Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province
by
Setsuo Otsuka
M.Ed. (Victoria University of Wellington, NZ)
B.A. (Victoria University of Wellington, NZ)
A Dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of Education & Social Work,
the University of Sydney, Australia,
in partial fulfilment of the
Degree of Doctor of Education
2006
For the children of Fiji,......
ABSTRACT
At an upper level of education, especially Forms 5, 6 and 7 of secondary school and in tertiary institutions, Indo-Fijian students often perform better than their ethnic Fijian counterparts. This pattern of ethnic difference in academic performance is a long standing one, lasting over 70 years. However, both ethnic groups have been participants in the same educational system in Fiji. Educational policies have been implemented to reduce this difference.
This present case study argues that there are cultural differences of values, beliefs and practices with respect to educational achievement among Indo-Fijians and ethnic Fijians. The achievement ethic of the two ethnic groups differs. Indo-Fijian culture respects and values education highly. Generally speaking, educating children has been always the top priority of Indo-Fijian culture. They believe that education changes people for the better, and the only way to “success” is through education. Thus, Indo-Fijian parents believe that helping children to strive for academic excellence is one of the most important tasks for them. The priority attached by such parents to educational success is one of the strongest forces behind academic success. By contrast, ethnic Fijian culture encourages children to have a strong sense of loyalty to their community and of becoming good members of their koro (i.e., village). Indeed, one’s total commitment to communal activities and cultural requirements is of vital importance. Although ethnic Fijian parents generally understand the importance of their children’s education and wish to support their education, ethnic Fijian communal demands are enormous in terms of time and labour. The pressure to maintain their moral and social obligations within the community tends to make ethnic Fijians spend a large amount of time, energy and money on functions such as ceremonial events and church activities, at the possible expense of providing for the formal education of their children.
These demands mean that parents are often absent from home, and unable to supervise children’s homework. Ethnic Fijian children, upper secondary schoolers, feel strong pressure from their peers within their koro to conform to social activities, such as attending church, playing sports such as rugby and volleyball, and hanging around in the koro and town. Besides, the layout of the typical ethnic Fijian home is a
more difficult environment than Indo-Fijian households for children’s study, largely
due to the limited space to study independently.
The socio-cultural background of ethnic Fijians, especially their home environment
including family values and priorities, is one of the major barriers to their children’s
educational progress. In addition, school leadership, teachers’ expectations, colonial
policies and legacies, e.g., land tenure issues, play important roles in affecting
differences in the academic performance of these two ethnic groups. Consequently,
the educational achievement differences between ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians are
revealed substantially during the secondary and tertiary educational institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my supervisor, Anthony Welch, for his
assistance and advice on my work. I would also like to express my very heartfelt
appreciation to the following people for their support: Ian Smith, Robert Norton and
Eta Varani-Norton. My very special thanks go to Ronald Webb, John Payne and those
who co-operated with my fieldwork in the Nadroga/Navosa Province, Fiji: Principals,
teachers, students, parents, education officers and church pastors.
I am grateful to the Faculty of Education & Social Work at the University of Sydney
for their generous financial and instrumental support, which made my fieldwork and
writing possible.
Words cannot express how much I owe my mother, Setsuko, and my wife, Vinceta.
Without their on-going financial struggle, support, understanding, caring and loving,
my study could not have been accomplished at all.
Finally, I dedicate this small piece of research to students in Fiji who strive for
academic excellence, despite their very difficult learning environments. Their
diligence, effort and determination kept my research going.

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION
This is to certify that:
I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the <insert Name of
Degree> Degree
II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
III. the thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree.
IV. no part of this work has been used for the award of another degree.
V. this thesis meets the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics
Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.
Signature(s):

Name(s):

Date:

CONTENTS
Abstract
Acknowledgments
Table of Contents
List of Tables
List of Figures
List of Abbreviations
Interview Notes
Chapter One: Introduction & Scope of the Study
Statement of the Problem.................................................................1
Research Questions........................................................................1
Significance of the Study...............................................................2
Research Hypotheses.....................................................................6
Outline of the Dissertation............................................................7

Chapter Two: Background to the Study
Introduction.....................................................................................9
The Regional Context......................................................................9
Educational System in Fiji.............................................................19
Effects of British Colonial Policy on Ethnic Differences in Academic Performance.........................................................30
Ethnic Differences in Academic Performance................................35
Conclusion......................................................................................51

Chapter Three: Theoretical Considerations
Introduction.....................................................................................52
Concepts of Culture..........................................................................52
Culture and Achievement...............................................................58
Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji..................................62
Conclusion......................................................................................77

Chapter Four: Research Design - Case Study
Introduction.....................................................................................78
Case Study.......................................................................................78
The Overall Research Sample.........................................................79
Research Site..................................................................................82
Construction of the Case Study.......................................................86
Implementation Procedures ............................................................89
Analysis Procedures.......................................................................92
Conclusion......................................................................................96

Chapter Five: Data Analysis & Discussion
Introduction.....................................................................................97
Characteristics of Seven Secondary Schools in the Nadroga/Navosa Province..........................................................97
Academic Performance in Seven Secondary Schools in the Nadroga/Navosa Province................................................103
Discussion......................................................................................107
Conclusion......................................................................................162

Chapter Six: Conclusions & Future Directions
Summary of Research Findings.........................................................164
Other Possible Variables influencing Ethnic Differences in Academic Achievement.........................................................168
Cultural Generalisations & Individual Differences........................169
Policy Implementations.................................................................171
Limitations of the Study ...............................................................177
Suggestions for Future Research in the Ethnic Fijian Community...180
Conclusion......................................................................................188

References......................................................................................189

Appendix One
Participant Information Sheet.........................................................211

Appendix Two
Participant Consent Form.............................................................218
Appendix Three
Face-to-Face Interview Schedule..........................................................225

Appendix Four
Face-to-Face Interview Questionnaire.....................................................228
- Student..................................................................................................229
- Teacher...............................................................................................31
- Principal, Vice-Principal & Assistant Principal......................................232
- Parent/Guardian..................................................................................233
- Senior Education Officer......................................................................235
- Senior Pastor......................................................................................236

Appendix Five
Survey Questionnaire............................................................................237

Appendix Six
Academic Performance in the Nadroga/Navosa Province.........................240

Appendix Seven
Parental Education................................................................................250

Appendix Eight
Parental Occupation................................................................................260

Appendix Nine
Students’ Perceptions of Ethnic Differences in Attitudes towards Formal Education.................................................................269

TABLES
1. Population of Fiji, 1921-1946............................................................11
2. Growth Rates for the Census Years 1966-1996 (By Percentage)............11
4. Ethnic Composition of House of Representatives after 1999 Elections....14
5. Numbers and Percentages of Total Population in Fiji, 2003..................15
6. Numbers and Percentages of Ethnic Origin & Gender........................16
7. Numbers and Percentages of Minority Ethnic Groups in Fiji, 1996.........16
8. Religious Affiliation by Ethnicity, 2003..............................................17
9. Educational Provision for Children by Ethnicity & Gender (Number)........21
10. Enrolment in Primary & Post-Primary Schools by Ethnicity & Gender 1963.................................................................23
11. Enrolment in Secondary School by Ethnicity & Gender 1963.............23
12. Enrolment in Primary and Secondary Schools by Ethnicity & Gender 1968....24
13. Types of Educational Institutions & Administering Authorities, 1986.................................................................26
14. Progression of School Classes & Forms............................................28
15. Fiji Form Seven Examination (FFSE) Results, 2002 per Subject by Ethnicity (per cent)..............................................................36
16. Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) by Ethnicity (Girls), 1999.........37
17. Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) by Ethnicity (Boys), 1999.........37
18. Sample of 1999 Intermediate Examination Marks, by Ethnicity (Girls).................................................................38
19. Sample of 1999 Intermediate Examination Marks, by Ethnicity (Boys)........................................................................38
20. Samples of Fiji Eight Year Examination (FEYE) Results by Ethnicity (Girls), 199.................................................................38
21. Samples of Fiji Eight Year Examinations (FEYE) Results by Ethnicity (Boys), 1999.................................................................39
22. Progress of the 1988 Cohort for 13 Years by Ethnicity & Gender...........39
23. Secondary School Entrance Examination Results by Ethnicity (1961-1963)...................................................................41
24. University Entrance Examination Results by Ethnicity (1963-1965)..................................................................................42
25. New Zealand University Entrance (NZUE) Examination Results for Fiji Students (1966-1973).................................................42
27. Results of Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations by Ethnicity, 1990-1995.................................................................43
29. Fiji Junior Certificate (FCJ) Examination Results in 1987 (per cent)..................................................................................43
31. Performance in EC102 & EC203 at USP (per cent).................................................45
32. Numbers Qualified in Selected Professions, 1958..............................................45
33. Results of Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examination by Rural/Urban 1997-1999, Number of Candidates and Passes........46
34. Telephones in Schools.............................................................................47
35. Primary Teachers Classified by Qualifications, 1999.................................49
36. Secondary Teachers Classified by Qualifications, 1999.............................50
37. Ethnic and Sex Comparisons on Self-Esteem..............................................74
38. Ethnic and Sex Comparisons on Self-Concept.............................................74
39. Face-to-Face Interview Sample by Ethnicity & Gender (Number).............80
40. Survey Sample by Ethnicity (Number)..........................................................81
41. Location of Six Secondary Schools in the Nadroga/Navosa Province........84
42. Management & Leadership of Six Secondary Schools in the Nadroga/Navosa Province, 2004......................................................86
43. Composition of Teaching Staff by Ethnicity & Gender (Number & Percentage) in the Nadroga/Navosa Province, 2004 .........................98
44. Total Enrolment by Ethnicity & Gender (Number & Percentage), 2004 ....99
45. Fourth Form Enrolments by Ethnicity & Gender (Number & Percentage), 2004.................................................................100
46. Ethnic Fijian Teachers by Qualifications (Number & Percentage), 2004............................101
47. Indo-Fijian Teachers by Qualifications (Number & Percentage), 2004 ........102
48. Fiji Form Seven Examination (FFSE) Results by Ethnicity (Boys), 2004 ........103
49. Fiji Form Seven Examination (FFSE) Results by Ethnicity (Girls), 2004 ......104
50. Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examination Results by Ethnicity (Boys), 2004..............................................................104
51. Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examination Results by Ethnicity (Girls), 2004..............................................................104
52. Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examination Results by Ethnicity (Boys), 2004......105
53. Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examination Results by Ethnicity (Girls), 2004.....105
54. Seventh Form Enrolments by Ethnicity & Gender (Number & Percentage) 2004........................................................................106
86. Results of the Fiji Form Seven Examinations (FFSE) at School B by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..243
87. Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School B by Ethnicity, 2004 (Boys)………………………………………………………..244
88. Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School B by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..244
89. Results of the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations at School B by Ethnicity, 2004 (Boys)………………………………………………………..245
90. Results of the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations at School B by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..245
91. Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School C by Ethnicity, 2004 (Boys)………………………………………………………..246
92. Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School C by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..246
93. Results of the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations at School C by Ethnicity, 2004 (Boys)………………………………………………………..247
94. Results of the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations at School C by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..247
95. Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School D by Ethnicity, 2004 (Boys)………………………………………………………..248
96. Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School D by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..248
97. Results of the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations at School D by Ethnicity, 2004 (Boys)………………………………………………………..249
98. Results of the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations at School D by Ethnicity, 2004 (Girls)………………………………………………………..249
99. Seventh Form Fathers’ Education Background at School A by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..250
100. Seventh Form Mothers’ Education Background at School A by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..250
101. Sixth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School A by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..251
102. Sixth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School A by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..252
103. Fourth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School A by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..252
104. Fourth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School A by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..252
105. Seventh Form Fathers’ Education Background at School B by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..253
106. Seventh Form Mothers’ Education Background at School B by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..253
107. Sixth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School B by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..253
108. Sixth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School B by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..254
109. Fourth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School B by Ethnicity (Number)………………………………………………………………………..254
110. Fourth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School B by Ethnicity
111. Sixth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School C by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 255
112. Sixth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School C by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 256
113. Fourth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School C by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 256
114. Fourth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School C by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 257
115. Sixth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School D by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 258
116. Sixth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School D by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 258
117. Fourth Form Fathers’ Education Background at School D by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 259
118. Fourth Form Mothers’ Education Background at School D by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 259
119. Seventh Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School A by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 261
120. Sixth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School A by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 261
121. Fourth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School A by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 262
122. Seventh Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School B by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 263
123. Sixth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School B by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 264
124. Fourth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School B by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 265
125. Sixth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School C by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 266
126. Fourth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School C by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 267
127. Sixth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School D by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 268
128. Fourth Form Parents’ Occupation Background at School D by Ethnicity  
(Number) ........................................................................................................ 268
129. Ethnic Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’  
Attitudes towards Studies, School A ................................................................. 269
130. Indo-Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’  
Attitudes towards Studies, School A ................................................................. 269
131. Ethnic Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’  
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School A .............................. 269
132. Indo-Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’  
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School A .............................. 270
133. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’  
Attitudes towards Studies, School A ................................................................. 270
134. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’  
Attitudes towards Studies, School A ................................................................. 270
135. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School A......................271
136. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School A......................271
137. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School A.......................................................271
138. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School A.......................................................272
139. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School A......................272
140. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School A......................272
141. Ethnic Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School B.......................................................273
142. Indo-Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School B.......................................................273
143. Ethnic Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School B......................273
144. Indo-Fijian Seventh-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School B......................274
145. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School B.......................................................274
146. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School B.......................................................274
147. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School B......................275
148. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School B......................275
149. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School B.......................................................275
150. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School B.......................................................276
151. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School B......................276
152. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School B......................276
153. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School C.......................................................277
154. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School C.......................................................277
155. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School C......................277
156. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School C......................278
157. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School C.......................................................278
158. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School C.......................................................278
159. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School C……………………279
160. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School C……………………279
161. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School D………………………………………………279
162. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School D………………………………………………280
163. Ethnic Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School D……………………280
164. Indo-Fijian Sixth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School D……………………280
165. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School D………………………………………………281
166. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Students’
Attitudes towards Studies, School D………………………………………………281
167. Ethnic Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Indo-Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School D……………………281
168. Indo-Fijian Fourth-Formers’ Perceptions of Ethnic Fijian Parents’
Attitudes towards Children’s Formal Education, School D……………………282

FIGURES
1. Four Possible Factors influencing Academic Performance
   in the Fiji Context………………………………………………………………..63
2. Ethnic Composition of Nadroga/Navosa Province, 2003………………………83
3. Fiji’s Ethnic Composition, 2003………………………………………………83
4. Coding of Participants……………………………………………………………..93
5. Validity of the Information………………………………………………………..94

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

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