

5. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Background

Research methods as defined by Cohen and Manion (1994) involve the use of a range of approaches in research to gather data which are in turn used to validate inference and support interpretation. However, Rist (1981) points out that the choice of any research method profoundly influences the form and content of the data to be collected, and that different methods represent different means of acting upon the environment. In simple terms, the nature of the questions being addressed determines the choice of the research method. Since the research problem and questions designed for this thesis require descriptive data, the research methodology to be employed is associated with the qualitative paradigm. Such a paradigm is described by Wiersma (1991, 85) as:

A process of successive approximations toward an accurate description and interpretation of the phenomenon. The emphasis is on describing the phenomenon in its context and, on that basis, interpreting the data.

The phenomenon being contextually described in this chapter is indeed the essence of this study, and is concerned with the existence of a policy on special education in Fiji and its implications for the design, delivery, administration and development of special education services in special schools, Ministry of Education and disability agencies. Substantiating the adoption of this qualitative paradigm by this study is the involvement of a naturalistic as opposed to a rationalistic inquiry. Tikunoff and Ward cited in a primary source (resource book, 1995, 2), define naturalistic inquiry as looking at:

... the natural way in which an organism interacts with other organisms and with the environment naturally, in its own niche, in its natural setting.

These three dimensions of naturalness do exist in this study: natural behaviour can be interpreted as part of special education teachers' and administrators' existing response repertoire; natural setting is typified by the special schools, Ministry of Education and Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons being settings outside the laboratory and not solely established for the purpose of conducting this research; and natural

treatment is indicative of the natural occurrence of the phenomenon being investigated (special education policy) regardless of the researcher's presence.

Research Tools, Strategies and Sampling

As expressed in previous sections, the focus and interest of this study lie in the analysis and development of the existing special education policy in Fiji which, for the most part, call for the identification, collection and treatment of mostly descriptive rather than empirical data due to its more dominant qualitative orientation. However, the approach taken in the collection and analysis of the research data will involve both descriptive and explanatory survey methods, under a process of methodological triangulation. Burns in a primary source (resource book, 1995) distinguishes between the two methods by pointing out that the descriptive survey aims to portray certain attributes of a larger population, and the explanatory survey seeks to establish cause and effect relationships. Hence, the subjects selected for this study will be able personally to describe their own experiences, thoughts and feelings about the research problem, and at the same time, their different responses to designated items in the interview schedules (Item 1 in Schedule 1, and items 1 & 4 in Schedule 2-4) can be assumed to be numerical, and thus quantifiable for the purpose of ascertaining both variations and deviations in the respondents' feedback. Since open-ended questions are used, information will need to be codified so that it can be recorded quantifiably. The tools for this study are also selected with a triangulated approach in mind to help the validation of the study, and will include techniques such as participant observation, structured interview, collecting and analyzing material and documents, and observing behaviour. For the most part, the realization of a carefully chosen, clearly defined and specifically delimited population is achievable in this study due to its small size and manageable representative sample.

By way of participant observation, the author of this study is able to gain first-hand experience and knowledge of the effect of special education policy on the design, delivery, development and administration of related services within the selected sites (see Appendix 1 for details) in Fiji, and to describe precisely and record carefully what has been seen as the practice in this field in the country. Every special school (13 in total) in the country

will be visited, ten of which are in the main island of Fiji called Viti Levu, two in Vanua Levu and one in Ovalau. Furthermore, participant observation will be supplemented by a variety of other data collection tools such as key-informant interviewing, field study and structured interviews. Moreover, field study is ideal for investigating the functions of the Special Education Unit and Ministry of Education in Fiji to establish their structure, responsibilities and networking initiatives particularly in relation to special education policy-making, implementation, evaluation and standardization. Key-informant interviewing will involve those special education teachers and administrators in Fiji who are selected for this study, and will be asked to relate their experiences and opinions on the relevance and implications of the existing special education policy. In addition to the thirteen special schools, the Ministry of Education will also be visited for consultation with the Chief Education Officer Primary and Senior Education Officer Special Education who are two important key-informers to this study. The administrator of the Government sponsored Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons will also be interviewed to gain the perspective of the administrators of special schools and concerned national disability agencies on the phenomenon under study. However, care needs to be exercised when the information gleaned from key informants is processed as these tend to be atypical of larger populations. A further breakdown of sites and subjects to be used in this study is presented in Appendix 2 & 3.

The structured interviews employed in this study have confined the target population to those individuals, organizations and groups who are directly involved in the process of special education policy-making as well as those who will benefit from related services. This target population become the subjects of this study as listed in Appendix 2. Because data collection and analysis approaches such as surveys need standardized information, all participants of this study will be asked similar questions, and likewise, processing of information will be administered in a standard fashion. Good interviewing, according to a primary source (resource book, 1995), is not an easy task, and techniques in performing empathetic and sensitive listening skills, formulating thoughtful questions, building rapport and trust, as well as probing and cueing need to be honed before undertaking the field study component of this research. Like questionnaires, interviews are common data collection tools of descriptive

surveys, and their proper use requires the observance of a number of sequential stages as recommended by Borg and Gall cited in a primary source (resource book, 1995, 4-5):

1. Define objectives of the study.
2. Carefully select the required sample.
3. List the items requiring answers.
4. Construct the questionnaire or interview schedule with clarity and in a logical sequence.
5. Pre-test for validity (does this test what the researcher wants it to?) in order to locate problems or discover any ambiguities.
6. Despatch the questionnaire or carry out the interview, and follow up.

These are all very important stages, follow up especially so as this is vital in ensuring a higher response rate in the case of questionnaires. The response rate must be an acceptable level in order for statistical inferences to be made.

Figure 3 shows a diagrammatic representation of the procedures used in this study. One of the hallmarks of survey research, according to a primary source (resource book, 1995), is its reliance on correct sampling procedure in order to get accurate representation of the larger population group. However, the sampling procedure for this study is not as straight-forward as anticipated due to the dual role of some participants, and the unclear boundaries of the context in which the phenomenon under study is placed. Emphasizing the importance of representative sampling of the target population in descriptive survey, Burns in a primary source (resource book, 1995) claims that it is just as crucial as the act of surveying itself for the purpose of ensuring accurate statistical procedures. Due to the high cost involved, logistical and practical problems associated with contacting and keeping contact with so many persons, geographical isolation of research sites and participants, and that greater benefit will be gained from dealing more comprehensively in terms of time and data analysis with a smaller population, the total populations associated with this study will not be surveyed. Rather, a sample that is representative of the whole population to which this survey is directed will be taken, and for the purpose of this study, the stratified and simple random sampling techniques (resource book, 1995) are used. The stratified sampling technique subdivides the target population into cohorts – headteachers of special schools, special education teachers, Ministry of Education officials, and concerned charitable organizations represented by the Fiji National

Council for Disabled Persons. The simple random sampling technique, on the other hand, is used to select members of the population to participate in this study, based on the different cohorts established by the stratified sampling technique. This is particularly true for special education teachers due to their high population (61) but not applicable in this study to the other cohorts because of their small size – for example, 13 headteachers; Ministry of Education officers (2); and charitable organizations represented by FNCDP (1). A breakdown of this sample population is presented in Table 5.1. Nevertheless, it is envisaged that correct inferences about this total population can be drawn up, based on the equal chance of selection for everyone in the population, and the representative size of the cohort selected.

Table 5.1: Composition of the Sample Group

Classification	Total	Used	%
Headteachers	13	12	92.31
Special Ed. Teachers	62	17	27.42
Ministry of Education	2	2	100.00
Disab. Agencies – FNCDP	1	1	100.00

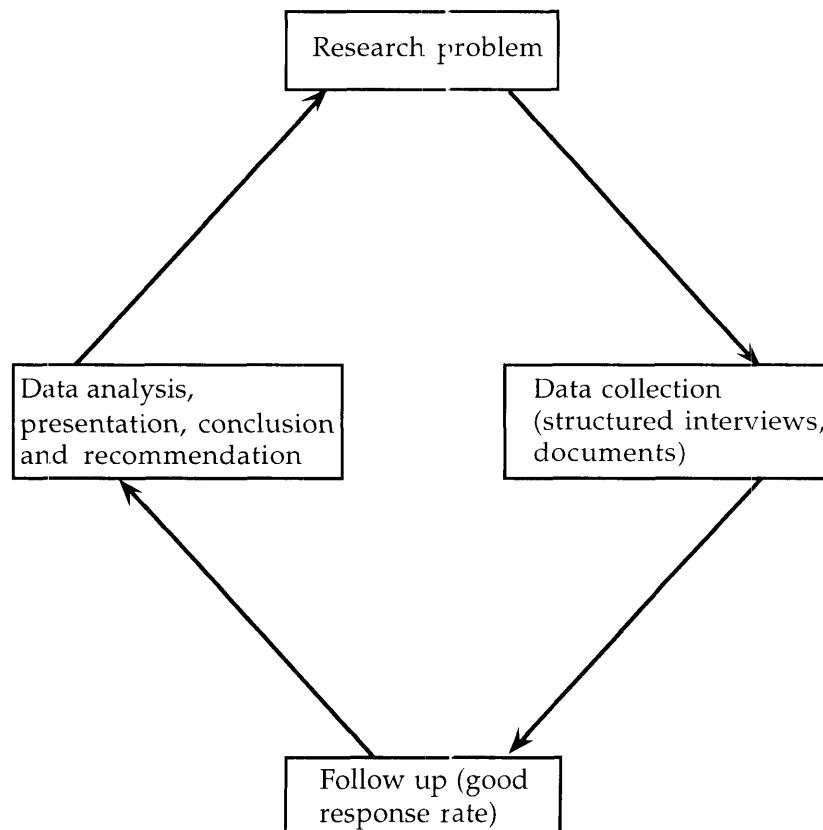


Figure 3: Research Methodology Procedures

Some Pitfalls and Areas of Concern

Qualitative research, which manifests itself through the employment of naturalistic inquiry and investigation of descriptive data, is not without its problems. A primary source (resource book, 1995) highlights three major issues which are also pertinent to this study – boundary problems, the interrelationship of data collection and analysis, and problems of authenticity. First, setting boundaries in naturalistic research poses considerable debate about the desirability of formulating research questions and defining the issues of interest prior to executing the study. Such activities, according to Schwartz and Jacobs cited in a primary source (resource book, 1995, 3), can be argued to be:

inconsistent with the stated intention to learn what the questions are and what the on-site issues are, reduce the capacity to discover the 'unexpected', impose a greater degree of 'rationality' on events than actually exists, and bias one in favour of finding things as you expect them to be.

However, Guba in a primary source (resource book, 1995) points out that while naturalistic research may not impose pre-arranged constraints on the inquiry, neither is the task approached in a mindless fashion, and that to have an open mind does not necessarily mean having an empty one.

Second, the interrelationship of data collection and analysis in qualitative studies is such that these two phases of research are often executed concurrently instead of occurring consecutively where data collection precedes data analysis. Qualitative data tend to overload the researcher badly at almost every stage; the sheer range of phenomena to be observed, the recorded volume of notes, the time required for write-up, coding and analysis can all become overwhelming. The most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data as suggested in a primary source (resource book, 1995) is that methods of data analysis are not well formulated and, therefore, individual researchers must develop their own strategies and techniques appropriate to the research purpose and nature of the data. Lofland and Lofland also cited in a primary source (resource book, 1995, 4) claim that a sharp division between these two research activities can lead to a failure in performing any kind of decent data collection or analysis, and therefore, they need to:

... run concurrently for most of the time expended on the project, and the final stage of analysis (after data collection has ceased)

becomes a period for bringing order to previously developed ideas. Analysis concurrent with data collection can highlight new questions, issues to focus upon, facts and opinions to cross-check, gaps in the evidence, and the strength of tentative conclusions.

Third, problems of authenticity relate to the establishment of bases for trust in the outcomes of naturalistic research, as in the authenticity of information gathered, the categories being derived, and the interpretations drawn. The three major criteria typically used to evaluate the rigor of research (resource book, 1995) are reliability, internal validity and external validity. Guba, amongst others, cited in the primary source (resource book, 1995, 6) suggests that:

the 'bases for trust' in naturalistic inquiry be defined in terms of 'authenticity' (of information, analysis, and interpretation); ... intrinsic adequacy in lieu of internal validity, extrinsic adequacy in lieu of external validity or generalizability, replicability in lieu of reliability, and neutrality in lieu of objectivity.

A fourth area of concern to this study is underscored by Leedy (1993) who points out that the data in such an inquiry are susceptible to distortion through bias in the research design and from the researcher's own self-interest and preconceived ideas. This means that the instruments used and analysis of information gathered should be safeguarded against such bias, and the data must be organized systematically so that valid and accurate conclusions can be drawn.

Finally, the secondary data through search of related literature will be employed to extract useful information about special education services and policy-making in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It is envisaged that the data acquired from these interviews, questionnaires and review of related literature shall facilitate a comparative study of special education policy between these three countries and Fiji. A variety of techniques is employed by this study to enable the researcher to validate or cross-check results obtained from observation and field notes.

A more elaborate description and detailed strategy of the methodology adopted in this study is demonstrated by the specific treatment of each subproblem as given below.

Subproblem One

What is the current education policy in Fiji, and how is its general education system designed and implemented?

The Data Needed

The data needed to solve this subproblem are:

- (a) information detailing the current education policy in Fiji.
- (b) information describing the general education system in Fiji.
- (c) data derived from the literature consulted and interviews concerning (a) and (b) above.

The Location of the Data

The data for this subproblem are located in the MOE headquarters, Suva, Fiji.

The Means of Obtaining the Data

The data required here shall be obtained from the MOE headquarters, Suva, Fiji by consulting relevant documents and conducting structured interviews (see Schedule 1) with designated personnel from the 'policy section' of MOE. If the interviewee has no objection, the conference will be taped to conserve time and lessen distractions of hand/typewritten notes.

The Treatment of the Data

The following steps will be taken:

- (a) record data from the literature being consulted describing the current education system and policy in Fiji.
- (b) analyze and record findings from interviews concerning (a) above.
- (c) using data collected from (a) and (b) above, compile a descriptive report outlining the current education system and policy in Fiji.
- (d) incorporate the data derived from this subproblem in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Subproblem Two

What is Fiji's existing policy on special education, and how are the related services organized and delivered?

The Data Needed

The data needed to solve this subproblem are:

- (a) information detailing the existing policy on special education in Fiji.
- (b) information concerning the structure, practice and delivery of special education services in Fiji.
- (c) data gathered from observations in special schools.
- (d) data derived from structured interviews regarding (a) and (b) above.

The Location of the Data

The data for this subproblem are located at the special schools, FNCDP and MOE in Fiji. (See Appendix 1).

The Means of Obtaining the Data

The data for this subproblem shall be obtained by means of observations held in special schools, and structured interviews with the CEOP (see Item 4 of Schedule 1), SEO Special Education (see Schedule 2), special education teachers (see Schedule 3) and FNCDP administrator representing national disability agencies (see Schedule 4). If the interviewees have no objection, the conference will be taped to conserve time and lessen distractions of hand/typewritten notes.

The Treatment of the Data

The following steps will be taken:

- (a) record data from the literature being consulted describing the current special education policy in Fiji.
- (b) analyze and record findings from interviews concerning the policy, practice and delivery of special education services.

- (c) using data collected from (a) and (b) above, compile a descriptive report outlining the current policy, practice and delivery of special education services in Fiji.
- (d) incorporate the treated data from this subproblem in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Subproblem Three

What do special education teachers and administrators in Fiji perceive as important components of a good and clear special education policy that is responsive to the needs and challenges of special education services in the country?

The Data Needed

The data needed to solve this subproblem are:

- (a) information describing how special education teachers and administrators perceive the role, expectations and limitations of the existing special education policy.
- (b) their recommendations on how this policy may be improved or strengthened for it to be more responsive to the Fiji situation.
- (c) data collected from structured interviews concerning (a) and (b) above.

The Location of the Data

The data required for this subproblem are located in the special schools, SEU and FNCDP in Fiji. (See Appendix 2).

The Means of Obtaining the Data

The data for this subproblem shall be obtained from the structured interviews with headteachers and teachers in special schools (see Schedule 3), and FNCDP administrator representing national disability agencies (see Schedule 4) who are selected for this study in Fiji. If the interviewees have no objection, the conference will be taped to conserve time and lessen distractions of hand/typewritten notes.

The Treatment of the Data

The response data to the structured interviews will be transcribed and typed by the researcher while the interviewee augments the transcription and signs the typed version. Transcription will then be analyzed, the summary of results recorded as treated data for this subproblem and presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Subproblem Four

How is special education practised in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom?

The Data Needed

The data needed to solve this subproblem are the descriptions of special education services in the three countries under study to be derived from relevant literature.

The Location of the Data

In this study, the information required for this subproblem resides as secondary data in textbooks, journals, reports and previous research on 'Special Needs Education' particularly in these three countries, and are located at or through the UNE library, Armidale, NSW.

The Means of Obtaining the Data

Since this study intends to obtain the data for this subproblem from secondary sources only, the data shall be derived from relevant literature available at or through the UNE library.

The Treatment of the Data

The following steps will be taken:

- (a) record data collected from the literature consulted regarding special education practices in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.
- (b) analyze and summarize findings of (a) above.

- (c) incorporate the data collected in (a) and (b) above in Chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis.
- (d) use these data for comparative purposes during data analysis, presentation and formulation of recommendations.

Subproblem Five

What trends, practices and policy provisions on special education exist in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom that can benefit the special education services in Fiji?

The Data Needed

The data needed to solve this subproblem are information pertaining to the formulation and implementation of special education policy as experienced in the three countries under study, and as described in the literature.

The Location of the Data

In this study, the information required for this subproblem resides as secondary data in textbooks, journals, reports and previous research on 'Policy on Special Needs Education' particularly in these three countries, and are located at or through the UNE library, Armidale, NSW.

The Means of Obtaining the Data

Since this study intends to obtain the data for this subproblem from secondary sources only, the data shall be acquired from relevant literature available at or through the UNE library.

The Treatment of the Data

The following steps will be taken:

- (a) record data collected from the literature consulted regarding special education policy-making in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.
- (b) analyze and summarize findings of (a) above.

- (c) incorporate the data collected in (a) and (b) above in Chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis.
- (d) use these data for comparative purposes during data analysis, presentation and formulation of recommendations.

Subproblem Six

What do the analysis and interpretation of the treated data reveal?

The Data Needed

The data needed to solve this subproblem are:

- (a) all treated data located in the previous subproblems.
- (b) pertinent and selected secondary data acquired from the literature.

The Location of the Data

The data required for this subproblem reside in 'Treatment of the Data' sections of the preceding subproblems. The secondary sources, textbooks, journals, reports and previous research on 'development of a Special Education policy' are located at or through the UNE library, Armidale, NSW.

The Means of Obtaining the Data

The data for this subproblem reside in treated forms in 'Treatment of the Data' sections of Subproblems One-Five, and the secondary data will be secured from or through the UNE library, Armidale, NSW.

The Treatment of the Data

The findings from the analysis of all treated data in the preceding five subproblems will be presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis, and will be used to guide and formulate the conclusions, summary and recommendations of this study.

The remaining sections in this chapter focus on the descriptive data and related issues pertaining to this study.

The Descriptive Data

Two kinds of data will be collected and treated in this study: the primary and secondary data. The primary data include:

- (a) the response data to the structured interviews with special education teachers (including headteachers) in special schools, CEOP in MOE, SEO Special Education and the administrator of FNCDP representing national disability agencies in Fiji.
- (b) the data collected through observations during the field study.

The secondary data include:

- (a) the published studies and texts, unpublished theses and dissertations that deal with special education practices, policy and trends in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.
- (b) documents pertaining to general and special education in Fiji.

The Criteria for the Admissibility of the Data

Data collected from the following sources only will be used in this study:

- (a) special education headteachers and teachers in special schools, SEO Special Education, CEOP in MCE, and administrator of FNCDP representing national disability agencies, based in Fiji and identified in Appendix 3, who are selected for this study;
- (b) pertinent secondary data obtained from selected literature.

The Definitions of Terms

1. Itinerant/Resource teacher – refers to a special education teacher who provides support services to special needs students and their teachers in an ordinary school setting, either in a classroom situation or resource room.
2. National disability agency – refers to any organization for and of persons with disabilities which has a national focus and coverage in terms of its vision and service delivery to its consumers.

3. Ordinary schools – refers to 'normal' or 'regular' schools.
4. Special education administrator – refers to a person who is directly involved with special education policy formulations, implementations and management at the Education Department and special schools level.
5. Special education teacher – refers to any teacher who has undergone formal teacher training courses in special education and is working in special schools, ordinary schools, resource rooms or special units.
6. Special schools – refers to special institutions in segregated settings where students who possess special educational needs due to the onset of a disabling condition which in turn limits strength, vitality or alertness, receive formal, remedial and individualized instructions.
7. Special unit – refers to a classroom situation whereby students with special educational needs undertake their schooling experiences in an ordinary school setting, and may have set times of interaction for a specific purpose with their non-disabled peers. Also known as a special class.

Abbreviations Used in this Study

1. ADA – American Disability Act.
2. CEOP – Chief Education Officer Primary.
3. CPO – Central Planning Office.
4. DDA – Disability Discrimination Act.
5. DP – Development Plan.
6. FAPE – Free Appropriate Public Education.
7. FNCDP – Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons.
8. FSLC – Fiji School Leaving Certificate.
9. HQ – Headquarters.
10. IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
11. IEP – Individualized educational plan.
12. ILO – International Labour Organization.
13. I/R teacher – Itinerant and Resource teacher.
14. LRE – Least restrictive environment.

15. LEA – Local Education Authority.
16. LT – Licensed Teacher.
17. MOE – Ministry of Education.
18. NSW – New South Wales.
19. OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
20. PSC – Public Service Commission.
21. S. Ed. – Special Education.
22. SEN – special educational needs.
23. SEO – Senior Education Officer.
24. SEU – Special Education Unit.
25. UN – United Nations.
26. UNE – University of New England.
27. USA – United States of America.
28. WHO – World Health Organization.

The Delimitations and Population of the Study

In this study, the subjects shall consist of headteachers and teachers in special schools, the Senior Education Officer (SEO) Special Education, administrator of FNCDP representing combined views of affiliated disability organizations and the Chief Education Officer Primary (CEOP) within the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Fiji (see Appendix 2). The population of this study is comprised of:

- (a) 12 headteachers of special schools;
- (b) 17 special education teachers based in special schools (excluding headteachers and licensed teachers);
- (c) the administrator of FNCDP representing 24 affiliated non-government disability organizations (see Appendix 3);
- (d) the Chief Education Officer Primary; and
- (e) the Senior Education Officer Special Education.

Ethical and Legal Issues

Some ethical and legal issues to be considered in the collection and processing of the data in this study are listed below:

- (a) The researcher's own bias (conscious or unconscious) towards the problem being investigated, setting, chosen and procedures employed can distort and influence the perceptions and interpretations of the data and related findings.
- (b) Interviewees should inspect and approve all their interview transcripts to avoid accusations of falsification of facts and other legal entanglements.
- (c) Explicit authorization must be obtained when examining documentations that may be considered relevant and useful to the study.
- (d) Negotiate reports for various levels of release as different audiences require different kinds of reports.
- (e) The researcher should accept responsibility for maintaining confidentiality.
- (f) When using humans as research subjects, their rights to be acknowledged should be carefully observed.

So far, the research methodology employed by this study and the descriptive data being investigated have been discussed. In the next chapter, both primary and secondary data collected for this study are presented and analyzed.

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In view of the research problem and subproblems prescribed for this study, and for the purpose of consolidating the significant issues emanating from the search of pertinent literature, the ideologies proposed in the theoretical framework, and the descriptive outline of the methodology being employed, the presentation and analysis of the data collected for this study shall be discussed and substantiated under the study's major areas of interest. Being a qualitative research project by nature, the task at hand involves the identification, interpretation and description of concepts that are commonly expressed or alluded to by the respondents involved in this study. Similarities in responses and general consensus on significant aspects of the research topic will also be acknowledged as important indicators of the respondents' support for, or rejection of the existing special education policy. It is to be noted here that a total of 32 structured interviews were held with the same number of subjects during the field study in Fiji, but after all interview transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for inspection and approval, only 27 (84.38%) of them were returned prior to the compilation of this chapter and submission of the final draft. However, certain remarks made by the CEO Primary Section, whose interview transcript was not returned, will still be cited in this chapter as he is regarded as one of the key informants in this study. Table 6.1 – an analysis of the research subjects and sites, and Table 6.2 – the distribution of respondents and their return rate clarify this matter. Furthermore, some useful documents were also secured during the field study to support, enlighten and clarify relevant research findings of this study, and important portions from these documents will be extracted and cited here for the purpose of illuminating such findings.

Table 6.1: Analysis of Subjects and Sites used in this Study

1. Classification of Research Sites		
(a) Special Schools		13
(b) Ministry of Education		2
(c) Disability Organization		1
	Total	16
2. Location of Sites		
(a) Viti Levu island		13
(b) Vanua Levu island		2
(c) Ovalau island		1
	Total	16
3. Classification of Subjects		
(a) Headteachers		12
(b) Special Education Teachers		17
(c) Education Officers		2
(d) Disability Agencies/FNCDP		1
	Total	32

Table 6.2: Respondents' Return Rate

Classification	n	Return Rate	% (n)	% Total Return (27)
Headteacher	12	10	83.33	37.04
S.Ed. Teacher	17	15	88.24	55.55
Ed. Teacher	2	1	50.00	3.70
FNCDP Officer	1	1	100.00	3.70
Total	32	27		99.99

Current Policy Provisions and Documentations Concerning Special Education Services in Fiji

In 1969, a year before Fiji was granted independence from Great Britain, an Education Commission was undertaken which provided the incoming democratic Government with valuable insights and information concerning the establishment and maintenance of an effective education system that would be responsive and sensitive to the educational needs of

its people. For about two decades after Independence (1970-90), the plans and policies pertaining to education in Fiji as well as other areas of Ministerial responsibilities were embodied within a national Development Plan. Each of these Development Plans (DP 6-9) covered a period of 5 years and was compiled, defined and controlled by the Central Planning Office (CPO) which today remains the planning unit for the country. This unit received submissions from different Government Ministries and as far as the Ministry of Education was concerned, its submissions were guided by the advice from different sections of the Ministry and prepared by its senior officers. With regard to special education, its contributions were prepared by the SEU through the Primary Section; and whatever shape or form the final submission took, that largely became the special education policy. Once the submissions had been received from all Ministries, the CPO modified them and compiled a Development Plan in line with the national aim and goals.

The substitute today is the Purple Book (also referred to as the Blue Book) which contains medium-term plans for the country, and is prepared by the Budget Section of the Ministry of Finance. A significant component that has come into play in the development and formulation of these national plans is the cost factor. That is, the financial implications of each submission from the various Government Ministries on the annual national budget and economic priorities will be carefully weighed and assessed. According to Mr Sefanaia Koroi who is the present CEO for the Primary Section of MOE, the formulation of an education policy can originate from three different levels. First, the community participation level where school committees (which own most of the primary schools) in partnership with the Government, propose changes to the education system. Such proposals are brought into an education forum consisting of those appointed to represent the community and school management who then meet three times a year to advise the Minister on policy issues. Second, the MOE level which involves the senior staff of the Ministry (CEO, Permanent Secretary and the Minister) who discuss quite thoroughly new ideas pertaining to the community needs before they are forwarded to the Minister for the determination and endorsement of a new education policy. Third, the Government inter-departmental level where the MOE is a part of the civil service bureaucracy. The Ministry of Finance oversees the CPO which is the economic planning unit of the Government and whose function also includes the formulation of papers

relating to Government policy and in line with finance, budget and foreign aid. Also, the CPO considers the demands that have come in from various Ministries and establishes a national budget that affects policies as these cannot be implemented without funding allocation. Before local funding is approved, the project papers are written up, presented to and endorsed by the Cabinet, then returned to the CPO where they are put into budget form, and then to Parliament for approval. For direct funding from foreign aid agencies concerning education, the CPO liaised with MOE for the establishment and implementation of an appropriate policy. However, for the most part, education policies are proposed by the MOE and presented to the Parliament for approval so that finance from the Government and manpower through the Public Service Commission can be obtained for the implementation of such policies. From the Cabinet, the proposed policy is then forwarded to the CPO whose task it is to determine its relevancy to the national goals and its economic viability in terms of the national budget. Only then is a national policy on education established. However, the Minister can make internal policy decisions if it affects her Ministry alone, and if it is without significant financial implications.

Apart from the Development Plans which the author alluded to earlier in this chapter, three recent documents of great importance to this study contain certain policy provisions for the education of individuals with disabilities by means of special education. Before analyzing these three documents (two being produced by and for the Ministry of Education, and the third promulgated by the Fiji Parliament), it is important to recall that special education began in Fiji in the 1960s and has been a component of ordinary primary education ever since. Therefore, the critique of these documents will be founded mainly on their contributions to special education services in Fiji in terms of their design, practicability, relevance and scope.

A. The 1996-98 Corporate Plan for the Ministry of Education

This document is prepared by the senior officials of the Ministry with contributions from sections and departmental heads including the Senior Education Officer of the Special Education Unit. Its function is to systematically map out the current activities and future directions of the

Ministry for the period 1996-98 in light of national development, economic growth, social integration and human resource needs for the nation. The special education plan was developed by the current Senior Education Officer Special Education, Mr Solomone Vosaicake, and defined as a specific programme objective with accompanying strategies for its implementation. This objective, which addresses the promotion, implementation and facilitation of the administration and management of special education policies in the schools and community, guides the activities of the Special Education Unit and the programmes it may support in special and ordinary schools, as well as the community at large. The strategies listed relate to the staffing needs of all special schools, vocational training centres and workshops; raising public awareness on the special needs of persons with disabilities; establishment of early intervention programmes; provision of administrative and professional services; development and maintenance of management and information service systems; and upgrading of staff capability. The specific programme objective concerning special education is defined as:

Promote, implement and facilitate the administration and management of special education policies in schools and the community. (10)

The strategies for the implementation of the above objective are:

Provide adequate staffing for all special schools and vocational training centres and workshops. Promote awareness of special needs of disabled people in the community. Establish early intervention programmes in these four major areas:

- * physical handicap
- * intellectual handicap
- * hearing impairment
- * visual impairment.

Provide administrative and professional services.

Develop and maintain management and information service systems.

Upgrade staff capability. (10-11)

Although this is a step in the right direction, it is somewhat hypothetical and presumptuous to formulate a specific programme objective and identify strategies for its implementation without the mandate and

sponsorship of a good and clear special education policy. Reference has also been made in the actual objective itself to the administration and management of special education policies in schools and the community, yet the availability and presence of these policies remain unknown. To this end, this study has found that there is no special education policy per se, but any reference to such a policy is largely understood and interpreted in the light and context of the existing primary education policy. Furthermore, the programme objective describes the Ministry's role in supporting the administration and management of special education policies which is somewhat erroneous and misleading, particularly when the policies being referred to here do not exist. If the general primary education policy is being implied, then the reference made is inappropriate and association is unrealistic. The concept of strategic planning as evident in this document is commendable but will only be effective and meaningful if the real interests, concerns and aspirations of those who work in and benefit from special education services are protected in the form of a specific policy. Moreover, it is understood that only the senior officer in the special education system developed this plan which would have been made more relevant and responsive if concerned personnel like teachers, students, parents/care givers and the like had been involved. As exemplified by the New South Wales Special Education Policy, the process to be employed in developing strategies as documented below should be a consultative one.

Strategies for implementing the Special Education Policy will be developed in schools and regions. Each will develop plans outlining a timetable for action, responsibility for action, resource allocation, outcomes and appeal procedures. This will be done in consultation with the whole education community, including departmental officers, school staff, students, parents, community members and where appropriate, key community groups and advisory bodies which represent the interests of students with disabilities, learning difficulties and behaviour disorders. (6)

B. The Policies, Strategies and Programmes for the Ministry of Education

This document details the policies, procedures, functions and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, but the parts of this document that concern special education are those same sections addressing primary education – Sections 7.0-35.0. The MOE in Fiji delegates different areas of responsibility to different departments within

the Ministry, and in this case, primary education is looked after by the Primary Section.

"Within this Ministry, we have different sections like Administration, Finance, Primary, Secondary, Technical Vocation, Curriculum Development and School Broadcast Units, Examination, Inservice, Teacher Training, Fijian Education and Rural Education, with each section responsible for different areas of the education structure. For instance, the primary section looks after special education, preschool education, library service and a very decentralized system consisting of nine education districts and four divisions where education officers are involved in the administration of education in Fiji." (education officer).

Because of this arrangement, any undertaking pertaining to special education will need to comply with those policies regulating primary education. The primary education policy is fairly comprehensive and addresses areas like specific aims, establishment, enrolment, staffing, grading, posting and transfer, grants and awards, religious instruction, discipline, examinations, and teacher training. Although primary schools in Fiji offer Classes 1-8 education for children between the age of six and 15, the main policy upholds the provision of 10 years of education for all children implying that they can go through primary education from Class 1 to 8, and up to Forms 3 and 4 – eight years of primary and two years of secondary education. Most of the primary schools are owned by local management authorities or school committees. Of the 609 primary schools being established at present around the country, the Government owns only 14 (2.30%), and of 148 secondary schools, it manages only about 10 (6.76%). These figures are indicative of the community's keen participation in the education system in Fiji, and reflect a partnership between the Government and local management or authorities who own and run most of the schools. The Government is involved very intensively in the sense that it provides for the salaries of 4,939 civil servant teachers in primary schools. The local committees do not pay the teachers in their schools except for two different classes of teachers – the reserve teachers and language teachers. However, the Government provides an annual grant of about \$2,000.00 to local committees to support the teaching of vernacular languages and those teachers who belong to religious orders like Seventh Day Adventist and Catholic churches. The Government is also involved in providing school fee subsidies, building grants, textbook grants and other financial assistance from public funding. An annual tuition fee grant of about \$4million is distributed to primary

schools according to their levels and given entirely to the school management to help buy materials for teaching purposes.

Although this primary education policy has been carefully designed to offer the best possible support to the Primary Section of the Ministry, and indeed primary schools, its implications for special education are generally inappropriate and irrelevant. This gross oversight is reflected in the formulation of the specific aims of this policy as stated in Section 7.1 which fail to acknowledge the existence of the special education component of primary education, nor address the specific needs and special considerations peculiar to it.

7.1 The specific aims of Primary Education are :-To improve the quality of and accessibility to education through the increase in the Tuition Fee Free grants to rural and remote schools. To further improve and broaden the curriculum by including a new range of subjects for the acquisition of life skill knowledge and a consciousness for national unity among the different races. To improve teacher performance and thereby to raise the student and school's achievement level by re-introducing the inspectorial system to schools, strengthening the in-service training and improving the advisory services. To introduce compulsory education ensuring that all school-aged children attend and remain at school till they have reached class 8 level. To maintain and improve high level of literacy in rural areas. To strengthen community support and participation through an aggressive adult education programme. To integrate small schools where necessary with the aim of upgrading all primary schools to a class 8 top. (Nainina, 1997, 10)

Also, the approved staffing schedules referred to in Section 10.0 and grading of schools in Section 11.0 are designed particularly with primary schools in mind, and therefore unsuitable for special schools. Since the population of school-aged children with disabilities is small anyway, most of these special schools have small rolls and will most probably fall into either 'medium' or 'small' school categories. The category into which a school is placed is very important as it also determines the number of teaching staff and extent of funding for this particular school (Section 27.0). Thus, the purpose of establishing special education services to benefit those marginalized children with special needs is being jeopardized by these very regulations which rely on criteria like student population and boarding facilities to ascertain such provisions as funding level, number of teachers and executive teacher positions. Furthermore, as far as special education is concerned, services rendered are usually guided by the learning requirements and instructional needs of individual students,

rather than those concepts adopted by primary education such as school size and location.

- 10.0 All schools are staffed in accordance with the approved staffing schedule. Staffing of schools is the responsibility of Senior Education Officers. All new recruits are approved by HQ and distributed to each Districts in accordance to staffing requirements. (Nainima, 1997, 11)
- 11.0 Currently all primary schools are graded as follows TE03 – Very Large School or Boarding 100+ boarders TE05 – Medium Schools/or 10-99 boarders TE07 – Small Schools. (Nainima, 1997, 12.)
- 27.0 The grants are payable each term to schools in accordance with this formula a) 1-49 pupils. \$3,500 p.a. b) 50-99 pupils. \$4,000 p.a. c) 100-149 pupils. \$4,500 p.a. d) 150 + \$30 per child p.a. (Nainima, 1997, 16)

In addition, the prevalence of these two characteristics of special schools – small school rolls and low teacher-pupil ratio – can be deceiving to lay educators and administrators who may not realize that the education of a handful of children with special needs exerts so much pressure and demands on everyone involved, particularly the teachers themselves. To maintain the same policies and regulations for both ordinary primary and special education is to disregard both diversity and individuality in the education system, and neglect the different learning threshold of those who will benefit from it. In view of teacher preparation in special education at both preservice and inservice levels, this primary education policy which is supposed to address special education issues as well has decided to remain silent on the matter as articulated in Section 35.0. It may be that the teacher training colleges have addressed this issue, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the different study programmes and actual course content they offer.

- 35.0 Students apply from schools for teacher training; they are short-listed, interviewed and selected. The number selected is dependent on the number of scholarships offered by the PSC. Private students are also considered when places are available at Lautoka Teachers College. They pay a fee and are not guaranteed hostel places. The minimum entry qualification is a good pass in the FSLC. The other two teachers' colleges make their own selection, but the minimum entry qualification is the same. (Nainima, 1997, 19)

Moreover, licensed teachers have also been recruited by the Ministry of Education through its Special Education Unit; not to work as vernacular language teachers as directed in the policy, but to actually make up the shortfall of classroom teachers required to teach in special schools around

the country. Even this recruitment drive has gone against a policy decision of the MOE as cited in Section 15.0:

... Apart from these Licensed Teachers, no other LTs can teach in primary schools. They are not part of the sanctioned staffing.(Nainima, 1997, 13)

Such a decision is indicative of the Ministry of Education's lack of clear special education policy and directions, which often result in the administration of 'band-aid treatment' on the real needs of its special education service. As expressed by an interviewee,

"... The licensed teachers' programme that is in place at the moment is encouraging students who have just finished high school to work with disabled students without any formal training. Issues like these are causing the Council a lot of worry ..." (Administrator.)

If such is the level of recognition of special education in the MOE's existing primary education policy, it is not surprising therefore that out of its 29 Sections (07-35) and numerous subsections, only one subsection specifically addresses special education – Section 10.6 which merely describes the posting of teachers to special schools.

10.6 Senior Education Officers must consult the Senior Education Officer (Special Education) on all postings to special schools.
(Nainima, 1997, 12)

By adopting such a generic policy, it can be perceived that the MOE identifies special education with ordinary primary education, special schools with ordinary primary schools, students with disabilities as those who possess the same teaching and learning needs as their non-disabled peers, and the onset of any disabling condition is insignificant to the student's learning requirements, styles and behaviour. It is imperative, therefore, that a clear distinction between special and primary education policies is maintained. After all, students with disabilities exhibit special learning and teaching needs, do not remain in primary schools permanently, and just like their able-bodied colleagues, they too have the desires, abilities and skills to excel in secondary schools and even go as far as tertiary education and higher learning. Again, the New South Wales policy on special education offers relevant insights into the design of a good and clear special education policy:

It is the policy of the Government of New South Wales that people with disabilities should be able to live in and be educated within

their own communities. This policy is based on the principle of Normalisation, that is, the creation of a lifestyle and set of living conditions for people with disabilities which are as close as possible to those enjoyed by the rest of the population. In line with this policy, the Department of School Education:

- acknowledges that every child with a disability, learning difficulty or behaviour disorder has the right to attend the ordinary neighbourhood school where this is possible and practicable and in the best interests of the child
- acknowledges that parents and caregivers will be involved in assessment, placement, review and programming for their children with special teaching and learning needs
- recognises that for some students their best interests will be met in special educational settings .. (4).

C. The Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (FNCDP) Act

This Act was passed in Parliament in 1994 and enshrined in the Fiji Act No. 21 of 1994. Even though the whole document focuses on improving the quality of life and equalization of opportunity for persons with disabilities in Fiji as described in Chapter 1, only two of the functions of this national body seem to be pertinent to this section.

... (b) formulate a national policy that would ensure that services are provided to all disabled persons in Fiji; ... (h) regularly inform the appropriate Ministries of the government of the problems and needs of disabled persons and seek solutions to such needs. ... (748)

Although this piece of legislation embraces the activities and role of the Council which may seem distant and isolated from any special education initiative, the two functions stated above can give this national body the mandate to instigate the formulation of an effective special education policy for the country and sensitize the Ministry of Education to the specific needs of special schools, their management, teachers and students. Furthermore, this body is in a unique and challenging position to utilize this legal mandate as a vehicle in pursuing the three definitions of equity that have developed over the years; one of equal access, one of equitable resources, and the most recent definition, equity as access to learning. Being a statutory body of the Government, and an umbrella organization of nearly all disability agencies in the country, the FNCDP should encourage, guide and support the MOE in formulating a national policy on special education as part of its two functions identified earlier. The legal mandate is no longer the issue here; but the mobilizing of resources, ideas

and manpower to deliver the required outcome. Thus, such a policy can be used as a lever to advance the rights and guarantee respect for the rights of individuals with disabilities as they pursue their education, maximize their potential and realize their goals in life.

Summary of the Three Documents

Fiji is quite fortunate to have at least two policy documents: the Corporate Plan and FNCDP Act, from which the interest groups can draw strength when attempting to develop a special education policy for the betterment of special needs students as well as those organizations and people who serve them. Whilst the third document (Policies, Strategies and Programmes) may not be as clear and specific, it does provide an opportunity for the policy-implementers to evaluate their effectiveness and relevance, and in turn make valid recommendations to either strengthen or replace the existing policy provisions. However, during the past few years of coexistence of these three documents, there has not been any tangible evidence of a special education policy being developed. Some assumptions can be drawn from this lack of progress and action. First, the two leading partners MOE and Societies are satisfied with the existing arrangement, whereby special education is subject to and under the domain of primary education. Second, the efforts of those organizations and personnel espousing to the formulation of a specific and concise special education policy have been ineffective, misguided or ignored. Third, the administrators, providers and consumers of special education services are unaware of current policy arrangements, and are not consulted to contribute meaningfully to the design, structure, vision and future of special education in the country. Moreover, this lack of forward momentum, affirmative action and futuristic outlook are symptoms of an education system's conservatism, lack of priority and non-commitment to the place, purpose and advancement of special education and those it serves. The effective contributions of these documents to actual special education initiatives will be greatly enhanced if they are more focused in their intent, relevant in their application and specific in their outcome. To have three documents at hand, and to witness an education system upholding a policy that is detrimental to special education initiatives only strengthens the call for the development of a good and clear policy on special education.

The Respondents' Awareness of the Current Policy Provisions

Even though special education has existed in Fiji for about 30 years, there has not been any significant attempt by those government departments and non-government organizations involved to develop a specific special education policy. Rather, the Ministry of Education has chosen to recognize pertinent sections within these three documents to guide its special education policy decisions: the Development Plans (when they were in use), and now its recently developed Policies, Strategies and Programmes handbook, as well as its Corporate Plan. Due to the generalist and cumbersome nature of these documents, their relevance to the real concerns of those individuals with special educational needs, and their effectiveness in sponsoring the delivery of essential special education services cannot be measured or evaluated realistically. On the contrary, non-government organizations involved in the establishment and management of special schools formulate their own policies that will support, realize and advance the vision, goals and objectives of their individual organizations. As a result, most teachers and administrators of special schools cannot affirm the existence of a special education policy, but have continued to provide essential special education services to the best of their understanding, and in light of their experience and training background. This widespread ignorance and uncertainty of the availability of a special education policy are clearly reflected in the responses of the interviewees to the interview question "Briefly explain the existing policy on special education as established by the MOE, and known to your organization." Some of these responses are given below.

"As far as the Council is concerned, we have not seen any special education policy. We have requested the Ministry of Education to provide us with this policy and to date, we still have not been shown anything at all." (Administrator).

"From the first day of my involvement in the field of special education till now, I have never come across any policy on special education." (Headteacher).

"Currently, there is no policy on special education. However, this issue was raised in a recent meeting (20.6.97) of the Education Advisory Committee of the FNCDP of which I am a member. Even the SEO Special Education said that there is no existing policy." (Headteacher).

"As far as I am aware, I have not seen any policy statement on special education at the moment. There is an education policy but

there is no provision for students with special needs ..." (S. Ed. teacher).

"To be honest, I am not aware of any policy on special education. Maybe there is one in place, but I have not seen or read it ..." (S. Ed. Teacher).

"We seem to accept the fact that since special education and special schools are running, there must be something written about them. I know there is something but not sure what it is ..." (S. Ed. Teacher).

Conversely, the two education officers who are involved in this study point out that MOE has policy provisions for special education services, namely, the primary education policy.

"There is a policy on special education since it is an accepted aspect of our education system. The establishment of teachers, provision of grants to special schools and their establishment follow the same procedures as other schools. Special schools get three types of grants from the Government; tuition free grants because they are regarded as primary schools with the amount dependent on their roll, special grants from the Special Education Unit also depending on the roll and building grants just like any other school. Within this Ministry, special education is looked after by the Special Education Unit and comes under the Primary section which I presently look after. The views on special education come through this Unit and then to me where I become their mouthpiece to senior staffing, budgeting, inservice training meetings and the like. There is a very open education system in this country so children can be integrated easily whether they are disabled or not, provided they can fit into the different levels of the education system. ..." (Education Officer)

This view is also shared by some teachers in special schools as exemplified below.

"At the moment, there is no policy on special education but there is a policy on primary education which also applies to us;" (Headteacher).

"I have heard of something relating to primary education in general, but I have not heard of anything to do with special education. Maybe the policy is laid in the special education curriculum that we have;" (S. Ed. Teacher).

Table 6.3 shows the respondents' awareness of this special education policy, and those interviewees acknowledging the existence of this policy actually mean the primary education policy. As mentioned previously, this association is based on the fact that special education is a unit presently looked after by the Primary Section of MOE. Therefore, services delivered in the name of special education are directed by the ordinary

primary education policy, which may well be responsible for the confusion in the respondents' feedback.

Table 6.3: Respondents' Awareness of Special Education Policy

Classification	Total	Aware	Unaware	Not Sure
Headteacher	10	1	9	0
S. Ed. Teacher	15	0	12	3
Education Officer	1	1	0	0
FNCDP Administrator	1	0	1	0
Total	27	2	22	3

The findings presented in the table above indicate that most interviewees (25 – 92.59%) are either unaware or uncertain of the existence of any special education policy, even the assumed ordinary primary education policy. Only two interviewees (7.41%) acknowledge the availability of a special education policy, not as a specific special education policy per se, but embedded or understood in the context of the primary education policy. If this sample group indeed reflects the overwhelming ignorance of the entire population (special education headteachers, teachers and administrators) of the existence of a special education policy in Fiji, the prediction that there is either no policy at all, or the present policy is inappropriate may not be far from the truth. Also worthy of mention is that both education officers who are MOE officials themselves, indicated during the interview that a special education policy exists in terms of its affiliation to the primary education policy. However, this study reveals the exact opposite on the part of most interviewees who express their lack of awareness or uncertainty of the existence of any special education policy whatsoever. This disparity and contradiction of ideas seem to suggest two plausible reasons. First, the important policy documents and relevant procedures are not familiar or filtering through to the grass-roots level (special schools and management committees), and second, if the special schools and Societies possess these documents, and are also aware of related procedures, then the real problem lies in their interpretation and being cognizant of the policy itself. Whatever the reason may be, the reliability and effectiveness of the partnership between the different Societies which own the schools and MOE which provides teachers and some funding is being tested here, as they should be collaborating,

cooperating and consulting each other in the design, delivery and development of special education services in the country.

Another factor that may have contributed to this state of affairs in special education in Fiji is the lack of legislation concerning the full recognition, expression and protection of the basic human rights of persons with disabilities. Instead of formulating legislation that empowers and promotes self-determination for individuals with disabilities such as the DDA of Australia, ADA and IDEA of the United States, and the Education Act of the United Kingdom, the Government has promulgated the FNCDP Act which is directly related to the establishment of a liaising and coordinating body (FNCDP). What special education requires is a specific and clear special education policy, and not one that is hidden or implied in other policies or regulations. The development of a clear and appropriate policy is considered by all interviewees (including the two respondents who claim there is an existing policy) to be taken up by MOE as a top priority in its agenda and plan of action. They reiterate that the lack of a clear and suitable special education policy is further exacerbated by the MOE's decision to place special education under ordinary primary education, which only encourages the domination and clouding of special education issues by those concerning the larger, more established and visible general primary sector. Therefore, any special education initiative will not be effective, and the current problems in the field will deteriorate unless there is a cessation of such an association, and a specific special education policy is formulated.

The Limitations of the Current Policy

From the research findings presented and discussed in the previous section and other pertinent data gathered from the interviews, it can be deduced that the current policy provision concerning special education services in Fiji, that is, the general primary education policy, is not widely known or well recognized by most interviewees. When asked about the effect and influence of this policy on their different roles and responsibilities, most respondents highlighted not its strengths and contributions, but its unsuitability and shortcomings. The unanimity of such responses raises some questions about the design, relevance and authenticity of the policy itself, which is something the policy-makers must pay close attention to. Because this policy provision does not address

the specific needs and requirements of special schools, special education teachers and administrators, it is incapable of supporting, realizing and furthering the purpose and objectives of the establishment of the special education services for the country. To most interviewees, this primary education policy is in no way, shape or form given the mandate to become or be considered as the special education policy. A summary of these limitations as identified by the respondents is given below.

First, this policy confines special education to the parameters of primary education, and regulations covering the Primary Section of MOE.

"The policy that is currently used is the general education policy which places special schools under the Primary Section. ... This arrangement often works to our disadvantage because the real issues concerning special education cannot be addressed properly. For instance, the establishment guideline for the primary section states that special schools should have only 66 civil servants, and because there are three of us in the Department – myself, a typist and clerk, there should only be 63 teachers. These number of teachers will not address the need for teachers in all our special schools. Also, work descriptions and areas of responsibilities for this office should have come from the section head, but I have been left to my own device as the people concerned lack the knowledge and understanding of special education ..." (Education Officer.)

"My work in this special school is indeed affected by the lack of a special education policy. For example, since prevocational training is an important area of teaching in such a school and the Rehabilitation Workshop, the very much needed funding to buy the necessary equipment and the provision of trained, qualified teachers are not forthcoming from the Ministry of Education due to our students' academic qualification being below Form 4 level. If there was a special education policy, the special needs of these children would have been recognized and accommodated. (Headteacher.)

Second, the policy does not address the instructional needs of students with disabilities, and the training requirements of teachers and administrators.

"At the moment, we come under the Primary Section and this limits my ability to teach because the regulations governing primary schools and teaching of non-disabled children can be inflexible and therefore insensitive to the special learning needs of our disabled children. There is no special education policy at present and this makes our work even more difficult " (S. Ed. Teacher.)

"Because I am not aware of any special education policy, my teaching responsibilities and methods are mainly based on the training I received at teacher's college as a primary school teacher. This is my eighth year of teaching in a special school and I have not received preservice or inservice training in special education. I have participated in various special education workshops organized by

the Special Education Department and have been assisted by those teachers who have training background in this field. Otherwise, it is just trial and error or learn from your mistakes." (S. Ed. Teacher.)

Third, the policy does not specify and clarify special education guidelines such as a clear definition of special education, curriculum design and presentation, categories and scope of services, illegibility criteria, screening, assessment and referral procedures, and the like.

"At the moment, we are still drawing on primary schools' curriculum and classification of our students is sometimes unclear ..."
(Headteacher.)

"Also, proper assessment and record keeping methods should be adopted to help teachers design meaningful individualized educational programmes and to assist in the future placement or referral of any disabled student. The special education curriculum used in special schools should be clear, specific and easy to follow ...". (S. Ed. Teacher.)

Fourth, the policy is silent on community involvement in special education, and public awareness raising of disability issues.

"The biggest problem I am facing is ... the awareness of the general public to special education services and disability issues ..."
(Headteacher.)

The Recommendations for a Separate and Specific Policy on Special Education

From the interviewees' responses to the questions concerning the effect of the existing policy on their present work, the important areas to be addressed by an appropriate special education policy, and the contributions of this new policy towards the improvement of their organization and current role, it can be deduced that conditions like job dissatisfaction, anxiety, frustration and urgency for change have dominated the organizational climate of most special schools in Fiji for some time. Such negative reactions emanate from the respondents' descriptions of the existing policy arrangement and structure of special education services as being ineffective, unproductive and useless in the execution of their different work responsibilities. Often, they have to resort to other avenues like the office of the local education district, colleagues in the field, textbooks and own experiences for guidance and clarification in formulating or implementing policy-related decisions. Consequently, they recommend the development of a separate, specific and carefully designed

special education policy that is divorced from policy provisions that regulate other units or sections within the Ministry of Education.

"Since I am not aware of an existing special education policy, my role as an administrator and teacher has been based mainly on previous training in special education and as a primary school teacher ... I utilize the district education office for guidance and assistance in my administrative work ... I believe there is a real need for a special education policy in Fiji to assist headteachers and teachers working in special schools in carrying out their respective duties ..." (Headteacher.)

The effect of having no appropriate special education policy has saturated the entire field of special education in Fiji, signifying the severity of the problem which has been compounded over the years, and will continue to deteriorate if it remains unattended. Although such a view may seem biased, and one that favours teachers in special schools due to their high representation (29/32 – 90.63%), their unanimous declaration for the development of a new special education policy in Fiji is not unique to them, but shared by other cohorts as well. Refer to Table 5.1 for analysis and representativeness of sample population. Furthermore, this united call is demonstrated by the similarity of responses as interviewees identify important areas to be addressed by the proposed special education policy. Table 6.4 presents a summary of these responses. Realizing the significance of having a good special education policy, some respondents point out that their special schools have developed their own policy to suit their purpose within their school district, while those headteachers who are members of the Education Advisory Committee of FNCDP reflect on their recent undertaking to work towards the formulation of a national special education policy. It can be argued that policy initiatives generated by the special schools and SEU necessitate the formulation of a national, more reliable and relevant special education policy that is responsive to the real concerns and aspirations of organizations and groups presently involved in the delivery of special education services in Fiji.

"As far as I know, I have not seen any blueprint or document that shows us the direction to where we should go. But in my school, I have drawn up a policy that I think is suitable for this district ..." (Headteacher.)

"I am not aware of any special education policy being established at the present time. However, I am aware of an initiative by the Education Advisory Committee of the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons concerning the formulation of such a policy." (Headteacher.)

"... The absent of a specific policy on special education has led me to focus the activities of this Department such as placement of teachers and training under four main disability areas: intellectual disability, physical handicap, hearing and visual impairment. This means that areas like emotionally disturbed, learning disability and others are not addressed and hopefully, these will be acknowledged when a new special education policy is developed." (Education Officer.)

Table 6.4: Areas to be Addressed by the Proposed Policy

<p>Headteachers</p> <p>The policy must have an aim, purpose and direction; support compulsory education for all children with disabilities; address the whole special education system from early childhood to vocational training programmes; support, fund and resource integrated education programmes; raise community awareness of the needs of disabled persons and the different services available in special schools; inclusion of special education units in all teacher training colleges; preservice and inservice training of teachers in special education; recognize formal training of licensed teachers; provide clear eligibility guidelines and assessment procedures; encourage the recruitment of suitable paraprofessionals; call for more government funding to maintain special schools and purchase of appropriate teaching materials and equipment; divorce SEU from the Primary Section of MOE and make it a separate body; restructure the SEU with education officers in the headquarters and at divisional and district levels; increase total special education establishment; review teacher-pupil ratio; offer financial incentives for teachers; and promote networking with other government departments.</p>
<p>Special Education Teachers</p> <p>Policy development processes must involve the participation of or consultation with all parties involved; recognize the rights of disabled persons to education; realize that special education is special and therefore quite difficult and costly to manage; provide clear illegibility criteria for access to special education services; present clear guidelines on the identification, assessment, classification and referral of children with disabilities; ensure the design of special education curriculum is clear, specific and easy to follow; design appropriate vocational training opportunities in special schools to prepare students for self or open employment; allocate necessary funding to maintain special schools and purchase of specialized teaching materials and equipment; incorporate comprehensive special education courses in training colleges; promote training in special education – preservice for teacher trainees, and inservice for regular and untrained special education teachers; organize regular workshops in special education; develop the SEU as an independent section of MOE; increase manpower and expand the existing structure to include special education advisors at district or divisional levels; promote public awareness programmes; the dissemination of MOE circulars should include special schools; regular visits to special schools should be made by education officers; and integrated education should be promoted.</p>
<p>Education Officer</p> <p>The policy should involve both MOE and Societies in its initial development; ensure that SEU becomes a separate department of MOE; provide a clear job description for education officers; encourage preservice and inservice training in special education for all teachers in the field; and recognize the need to have additional education officers for SEU.</p>
<p>FNCDP Administrator</p> <p>The policy should address educational needs of disabled persons from early childhood to higher education level; the policy formulation process should involve disabled persons and FNCDP; ensure that SEU becomes a separate department of MOE with its own structure; provide training opportunities for teachers in the field of special education; and establish a school transport system.</p>

Key Areas to be Addressed by the Proposed Policy

From the research findings presented in Table 6.4, several key areas are common to most respondents, particularly in their four different cohort groups. Because of the prominence and significance of these key areas which are discussed below, they can indeed be used to guide the direction, set the focus and determine the format of the new special education policy.

- (a) To include or consult the organizations involved (Societies, FNCDP and MOE), and concerned groups (teachers, students, parents, paraprofessionals etc) in the development process of the new special education policy. This recommendation clearly demonstrates the respondents' consensus towards the development of this proposed policy as soon as practicable, and also expresses their genuine concern that all parties involved in the design, delivery and consumption of special education services in the country should be involved at the policy formulation stage.

"The need for a special education policy must emanate from the different groups or Societies, based on the real needs and expressed through the National Council for Disabled persons which the Government has just recently established to be the Societies' mouthpiece ..." (Education Officer.)

- (b) To provide a comprehensive course on special education at all levels of teacher training in all relevant institutions. Such a move facilitates the infusion of special education content into traditional courses on methods and materials, classroom management, and curriculum design; and permits the offering of specific coursework in special education to prospective teachers. Also, it ensures that these prospective teachers receive preservice training in special education prior to their placement in any school in the country. This training prepares these teachers with useful knowledge, skills and attitudes to address the learning difficulties of those students who may be exhibiting a potential special education need, instead of aggravating the problem through isolation, ignorance and neglect. Furthermore, all existing special schools are urban based, and if teachers are equipped with the appropriate tools, the learning and instruction needs of those students with special education needs can be met in the ordinary classroom in regular schools. Hence, the concept and practice of inclusive education will be widely recognized and embraced.

"A special education policy should look into incorporating a special education course at the teacher training colleges and students interested in teaching in special schools should undertake this comprehensive course prior to their placement in such schools. For those teachers already working in the field without any proper training in special education, opportunities for inservice training should be provided to help them in their teaching responsibilities ... Provision of further training in special education enables teachers to work more productively with their disabled students as they would have learned effective teaching approaches as well as appropriate methods of tackling unacceptable classroom behaviour ..." (S. Ed. Teacher.)

- (c) To encourage inservice training in special education for the untrained teachers already working in the field. According to the present Senior Education Officer Special Education, only 17 (22.67%) of the current 75 civil servant teachers have undergone training in special education. This means that a majority of these teachers (58 – 77.33%) have not received training in special education; and yet, all teachers, trained or not, are presently teaching in special schools around the country where they are working directly with special needs students. To teach students with learning difficulties is already a challenge; and to do so without any formal training in special education is simply making the task extremely difficult, and for some, unbearable and frustrating. Furthermore, an additional 45 licensed teachers have been recruited by the Ministry of Education to work in special schools and help meet the teacher shortages in such schools. Sadly though, their placements have not been supported by further training either in regular or special education. Also, a majority of these trained teachers is nearing retirement and it is imperative that more teachers be trained in special education.

"I have worked for 18 years in this field and have never received an opportunity to undergo inservice training in special education ... and with a lack of proper training in special education, I have found my placement into this special school from a normal primary school very difficult. What I have learnt is through my own experience over the years like sign language, reading some relevant textbooks and from the help given to me by my headteacher ..." (S. Ed. Teacher.)

- (d) To create a separate special education department in the Ministry of Education, with its own policy, autonomy, structure and human resources. It is also clear that the respondents are dissatisfied with the existing arrangement whereby special education is a unit under the

Primary Section of MOE. Hence, they point out that special education services concentrate on a special student population (those with special education needs) who are supported by specialist teachers and benefit from specialized instructions and equipment. Thus, the main emphasis and agenda of special education are slightly different from those of ordinary primary or secondary education, and indeed deserve to be overseen by a separate, clearly defined and well-resourced department that is familiar with and supportive of any viable special education initiative.

"This Department too does not have education officers as provided for primary schools, so I consult and discuss important matters and development with the headteachers of special schools prior to implementation. ... There is also a need for this Department to be a separate entity and not placed under the Primary Section."
(Education Officer.)

- (e) To promote education for all children with special needs at all levels of education; from early childhood to higher education. Like regular education offered in ordinary educational institutions for normal students, the respondents see special education services as a basic right for individuals with disabilities who should be given equal opportunities to receive education in either an ordinary school or special school setting. Related to this recommendation are two other key issues: integrated education (the latest concept being inclusion or inclusive education) whereby special needs students receive their education in regular schools in their own community; and the provision of additional funding to maintain special schools, purchase specialized equipment and teaching materials, and support inclusive education initiatives.

"An effective special education policy must have an aim, purpose and direction. It should address the whole special education system beginning from early intervention to the different school programmes and then to prevocational and vocational training ..."
(Headteacher.)

- (f) To establish a relevant curriculum, clear screening and assessment procedures, and define proper illegibility criteria for special education services. Two groups of respondents, headteachers and special education teachers, propose this recommendation, which can reflect the current malpractice in these aspects of their work or responsibilities. Misguided and uninformed decisions on the proper

classification and placement of special needs students are direct results of lack of formal training in special education and unclear or nonexistent screening and assessment procedures.

"Also, assessment procedures should be drawn up and suitable professionals recruited in the assessment team to ensure such processes are carried out properly for the purpose of classifying children into their most appropriate disability categories, which in turn help the teachers in designing the most appropriate teaching programmes ... (Headteacher.)

- (g) To conduct public education and awareness raising programmes on special education issues and the different services provided by special schools and their managing organizations. Similarly, this recommendation is raised by headteachers and special education teachers who, by virtue of their work responsibilities and close contact with the community regard this issue as important. In Fiji, special education is still a new concept, predominantly urban based and presently confined to segregated settings in three islands only. In contrast, the country has well over a hundred inhabited islands with schools situated in both urban and remote rural areas, and for special education to be widely known, the realistic option to take is for an active campaign on educating and raising the awareness of the community through different forms of media available. Only then will special education lose its novelty and stigma, gain the recognition and support it deserves from the public, and become another alternative education option for those children that need its services.

"It is also frustrating to learn of the lack of support from the Government, particularly the Ministry of Education as it fails to recognize the importance of special education services on the lives and welfare of disabled children. This lack of recognition leads to people being unaware of the rights of these disabled children to education just like their non-disabled peers." (S. Ed. Teacher.)

The Advantages of Establishing a Separate and Specific Special Education Policy

The key issues emanating from the interviewees' evaluation of the existing special education policy as presented in the preceding section carry a desire for change and glimmer of hope for a brighter and better future for those organizations and individuals involved with special education services in Fiji. For the most part, these respondents founded their

reflections on the inappropriateness of this existing policy, and therefore, their analysis and recommendations are aimed at improving the present situation and forecasting a scenario that ideally benefits their course, and suits the education system they work in. For uniformity's sake, the discussions of the anticipated outcomes of this proposed special education policy are based on the key areas identified in the previous section.

- (a) The participation of organizations, groups and individuals associated with special education in the planning phase of this new special education policy encourages fair representation and active involvement in an education system that is built on a partnership arrangement between the Government (MOE) and community (Societies).

"Because the Government and Societies are working in partnership in the delivery of special education services in Fiji, they should jointly formulate a clear national special education policy that defines each party's responsibilities, contributions and commitment to this partnership agreement if it is to function effectively and efficiently. The partnership is only productive if the Government and Societies can work together with a clear understanding of each other's role ..." (Education Officer.)

- (b) When special education is offered as a compulsory unit or programme of study at all teacher training institutions in the country, and those untrained teachers in special schools are given the opportunity to undergo inservice training in this field, the unjust placement of ill-prepared, inexperienced and unskilled teachers in special schools and mainstream settings will not be entertained, and the concept of inclusive education will be readily embraced.

"This new policy provides an opportunity for me to receive formal training in special education because my training as a primary school teacher does not prepare me to address the special learning needs of the disabled students I teach. Therefore, my teaching work will be more productive and cause less frustration if I know what to do with these students. As for those teachers who have just been to training colleges, they will be able to identify problem students in the classroom and refer them to the right place since they will have some introductory course in special education at college." (S. Ed. Teacher.)

- (c) The creation of a separate department or section of the Ministry of Education to oversee special education affairs enables this Ministry to address such issues with greater sensitivity, accuracy and urgency.

"If Special Education becomes a section on its own, it will have shorter links to the senior officers, have more power and maintain a neater administration system ..." (Education Officer.)

- (d) The formulation of a clear and specific policy on special education allows the policy-makers to consider and address every aspect of special education such as curriculum, illegibility criteria, assessment procedures, inclusive education, funding level, departmental status, parental involvement and others.

"A national policy on special education provides a useful guide to the management of special schools and the different services they deliver. Teachers will have the appropriate training and qualifications to teach in such schools, funding available to support these services, parents will know what to do with their disabled children and these children will eventually have a meaningful and rewarding educational experience to prepare them for a better future." (Headteacher.)

- (e) This specific policy recognizes the rights of individuals with disabilities to education, raises public awareness of disability-related issues, and sensitizes the government and appropriate sectors of the community to the needs, concerns and aspirations of such persons.

"Greater public awareness on disability issues will create better understanding and realistic expectations of the potentials of disabled persons. The expansion of the Department means that more support, personnel and assistance will be available closer to the special schools." (Headteacher.)

Conclusion

The analysis, presentation and discussions of the data in this chapter have brought to life some startling realities about the nature, design and effectiveness of the current policy arrangement concerning special education in Fiji. It is quite clear now that such a policy provision is ineffective and in critical need of a substitute that is more appropriate and responsive to the actual needs and concerns of the special education system. The responsibility now lies with the policy-makers, and the future of special education in Fiji rests on them. It will be a brighter one if the decisions are favourable, but more ominous if otherwise! In the next chapter, the summary, conclusions and recommendations of this study are presented.

7. THE SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This final chapter contains the summary, conclusions and recommendations of this study which are presented in a format that, for the most part, reflects the different phases of this study. The challenge in this thesis has been to tease out the assumed special education policy as prescribed in the MOE's policy governing primary education in Fiji so as to ascertain its relevance to the education of students with special needs, its support for the preparation of organizations and people that serve them, and its recognition of international trends and practices in the field of special education. Much has been written in this document about the research topic, and so this final chapter will focus primarily on the formulation of an executive summary of the entire study based on its implications for the:

- (a) research problem;
- (b) related literature;
- (c) theoretical framework;
- (d) processed data and research findings; and
- (e) future research areas.

The Implications for the Research Problem

As indicated throughout, this thesis sets out to determine the productivity and suitability of the existing special education policy of the Ministry of Education in Fiji by investigating its implications and influence on the provision and delivery of special education services in all special schools, the FNCDP representing all disability organizations, and the MOE headquarters in the country. It is also envisaged that the development of a more appropriate and responsive special education policy may be necessary to support related services or sponsor the implementation of new initiatives. The investigation of the research problem in this study follows a sequence of specific steps, beginning with the examination of the current general and special education policy in Fiji, and followed by the

discussion of the special education practice, trends and policy provisions in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, an outline of the theoretical framework proposed for the study, an account of the research methodology adopted, and the presentation and analysis of the data collected.

It becomes apparent from this study that special education in Fiji is part and parcel of the general primary education system, and like most primary schools, special schools too depend on a solid partnership agreement between the Government (MOE) and community (Societies) for existence, sustenance and development. Because of these affiliation and partnership arrangements, special education in Fiji has not been given the proper consideration and treatment it deserves. Instead of it being a separate and independent education issue, special education is addressed by the MOE and Societies responsible as simply another general education matter devoid of any special characteristics or peculiarities. Thus, the specific educational needs of students with learning disabilities and difficulties, as well as training and administrative needs of persons and organizations that serve them are not addressed at all. If they are considered, the decisions made are influenced by or in line with regular primary education policy guidelines. Therefore, this existing policy is unsuitable for special education purposes and interests.

The Implications for the Related Literature

For the most part, the literature consulted and cited in this thesis serves the purpose of illuminating, clarifying and enlightening the research topic, particularly in reference to special education practices, trends and policy provisions in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Where necessary, similar developments in other countries like the United States are also acknowledged for this same purpose. It is obvious from the literature that special education practices in these countries are clearly defined, more established, well coordinated and adequately resourced when compared with the Fiji situation. The intent is not to identify or justify this gap, but to publicize the research-based and proven practices and trends in these countries for the purpose of sensitizing special education policy-makers in Fiji to such activities and thinking in this specialized field. If the Ministry of Education and disability organizations in Fiji wish to improve the quality and standard of special education in the

country, they need not search or think very far because some other countries like the ones cited in this study have been through the system, and their experiences as well as insights will greatly benefit the establishment of similar initiatives in Fiji. Special education issues such as inclusive education, legislative, policy formulation, parental involvement, devolution and others which are addressed here offer valuable information and guidance to those organizations and people involved in the design and delivery of special education services in the country. The challenge lies not in Fiji's ability to function at the same level as these other countries, but in its commitment to the establishment and provision of an effective, efficient, responsive and sustainable special education system that really benefits its target population.

The Implications for the Theoretical Framework on Research Data and Related Findings

The implications of the ideologies presented in this study's theoretical framework, and the processed data derived from this study are best described in a summary form as given below.

- (a) Special education is better served by a specific rather than a generic education policy. As revealed by the research findings presented in Chapter 6, Fiji does not have a specific special education policy per se, even though the Ministry of Education may claim otherwise. Indeed, the data prove that the primary education policy which MOE has designed to guide the activities and interests of its Primary Section (which also oversees special education) is unsuitable for the actual design, delivery and requirements of special education services. By providing such a generic policy, it can be assumed that the Ministry of Education has no proper definition and clear understanding of special education, and so decides to address the real issue by simply identifying special education with ordinary primary education, special schools with ordinary primary schools and students with disabilities as those who possess the same teaching and learning needs as their non-disabled peers, and the onset of any disabling condition is insignificant to the student's learning needs, patterns and behaviour. A policy governing primary education which is also expected to guide special education services cannot be as effective and precise as a separate and specific special education policy. Whilst the earlier option only creates

confusion and ambiguity, the latter ensures conciseness and clarity. Furthermore, a specific policy is more likely to address every aspect of special education like criteria for illegibility, screening, assessment and classification procedures, desirable teacher-pupil ratio, teacher training and the like. These specific areas that are peculiar to special education may not be addressed to such an extent if a generic policy like the current arrangement in Fiji is adopted.

Moreover, special education is not merely a primary education matter, but spans across the entire spectrum of an education system; from preschool to post secondary education, from early childhood intervention to vocational training; and job placement, and from the family structure to every administrative level of the education hierarchy. To a lay person, this policy arrangement is flawed, and one can easily attribute the problems facing special education in Fiji to the absence of a specific special education policy. As evident in the literature, the formulation of a separate policy on special education and associated legislation measures are inevitable if students with disabilities are to receive their education in the most appropriate setting, and be provided with essential support services to facilitate such a placement. It must be recognized that the concept of 'most appropriate setting' can be a placement in either a special or ordinary school, and therefore a specific policy is more likely to acknowledge this issue better than a general policy. Also, a whole philosophy of education that is embedded in a special education policy must be a philosophy that has been thought out in terms of its manifestations in the daily lives of those who will implement it. High sounding statements are insignificant unless they are clearly defined in terms of programmes and procedures, and in terms of the behaviour of teachers, administrators, parents and pupils. Therefore, if a special education policy is to be workable, it must clearly spell out the mission of MOE, special schools and their respective management bodies in behavioural terms. Such policy statements imply commitment to Clearly defined actions.

Furthermore, it must be recognised that not all aspects of this special education Policy will be Within the Power of special schools to determine as there are different levels of policy making in most education systems. While some Policy is laid down in legislation,

other aspects are handed down to schools through the bureaucracy of which they are a part. However, such centrally determined policy is usually formulated only in very general terms, and the crucial task of bringing it to life in the daily activities of a particular school is often unclear. Also, not all aspects of centrally determined policy are equally relevant to all schools, and so each school has to make its own decisions about the priorities that apply to it.

Indeed, this study supports the adoption of a collaborative, consultative and inclusive approach during the process of policy development. Whilst the ideals of inclusive education provide one way of reconceptualizing schools, that is, a shift from the more hierarchical structures to a model that embraces community and celebrates diversity, the process and strategies involved in the development of a special education policy must closely adhere to such a concept if it is to respond effectively to the varying needs of those it serves. It is vital that the input from those involved in the provision of special education services (management), their delivery (teachers and administrators), and consumers (parents and special needs students) are also elicited in this process to ensure the formulation of a stable and holistic special education policy that is indeed representative of the pluralistic society with which it interacts. The responsibility of developing a special education policy should not solely be ascribed to policy makers in the Ministry of Education, but instead, a wider consultation and collaboration between these policy makers and appropriate agencies, groups or individuals should be encouraged and obtained. This idea is not an attack on the status of MOE as one of the leading decision-makers for special education initiatives, but is based on the concept of the Ministry as the facilitator of decision making procedures within the system. This approach is particularly important since it is capable of creating a constructive and effective governmental remedy to a societal concern for special education, and so avoid a debilitating form of ambivalence that may result in governmental non-policy and non-action as typified by the present situation in Fiji. Also, a collective effort develops a sense of ownership of the policy, and serves as an extrinsic motivator towards greater accountability and commitment to the proper implementation, observation and evaluation of policy decisions. To be involved in a decision has great power to commit the participants to the decision. Countries cited in

this study have proven that the formulation of a comprehensive special education policy is a product of an inclusive rather than exclusive concept of policy formation. However, it must be acknowledged that the discussion of developing a policy on special education without any real substance or decision suggests that the parties involved are losing their professional cutting edge.

- (b) Effective and efficient administration of special education services warrant an autonomous but not isolated administrative structure. The present structural arrangement concerning special education at the top administrative level of MOE results in special education becoming one of a few units and areas of responsibility under the Primary Section, which is largely responsible for all ordinary primary schools throughout the country. Hence, special schools and any other special education activity are under the jurisdiction of this section and its administrator (CEOP). At face value, this arrangement seems detrimental to the success, growth and development of special education services, policy provisions and initiatives nationwide due to the amalgamation of several smaller units which insist on maintaining their own individual identity, priority and agenda. Also, these few smaller units which include special education are grouped under a larger section which is mainly concerned with regular primary education in ordinary primary schools. Although such an arrangement invites strong criticisms from staunch special education advocates, the efforts of MOE must be applauded for at least recognizing special education and addressing related issues to the best of its ability, and within the confines of its scarce financial, human and technical resources. At the same time, the purpose of placing a small and specialized unit like special education under a larger section must not be one of 'sweeping the issue under the carpet' whereby matters concerning the majority group dominate, cloud and take precedence over those of the minority units. If this type of arrangement is to be maintained and successful, allowance should be made for the Special Education Unit to exercise limited powers in making decisions and executing duties that are specifically related to special education to ensure that choices made and tasks implemented are done by the most appropriate unit available. In addition, it encourages delegation of responsibility with authority, and avoids uninformed ill-advised decisions and bureaucratic procrastination. However, the findings of

this study pertaining to this issue are very clear. The Ministry of Education should establish a separate department or section to look after the affairs, interests, concerns and development of special education in Fiji, and to design a suitable structure that supports a more decentralized, effective and efficient system of operation. Moreover, special education units should be set up in either the Ministry of education's existing education divisions or districts, and to be managed by appropriate education officers.

This proposed structure is sensitive and responsive to the delivery of special education services in Fiji, which is contingent upon a partnership agreement between the Government (MOE) and registered non-government charitable organizations (Societies). The first provides teachers and financial grants, while the latter establishes and maintains special schools. However, it is also noted that this partnership is now into its 30 years of existence, without the implementation of any formal review or evaluation by either party to ascertain its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. This has resulted in the maintenance of the 'more of the same' approach where Fiji has seen and will continue to witness the establishment of more special schools around the country, posting of untrained and non-specialist teachers to such schools, growing disillusionment of teachers, provision of ineffective special education services, and a stronger opposition to the concept of inclusion, equalization of opportunity and social integration. Conversely, the provision of an appropriate special education policy and efficient structure will also serve as effective monitoring devices to keep the entire special education operation in order, relevant, viable and responsive.

- (c) The influence of global trends and practices in special education. As described in Chapter 2 of this study, a lot of significant developments and trends have unfolded in the field of special education in recent years, and some of which have been recognized, implemented or benefit the Fiji practice. Nevertheless, such promising trends and innovations die early deaths and are deemed unrealistic for the development of special education in Fiji due to the quality of this partnership which, to a great extent, is insensitive to the changes ushered in by these newfound practice and ideologies. Special education is not a stagnant field and the increasing research interest it

continues to attract guarantees new development and concepts. If the Fiji practice fails to embrace relevant international trends which may need some adaptations to suit the local setting anyway, it will continue to lag behind other leading countries, and the 'knowledge gap' between them and Fiji will become wider and more pronounced. In a changing and growing field like special education, internal structural arrangements often require some modifications at the cost of better output and quality control in service delivery.

If Fiji through its Ministry of Education is to embark on the task of developing a special education policy, it is only advantageous and proper that the Ministry considers and utilize the rich and invaluable experiences of the three countries (and others) cited in this study for guidance, insights and information. The literature proves that these countries have experienced the process of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. The special education policy they developed have been trialed, and were later amended, substituted, or led to the formulation of related policies prior to the adoption of acts, legislation or policy provisions that best addressed the needs and aspirations of those groups and organizations concerned. Therefore, the Ministry of Education does not necessarily need to revamp the entire process, but simply draw out the relevant aspects of such well established policies that, together with local input, may contribute to the formulation of a good special education policy for the country. In this way, the special education policy in Fiji will be compatible with those of other countries, and so exposes the providers and consumers of special education services to the standard, quality and opportunity often enjoyed by their counterparts elsewhere. Otherwise, the development of a special education policy that does not acknowledge the current trends and practices in the field will render the country's special education services obsolete, inappropriate and ineffective, thus limiting potential achievement by special needs students, and hindering the opportunity for information sharing, meaningful participation and cross-fertilization. Although a special education policy is formulated to address the special education needs of a particular country, it should also be noted that most countries are not immune to better, more effective and efficient practices that are being recognized and implemented worldwide. The importance of

maintaining the status quo even in terms of special education policy-making has some merits in this regard.

Conclusions

In sum, the preceding paragraphs have served the purpose of concluding this study, however, for the sake of drawing meaningful conclusions, the data that have been reported from this research project present the following picture:

- (a) The existing policy provision on special education is not delivering the services as planned, and therefore, the formulation of a new special education policy is necessary.
- (b) A large percentage of people who work in special education settings are not finding the teaching and management experiences to be inspiring and are losing interest.
- (c) The educational programmes of many students in special schools are not meeting their current and future needs, and are therefore unprepared for the multi-dimensional demands of adulthood.
- (d) Members of the community are largely ignorant and apprehensive about having to deal with special needs students or disability issues in general.

The above images have exposed the darker side of the special education system in Fiji which could have been created by the absence of a good and clear special education policy. A relevant question to ask is whether these images will change and put on new, positive and attractive identities once this special education policy is established. Surely, special education in Fiji needs more than just the development of an appropriate special education policy. What good is this policy if it is not implemented, recognized, standardized, and evaluated? To simply have a policy in place is not enough; what makes it work and keeps it relevant are the commitment, compliance and sensitivity of organizations and people involved.

Recommendations of the Study

Thus far, this research project which is an integral part of the author's programme of study at UNE has run its full course; beginning with the identification of the research problem and concludes with a summary of the entire activity. However, the concluding remarks will only echo the purpose and more importantly, the findings of this study, which have become quite prominent particularly towards the latter chapters of this thesis. Suffice it to say that the entire process has not unfolded without its problems and difficulties, but throughout the different stages of the research, the challenge, promise and excitement associated with the goal, findings and recommendations of this study have provided the author with the much needed motivation and inspiration to present a thesis document that not only fulfils the requirements of the study programme, but has the potential to offer guidance and insights to the Ministry of Education and disability organizations in Fiji, should they decide to develop a specific policy on special education. The following recommendations only reiterate the findings of the study, and the concluding sections describe its limitations and future research areas. If the efforts of the Ministry of Education officers, management boards and administrators of different disability organizations, educational and related service personnel, parents and individuals with disabilities can be harnessed to anticipate and plan for upcoming policy changes, the future of special education in Fiji will certainly reflect the best practice that professional educators can offer, as well as the most effective education the country can provide to promote the optimum learning and development of special needs students.

- (a) That the Ministry of Education in Fiji considers the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the existing so-called special education policy as enshrined and implied in its current primary education policy. According to this study, this policy provision is unsuitable for special education, and the development of a more precise and appropriate policy on special education is necessary.
- (b) that in light of the first recommendation, the Ministry of education will also review the present structure, administration and resourcing of the Special Education Unit, whereby it becomes a separate and

autonomous section of the Ministry at national, divisional and district level.

- (c) That in the consideration of the first and second recommendations, the Ministry of Education seeks the guidance, leadership and experience of those countries which have well established special education policies.
- (d) That in the process of policy formulation, all organizations and groups presently involved in the design, delivery, consumption and development of special education services in the country should be encouraged to participate to ensure wide representation, consultation and cooperation.
- (e) That the Ministry of Education facilitates a wide publicity and proper dissemination of the new special education policy.

The Limitations of the Study

Because special education is still a new and growing concept in Fiji, this study is trapped by a false assumption that the country has in place a policy on special education within its Ministry of education. Hence, the presence or absence of this policy remains unclear until the field study is undertaken; and as indicated in the research findings, the situation is still a grey area requiring urgent attention by the Ministry of Education. Also, the target population cannot be proportionally represented in the sample group due to the small size of some of the cohort groups such as national disability agencies represented by FNCDP which has only one member, and the Ministry of Education officials which has two. Probably, more 'potential' research sites and subjects could be involved. The time factor and financial constraints posed real threats during the field study (travelling around three islands to visit all 16 research sites) and exchanging of interview transcripts, and perhaps, a supplementary data collection tool could have been employed such as a questionnaire.

Future Research Areas

In recognition of the specificity and limitations of this study, and being aware of numerous plausible researchable topics pertaining to, but beyond

the scope of this thesis, it is recommended that areas such as 'Inclusive Education', 'Legislating Special Education Services' and 'Preparing Teachers to be Effective Special Educators' be the focus of related studies in the future. Or for the purpose of extending this study, the 'role of service providers and consumers as special education policy makers' may be researched.

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9. STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Schedule 1: Structured Interview Questions for Subproblem One. Item 4 is also applicable to Subproblem Two. (For CEOP in MOE headquarters, Fiji).

1. Briefly explain the current education policy in Fiji, and kindly provide a copy of this document.
2. How is the Fiji education system structured and implemented?
3. How is the Fiji education policy determined, formulated, implemented, evaluated and standardized by the Ministry of Education, and who is responsible for each of these activities?
4. How is special education accommodated by the Ministry of Education, and how does it fit into the country's education system? How can a new and more appropriate policy on special education be developed?

Schedule 2: Structured Interview Questions for Subproblem Two. (For SEO Special Education.)

1. Briefly explain the existing policy on special education services as known to your Department.
2. How is special education practiced in Fiji, and how are the related services determined, designed and delivered by the Ministry of Education, your Department and special schools?
3. How do you describe your present work responsibilities as a special education administrator in light of this policy?
4. What areas should a policy on special education address so that special education services in Fiji are both effective and efficient? How will this policy benefit the entire special education system in the country?

Schedule 3: Structured Interview Questions for Subproblems Two and Three. (For headteachers and teachers of special schools who are selected for this study. Question 2 is to be answered by headteachers only.)

1. Briefly explain the existing policy on special education services as established by the Ministry of Education in Fiji.
2. How is special education and the related services practised, determined, designed and delivered in your own organization?
3. How is your teaching and/or administrative responsibilities as a teacher/headteacher in a special school affected by the existing special education policy?
4. In your opinion, what constitute a suitable policy on special education services in Fiji, and what areas should be addressed to facilitate the effectiveness and efficiency of your role as a special education teacher/administrator?
5. How would this new policy on special education help your school in meeting the educational needs of the students it serves?

Schedule 4: Structured Interview Questions for Subproblems Two and Three. (For administrator of FNCDP representing disability organizations in Fiji.)

1. Briefly explain the existing policy on special education services in Fiji as known to the Council and its affiliates.
2. How is special education practiced in Fiji, and how are the related services determined, designed and delivered?
3. How is the Council and its member agencies which are involved with the management of special schools affected by the existing special education policy?
4. What areas should be addressed by an appropriate policy on special education to ensure that the special education services being delivered by the Council's affiliates are both effective and efficient?
5. How will this new policy on special education benefit the Council and its affiliates?

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SITES IN FIJI USED IN THIS STUDY

SITES	TOWN	ISLAND
<i>I. SPECIAL SCHOOLS:</i>		
1 School for Special Education	Ba	Viti Levu
2 School for Special Education	Lautoka	"
3 School for Intellectually Handicapped	"	"
4 Centre for Special Education	Nadi	"
5 Crippled Children School	Sigatoka	"
6 Ra Society School for the Disabled	Rakiraki	"
7 Hilton Special School	Suva	"
8 School for Intellectually Handicapped	"	"
9 School for the Blind	"	"
10 Early Intervention Centre	"	"
11 School for the Handicapped	Labasa	Vanua Levu
12 School for the Handicapped	Savusavu	"
13 School for the Handicapped	Levuka	Ovalau
<i>II. OTHERS:</i>		
14 Ministry of Education Headoffice.	Suva	
15 Special Education Unit.	Suva	
16 Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons	Suva	

**APPENDIX 2: LIST OF SITES AND SUBJECTS USED FOR THE
FIELD STUDY IN FIJI.**

SITES	SUBJECTS
1. Ba School for Special Education	Headteacher and two S. Ed. teachers
2. Lautoka School for Special Education	Headteacher and two S. ed. teachers
3. Lautoka School for the Intellectually Handicapped	Headteacher and two S. Ed. teachers
4. Nadi Centre for Special Education	Headteacher and one S. Ed. teacher
5. Sigatoka Crippled Children School	Headteacher and one S. Ed. teacher
6. Hilton Special School	Two S. Ed. teachers
7. Suva School for the Intellectually Handicapped	Headteacher and one teacher
8. Fiji School for the Blind	Headteacher, I/R teacher and one S. Ed. teacher
9. Early Intervention Centre	Headteacher and I/R teacher
10. Labasa School for the Handicapped	Headteacher and one S. Ed. teacher
11. Savusavu School for the Handicapped	Headteacher and one S. Ed. teacher
12. Levuka School for the Handicapped	Headteacher and one S. Ed. teacher
13. Ra Society School for the Disabled	Headteacher
14. Ministry of Education	Chief Education Officer Primary
15. Special Education Unit	Senior Education Officer
16. Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons	Executive Director

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF NON-GOVERNMENT DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS AFFILIATED TO THE FIJI NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR DISABLED PERSONS (FNCDP)

1. Fiji Rehabilitation Council.
2. Counter Stroke Fiji.
3. Fiji Red Cross Society.
4. Fiji Crippled Children Society.
5. Fiji Disabled Peoples Association.
6. Fiji Crippled Children Association-Suva Branch.
7. Crippled Children Society-Nausori Branch.
8. Suva Special School (I.H.S.)
9. Crippled Children Society-Ba Branch.
10. Lautoka Society for the Intellectually Handicapped.
11. Nadi Society for the Intellectually Handicapped.
12. Levuka Society for the Intellectually Handicapped.
13. Nadi Crippled Children Society.
14. Navuaira Society for the Disabled.
15. Ra Society for the Disabled.
16. United Blind Persons of Fiji.
17. Tavua Welfare Society.
18. Western Disabled People's Association.
19. Veilomani Boys Home and Rehabilitation.
20. Spinal Injury Association Fiji (S.I.A.)
21. Sigatoka Crippled Children Society.
22. Fiji Society for the Blind.
23. Fiji Crippled Children Society-Lautoka Branch.
24. Lau Society for the Disabled.