

SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN FIJI¹

Melvyn Rainey

Research in the area of school librarianship in the South Pacific has not been a high priority. Indeed, the scarcity of research might well be compared to the proverbial 'hen's teeth'. In an attempt to discover what research has been done in school librarianship in Fiji, which is the most developed of the South Pacific countries, only one study, carried out in 1978 for the Ministry of Education could be found (Ragni, 1978).

Ragni's study included 750 primary and secondary schools and had a response rate of 67 per cent. The survey questionnaire stressed information about the physical layout of the library, size, furniture, collection, budget and the training of personnel. The study concluded that primary schools were faced with an acute shortage of books and until there was an improvement in the availability of books which were of interest to South Pacific children, there was little chance of children becoming regular, interested and fluent readers. In secondary schools the lack of sufficient budgets to improve collections was the greatest problem which librarians believed they faced. From his findings, Ragni believed the lack of trained personnel was the other major problem facing libraries.

Although Ragni's study is the only one specifically covering libraries, there were three other studies carried out on reading and publishing which all had implications for better school libraries. The report of the Fiji Book Flood, (Elley and Mangubhai, 1981) stated in its recommendations the importance of a central school library where children would have access to books if their reading was to improve. A study by Ricketts (1982) also stressed the importance of developing a strong collection of well-written and well-illustrated stories for children if there was to be an improvement in language, writing and reading. A study on publishing in the South Pacific (Williams, 1986) stressed,

¹ Reprinted with kind permission from *The Australian Library Review*, Volume 9 Number 3 1992.

among other things, the need for well- illustrated books with good plots to be written and published for children. While these three studies were not specifically research on school libraries, they all stressed the importance of libraries and reading materials for children.

No other research projects on school libraries in the South Pacific could be located, although a paper on the development of school library services in the Republic of Kiribati by Evans and Etekiera was published in 1990. The paper discussed the development of libraries from a historical perspective; as well, it discussed some of the problems libraries faced in their development.

Because of the dearth of research on school libraries in the South Pacific, it seemed logical to ask why this was so. To obtain local feedback, a questionnaire was sent to fourteen professional librarians working in various types of libraries in Suva, the capital city: government, special libraries, the University of the South Pacific Library and Library Services of Fiji. The last is responsible for school libraries as well as special libraries and some public libraries throughout the country. Some public libraries come under the jurisdiction of local town councils.

The respondents were asked to list six reasons why they believed there had been little research done in the area of librarianship. As none of the respondents was working in a school library and because there are no librarians in schools with a professional library degree, it was decided to broaden the questionnaire to include all types of libraries. Seven of the fourteen people responded, and although a number of reasons were given, only the six most often-mentioned reasons are listed. They were:

1. **Lack of time:** all seven respondents felt their time was taken up with their work. After work a number of them stated they had other commitments with family, church activities and sports.
2. **Lack of financial support:** a number of respondents stated that there was no financial support for research projects. Any individual who undertakes research must find the funding. With very few exceptions, salaries are far too low to expect

individuals to use their own funds for projects.

3. **Lack of resources:** in most instances there is a lack of support staff. If staff could be found to do the work, they would have to do it after working hours and this would be an extra cost for the researcher. As well, in some instances supplies of paper and photocopies of materials must be paid for by the researcher.
4. **Lack of commitment:** four of the seven respondents stated that there was often a lack of commitment on the part of individuals to undertake a research project.
5. **Lack of knowledge on how to carry out a research project:** four of the seven respondents stated that they felt inadequate to carry out a research project. To such a comment there is little one can say. The answer perhaps lies with training institutions. Perhaps a course in the fundamentals of basic research should be required which all librarians should take as part of their training. The four respondents to the question received their professional training in overseas institutions.
6. **Importance of research:** four of the seven respondents questioned the need for research at this stage of development in libraries. They stated such priorities as acquiring funds for budgets, salaries and acquisitions along with cataloguing collections, computerisation of libraries and special projects like National Library Week, workshops and the biennial convention as having a higher priority than research.

Although all the comments made are worthy of serious consideration, it is the last point which causes the greatest concern. Through research into all areas of school librarianship a strong case can be made for their improvement and the improvement of education in general. At the same time, there is little evidence to support statements which are made for the improvement of budgets, better training, increased knowledge about the role the library and the role the teacher librarian should play in the educational system. There has been no attempt to find out if team

teaching and cooperative planning of units of work between the classroom teacher and the teacher librarian will improve the teaching techniques and, in turn, if this will have a positive effect on the learning process.

By addressing these problems and others through research studies, we would be better able to address many of the problems facing school libraries and education in general. Studies which have been done in developed countries are often looked at in a sceptical manner in developing countries and very often it is said that such studies have little relevance in the South Pacific. While this is not necessarily true, it does suggest that if we are not prepared to accept good reliable research done elsewhere, then we must be prepared to carry out our own studies.

How then can we overcome these problems? The Ministries of Education in the South Pacific countries, the teacher training institutions, teachers' organisations and members of the library associations must become convinced of the importance and value of research. The library associations must take the lead in this task. There are many ways in which this might be accomplished. For example, a letter campaign might be tried; as well, librarians should use every opportunity to make others aware of research which has been carried out. This can be done through workshops, conferences, etc. Cooperation between two or three people in planning and carrying out a research project would also be a positive way to develop a field of research literature. Local library associations can set up a small fund to help individuals carry out research projects. The International Association of School Librarianship might consider setting up an international fund to help developing nations carry out small research projects. As well as financial support, some expertise from individuals in developed countries could be used to help develop questionnaires and interpret the results. Grants do not have to be large. A grant of \$500 would be sufficient to carry out a field survey. The results of the study could be published in local and international journals and in this way the study would be made available to everybody.

While it might appear that money is the answer to the problems we face, that is not entirely true. Money does play an important role, but it is not

the cure-all. What we need is encouragement and support in the form of expertise to help us carry out research. In a country like Fiji it does not seem likely that money will be forthcoming from government or school committees to improve libraries, when we cannot justify through research why money is needed. Research into the problems we face can help show us where money can be spent wisely.

The remainder of this paper considers a recent study of 109 secondary school libraries in Fiji. The purpose of this study was to see what improvements had taken place over the past twelve years in the areas of facilities, staffing, budgets, collection developments and programmes. As well, in one section of the questionnaire, respondents were able to make comments which they felt would clarify the state of school libraries.

Ragni, in his comments about school libraries in Fiji, stated that statistics provided some surprises because they contradicted the popular belief that there was a complete lack of facilities, materials and interest in the welfare of libraries. The present study concurs with Ragni in a number of instances. Facilities have increased in numbers and the size of many libraries has improved considerably. Comments by principals and teacher librarians indicate a high interest in the development of libraries in schools.

The questionnaire was mailed to 139 secondary schools in February 1991. A follow-up mailing was sent in April. A total of 109 schools replied, giving a 78 per cent return. Three schools sent in the questionnaire too late to be included in the evaluation of the results. However, their comments would have had no effect on the overall picture other than raising the return of questionnaires to 80 per cent.

The schools were selected from three sources: the Fiji Library Association (FLA) membership list, the Fiji Telephone Directory and the latest edition of the *Library Directory*, which is currently under revision. According to Library Services of Fiji, which is responsible for school libraries, there are 142 secondary schools in the country.⁸ The size of the school enrolments and teaching staffs ranges from 300 or fewer

students with teaching staffs of twenty or fewer to enrolments of over 700 and teaching staffs of more than forty. The largest number of schools in the study (71 per cent) have fewer than 500 students.

Facilities

In the section on library facilities, the respondents were asked if the school had a separate room at least the size of a regular classroom as its library resource centre; 94 per cent replied that they did. In Ragni's study 78 per cent of the schools replied 'yes' to the same question. The percentage increase in the number of facilities is a positive sign that libraries have achieved some measure of importance in most schools.

Although the number of facilities has increased in the past twelve years, the bare necessities such as shelving, circulation (issue) desk, card catalogue, storage area, etc. are sadly lacking in many libraries. For example, almost one-third of the libraries have no tables or chairs or sufficient shelving. Over one-quarter of the schools in the study have no storage space for maps, audiovisual equipment or library supplies, and nearly one-third have no access to a photocopier or a duplicating machine.

Staffing

Staffing libraries with qualified personnel appears to be one of the greatest problems facing schools (see Table 1-3). Of the sixteen schools that had over 700 students enrolled, only 50 per cent have a full-time teacher librarian. The other 50 per cent have a teacher librarian who spends from less than 25 per cent up to 90 per cent of his or her time in the library. Of the 86 per cent of the schools in the study who said they have a librarian, 71 per cent are in the library less than 50 per cent of the time.

Table 1. School Enrolment

Enrolment	Number of Schools	Percentage
Under 300	44	40
301-500	34	31
501-700	15	14
Above 700	16	15
Total	109	100

Table 2. Teaching Staff

Number of Teachers on Staff	Number of Schools	Percentage
20 or less	58	53
21-30	28	26
31-40	17	16
Above 40	6	5
Total	109	100

Table 3. Time Spent in the Library Resource Centre

Percentage of Time	Number of Schools	Percentage
Less than 25	47	50
26-50	20	21
51-74	10	11
76-90	8	8
100		
Total	94	100

Training

The professional training required to become a qualified teacher librarian is offered through the University of the South Pacific (USP). The Certificate in Librarianship has been offered since 1980, yet the number of qualified teacher librarians remains low. Only 11 per cent of those in charge of libraries have both teacher training and either the USP Certificate in Librarianship or an equivalent certification (see Table 4). Fifty-two per cent of those in charge of libraries are qualified teachers, but they have no specialised training in librarianship. While it is a positive sign that qualified teachers are in charge of libraries, little can be expected from them when they have no specialised training and have little time to spend in the library. It is not possible to serve two masters effectively, and it is understandable that classroom teaching duties take precedence over other duties. If the classroom teacher is also to be the teacher librarian in the school, then it seems reasonable that his/her classroom teaching load should be lessened accordingly so that the library can play its role in the educational process in the school.

Table 4. Training

Training	Total	Percentage
Teacher training but no library training	49	52
Teacher training; U.S.P. Certificate in Librarianship or equivalent	10	11
Enrolled in Certificate	6	6
Enrolled in USP Diploma	3	3
No training	26	28
Total	94	100

Many of the respondents stated that they had attended workshops on various aspects of library work. These workshops are offered by Library Services of Fiji and the Ministry of Education and the FLA. While there is little doubt that the workshops are a valuable means of updating for people in the field, they cannot take the place of professional and academic training.

Student volunteers are used by 76 per cent of the school libraries. The use of volunteers can have a very positive effect on the library because they can free the librarian from many clerical and routine tasks that must be done on a daily basis. As well, working as volunteers can give students a sense of achievement and responsibility.

If school library resource centres are to play an important role in the education of young people, then it is incumbent on the administration and staff, the school committee and the Ministry of Education to work in close cooperation to bring this about. A library resource centre in a school plays a minor role in the education system unless there is a qualified teacher librarian in charge. Without such a person the library is like a ship without a captain.

Budget

The results from the question, 'does your school have a yearly budget?', show that budgets are woefully lacking (see Table 5). A total of 45 per cent of the schools have no regular yearly library budget; 82 per cent of the schools which do have a budget receive less than \$2000 per year; only 5 per cent of the schools with a yearly budget receive more than \$5000 per year. In a developing country like Fiji, where many of the materials must be purchased from overseas, the cost of transportation added to the high cost of materials means that budgets must be dramatically increased if good collections are to be developed in school libraries.

Table 5. *Budget Expenditures for 55 Per Cent of Schools Which Have a Yearly Budget*

Amount per	Number of Schools	Percentage
\$1000 or less	35	59
\$1100-\$2000	14	23
\$2100-\$4000	6	10
\$4100-\$5000	2	3
Above \$5000	3	5
Total	60	100

Collections

Many schools in developing countries depend on donations for books. Of the 109 schools in the study, 41 per cent stated that they depend mainly on gifts to develop their collections (see Table 6). While there is little doubt that a number of good titles may be received in this manner, too often many of the titles are textbook type materials which often have a difficult reading level or little relevance for the users. The collection in the school should be developed, first, to meet the requirements of the curriculum and, second, to meet the recreational and social needs of the students. While gifts and donations can strengthen the collection, they should never be the chief source of materials used to build the collection.

Table 6. Schools Depending on Gifts

Number of Schools	Depending on gifts (percentages)	
	Yes	No
100	41	59

The age of a collection is an important consideration in attempting to upgrade it. Respondents were asked to state the age of the majority of their collection (see Table 7). Fifty-nine per cent said that their collections were made up of materials published since 1980. The other 41 per cent stated that their collections were made up of materials published in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Many librarians are loath to discard any materials from their collections because there is a lack of money to replace materials. Visits to a number of libraries in the past three years have shown that a large percentage of the collections is in need of weeding.

Table 7. Age of Collection

Date of Imprint	Number of Schools	Percentage
1950-1959	14	13
1960-1969	31	28
1970-1979	47	43
Above 1980	17	16
Total	109	100

The reading level is one of the most important factors to consider in purchasing materials for the collection. If students cannot read the material and have a reasonable understanding of what they have read, then the material is of questionable value. When asked if students had difficulty understanding material found in the collection, 77 per cent of the respondents stated that difficulty level ranged from some degree of difficulty to considerable difficulty.

Reference Collection

A good quick reference collection of up-to-date materials is a basic requirement of any library. Encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, dictionaries, yearbooks, handbooks, directories and manuals form the basis of such a collection. It is in this area in which school library collections are extremely weak. Sixty-six per cent of the respondents stated that their libraries did not have a set of encyclopedias that had been purchased in the last ten years (see Table 8). Respondents were asked to name the set they had in the library if it was bought within the last ten years. *Encyclopedia Britannica* headed the list by a ratio of five to one. While *Britannica* has a fine reputation, it is perhaps the least suitable set to purchase for a school where English is the second or sometimes the third language of the majority of the students. The level of writing more often than not is beyond the user's understanding and, second, it is often difficult for users to locate material in *Britannica* because of the way the set is organised. There are many other sets

such as *World Book* (Pacific edition), *Academic American* or *Colliers* which would better meet the needs of students.

Table 8. Quick Reference Materials Excluding Encyclopedias

Materials purchased within the past five years	Number of Schools		Percentage	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Dictionary in local languages	27	82	25	75
Dictionary in English language	90	19	83	17
Atlas of the world	63	46	58	42
Atlas of the South Pacific	31	78	28	72
Pacific Islands Yearbook	32	77	29	71
Almanac	23	86	21	79
Biographical dictionary	21	88	19	81

With the exception of an English language dictionary and a world atlas which most libraries had, the other basic reference materials were not part of the collection. Every school library should have at least one up-to-date copy of each of the following reference materials: *Atlas of the South Pacific*, *Pacific Islands Yearbook*, an almanac, *Who's Who in the South Pacific* and *Who's Who in Fiji*.

A school library should contain a good selection of recreational reading materials which cover a wide range of genres. Roughly 20-25 per cent of the collection should be fiction. Approximately 50 per cent of the collections fall into this category.

Library Programme

In the past decade in many developed countries there has been a move away from regularly scheduled library classes. This move came about as teachers and librarians began to do more cooperative planning and team teaching. This meant that libraries became more open and students could come to the library on an individual basis or in small groups to do research under the guidance of the librarian. Teachers could also book a class or group of students into the library when the

need arose. This has made libraries much more flexible and valuable to both students and teachers. The idea of unscheduled library classes has not yet been widely accepted in Fiji schools. Ninety per cent of the schools still have regularly scheduled classes, and in a number of schools not all forms (grades) have a library period, nor are they allowed to borrow materials because collections are insufficient.

Some schools are doing some cooperative planning and teaching; 25 per cent of the schools indicated that some work of this nature was being done. When asked if information and study skills were being incorporated into the curriculum, 80 per cent of the schools indicated that they were. It is difficult to understand how research skills can be effectively incorporated into the curriculum if teachers and librarians are not working in close cooperation, and if all students do not have access to the collection. Teaching information and research skills in isolation from the curriculum has little meaning for students. They must see the reason for learning skills; when these skills are taught as part of the curriculum content, they become part of the learning process. They are best taught and learned when the classroom teacher and the teacher librarian work closely together to prepare units of work which are taught and evaluated through a team approach.

Research and study skills should be developed on a school-based continuum. Classroom teachers and teacher librarians must decide what skills will be taught at each level. Because the abilities of students in each school will differ, skills will not always be taught at the same level in every school. The teaching of skills is not a 'one shot' lesson; they need to be incorporated in units of work and reviewed on a regular basis.

In the area of recreational reading the teacher librarian can do much to help students develop a love of reading. A good collection covering a wide range of genres will help. In addition, if books are discussed with enthusiasm and sincerity, students will become interested - one way this can be accomplished is through the use of book talks or discussions. It is a positive sign that this avenue is being used by 34 per cent of the schools in the survey.

There may be emergencies that arise in the school when the teacher librarian is asked to take a class into the library; however, this should not become a regular habit. The teacher librarian should not be used as a study hall supervisor, nor should the library be used as a study hall. Just over 25 per cent of the schools in the survey use the library in this manner. Every effort should be made to keep this practice at a minimum.

Principals and librarians did make some very important comments about their specific situations. These have been summarised under the following points:

1. *Lack of trained personnel.* This was the most commonly acknowledged problem facing library resource centres. The study shows that relatively few people in charge of school libraries have taken advantage of the Certificate in Librarianship or of the new Diploma in Library/Information Studies. It would appear that these programmes need to be better advertised in the schools.
2. *Budgets.* Finances for the development of programmes are always a problem. If school libraries are seen as a frill in education, then budgets will continue to be insufficient. A large number of schools mentioned that they have yearly fundraising for the school and the library was one of the target projects to receive funds. However, a number of individuals mentioned that when funds were allotted to various programmes in the school, the library usually received very little funding. If libraries are to improve their collections and programmes, then much more money would have to be spent.
3. *Facilities.* A number of schools remarked that the facilities were too small, while others remarked that the library had become a classroom because of the shortage of space. In one instance the library had been taken over by the staff as a staffroom.

4. *Lack of suitable materials.* Purchasing suitable materials for the school library is not an easy task. It requires serious thought, considerable time and money. Selection of materials needs to be done on a cooperative basis involving the materials, the content reading level and how the material will be used, as well as the cost. As much material as possible should be purchased locally. There has been a great improvement in the growth of stock carried by local bookstores in Fiji. Personal viewing of these materials should be encouraged and practised as much as possible.

Recommendations

While a long list of recommendations to improve the situation of school library resource centres could be prepared, it is thought that eight basic recommendations, if they are carried out, will make a good starting point for school library resource centres.

1. The Ministry of Education should consider an overall long-term plan from seven to ten years to improve library resource centres. Every two or three years an evaluation of what has been accomplished within that period should be carried out. Such a plan needs to be developed in close cooperation with principals and teacher librarians.
2. FLA and Library Services of Fiji must take a more active promotional role in encouraging people to become qualified teacher librarians. Information could be sent to all schools explaining the training programmes which are offered through USP Extension.
3. The teacher training colleges must become more aware of the role the library plays in the education of young people. The idea of team teaching with the teacher librarian needs to be explored in the teacher training programme.

4. **Teacher organisations must be actively involved in supporting the role of the library and the teacher librarian in the teaching process. This can be accomplished to some extent through professional in-service workshops.**

5. **Principals must be actively involved in supporting the library and the teacher librarian in their schools. As the leader in the school, the principal is the key to the success of any programme. However, it is the teacher librarian who must keep him or her informed of the needs of the library as well as the services and programmes which are being carried out.**

6. **Budgets need to be greatly improved in all libraries, but this cannot be done in a short time. Each year the library budget should be increased substantially. This increase should be in excess of the inflation rate.**

7. **It is imperative that teacher librarians have a clear understanding of their role and be able to communicate that role to others in the school. A greater degree of assertiveness may be required on the part of teacher librarians if they are to develop a strong working relationship with principals, teachers and students.**

8. **Collection development requires special attention if the collection is to meet the needs of the students and the curriculum. While the ultimate goal would be for each school to have a wide range of selection aids available, this may not be possible because of the cost. A possible alternative would be for Library Services of Fiji to develop up-to-date bibliographies in the various subject areas. The work could be done by a committee of teacher librarians under the leadership of Library Services. The bibliographies could then be distributed to schools. Library services should purchase up-to-date selection aids for their reference area. They should also consider using the wide selection of professional journals and other selection aids which are in the University of the South Pacific collection. Many of**

these aids are useful in the selection of materials for school libraries.

School library resource centres have made a beginning in Fiji. The problems they face are not insurmountable. There is a great supply of human resources and talent in the field of librarianship and education in Fiji. All that remains is for those resources to be organised into a cohesive force.

References

- Elley, Warwick B. and Mangubhai, F. (1981) *The Impact of a Book Flood in Fiji Primary Schools Studies in South Pacific Education*, No. 1. New Zealand Council for Educational Research and the Institute of Education, the University of the South Pacific.
- Evans, J. and Etekiera, K. (1990) 'Development of School Library Services in the Republic of Kiribati'. *Education Libraries Journal* 33, 3.
- Library Services of Fiji, (1991) Personal Communication.
- Ragni, J. (1979) 'Primary and Secondary Library Questionnaire,' *English Teachers' Journal* 15. Institute of Education, the University of the South Pacific.
- Ricketts, J. (1982) 'The Effect of Listening to Stories on Comprehension and Reading Achievement'. *Directions* 8. Institute of Education, the University of the South Pacific.
- Williams, E. (1986) 'Survey of Publishing in the South Pacific'. *Fiji Library Association Journal* 15.