliated with COPE have about schooling, teaching and their work conditions; and
4. To use the survey data to suggest subsequent research.

The survey consisted of 13 questions across four sections. The sections were designed to enable qualitative analysis to determine the similarities and differences across the responses.

1. Demographic section (5 questions) asking the nation where the participant works, their role, the number of students enrolled at their school, their teaching experience and their employment status (casual, part-time or full-time).
2. A section (3 questions) asking participants to reflect on their own role, in terms of the challenges they face personally; the concerns they have for teaching in their country more broadly and; their current work conditions (employment status, pay and class size).
3. A section (4 questions) asking participants to reflect on education policy reforms, including how education policy decisions are made and the current policy direction of their government and; the role of international organisations and companies in both setting policy agendas and operating within their school system.
4. A final question asked participants what their hopes and fears are for the future of their school systems.

## 4.2. Sample demographics

There were 82 participants who completed the survey. All participants were members of a teachers' union affiliated with the Council of Pacific Education—the sub-regional organisation of Education International. The conduct of the survey depended upon the national-based unions contacting their members and recruiting them to the survey. The uneven participation across these national unions reflect the realities of working with different national unions across geographically diverse contexts. For whatever reason, it appears that some unions were more successful in recruiting participants than others, most likely a reflection of strategies employed, overall interest and ability to overcome infrastructure and access issues in participant recruitment. It must be stressed that this is a limitation of this survey. While significant attempts were made to promote this to 8 of the COPE unions, the returns from some were very low, such that we would be reluctant to support the claim that these findings could be used to compare Pacific Island nations against each other. Further, given the self-selection bias evident in a volunteer sample, we would also caution against generalising about perceptions of influence and concerns to the wider population. That said, as an exploratory study this survey presents findings of interest that should provide the focus for further research.

On other indicators, we are more confident that the sample represents a diverse range of respondents. On demographic indicators such as years teaching, school role and school size, the sample of respondents indicates that the survey attracted views from teachers and principals working in a range of school contexts. This diversity of respondents is important for understanding whether GERM-based education is experienced unevenly across the Pacific Island regions.

**Table 1. Survey sampling**

Pacific Island	Union	Participants
Cook Islands	Cook Islands Teachers Institute (CITI)	8
Fiji	Fiji Teachers Association (FTA)	8
	Fiji Teachers Union (FTU)	6
Kiribati	Kiribati Union of Teacher (KUT)	15
Samoa	Samoa National Teachers Association (SNTA)	15
Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands Teachers Association (SINTA)	3
Tonga	Friendly Island Teachers Union (FITU)	15
Tuvalu	Tuvalu Teachers Association (TTA)	0
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Teachers Union (VTU)	12

**Table 2. Participant demographics**

<b>Role in school</b>	Principal	23
	Teacher	55
	Other	4
<b>Size of school</b>	Small	7
	Medium	36
	Large	11
	Very large	18
<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	Early career	13
	Mid career	21
	Experienced	44

### *A note on coding*

To protect the anonymity of the schools and participants, but to also provide important demographic information to contextualise participant responses, the following coding strategies were adopted.

**Table 3. School size**

School Size	Student Numbers
Very large	1000+
Large	401-1000
Medium	101-400
Small	1-100

**Table 4. Years teaching**

Teacher	Years Teaching
Experienced (E)	15+
Mid-career (MC)	6-15
Early career (EC)	0-5

Demographic information is presented in the following order in brackets after each quote: (country, school role, school size, years of teaching experience) so that the following qualifier (T, MC, Large, Samoa) indicates that this opinion was voiced by a mid-career Samoan teacher working in a large school.

## 4.3 Thematic analysis

### *Control*

Across the survey participants, education was perceived as a national priority for governments in the Pacific Islands. Achieving comprehensive schooling for all students was considered a policy imperative that would allow Pacific Islanders better post-secondary pathways, particularly in terms of competing in the global knowledge economy.

**Free, inclusive and compulsory education are the major concerns for government.** (P, MC, Medium, Kiribati)

**[My] hopes for the future of Cook Islands school system is to provide pathways for our children that help in enabling them to succeed in their strengths and help improve their weaknesses.**  
(T, EC, -, Cook Islands)

**I hope for a well-structured school system that will allow our students to survive at the international level.** (T, MC, Very Large, Tonga)

**The government has continued to prioritise education policy and school processes for developmental of schools.** (P, E, Small, Samoa)

**...more productivity economically. High pass rate to give them a competitive edge overseas.** (P, EC, Small, Fiji)

While participants argued the need for a clear national policy direction in shaping education reform trajectories, there was a broad acknowledgement that international organisations, particularly the United Nations, have an influence on the direction of education policy.

**International goals (UN) have an impact on policies in my country.**  
(T, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

**All goals are aligned with SDGs.** (P, E, Medium, Cook Islands)

**The policy direction of my government at the moment is working with 15 minimum standard or goals adopted from the Millenium Goals or now SDG to provide and promote education for all and standard education.** (P, E, Small, Vanuatu)

There was also a sense that policies are sometimes “copied and pasted” from other countries, leaving some participants concerned that their

education systems were unable to maintain their own independence and cultural identity, and were instead adopting more “Western ideas”.

**The international organisations indoctrinate the curriculum department with their Western ideas to be disseminated in schools.** (T, E, Large, Vanuatu)

**Policies are copy pasted from other countries and implemented in our small society. I think that we need to keep things more simple and focused more to the care and needs of our people. Because of the fast development of our country, policies are designed to protect equipment, resources and [other] things. People are more important than things.** (T, MC, Small, Cook Islands)

**Teachers [are] being expected to deliver learning content(s) and its expected delivery approach that does not or does little to consider the learning methods of Indigenous Taukei pupils.** (T, MC, -, Fiji)

**The policy direction is just a failure because there is no consultations with any stakeholders. Borrowed policies from other countries.** (P, E, Small, Fiji)

As the last comment already suggests, many participants perceived school personnel are not adequately consulted in policy reform processes, and these are largely delivered in a top-down manner. Participants viewed this as problematic, given teachers are expected to implement policies that are created without their knowledge and expertise of what is happening in classrooms and schools. Policymakers were critiqued as following their own agendas.

**Some policies could have been made accessible to the public, or even been consulted with teachers/community so that everyone's need and challenges should be included.** (T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

**Lack of having wider consultations before the policies are implemented. It suits the aiders not the country in terms of curriculum, scheme of services for teachers etc.** (T, E, Medium, Solomon Islands)

**It is made by the government without the teachers awareness and concerns but when ordered by them to be implemented by teachers.** (T, E, Very Large, Vanuatu)

**Little consultation with teachers who will implement the policies and to gather reviews from them on whether those already in place are benefitting or need improving.** (T, MC, -, Fiji)



Some policies are made without any consultation therefore does not meet the demands of the people in the islands or is not suitable for certain contexts. (P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

Teachers are implementers of education policies. Teachers are not aware of how policies are approved or implemented. (P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

Policy direction of government is very direct however, people need to be informed and consult its policy. (P, E, Large, Tonga)

Policy direction is more towards seeing that work is done, and that predicted outcome is achieved regardless of the concerns/ grievances raised by teachers and their respective unions. (T, MC, Medium, Fiji)

It is worth noting, however, that participants from Kiribati and Samoa suggested there was more stakeholder engagement in policy processes. For example, Head Teachers are often involved in policy consultation processes in Kiribati.

There are two sides of [policy] decisions in Kiribati - advantage and disadvantage. Policy made by the ministry. They consult some head teachers, but class teachers are not included during the consultation, so the policy [is] made according to the head teachers' view. (T, EC, Medium, Kiribati)

In our country, Kiribati, all Head Teachers and the Director of Policy Section meet and discuss matters without consulting teachers in their school. Whatever decisions made in their meeting would brought up to the cabinet for approval to become an Act. (T, MC, Medium, Kiribati)

Similarly, in Samoa, participants said that policy making processes have changed over recent years where teachers are now more involved in consultation processes.

In Samoa policy decisions have been changing (Sector Plan), right now the ministry discuss and all teachers involved to consult. (T, MC, Small, Samoa)

Sector Plan 2016-2018 means policy making in Samoa has been changing... now, policy can be consulted [with teachers]. (P, E, Small, Samoa)

Beyond consultation, participants also perceived that teachers are not adequately supported in policy implementation, and that this resulted in confusion and a lack of awareness in what was expected from teachers.

**Poor planning; a lot of confusion, misinformation, there is lack of transparency.** (T, MC, Medium, Fiji)

**Not enough awareness and trainings to teachers.** (T, E, Very Large, Vanuatu)

Similarly, one participant noted that without adequate consultation about and training for policy reforms it was difficult to keep up with the “fast paced” reform agendas and they also questioned the “research being used to inform policy endeavours” (T, E, Medium, Fiji).

In responding to the question, ‘what are your hopes and fears for the future of schooling in your country?’, participants regularly referenced their desire for “closer cooperation between policy makers and teachers who are responsible for implementing the policy” (T, E, Very Large, Tonga) and a “more accommodating forum when it comes to policy discussion and implementation” (T, MC, Medium, Fiji). Similarly, there were calls for governments to adopt policies that “could empower teachers” and respect “their capacity and knowledge” (T, E, Large, Solomon Islands).

## Access

Access refers to the extent that all children and young people have access to high quality schooling, and the challenges/barriers to access that exist. Participants identified elements of access to include school infrastructure issues, student enrolment policies, access to quality curriculum and resources, student issues and community engagement. It was clear across the survey participants that resourcing issues constrained schools’ capacities to provide a quality education for their students. This included, for example, a school’s capacity to provide instruction, where a common concern across participants was a large student to teacher ratio.

**Too many students in my school and not enough teachers.**  
(P, E, Medium, Samoa)

**Teacher student ratio, lack of cooperation.** (T, E, Large, Vanuatu)

**Populations in each class is about 30-40 which there are too many to cater for individually.** (T, MC, Very Large, Tonga)

**Ratio of teachers to students is 1:60 or 70 so I couldn’t produce quality learning as there are lack (inadequate) resources for teaching of learning.** (T, E, Medium, Solomon Islands)

My concerns for teaching is based on the roll of students. In my country there are 35-40 number of students in each class. I think that the learning is not achievable, especially for the weak ones.

(T, MC, -, 8, Samoa)

I teach five classes ranging from a total number of 39,38,38,28 and 40 per class. (T, EC, Very Large, Tonga)

As some of the above responses highlight, the concern with large class size is a teachers' ability to cater for individual student needs and relatedly, a key issue participants reported was their inability to deal effectively with student behaviour, particularly for Early Career teachers. Discipline, bullying, fighting, and involvement with drugs were all cited as regular issues that teachers needed to address on a day-to-day basis. Spending time on behaviour management means that there is less time for meaningful teaching and learning in classrooms.

Students discipline and bullying cases in schools are rising and this is becoming a major challenge. (P, E, Large, Samoa)

The challenge of being a young teacher is that students hardly listen to you. Also, dealing with students who are being raised in different environments where some are good at socializing while some are not. (T, EC, Large, Kiribati)

When students fight with each other, I feel nervous, but now I know what to do... it is a hard challenge to face because it is the everyday behaviour of students. Right now, I use the time-out corner to face it. (T, EC, Medium, Kiribati)

One of the main challenges that I faced daily is the never ending behavioural problems that trickles in to half of my teaching time.

(T, MC, Medium, Fiji)

I also hope that bullying be dealt with seriously and that children and teenagers in schools [can] be protected from such activities that may lead to involvement with drugs. Schools should be aware of the signs and take action as a means of caring. (T, EC, Very Large, Tonga)

Not only did participants report that they struggled with behaviour management strategies, but also their confidence in supporting children with special needs. It was clear that teachers felt they did not have adequate training to provide inclusive pedagogies, nor do enough specialized teachers exist in the school system.

**Not enough support provided for teachers with difficult/challenged students - most teacher aides are not trained.**

(T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

**My concern for teaching is focussing on children with special needs, especially those who are capable of learning like deaf and blind/low vision. The teachers need more training so they can fulfill their profession as teachers for students with special needs.**

(P, MC, Medium, Kiribati)

**There is a lack of specialized teachers.** (T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

These challenges were heightened by the perceived lack of resources to support teaching and learning activities. This was a dominant theme across all participants, and included, for example, inadequate, inappropriate or outdated coursebooks, computers and other technologies and subject-specific resources (such as science laboratories and sports fields). Some participants suggested they spent a lot of their time creating resources for their students.

**Shortage of resources.** (P, E, Small, Samoa)

**More resources needed, especially Science (Lab).** (P, E, Small, Tonga)

**Very limited resources to teacher Cook Islands Maori - I spend much of my time making resources.** (T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

**Resources - lack of resources, distribution of existing resources.** (T, EC, -, Cook Islands)

**Having the right kind of resources to support the learning of children: IT resources, photocopying, portfolio supports.**

(T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

**Getting resources that are updated and a budget to run my social science department.** (T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

**Facilities (no sports field, not enough classrooms/inadequate labs).** (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

**Resources are not very effective e.g. laptops and computers. More technologies are required.** (T, E, Medium, Kiribati)

While participants often reflected about issues within their subject-area, in general, there was a concern for students' literacy levels (most evident in Kiribati) and how these might be improved with access to more appropriate resourcing.

**Language barrier - students encounter difficulties in the use of English, hence cannot understand reading materials.**

(T, E, Very Large, Samoa)

**Year 2 students are struggling in learning how to read.**

(T, MC, Medium, Kiribati)

**Very weak students who can't read or write.** (T, E, Small, Kiribati)

**In my country, I am concerned about the students literacy progression in the teaching and learning process. I definitely assure that most students in my country are very struggling towards learning literacy.** (T, EC, Large, Kiribati)

Physical infrastructure was also commented on by participants as a challenge to providing students' access to quality schooling, with concerns raised about conditions of buildings, size of classrooms to accommodate student numbers and no clear understanding of whether schools would receive funding to fix these issues.

**Lack of resources – infrastructure. Deteriorating condition of infrastructure.** (P, EC, Medium, Fiji)

**There are bad areas of the schools' compound, and we don't know whether they are going to be fixed or not and ...the classroom are not built well.** (T, EC, Medium, Kiribati)

**Classrooms are getting old.** (T, E, Medium, Kiribati)

A final theme that emerged from the survey participants was a concern for effective community engagement, and in particular, the role parents' play in the education of their children. Participants argued that it was difficult to communicate with parents, that parents were making excuses for their child's behaviour and shifting responsibility for teaching cultural values onto schools/teachers. Teachers perceived that this lack of support from parents made their task of teaching children more challenging, particularly around issues of attendance and discipline.

**Lack of communication between us (teachers), parents (community) and children.** (T, MC, Medium, Samoa)

**Dealing with staff, disciplining parents and students issues.** (P, E, Medium, Cook Islands)

**...Parents make too many excuses.** (T, E, Medium, Cook Islands)

**...Parents forgetting the shared responsibilities. Cultural values we used to have are fading away to adopt foreign thinking.** (P, E, Medium, Cook Islands)



Few areas of my working conditions need to be improved in the way of parent/teacher association. For example, absenteeism. The main problem here is students' attendance. (T, E, -, Kiribati)

Lack of parental assistance on reading, homework, attendance of children and meeting. (T, E, -, Fiji)

The mindset of the parents towards education. (P, E, Medium, Fiji)

Very poor parental support. (T, MC, Medium, Vanuatu)

Communities and parents are not supportive in school plans and activities. (P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

Related to these above issues of access, participants strongly articulated in their hopes for the future of their school systems that many of these issues would be addressed to ensure all students have the opportunity (and see the value in) accessing quality schooling.

One of my greatest hopes is the improvement of every child's learning ability. Also, I hope that one day every child will attend school. (T, -, Small, Kiribati)

The school system is friendly for all races. Making sure the school are catering for all of the students. (T, E, Medium, Cook Islands)

Hope for my school system in the future is to have very powerful policies that could contribute to putting every child in Tonga inside a classroom and not roam in villages and town areas causing trouble. (T, EC, Very Large, Tonga)

Likewise, there was a sense that once these students had equitable access to schooling, they then need to be better engaged in the learning process, which would lead to better outcomes and better educated citizens that would be able to compete at the international level.

The only hope is for students to be able to overcome challenges that they face and become future leaders of our nation. However, the fear is that students are unable to continue their studies due to different problems that they have at home. (T, EC, Large, Kiribati)

Hopes for the future of Cook Islands school system is to provide pathways for our children that help in enabling them to succeed in their strengths and help improve their weaknesses. (T, EC, Medium, Cook Islands)

I hope for a well-structured school system that will allow our students to survive at the international level. (T, MC, Large, Tonga)

Better literacy role and more productivity economically. High pass rate to give them a competitive edge overseas. (P, EC, Medium, Fiji)

## **Funding**

Issues of funding were not prominent in survey responses as no explicit questions were asked on this issue, as it is difficult to compare funding arrangements across countries as these are generally complex and can involve a mix of public and private expenditures. The survey did, however, ask participants to respond to whether international organisations or companies operate in their education systems and the type of work that they do. Responses to this question suggests that philanthropies and aid agencies provide various types of financial support to school systems and schools in COPE nations. Participants referred to programs and agencies (government, NGOs and private sector agencies) that provided school resources. Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China were commonly cited as providing funding for school resources and infrastructure.

DFAT - The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: give funding and school resources, including the KEIP [Kiribati Education Improvement Plan]. (T, EC, Medium, Kiribati)

NZ High Commision in terms of funding NZ Aid, Australian Aid, China - funding resources in schools. (T, MC, Small, Cook Islands)

Donors from other countries, such as China who built the school of Tonga High School. NZ aid donated money to help with resources for the schools. In Tonga High School ex-students and parent teacher association is the main donors nowadays to the school in terms of money for running the school. Providing toilet paper etc, and paying workers such as office workers. (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

JICA [Japan International Cooperation Agency] support the running of education by providing funds for facilities and resources for schools in Kiribati. (P, MC, Medium, Kiribati)

In general, participants suggested that the role of philanthropy and aid was predominately to donate resources to schools including learning materials, computers, furniture, photocopiers and sometimes, school facilities.

So far, I assume that organisations only donate things. (T, E, -, Fiji)

The only role of organisations and companies play in school is due with the school facilities. This includes buildings, tables and other things that are donated from different organisations and

companies. (T, EC, Large, Kiribati)

Provide facilities such as fixing computers, photocopying machines etc. provide resources such as teaching resources, reading books etc. (T, EC, Large, Kiribati)

Others referred to philanthropies and aid agencies pushing more specific programs targeted at particular teaching and learning initiatives into schools, including a focus on literacy and numeracy and teacher professional learning.

I do know that the UNESCO, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other international organisations contribute to our Education ministry's budget. (O - Chaplin, MC, Very Large, Tonga)

TESP (Tonga Educational Sector Project) – support the education policy of the government of Tonga aiming to improve early grade student learning outcomes and equitable access. This organisation is funded by Australian Govt and foreign affairs. It was started in 2005 or 2006. (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

EQAP – Education Quality and Assessment Programme provides training and conduct literacy and numeracy initiatives in the country; PILNA – Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment. EQAP works closely with other international organisations to my understanding.

TESP – Professional development of Teacher. UNESCO – Professional development of teacher. Fund same project. Training. Empower teaching. (P, E, Large, Tonga)

## Teaching

Participants across the survey clearly articulated that there is a shortage of trained and/or qualified teachers in Pacific Island schools. They perceived that there is a lack of adequate teacher training programs and critiqued the varying standards of the programs available. There was a sense that teachers are lacking basic subject-specific skills when they enter the workforce.

There is not teachers training college in place for upcoming and retraining of teachers. There is a program that trains teachers but not to the extent to be fully qualified after their third year. They are placed in the classroom to observe and support classroom management and fill gaps to replace local teachers that are at



the end of their career or a position available due to the teacher per student ratio...I believe in centralizing and securing a place where teachers can be trained before taking their place in the classroom. To be able to be trained by professionals, and valued.

(T, MC, Small, Cooks islands)

Poor training for new teachers, not enough trained teachers, not enough support provided for teachers with difficult/challenged students - most teacher aides not trained. (T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

Teaching is not equal - one teacher is not the same as the other. Not all teachers are qualified. (T, E, Medium, Kiribati)

Because of the heavy workload the quality of teaching is getting lower. I evidenced this over the years as lower forms come up to exam classes; a lot (MANY!!!) of the skills required to be mastered at lower levels eg. Graphing and tabulation skills in form 3 and 4; still I have to spend a lot of time in front and 7 to teach and retrain these skills; and the common question: Who "was" your teacher? Even students who come from teachers training college; they still require a lot of training on lower end skills eg. Lab report writing or even to "PLAN" an investigation. (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

Moreover, there was a common concern that despite being under-trained, teachers are unable to access system-supported professional development and learning to develop the skills they require to be effective teachers; this included leadership skills for principals and head teachers, subject-specific skills, development of inclusive pedagogies and as commented on previously, behaviour management strategies. Some participants also argued that the training they do receive does not relate to their individual needs in increasing their professionalism. There was a clear sense that participants desired a more accessible and effective system for ongoing professional development and learning.

Being criticised for my performance as a teacher and principal, yet not provided with further training to help develop my skills.

(P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

Need further training and leadership skills. (P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

Class sizes vary every year with inclusive education leaving teachers great need to be trained on how to handle and teach children with special needs. (P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

Lack of Professional Development as well as any upgrading or refresher opportunities for teachers. (P, E, Very Large, Tonga)

Lack of staff development and support for upgrading programmes that will help teachers with the continuum upgrading of their knowledge in their particular teaching areas. (T, E, Large, Tonga)

[Need] useful personal development: not hour long lectures discussing areas that don't relate to me, don't get followed through, or are just implemented to 'tick boxes' for others. (T, EC, -, Cook Islands)

Improving teaching standards by organizing professional development. (T, MC, Medium, Vanuatu)

Teachers need further training in their career, there should be enough trained teachers to occupy the vacant parts of the school, the government should promote ISE Teachers in the field to assist in teaching continuous training and workshops for teachers needed. (P, E, Medium, Vanuatu)

One of the most concerning elements to teaching in the Pacific Islands as perceived by survey participants was the employment status of teachers. In particular, some participants were concerned by the widespread use of short-term contracts in the employment of teachers. Participants felt that this created instability in the workforce and created stress around job security. Subsequent effects of this were a lack of confidence in selection and promotion criteria and a loss of 'the love of teaching'.

The contracts we now work under gives us a sense of instability, looking at our work in the long term. (T, MC, Medium, Fiji)

Employment status: many teachers feel unstable in their placements due to the branding system. (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

Contract disturbs teachers love of teaching. (T, MC, -, Fiji)

Contracting teachers like casual workers. (T, E, Medium, Solomon Islands)

Teachers are on contracts. Many receive 95% of their pay. Inconsistent contracted period, high job insecurity varies forms of selection and promotion criteria has been implemented and this has brought lack of confidence amongst teachers. (O (admin), E, Very Large, Fiji)

I am working as a contractor and I feel stress because of too many students with only 3 teachers and myself. Every teacher takes two classes in a very low pay. (P, E, Small, Samoa)

Similarly, salary was considered an issue with many participants arguing that current pay levels do not reflect the challenges of teaching (particularly around class size), nor are they sufficient for supporting a high quality of life for COPE members. Some participants were concerned that teachers were not being paid at the appropriate qualification level and others felt that despite increased pay for qualified teachers, teaching was not an attractive career compared to other professions.

**For the pay, it is not enough for a professional teacher who is dedicated and devoted to their duty.** (T, E, Small, Kiribati)

**A pay for us is still not enough to gather for all expenses in our family and school commitment.** (T, MC, -, Kiribati)

**Teachers pay is always low and still not enough teachers.**  
(T, -, Small, Kiribati)

**I have been teaching for 20 years. The number of students taught in my class for the spread of 20 years is 45 plus students. Extra responsibilities given by the school administration is also another load because the salary paid to teachers is not balances to the workload done.** (T, E, Large, Vanuatu)

**I am a full time permanent. I am not happy with the pay. Too many students in class, should be more teachers at each class.** (T, MC, Medium, Samoa)

**Cost of living which my salary could not cater.** (T, E, Medium, Solomon Islands)

**In my country, the working conditions are not good. Especially on the class size and pay. Some teachers get higher qualification (degree) but are not paid according to their qualification.**  
(P, MC, Medium, Kiribati)

**Teaching in my country will be way better if all teachers would be registered like New Zealand and salaries needed to be raised. This is due to the slacked in the recruitments of the top students for they always choose other professionals compared to teaching and it has been to do with the under-paid teacher in Tonga.**  
(T, MC, Very Large, Tonga)

These workforce issues came together as the causes of teacher stress and welfare concerns. Participants perceived that governments did not value teachers, particularly in terms of supporting a housing and transport allowance, or recognizing that teachers have a high workload with extra

administrative and disciplinary duties they are expected to perform. Participants argued that teacher stress caused people to leave the profession.

Working conditions and terms/ welfare of teachers is not valued and recognized by our government. Government and EAs expect teachers to perform without considering a lot of important factors that will motivate teachers to perform and as a result effective teachings. (T, E, Large, Solomon Islands)

It is not good because no housing allowance, transport allowance. We are paid an annual salary with no overtime/incentives. Cost of living is high, the number of students you taught were more than what you should teach. (T, EC, Very Large, Solomon Islands)

..am not satisfied with salary compared to workload. School terms/ holidays are too short. Too many responsibilities compared to time spent in school. (P, E, Medium, Samoa)

That there would be people (authority body) put there to do (Action) something on the workload of individual teachers.... I am highly hoping that there will be something done to the workload of teachers in Tonga and other islands in the pacific if they are experiencing the same challenges. (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

Teachers are overworked with administration, discipline, and imparting knowledge. This creates a lot of stress for teachers and most end up dying at an early age. Some leave to find other professions that will help their family and take away some stress. (T, EC, Large, Fiji)

Teachers commitment and dedication to the teaching profession: getting to be more money driven. Lack of promotional positions in the current structure, resulting in teachers leaving the profession. Ministry of education is somehow dictated in a way by political interests. (P, E, Very Large, Tonga)

I feel the teaching profession seems to be like a temporary job where people just come to work while they look out for a better job (good salary). Once they find a better job they move on. (O (school chaplin), MC, -, Tonga)

I fear that politics is taking over the school system and it is sad to see the staff system and it is sad to see that staff turnover is getting higher and higher every year. (T, MC, Very Large, Tonga)

With the way teachers are treated, I have a fear that many will resign. (T, MC, Medium, Fiji)

Concern was also expressed that the teacher shortage was being filled by expatriate teachers and that they may not be as aware of community knowledge and cultural understanding to relate to and engage with students.

**Lack of Cook Islands teacher - the old teachers are retiring with no replacements only from overseas.** (T, E, Small, Cook Islands)

**There is a lack of local teachers, and a long line of retiring teachers. There is an increase of expatriate teachers filling in these gaps, however there is a need to reopen or redesign a program for teachers. I fear that without new local teachers, our students will miss the opportunity of a culture that a village raises your child - a local teacher knows his/her student, he/she knows his background, he/she can relate to student. Expatriate teachers come and share ideas and get to experience education in a different culture and they return.** (T, MC, Small, Cook Islands)

Finally, some participants referred to issues of unionisation, including the relative power of unions in impacting on education policy and shaping the condition under which teachers practise. Some perceived that unions had more of a role to play in ensuring all teachers know their rights and have the confidence to speak up against injustice, others felt the union could be more proactive in leading professional development opportunities for their members, and others recognized that unions were engaging with government around their rights and responsibilities.

**Fears: teachers not knowing their union rights and not speaking up.** (T, E, Very Large, Vanuatu)

**Hoping for a national teaching union to establish in this kingdom in the future and enforce every teacher to participate in the club/ union.... this union should provide opportunity for teachers to participate in any conference/workshop/ professional development held in a developmental country such as Australia, New Zealand and Finland.** (T, E, Very Large, Tonga)

**Our teacher unions voice up opinions and submissions however, we have yet to see any of these taken up by policy makers.** (T, MC, Medium, Fiji)

## 5. Interview findings – Fiji

Fiji is a case site in this research as it was the most accessible location for researchers to conduct interviews. We sought to interview COPE unionists and education bureaucrats to explore how key stakeholders understand the public provision of schooling in Fiji, and any concerns or challenges the system faces in delivering quality schooling. Through six semi-structured interviews, researchers were able to draw out some further nuance to the survey responses, and further characterise the effects of the GERM in Fiji.

### 5.1 Control

Control of schools and school systems is about understanding who enacts education policy reform, who owns and regulates schools and the responsibilities that local authorities have in determining teachers' employment and remuneration conditions and policies related to curriculum, assessment, student admissions and discipline (Mockler et al. 2019).

#### *School ownership and regulation*

In exploring these issues, it is first necessary to understand Fiji's geography. Fiji is an archipelago comprised of 540 islets and 300 islands, of which 100 are permanently inhabited. As one participant, Interviewee 1 observed, this means "Fiji is so widely dispersed" with schools across "the outer islands, the rural islands and the central islands". This is managed through school jurisdictions.

We have divided up our education system into four main divisions. The Northern division, which involves the Northern schools of Northern Viti Levu, Northern Fiji and we have a Divisional Education Office that looks after that division, based in Labasa. Then there's the Western side and that is managed by the Divisional Education Office West. Then we have the Eastern though the main office of the Eastern Education Office is in Suva, it looks after the Maritime, which is all these scattered islands in the Lau and the Lami group, so you - and Kadavu. You will understand that they cannot have an office in one of these Maritimes, so that's

why it is housed in Suva. Then the Central Division which is the Suva and Nausori and to look after all these schools, we have two office. One is based in Nausori and that's called the Central office, whereas there is another one in Suva that looks after the Suva schools, because the major number of schools are in the Central Division. That's why there are two in close proximity but to be able to look after all these schools. (Interviewee 3)

These divisions service 9 districts - Ba-Tavua, Cakaudrove, Eastern, Lautoka-Yasawa, Macuata-Bau, Nadrgoa-Navosa, Nausori, Ra and Suva. According to one interviewee, these districts educate thousands of students across 835 primary schools and 200 plus secondary schools (Interviewee 5). Schools in Fiji are classified as government, non-government or private. For example, out of 733 primary schools in 2016, 2 were government, 714 non-government and 17 private (Ministry of Education, 2016). According to the interviewees, government and non-government schools sit within the remit of the Ministry of Education, and private schools do not.

We have all the government schools then we have what we call the committee of religious schools. Ninety per cent of the schools in the Ministry of Education are religious and community organisations. What I mean by that, it could be religious, like it's Methodist or Catholic or Anglican or Arya Samaj or a few others. At the same time, we would have the local village school - that belongs to the community there. That's what we mean by religious community organised school. Then the third category is private and it's fully private. The only involvement that the Ministry has is that they register the schools through our registration but the running, the teachers, the fees and all that, it's not under our control. (Interviewee 3)

The large proportion of non-government schools is explained by Interviewee 5 as partly due to the history of Fiji's formal education system:

Well, the Fiji education system has been in existence as long -since the missionaries brought the education - well it was informal education then. Now since colonisation, we were run by the colonisers, the British Government, for over 100 years probably and then we gained independence in 1970 with the help of those experts. They were run in - the Minister of Education. I would say that Fiji had a very good system of education. It had its - there was a structure in the education system in our country which since

independence it's been improving. It's probably one of the best in the South Pacific. (Interviewee 5)

Similarly, Interviewee 4 suggests that the remoteness of some communities means that,

The community can get together and they can say they want a school and we can justify it in the context of viability and numbers and so on, and then we would look at other aspects including the construction, operation of buildings, OHS issues, equipment, furniture, and so on and so forth... For recognition, we have certain procedures that people need to go through that quite honestly, need to be tightened up. So we're trying to tighten up on them to make sure that we get value for money. Because each time we establish a new school, it's a new infrastructure, it's new staffing, and all of those types of things. Particularly with the rural-urban drift, we have to be a little bit more conscious because we may be starting up a school in an island or a maritime area that's not going to continue for very long because the population isn't there because they've moved to a larger island.

As observed by this interviewee, schools are established and dissolved alongside community need, and that given the large number of schools (approximately 1000) for the number of students, there is a sense in the Ministry that further regulation is required. Indeed, as further clarified by Interviewee 2, the status of schools has changed over time, particularly after the introduction of 'Free Education' grants paid to schools (on a per student basis) by the Ministry of education. In particular, many of the religious schools that were running as private schools (privately funded), became non-government schools (publicly funded), and thus partially integrated into the broader public system.

We have our public schools and then we have our church schools. The church schools are not specifically holding private status, but they're being controlled by church organisations... But our schools before 1990, a few of our church schools were run privately, and then we had that reform that the ministry was going to provide the Free Education grant across all schools, which limited the private entity that church organisations had before. We have, like I said, public schools which do normal registration and operate normally as any other school. The difference in our schools before was that church schools had their teachers paid from church organisations or religious organisations. But now the Ministry has paid the



salary across the board for all teachers, whether they're in church schools or they're in public schools. I think the other type of schools that we have, we have categorised our special education schools mostly as private schools at a time, and then coming into the new reform that we had with the utilisation of free education grant, they were sort of hovering in-between private and public schools.

While there are relatively few private schools in Fiji, one participant reflected that more are emerging. According to Interviewee 1, private schools can employ unqualified teachers and designate their own curriculum. Although as clarified by Interviewee 2, the Ministry must first approve this curriculum, showing that there is a degree of regulation of private schools by the Ministry of Education,

So, some of these private schools, they come in with a separate curriculum different from what provision [the] Ministry has. But they have to apply and we've regulated within the Ministry to give them approval after inspecting the curriculum that they intend to use.

Participants were concerned that these private schools would bring in a more privatised system that could limit access to children based on enrolment criteria and school fees.

All those who are categorised as private schools that have been established in Fiji so far, these are schools where the school organisation or the holding body dictates what fees and other financial engagement that students and parents would go through if they enrol in their school system. (Interviewee 2)

One final important point in the context of Australia and New Zealand's influence in the Pacific Islands, is that some participants referred to Pacific Technical and Further Education (TAFE) – providing skills-based qualifications and training – as the commercialisation of learning in Fiji and a “money-making” scheme.

I think the commercialisation of education is really the introduction of TAFE courses, TAFE programs. This is very new in the region. It was there small scale, now it's grown so big. The programs that they are providing are not - I mean, we are overproducing what we call these skills. So we are not addressing the needs of the workforce, or what are the employers looking

for. For a small [inaudible] advertising your programs, selling, selling these programs, I think this is what I would put under the commercialisation of education from the university. It's a money making program. (Interviewee 1)

According to this participant, Pacific TAFE is under the banner of USP, but imported from Australia.

### *Determining employment conditions*

While it is clear that the Ministry does not have any influence over employment conditions of staff within private schools, it does influence the employment conditions of teachers in government and non-government schools. A pertinent issue raised by participants was the 'one year contract'. This move was part of a broader civil service reform in which anyone being hired for the public service was put on 1 year contracts. This policy of short-term contracts is informed by New Public Management (NPM) which is a business-style managerialism that aims to render the public service more effective (Clarke, 2004). As Christensen and Laegreid (2007) assert, the assumption of NPM is that market-oriented management will lead to greater cost efficiency and improved success for governments. In the case of Fiji, for example, the Ministry believes that placing teachers on contracts is a way to drive up education training and qualifications which is in the best interest of students and the school system more broadly.

That's the policy at the moment. Part of that, I meant the unions again will say to you that we've put people in a bad position and so on, but contracts have been in the civil service since 2009. So it's not a new phenomenon... Part of it is to keep people on their toes. It has to be performance related. If you have - traditionally... If you're a permanent employee in the civil service, you're in a comfort zone and you do the same job everyday. You don't try and do things better. You don't try and do things more economically. So this is a way of ensuring there's proper performance in the best interest of ensuring there's a quality education system in place. (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 3 also argued that short-term contracts are about creating "efficiency, effectiveness and productivity" in the civil service. However, they also highlight the policy is about 'downsizing' the teacher workforce:

There is this misunderstanding that we - I think we at the Ministry - employed too many personnel and so they feel that contracting them out will downsize. Because we are the biggest Ministry in the Government of Fiji. We employ about 10,000 teachers, that's primary and secondary teachers so they feel that we employ too many but forgetting in the process, with that many, we're still not satisfying the ratio of one student to 25, especially in the urban area schools.

While Interviewee 4 does not refer to the need to downsize the teacher workforce, they do argue that if teachers remain unqualified "there's no space for them in the system". Indeed, according to Interviewee 4, the underpinning rationale for putting teachers on a one year contract is to ensure they are working towards a recognised teaching qualification and through this process, the Ministry is addressing the issue of unqualified teachers working in the Fijian education system,

For those who in 2018 we appointed at Band D, because traditionally there haven't been enough qualified teachers in Fiji, we have alerted them to the need to upgrade their qualification. That's part of it - but also because some of them are leaving currently, New Zealand's poaching teachers; primary teachers and maths teachers in particular. In some instances they leave for Australia. That puts some additional pressure on us. So there's been a tradition for a number of years, and I think that this happens in other Pacific islands as well, that... we're appointing people as classroom assistants without proper qualifications in education to go into some schools because of a shortage of teachers.

So for those new teachers that came in in 2018, we knew that they didn't have a qualification and we told them at that time they needed to upgrade their qualification. So at the end of 2018, we said to them, we're going to extend your contract for one year, but you have to get a qualification.

Despite us saying to the teachers, get your qualification, a number of them didn't. So we rolled over those contracts for one year and we've said to them, actually, we're being quite serious on this, so get your qualification. It's essentially a win-win, as I said before. So those are the ones that we've - as they've got their qualification and their graduation certificate or their completion letter, we go through a process of verifying it. If it's all hunky-dory, then we upgrade their salary and their contract. So we issue a contract on new terms and conditions.

Interviewee 4 further explains that the Ministry came to an agreement with the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 2018 to create an online teacher qualification that teachers could access and complete during their one year contract:

In 2018, my colleagues made an arrangement with USP particularly, but I think the other universities might do it, so that they could do an online course to upgrade to a postgraduate diploma, which originally was 18 months. I said to my colleagues, are you stupid? Because what you really need is to have it in one year because those are one-year contracts. So USP concentrated it to a large extent to be able to do that.

The following excerpt of the interview between the researcher and Interviewee 4 shows that from the Ministry's perspective, there are no significant issues in teachers accessing this online training course:

**Facilitator:** Just to return to the point about USP providing that qualification within 12 months, two follow-up questions: first of all, does it cost much for the teachers and do they have any kind of loan help in terms of paying those fees?

**Interviewee:** If a teacher does not already have, I think it's a diploma, they would be eligible for a loan from our tertiary scholarships and loan support. That is an option, but it depends on what qualification they've already got. What we said to USP is that because it's the teachers, the unqualified teachers, soon to be qualified teachers who are earning the least amount of money that it'd be helpful if they actually extended the payment process. So that they paid what they could, negotiated that with the university, and then once they get their salary upgrade and so on, they can pay off at a quicker rate. That's the acknowledgement that we have done. So we did intervene with USP at the time to say that they need to be kinder than they usually are.

**Facilitator:** Yeah, and then one other thing: I know trying to do work in this context, is just the infrastructure issues in terms of teachers potentially accessing the internet to do an online programme. Have they reported back that that's a potentially limiting factor?

Interviewee: No.

Facilitator: So internet is broadscale enough to be able to do that, even in rural and remote areas?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Facilitator: Okay.

Interviewee: There are some areas for sure where there aren't, there isn't very good access, but my colleagues have said that somewhere at the moment between, there's probably about 150 schools that have iffy connections, but they still have connections. The fact is that there are 650,000 people in Fiji who have access to Facebook. That says that a heck of a lot of people have got access to the internet. I haven't come across anyone saying that this is a particular hardship.

Once teachers have a qualification, they are remunerated accordingly, where a Bachelor of Education earns the highest salary (Band F), then a Diploma in education (Band E), to classroom assistants (Band D), "who generally don't yet have an education qualification" and are thus "given a shorter contract". According to the 2017-2018 budget address in Fiji, qualified teachers have had an average increase in pay by 14.3% and for heads of schools and administrators, 13.8%. The perspective of government is that this increase in pay will mean less movement of people and fewer changes in school leadership. Despite pay increasing for qualified teachers they are not given permanent employment, just an increase in their contract length to 3-5 years.

Not only are teachers only being offered short-term contracts, but these are now filled on an 'order of merit'. As explained by participants, this is a job test that all teachers have to engage in and then they are assigned (and also reassigned) to positions.

Interviewee: Maybe, one thing is to basically determine the calibre of people that we have, to then assign them appropriately to different levels. The other would be to assess their literacy level, because I think there is a component where they talk about communication in the test. I think they have three or four components there. Maybe, in terms of privatisation, it's basically an aid by the government to give people contracts.

- Facilitator: What's the rationale of this? Why does the government come up with this?
- Interviewee: Well, the issue of contracts is interesting because in that manner the government, or whatever employer in there, does not need to negotiate with the union because a contract is an individual contract where the government is basically issuing a contract with the individual. So it's basically a means to eventually kill the unions.
- Facilitator: Where do you think the pressure for these reforms come from?
- Interviewee: With Fiji and the demography that we are in and the amount of resources that we have, that could be a factor. The other factor is basically external. So what happens in our neighbouring countries like New Zealand and Australia basically gets trickled down to Fiji and eventually made from here it would end up with our other Pacific Island countries.
- There is some level of commercialisation in that one and, especially, they talk about casualisation where we no longer hire you as an employer of the institution, rather, you will work as a consultant. In that manner, you could be a consultant for this institution, for that institution, so we only engage you for that many hours. So we don't have to pay for your medical bills, medical insurance, we don't have to pay for leave, we don't have to pay for your conference, we don't have to give you an office, because you are a consultant for the institution.
- (Interviewee 3)

While Interviewee 3 perceives this reform policy as one potentially influenced by economics, by the policies of Australia and New Zealand or as a way to push unions out of enterprise bargaining arrangements, another participant sees it as racism,

So, a lot of principals and head teachers in the Ministry of Education - we have a long list and it's here in my file. That these people were displaced with this new reform. The most experienced - the metrics that they used to decide on that leader, the experience was out. They looked only at qualification. For us

Indigenous people, we would say it's a way of just shoving us out. But from a professional perspective, because I think they should have - because of the lack of consultations. As I said, there was no consultation done. Okay. For me, I was explaining the way they cunningly took us out of our positions and gave us acting positions only and then advertised the posts. We were not informed like we were - there was no consultation meetings going on in all the centres - other centres probably call all the teachers in and slowly try and get information across to us. It was just all of a sudden. All of a sudden. This is a - okay we heard the Attorney General announcing, we are going to introduce civil service reforms. (Interviewee 5)

Later in the report, we comment further on one year contracts, particularly the effect of these reforms on school personnel (welfare/stress). However, as highlighted by the participant above, part of the issue around these processes is the lack of consultation between the Ministry and school personnel. Despite this, the Ministry is confident that they have clearly articulated the process around contracts and the rationale for doing so:

We have voluntarily gone through the process of saying we will audit every single teacher's file. We will make sure that they will get the right salary. As a result of that, we've terminated three contracts because teachers had forged their qualifications. (Interviewee 4)

### ***Curriculum and assessment policies***

Participants also perceived little consultative processes happening around curriculum reform policies. For example,

I think consultation here is minimal. They just implement from the top, pass it down. Implement from there, pass it down. Go and get the curriculum from Australia, or Bangladesh or whatever, and come implement here and tell the teachers, now, deliver it in the classroom. (Interviewee 1)

Indeed, there was a sense that reform agendas were influenced by those without education expertise.

My hope is that this reform is in control, is - because at this time, anyone - especially from the government, anyone who wants to

push their agenda, they want to bring it to education, to - for us to incorporate it into the curriculum. Already, it's a full curriculum. Certainly now, the way things work, they don't leave it to the educational - education experts to do the reform. These are people who don't understand how the curriculum works, how education works. They want reform, especially [if] they have the power, especially when it's coming from government. We've had a history of different ministers of education, those that don't have any education background...That's my fear, that they will keep influencing and then there is no - for curriculum reform and curriculum process is a long process. It is not an overnight thing that you do. (Interviewee 3)

There was a sense that reform policy agendas would be more successful and better understood if principals and teachers were included in the consultation process:

If the reform was to be implemented effectively, the people who would be affected in the reform, needs to at least be consulted, so that they are comfortable in their working environment... the hope is definitely to ensure that the teachers could confidently work within their environment with the new reforms being designed and implemented. The fear that I have is with the current lack of consultation, the teachers are facing a lot of challenges in terms of worrying about their future, their career path. It also will dwell down into maybe challenges of delivering effectively in the classroom. So, when we look at it as a whole, if teachers have that fear over and above them, then they are guaranteed to be performing not to their best or their maximum capability. (Interviewee 2)

## **5.2 Access**

### ***Enrolment and school choice***

Access relates to how far all children and young people have access to schools and high quality curriculum, and the extent to which barriers to enrolment and access exist (Mockler, et al., 2019). In Fiji schooling is compulsory from 5 years of age, but at this age, students are expected to enrol in a Kindergarten program. The issue with this is that many of the early childhood education centres are private.



Now, the government has made it compulsory that at the age of five, children must go to school, kindergarten. But, the problem is that there's not enough kindergartens, and these kindergartens are mostly private schools. So parents have to pay and it's very expensive. (Interviewee 1)

The subsequent issue according to this participant is that having attended Kindergarten is a requirement for enrolment in year 1, and this becomes a proxy enrolment criteria if a school is oversubscribed.

So if there is limited space, what will happen to this child? Their parents will be running around trying to see who can help them to put their child in [to a school], because of the limited space. So they [the school] will give the first priority to the child that went through kindergarten. So there is a gap there. The Ministry is not in sync with the requirements for entry into primary school. (Interviewee 1)

According to former bureaucrats, the Ministry has recognised the need for more early childhood education, and that “the drastic development after Winston in 2016 has seen our early childhood providers increased drastically from the few below the 60s before that, to almost 1900 centres to date”. This rapid increase in providers highlights that further research is required on the privatisation/private provision of early childhood education in Fiji.

Beyond issues with access to kindergarten, participants had mixed perceptions about the comprehensive nature of schools. For example, some discussed the use of school zones for student enrolment and how this had worked to decrease ethnic segregation.

In terms of school jurisdiction, there would be - and - well, slightly variable in some case because before we used to have schools based on ethnicity. We had Indian schools, we had Fijian schools and so on. There was a tendency for students to basically choose where they wanted to go, but now I know that those racial differences are taken away. Every school should be an inclusive one, so everybody should be able to choose whichever. I think the zoning thing also comes in. There is a restriction on that basis, on which school a particular child can go to. (Interviewee 6)

However, as described by another participant, while zoning policies had intended to limit school choice, many heads of school don't abide by it and admit students outside of their zone,

Sometimes the school management puts pressure on the head of school to admit kids that aren't within the zone. Sometimes the old scholars, the parents, put pressure on the head of school to admit them, admit their kids and that type of stuff. So there is an informal level of choice, yes, but we're trying to re-emphasise to people that we should be applying the zoning policy full stop.

So for example, the government boarding schools were originally established for those kids who are out in remote areas who don't have access to a secondary school, predominantly. Now we're finding that because of the rural-urban drift, the parents who were living in the island previously but are now living in Suva or Nadi or wherever, they want their kids to go to that particular school. Instead of stepping back and saying okay, I've had my chance, now let me make sure that someone else from a rural area is able to get the same chance that I had. That hasn't quite filtered through. (Interviewee 4)

As described by this participant, there is some school choice evident in Fiji with parents choosing to send their children to particular schools. Similarly, private schooling was also seen as an element of school choice, where some parents were choosing to send their children to private schools for different learning opportunities:

They're [private school] doing things on IT, like PowerPoint presentation at a very young age. So she likes the creativity, children are given that freedom, that space. Whereas in the normal public schools, this is not the case. It's more like the teacher teaching on the board, or that sort of thing. The learning is quite different, the learning is straight. (Interviewee 1)

### **Curriculum, assessment and resources**

Participants agreed that there are access issues in relation to curriculum and resourcing in schools. Some participants perceived that recent examination and curriculum reform had narrowed curriculum and brought in a focus on outcomes in a response to a perception that the education system was failing students,

When I was teaching in high school the marks were scaled. That is no longer in existence. So they say we only deal with real marks, the student's ability. But then, the national results dropped significantly when that system was put in place. So now teachers

are saying they have made it so easy, the exam paper is so easy to get students to pass, because basically the education system has failed. These students are not learning... it has impacted the teaching in the classroom, and what graduates they are producing.

(Interviewee 1)

According to Interviewee 3, the Ministry was focused on an assessment reform trajectory that would allow teachers to focus on a more holistic curriculum in their classrooms.

Another reform in terms of the examination, when we were reviewing the curriculum, the major curriculum reform, alongside that was the reform of the actual examination, so that we could work towards classroom-based assessment. Unfortunately, with a change of government, they brought back the exam-oriented - so, we had taken away a few of the examinations, like the Year 6 and the Year 10 examinations. Now, with this current government, they want that reintroduced again. (Interviewee 3)

Similarly, assessment reform was about ensuring the system infrastructure is improved to allow the broad-scale administration of examinations throughout Fiji,

One of the major reforms, ...was improving the actual IT processing system of processing of results. That was major and it was assisted by, again, Australian Aid, to the extent that we could offer examinations online. Literacy and numeracy assessments are online. Even to the extent that we draft examination papers and it is accessed online by the different schools in the different areas and then all they do is print it and give it to the student. That is one, that's one examination. Another is the actual IT, so that it will be a - the process of this examination reforms. (Interviewee 3)

Interestingly, while the Ministry is focused on improving the IT capabilities of assessment infrastructure, other participants observed the lack of resources that complement these reforms to curriculum and assessment. Interviewee 1 in particular, who up until recently, was a teacher in Fijian schools, observed that teachers were under pressure to produce workbooks to complement the new curriculum, but were not offered appropriate time or support to do this:

So they were told to write a coursebook ...it's all from Wikipedia. I mean, most of it is internet cut and paste. She told me that she didn't have the time. She was told by the permanent secretary that, I want this rolled out in the school by this date, so that leaves

her in that tight situation. She has to deliver. So consultation was at its minimal.

Moreover, there was a sense that teachers are under pressure to teach only to the test, where for example, rather than do a practical in the science laboratory, they're just learning all the answers from the book.

One effect of this reform movement perceived by Interviewee 1 is that schools are not producing graduates ready for university:

So I have one good example. I was in Canberra just in April. I went to meet the Fijian students in ANU, and then one of the accounting students, who was the topper in Fiji - so we have this topper scheme. Those who achieve, I think over 350 out of 400 in the national exam in Year 13 are given that Australian scholarship award for Pacific Islanders. So this student, who is doing actuarial studies, has failed all... He came from one of the top schools here, who's a top achiever, and he was the top student. When he went to ANU he was failing. Why was he failing? Because the education system here has failed. It did not prepare the children to go out and go and be able be competent enough to cope with university studies. (Interviewee 1)

Perhaps more worrying is one participant's reflection on students' literacy levels and how these have changed over time, observing,

You remember that in our days when we went to school, there were no non-readers in existence. I'm afraid to share with you that now we have non-readers up until secondary level. So, that is what [happens] when the school system would undergo reform experience when the teachers' issues are not addressed adequately to guarantee them or to assure them of a good profession... (Interviewee 2)

## **5.3 Funding**

Recent and ongoing work on school funding internationally (Posey-Maddox, 2016; Rowe & Perry, 2019; Thompson, Hogan, & Rahimi, 2019) has highlighted the complex relationship between funding of schools and definitions of publicness for schools and school systems. As noted above, sources of funding for schools should not be conflated with issues of control – there are plenty of examples internationally of private schools receiving

government funding, government schools receiving funding from private sources, privately-funded schools being required to comply with government regulations and so on. We are interested in understanding public expenditure, funding from private sources (e.g. parental fees, philanthropy/aid money) and whether there is the ability for schools to run for profit.

### Public expenditure

Fiji has undergone reform in recent years to create a free public education system. As Interviewee 5 noted,

Things began to change a couple of years back when government ... decided to take over and pay the full amount and say that it would be free education provided for all Fiji citizens from primary to secondary schools. Yes, right now we have free education in our country from early childhood education, ECE, primary schooling and also secondary schooling as well. We're hearing of the government's initiative that in a couple of years it will be paying also for tertiary education for free in our country. (Interviewee 5)

It is important to note, that it is free to attend public schools (government and non-government) and that private schools, including private early childhood education providers charge fees. One interviewee gave an indication of what one private school in urban Fiji charges in fees.

So they [private schools] have four terms, and these two schools I know, they charge \$1,000 a term, so there are four terms, so \$4,000 a year as opposed to going to a public school, and then that is free... Not kindergarten. Kindergarten only for the ones that the government has done the set up. But the private ones, of course, you pay. You pay to put your child in. So school here is free from Year 1 to Year 13. (Interviewee 1)

The government provides funding in the form of the Free Education grant which is worked out as a per student amount that intends to cover all the costs of schooling:

The Free Education grant, we've covered almost all costs of running that school. Meaning we have catered for administrative costs; we've also catered for school maintenance costs... [It] is allocated to admin, to staff development and school maintenance and other expenses like if the principal intends to attend the



principal's conference, those expenses are catered for within the guidelines of the Free Education grant. I think the Free Education grant is the main funding mechanism that is there for all our schools in Fiji. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 3 provides further insight into what the amount of funding per student is in the Free School grant,

For the history of the Ministry of Education, there's always grants given to the school but since 2014 - the government has paid for the tuition fees of all students. Primary, secondary and for kindergarten, [but] only the five year olds. Because the kindergarten in Fiji is a mix of three year old, four year old, five year old. Any fees being paid by government is only for the five year old, in the kindergarten. For the primary and secondary, all are given tuition fees. For the - while the primary, for each individual student, it's about \$250 per year, for each student in the primary. In the secondary, it's different. For the years nine and 10, it's about \$300 plus; for the years 11 and 12, it's about \$400 and something. Then in the Year 13, each child is paid \$600 and something. Those are the current fee arrangement in the school.

Interestingly, Interviewee 1, who sits on a primary school board had the figures from the previous terms grant, and her school, with 526 students, received \$65,136 FJD, which equals \$123.83 of funding per student for use during term 2 of the 2019 school year.

### *Private sources of income*

While it is clear that the major source of income for schools in Fiji comes from the government Free Education grant, participants perceived parental fees and philanthropy as also contributing to the overall budget for some schools. It is important to note that some differences in perception existed around the issue of parent fees - as this was a relatively new policy reform of the government that no longer allows schools to charge parents fees.

The parental contribution is not an agenda of the ministry, and the ministry discourages school committees and school management from conducting fundraising. Because as I've said with you earlier on, we have provided completely for the school running and the school operations for all the expenses that will be needed. However, some parents still have that PTA organisation or the

PTA and the staff organisation which organises these sorts of fundraising locally. (Interviewee 2)

So, yes, I thought - right now the government is giving funds, the total running of the school and if the management - the school management wants more to develop the school, they would have to be raising funds. But then raising funds is not allowed. That is what the government has done. The students are not allowed to be given [sentivel] cards or walkathon or all that because the government feels that the amount it has given is sufficient to run the school. (Interviewee 5)

According to Interviewee 6, however, this grant is insufficient in providing everything required by schools, and often parents still have to supplement funding to the school to enable access to resources, including textbooks and technologies. Interviewee 6 noted:

The government is giving free education...right up to form seven.. But I think the schools do charge a building fee, so there is a component that is being levied to the child. The government can talk about free education, but there is a component that the parents have to bear. The text book is also now provided by the ministry. They have created - which is really good - they have created a repository of these text books and families - and as a parent with the use of technology it's quite easy to basically access the resources. (Interviewee 6)

One interviewee did clarify that while school fees are no longer allowed, the Ministry does allow schools to run a fundraising campaign once a year to help support infrastructure costs. As explained in the quote below, the tightening of policies around private funding was to ensure that there were fewer barriers for all students being able to access schooling,

What we do allow is that on one occasion a year any school can do its own fundraising. Quite a few schools do that because the school management wants to build another classroom type thing, which is fine. They keep telling us it's their school, in which case, go ahead. But what we don't like is forced levies. So some schools, we've actually had to step in to say you can't levy - there was one school I think last week or the week before which was saying any new student wanting to enrol, their parents had to pay \$20 for enrolment fees or something like that. We said no, stop that. Refund.

So the idea is that the government has removed obstacles to people getting an education, regardless of their socioeconomic status. There's a significant investment that government has made through increasing teachers' salaries, through the free education grant, through transport assistance, through free textbooks, through milk for year one, but that's been reduced because there was a lot of abuse so that's only going into the remote schools. All of these things are saying that there's not such a requirement for people to pay up, but where it becomes issues of infrastructure, then there's a limit to what government can do in terms of infrastructure because with 1,800 institutions of some sort, there has to be a line drawn somewhere. (Interviewee 4)

Philanthropy was still seen as being more prominent in schools, particularly through organisations that donated resources to schools:

Some schools will have opportunities or would have been lucky enough or fortunate enough to be supported by some embassies, some non-governmental organisations who find keen interest in those schools. (Interviewee 2)

Because part of the reason of the fundraising in the past was because the parents themselves paid the fees. So, there is fundraising to assist in the running of the schools. I'd like to share - also, we've had groups, like a volunteer system, like the Peace Corps... and then individuals that have gone right to a school but to an island and provided their voluntary services. They have organised, in their own way, assistance to the schools. For example, they would bring in books - library books, or they would bring in computers. (Interviewee 3)

We have experienced that over the years, that some forms of assistance come in terms of second hand computers that have been refurbished in our commercial banks locally, they donate those to some of the schools. (Interviewee 2)

Beyond the school, philanthropy - and aid programs - were present in the broader system, particularly around curriculum and assessment reform,

While I was at the Ministry, assistance from the New Zealand government; New Zealand Aid, Australian Aid, especially Australian Aid. We've had major projects that have - that were with the Ministry, that they worked with us at the curriculum at the time



when I was heading the professional section. In terms of reforms, in terms of assistance, in terms of curriculum and examination work. They were the ones - even to the extent of the IT system [income] of the Ministry, the aid - and New Zealand government was small projects; they assisted us in small projects. That is really the aid money that came into the Ministry. Otherwise, it's mostly government and the usual government taxation [unclear] process. (Interviewee 3)

Some of the aid programs present in Fiji were not overseen by the Ministry, but schools applied for this funding themselves, particularly around infrastructure support,

Aid funding goes more into systems and piloting of smart classrooms, making sure there's internet connectivity. The Japanese seem mostly to look at rebuilding schools at the current time, so they have a small grant programme. Schools can apply to them for whatever they want, whether it's computers through to buildings or whatever it is. (Interviewee 4)

## **5.4 Teaching**

Developed in response to the notion that both endogenous and exogenous privatisation of schooling reshapes and redefines teaching and teachers' work more broadly (Hogan, Thompson, Sellar, & Lingard, 2018), the final dimension of the typology we have used to inform this analysis, *Teaching*, relates to these factors. Ball and Youdell (2008) suggest that privatisation in education is either 'endogenous', in which ideas, techniques and practices are imported from the private sector to make the public sector more business-like; or 'exogenous', in which public services are opened to private sector participation where the private sector designs, manages or delivers aspects of public education (p. 9). As Ball and Youdell (2008) observe, these forms of privatisation are not mutually exclusive and are often interrelated. Indeed, as Fredricksson (2009) has noted, the relationship between teachers' work and the marketisation and privatisation of public education is not a simple or linear one: in many cases, privatisation may have led to better (or worse) teaching and learning conditions, access to professional development opportunities and so on.

## Staffing

A number of issues emerged for teaching which were perceived to impact on the welfare of the profession. One was the concern about class sizes with participants reporting the teacher to student ratio is high:

[It has] been reported that classroom would sit normal capacity is 30, but now they have to push more children, to 40, because the government is now - ministry is coming to us, can you please accommodate, because they are stuck. There are not enough schools to cater for the growing population. (Interviewee 1)

Perhaps more troubling is the effect that one year contracts (as discussed in Control previously), have on teacher morale. Two Interviewees observed,

We have a demoralised group or - probably yes, a demoralised group of teachers. Majority of them, they don't feel like - take for example, I've had five people who have come here to give me a copy of their resignation in this last three months, resignation. They have decided to go and plant kava back in their villages. They think they would live a much more peaceful life. They would not be shoved about and being ordered and being given very unfair treatment by the Ministry of Education, because they - some of our teachers get a one year contract only. One year contract. After having taught for so many years, 10 plus years, 20 plus years and now they're facing contract problems and it's affecting their families, when they're not given - when their contract takes time to renew - it's not renewed immediately, their pay does not remain. When the contract ceases, the Marela House [Ministry of Education] people immediately cease their pay. So, they are left to wait for four weeks, two months until their contract is renewed to go and work. Your contract will come. We'll call you. But then they don't get paid for this month, for this much time. It's demoralising. It's demoralising. It's affected their performance in the school, in the classroom. It's affected their performance in the classroom. The teachers now probably hate their jobs so much they're having second thoughts about having chosen to be a teacher. (Interviewee 5)

But with this new contract, some teachers are finding it really difficult. Difficult in the sense that some of these contracts are not even written in three to five years terms, they are given annually. When that happens, teachers face a lot of disadvantages. They cannot acquire certain loans from [unclear] commercial banks. (Interviewee 3)

As these participants observe, the one year contract has created uncertainty around employment and salary conditions amongst the teaching profession, with some teachers leaving the profession altogether. According to Interviewee 3, the Ministry has noted there is an issue with the one year contract and is currently increasing the period to 5 years. However, Interviewee 3 also notes that with the move to the Jobs test system, employment is no longer guaranteed:

Now, I hear that there's change from one year to five years for teachers but - that is one, that is for the current teachers. In the past, we have never had teachers who come in for the first time into the - they're graduates, they're teacher graduates. They're normally - it's based on their needs, whatever the number that you would have employ for that year, they're all you take in. Even with that, they used to come in just with their graduate certificates. Now, they have to apply. The current process now, even the new graduates, they have to watch for advertisements that come up then they will apply and then they get sorted, selection and all that. It's not like in the past, once you graduate, you are guaranteed a job.

It is worth noting that the Ministry does not agree with some of these concerns, as they believe they have ensured teachers can still receive loans from commercial banks, and as long as they perform, their contracts will keep being rolled over, and this is no different to anyone else working in the civil service or in many instances, the private sector,

That is not true because the banks have been told that civil servants' contracts must be honoured in the same way as a contract in the private sector. One of the shops down the road here... It's a clothing shop. The staff member said but I never understand what these teachers are going on about. I'm on a one-year contract. If I perform then I know that it's going to get extended or rolled over. In the private sector in Fiji for many, many years, they've had contracts and it's not a new phenomenon in Fiji. It's not a new phenomenon even in the civil service going back ten years. So that I don't think is a real issue.

Teaching is static. We're always going to need teachers until we get real artificial intelligence, but that's another debate and it's not going to happen immediately. So there's no problem in terms of security of employment if you're doing the job properly.

(Interviewee 4)

Beyond employment conditions, some participants also perceived an issue around teacher pay too, particularly compared with other civil service professions:

In the teaching profession, I raised this with the Minister for Education in our last meeting in April. I told her it's so unfair. A teacher's starting salary is 12,000, if he graduates here, she graduates with a diploma. If he or she graduates with a degree, he starts at probably 13 or 14 or 16. But this teacher passed the highest level of secondary education at Form 7. He or she got a training for two or three years, teaching training. He is a fully fledged, fully trained teacher. He has got a diploma. He's got a diploma to - he's been sent to a school. Compare us with the RFMF and the police department. These people have failed their Fiji - some of them even Fiji Junior. They are handpicked because they have strings attached to higher ranking people in the organisation. They failed their examinations. They are being picked - some of them. I'm talking about some. Not all of them. They go training for a 12 week basic training. They get trained for 12 weeks. This guy gets trained for three years. For 12 weeks, when he comes out, he starts at a salary of 16,660. This poor teacher starts at 12,000. How is that fair? (Interviewee 5)

These issues are seen to be detrimental to the teaching profession, with Interviewee 3 voicing a fear that the future of the teaching profession, and its quality, is at risk,

My fears are that they will introduce a lot of changes that are leaving the schools and the teachers confused. That seems to be the state of affairs right now. They're fearing their own jobs, their own future, because of the contractor issues. They keep changing things - the curriculum people keep changing things so they're - the teachers don't know. It's - though we have internet in Fiji and so on, it takes time to get teachers to understand changes and knowing how to deal with it, how to [unclear]. That's my fear, that there's - if nothing is done, it will - the quality will certainly go down. (Interviewee 3)

### *Qualifications and regulation*

As discussed in detail above, the one year contract is a policy initiative by the Ministry to help address an under qualified teacher workforce.

It is also worth noting that the Ministry has identified that the ongoing professional learning of teachers and principals is something that needs to be addressed, and they are working towards developing online professional development programs. The extended quote below highlights that professional development is required around school management capabilities, increasing ICT capability with principals and teachers, pedagogies, particularly in shifting from teacher-centred to more student-centred, inquiry style learning, and effective strategies for student behaviour management:

It's going to be a major undertaking because it's going to mean getting the teacher training institutions online and all of that type of stuff. I think at the, we're going through a whole bunch of changes which are really aimed at modernisation....

So we're working on trying to - because we've got a small pool of teachers and school leaders, we've recognised that we actually have to upgrade their skills. One of the other reform issues is that we've been working to develop an online learning tool for heads of schools so that we can help them upgrade their competence in terms of the job. Because one of the things in terms of the job evaluation process is that many of them got more than 15 per cent increase in salary. That's why all of those positions were declared vacant so in terms of open merit everyone had to have an opportunity to apply.

But it also says that our expectations had increased for what a head of school should be doing in terms of stakeholder management, financial management, developing a strategy and an operational plan for the school, instilling a sense of positive behavioural change, instructional leadership, educational leadership, mentoring people. All of these types of things that have not been as obvious, I suppose, is one way of putting it, up until then. We're looking to move a lot more training issue online. I still need to sort out in terms of a debate who should be responsible for continuing professional development. There's no culture of it here. We need to re-instil that culture. It did exist apparently about 10 years ago or so.

We need to be able to ensure that teachers are up to date in terms of what they're teaching. We need to change from an exams-based system to a more competence-based system. We need to ensure that teachers are literate and numerate so that our students are literate and numerate when they come out of the system. There are a whole lot of reforms that we need to, I mean



those are the outcomes, but there are a whole lot of reforms that we need to put in place to be able to achieve those outcomes. I mean, corporal punishment is still very much a culture here. We take a zero-tolerance approach on that. It's also about trying to empower teachers in terms of what to do instead of hitting a child. Our teacher training institutions haven't been very helpful in that.  
(Interviewee 4)

As clearly identified, the issue moving forward is how to best design and implement professional learning systems for Fijian teachers. However, there was some concern about how this system could be implemented. Part of this concern was the requirement for teachers to 'be on duty' an additional 7 days per year for student-free days before each term. From the government's perspective, these additional days were seen as necessary to ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to teach new curricular and provide the best possible outcomes for students. Ultimately, Interviewee 4 suggests that currently, there is not a collegial approach to improving teaching standards,

I mean they [unions] come at it from the perspective that many of our members don't know how to use computers, so we shouldn't make them. They come at it from the perspective that our so-called general orders say that teachers must be allowed to enjoy their holidays so we can't do any professional development in the holiday. I'm not keen to take teachers out of classrooms because that's the primary service they're supposed to be providing to the student to do a professional development. So it has to go online and they're going to have to go through it.

For me, if I want to look at myself in the mirror, I need to be making sure that I'm able to provide the best service I can, which means that if I need to do additional reading, if I need to do additional online work, whatever it is, then I do it. But the unions are understandably, from their perspective, pushing particular lines, but it's not necessarily going to be a collegial approach to improving standards.

## 6. Summary

In summary, like many jurisdictions around the world, COPE grapples with inadequate resourcing that limits the support for teachers, students and their communities. This impacts the ability of systems to support innovative teaching and learning; continued professional learning and development; and to deal with the effects that increased teacher workload has on teacher wellbeing and effectiveness. This is exacerbated by ongoing problems regarding the conditions under which teachers operate, including insufficient pay; the low status of the profession; wide-scale use of contract employment; a lack of support for managing student behaviour; minimal training in how to foster inclusive pedagogies for all students; and insufficient consultation over reform policies between all education stakeholders. These issues are not unique and reflect global concerns regarding teachers and teaching in many nations.

However, there are also specific issues that seem to be experienced more acutely in the Pacific Islands. These include the complexity of delivering quality education across regional and remote islands and sparsely populated areas; the challenge of an under-qualified teaching workforce and the responsibilities of governments to support these teachers in gaining the appropriate knowledge and qualifications; and the influence of philanthropy and aid organisations in education reform trajectories.

All these issues are worthy of further attention by COPE, and its affiliated unions, in thinking about how they might best support their members in contexts that are increasingly affected by strengthening market-like logics and procedures in education. While the privatisation of school systems in COPE nations seems most focused on endogenous forms (in which ideas, techniques and practices are imported from the private sector to make the public sector more business-like), it is important to remember how these can lead to further exogenous forms in which public services are opened to private sector participation where the private sector designs, manages or delivers aspects of public education). For this reason, we have decided to present a list of suggestions for future research into the impact of GERM (and subsequently, privatisation and commercialisation) on students, teachers and schools that COPE should consider worthy of further discussion and potential action with members.

## **6.1 Suggestions for further research**

As a scoping project, the methodology utilised here is appropriate for uncovering perceived issues and concerns. However, due to the limitations of such a study, it is not appropriate to draw firm conclusions as to why people feel as they do, the significant factors and/or the impact that GERM, privatisation and commercialisation are having on educational issues in the South Pacific.

With that in mind, we consider that the following areas are worthy of further research so as to better understand the elements (and related components) of school provision:

### ***Control***

- 1.** Assess the impact of short-term contracts on the interrelated domains of access, equity and quality of education and the morale, status and conditions of the teaching profession.
- 2.** Evaluate terms of school regulation (for non-government and private schools in particular) and consequential effects on student outcomes and teacher professionalism.
- 3.** Explore avenues for creating more effective consultative processes between education stakeholders, particularly government departments, unions and school personnel.

### ***Funding***

- 4.** Establish how aid money is being used in education, and the extent to which it influences national education system policies and/or individual school practices.
- 5.** Establish how school funding arrangements work in nations of the Pacific Islands, including public funding (e.g. taxation), private income (e.g. fees and parental contributions) and philanthropy (e.g. aid money).
- 6.** Explore how schools engage in philanthropic arrangements to meet a perceived shortfall in infrastructure and resourcing.



## Access

- 7.** Assess the impact of curriculum and assessment reforms, particularly in terms of cultural appropriation, uptake and effectiveness.
- 8.** Establish the prominence of school choice and school competition and evaluate what information and resources parents are using to inform their decisions.
- 9.** Explain the relationship between Early Childhood Education and education privatisation.
- 10.** Evaluate opportunities for further use of ICTs at all levels of the education system.

## Teaching

- 11.** Establish the reasons why some teachers are not accessing further qualifications and training (despite this being a condition of their contract renewal).
- 12.** Explore opportunities for broad stakeholder collaboration in the design and enactment of continuing professional learning for teachers and school leaders.
- 13.** Evaluate the current post-secondary pathways for teacher training/qualifications and how these might better support the needs of future teachers.
- 14.** Understand wellbeing issues for teachers and the support structures required to enhance their professionalism.



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# Commercial Activity in Pacific Education

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