Practicum Teaching Quality for Educators and Aspiring Teachers in Fiji – A case study of selected High schools in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to fill in the void in the existing literature and investigate the quality of practicum teachers in Fiji as this is one of the most crucial factors underpinning Teacher Education Programs in Fiji’s Teacher Education Institutions. Furthermore, the paper examines the need to continuously raise the bar and be on par with new teaching knowledge; skills and strategies needs be consistently monitored during this period and not left to chance. The purpose of this research is to identify the necessary contemporary skills essential for the enhancement of learner’s skills and attitudes. The study implements mixed method design with the intention of incorporating qualitative and quantitative research methods in the data collection and analysis. Hutter-Hennink qualitative research cycle is used and data is collated through the use of semi-structured interviews which uses a mixture of both open ended and closed questions. Transcripts are analyzed line by line identifying key phrases or indicators in emic and perspectives of Verstehen. Emerging themes are tabulated providing the qualitative analysis of this research. The paper further conducts quantitative technique using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) to gather the finer points of this Practicum Teaching Quality in Fiji schools. The key findings are that children have a right to quality education. In all facets of the school and its surrounding education community, the rights of the whole child to survival, protection, development and participation are at the core of sustainable development. This means that the focus is on quality learning facilitated by robust, competent, impactful, effective and student-centered teachers who will indisputably strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes. The paper finds a void in Fiji’s aspiring and practicum teachers who need to upskill themselves in terms of quality delivery so that meaningful learning is acquired and children can construct for themselves and the community at large; places of safety, security and healthy communication. However, quality also largely depends on national policies pertaining to teacher intake requirements, practicum duration, synchronizing of Teacher training courses and teacher preparedness.

Keywords: Fiji, practicum teachers, quality, competent, student-centered, FNCF, MOE.
1.1 Introduction

The Teaching Practicum is normally acknowledged as one of the core components in Teacher Education Programs for the three tertiary educational institutions in Fiji. The assessment of Practicum Teachers during the practicum appears to be problematic as making precise conclusions to such teaching has become a more complicated sequence. As with any form of assessment, judgments are made against some form criterion or normative standard, and this judgments must ultimately involve some implicit or explicit understanding of what constitutes good teaching (Porter, A.C., Youngs, P., & Odden, A, 2001). This research will use a Mixed Method Approach (Cresswell, J., & Plano Clark, V, 2010) to better understand the readiness for practicum teachers and aspiring teachers ability to teach as to what aspects of a practicum teacher or aspiring teachers practice are considered when judgments of his/her readiness to teach, are referred to.

On the onset, this paper examines the quality of Practicum Teacher absorption in the mainstream teaching in Fiji. The research is primarily based on a mixed method [qualitative and quantitative] study that explores the link between quality, competence efficiency, and teacher preparedness in the practicum teacher requirements in Fiji.

To begin with, quality public education entails learners who are healthy, well-nourished, eager to learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities. With this in the limelight, The Ministry of Education in its vision and mission has precisely spelt out that every child should be given healthy, safe, protective and adequate resources and facilities to ensure quality and equity in education. When a child has access to a conducive learning milieu, acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace can be easily attained. However, this can only happen with the guidance of quality teachers teaching in Fiji schools.

During recent years, the significance of quality education has been rediscovered. The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990 saw government leaders embark on a global commitment to uplift quality in education delivery (Smedt, 2001:45). This however, cannot be achieved in isolation. The focus now is on the aspiring and practical teachers in Fiji to improve quality. The Education International Declaration on Professional teacher ethics on commitment to the profession explicitly stipulates education personnel to: ‘justify public trust and confidence and enhance the esteem in which the profession is held by providing quality education for all students’ (Smedt, 2001:10). This depicts that if teachers are competent, efficient and pro-active, they will underpin a vibrant and pluralistic civil society. With the right teacher training, the budding aspiring teachers will enrich social and cultural life by generating new knowledge, thus, enhancing humanity’s intellectual and cultural heritage.

More so, there has been growing concerns and interest about the quality of Practicum Teachers graduating from the major Teacher Training Institutions in Fiji. Much debate has
surfaced in The Ministry of Education, after the Fiji government’s significant share of 2014 National budget allocation to the Education Sector.

Undoubtedly, myriad inputs contribute to improving the quality of education, which in turn determines the quality of children’s learning outcomes. However, there are some reservations and subject to critiques as to how equipped, trained and well-prepared our cohort of Practicum Teachers in Fiji are after completing their Teacher Training Programs and the work expected of them in Fiji’s Primary and Secondary schools.

Puamau (2006) writes in Journal of education Studies, Volume 28 [1and 2] that teaching, learning and teacher education are facing an uncomfortable dilemma. Indisputably, the inheritance of outdated, cumbersome, colonial and neocolonial education structures are constantly challenged by the desire of the government to implement reforms perceived to better the current education offerings in Fiji with new opportunities at the global front. With Fiji’s smallness and still at its developing stage, a lot of pressure is exerted on the education sector to provide quality education for its population.

However, the reality is that Fiji continues to struggle with basic education provisions, accessibility, infrastructure development, appropriate and coherent national curricular, and retention of students in secondary school to complete education up till year twelve, access to higher education at its forefront of literacy and a countless other tribulations. With these issues crippling the national effort to uplift quality in delivering education, one may ask, how well trained and prepared our aspiring teachers are?

Irrefutably, The Ministry of Education’s vision explicitly spells out, quality education for change, peace and progress, where the government continues to embark on ‘free to all education’ – making an effort for education to be accessible through its myriad initiatives such as free bus fare schemes, e-tickets, matua program, 600 national toppers scholarship and so forth. There is no denial that to teach is a life-long process of learning. In Fiji, among other things, recruitment of secondary school graduates, or those with corresponding qualifications into teacher education, quality pre-service training, the induction phase and teacher training is a challenge. No doubt, the status of teacher’s quality is declining globally. Thus, it is indispensable that this inclination is addressed so that the teaching profession is alluring to the best students. The Second World Congress of Education International, in Washington D.C from 25-29 July, 1998 states that ‘it is of crucial importance that teachers receive the highest quality professional education that builds on a full secondary school qualification’ (2001: 41).

In 2014 National Fijian Budget, the government has allocated F$541.5m to the Education Ministry. This figure entails 19% of the total 2014 budget. This surely confirms the government’s commitment in ensuring quality education for a sustainable Fiji. Education is an investment and to ensure a progressive nation; quality, equity and social justice should be at the core of service delivery. For an island nation as ours, it is mandatory for Teacher training Institutions to work closely with The Ministry of Education and provide the highest quality of teacher training to our children as the country is working tirelessly in making education
accessible to the less fortunate, tapping school drop-outs, improving facilities for all — especially in the outer islands and rural areas— and increase access to technology.

In addition, Government funding in terms of increased grants, free to all education, phasing away of external exams in lower Primary and at Form Four Level, food vouchers, bus fare, matua programme are one of the many schemes through which the government assist all Fijians. Another promising initiative is the 600 toppers scholarship given to Form Seven students to pursue tertiary education in Fiji. The scholarship is given to students who excel in Fiji Seventh Form Examination. Irrespective of caste, creed or colour, the Ministry of Education ensures to provide equity so that all children have a fair share of learning which may equip them for lifelong learning.

The Fijian government is investing largely on education. The challenge then is on the teacher education institutions in Fiji to effectively equip teacher training programmes in line with MOE requirements. There are 3 major Universities in Fiji namely; The University of the South Pacific, Fiji National University and University of Fiji train aspiring teachers. Quality Tertiary education is of immense magnitude in today’s and globalised educated world. Thus, the need to uplift Teacher Training Institutions and its aspiring workforce is becoming imperative. More so, high-quality and principled tertiary level education is predominantly essential in Fiji. Additionally, tertiary education market in Fiji is small. In the past has been generally catered by The University of the South Pacific (USP) with its main campus located in Suva. The University of Fiji entered tertiary education scene in 2005. More recently there has been an amalgamation of a number of tertiary Government institutions into the new Fiji National University (FNU) established in 2010.

The Teacher Training Programmes within the university requires aspiring teachers to complete student teaching practicum. The Practicum experience enables a much richer experience by expanding the practicum teacher’s access to our highest performing educators, providing a collaborative and instructional delivery experience, and enabling them to build more robust relationships with students. Through the course, the practicum experience allows aspiring teachers to expand their capacity and responsibility for student supervision and instructional support and delivery. The benefits of the practicum program positively impact all stakeholders.

In addition, in Fiji schools, the aspiring teacher is mentored by an effective teacher with demonstrated success increasing student achievement as well as coaching and mentoring competencies. The aspiring teacher works collaboratively with other certificated teachers. Aspiring Teachers initially receive targeted professional development on classroom management, establishing cultures and norms, and behavior intervention strategies; and, as the year progresses, the professional development will shift to lesson planning, differentiating instruction, and pedagogy techniques. The school principal is responsible for ensuring the aspiring teacher has the prospect for an authentic and enriching practicum experience. The Mentor Teacher is responsible for ensuring the aspiring teacher has sufficient exposure and knowledge to lesson plans, instructional strategies, content standards, and differentiated
needs. The teacher preparation program will be expected to perform multiple job-embedded observations and provide feedback to the Aspiring Teacher and their mentor. In Fiji schools, the successful completion of the experience is be determined by the school Principal with input from the Aspiring Teacher’s mentor and measured against a known set of expectations. If the Teacher Practicum requirements are effectively completed, objectives met and Associate Teacher had mentored training teacher, then and only the practicum experience can serve as a critical foundation for future success of achieving quality education in Fiji.

1.2 Background and context

The Practicum Teaching in the Graduate Diploma in Teaching Program is one of the most crucial factors underpinning teacher education programs at the University of Fiji. The need to continuously raise the bar and be on par with new teaching knowledge, skills and strategies needs be consistently monitored during this period and not left to chance. In Fiji as elsewhere, research has acknowledged the crucial responsibility teachers play in students learning and achievement (Alton-Lee, 2003). The challenge for teachers is to mold and assist in the preparation for practicum teachers to work efficiently and effectively in the real world to cater for all abilities of children in the 21st century. How do practicum and aspiring teachers deem proficient during their field term to become beginning teachers. This research sets out to find how effective is the graduate diploma in teaching program in all the local universities? How has this program enabled graduates to become competent teachers? What key factors do the Administrative Staffs and Associate Teachers use to identify the practicum teachers ability to teach?

Following the demands of the 21st century to transform society through education, the Ministry of Education has articulated its vision ‘quality education for peace, change and progress ’(2012:5) at National Level, thus reforming education for quality, equity, accessibility and efficiency in the delivery of education. Among the areas of special prioritized action, the focus is on the Teacher Training Institutions to uplift the quality of aspiring teachers who then will join the teaching fraternity.

Accordingly, the Tertiary Teacher Training institutions in Fiji namely; The University of the South Pacific, Fiji National University, The University of Fiji and Corpus Christy College are expected to align their Teacher Education Programs to that of the Ministry of Education’s reformed education system. As articulated by Tuli Fekeke (2009:38):

‘It is beyond the shadow of doubt that teachers are agents of change in a society as they are central to the delivery as well as quality of education.’

Similarly, a finding by The National Commission on Teaching America’s Future (NCTAF) 1997 asserts that teachers are positioned with a fundamental responsibility in shaping the future of individuals and posterity to come. For the aspiring teachers to be able to execute their roles as impactful teachers, thus creating ‘knowledge based society’ (MOE, Annual Corporate Plan, 2012:8), the aspiring teachers should be well trained, up skilled with a range of knowledge, adeptness, constructive approach, ethos and apposite teaching experience in Fiji’s myriad classroom settings. This will enable the aspiring teachers to swiftly fit-into the
reformed 21st century teaching and learning milieu. The Ministry of Education’s (MOE) values explicitly spell out:

‘Education provision is based upon a core of intrinsic and enduring values. These are: human rights and human dignity, responsibility, safety and security for all, civic pride, cultural understanding, empathy and tolerance, honesty, fairness and respect for truth and justice, integrity, flexibility, environment sustainability, peace and prosperity, compassion, sense of family and community, faith, creativity and life-long learning’ (2012:5).

Thus, the responsibility lies on the tertiary institutions, primarily on the Teacher Training Departments to effectively prepare aspiring teachers who are fully committed, zealous and skillful to disseminate knowledge suited to the realities of today’s Fiji classrooms. The aspiring teachers are expected to fathom their discipline, interdisciplinary teaching, be robust human resources for the Ministry of Education and adopt various teaching pedagogies for quality teaching and being exemplary teachers. In response to this, The Ministry of Education in Fiji and the various Teacher Training Institutions are making their teacher training programs competent so that aspiring teachers exhibit all levels of competency in the teaching fraternity. These areas of competencies are:

i. Planning and teacher preparation;
ii. Competency in teaching and learning;
iii. Awareness and compliance with MOE’s teacher regulations;
iv. Organization and professional development;
v. Competent management skills, attitudes, ethos and community outreach programs.

To achieve the aforementioned competencies for aspiring teachers, the Ministry of Education recommends that Pre-service Teacher Training Programs encompass in its delivery of qualified teachers; the introduction of practicum, a robust teacher preparedness programs, quality assessment, micro teaching, and certification of teachers for teacher registration (FTRB), gender balanced for a knowledge based society (FNCF: 2014).

In doing so, one of the most prominent of these is the introduction of practicum, which is undeniably the most valued component of the Teacher Education Program (Silberman, 1970). A supervised internship of the on-site teaching experience forms a pivotal component of the pre-service preparation of professionals across disciplines (Ralph, E, et.al:2007). In Fiji, the Teacher Education Programs in tertiary institutions require the aspiring teachers to spend a significant portion of their Pre-service in schools. Firstly, the aspiring teacher begins with observation of teachers in the first internship, then going into classrooms, experiencing theoretical knowledge with first-hand clinical practice. The practicum assessment thus forms an integral component of the Teacher Education Program.

However, the underlying aim is for the aspiring teacher is to observe teachers, experience different high school settings, experience the school environment and practice teaching specific subjects related to their discipline. The aim of any Practicum experience in Fiji is to integrate campus experience in a meaningful way.
Accordingly, the Teacher Training Institutions in Fiji who prepare high school graduates send their graduating students to different secondary schools of their choice, in the view of having the schools assign an Associate Teacher to each aspiring teacher placed at a particular school. The Associate Teacher is tasked to guide the aspiring teacher during the duration of his/her stay at the school, enabling the student-teacher to achieve high levels of competence, gain first-hand quality practicum experience and knowledge that will allow the aspiring teacher with an opportunity to put their theoretical knowledge learned in the Teacher Training Institutions into practical reality.

Therefore, this research was attempted to ascertain the quality of the student-teacher experience of the practicum. The study was designed to explore, fathom and describe the aspiring teachers’ quality after the Teacher Training institutions sent their student-teacher to various high schools in Fiji. As practicum is an essential element of a Pre-service Teacher Training Program, The Ministry of Education, the Teacher Training Institutions, even the society are focused in better preparing the aspiring teachers for realities of Fiji’s classroom.

1.3 Research Questions

Given the purpose of the research, this study will be guided by the following overarching questions:

a) How effective is the Practicum Teaching Programme in all the local universities?
b) How has this Teacher preparedness enabled aspiring teachers to become competent teachers?
c) What key factors are employed by the Administrative Staff and Associate Teachers in order to identify the Practicum Teachers ability to teach in an impactful and effective manner?

1.4 Literature Review

“Generally, most of the literature on schools is based on the research undertaken in well-resourced and staffed schools in developing countries” (Harber C, 1997). However, there has been a scarcity of previous research regarding teaching practicum quality standard in Fiji which is one of the several reasons needed to conduct this research. It is crucial since it highlights and addresses issues encompassing the quality of teaching practice and the academic practice and attitude of the teaching practice programme offered at the University of Fiji in the Graduate Diploma in Teaching Program. In light of this all there is a colossal challenge for preliminary teachers to prepare practicum and aspiring teachers in an escalating multifaceted and diverse environment and to teach in more sophisticated ways to meet the demands in the 21st century. Practicum plays an imperative role in the preliminary Teacher Education Programs, ‘presenting genuine opportunities for Practicum and Aspiring Teachers, working in conjunction with and supervised by knowledgeable and skilled teachers, to gain understanding about the authenticity and intricacy of teaching. The practicum is also a key site for determining student appropriateness or otherwise, for entry into the profession. The quality of the Practicum will likely define the quality of teacher education (Zeichner, 1990).
Nevertheless, the assessment of Practicum and Aspiring Student Teachers learning during a practicum is challenging, problematical issues include the tension between purposes of assessment, the collision of milieu on practice and the essential component of what is “good practice” (Porter, A.C., Youngs, P., & Odden, A, 2001). Furthermore, if principles are to impact optimistically on students’ teachers considerate of their practice, then the teacher appraises necessity be part of a society of interpreters (William, 1996) who distribute norms of practice and concur on what constitutes appropriate substantiation of good teaching.

Since there is inadequate research verification from any source about how compelling reliable judgments are made about practicum teacher’s willingness to teach or the way which university personal make evidence-based honorable judgments of student teachers keenness to teach. It is not comprehensible on what foundation the Fiji tertiary institutions and schools make judgments’ about student’s teacher’s achievements against the learning outcomes of the practicum or how issues to do with dependability and legitimacy of judgments’ are addressed. Therefore this research sets out to find out how effective is the graduate diploma in teaching program in all the local universities? How has this program enabled graduates to become competent teachers? What key factors do the Administrative Staffs and Associate Teachers use to identify the practicum teachers ability to teach?

If Practicum quality teaching is aligned in relation to The Fiji National Curriculum Framework (FNCF) that embarks on inclusiveness, the Teacher Training Institutions in Fiji will then have to take into account three fundamental aspects of social constructivist principles (2013:12):

i. regarding learning as an action process rather than passive recipients of knowledge and understanding
ii. regarding learning a social process whereby individuals construct meaning about the world around them in dialogue with others
iii. learners create or recreate knowledge, reshaping and internalizing knowledge in ways that change their view of the world around them [Phillips, 1995].

The philosophy of education in Fiji articulates inductive learning. For this to happen, the FNCF is committed to ensuring teacher preparedness through effective implementation and on-going child monitoring, assessment, evaluation and continuous improvement of curriculum development and delivery. FNCF sets out the groundwork for Teacher Training Institutions in their preparations of aspiring teachers to create knowledge based society. For this to happen, the leading Teacher Training Institutions in Fiji needs to align their practicum with that of FNCF. Thus, teacher preparedness cannot happen in seclusion, the aspiring teachers should be aware of the changed inclusive curriculum and effectively adopt it while teaching.

Literature reveals that Practicum Experience is critical for the totality of the teacher education programme at the different tertiary institutions in Fiji. In its Professional Experience program, the University of Fiji for instance, attempts to shift the focus of the experience from the traditional technical skills of the ‘practicum’ in teacher education programs to one that has a broader educative process; a professional experience that provides
student teachers with opportunities for inquiry, for trying and testing new ideas within collaborative relationships, and for talking about teaching and learning in new ways.

A century ago John Dewey (1904/1965) argued for teacher education programs that went beyond building immediate classroom proficiency skills for teachers. He criticized teacher-education programs for placing too much emphasis on skill acquisition and the mechanics of classroom management. He argued that although first-hand experience in the school is critical for preparation of new teachers, the experience might well become misconstrued if it halted the growth for further learning.

Zeichner (1996) has shared the same view of the professional experience of student teachers being an important opportunity for growth and learning, rather than for demonstrating things already learned. He contends that professional experience is educative if it helps student teachers to understand the full scope of a teacher’s role hence, to develop the capacity to learn from future experiences, and to accomplish the central purpose of teaching, helping all pupils to learn. Zeichner (1996: 27) points out ‘a focus in the practicum only on instruction with children in the classroom, although important, does not prepare teachers for the full range of their responsibilities’. Zeichner clearly suggests the need for student teachers to engage in inquiry during professional experience in order that they grow into teachers who are knower’s, thinkers and researchers about education, and who care about their school and learners.

Teacher education in the 21st century cannot be apprenticeship training that is still rooted in a model of the teacher as technician. Today’s schools are asked to educate the most diverse student body ever in response to an increasingly complex society and a rapidly changing, technology-based economy. Teaching has thus become a complex, multifaceted, intellectual, creative decision-making activity. As such, teacher education needs to prepare teachers not as followers, but as leaders, as professionals who are thoughtful, reflective, inquiring, self-directed, goal setting, active participants and wise in decision making. New scholarship in teaching and teacher education must emphasize the preparation of teachers who learn from their teaching, throughout their careers.

1.5 Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methods and procedures that were developed in addressing the research questions. It outlines the details of the research designs, sample size, study population and data collection process. Outlining the proposed theoretical framework of this research, this aids in making the necessary methodological choices and constructing the appropriate research design.
1.6 Research Design

This research will be implemented using a mixed method design (Creswell, 2012) “with the intention of incorporating qualitative and quantitative research methods in the data collection and analysis”. The use of “mixed method designs are considered appropriate in a study when the use of a single type of research is unable to adequately address the research questions”. Qualitative data will be collected through the use of semi-structured interviews (Cresswell, J., & Plano Clark, V, 2010) “which uses a mixture of both open ended and closed questions”. This phase will involve making comparison and asking questions of the data collected. These procedures are “basic to the coding process though their nature changes with each type of coding” (Strauss, 1990). Transcripts will be analyzed line by line identifying key phrases or indicators “because they make some as yet inchoate sense” (Sandelowski cited in Ryan & Bennard, 2000) and emerging themes will be tabulated providing the qualitative analysis of this research. For the quantitative aspect of this research will be enlightened by the use of a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) to address theoretical and practical impacts of Practicum Assessment of the program Teacher Education Programme while open ended questions were used to gather finer points about the overall quality of Aspiring Teachers.

More so, secondary data was sourced from scholarly articles, prior research on practicum teacher quality and most importantly from Practicum Manual for Trainee teachers compiled by The University of Fiji’s Department of Education. It was considered that myriad data types were complementary and allowed for deeper evaluation of aspiring teacher’s quality.
Table 2 shows the study constructs and variables of each construct.

### Study Constructs and Variables – Administrative Officer

[5 point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Constructs and Variables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Planning and Preparation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Does the Practicum/aspiring student demonstrates accurate knowledge of the subject</td>
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<td>and curriculum expectations of the Ministry of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Demonstrates sound knowledge of how students learn and of factors that impact on learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>and achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Develops appropriate learning expectations from relevant curriculum documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Plans to accommodates needs and abilities and prior learning of all the students</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Organizes learning activities and procedures in clear and meaningful ways that support</td>
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<tr>
<td>students’ learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Identifies, prepares and utilises appropriate resources for learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Lesson objectives are stated in all three domains: cognitive, psychomotor and affective</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Awareness and Compliance with MOE teacher regulations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Aware of the MOE vision and mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Aware of the school’s vision and mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. The Practicum/aspiring student is punctual to work and all other official gathering</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Appropriately dressed at all times</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Awareness of Zero tolerance of corporal punishment to students</td>
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<td>f. Awareness of minor and major misconduct and the implementation of appropriate actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Responsive to the channel of communication in school</td>
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<td>h. Demonstrates awareness of the MOE gazette and closely follows it accordingly</td>
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<td><strong>3. Management</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Demonstrates a professional and positive rapport in interactions with students and staff</td>
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<td>b. Upholds the school ethos and displays cultural sensitivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Promotes a positive and collaborative learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Maintains professional etiquettes in school at all times</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Maintains general awareness of student status during the lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Willingly executes other responsibilities apart from the teaching duties</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Shows initiative to actively engage in other in-house activities organised by the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Readily entails in community outreach programmes</td>
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</table>
## Associate Teacher

### 1. Planning and Preparation

- **a.** Does the Practicum/aspiring student demonstrate accurate knowledge of the subject and curriculum expectations of the Ministry of Education?
- **b.** Accommodates and facilitates students need to effectively learn and achieve the desired goals.
- **c.** Develops appropriate learning expectations from relevant curriculum documents and other resources aligning with NCF.
- **d.** Plans to accommodate needs and abilities and prior learning of all the students.
- **e.** Uses other teaching strategies consistently other than chalk/board.
- **f.** Identifies, prepares and utilizes appropriate resources for effective learning.
- **g.** Lesson objectives are stated consistently in all three domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective.

### 2. Teaching and Learning

- **a.** Does the Practicum/aspiring student use appropriate introductory procedures.
- **b.** Engages students in purposeful learning activities and creates a learner-centred class.
- **c.** Provides clear directions and explanations so that learners are active participants rather than passive recipients.
- **d.** Accommodates diverse learners in class and able to provide appropriate activities to support their learning needs.
- **e.** Provides constructive and timely feedback to students that supports their learning and swiftly progress in class.
- **f.** Integrates, where possible, technologies into teaching and learning opportunities.
- **g.** Demonstrates appropriate use of assessment protocols and recording processes.
- **h.** Demonstrates awareness of pacing and timing and need to be flexible and responsive.
- **i.** Uses textbooks, blackboard, and appropriate teaching aids in an organized manner to maximize student learning.
- **j.** Uses appropriate summation procedures and sets relevant follow-up activities.

### 3. Organization and Professional Development

- **a.** Demonstrates a professional and positive rapport in interactions with students.
- **b.** Uses consistent, fair and positive strategies to manage learning environment.
- **c.** Promotes a positive and collaborative learning milieu.
- **d.** Reinforces positive behaviour in children consistently.
- **e.** Maintains general awareness of student states during and after class.
1.7 Area of Study

Fiji is an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean. The total number of islands in Fiji archipelago is 332. Among them people live on only 110 islands. The geographical coordinates of the location of Fiji is 18 00 S, 175 00 E. It has a total land area of 18,274 sq km (7,055 sq. miles). The coastlines spread up to 1,129 km, (702 miles). Fiji is made of many small islands of which Viti Levu and Vanua Levu are the largest. The larger islands were formed due to volcanic activity. The comparatively smaller ones are made of coral reefs and thus unsuitable for habitation.

![Figure 1.01 Map of Fiji](http://www.worldatlas.com)

Source: www.worldatlas.com

1.8 Study Population and Sample

This study sought to understand selected high school teachers’ analysis of trainee teachers’ quality while on teaching practicum. The prime feature of the interview and questionnaire was to facilitate the participants to share their perceptions and familiarity on the quality of practicum teachers in Fiji.

The study population for the primary data consisted of selected high school teachers’ in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. A total of 93 high schools were visited upon receiving approval from The Ministry of Education. Selected high schools from Viti Levu and Vanua Levu was chosen due to the three major teacher training institutions trainees centered around these schools for the completion of teacher training programmes. First visitation to selected high schools in Vanua Levu was from 24th to 26th of September, 2014. Nine high schools in Ba were visited on 12th of September from 8am to 4pm. A total of 18 questionnaires were given. Similarly, all schools in
Sigatoka and selected schools in Nadi were visited on the same day by Ms. Atelini Bai. All high schools in Lautoka were visited on the 16th of September, 2014. Two questionnaires were given in each school visited. Trainee Teacher Coordinator and one Associate Teacher were chosen for interviews and structured questionnaire.

The study examined Teacher Practicum Manual, aimed to illustrate how the nature, content and the duration of Teacher Practicum have developed and trained aspiring teachers and the implications for future Training preparedness. The Teacher Practicum Manuals were sourced through direct request from the Teacher Training Institutions in Fiji.

1.9 Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires were distributed from early September to December, 2014. After the first session of the distribution of questionnaires to selected schools in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, interviews were conducted. A questionnaire guide inclusive of questions was used for data collection (Appendix 1). The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the same teachers issued with the questionnaire. This allowed the researchers to explore and probe some of the responses further and ask further questions which resulted in explicit explanations. The questionnaire covered an array of questions centered on teacher quality, expectations and delivery in school during practicum sessions. Key issues were noted during school visitations, questionnaire was collected after a month from the first visit. This gave respondents adequate time to precisely reflect on trainee teacher quality and level of preparedness prior to the selection and reporting to respective schools for practicum.

1.10 Findings

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<th>Race</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i - Taukei</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indo Fijian</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.01 Respondents in the Survey by race
The Survey was sent to 85 Administrative Officers and 85 Associate Teachers in 92 selected high schools in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. As such the response rate was 91% which is acceptable for discussion.

The Third World Congress of Education International meeting in Jomtien, Thailand (2001:41) delineated four elemental components of training that an aspiring teacher needs to acquire:

i. Knowledge and skills needed to teach
ii. In-depth knowledge of the subject taught
iii. Education in a wide range of approaches other than limited to teaching only
iv. Knowledge of the psychological and physiological development of learners

As educationalists, we may ask, are these components reflected in the aspiring teachers practicum needs and if they are, how effectively are these implemented in the classrooms in the real teaching and learning? Also, the Teacher Training Institutions need to align their courses and be responsive to global needs in order to achieve quality education for all.

Figure 1.01 explicitly shows the career paths for an aspiring teacher. During the aspiring teacher’s span of career advancement, if the practicum component was effectively catered for, eventually the aspiring teacher progresses to becoming an impactful teacher. However, research findings revealed that the aspiring teacher needs to understand the significance of the practicum component in order to be able to integrate theoretical knowledge and professional practice across the three domains of a teacher Education Program; ‘content’ knowledge gained through a liberal education, professional knowledge, pedagogical skills and insights. Figure 1.01 further articulates clear and progressive stages for the development of the acquired knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions of beginning teachers.
To begin with, for the University of Fiji, the theoretical knowledge that supports the outcomes of the Professional Experience Program are governed by the theories of constructivism, entailed with a commitment to authentic caring, and implemented with conscious, careful, and active inquiry and reflection. The program trains the aspiring teacher as critical thinkers and researchers - one who genuinely cares about the teaching profession, about holistic development of children, their needs and about schools. Such a philosophy is embodied in the ‘reflective practitioner model’ presented below.

Care about Scholarship requires that teachers understand and master the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of their subject discipline(s) in order to engage students in meaningful learning.

Care about Professional Knowledge requires that teachers reflect on their practice to improve student learning as well as to employ instructional strategies to further develop students’ critical and creative thinking skills.

Care about Communication requires attention to detail in written and spoken language as well as a desire to listen and understand others with appreciation for the cultural dimensions of communication. Technology and media are used to facilitate student learning.

Care about Inquiry requires critical thinking about theory and practice, ethics and values, personal reflection and conduct.

Care about Leadership requires professional development and transforming approaches to education through advocacy for children and youth (UniFiji Education Manual: 2006).

**Practicum Experience**

While the framework of the Professional Experience program of each Teacher training institution is aligned with the new scholarship in teaching and teacher education, the aim of Teacher Education Programs is to ensure aspiring teachers in Fiji are of high quality, able to perform to their fullest and be competent teachers.

The Professional Experience Program amounts to a total of 14 weeks of experience in a secondary school in Fiji. These consist of 4 weeks for Professional Experience Block I, 5 weeks
for Professional Experience Block II and 5 weeks for Professional Experience Block III. Student teachers are placed in schools where a team of at least three collaborating teachers (the school coordinator and two subject mentors) support them in each block. The focus of teaching study is Year 9–10 in Professional Experience Block I, and Year 11-13 in Professional Experience Blocks II and III. The Professional Experience program is supported by Education courses studied by student teachers within the semester at the University of Fiji.

Demographic Data

Table 1.01 Overall Rating of Practicum Teachers in Fiji

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Highly recommendable</th>
<th>Recommendable</th>
<th>Not recommendable</th>
<th>Highly not recommendable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: refer to sample Questionnaire in Appendix 1]

In the light of the changing needs of 21st century and a demand for quality education in Fiji and developments in to global educational landscape, tertiary Teacher Training Institutions need to strengthen teacher training, teacher preparedness, having strong partnership with key stakeholders such as high schools to ensure enhanced practicum experience (NIE, 2009). The study found the following rudimentary areas that should necessitate quality aspiring teachers in Fiji, endowed with these elemental mechanisms in the Teacher Education Programs:

i. Creating teaching a profession of choice;
ii. Theory-Practice Nexus;
iii. Synchronizing Practicum assessment across Teacher Training Institutions;
iv. Programme refinement and an extended instructive selection;
v. Inadequate funding;
vi. Rural and remote placements of Aspiring Teachers;
vii. Role of Associate teachers and schools.

i. Creating Teaching a Profession of Choice

Decades back, Fiji’s Teacher Training Institutions had an entry requirement specifically targeting and attracting the best and brightest to make teaching a profession of choice in their specific discipline. 87% percent of the respondents interviewed stated that The Ministry of
Education ensured that Year 13 students should pass English with 50% and above as a mandatory entry requirement together with a quality pass in Fiji Seventh Form Examination of 250 marks and above. Specifically, aspiring teachers were given an entry into the Teacher Training Institutions primarily on a strict entry requirement, aptitude test, and stern screening policies in place for recruitment of aspiring teachers, more so, a sound knowledge of two major vernacular languages in Fiji together with proficiency in English. Only then the best aspiring teachers were taken into the Teacher Training Programs.

However, findings revealed that in recent times with education made more accessible to students, renaming of Teacher Training Institutions and bringing its operations under one umbrella, to the establishment of a new university in Fiji has led to more stiff competition among the tertiary institutions. Hence, the focus has shifted to financial gains and increasing the student population at the expense of quality intake, better teacher preparedness and effective coordination and delivery of Teacher Education Programs in Fiji. 61% percent of the respondents said that the overall quality of teachers has been compromised. The study clearly depicts that 25.1% percent of Associate Teachers strongly feel a decline in the quality of aspiring teachers. This has been attributed to a decline in the recruitment of aspiring teachers by almost all the Teacher Training institutions in Fiji.

During the interview with Associate Teachers, almost all the Associate Teachers had revealed that a defined set of synchronized assessment, timing of Practicum and specifying entry requirements will surely ensure to support the concept of quality and competent teacher graduates in Fiji with a life-long professional education and clinical experience. It is evident that almost all the respondents in the overall comments have stressed on a need for Fiji’s Teacher Training Institutions to enroll only those students in the Teacher Education Program who take up the career as a choice and not as a last resort. If the latter is enrolled in the program, quality is undeniably compromised.

Added to that, during the semi-structured interviews, 62 percent of the respondents strongly asserted a need for a national entry requirement for teaching profession. In doing so, what this indicates is that the alternative routes that the various Teacher Training Institutions in Fiji offer for students by passing some education coursework required of students in schools of education will simply be left out. Hence, this will have a huge impact on the student number in tertiary institutions and surely not a viable option for the education providers. The study precisely showed that all the Administrative Officers and Associate Teachers strongly indicated that for any aspiring teacher to be a qualified and certified teacher in Fiji, one should primarily be considered for teaching profession on:

a) Merit based;
b) Specific entry requirement for teaching as a profession;
c) Taking teaching as a choice and not an alternative career path.
These indicators are specifically required for teaching as a career as in the 21st century landscape, education focuses on nurturing the whole child – morally, intellectually, physically, socially and aesthetically (NIE, 2009). Undeniably, quality teaching fraternity determines quality education.

ii. Theory-Practice Nexus

The study found that it is evident that a good theoretical knowledge will equate to a better prepared aspiring teachers. However, majority of the respondents indicated that though the aspiring teachers have theoretical knowledge, they are unable to effectively transit this knowledge in schools. 58 percent of Administrative Officers responded in the overall comments stated that Teacher Education Programs must ensure aspiring teachers to leverage on both types of skills in the actual classroom settings. Study showed that this was unfortunately lacking in many of the aspiring teachers. Majority of the respondents during the semi-structured interview showed concerns over the lack of coordination between theoretical knowledge to its application in the actual classroom settings.

Added to that, when aspiring teachers are sent on practicum, there are usually four phases of practicum assessment by all tertiary Teacher Training Institutions. In these attachments the aspiring teacher is assessed on his/her ability to display the theoretical knowledge acquired at the campus of their choice. The Associate Teacher closely mentors and monitors the performance of the aspiring teacher. The Associate Teacher plays a key role during the aspiring teacher’s Practicum assessment. Of the 85 Associate Teachers who were given the questionnaires 35% revealed that the student-teacher under their guidance was robust, effective, displayed etiquettes of shaping into a quality teacher after successful completion of the program, while 35% of the Associate Teachers were awed by the declining quality of overall trainees sent to high schools for attachment. Some even shared unpleasant experiences they had with the trainees who were devoid of theoretical knowledge of teaching, let alone practicing in class. These Associate Teachers of various selected high schools in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu shared similar sentiments in regards to an overall decline in aspiring teachers’ quality. While some may have been skillful in classrooms, or proficient in one area, largely they did not perform up to expectations on a whole.

In addition, many respondents indicated a need for Practicum Coordinators in tertiary Teacher Training Institutions to ensure that the very essence of learning how to be competent, confident and inductive teachers in Fiji through a conscientious micro-teaching classes at University Teacher Training Programs. The more robust implementation of micro-teaching program, indubitably Fiji will have better equipped, confident and capable aspiring teachers in high schools.

Figure 1.01 highlights the correlation between theoretical knowledge and Practical experience. If this model is scrupulously followed and effectively implemented in the Teacher
Education Program, the overall quality of aspiring teacher will increase and they will also become versatile teachers. Also, during For the Record Programme by Fiji Broadcasting Corporation [FBC] on 19th October, 2014 from 6.30pm to 7.30pm, the Minister for Education, honorable Dr. Mahendra Reddy stressed an exigency in Fiji’s Tertiary institutions to push the frontier for graduates from Universities. He further added after FBC journalist, Edwin Nand posed him of the current quality of graduates in Fiji and Dr. Reddy avowed the need for all stakeholders to work in collaboration in order to uplift quality, ensure critical thinkers, innovative thinkers and most importantly, a need for Fiji’s education system to be in a position to produce robust workforce suited to the 21st century. This is also applicable to the focus on the intake of students for specific programmes rather than producing bulk of teacher graduates at the expense of compromising quality.
iii. Synchronizing Practicum Assessment Across Teacher Training Institutions

Study has revealed that there is no synchronized model of practicum provision in teacher education courses in Fiji. There is also little consensus on questions such as how many practicum there should be, when practicum should commence and the best structure for practicum as illustrated in the following summary of the evidence that the study received on these questions.

Certainly, there is a range of requirements regarding the amount of practicum that is included in teacher education programs. While there was little consensus in submissions about how much practicum there should be, the respondents highlighted that variance in the number of clinical assessments of each Teacher Training Institution. Many respondents further stressed that the length of practicum should be same for all Teacher Training Institutions. Many Administrative Officers regarded the duration of practicum in year one graduate teacher education programs devoid of consistency. The study discovered that there were be no mandatory requirements for Teacher Training Institutions in determining the appropriate number and duration of Practicum. Respondent have indicated that the quality of the practicum is more important than the number of days.
In addition, research found out that in some Teacher Education Programs the aspiring teacher begins practicum in their first year; in others, they start much later. During semi-structured interviews one Administrative Officer revealed: ‘early start to practicum provided students an opportunity to ‘test’ whether teaching was an appropriate career choice for them’ (2014). Other Administrative officers maintained that aspiring teachers were likely to have a more fulfilling and rewarding practicum experience later in their courses when early studies had provided adequate theoretical grounding. One university Practicum Coordinator argued that school leavers needed at least one year between leaving school and their first practicum in a school because they needed to make a transition from being a pupil to being a teacher’ (2014).

Moreover, study found that practicum structures in Fiji vary widely from each Teacher Training Institutions. For instance, Fiji National University has block placements; whereby they send students into schools for a number of weeks at a time. While block placements are often favored as they provide students with continuity and the opportunity to engage more fully with the broader school environment, other teacher Training Institutions place students in schools for stipulated time on a continuing basis, either in addition to or as an alternative to the usual block placements. The concurrent attendance at school and university is considered valuable because it provides students with an opportunity ‘to integrate theory and practice and reflect upon their experiences in a supportive environment’ (2014).

Conversely, many respondents pointed out that practicum are only one aspect of the professional experience component of teacher education courses. Students also engage in professional experience through a variety of other arrangements, including: spending time in classrooms or relevant non-school organizations as part of the requirements for specific subjects, and working with children who visit the university campus from schools for specific sessions.

iv. Programme Refinement And An Extended Instructive Selection

Teachers interviewed shared views about the need to relook and modify the existing higher teaching curriculum to be inclusive of the needs of modern day students whereby rote learning needs phasing out and the need to critically think was imperative for the modern Fijian learners.

v. Inadequate Funding

Most Teacher training Institutions in Fiji does not provide funding to the aspiring teacher while they are sent on clinical assessment. The study claimed that inadequate funding hindered their capacity to ensure high quality practicum experiences for the aspiring teacher. Expenses relating to practicum include; aspiring teachers travelling to the school for Practicum, administration costs of arranging practicum; travel of Practicum Coordinator visiting and supporting both the students and the teachers supervising them.
Research revealed that each Teacher Training Institution should be responsible for funding aspects of the practicum. The funding level should be sufficient to enable Teacher Education Programs to scrupulously prepare teacher mentors for their role. It should allow for adequate face-to-face visits to high schools where aspiring teachers are placed for Practicum Experience in order to enable collaborative mentoring, supervision and assessment of the students undertaking practicum.

vi. Rural And Remote Placement

Despite the value for students in undertaking practicum in rural and remote areas, the costs borne by students accessing these opportunities can be exorbitant. Costs include travel and accommodation. The family commitments of mature-age students also prevent many from leaving their local area. Where students do undertake practicum in rural and remote areas, the Teacher Training Institutions can find it difficult to provide these students with adequate face-to-face support and to visit them for assessment purposes.

Some respondents suggested that rural practicum placements would lead to more teachers taking up positions in these schools. This is because the experience of living and working in rural and remote communities can persuade graduate teachers of the value of working in schools in these areas. While there are a number of initiatives in place designed to improve practicum and there are also many teachers who individually are outstanding teacher supervisors, it is unacceptable that the quality of practicum is as variable as it is reported to be. Also, it is particularly disappointing that universities are experiencing difficulties finding a sufficient number of schools and teachers willing to accept teacher education students for practicum placements.

The persistence of the problems with practicum can largely be attributed to the current division of responsibilities for delivering teacher education and the lack of a sense of shared responsibility among stakeholders. The key to achieving high quality practicum for aspiring teachers is the establishment of strong authentic partnerships among all stakeholders. It will also require a significantly increased level of effort by each Teacher Training Institution.

vii. Role of Associate Teachers and Schools

Study has explicitly discovered that every aspiring teacher sent on Practicum Experience should be under the guidance of a high quality supervising teacher. The development and implementation of professional standards for teaching at levels of accomplishment and leadership would facilitate the identification of teachers who could be expected to take on this role. There is no denial that MOE and major Teacher Training Institutions are working in isolation. Rather than competing amongst each other, the Teacher training Institutions need to complement each other, assist and meet more often to discuss and align the practicum Teacher requirements with that of
FNCF. It is clearly evident from the research conducted that all stakeholders should take a leadership role in developing a partnership approach to delivering practicum.

Almost all the respondents mentioned during interviews that Teacher Training Institutions need to maintain close links with Associate Teachers while aspiring teachers are on practicum. However, evidence revealed that there is a complex interplay of factors that affects the priority that universities are able to give to practicum supervision and teaching. These include the allocation of funding to Teacher Education Programs. Also, Practicum Coordinators must give greater priority to properly supporting aspiring teachers on practicum and also provided with sufficient time to devote to this aspect of their role.

Added to that, study investigated the role of schools where aspiring teachers are placed for Practicum Experience. Thus, it is indispensable that Teacher Training institutions in Fiji need to build strong relationships with high schools. Since the school is the only place for aspiring teachers to experience their theoretical knowledge into practice, it is essential that Teacher Training institutions entail school staff in the design of the curriculum around practicum. 23 percent of respondents revealed that if the schools were consulted for designing of Practicum Component, apparently schools will be more inclined to welcome practicum students if they stand to benefit from doing so. Study further revealed that one of the Associate Teachers stated in the overall comments section that:

‘ if Teacher Training Institutions begin to value the input of Associate Teachers in mentoring aspiring teachers, ultimately other staff in school will be willing to mentor aspiring teachers in future’ (2014).

Universities need to provide ongoing support to supervising teachers throughout the practicum period through regular contact (not just in response to problems). Universities should make clear to teachers what is expected of them as practicum supervisors. They should also make explicit any relevant theoretical background that the students have been given in their course. Universities should develop and provide specific and substantial preparation processes for teacher supervisors.

Principals should actively encourage suitable teachers to pursue opportunities to supervise practicum students, and to undertake appropriate professional development for this role. School leaders should also promote a culture in which the whole school takes part in supporting practicum students to develop the art, craft and science of teaching.

Conclusion

At the end of this research the collaborative researchers will fill in the void in the existing literature about the worth of Quality Practicum Teachers in Fiji as this is one of the most crucial factors underpinning Teacher Education Programs in the Fiji’s Teacher Education Institutions.
Furthermore, the co-researchers would have been able to collate examined myriad ways in which the teacher Training Institutions will partner to raise the bar and be on par with new teaching knowledge; skills, strategies and attitudes.
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