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## Using A Polar Grounded Composite To Describe The Socio-Cultural Determinants Of ESL Teaching In Rural Fijian Schools

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## Using A Polar Grounded Composite To Describe The Socio-Cultural Determinants Of ESL Teaching In Rural Fijian Schools

### Abstract

This paper utilizes a grounded narrative to report on the most culturally-Fijian characteristics of teaching. The grounded narrative is a qualitative reporting methodology used to convey the Fijian educational setting vividly and authentically. It highlights the salient cultural characteristics that typify Fijian teaching by depicting a most culturally-extreme Fijian rural school, the 'ideal type'. This description effectively highlights the sociocultural determinants of Fijian school ethos by reporting on extreme aspects of English teaching and daily school management.

### Keywords

Qualitative Reporting, Grounded Narrative, Grounded Theory, ESL, Teaching Methods, and Fiji

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# **Using A Polar Grounded Composite To Describe The Socio-Cultural Determinants Of ESL Teaching In Rural Fijian Schools**

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*This paper utilises a grounded narrative to report on the most culturally-Fijian characteristics of teaching. The grounded narrative is a qualitative reporting methodology used to convey the Fijian educational setting vividly and authentically. It highlights the salient cultural characteristics that typify Fijian teaching by depicting a most culturally-extreme Fijian rural school, the 'ideal type'. This description effectively highlights the sociocultural determinants of Fijian school ethos by reporting on extreme aspects of English teaching and daily school management. Key words: Qualitative Reporting, Grounded Narrative, Grounded Theory, ESL, Teaching Methods, and Fiji*

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## **Introduction**

This paper utilises a grounded narrative to describe major sociocultural characteristics that determine the ethos and administration of Fijian rural secondary schools and that influence their teaching of a common 'English as a Second Language' curriculum.

The ethnographic field work informing this article was conducted in eight rural Fijian secondary schools over three years. Polar analyses of salient observations were coalesced and reported as characteristics of one fictional characteristically-Fijian secondary school. These polar characteristics are grounded by references to the data. This original phenomenological qualitative reporting technique, which I call 'grounded composite narrative', is derived from Weber's 'ideal type' and Grounded Theory methodology.

This paper presents (1) the grounded narrative as a qualitative reporting methodology, then uses the grounded narrative to describe (2) a fictitious rural Fijian secondary school: Koronivuli Lomolomo and (3) its interpretation of the 'English as a Second Language' (ESL) curriculum.

### **1 The grounded narrative as communicative qualitative reporting methodology**

*The grounded narrative as an interpretive tool for etic context-representation*

The grounded narrative is a qualitative reporting methodology that I used for vividly describing the Fijian educational research context. It is a narrative, grounded in insiders' experiences (Halliwell, 1995) and anchored in reality, which should be seen as "opening a window on the mind, or... as opening a window on their culture" (Cortazzi,

1993, pp. 1-2). This methodology provides an emic contextual dimension to etic context-representation and allows the grounding of abstract analytic concepts in concrete particulars. The resulting richly vivid descriptive narrative allows the reader to vicariously and emphatically experience the anthropological research context by reorganising and reconstructing its context to create personally relevant meaning.

To this end, I developed three types of grounded narratives. The first is the polar grounded composite of extreme characteristics which functions as a stereotype. The second is the bi-polar grounded composite that contrasts two contexts. This is used for describing two fictitious contexts, each embodying contrasting characteristics. The third type is the modal grounded composite that typifies the research context by a description embodying its modal characteristics.

This article uses the polar grounded narrative which is an extension of Weber's 'ideal type':

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (*Gedankenbild*). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct... cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a utopia. (Weber, 1949, pp. 89-90)

This unified analytical mental construct allows for the creation of a vivid description of the most culturally-extreme characteristics of Fijian rural secondary schools by coalescing them into one fictional school. The polar grounded composite narrative is thus a method of qualitative data reduction, condensing extensive rich ethnographic data while rigorously retaining their situated meaning. It has, in particular, allowed extreme Fijian characteristics to be reported. These extreme characteristics are observed in the most rural of Fijian schools. They may, however, remain unnoticed in culturally-moderate Fijian schools, such as those in urban areas.

The validity of this narrative is in the grounding of the description of this fictional Fijian school to the data. The description is primarily composed of its own illustrative evidence. This evidence is a text unit, such as verbatim quotations, cited by their transcription document names and text unit numbers (from NUD\*IST). These text units are prime markers of categories of text units describing the polar composite. These categories emerged from iterative qualitative analysis and verification in the field. For this analysis, all text units were initially multiple open coded to retain their contextual meanings. Text units describing extreme Fijian characteristics, identified as traditional and different from those in urban areas, were categorised by successive iterations of qualitative analysis and represented by higher order codes. At each stage, ethnographic triangulation, in the field, further verified these emergent categories. This iterative process resulted in increasingly discriminating polar categories that approached emic saturation. Text units that are the prime markers of these categories comprise the description and are cited with the description.

## Using a Grounded Theory methodology to elicit culturally specific Fijian behaviours

This section briefly describes the decisions and experiences that determined my methodology.

### *A grounded negotiated social reconstruction of Fijian cultural intentions*

Anthropological ethnographic research methods are well fitted for exploratory research in remote island indigenous societies and for in-depth investigations into cultural values and their influences on educational practices. An initial literature review led me to select an ‘a-historical’ Grounded Theory (GT) research paradigm. An initially loosely structured research approach such a GT had been found to allow for theoretical ideas to emerge from the field and for inductively derived theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). So I went into the field consciously separating etic and emic judgments. My ethnographic field notes used ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) recording emic interpretations that allowed later coding by their symbolic significance. The qualitative analysis followed Strauss and Corbin’s GT classification of concepts (1990, p. 61) where concepts are compared then grouped into higher order concepts, which they called categories. A grounded negotiated social reconstruction of Fijian cultural intentions hence gradually emerged from this iterative analytic method and continued ethnographic verification of the data. (Holliday, 1994, p. 5; Richards & Richards, 1994, p. 446).

### *Iterative analytic method to convert data into a fictional grounded composite narrative*

This GT research methodology necessitates a sensitivity to the cultural milieu and some cross-cultural sagacity. It is necessary to distance oneself and to look without prejudices (Géraud, Leservoisier & Pottier, 1998, p. 30). I made observations and rigorously coded the data to include as much of the contextual information as possible. Etic value judgments were not used, so as to avoid defining the reality of the people studied from a ‘Western’ viewpoint that might be interpreted as objective. To give a detailed illustrative example, a common statement such ‘Fijians are happy-go-lucky’ could be considered derogatory when a positive value judgment is placed upon ‘accountability’ and ‘concern for the future’ as desirable characteristics. Instead of evaluating this statement, I investigated the Fijian definition of ‘happy-go-lucky’ in search of behaviours indicative of its cultural intentions. To do this, the data, such as the behavioural definition of ‘happy-go-lucky’, was transcribed in 624 on-line documents and open coded using 525, 298 codes in NUD\*IST under 986 unique keywords and phrases. This data structure was then analysed to identify specific culturally extreme Fijian behaviours. The people with whom I lived emicly interpreted my observations and themes developed from the consistencies in the ethnographic data. The most extreme cultural behaviours indicative of the themes were then eticly identified and coalesced into a fictional account grounded in reality. Although the etic identification of culturally extreme behaviours was an expression of my different expectations of school management and English teaching, it can be expected that similar Fijian characteristics might have been selected by a Western researcher using the same rigorous analytical procedure to reconstruct the Fijian socio-educational setting. This makes grounded

composite narratives useful heuristic reporting devices of which the focus is “on recreation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). Not only does the narrative form provide the reader with a sense of the outcome, but it allows generalisation from concrete cases by embracing many cases in a single framework.

### ***Data informing the Fijian polar grounded narrative***

The qualitative data which have been gathered to inform the school’s characterisation include codings of recordings of semi-structured interviews, in urban and rural schools over a three-year period with English teachers, Form III and IV students, Heads of Department, Principals and Vice-Principals, and observation of Form III and IV English classes and interviews with local education officers and Ministry of Education staff. The data also include codings of administrative and course documents (Altheide, 1996, p. 3). The administrative documents included school financial returns, evaluative reports on external examinations, staffing details, disciplinary procedures, codes of ethics, and school rules. The documents specific to the teaching of the Forms III and IV English Fiji Junior Certificate course included schemes of work, past internal examination papers, and teachers’ notes. The ethnographic field notes for this Grounded Theory study (Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1971; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) used ‘thick description’ recording emic interpretations coded by their symbolic significance. It was the analysis of these thick descriptions of Fijian rural schools that gave rise to ‘Koronivuli Lomolomo’ - a grounded narrative of a Fijian rural secondary school. In part 2 of this paper, the grounded narrative first describes the major physical and management features of this Fijian rural secondary school. Then, in part 3, it describes how the Fiji Junior Certificate (FJC) ‘English as a Second Language’ (ESL) syllabus is operationalised in an ‘English as a Foreign Language’ (EFL) context (Boufof-Bastick, 1997, p. 60; Stern, 1983, pp. 16-17).

The polar composite described in part 2 of the paper, as an extension of Weber’s ‘ideal type’, records as polarities what was most starkly different from the reports given by teachers in urban Fijian secondary schools. Similarly, what is reported in part 3 of the paper are polarities of ethos and daily administration of the schools that are most starkly different from those of urban Fijian secondary schools. These contrasts are in large part due to the traditional socio-cultural values of the rural Fijian communities, that are socially integrated with the rural schools and maintained by the pervasive social obligations and relative geographic isolation of their communities, being very different from the socio-cultural values of schools catering for Fijians living in the urban centres. Data from urban centres, which are not used in this report, contrasted with that used in this grounded narrative on one hand, because of the cultural specificity of rural Fijian schools and on the other because of the lack of commonality in type, management and ethos of urban schools.

## **2 A Fijian rural secondary school: Koronivuli Lomolomo**

The following grounded composite narrative, whilst keeping schools’ confidentiality, reports on major socio-cultural characteristics that determine the ethos and day-to-day operation of eight rural Fijian secondary schools on the three Fiji islands

of Vanua Levu, Ovalau and Taveuni. The fictional rural Fijian school that characterises these eight rural schools is called 'Koronivuli Lomolomo' (KL). KL has a predominantly indigenous Fijian population and it is located in the South of Vanua Levu.

### **Location of the school and school buildings**

Koronivuli Lomolomo is a rural Fijian secondary school situated in the South of Vanua Levu Island. KL is pleasantly located at the top of a steep dirt road a few kilometers away from a small urban centre. The school overlooks the sea and nestles in a bushy forest. It is a school serving the local village communities. However, 280 of the 550 students board at the school because of the transport difficulties to and from some of the local villages.

Three long single storey buildings make up the school. The first building comprises two small administrative offices and a tiny staffroom. Each of these administrative offices is stacked with piles of files and yellowing aged school records. The classrooms are located in the other two long buildings. The first building is an older building where the junior classes are accommodated. The classrooms have this battered look indicative of the passing of time. Old-fashioned desks designed for two students to sit together clutter the classrooms. Some of the desks bear the names of generations of students' names carved into their wood. In contrast, the students' desks in the senior classrooms are newer and designed for students to sit individually. All classrooms are adorned with faded pictures posted on the walls beside administrative notices such as the school rules or the class weekly timetable.

KL also has a small library. It is one of the smallest rooms in the senior school designated as 'the school library'. This minuscule library consists of a six shelves stacked with unwinsome reference books and sets of identical textbooks. The library is used principally for students to consult reference books and read newspapers and as a storage room for the school textbooks (Singh, 1995). The popular fiction 'library' books are guarded elsewhere by the English teachers who give out the books to students in class time. The English teachers monitor the issuing of these highly popular books - books like *The Hardy Boys* or *Nancy Drew*. Records of the fiction books issued by English teachers are intended to reduce the loss or 'stealing' of popular library books. Teachers, tolerant of their losses, will explain that students attach high value to these books because of the dearth of such books in the students' own homes.

Although the paucity of library books is of concern to the school management, the purchase of appealing readers remains low on the list of priorities at KL. However, the school management and English teachers welcome book donations from outside donors.

The lack of educational provisions noted at KL is a problem reported in most Fijian rural secondary schools (Stewart, 1983, 1984).

### ***KL school management practices and objectives***

The Catholic Church has established KL. The priest is the chief school manager and he oversees the accounts. This causes problems for the newly appointed KL principal who is somewhat displeased with the overall school management. He complains that the priest's religious obligations are given precedence over school matters. He mentions, in particular, that the priest often leaves the community for a few weeks at a time and during

his absence no necessary unanticipated purchases can be made - this is because the priest keeps the school chequebook. The principal also alludes to the school management's ineptitude in making any long-term development plans and to the lack of positive support for his own proposals. This issue had been raised contentiously by former Minister of Education, Mrs. Vakatale (Vakatale, 1997) who declared, "Most Fijian committees have to be trained in the basics of bookkeeping and accountability. They don't really set up their budget for the year, they don't have plans for the school and it always seem (sic) to be on an ad hoc basis".

The Vice-Principal (VP) who is New Zealander and has now been teaching at the school for over a decade and is more indulgent of administrative discord. He refers to the school's achievements with pride. He mentions, for example, the success of the multi-craft course, which was regrettably recently abandoned due to the lack of adequate funding. The VP avows that multi-craft students have learnt valuable practical building skills that are highly valued in their village communities (Baba, 1986; Sharma, 1989). He will tell you proudly that his past students are to be commended for erecting a new classroom and he deplores the budgetary constraints of the school. The local communities through fundraising provide additional financial resources. Being a Christian school, a strong emphasis is placed on acknowledging traditional Christian celebrations. These days of celebration often become fundraising events when parents and members of the 'mataqali' come from the villages and bring food, drinks and handicrafts to be sold on the school compound. Although these congenial fundraising events augment the yearly school budget, they are insufficient for major curriculum developments or for the purchase of costly resource materials. The school keeps untidy records of financial outlays that are then entered on the annual financial return forms sent by the MOE. The financial return forms are filled in pencil that makes the forms hardly legible. Further the Principal mentions that the Ministry of Education (MOE) requires school financial returns to be completed by a given date. He points out that this date does not take into account the lateness with which the forms arrived at the school nor the time required to fill them in. This typical delay and the lack of care shown in filling in the financial management forms has proved costly to the school in the past because requests for building grants have so far not been awarded to KL.

### **3 Operationalising the FJC English curriculum**

Learning English at KL is not so much learning a second language (SL) as a foreign language (FL). A foreign language is a language that is learnt as a school subject and it is not the language spoken by the local Fijian communities (Stern, 1983, pp. 16-17). Designation as a second language assumes community usage the pedagogic significance being that FL is more instruction whereas SL is immersion.

This second section describes the low level of English usage within the local Fijian communities and then examines how teachers at KL translate the MOE English as a Second Language syllabus into classroom practices at Forms 3 and 4. This section outlines (a) how language use is compartmentalized and (b) the features of teaching English as a Foreign Language at Koronivuli Lomolomo.



## Compartmentalised language use

The use of English in education, a colonial legacy (Lotherington-Woloszyn, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Moag & Moag, 1978; Figure 1), is limited to the school. Many rural Fijian communities do not yet receive television broadcasts and English newspapers are rarely seen, apart from the dated copies in the schools.

### Figure 1: NUD\*IST Reference 1 Document and Text Units

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Ref 1\*

The following excerpt from an interview with a rural Fijian Senior Education Officer taped on April 19th in Savusavu on Vanua Levu island reports on the English language policy enforced in school.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: T3B

+++ Retrieval for this document: 9 units out of 552, = 1.6%

++ Text units 113-121:

\* language usage; vernacular; Fijian; community; language policy; rural; EFL; ESL;

USP; language status; colonial policy; 113

Q. Q11: And in these remote schools, they don't ... do they speak English? 114

Ans. Oh yeah. 115

Q. Yes. 116

Ans. All of them. If you go to furthest island, *you'll find people that even at Class 1 they talk in Fiji-an English*. Because in colonial days, English has to be compulsory for all schools. And even our Fijian languages it's pushed aside. And that was:, I think that was: a mistake, and: we had tend to say that English is supreme. It's 'higher' then all other languages and we also look at coloured people as these other people who.. er..very 'high' mighty. The whites are more mightier then the blacks. So these kinds of interpretation that was a colonial thing. So now we are trying to 'get' these things back and I think the teaching of Fijian has gone back, euh... as far as this year is the first year to be introduced at USP in language studies. 117

Q. Oh, Yes. 118

Ans. It's introduced this year. 119

Q. Yes 120

Ans. So, if you like, you can go in there, for: a 'session' with them [laughs] 121

Hence, Fijian remains the language of the local communities (Geraghty, 1984, p. 49; Mugler, 1996, p. 275). This language compartmentalisation is further strengthened by the school's language policy embedded in the school rules. These school rules are faded documents posted on classroom walls reminding students that English is to be used at all times between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. The purpose of the 'English only' rule is to encourage students to use English to express themselves. This is intended to extend the use of English outside the classroom and favor spontaneous interaction between students. The English teachers assert that interacting verbally in English helps students to develop their linguistic skills in this language. Although teachers acknowledge the benefit of this

informal use of English, little attention is paid to applying the 'English only' rule (Tamata, 1996, p. 96). Teachers address one another in Fijian, greet one another 'vakaviti' with a cheerful 'bula' whilst staff meetings and school records use both English and Fijian (Figure 2).

### Figure 2: NUD\*IST Reference 2 Document and Text Units

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Ref 2\*

This excerpt from an interview with Fijian principal taped on July 7th, 1995 indicates that the ELP is not strictly enforced in Fijian schools. Not only Fijian is used in personal interaction, it is also used in school administration.

This interview also shows the good-natured informality of the Fijians.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-60

+++ Retrieval for this document: 4 units out of 159, = 2.5%

++ Text units 151-154:

Ans. I am afraid the *exam results are written in Fijian*. But the figures are *alright*. 152

Q. Can I pay for the photocopies? 153

Ans. No. It's a pleasure to give out those results. Maybe because they are good results, if they were bad I would have hidden them. 154

The continuous language switching (Tamata, 1996, p. 98) is also manifest among students whose tentative attempts to express themselves in English are noticeable when teachers can overhear them. The principal concedes that enforcing the use of English in school has failed but the rule remains (Figures 3 and 4). Liddicoat (1990, p. 46) reported similar findings on the 'English only' language policy in rural Samoan schools. He made a similar remark that "the policy of English only... was not always upheld".

### Figure 3: NUD\*IST Reference 3 Document and Text Units

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Ref 3\*

This interview held on November 17th, 1995 with a Fijian teacher of English at a rural government secondary school on Taveuni island shows the non-enforcement of the ELP in Fijian rural secondary schools: English is the language of instruction and it is to be used from '6 to 6' (as this is a boarding government school) in the school compound, but in practice Fijian remains the language of interaction.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-B13C

+++ Retrieval for this document: 3 units out of 270, = 1.1%

++ Text units 112-114:

Q. Do you have a school rule that students must speak English the whole time? 113

Ans. Yes. Euh... I have been teaching here for the last 2 years but *I heard that they did try to have it*. But, yes, there is a need for... Yes, Fijian students to speak English. 114

#### Figure 4: NUD\*IST Reference 4 Document and Text Units

+++++

Ref 4\*

The excerpt from an interview with an Indian Form III teacher of English at a Fijian Methodist high school on Taveuni island shows the extent of the ELP applicability in school. This teacher reports on the difficulty to enforce the ELP - ELP tried to be implemented during term I of 1995 but it had to be abandoned the following term.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-B18A

+++ Retrieval for this document: 4 units out of 83, = 4.8%

++ Text units 71-74:

Ans. If they [students] speak in Fijian they have to collect 10 coconuts for us [teachers]. So that time they've practised speaking in English '8 to 3, 3.30'. But everybody *trying to speak in English that time*. Even teachers they had to. But sometimes, teachers, Fijian teachers, for the subject they *have to speak in Fijian*. 72

Q. Why? 73

Ans. Because Fijian is one of the subjects taught and sometimes some of the students when they don't understand *they speak in Fijian*. I don't speak Fijian so... 74

+++++

#### Teaching EFL in Forms III and IV at KL

The MOE-prescribed FJC curriculum is common to all secondary schools. Schools in rural areas where English is a foreign language, such as KL, follow the same English curriculum as in urban schools where English is a second language used by the urban community, and sometimes a first language. Students from all secondary schools in Fiji sit for a common Fiji Junior English examination paper at Form 4. So inevitably rural students' FJC examination results in English are lower than those of urban students.

Teachers at KL admit that teaching the FJC English syllabus to rural students requires a different teaching methodology from teaching English to urban students - one of the major reasons being the limited English usage outside the school. Teachers' major methodological strategies to cover the FJC English as a Second Language syllabus are: (a) discriminative choice of passages from the prescribed English 'Link' textbooks and (b) compilation of model answers.

#### Discriminative choice of Link passages

The Link 3 and 4 textbooks are the MOE-prescribed English textbooks for Forms III and IV. They are considered as the English curriculum at Forms 3 and 4 by KL English teachers (Crossley & Myra, 1994). Few teachers, other than the Head of the English Department, consult the Form 1 - 4 English prescriptions. The Curriculum Development Unit of the MOE sets this prescription. It was originally developed with the help of overseas advisors who, like the local urban curriculum designers, did not utilize the SL/FL distinction. The prescription describes the broad educational and linguistic objectives of the junior secondary English course. Instead, teachers rely primarily on the

Link textbooks to prepare their Forms 3 and 4 students for the language section of the Fiji Junior Certificate paper. Their reliance on the Link textbooks for adequate examination preparation for the language section of the FJC paper necessitates a discriminate choice of passages within the Link textbooks. For example, Form 3 teachers report that they cover only the first eight of the ten units in Link 3. Similarly, Form 4 teachers say they leave out some of the Link 4 reading comprehension materials. For instance, Form 4 teachers concede that some language exercises are shortened and long reading comprehension passages are curtailed. Teachers report that the discriminative coverage of Link language activities is necessary because of the unrealistic amount of language materials presented within each Link unit. Thus KL teachers prefer to focus on selective aspects of the course that they consider important for the examination. The three major criticisms that teachers make of the Link books concern the length of the reading comprehension passages, the uninteresting themes and the repetitious nature of each of the Link units. Benson's evaluation of the Link course in 1989 also reported these features (p. 13). Clive Benson also wrote the 'Target' books that are more concise than the Link books. KL English teachers now show a preference for these Target books that they claim address better their students' needs. The conciseness of the language exercises makes the Target books popular among both students and teachers. In sum, the amount of language curriculum materials to be covered in the English FJC course is somewhat problematic to English teachers. So KL English teachers adopt a focused methodological approach to teaching English that they claim is an appropriate way of teaching the FJC ESL syllabus to their EFL students (Stern, 1983, p. 16).

### **Compiling model answers**

KL English teachers prepare their students by selectively working through the Link books (Curriculum Development Unit, 1980) and also by efficiently preparing their students to give suitable answers to the literature questions of the FJC English paper. KL English teachers explain the importance of preparing their students for the literature section of the FJC English paper as this section carries 30% of the English paper - the remaining 70% being allotted to the language section.

The preparation for the literature section of the English FJC paper consists in selecting three of the four literary genres examined in the Fiji Junior. The study of literature is done systematically: the teacher reads the passage under study stopping on difficult words so as to explain them or to translate them into Fijian, asks general questions orally, writes down specific factual questions on the board which the students copy down on their literature books to then answer, and finally students write their own summaries of the passage. The teacher for expediency, however, often dictates these summaries. This expedient practice ensures that all students have 'understood' the main ideas of the passage and written them down in grammatically correct English. The assumed 'correctness' of the teacher's notes encourages the students to memorize these notes and reproduce them, often inappropriately, in the examinations (Figures 5 and 6).

**Figure 5: NUD\*IST Reference 5 Document and Text Units**

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Ref 5\*

The following excerpt from an interview with 2 good female (Fijian and Indo-Fijian) students of English recorded in April 1995 in a Fijian Catholic school in Labasa on Vanua Levu Island indicates the predictability of the FJC examination taken at the end of Form IV.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TB19A

+++ Retrieval for this document: 15 units out of 350, = 4.3%

++ Text units 31-39:

Q. Was there anything in the [mock] examination you didn't expect? 32

Ans. S1: We expect everything to come, what we learnt and what we revised like euh... we expected that to come, *and it came*, but like, *sometimes* new things come, so we just try to tackle it. 33

Q. Would it be something you haven't revised? 34

Ans. S2: We revise everything. 35

Q. You revise everything! 36

Ans. S1: Yes. 37

Q. So you could answer all the questions? 38

Ans. S1: Yes, we answered *all* the questions. 39**Figure 6: NUD\*IST Reference 6 Document and Text Units**

+++++

Ref 6\*

The following excerpt from an interview with 2 good female (Fijian and Indo-Fijian) students of English recorded in April 1995 in a Fijian Catholic school in Labasa on Vanua Levu island shows the routine literature teaching geared to prepare students to answer the expected FJC literature questions and the resulting students' literature study style.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TB19A

++ Text units 140-145:

Q. Do you do a lot of 'cramming' then? 141

Ans. S2: Like for me, *to read this much*, and like for me *to keep it in my head*, and *to say it without looking*. We don't cram. We find that when we cram when we sit the exam we forget. 142

Ans. S3: Sometimes *just the hard parts*. 143

Q. What are the hard parts in English? 144

Ans. S3: The book, the main parts, the... what we like about it, that's all. [usual FJC literature questions] 145

The English teachers claim that their students are suitably prepared to answer adequately the FJC literature questions. They admit that they can predict fairly accurately the

questions to be set in the examination (Figures 7, 8, and 9). Their accurate predictions result from the similarity of the literature questions set over the last two decades.

### Figure 7: NUD\*IST Reference 7 Document and Text Units

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Ref 7\*

This excerpt from an interview with a Form V Fijian male student held at a government school on Taveuni island on November 1995 illustrates the predictability of the FJC English paper.

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-B13A

+++ Retrieval for this document: 5 units out of 107, = 4.7%

++ Text units 5-9:

Q. At the FJC, were there questions you were not prepared for, in English?	6
Ans. No, I was prepared.	7
Q. There was no surprise?	8
Ans. <i>No surprise</i> . It was quite fair.	9

### Figure 8: NUD\*IST Reference 8 Document and Text Units

+++++

Ref 8\*

The following excerpt from an interview with a Part-European (mixed Fijian-European blood) female teacher of English taped on November 21st, 1995 shows the predictability of the English FJC composition themes, the lack of students' written English proficiency and independent thinking and the resulting teaching methodology used for examination preparation (teaching students what to say and how to say it - i.e. how to answer FJC expected composition questions).

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-B19A

+++ Retrieval for this document: 13 units out of 134, = 9.7%

++ Text units 57-63:

Q. And how do you know that they will be tested?	58
Ans. Comprehension questions, for example, at least they have the same aim. Just read them, circle answer, hey? So I can just do 1 or 2 instead of doing 5 you know.	59
Q. And for the composition, how do you teach composition? How do you select the themes?	60
Ans. Um... just a couple of weeks ago I was teaching composition to these Form III. They've come up from PS like, came up knowing not, how to write. I mean, you know, how to write a grammatical sentence, you don't know how to put your ideas into order. To write like, for example, the expository composition... <i>So I tried to find a solution and teach them. Also I managed to get some notes to teach them about the themes.</i>	61
Q. Where from?	62
Ans. It's a book called English through Basics. A very simple book. When I came in to teach, I noticed they were using it at the 5th Form level. But when I opened it up, and I looked at it, I thought it should be part of a 3rd Form level, not a 5th Form level. Because it's English basics too. So I have been using that book, <i>teaching about the theme.</i>	63

**Figure 9: NUD\*IST Reference 9 Document and Text Units**

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Ref 9\*

The interview held on November 21st, 1995 with Form III Part-European teacher of English shows the predictability of the FJC English examination

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+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-B19A

++ Text units 121-126:

Ans. The paper was all right. *Everything that I thought was tested.* 122

Q. There was no surprise? 123

Ans. *No, there shouldn't be.* [laugh] 124

Q. Why do you say 'there shouldn't be'? 125

Ans. Because all the schools are aware of the syllabus, like, what will be tested. And the Education Department too. If it's a surprise then it will be something which is out of the syllabus. *Everything is in the syllabus* but probably a few questions would have been difficult for some children 126

The unchanging type of questions enable KL teachers to go through past examination papers (Figure 10) and provide model answers which the students can memorize (Figure 11).

**Figure 10: NUD\*IST Reference 10 Document and Text Units**

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Ref 10\*

Fijian male teacher of English from a government school on Vanua Levu explains how he prepares his students for the FJC examination on November 17th, 1995.

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+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TD-B13C

++ Text units 82-85:

Q. How do you prepare the students for the examination? You said it was *your responsibility?* 82

Ans. Yes. 83

Q. What do you do? 84

Ans. For me. I am taking them for English and I am also their class teacher. So what I did *I went through the past year papers.* We just looked at the format of the paper. And from there what the paper would be. What the paper would be like. 85

**Figure 11: NUD\*IST Reference 11 Document and Text Units**

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Ref 11\*

The excerpt from a transcribed interview with the Professor of Education and Culture at the University of the South Pacific taped on November 16th, 1995 shows the similarity between traditional learning methods and those in school.

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+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TB52

+++ Retrieval for this document: 3 units out of 61, = 4.9%

++ Text units 30-31:

Q. Why do you think they emphasise this method of repeating? Do they feel that as teachers they should really hammer things into the children's heads or is it because they feel accountable to the Ministry and hence if they don't get good examination results...30  
 Ans. Um... Yes, well, I think it is both. Because they know that in the *traditional contexts*, chanting and memorising words, in the sense that *you can teach information, you can pass on information in that way*. And they know also that *it works* because the kids score highly in the exams. So I mean they are very clever, that they obviously could see that there is a link between the... memorising and the... what goes on in the classroom. And performance in the examination. And that is because probably because of the way the examinations are constructed. It allows for that kind of memorising. If the exams were such, it did not allow kids to regurgitate memorised facts, then the teachers would know that this method is not going to work and they would change. 31

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So the study of literature becomes a memorisation exercise. Teachers are aware of the pedagogical unsoundness of training students to produce acceptable answers. Nonetheless they find no better alternative for helping their students to pass the Fiji Junior English paper. The lack of their students' proficiency in English and their students' inability to express themselves necessitate these pragmatic teaching strategies that enable EFL learners to contend with an ESL syllabus.

### Summary

The reporting methodology that I called 'grounded composite narrative' has been derived from Grounded Theory research methodology. This grounded narrative has described the socio-cultural determinants of the ethos and daily management in eight Fijian rural secondary schools by depicting a fictional rural Fijian secondary school, Koronivuli Lomolomo, and its English teaching. The first part of the narrative described the school's main physical and management features. The second part of the narrative focused on the teaching/learning of English in a Fijian rural context. It has in particular highlighted the problems that emanate from this socio-cultural context: problems of daily management and the problems encountered by English teachers when implementing the Fiji Junior ESL syllabus in an EFL context. The paper has outlined the teachers' methodological strategies for teaching English. These included focusing on selective aspects of the FJC language course and providing model answers to the FJC literature questions. It is realized that the systematic training of students to the FJC examination is



inimical to the broader pedagogical objectives of the CDU English prescription. This ESL prescription, which had been drawn up with the pedagogical assistance of metropolitan curriculum advisers, ignores the fact that English is not the language of the community (Benton, 1981, p. 3) and that “school learning does not provide a continuation of community learning” (Lotherington, 1996, p. 353).

However, this teaching methodology is claimed to be an effective way for EFL students to be successful in the ESL FJC examination. This finding has relevance for the training of teachers and managers for Fijian rural secondary schools. It underscores that teacher training, without reference to the determining socio-cultural characteristics of Fijian rural secondary schools, is unlikely to significantly broaden the pedagogy of rural English teachers and hence their students’ English language proficiency.

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### Glossary

bula:	hello
koronivuli:	Fijian lexical sign for school. This sign is made up of three words: 'koro' which means 'village,' 'ni' which means 'of,' and 'vuli' which means 'learn.'
mataqali:	clan
vakaviti:	Fijian way

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