

## A Community Library Survey in Western Samoa

*Graham A. Wagner and Dick Bishop*

### Introduction

In late 1983, under the terms of an agreement between the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the University of the South Pacific (USP), the Institute of Education (IOE/USP), in conjunction with the Western Samoa Public Library Service, was contracted (among other things) to carry out an investigation on the following: "the attitude of the community to library service and their perception of the role of the library"<sup>2</sup>. This paper reports on a survey at Fagamalo, Savaii, Western Samoa, in which the attitudes of a rural community were explored to realise the above objective and to sound out the community about opening the local junior high school library for public use.

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<sup>1</sup>. This paper is taken from the "Fagamalo School/Community Library Pilot Project", a report by Graham Wagner, Dick Bishop and Mataina Te'o first produced for the IOE in late 1987. The authors would like to acknowledge the support of Cliff Benson, the present Director of the Institute of Education (USP), in releasing the report for publication given the sad news that the school/community library at Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 was completely destroyed in a hurricane last year. It is hoped that the above report and the published papers evolving from it will enable donors and local administrators to quickly and cost-effectively replace something that was generally acknowledged to be a valuable school and community resource in Western Samoa, and a model for developing countries.

<sup>2</sup>. See the report already mentioned for details.

### *Aims and objectives*

The researchers were particularly interested in whether the concept of a school/community library would find favour with the community surrounding Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 as a new school library had been established at the school some months prior to the survey. Working with the Western Samoa National Librarian and the Western Samoa Education Department, the authors needed to know if the sharing of the UNESCO-funded library resources at the school was a viable option for the community. The interview survey described in this paper is an attempt, to not only meet the requirements of the UNESCO contract, but to determine whether the community and the school would accept that a school library could meet the general library needs of the community.

### **Method**

#### *Design*

After consulting colleagues familiar with questionnaire surveys in developing countries, it was decided by the authors that a semi-structured bilingual questionnaire administered by local people should be used to realise the above objectives. The questionnaire was first written in English then translated into Samoan and checked again by back-translating into English. The translation work was carried out by a local academic staff member of the USP in Apia, Western Samoa. A section of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix A. The full questionnaire is contained in the previously mentioned report.

#### *Sampling*

Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1, the school which housed the school/community library, is located in the village/district of Fagamalo on the North side of the island of Savaii in Western Samoa. In order to be a representative survey it was agreed that as many people as possible from the surrounding villages should be sampled. Therefore, after consultation with the teacher at Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1, all main villages between Samalaeulu in the south-east of

Fagamalo to Sapunae in the north-west were included in the survey. In all, nine separate villages were visited by interviewers.

In each village, interviewers tried to involve equal numbers of males and females from four major age groups. They were asked to select equal numbers from those above 40 years, those between 30 and 40 years, those between 20 and 30 years, and some under 20 years. Attempts were made to achieve a balance between educated and non-educated people.

There were about 5,000 people in the region being surveyed but, because of the time that it took to interview, it was only possible to include about 10 people from each village. This meant that overall, 103 questionnaires were issued. Some interviewers were more successful than others in meeting their quota in the time allocated for the survey.

### *Interviewers*

Because English was not widely understood among the older community being surveyed, bilingual interviewers were canvassed from the Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 staff who all agreed to conduct the interviews when approached. They were chosen as the most suitable group on the grounds that they had some familiarity with questionnaires of this kind and also had experience in parent interviewing by virtue of their jobs. Furthermore, they were respected members of the community and could gain access to most homes. The 10 staff involved were all Western Samoa nationals with the exception of one American Peace Corps teacher who interviewed some of the English speaking members in the local village.

The interviews were conducted over a period of two evenings in nine different villages throughout the region. Any longer would have meant that collusion (innocent though it might have been) would have compromised the results. Interviewers were first briefed on the task in hand and asked to make certain that they received the genuine personal responses of the interviewees. By all accounts, the interviews went according to plan, although there is no real way of knowing how personal the responses were given the communal lifestyle and the close proximity of other people in the fales when interviewing was taking place.

### *Questionnaire*

An in-depth interview schedule was chosen because it allowed the interviewers to probe people's attitudes to libraries in general. A written questionnaire was rejected because of the oral nature of discourse in the community.

The questionnaire was made up of 29 separate sections split into two major parts. The first part covered libraries and sought to find out whether respondents were familiar with the notion of libraries and what they offered the individual and the community. Specific questions were directed to how libraries might serve the local community and how they might operate if introduced into the district. The second section was on books and the questions they sought to determine the respondents' knowledge of books and attitudes towards a written literature. An attempt was also made to gain an impression of reading habits and reading preferences of the community at large.

Some of the questions were forced choices, while the remainder were open-ended thus allowing a wide selection of responses. At the very beginning, there was a section for the interviewer to put down the name of the person, their sex, their age and their occupation.

The questionnaire was, in most cases, administered in private and took at least 20 minutes up to, in one case, three hours. Interviewers or interviewees had the choice of using English or Samoan to fill in the questionnaire. Nearly half chose to conduct the interview in Samoan. This meant that upon return to the USP the questionnaires had to be translated into English. To undertake this task, a Western Samoa native speaker, selected by Professor Albert Wendt (then Head of the School of Humanities, USP), was commissioned to perform the translations prior to categorizing and coding responses. When the questionnaires were completed, they were returned to the first author who undertook the analysis and interpretations of the summarized data.

### *Procedure for administering the questionnaire*

Interviewers were asked to take about 10 questionnaires and over a period of two evenings visit the homes of a representative sample of the community in surrounding villages. They were requested to see if they could speak in private to a householder or family member and sit with them for about an hour. During this time questions were asked in either English or Samoan and the responses recorded likewise. Most of the interviewing took place in the home and in most cases would have been witnessed by other members of the family. In some cases the family members would have joined in but this was not seen as an extraneous influence given the close family ties that are a feature of Polynesian cultures.

### *Data Analysis*

When all the questionnaires were completed they were collected up and taken back to the Institute of Education, USP. There the information was analyzed and coded by a research assistant under the direction of the first author. The results were tabulated and reported as percentages in tables or figures which are given in full in the report mentioned previously. All work was checked carefully before inclusion in the final report as was the case for this paper.

Because age and teachers' occupation biases appeared to feature prominently in the survey results it was necessary to run significance tests on all tabled data to see if there was a detectable bias or not. In only one instance was such a difference found and this is mentioned in the body of the text.

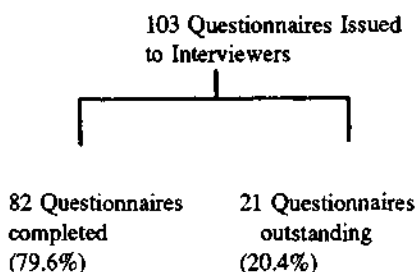
To aid the reader most table differences are couched in percentages alongside column totals. In some cases a bar graph has been used to make a particular point more prominent.

## **Results**

### *Response rate*

There was a good response rate for this survey. In all, 103 questionnaires were issued to interviewers, with 82 returned as completed. This gave a

satisfactory 79.6 percent overall response rate as shown in Figure 0.



**Figure 0: Response Rate**

In round figures, eight out of every 10 people targeted for the survey were interviewed. However, as reported earlier, two interviewers had some difficulty meeting their quotas, whereas one interviewer managed to achieve more than his quota suggesting that there were some interviewer differences which could have lowered the return rate. In general, the overall response rate was high for a survey of this kind.

#### *Respondent characteristics*

**Gender** - The breakdown into the sex of the respondents showed males (49%) and females (51%) were almost equal. In other words we can say that the sample did not have a significant bias in this respect.

**Age** - There is an age bias with just slightly over half of the respondents in the 20 to 29 year age group.

The reason given to the researchers for so many young adult respondents is that the school teachers at Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 found their own age group the most accessible and approachable. This bias is a consequence of having to use educated young school teachers proficient in English and Samoan to do the interviewing. Yet, it is not an unreasonable bias as these are the ones who had the most to gain in the long-run from a school/community library in their district.

Occupations - the largest single group (36%) are school teachers. This is a far more serious bias as teachers, one might suspect, would be strongly against opening their school library to the community at large<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1**  
**Occupations of Respondents**

Occupation	No.	%
Teacher	29	36
Domestic Worker	15	18
Farmer/Planter	10	12
Matai	4	5
Pastor	3	4
District Nurse	3	4
Store Keeper	2	2
Fisherman	1	1
Postal Clerk	1	1
Youth Students	4	6
Unemployed	2	2
Non-classified	8	10
	82	100

Having identified possible biases in the sample it remained to be seen how these biases influenced the results by comparing age and occupation in cross tabulation checks. This technique allowed for a statistical test of significance to be used to assess whether the differences were significant or not. In cross-tabulations of this kind the chi-square statistic was judged the

<sup>3</sup>. It is not uncommon, when visiting schools in Pacific Islands, to discover the only library books in the school locked away in a teacher's office for "safe-keeping". This is because there is a great respect by teachers for books, as such, mainly because they are hard to come by and deteriorate rapidly through heavy handling in a tropical climate.

most appropriate way of identifying an important difference of opinion between two groups. However, in brief, there were no age-related differences and only one teacher-related one, which is mentioned in this report.

### *Meaning of the Library*

When asked to explain what a library was, most of the respondents had some idea. However, less than half (41%) gave what might be called an accurate definition of a library with an acknowledgement that it is a place where one can principally acquire information from books and other reading materials.

When next asked "What do you think a library should do for the community?" slightly more than half (54%) saw the library principally as a place where knowledge/information is provided for public use. The main difference between this and the previous question is that some respondents saw the library as more than a place to borrow books, but as a place to be taught in as well.

In response to another question on whether respondents had been into a library, it appeared that all but one person in the sample had done so. This is not surprising for everyone leaving the island of Savaii would go through Saleologa where the national library has provided, with Japanese aid, an excellent library facility. Similarly, everyone visiting Apia would be aware of another excellent library resource in the form of the National Library in the nation's capital. For example, most respondents (70%) claimed to have visited the Apia library with a lesser number (40%) having visited the Saleologa library<sup>4</sup>. All in all then, it appears that approximately three quarters of the respondents had been into at least one of the government run libraries.

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<sup>4</sup>. Fagamalo is on the other side of Savaii from Saleologa. The two centres are a considerable distance apart therefore visiting the Saleologa library would not be that easy.



In exploring the reasons why people might go into libraries, it was discovered that the largest group of respondents (55%) did this to read books and look at other visual reading aids such as maps and posters, while some (37%) went there to read "lighter" materials such as newspapers and magazines. Only four percent appeared not to use the library, or did not know how to use it properly.

On the question of whether libraries are useful, an overwhelming majority (99%) said that they were useful. There was some division about whether a library was a place where you gained information, or a place where you went to develop skills in reading. A few thought it was a place to read and relax, while the one person who said that libraries were not useful did so on the grounds that they were too expensive.

Apart from one dissenter, all other respondents (99%) were over-whelmingly in favour of having a community library in the district.

While the desire for a community library was almost unanimous, the reasons for having a library in the community were varied as the next table indicates. Cost, as might be expected, stands out as the main factor.

**Table 2**  
**Why would you like a community library?**

Reason	No	%
Costs too much to go to other libraries	29	36
To help people to get books and enjoy reading	20	25
To help people/students with their study	9	23
To help community with reading skills	6	7
To be a community resource centre	3	4
No response	4	5
	81	100

Most people (51%) thought community libraries should be run by a specially trained person. Some (15%) thought that the person who ran the library should be an honest and co-operative educated person, while others (15%) thought that if it was a school-based library then the teachers and the Education Department should run it. The remainder (19%) had a range of differing ideas which included the government, matais, pastor, USP, the community, and in one case "Someone knowledgeable in History".

When it came to a question of who should pay the librarian, about two-thirds (68%) were of the opinion that it should be the government or the Education Department, while only about one-fifth (19%) believed that the district or the community should be held responsible. Some (7%) thought that the USP should provide the funds.

On the physical location of the community library, opinion was evenly split for the majority (52%) over the principle of general accessibility; whether the library should be in every district or at a central locality. The next biggest group (30%) thought Fagamalo or specifically Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 would be the best locality. Finally, some (18%) thought that outlying villages would be a suitable location.

**Table 3**  
**Where should a community library be placed?**

Locality	No.	%
In each District	21	26
Middle of Community/Central place	21	26
Fagamalo	14	17
Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1	11	13
Other places (seven different (villages)	15	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>

Teachers did not hold strongly to the opinion that it should be placed in Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 (7%), while a greater number of others in the community preferred it there (17%). When the categories of this table were collapsed to provide a comparison among teachers and others on whether the library should be placed in the region/district, in Fagamalo or in one of the villages, teachers were inclined to opt for the region/district (69% versus 41%) while just over a third of the others favoured Fagamalo (36% versus 21%). This difference was bordering on significance at the .05 level ( $p = .57$ ) but probably reflects the allegiance that the teachers in the sample showed for their own/home villages.

#### *Library organization and administration*

Nearly two-thirds (60%) of the responses to the question "What type of books should be in a community library?" opted for non-fiction as can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**What type of books should be in a community library?**

Type of Books	Multiple Responses	No.
Non-fiction, reference, true-life	49	60
Samoan myths & legends, history stories, culture	34	41
Fiction/Novels	27	33
Newspapers	26	32
Magazines	24	29
Textbooks/Schoolbooks	21	26
Any type of book	11	13
Religious books	11	13
Children's books	13	16
Love stories	7	9
Bibliography/Autobiography	3	4
Family/Sport	3	4
No response	1	1

When this table was analyzed further in terms of the range of reading opportunities a library should offer it is clear to see that those respondents who would use a library would do so for the wide range of reading materials that it made available.

To see whether respondents believed that library books should be borrowed, or not, the following question was asked: "Where should library books be read?" An almost unanimous number (99%) agreed that library books should be read at home thus supporting the idea of borrowing books. However, a surprising minority (30%), were of the opinion that books should not be read in the library and one respondent (who happened to be a teacher) thought that library books should only be read in the library.

The survey showed that respondents as a whole (83%) preferred library books to be borrowed for a period of up to 14 days. There were few people (10%) who believed that books should be borrowed for longer than 21 days.

About two-thirds (67%) of the people who responded to the survey thought that the traditional method of lending books by recording and date-stamping should be the preferred method of issue. Other suggestions such as date stamping alone, paying money to borrow books, having no rules about borrowing and other similar suggestions were not strongly supported.

All respondents indicated that care should be taken of borrowed books and if the books were damaged then nearly half (49%) said that the borrowers should pay for the value of the books. However, nearly a quarter (23%) said that the borrowers should just pay for the damage, while the same number said that the borrowers should pay a fee or a fine. Four people (or 5%) indicated that any damage to library books should lead to borrowers being banned from borrowing.

The perceptions of teachers regarding the extra curricula uses of the community library are worth noting here for their views departed significantly from the other respondents.

Teachers, for example, were more likely to see the library as a place to read and study (42% versus 8%) and less a place to learn to read (3% versus 21%). It is also worth noting here that there were more Teachers than Others who did not respond to this question (17% versus 9%). Overall, however, there was a strong significant difference between Teachers and Others ( $X^2 = 18.52$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p = <.002$ ) which one might speculate is due mainly to the teachers' general belief that a library (especially a school/community library) is more than an extension of the self-study side of the school itself and should be kept that way.

#### *Attitude to books*

As might be expected in a broad community survey of this kind, not everyone liked reading books. Two out of the 82 respondents were quite negative about reading with one saying that this practice leads to "wasting precious time that should be spent doing other useful chores". Even so the large majority of people surveyed (98%), liked reading books.

To gauge the range of reading done by the community, the question "Do you read many books?" was asked. Over three quarters (85%) said that they did read many books<sup>5</sup>, while the remainder said that they did not.

The respondents were then asked to estimate how many books they read per week. Almost three quarters (73%) said that they read anything between about 6 and 21 books over a four or five week period proving that for some respondents more than one book was equivalent to many. A small minority (26%) said that they did very little reading in a year or longer period.

When asked about what kinds of books they read respondents nominated a ranking order that went from the predictable non-fiction closely followed by fiction, to a variety of individual choices. About a quarter of the respondents showed a firm interest in Samoan history, customs, legends and folk tales.

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<sup>5</sup>. "Many", in this sense, ranged between six books every four weeks to 21 in a fortnight. from children's stories (e.g. Cinderella) to the more intellectually challenging ones (e.g. Shakespeare).

To gauge some idea of the range of books that were being read by the community at large the following question was asked: "What was the title of the last book you read?" Close to two thirds of the respondents (65%) reported 53 different titles, 6 percent recorded a common title, 5 percent recorded a newspaper (i.e. the Samoa Times), while 9 percent recorded the Bible, and 17 percent did not respond to the question. The books read by the majority were primarily fiction ranging from children's stories (e.g. Cinderella) to the more intellectually challenging ones (e.g. Shakespeare). On the question of the availability of reading books, just over two thirds (69%) said that they did not have enough books to read.

Of those who did not have enough books to read, the majority (54%) acquired their books from a library or friends. The remainder said that they acquired their books from the book store, or other unidentified sources, except for four who did not indicate where they obtained their books.

It is clear from responses to the question, "Who else reads your books?", that the books most people (79%) have access to are read by a variety of people associated with the reader's family or friends (79%). Yet one does not get the impression that literature in book form is widely available in the average home. From the next question on the availability of books in the home, it is clear that the number of books in the average home in the Fagamalo region (54% of the sample for this study) ranges anywhere between 1 and 15. Another group in the sample (27%) claimed they had between 16 and 100 books in their home. Of the remainder, most were either vague about the actual number of books they had, or did not respond to the question. It is worth noting for the record, that some (11) admitted that they had no books in their homes.

### *General reading habits*

When asked where most of the reading was done, eight out of ten respondents (81%) said that it was done at home. Furthermore, most respondents reported that they read both newspapers and magazines (90%), preferred to read these in their spare or leisure time (44%), or in some cases at night-time (24%), with the remainder indicating no preferred time.

When asked how often respondents read magazines and newspapers, it appeared that the majority (42%) read them infrequently, while nearly one third (30%) said they read them once a week and the others either never (2%) or anywhere between twice a week (16%) and every day (6%). Three people (4%) did not respond to this question.

### *Preferred reading language*

Most people (76%) consider themselves bilingual to the extent that they regularly read in both Samoan and English, or mainly in English. Even so almost one quarter (23%) preferred to read just in Samoan.

When asked what language most library books should be written in, the surprising result is a swing from preferred language to the realisation that English is necessary as a study language. Even so, it should be noted that slightly over 50% of those surveyed appear to want some Samoan language books in their libraries.

## **Discussion**

### *Community library survey*

The teachers at Itu-o-Tane were interested in the community library survey and agreed to help interview adults in surrounding villages. They wanted to know whether people in the community would come to the school rather than use a branch of the public library service on the other side of the island. Analysis of the survey results showed that the community were, by and large, familiar with the benefits of a library, wanted a community library close at hand, were not too keen on paying for the library, recognised the job of librarian as a specialized one, differed over where a library should be located, and were divided over what other uses there should be for a community library.

Looking at the matters of the availability of reading materials and the attitudes towards reading among respondents the general impression is one of widespread interest but few books or other reading materials. Although most read in both Samoan and English, as might be expected a majority (in

this case just over half) wanted some Samoan books in their local library.

This was in addition to acknowledging the importance of English as a language of study.

There was a contradiction in the responses, when it came to what respondents said they read, compared with the availability of reading material. It may have been that the former response was a liberal interpretation of reading which included all kinds of reading material while the latter response was confined more to library books as such. Both questions specifically asked about books.

Although age could have influenced the results, upon investigation there was no evidence of this. However, when it was discovered that the largest single occupational group were teachers, the results of the survey were cross-tabulated to see if the teachers had biased the results in some way.

Statistically there was only one difference of any magnitude which showed a teacher bias and that related to what other purposes the library should be used for. As might be expected the teachers had a fixed teacher/ learner-centred view of the library while the non-teacher group tended to see the library as a community resource with flexible uses.

It is not surprising that teachers should feature so prominently in the survey as school teaching is a major occupation in the highly populated rural areas around Fagamalo. What is surprising is that the teachers' views on most aspects of the survey were very similar to their non-teaching counterparts. This could be because there is a generally accepted view-point in most Pacific Island communities that emanates down from community matai (leaders) or elders. Although there are obvious differences of opinion on just about all questions in the survey, the general consensus is remarkably uniform in most areas even overcoming occupational and specialist training.

To the researchers the important information that this survey provided is the knowledge that the community would accept and use a community library even if it were based at Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1. Furthermore, the survey showed that respondents in general knew enough about a library and what



it offered the community to indicate that they would support it and could benefit from this kind of community resource even if the books were mainly in English. Nevertheless, there was an indication that the community expected some Samoan books to be placed on library shelves.

### **Conclusion**

The survey has provided a solid base of information for the researchers, the Western Samoa National Librarian, the Western Samoa Education Department, and the local school's librarian about the Fagamalo region's library needs. It did not give a clear picture of how a community library should be run, although it was recognized that the librarian had to be a specialist (trained) person. There is no doubt that two out of every three respondents saw the community library as a Government/Education Department function. On the other hand, about one in five admitted that the district or community should be responsible for the support and maintenance of the library. In other words, the survey reported here supported the then current plan to turn the new school library at Fagamalo into a school/community library at the first convenient opportunity.

**Footnote:** Principally on the basis of this survey the school library at Itu-o-Tane JHS No.1 was opened to the local community in early January 1985.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
Age: \_\_\_\_\_

### SCHOOL/COMMUNITY LIBRARY SURVEY

#### Introduction:

O lo o taumafai nei le Vaega Faapitoa mo Asoaga o le Iunivesite o le Pasefika i Sauti e suesue po o a ni manatu o tagata lautele e faatatau i faletusi. E i ai nai fesili nei e manamais ai ni ou manatu po o le a se soga o se faletusi mo tagata lautele, seaisise o ai ou manatu faatatau i tusi faitau. E le o se suesue lenei. E leai ni tali e a'o pe aese. O le autu o lenei taumafaiga o le fia iloa lea po o a ni ou manatu faatatau i se faletusi ma soo se tusi faitau.

The Institute of Education (at the University of the South Pacific) is carrying out a survey of what people in the community think about libraries. Can I ask you a few questions about what you think about the value of a library in your community and what you think of books in general. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. What we would like from you is to see what you really think about a community library and reading books.

#### LIBRARIES:

1. Faamatala mai i ni au lava upu po o le a lea mes o le faletusi?  
Using your own words would you describe what a library is?

2. E te manatu o a ni soga o se faletusi mo tagata lautele?  
What do you think a library should do for the community?

3. Ua e oo i totou o se faletusi? Ioe/leai.  
Have you been into a library? Yes/No.

Atai o le Ioe, i fea? (O fea?)  
If yes, where?

4. O a ni mes e te manatu e mau i se faletusi?  
What would you expect to find in a library?

(Afa'i e otagio e le vilafin e lea tagata ni mes e mau i se faletusi, tau i ai o le fale lea e mau ai tusi faitau mo le mamalu lautele, e ia tusi ai i le fesili e 4 o lo o i luga ia upu - E le iloa)

(NB: If the person clearly does not know then tell them it's a place that books are held for lending but enter Doesn't know in 4 above.)