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**CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN FIJI**

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# Cultural Influences on Academic Achievement in Fiji

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## **Abstract**

*There are cultural differences between values, beliefs and practices in affecting achievement among Indo-Fijians and ethnic Fijians in the Fiji context. Indo-Fijian culture respects and values education highly. They believe that education changes people for the better, and the only way to success and to establish good customs is through education. Thus, Indo-Fijian parents believe that helping children to strive for their academic excellence is one of the most important tasks for them. On the contrary, ethnic Fijian culture encourages children to become good members of their community. For this purpose, one's total commitment to communal activities and requirements is of vital importance. Ethnic Fijian parents spend a large amount of time and money on making contribution to ceremonies and church, somewhat at the expense of their children's education. Consequently, Indo-Fijian students generally become better performers than their ethnic Fijian counterparts.*

## **Introduction**

It is a common perception that, at both upper secondary and tertiary levels, Indo-Fijian students often perform better than their ethnic Fijian counterparts in the Fiji context, despite that following facts that (1) both ethnic groups have been involved in the same educational system for over 80 years. (2) The educational system has favoured ethnic Fijians (e.g., there are a number of scholarship schemes reserved for ethnic Fijian students, and tertiary entry requirements for ethnic Fijians are lower than those for their Indo-Fijian counterparts). The most recent figures in Fiji (Government of Fiji, 2003) have indicated that, of the Indo-Fijian candidates who sat for the externally examined Fiji Seventh Form (aged 18 years) Examinations in 2002, 7.1% of Indo-Fijian students received Grade 1 for a compulsory subject, English, as compared with 2.2% of their ethnic Fijian counterparts. For Mathematics in the same examinations, 7.9% of Indo-Fijians received Grade 1, while it was 0.4% of their ethnic Fijian counterparts (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Results of the Fiji Seventh Form Examinations, 2002: Grades Percentage Distribution per Subject by Race

Subject	Total Number of Candidates Sat		Ethnic Fijians			Indo-Fijians		
	Ethnic-Fijians	Indo-Fijians	1 *	2 **	3 ***	1 *	2 **	3 ***
English	1,265	2,461	2.2	6.4	11.5	7.1	8.6	13.9
Mathematics	1,207	2,436	0.4	2.8	8.1	7.9	11.1	16.7
Biology	388	846	2.6	3.8	9.8	9.1	12.5	19.7
Chemistry	360	982	1.1	2.2	11.1	8.5	11.7	21.6
Physics	246	731	0.8	4.9	15.8	14.4	17.0	20.4
Geography	669	743	1.1	5.6	7.0	3.4	8.1	10.1
History	334	37	1.8	1.5	8.3	10.8	-	-
Accounting	363	1,290	0.3	2.5	4.1	6.7	12.2	13.0
Economics	576	1,265	0.7	3.0	2.8	7.5	10.9	13.0

Source: Government of Fiji (2003). *Ministry of Education Annual Report for the Year 2002*. Government of Fiji, Suva: Parliamentary Paper No. 97 of 2003.

- Notes: \* denotes “excellent standard of achievement” and approximately top 5% of all the candidates who sat for the Fiji Seventh Form Examinations in 2002.  
 \*\* denotes “very high standard of achievement” and top 8% of all the candidates.  
 \*\*\* denotes “high standard of achievement” and top 13%.

Likewise, in 1999, 61.9% of Indo-Fijians (i.e., an average of the male and female pass rate) passed English in the externally examined Fiji School Leaving Certificate (commonly called FSLC) Examinations at the end of Form 6 (aged 17 years), as compared with 48.7% of their ethnic Fijian counterparts (i.e., an average of the male and female pass rate). Of Indo-Fijians, 40.4% passed Mathematics in the same examinations, whereas, it was 22.7% of the ethnic Fijians who passed that subject (Ministry of Education, 2000) (see Table 2 & 3 below).

Table 2: Fiji School Leaving Certificate Subjects Statistics by Ethnicity & Gender, 1999

Subject	Indo-Fijians (Female)			Ethnic Fijians (Female)		
	No. Sat	% pass	Mean	No. Sat	% Pass	Mean
English	3,080	66.1	55.3	2,834	54.2	51.3
Mathematics	3,067	35.3	46.6	2,769	19.6	40.4
Biology	1,282	52.4	52.1	1,258	31.4	44.2
Chemistry	1,181	55.5	52.6	1,001	35.2	43.4
Physics	474	54.4	53.5	328	28.7	43.6
Geography	1,220	55.8	50.9	1,424	46.6	48.1
History	71	64.8	54.3	560	43.2	47.4
Accounting	1,748	57.7	53.7	742	45.7	48.6
Economics	1,527	55.5	52.1	1,130	34.5	45.4

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva: Ministry of Education.

Table 3: Fiji School Leaving Certificate Subjects Statistics by Ethnicity & Gender, 1999

Subject	Indo-Fijians (Male)			Ethnic Fijians (Male)		
	No. Sat	% Pass	Mean	No. Sat	% Pass	Mean
English	2,652	57.6	52.3	2,355	43.1	47.0
Mathematics	2,725	45.5	51.1	2,339	25.8	42.3
Biology	886	50.1	50.8	728	37.9	43.8
Chemistry	1,219	58.1	54.4	842	37.1	44.3
Physics	1,021	60.7	55.6	852	23.9	40.2
Geography	840	53.7	50.2	959	47.1	48.1
History	44	45.5	49.9	377	50.9	48.8
Accounting	1,092	60.0	55.3	405	49.1	47.4
Economics	1,009	57.6	53.2	670	33.4	45.5

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva: Ministry of Education.

Similarly, in the externally examined Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations, which Form 4 students (aged 15 years) took, the pass rate for ethnic Fijians was comparable to Indo-Fijians, but ethnic Fijians recorded a lower percentage of passes with grades A-C (Raicola, 2003). In conclusion, while the overall pass rates were similar, the Indo-Fijians were over-represented at the high end of the achievement distribution at these public examinations held at the end of compulsory education (i.e., the FJC Examinations) and beyond it (i.e., the FSLC Examinations and the Seventh Form Examinations).

The major purpose of the present paper is to examine from a cross-cultural perspective the factors that create and influence considerable difference between the academic achievement of these two ethnic groups in Fiji. This study focuses on the cultural influences on academic performance, and suggests that cultural differences are the basis for creating the significant differences in achievement and performance between Indo-Fijian students and their ethnic Fijian counterparts, since individuals generally try to achieve in a given situation (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). One of the most influential contexts in which individuals develop their own values and beliefs is their culture (see Smith, 2000). Cultural values and beliefs are normally internalised through their socialisation process (Eisenhart, 2001) and through interaction between individuals and their communities (Krause, Bochner & Duchesne, 2003). Cultural values change slowly, they are not held to change like fashion. Values are supposed to endure over a long period of time. They give intensity, stability, direction, order and predictability to all aspects of one's life (Smith, 2000). According to Hofstede (2001), values are an attribute of individual as well as collectivities, and a value is defined as a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others. Values have to do with what members of the society believe are good. But, they are different from preferences. Preferences can be individual matters, whereas values are likely to reflect a whole culture's interpretation. Beliefs were defined by Pepitone (1994) as:

Relatively stable cognitive structures that represent what exists for the individual in domains beyond direct perception or inference from observed facts. More particularly, beliefs are concepts about the nature, the causes, and the consequences of things, persons, events, and processes. Beliefs are social constructions that are part of a culture and have guided the socialisation of those who share that culture and more or less adopted from what is already there in the culture (p. 140).

It is, however, briefly noted that there are some individuals who do not achieve highly in their own culture. But, these individuals may strive more in different cultural environments, after they are culturally re-socialised in their new cultural environments to some extent.

Thus, it could be hypothesised that cultural factors, specifically cultural values and beliefs in education, are probably major predictors of Indo-Fijian and ethnic Fijian academic “success” and “failure”. For this reason, this paper would focus on individuals’ values, beliefs and practices in affecting achievement, which are the basis for the different interpretations placed on achievement in different cultures (see Levinson & Holland, 1996; Maehr & McInerney, 2004). If this is the case, it is crucial to examine how values and beliefs are related to individuals’ performances and achievements from a cross-cultural perspective. In other words, what achievements are children culturally expected to value via social support, especially from their trusted others such as parents, siblings, relatives and elders? Stewart (1983), for instance, has claimed, ethnic Fijians do not appear to value education as much as other groups like Indo-Fijians. If so, what motivates ethnic Fijians? The following section of this paper discusses briefly cultural influences on achievement from a theoretical perspective.

### **Theoretical Background**

Most research that has been conducted in an area of cultural influences on academic achievement in the cross-cultural perspective originate in cross-cultural psychology. Specifically, most studies generally investigate the influence of students’ cultural background and achievement motivation on their academic performance.

However, another starting point is the sociological view Max Weber. Weber’s (1930) work, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”, played a key role in the conceptualisation of McClelland’s (1961) influential work on the relationship between culture and achievement motivation. Weber (1930) suggested that the difference between the level of economic productivity in Protestant and Roman Catholic countries was not just a function of capacity, ability or resources. It was a function of ideology, of values, attitudes and motivation, which were developed in a given context.

Achievement motivation theorists such as McClelland (1961; 1971) and his colleagues (McClelland & Winter, 1969) extended the idea that was created by Weber (1930). They argued that a significant aspect of a given achievement situation is the pattern of norms that guide family behaviour and child-rearing practices, in particular, establishing the child's early learning experiences. It is because culture is composed of habits, i.e., learned tendencies to react, acquired by each individual through her/his life experience after birth (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Geertz, 1993; Wicker, 1997; Bauman, 2000; Smith, 2000; Eisenhart, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). According to McClelland (1961; 1971), these early learning experiences create enduring personality patterns that persist through adulthood and determine the individual's level of achievement motivation. McClelland and his colleagues (1969) hypothesised that individuals need to achieve in a competitive society and this trait, whose experience is different from person to person, is acquired in childhood. McClelland's (1961) influential work, "The Achieving Society", proposed the basic notion that when a society characteristically fosters the development of the personality trait of achievement motivation, this eventuates in economic growth (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980).

However, there are a number of criticisms that have been levelled against McClelland's (1961) hypothesis, and much criticism relates to personality as the critical variable in determining achievement behaviour. For example, Maehr (1974) argued that when achievement motivation is treated as a personal trait, the possibility of diverse modes of achievement in different cultures is almost ignored. He further argued that "different cultural groups are not only likely to establish different tasks as achievement tasks, but to expect these goals to be pursued in different ways" (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980, p. 224). That is, McClelland and his colleagues (1969) stressed that achievement motivation is to seek individual success. But, this concept does not apply to the nature of achievement behaviour in different cultures, which stress co-operative behaviour, like an ethnic Fijian society. Achievement is less an individualistic phenomenon than it is asserted to

be in Western cultures. It is something that occurs within a group and serves group goals. That is, ethnic Fijian concept of achievement is generally associated with communal role and status, especially within the village where they belong (Nabobo, 2001). Hence, the ethnic Fijian achievement question is not anything like: “Am I competent?” Rather, “Am I a good member of the community?” Ethnic Fijian achievement motivation is related to fulfilling one’s role within a group (White, 1997).

Accordingly, cross-cultural psychologists have paid much attention to cultural influences on students’ academic achievement, focusing on a situational-contextual analysis of achievement motivation. The achievement situation or context, especially students’ home background (e.g., their socialisation processes and practices), are these psychologists’ major concern in considering variation in achievement motivation across social and cultural groups (see e.g., Maehr, 1974 & 1984; Pekrun, 1993). Most work that has been carried out by educational psychologists in this area of research is based on cross-cultural comparisons and contrasts between students from the West and those from the East, particularly East-Asian societies. This developing research field is based on these researchers’ strong interest in East-Asian students’ academic achievement over-representation in English speaking societies, despite the fact that they have difficulties in English comprehension, and not withstanding cultural differences (see Salili, 1995, Salili, Chi & Ying, 2001; Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Chao, 1996; Hattie & Purdie, 1996a & 1996b; Watkins & Biggs, 1996 & 2001; Eaton & Dembo, 1997; Bempechat & Drago-Steverson, 1999; Earley, Gibson & Chen, 1999; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2000; Ng, 2001; Markus, Kitayama & Heiman, 2003).

Most of these researchers’ (e.g., Salili, 1995; Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Hattie & Purdie, 1996a & 1996b; Eaton & Dembo, 1997; Earley, Gibson & Chen, 1999; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2000) work, however, has limitations. It is not only because of difficulties involved in making comparisons of different educational systems across countries, but also because there are



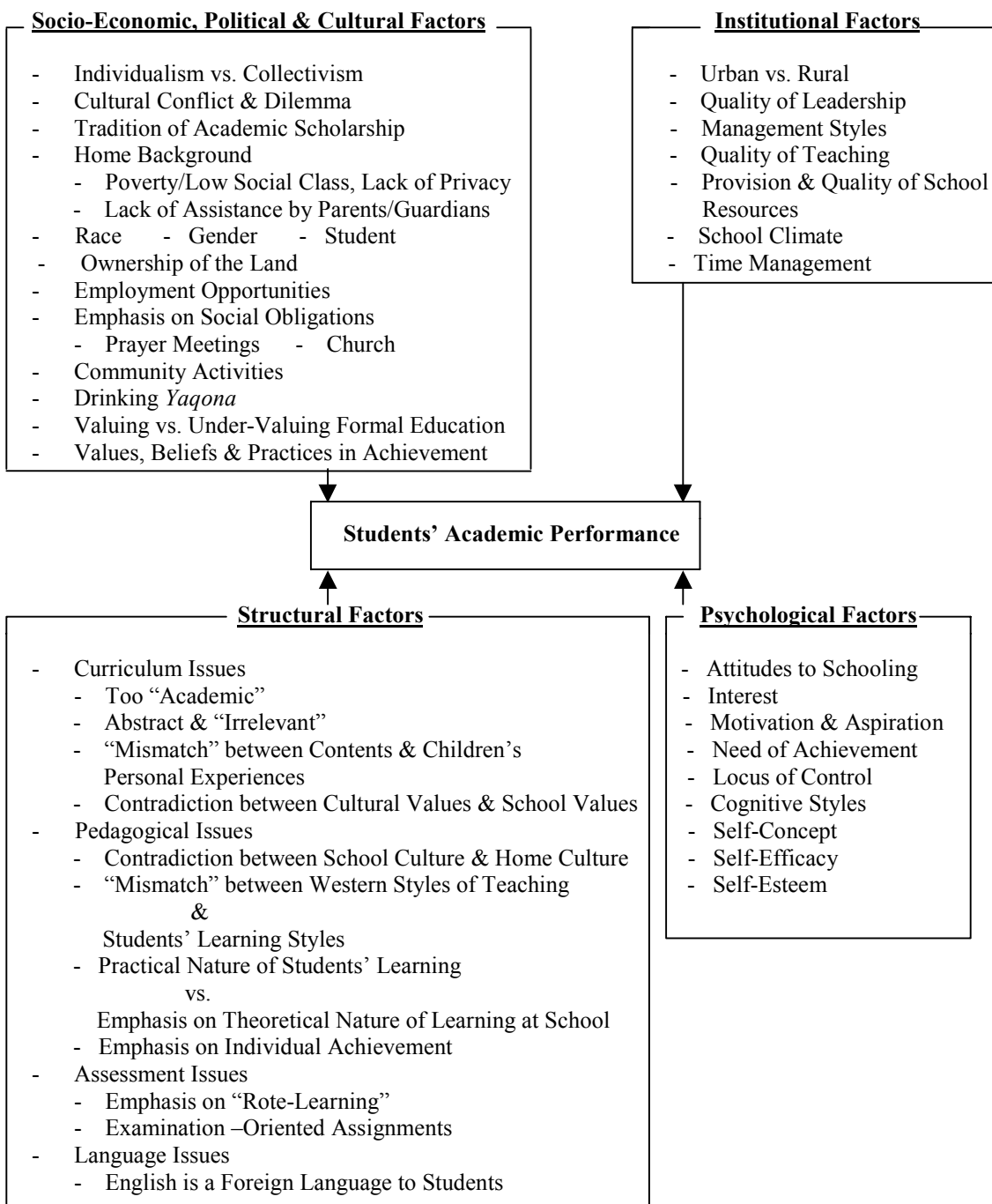
enormous cultural differences between English speaking countries, and East-Asian societies such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Japan. Moreover, each country has different cultural values and beliefs in affecting achievement. Also, languages (including dialects within the language), individualism versus collectivism influencing one's self-efficacy and self-concept, which is generally regarded as a major influence on one's thought and action (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), religious beliefs, traditions, customs and so forth are all culturally dependent; therefore, in some respects culturally unique. They are very influential on one's cultural values and beliefs in achievement and performance. Therefore, the research findings, results, analysis, critique and discussion have limitations when the factors that create and influence differences of academic achievement, performance and motivation of students from these different cultures are examined. Nevertheless, these studies have often suggested that there is a strong linkage between students' academic performance and their socio-cultural background.

### **Relevant Literature Review**

In the Fiji context, numerous studies have examined factors creating the considerable differences in achievement between Indo-Fijian students and their ethnic Fijian counterparts, although most of these studies are rather old (approximately 4 to 33 years old). These studies have attempted to examine the major issue, focusing on ethnic Fijian under-achievement, rather than their academic "success", from the following four different perspectives: (1) socio-economic, political and cultural factors; (2) institutional factors; (3) structural factors, and (4) psychological factors. According to Baba (1979), Puamau (1999) and the Ministry of Education (2000), each category is identified in the following way (see Figure 1 below):

**Figure 1**

**Four Possible Factors influencing Academic Performance in the Fiji Context**



Source: Otsuka, S. (2003, June). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance: A Case Study in the Fiji Islands from a Contextual Perspective*. Paper presented at the PESA Research Forum, Faculty of Education & Social Work, University of Sydney, Australia. Based on Puamau, P. Q. (1999). Understanding Fijian Under-Achievement: An Integrated Perspective. *Directions*, 21 (2): 100-112.

Of the categorisations identified by Baba (1979), Puamau (1999) and the Ministry of Education (2000), not only are the (1) socio-economic, political and cultural factors, but also other factors, such as (2) institutional factors, (3) structural factors and even (4) psychological factors, are culturally different between the Indo-Fijians and the ethnic Fijians.

Overall, most studies (e.g., Tierney, 1971; Kishor, 1981, 1983 & 1984; Elley, 1982; Nabuka, 1983 & 1984; Sofield, 1983; Stewart, 1983 & 1984; Veramu, 1986 & 1992; Tavola, 1990, 1991 & 1992; Thaman, 1990; Tuvuki, 1992; Nabobo, 1994; Dakuidreketi, 1995; White, 1997; Bole, 2000) explain sufficiently the effect of cultural values and traditions on children's education, by examining different factors (i.e., socio-cultural, institutional, structural and psychological elements). However, as the present paper focuses on cultural values, beliefs and practices in affecting achievement, this section of the article reviews socio-cultural factors that influence academic performance of these two ethnic groups in Fiji.

Nabuka (1983) compared 400 ethnic Fijian and Indo-Fijian urban Form 4 students based on scores in each subject on the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) Examinations. He further compared ethnic Fijian and Indo-Fijian students on a number of home background variables. They were: (a) father's educational level; (b) living with parents; (c) distance from home; (d) the number of people in the household; (e) being able to do homework; (f) receiving homework assistance; (g) the number of books at home; (h) access to textbooks; (i) career aspirations, and (j) educational aspirations. Nabuka (1983) found that Indo-Fijian students attained higher scores on all subjects, other than Geography. Based on his research results, Nabuka (1984) reported that ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians differed the most, and at a statistically significant level, on the following variables: (1) living with parents; (2) the number of books at home; (3) the father's educational level, and (4) access to textbooks. He concluded that these factors were possibly the more critical variables in explaining differences between ethnic Fijian and Indo-Fijian achievement levels. Like Elley's (1982) study, Nabuka (1984) argued that ethnic Fijians have more disadvantages in

their home environments than Indo-Fijians.

Sofield (1983) correlated the achievement levels (i.e., examination scores on the FJC Examination) of 45 ethnic Fijian and 55 Indo-Fijian Form 4 students with the following socio-cultural variables. They were: (a) socio-economic status, parents' aspiration for their children's future education and occupation; (b) level of English usage; (c) level of personal independence, and (d) individualistic-collectivistic value orientations. Sofield (1983) derived the above variables from interviews with students and questionnaires for parents. She has found that there was no significant relationship between these variables and academic achievement. However, she further found that Indo-Fijian families expressed higher aspirations for their children's education and future career choice, and that more English was spoken in the home than their ethnic Fijian counterparts.

Dakuidreketi (1995) has investigated cultural factors contributing to academic achievement of first year science students at the University of South Pacific (i.e., USP). His research was based on a qualitative and quantitative study that used interviews and questionnaire as the main research methodology for data collection. Interviews were conducted with 20 ethnic Fijian science students and 6 science lecturers together with data that was collected from 80 first-year students. His study found that the key factors contributing to the academic performance could be explained with respect to: (1) Students' Home Background; (2) Institutional Characteristics; (3) Students, and (4) External Influence. There was a "mismatch" between students' cultural norms and those required by the USP to be successful. Ethnic Fijian cultural upbringing tends to hinder their academic performance. In addition, ethnic Fijian low socio-economic status had some effect on their performance. But, the problem is much deeper than these socio-economic factors, as ethnic Fijian students' performance is also affected by the characteristics of their schools. In particular, the majority of ethnic Fijian schools tend to place more emphasis on sports rather than on academics. The unavailability of resources in most rural ethnic Fijian secondary schools affected

the quality of teaching, which further affected the quality of students coming to the USP during their first year studies.

In rural schools, teachers are often not well qualified, experienced and trained. Many rural secondary schools have a relatively high number of diploma holders, in their first or second year of teaching, whereas more than a half of the teaching staff in urban schools are university graduates (Ministry of Education, 2000). Many teachers at ethnic Fijian schools in rural areas are newly appointed grant-in-aid teachers who often hold acting positions. According to the Ministry of Education (2000), there were, overall, 1,077 grant-in-aid teachers in 1998 and 1,153 in 1999. These teachers are probably not secure and satisfied about their position. Teachers often go to a rural school for their first appointment to gain a position in the teaching service and then move to an urban school to secure a promotion (Tavola, 1991). On the other hand, many qualified, committed and experienced teachers at ethnic Fijian schools are now reaching the retirement age. Indo-Fijian teachers are significantly absent from rural schools, especially secondary schools in islands. Indo-Fijian teachers are often more qualified than their ethnic Fijian counterparts in subject areas such as Science, Mathematics and Technical subjects (Ministry of Education, 2000).

A teacher's good care for her/his teaching subject and students can encourage students greatly. However, generally speaking, many young teachers who have just completed diplomas and degrees often find it very difficult to teach effectively (Ministry of Education, 2000). Moreover, until quite recently, some schools had to appoint those who only completed secondary school diplomas to their teaching staff at times, due to a serious shortage of teachers (Robertson & Sutherland, 2001). It is particularly difficult for these high school graduates to manage the classroom where some children cause trouble and some "slow" learners are behind, which may be influenced by their culture to some extent. Hence, it is vital to have well-experienced teachers at rural schools. However, as a positive note, the Ministry of Education has recently introduced a new regulation to the teacher employment system in Fiji. According to the Ministry's Affirmative

Action Program, newly appointed teachers have to serve the first three years of their teaching in rural school (Ministry of Education, 2000). Tavola (1991) has pointed out that some brighter rural children from a relatively well-off family leave their rural schools to attend urban schools, leaving the less capable behind. This lowers overall academic performance in rural areas even further.

Other external factors found to affect ethnic Fijian students' performance at the USP included: (a) the sponsoring of ethnic Fijian students with low entry marks; (b) the students' inadaptability to the university environment; (c) the absence of ethnic Fijian student role models and supporting environment; (e) the attitude of lecturers towards students and the lack of parental involvement in terms of educational pressure and assistance, and (e) the influence of peer groups.

White's (1997) readable thesis (more than 300,000 words in length!) has examined cultural influences on academic performance, by conducting a case study at a racially mixed secondary school in the Viti Levu Island of Fiji, which has the country's major economic industries, such as sugar cane, tourism and gold mines, and the capital Suva. She administered a questionnaire with 70 students from the school (i.e., 54 ethnic Fijians, 13 Indo-Fijians, 2 Pacific Islanders and 1 Chinese). She further conducted face-to-face interviews with Form 2 and 3 students. She has found that not only ethnic Fijian cultural values and behavioural norms, but also peer group influences (e.g., the influence of teasing on academic performance) and teacher responses (e.g., teachers' negative assumptions and reactions towards students) are the most significant in the school setting in influencing academic performance. In particular, in the absence of parental or teacher support, the peer group becomes the most important agent directly influencing students' performance in the form of academic pressure.

The next two sections discuss Indo-Fijian and ethnic Fijian cultural values and beliefs in achievements. What kind of achievement does each culture encourage children to value highly?

## **Indo-Fijian Cultural Values and Beliefs in Achievements: What does their Culture Expect Children to Value?**

Indo-Fijian culture generally expects children to value education highly. Indo-Fijians espouse great respect for schooling and, indeed, they value formal education highly and it is rooted in their culture. According to an Indo-Fijian folk saying that often appears in their conversation, “the difference between an educated and uneducated person is the difference between the earth and the sky!” Indo-Fijians believe that education can open new worlds. Indo-Fijian parents and children alike view formal education as an investment in their future. They perceive a strong and positive correlation between the amount of education s/he has and the type of employment s/he can expect to obtain.

Therefore, Indo-Fijians note that an uneducated person has no value. Both boys and girls repeatedly receive almost the same advice from their elders and parents with respect to their school behaviour. Although boys are traditionally more expected to receive higher formal education than girls (Ministry of Education, 2000), parents encourage their children, both daughters and sons, to acquire credentials that can lead to well-paid employment. In India, indeed, educated people have generally occupied business and professional niches as well as public-sector employment (Gibson, 1988). Likewise, in Fiji, most private business sectors are run by Indo-Fijians. They greatly outnumber ethnic Fijians in business (Government of Fiji, 1988).

It is, however, clear that, overall, Indo-Fijian children perform well. Parents of ‘lower’ socio-economic status and those with an “uneducated” background still encourage their children to do well at school. Accordingly, these parents often tell children to do home work before going to bed. Therefore, among Indo-Fijians, it is impossible to make direct casual linkages between parental background and a child’s success at school (Tavola, 1991). Parents’ income and education is no predictor of school grades for Indo-Fijian youth. Many mothers and quite a few fathers in Tavola’s (1991) study have themselves had only a very limited amount of schooling. A

very few mothers has finished high school. As a matter of fact, in Indo-Fijian culture, even if parents themselves have little education, they nearly always have access to highly educated individuals through their extended kin group or through the local Hindi temple (Ali, 1979; Kelly, 1991). Such individuals are held up as role models for their children. Accordingly, parental involvement in children's education is of great importance. Indo-Fijian parents, whether or not they themselves have had the opportunity to finish high school, still want their children to receive their diplomas.

Consequently, Indo-Fijian parents have a tendency to place pressure on their children to excel academically. Indo-Fijians urge children to place school work first, ahead of house work, jobs and social activities, in particular, even including those sponsored by the schools. Parents and elders expect their children to do well academically. They often admonish children to do better by trying harder and by asking their teachers for help. Indo-Fijian folk beliefs say: "Hardship breeds success and one can only become successful if one has known hardship!" Practically speaking, if a child does not do well at school, parents often blame her/him. Thus, self-discipline is a crucial factor for Indo-Fijian academic success.

Indo-Fijians generally see education as bringing credit to the whole family. Indo-Fijians believe that if one relative gets educated, a whole sub-caste raises its status. They can get better matches for their daughters and sons. They can also get help from an educated person and cite her or him as example to the younger generation to create an even more educated set of people. Accordingly, parents constantly remind their children to think of themselves as being as good as anyone else. For example, children are often told stories of those who have overcome adversity-perhaps the death of one's father at an early age or being born of parents in very humble circumstances-to become highly respected doctors and lawyers. Furthermore, parents and elders often say to their children (Nabuka, 1983): "Obey your teachers!" "Do your school work!" "Stay out of trouble!" "You are there to learn!" "Keep trying harder!" "Keep pushing yourself!" Thus, a child who



brings home a poor report card is told s/he has not tried hard enough and is made to feel a failure. When word of poor performance reaches relatives and family friends, children may even be ignored socially! Parents believe that this sanction generally serves as a deterrent to mediocre academic performance and helps instil a desire to acquire top marks. Parents monitor their children's out-of-school activities carefully, even during the late teenage years, in order to avoid "bad company" that might distract from the main goal of getting on in the educational systems. Children are taught that their teens are a time for diligence at school and they will be able to enjoy themselves socially later on. However, excessive pressure on children for academic success often causes serious psychological problems, and the extreme case often leads teenagers to a suicide. In Fiji, the suicide rate among teenagers (aged from 13 to 18 years) has been increasing: 57 Indo-Fijians (i.e., 45 boys and 12 girls) committed suicide in 2003, compared to 50 (i.e., 36 boys and 14 girls) in 2002 (Narayan, 2003a). These rates were more than three times higher than those of ethnic Fijians. There were 18 ethnic Fijians (i.e., 16 boys and 2 girls) who committed suicide in 2003, compared to 13 (i.e., 10 boys and 3 girls) in 2002.

Consequently, parental involvement in education is a strong factor influencing children's school performance. It is reported by Otsuka (2004) that a father of an Indo-Fijian fourth form female student checks her workbook from time to time without any notice. If she does not do much on her school work, according to her father's perception, he gives her a severe scolding. Or, another father of an Indo-Fijian sixth form male student hit him on his back with a wooden stick when he dropped academically to the 8<sup>th</sup> place in his class. It may even be fair to say that typical Indo-Fijian parents have a strong tendency to control their children's study. Over 90% of ethnic Fijian students across secondary school forms and genders perceive that typical Indo-Fijian parents are very strict about their children's studies. Nearly 80% of ethnic Fijian students perceive that Indo-Fijian students concentrate on their studies, put a lot of efforts into school work, or they are very good at studies (Otsuka, 2004).

Parents think that school work should come first, ahead of house work, jobs and especially social activities. In fact, Indo-Fijian children are culturally conditioned to be conformists and submissive to the mandates of their parents, relatives and teachers. In general, Indian children are often disappointed if their parents and teachers do not tell them what to do (Gibson, 2000). This cultural factor also plays an important role in encouraging children to work hard at school. People from the West such as Australians also recognise the importance of parental involvement in children's schooling (e.g., Baxter, 1983; Irvin, 2000). Carpenter (1985) reported that the Australian interpersonal influence on significant others, especially of parents, teachers and friends, within children's academic achievement is one of the most important predictors. However, parents generally feel that their children's performance should not be the focus of their parenting, but children's social development should be of foremost concern (Chao, 1996). In sum, parents' aspirations for their children and the support, which they give them, together with the students' own goals and assumptions about the value of schooling, are probably more important factors in explaining Indo-Fijian performance than parental education and income. That is to say that academic achievements are representatives of what an individual could accomplish regardless of parental income and education. Indeed, Indo-Fijian children work hard at schooling despite the fact that their parents had little formal education.

### **Ethnic Fijian Cultural Values and Beliefs in Achievements: What does their Culture Expect Children to Value?**

Ethnic Fijian culture expects children to develop a strong sense of their loyalty to *vakaturaga* in *vanua* ethos. *Vanua* is of vital importance to understand their cultural values and beliefs. The term refers to the land area with which a person or a group is identified (i.e., the totality of an ethnic Fijian community). The land is a source not only of identity, but also strength, insurance and livelihood (Nabobo, 2001). In fact, ethnic Fijians hold title to 83% of the archipelago's land, while Indo-Fijian farmers hold long-term leases as cane cutters (White,

2001). *Vanua* also refers to a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another. According to Ravuvu (1987), the term embodies the ethnic Fijian values and beliefs which people of a particular locality have in common. “It includes their philosophy of living, and their beliefs about life in this world and in the supernatural world” (Ravuvu, 1987, p. 15). Life on earth (*varavura*) is closely tied to spiritualism and the supernatural: nature and the heavens. Thus, ethnic Fijians have a tendency to understand that one’s inappropriate behaviour or sorcery of some kind causes one’s illness. Therefore, an appreciation of the cultural *vanua* is the key concept for one’s actions and thought. In addition, *vakaturaga* (i.e., the chiefly manner) is probably the most important concept among ethnic Fijians, which refers to actions and personal characteristics befitting the presence of a person of high status, such as a chief and her/his representatives and counterparts. Hence, those who are *vakaturaga* in behaviour know their place in the community and act appropriately. People comply with their various social obligations, their service to others and respect for those who have defined authority over them. In particular, the practice of respect is an important aspect of the *vakaturaga* concept.

Practically speaking, one’s involvement in communal activities in the village, such as preparation and attendance at ceremonies like funerals and weddings, is of great importance in order to express one’s appreciation for *vakaturaga* in *vanua* ethos. Ceremonies highlight critical points of ethnic Fijian life: initiation of the young into their communities, marriage, repair of ruptured relationships and death (Ravuvu, 1987). It often takes weeks to conduct the funeral ceremonies, and it takes even longer to get things done for a wedding, including long-term-preparation for that occasion-sometimes it takes nearly a year! This includes cultivating gardens, raising pigs, cattle and so on. To ethnic Fijians, ceremonies are essential in providing fulfilment, identity, co-operation among themselves and others. Also, one’s participation in ceremonies maintains one’s social links, status and recognition. It is one’s expression of

genuine love, care, support and concern one has for her/his fellow men. Ravuvu (1988) has explained that the ethnic Fijian ideals of sharing and caring are embodied in such terms as *veivukei* (giving a helping hand), *veinanumi* (consideration of others), *veilomani* (being loving and friendly to one another) and *yalo vata* (of being the same spirit). Therefore, “apart from those who are directly involved or formally informed of any happening, many others who casually know about the occasion or accidentally come across it often feel obligated also to participate” (Ravuvu, 1987, p. 330). Ethnic Fijian attitudes towards loving and caring about each other develop their sense of generosity, co-operation, solidarity and harmonious social relations.

Moreover, one’s contribution to the Christian church, commonly the Methodist church (see Ewins, 1998), is the most obvious manifestation of ethnic Fijian *vanua*. Even among ethnic Fijians who live overseas such as Sydney, adhering to a religion is of vital importance. Over 92% of ethnic Fijians in Sydney are practising church members in Sydney (Stanwix & Connell, 1995). For ethnic Fijians, church generally has three functions: (1) It provides ethnic Fijians with a place to socialise and to have a religious service. (2) It facilitates the exchange of information like social events and issues, and (3) it encourages interaction and communication between people from different villages. Thus, the church can be a point of liaison between participants from different communities, since different provincials come to attend a church, even from a distance. That is to say that commitment to the church by ethnic Fijians is very strong.

One’s participation in ceremonies and church activities enhances one’s total commitment to communal expectations and requirements. Thus, “the Ethnic Fijian society promotes communal living and work as opposed to individual aspirations for the sake of individual advancement” (Nabobo, 2001, p. 59). However, I would say that one’s motivation to achieve an education may be a rather personal investment, not only for cultivating and nurturing one’s

intellectual capability, but also for affording one’s future opportunities and possibilities (see, e.g., Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). I would further say that, as personal investment, education may be a very individualistic activity. One has to think, analyse critically, review, create and express one’s view independently either in written form or orally. According to Kishor’s (1983) study, Indo-Fijian children have a more internal locus of control orientation than their ethnic Fijian counterparts (see Table 4 below), and “the internally oriented person who normally believes ‘success’ is dependent on one’s own hard work would be more willing to expend effort toward academic goals” (Kishor, 1983, p. 298). Therefore, he concluded that individuals with greater internal orientation, such as Indo-Fijians, achieve at higher levels than externally oriented individuals such as ethnic Fijians.

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviation for Internal Locus of Control by Sex and Ethnicity

Gender	Ethnic Fijians			Indo-Fijians		
	Mean	S. D.	N.	Mean	S. D.	N.
Male	22.57	6.17	137	28.37	5.25	141
Female	23.50	6.40	135	27.84	6.55	132
Total	23.02	6.29	272	28.11	5.95	273

Source: Kishor, N. (1983). Locus of Control and Academic Achievement: Ethnic Differences among Fijians. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 14(3): 297-308.

Accordingly, one has to see education as a ‘beneficial tool’ in long term interest. However, ethnic Fijians are more likely to expect to see benefits from things that happen, including education, in the rather short term (Ravuvu, 1983; Lasaqa, 1984). Their attitude towards ‘living for the day’ and ‘tomorrow will look after itself’, for instance, tends to reveal that the way they spend or share the money, if it is there. They expect to get help if it is not there. That is, the importance of personal investment in education has traditionally not been a high priority; instead, maintaining communal solidarity has been heavily emphasised (Ravuvu, 1987). Deane (1921) has argued that individual services are required everywhere by the program of communal work. Although he argued this more than 80 years ago, loyalty and respect to one’s chief and communal demands still continue to be exercised among many ethnic Fijian communities today. Even so-called well-educated ethnic Fijians still strongly

preserve their cultural values and beliefs in communal activities and traditions (Ewins, 1998). In consequence, it is very difficult for ethnic Fijians to separate themselves completely from their own people or their *vanua*, although individual freedom of choice has been emphasised recently. For example, marriages and mobility are not as restrictive for men or women as much as they were in the past. Thus, free interaction between the sexes with members of other groups is not severely limited and firmly controlled any more. But, becoming a good member of the community is still one of the most important priorities among ethnic Fijians. Most people, in fact, feel privileged to commit themselves to communal activities.

## **Discussion**

Therefore, according to ethnic Fijian cultural values, parental investment in children's education is not as important as one's participation in communal activities. Indeed, education as a topic is less discussed in ethnic Fijian homes than Indo-Fijian homes. Approximately 62% of ethnic Fijians even did not know their fathers' education, compared with 18% of Indo-Fijians. Similarly, 55% of ethnic Fijians did not know their mothers' education, while 20% of Indo-Fijians (Tavola, 1991). Nevertheless, ethnic Fijian parents in general understand the importance of educating children at school (Ewins, 1998). For this purpose, some parents make tremendous efforts to support their children financially. Parents from rural areas even migrate to towns in order to find jobs that allow them to be close to their children's school, and, in many instances, throughout Fiji, some villagers spend considerable effort to raise money to improve the education of their children (Lasaqa, 1984). Such efforts are made by ethnic Fijians not only because they regard the provision of a good education for their children as an obligation they cannot avoid, but also because it is hoped that the children, through education, will be able to bring knowledge and kudos to the family.

However, ethnic Fijian communal demands are enormous both financially and instrumentally, and they are substantial. Therefore, considerable pressure from maintaining their moral obligations within the community tends to make ethnic Fijians spend a large amount of time and money on ceremonies, somewhat at the expense of their freedom of choice and their children's education (Ravuvu, 1987). Many ethnic Fijians suffer physically and financially to participate in ceremonies. For instance, according to Ravuvu's (1987) report, in some rural ethnic Fijian villages, six ceremonies were carried out and involved residents, non-residents, foreign visitors and ethnic Fijians. It took those ethnic Fijians eleven days to travel to each one of the ceremonies and another ten days to conduct the ceremonies. Besides, the ceremonies involved a total of 1,411 people including one's relatives, neighbours, friends and workmates, for an average of just over five days each. But, the cost was assessed at more than \$F81, 300-an average of \$F57.00 each, which was about a quarter of the annual per capita income of rural villages in the area. The goods alone were worth \$F30.00 per person. Much of the resources actually came from those who were working in town, but an average of their income was between 30 cents and \$1.50 per hour. There are even some ethnic Fijians who have to rely on remittances that are sent from their family and relatives living overseas. A study (Stanwix & Connell, 1995) suggested that more than 20% of remittances, which an ethnic Fijian family in Fiji received from their relatives in Sydney, was used for ceremonies and social obligations. In a year, almost two-thirds of ethnic Fijian households in Sydney remitted A\$1,000 or more. In some cases, ethnic Fijians remitted up to 50% of their income! "Ethnic Fijian remittances are substantial, involve sacrifices by the remitters and have a considerable impact in Fiji at the household and village level" (Stanwix & Connell, 1995, p. 85). Communal remittances have definite goals for the development and improvement of projects that affect the whole village in Fiji. Besides, typical ethnic Fijian attitude towards the use of time often consumes a great deal of time in events. For instance, it is not uncommon that the village meeting, that is supposed to begin 'after lunch', actually starts at 4:00 p.m. or

even later (Nabobo, 2001). Or, it took an ethnic Fijian secondary school in the Sigatoka region a whole day to conduct the class photograph session! It is, therefore, inevitable to spend such amount of time to conduct most events (e.g., ceremonies and church activities) according to the ethnic Fijian value system.

In addition to the cost of ceremonies and church, the traditional ethnic Fijian socio-economic system, which still remains to a great extent, is a barrier to savings, thrift and capital accumulation. In particular, the survival of the ethnic Fijian custom called *kere kere* (which literally means the practice of borrowing amongst kin, at the will/request of the borrower) causes ethnic Fijians to fail to break into the modern individualistic economy. Many ethnic Fijian shops, for instance, have foundered due to this rigid system (see Lloyd, 1982). Individuals are expected to be ready, at any time, to lend their in-group people (often including those from other villages who are not related to them) not only their money but also their “belongings”. This is largely due to their moral obligation within their community. It is very common that once their “belongings” are borrowed, they are almost never returned. Due to this traditional ethnic Fijian custom (i.e., *kere kere*), people often incur extra expenses.

But, it should be noted that, historically, many Indo-Fijians have been at a greater disadvantage economically than ethnic Fijians (Mann, 1935). In fact, Indo-Fijians have belonged to the poorest group of the country (Ministry of Education, 2000). This trend was still evident in the early 1990s; 31.0% of Indo-Fijians were below the basic poverty line, compared to 27.7% of their ethnic Fijian counterparts (Ministry of Education, 2000) (see Table 5 below).



Table 5: The Basic Poverty Line by Ethnicity, 1990-1991

Ethnicity	Minimum Gross Household Income Required to Meet Basic Needs Each Week (\$)	Percentage of the Population Earning less Than the Poverty Line
National	83.00	25.5
Ethnic Fijians	92.63	27.7
Indo-Fijians	97.34	31.0
Others	92.63	27.6

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva, Fiji: Ministry of Education.

79.0% of ethnic Fijians, and 89.0% of Indo-Fijians belonged to so-called disadvantaged classes such as small farmers, wage workers, the peasantry, unpaid family workers and the unemployed (Robertson & Sutherland, 2001). “Lower-income Indo-Fijian households were worse off in terms of their income levels than lower-income ethnic Fijian households, with the lowest 10.0% of Indo-Fijians having an average income that was 14.0% lower than the lowest-income ethnic Fijians” (Ministry of Education, 2000, pp. 44-45). Nevertheless, the Indo-Fijian school attainment rate is higher than their ethnic Fijian counterparts (Government of Fiji, 2003). I would argue that the way parents spend money is probably culturally different from Indo-Fijians to ethnic Fijians. For the former, sending children to school regularly is of great importance. Hence, they spend money on children’s schooling, after feeding themselves. Even children themselves with an under-privileged background try to make money for utilities for their study. At times, children as young as 10 years of age attempt to make money for this purpose, by selling fish and vegetables in the street and market (Baselala, 2003; Sharma, 2003). Whereas, for the latter, it is inevitable to spend money on communal demands.

Consequently, it is often very difficult for both ethnic parents to spend money on children’s education. In particular, many ethnic Fijian parents cannot afford their children’s basic educational utilities, such as school maintenance fees (commonly called “building fees” or “ground fees”), school/sports uniforms, stationery, bus fares (in Fiji, a major transport among

children is a bus), meals (i.e., lunch) and so on (Puamau, 2002). Some well-facilitated schools often charge so-called book guarantees of up to F\$100.00 and more a year, which covers hire of students' textbooks for one academic year and it is refundable according to the particular conditions. Some primary schools even charge F\$40.00 per term (schools in Fiji, both primary and secondary, have three terms a year). A primary school in Suva, for instance, charges F\$70.00 just for enrolment fees and this does not include other utilities like "building fees", "ground fees", sports uniform, etc. A Methodist primary school in Sigatoka requires F\$10.00 for each term of one academic year (i.e., a total of F\$30.00 a year to pay the school maintenance fees). There are even some secondary schools which levy F\$60.00 to F\$70.00 'building fees' a year (Narayan, 2003b). Furthermore, many ethnic Fijian secondary school students attend boarding school. In 1987, for instance, nearly one third of ethnic Fijian Form 4 students were attending boarding schools (Meleisea, 1987). Parents have to pay the boarding fees, which is a burden (Lasaqa, 1984).

As a result, some children have to end their schooling even during the primary school stage, despite the 'fee-free' educational policy for both ethnic groups in Fiji. In fact, ethnic Fijian children, overall, leave school earlier than their Indo-Fijian counterparts (Puamau, 2002).

According to the progress of the 1988 cohort for 13 years by ethnicity (Ministry of Education, 2000), by the time of Class 4 (aged 9 years) at primary school starting in 1991, 16% of ethnic Fijian children had already dropped out of the school, while 4% of Indo-Fijians had done so (Ministry of Education, 2000). When the final year (mostly Class 8, aged 13 years) of primary schooling in many urban areas began in 1995, another 10% of ethnic Fijian children dropped out while 2% of Indo-Fijians left school between Class 4 and Class 8 in the same period. By the time of the Fiji Junior Certificate Examination conducted at the end of Form 4 in 1997, 48% of ethnic Fijian students had dropped out. 52% of ethnic Fijians (i.e., 5,811 students) continued up to the next form level (i.e., Form 5, aged 16 years), compared to 61% of Indo-

Fijian counterparts (i.e., 5,922 students) who went on to that form level. Of 11,117 total ethnic Fijian enrolments in Class 1 (aged 6 years) in 1988, 5,733 ethnic Fijian students (52%) reached Form 6 at secondary school in 1999. This means that 48% of ethnic Fijian students dropped out of the school before they reached Form 6. Out of these dropouts (i.e., 5,384 people), 2,170 students were male students and 3,214 were their female counterparts (the dropout rate; 37% and 61% for boys and girls, respectively). Eventually, 1,247 ethnic Fijian children reached Form 7 in 2000: 22% of ethnic Fijian Sixth formers went up to that form level. That is to say, 11% of ethnic Fijians attained Form 7 and the rest of ethnic Fijian children (i.e., 89%) all left school before arriving at that form level (see Table 6 below). In particular, at the secondary level, according to the Government of Fiji (2003), approximately 0.9% of a total enrolment of Indo-Fijian secondary students, from Form 3 (aged 14 years) to Form 7, took up the Form 7 enrolment in 2002, while it was 0.4% of their ethnic Fijian counterparts.

Table 6: Progress of the 1988 Cohort for 13 Years by Ethnicity & Gender

Year	Class	Ethnic Fijians			Indo-Fijians		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1988	Class 1	5,846	5,271	11,117	5,053	4,685	9,738
1989	Class 2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1990	Class 3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1991	Class 4			9,325			9,311
1992	Class 5	4,829	4,790	9,619	4,889	4,677	9,566
1993	Class 6	4,566	4,518	9,084	4,603	4,476	9,079
1994	Class 7/Form 1	4,486	4,508	8,994	4,479	4,487	8,966
1995	Class 8/Form 2	4,213	4,010	8,223	4,602	4,587	9,189
1996	Form 3	3,614	3,785	7,399	3,919	4,343	8,262
1997	Form 4	3,283	3,623	6,906	3,601	3,938	7,539
1998	Form 5	2,858	2,953	5,811	2,763	3,159	5,922
1999	Form 6	2,632	3,101	5,733	2,830	3,182	6,012
2000	Form 7			1,247			2,604

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva: Ministry of Education.

This statistical data on the ethnic Fijian retention rate clearly show that ethnic Fijian secondary schoolers are more likely to drop out of the school than their primary school

counterparts (see Table 6 above). Moreover, ethnic Fijian performance at secondary school is lower than that of their primary school counterparts (see, e.g., Lasaqa, 1984). At the primary school level, ethnic Fijians, indeed, perform better than their Indo-Fijian counterparts in some subject areas such as English. The results of the externally examined Fiji Intermediate Entrance Examination (FIEE) conducted in 1999 (Ministry of Education, 2000), for which students sat at the end of Class 6 (aged 12 years) of primary education, suggested the following. Of ethnic Fijian boys who sat for the FIEE, 94.3% passed the English Composition, compared with 89.4% of Indo-Fijian boys who passed that subject. 98.2% of ethnic Fijian girls passed the same subject, whereas 95.5% of their Indo-Fijian counterparts passed. 93.7% of ethnic Fijian boys passed the English Comprehension, as compared with 93.2% of their Indo-Fijian counterparts. 98.1% of ethnic Fijian girls passed the English Comprehension, while it was 96.2% of Indo-Fijian girls who passed that subject (see Table 7 & 8 below).

Table 7: Results of a Sample of 1999 Intermediate Examination Marks, by Gender and Ethnicity

Subject	Ethnic Fijians (Female)			Indo-Fijians (Female)		
	Sat	Pass	Pass (%)	Sat	Pass	Pass (%)
English Composition	639	628	98.2	476	455	95.5
English Comprehension	639	627	98.1	476	458	96.2

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva, Fiji: Ministry of Education.

Table 8: Results of a Sample of 1999 Intermediate Examination Marks, by Gender and Ethnicity

Subject	Ethnic Fijians (Male)			Indo-Fijians (Male)		
	Sat	Pass	Pass(%)	Sat	Pass	Pass(%)
English Composition	672	634	94.3	567	507	89.4
English Comprehension	672	630	93.7	567	529	93.2

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva, Fiji: Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, completion rates of ethnic Fijian tertiary qualifications tend to be low despite the existence of a number of scholarship schemes reserved for ethnic Fijian students. The

Ministry of Fijian Affairs Scholarship Scheme, for example, allocated a higher education award to 6,252 ethnic Fijians between 1984 and 1999, but just over 2,466 ethnic Fijian scholarship holders (39.4%) graduated from tertiary institutions (Robertson & Sutherland, 2001). Of these figures, 24.7% of ethnic Fijians (i.e., 774 students), who held that scholarship, graduated from the University of South Pacific (USP) in Suva in the same period. 51.5% of ethnic Fijians (i.e., 1,220 candidates) satisfied the requirements of the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) on that scholarship, and 65.2% of ethnic Fijian scholarship holders (i.e., 43 people) received a graduate certificate at the Fiji School of Medicine (FSM). At the Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA), 74.6% of ethnic Fijian students (i.e., 50 scholarship holders) finished their certificate (see Table 9 below).

Table 9: Ministry of Fijian Affairs Tertiary Scholarships, 1984-1999

Institutions	Scholarships	Graduates	% Graduating
Overseas	526	319	60.7
University of South Pacific	3,133	774	24.7
Fiji Institute of Technology	2,369	1,220	51.5
Fiji School of Medicine	66	43	65.2
Fiji College of Agriculture	67	50	74.6
Corpus Christian Teachers' College	20	12	60.0
Fiji College of Advanced Education	2	2	100.0
Fulton College	14	10	71.4
Pilot Training	55	36	65.5
Total	6,252	2,466	39.4

Source: Ministry of Education (2000). *Learning Together: Directions for Education in the Fiji Islands*. Suva: Ministry of Education.

Accordingly, ethnic Fijian under-achievement at the tertiary level makes no exceptions. An analysis of 1994 USP units has shown that ethnic Fijian students were approximately three times as likely to be failing than their Indo-Fijian counterparts (Narsey, 1994). Table 10 indicates that 37% of ethnic Fijian students failed the Economic Unit (EC102), in contrast to

13% of their Indo-Fijian counterparts. 17% of ethnic Fijians failed in the Economic Unit (EC203) in the same year, as compared with 5% of their Indo-Fijian counterparts.

Table 10: Performance in EC102 & EC203 at USP (per cent)

Unit	Ethnic Fijians			Indo-Fijians		
	Grade A/B	Grade C	Fail	Grade A/B	Grade C	Fail
EC102	6	57	37	16	71	13
EC203	43	40	17	80	15	5

Source: Narsey, W. (1994). *Fijian Academic Performance at USP: Where are the Problem?* Unpublished Paper. Suva: USP.

These data listed above (i.e., Table 7, 8, 9 & 10) could suggest that, as compared with ethnic Fijian primary schoolers, their adolescent counterparts (i.e., secondary and tertiary students) are probably expected to be more involved in their communal activities and obligations to participate in ceremonies including their preparation and travelling, despite the fact that many ethnic Fijian secondary schoolers attend boarding school. Ethnic Fijian adolescents spend a large amount of time working on communal activities (Ravuvu, 1987). Thus, they may find it rather difficult to spare enough time for their homework and study. Accordingly, ethnic Fijian students perform better at primary level than secondary level. These data may further suggest that ethnic Fijian primary schoolers are freer from their communal obligations than their secondary school counterparts, or even their tertiary counterparts, so they can concentrate on their school work. Besides, typical ethnic Fijian home situation is a difficult environment for children's study. Ethnic Fijian homes are usually crowded and have little privacy, and this often deprives children of the time and space to study (White, 2001). Thus, children's concentration on their homework is often distracted. In particular, adolescents who become more independent and need their privacy (see Peterson, 1996) might find it even more difficult to study at home. That is, the socio-cultural background of the ethnic Fijians is a disadvantage in children's educational progress.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed cultural values, beliefs and practices affecting achievement in the Fiji context. Indo-Fijian culture encourages children to value schooling highly. For this purpose, social support such as parental involvement and understanding of children's education is of importance in order for children to strive for their academic "success". On the other hand, ethnic Fijian culture expects children to have a strong sense of loyalty to their community. It is crucial for them to become good members of the community (i.e., village). Therefore, one's involvement in communal activities is of vital importance. Children's schooling is not taken as their first priority according to ethnic Fijian cultural values and practices. Consequently, Indo-Fijian students generally become better performers than their ethnic Fijian counterparts.

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