

## **Teacher Education in Aided Project: The case of the Fiji-Australia Teacher Education Project (FATEP)<sup>1</sup>**

*Unaisi Nabobo*

### **Introduction**

After the political upheavals of 1987, Fiji experienced major changes, not only in government but also in all sections of the economy. Numerous qualified persons emigrated to countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the USA. This post-coup exodus was quite significant.

*Between June 1987 and July 1989, over 4,400 employed persons officially migrated... This exodus depleted the country's supply of skills to a significant extent, with 16 percent of administrative/ managerial personnel, 7 percent of clerical staff and 7 percent of professional/ technical manpower estimated to have emigrated by mid 1989. (FATEP, 1992:21)*

The early 1990s also saw major political change occurring in Fiji which impacted on higher education developments. The establishment of the Fiji College of Advanced Education (FCAE) as an aided project, the Fiji-Australia Teacher Education Project (FATEP), was an example of how the politics of the state impacted on higher education development. FATEP was seen in some quarters as an attempt at restoring "normalcy" at the international level, given that Australia was among the loudest critics of the coup. The FATEP could have been used as a peace treaty of sorts between Australia and Fiji.

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This paper is in two parts. The first part documents the establishment, development and implementation of the Fiji-Australia Teacher Education Project, funded by the Australian aid project, AusAID. The second part focuses on a number of issues that have arisen and impacted on the project. It also highlights lessons learnt from the project that could be of relevance to similar projects in the context of Pacific Island countries.

### **Establishment**

In February 1991, the Government of Fiji (GOF) produced a report on the future use of the buildings at the then Nasinu Residential College. The report recommended that the old Nasinu Teachers' College be reinstated but renamed the Fiji College of Advanced Education. The FCAE was to provide teacher education for teachers at the junior secondary level, Forms 1-4. The 1991 report further proposed a request to the Government of Australia (GOA) for assistance with this development.

At the annual bilateral aid consultations in Fiji in August, 1991, it was agreed that assistance be provided. FCAE began its pre-service teacher education programme in March, 1992 and the beginning of the Government of Australia's inputs eventuated in November of the same year. The project time officially began in October of 1992, and ended in September of 1995. Since 1995, the college has been the sole responsibility of the Fiji Government through the Ministry of Education (MOE).

The rationale for the establishment of the Fiji-Australia Teacher Education Project was to develop the FCAE as a fully operational institution capable of providing both pre-service and in-service teacher education, as a means of meeting a serious shortage of secondary teachers in Fiji. That shortage had developed since the early 1980s as a result of a number of factors, including the loss of teachers due to emigration in the post-coup period, the introduction of early retirement, and the withdrawal of USP's Diploma in Education in 1984. (FATEP, 1992). Ironically this was a result of a Fiji government decision

to discontinue giving scholarships for this Programme on the grounds that there were already enough teachers trained at this level.

The objectives of the establishment of FCAE or specifically of FATEP, can be clearly understood as four overall goals. These are: institutional development, development of pre-service teacher education, consolidation of in-service teacher education, and project management.

Institutional development refers to the establishment of the FCAE as a fully operational institution meeting the needs of the Ministry of Education in Fiji. The development of a pre-service teacher education programme refers to the establishment of a two-year pre-service junior secondary teacher education programme. The consolidation and development of the in-service secondary teacher education programme refers to the establishment of an in-service programme with particular emphasis on senior secondary school teachers. Finally, project management refers to the completion of project activities within budget and with intended and other beneficial outcomes. (FATEP 1995).

The pre-service teacher education programme at the FCAE began in March 1992 with input from the Government of Fiji only. Local lecturers deemed capable by the Fiji Ministry of Education to take on tertiary teaching were transferred from senior secondary schools to FCAE. Initial curricula were drawn up with the help of Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) personnel. Local lecturers also sought help informally from personnel at the University of the South Pacific (USP). 100 students enrolled at FCAE in 1992. Of these, 82 graduated in 1993, the first graduates of the College.

Fiji Government monetary input into the project was \$3.6 million. It also looked after local lecturers' salaries, development and operating costs and some teaching materials and resources.

### **The Project Implementation Plan and Australia Input**

The Australian Government input involved the close reference to and use of the Project Implementation Document (PID). This document outlines clearly the origin, implementation and monitoring procedures of FATEP. It stipulates the contribution by the two governments involved as well as the nature of the USP's involvement.

The PID document also has a detailed outline of the work and organisation of the Australian consultants and their terms and conditions of work. The PID does not, however, stipulate these for local counterparts but repeatedly states the hope that local counterparts' terms and conditions will change to enable them to work on a continuous basis with the consultants. Local counterparts joined the project on teachers' terms and conditions and remained so till the end of the Project. This meant that they were entitled to school holidays which interrupted their work at FCAE.

Input by Australia began in October 1992, after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and Fiji. Together with monetary input of some A\$3.5 million, local personnel received professional support from Australian consultants. The Australian Government also provided some teaching materials and resources, as well as consultants, both long and short term. Griffith University, which won the contract by AusAID, began to oversee the project through its International Projects Office in Brisbane. The Fiji Government, through the MOE, worked hand in hand with Griffith University.

The USP, through the Institute of Education, had some input into course development by providing commentaries on most courses on a consultancy basis. Course commentary by the USP was an exercise that the Australian consultants and their local counterparts considered very important and prepared well for, and it later resulted in many cross credits being awarded, although this was not the main initial purpose.

Australian advisers, as planned for in the PID, numbered eighteen, seven long term and eleven short term. Long-term advisers (LTAs) stayed between fourteen and thirty-six months. The short-term advisers stayed with the project for periods ranging from three to six months.

### **Management**

During the project, i.e. October, 1992 – September, 1995, the FCAE was managed jointly by the two governments involved. The GOA functioned between the International Projects Office at Griffith's Mt. Gravatt Campus and an in-country project office at FCAE under the supervision of the Australian Team Leader. These two offices liaised with one another, and the in-country office liaised with the GOF. For day to day affairs, management was a liaison between the GOF's FCAE Principal and the Australian Team Leader.

### **Local Staff Development During the Project Time-Frame**

All local lecturers received counterpart training in the college as was stipulated in the Project Implementation Document. Counterpart training often makes the assumption that the local lecturer has a lot to learn from the Australian consultant. Spitzberg (1978) suggests that counterparts in such a relationship should be equally valued as expertise is a two-way exchange rather than a one way transfer from overseas consultant to local counterpart. This latter view, however, seemed to be the dominant tone in the PID but, in their farewell addresses, most of the Australian consultants admitted that they had learnt a lot from their local counterparts. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that both the local counterparts and Australian consultants gave equally of their know-how, time and effort to the project and benefited in the process.

Some local counterparts also received a one month training attachment in Australian institutions. Twenty-six training attachments and two training fellowships were costed in the Project Design and Implementation Documents at A\$206,000 (FATEP, 1992).

Fellowship training was also planned. The original project design had set aside two one-year post-graduate fellowships in Australia in the field of education at a total cost of A\$50,000. This was changed by the GOA's 1994-5 Annual Plan to seven distance fellowships at Deakin University and two at Curtin University. Thus, instead of sending two personnel for a year each, nine lecturers benefited. It must be noted, however, that, by the end of project time-frame, only four out of the nine lecturers had completed their programmes. No provision was made by the project to fund lecturers who chose to study at USP. Four such lecturers obtained Graduate Diplomas in 1994 and five in 1995.

### **Curriculum Development**

As mentioned earlier, the first curriculum package used in the pre-service teacher education programme at the FCAE was drawn up by CDU officials. This was followed and revised in numerous ways by local counterparts and advisers between March and October of 1992. The curriculum of the college also underwent a major review between October 1992 and February 1993. It was:

*a period of review of existing courses and design of new courses (including all Year 2 courses) to be introduced in February, 1993. This activity was completed by the GOA long and short-term advisers and local counterparts. All courses were fully documented and approved by the Academic Board prior to their implementation. (FATEP 1995: 13)*

Throughout 1993, courses were continually reviewed. The Project Completion Report noted:

*An important part of that review was commentary on all courses provided by the USP staff throughout 1993 and early 1994. The commentaries and the subsequent adjustments comprised an important part of the course development process.*

*By the end of 1994, courses in each of the specialist streams except Agriculture had been stabilised (Ibid: 14).*

The Project Completion Report further maintained that the curriculum was one of the major successes of the project and associated this with the success of counterpart training, the attachments and the post-graduate studies by the FCAE staff. The college curriculum was also strengthened by the establishment in 1993 of the Teaching Practice Centre as well as the Resource Centre.

### **Expansion**

The FATEP Mid-Term Review Report (1994) identified a number of issues which were deemed important in the achievement of the four overall goals outlined above. These issues are:

- a) the retention of staff at the FCAE,
- b) upgrading of the Physical Education, Music and Art and Craft (PEMAC) facilities,
- c) provision of technical assistance to Accounting, Economics and Secretarial Studies,
- d) an improvement of relations with the USP,
- e) a widening of FCAE's activities,
- f) the availability of more funds to build a computer centre,
- g) a forward plan and
- h) the promotion of participation by females in education at the FCAE and in the education system as a whole.

As part of the overall four goals of FATEP, the new look FCAE in 1996 boasted a new and enlarged, as well as fully automated, Resource Centre, new classrooms, a computer laboratory, a media workshop, two microteaching laboratories and renovations and extensions to the old lecture theatre. Furthermore, intensive upgrading took place during the project period to the Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Secretarial Studies and Science complexes.

### **The In-Service Secondary Teacher Training Certificate (STTC) Programme**

The STTC programme takes place in the school holidays. Staffing for the programme has been changing since 1991. In 1991, it was conducted by the Australian consultants with local CDU personnel. In 1992, it became a part of FATEP which meant that it was run by local counterparts and the Australian consultants. This was also the case 1993 and 1994. In December of 1994, however, local lecturers went on vacation when their existing terms and conditions of employment were not upgraded. Their refusal to work on the programme was due to their unresolved grievances; they were still on teachers' terms and conditions, and therefore were not obliged to work in the school holidays to run the STTC. The programme was cancelled and resumed in November, 1994, when teachers to conduct it were drawn from senior secondary schools and the University of the South Pacific (Cawanibuka, 1995).

### **Sustainability**

The 1994 Mid Term Review Report emphasises the importance of sustainability and states that local staff training is a major component of the project, in the hope that when the Australian counterparts left, the College would be able to continue to run with local staff. The Project Completion Report of 1995 also highlights issues that are of concern to any attempts at sustainability. These are:

- a) *the retention of trained and experienced teaching staff within FCAE,*
- b) *the retention of library staff;*
- c) *the continued maintenance and replacement/repair of equipment;*
- d) *the maintenance of a high quality pre-service student intake;*
- e) *the further development of facilities in areas of potential development such as PEMAC;*

- f) *continued support through the GOF recurrent funding for the Practicum and supporting teaching resources;*
- g) *recognition of the FCAE Diploma by USP for purposes of cross accreditation. (FATEP 1995: 23-4)*

As the Project came close to an end in 1995, local lecturers became increasingly concerned about the issues listed above. As early as September 1994, for instance, the College Practicum Committee, after much deliberation, wrote a letter to the College Principal, Vice-Principal and Australian Team Leader. The letter pointed out that, according to the PID, the aid money which financed the Practicum would continue only until 1995, the end of the Project period. The Committee wanted some assurance that sufficient allowance had been made to increase local GOF input to meet Practicum costs after 1995 when the project ended. The letter stressed the importance of maintaining the Practicum as it played a pivotal role in the whole teacher education exercise and the consequences of insufficient funding. The letter read:

*“... One extreme possibility is the disintegration of the practicum. To allow this to happen, ... is to accept a considerable decrease in the quality of education provided by our Institution as well as a loss of substantial professional networking within the school system....” (Nabobo, 1994:1).*

## **Issues**

A number of issues arose out of the project that may impact on the continued success of the college. Some of these issues are discussed here.

### 1. The transition from Secondary teachers to Teacher Educators

Local teachers who were selected to teach at the FCAE in 1992 experienced the transition from secondary teaching to tertiary teaching almost overnight. They found their new roles trying but challenging.

In an interview the author had with two local lecturers, they looked back on this transition and commented as follows. Vucukula (1996) noted that the utmost dedication was needed on one's part in terms of collecting materials and reading up for lectures, preparation of workshops and all other associated tasks of tertiary teaching. Tagivakatini (1996) added that those were trying but exciting times; things were only possible because lecturers really worked hard and because academics at the USP were willing to help out. (The initial plan was to attract Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) officers of the MOE to work at the College. This did not materialise because college lecturers' salaries were lower than those of CDU officers.)

## 2. Retention of trained experienced teaching staff within the College

While the FATEP's PID expressed the hope at the beginning of the Project that lecturers' terms and conditions might improve during the Project, this did not happen. The PID noted that the Project Design Document had not made any mention of the terms or conditions under which local FCAE lecturers were to be appointed. On the other hand, terms and conditions of the overseas consultants were thoroughly stipulated in the Project Implementation Document. At the completion of the Project in September, 1995, remuneration of local lecturers was the same as at the beginning of the Project, i.e., they were paid like secondary school teachers, not like teacher educators.

Terms and conditions of employment were a constant problem throughout the project and became a cause of dissatisfaction and frustration. Several lecturers left, some to take up posts at the USP, others went back to the school system to take up posts as principals and were more highly paid. This turnover defeated one of the purposes of the project, that of retaining staff who had benefited from the exercise of working with the Australian advisers, were familiar with courses and had gained experience in teaching at this level. Newcomers had to start from scratch.

3. Links with tertiary institutions of higher education

Aid favours and encourages links with tertiary institutions overseas and in the process effectively by-passes and weakens links with local tertiary institutions. Bab (1989) highlighted this important point when discussing Australian aid policies on education. Local lecturers with FATEP undertook attachments of four weeks each. Besides this, nine local lecturers were enrolled in the long distance study mode with Deakin University for post-graduate qualifications yet these were available at USP, undoubtedly at a much cheaper rate. A number of local lecturers chose to study at USP. Their part-time studies at USP were funded either by the Public Service Commission or by the individual lecturers themselves.

Reports on overseas attachments made by local lecturers were largely favourable. The Head of School of Education on her return from her four weeks attachment in Australia highlighted in her report that one of the successes of her attachment was that she had identified a University for her Doctoral Studies.

Overseas attachments also gave new ideas in terms of institutional development to locals. An example was when the College Librarian on her return from attachment pointed out that the experience had given her insight on the possibilities of how the College Library may develop five years into the future. She added that the trip had also allowed her to identify suppliers for the library and coordinator of supplies. She added, however, that on the question of sustainability, she had to identify areas she thought the Fiji Government could afford in the long run without Australia Government Assistance.

While reports of attachments made by local lecturers were largely favourable, the fact remains that the same amount of money could have been used to provide attachments at the USP for a larger number of lecturers. Moreover, being a local institution, the USP is more in tune with the Fiji context and so can provide a more realistic experience.

There is also greater opportunity for lecturers wishing to continue their studies, since the USP is so close.

Textbooks are an important element of curriculum development in an aided project, and in FCAE's case there was a clear Australian bias. The College Librarian for instance, in an address to second year trainees on the topic "Hidden Curriculum" on September 29, 1994, stated that Australian books, texts etc. make up to about 70% of all books in the College Library. These were bought under Project aid. The College Library had about 30,000 volumes of books, periodicals and cassette tapes by the end of the project. (FCAE Handbook, 1996: 5). Links between FCAE and the MOE's Education Resource Unit (the local textbook production unit) was scant. The USP's publications were similarly not utilised fully, although many of them are suitable for the Pacific Region.

In an aided project such as this there is also the tendency to align academic standards of the aided institution to standards in similar institutions in the aid donor's country. During the FATEP, attempts were made by the Australian consultants to get external recognition of the College programmes from a number of Australian institutions. The Australian Team Leader in his paper to College lecturers noted:

*... The B+ to A+ bracket of grades is awarded to students who obtain 75% or higher. This corresponds with the Distinction/High Distinction range in many overseas universities (e.g. University of New England, Queensland University of Technology, RMIT and Monash) ... (Coulter, 1994: 1)*

There is no mention of the USP.

Minimal involvement of local higher education institutions in aided projects has been raised by numerous writers. Baba (1989), for instance, detailed how Australian aid policies did this, as laid out in

the Jackson Report of 1984. This report favoured the use of Australian institutions ahead of local ones. As a result of such policies the University of the South Pacific as the local higher education institution in Fiji had minimal involvement with the Project. The Project Implementation Document did not clearly state the nature nor the extent of USP's involvement. The PID, (FATEP 1992:13), noted strong disappointment among some USP staff that they had not been directly involved in the subject advisory element of the project. On the same note Lloyd and Packer (1994) say that the lack of involvement of local higher education institutions in project aid has been a source of aggravation to the personnel of local institutions.

#### 4. Who Benefits?

The PID (1992:35) noted that with regard to beneficiaries of the Project in FCAE, 12,402 Fiji persons would have benefited directly or indirectly between November 1992 and November 1995. The same document also noted that by the end of the project period, at least A\$2,620,500 would have been spent on Australian consultant fees alone, ie approximately 74% of the Australian Government input of A\$3.5 million. This is related to what Leach (1993) terms the human dimensions of project work where there is the obvious disparity of the expatriates' privileged lifestyles and differences in the use of resources. In the case of FATEP, the short term consultants stayed in one of Suva's most expensive hotels while the long term consultants stayed in apartments at a rate of F\$1,500 a month. There were also differences in the use of vehicles and other equipment such as photocopiers. The expatriates were allowed to use the 'Project vehicle', and other facilities which were generally newer and better than college facilities.

Baba points out that Australia benefits overwhelmingly from the aid it gives. He noted that:

*Australian businesses and institutions are involved in virtually every aspect of country programme implementation. (Baba, 1989:16).*

#### 5. Cultural sensitivity

Some consultants showed sensitivity to local customs and cultures while others did not. The following incident reflects this:

*The locals were excited as usual. Another feast perhaps! It was the first ever function the donors were throwing where both local and overseas counterparts were to attend. Before this occasion, the locals had thrown a number of Pacific type of feasts to welcome the overseas counterparts.*

*Food plays an important role in Oceania. It not only is for satisfying physical appetite; it more importantly is used to collect people. Food prepared for visitors symbolises the importance the host places on those invited.*

*On this particular day, or rather, afternoon, the locals in their own quiet way were expecting some show. The function ended some two hours and the stories continued to be told some two months later. The visitors could not understand why they were fed carrot and celery sticks amidst drinks.*

*Two of the more culturally conscious consultants A and B were quite ashamed of what was quietly deemed to be an inappropriate show. The two understood the role food played in Oceania. They knew the locals had not only come to fill the beliefs but to make a quiet, almost passive, assessment of how the donors and the overseas team valued them. (Nabobo, 1995).*

6. Eurocentric notions of knowledge overriding local notions and understandings.

The debate on the model for teaching practice is an example of a conflict of opinion between eurocentric notions and local notions. The need arose, in the teaching methods course, for a model that would depict both content and context and underpin the essence of the whole course. Local lecturers deliberated and unanimously agreed on a model - a coconut tree. These written recollections by a consultant throw more light on this issue:

*The model is not immediately apparent. There are certainly no neat boxes carefully interconnected by multi-directional arrows. Instead there's a hastily drawn picture of a coconut palm, firmly embedded in the earth. Looking closer, however, those around the desk can see that each element of the drawing – earth, roots, trunk, fronds, flowers, fruit – is labelled, and that each label refers to a process or product of the curriculum. As the model is explained, the level of interest and excitement around the table rises. Soon everyone is engaged in vigorous analysis, suggesting amendments, extensions and refinements.*

*The group decides there and then that the “coconut tree model” will become the focal point of a presentation at the next staff meeting. The meeting duly eventuates and the presentation made, using a suitably artistic overhead transparency. It is immediately clear that the model has captured the imagination of the insiders. Their response to it is overwhelming positive. They obviously feel comfortable with the model: they understand it, they accept it, they seem excited and intellectually challenged by it.*

*But not so the outsiders. They are decidedly unenthusiastic. Their response is muted indeed. Eventually one of their number, grey of beard and wiser than most,*

*gets reluctantly to his feet. "I'm sorry, but this is not a model. A metaphor, perhaps, but definitely not a model. You see it is not completely logical. Some of the categories are not mutually exclusive. It leaves some of the issues open, some questions unanswered. It contains certain conceptual ambiguities. No, it is definitely not a model. And anyway, why choose a coconut palm? They are such untidy and rattly things. Why not a solid, green substantially mango tree?*

*After much debate (intellectual discourse?) finally, the 'insiders' have it!! (Nabobo, 1995).*

7. The lack of liaison between FCAE and the local branches of MOE, particularly the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU)

Benson (1993) emphasises the importance of the liaison between teacher training colleges and the CDU. However, as he points out, lack of time is a major reason this is not happening. At FCAE, lecturers' heavy workloads and packed timetables, and the equally heavy workloads of CDU officers did not really allow this to happen.

**Lessons to be Drawn from the Project**

These issues suggest several lessons, which could be of relevance to similar projects in the context of Pacific Island countries. With regard to sustainability of FCAE, the lessons learned include the need for the local partner, i.e. the Government of Fiji, to make long term plans as to how to maintain and continue to develop the institution at the end of the aid period.

Furthermore, the local regional university could have been a part of the consultancy team. This would have ensured ongoing relationships, mutually beneficial, at the end of the project between the two local institutions. Conditions of aid need to be mutually agreed upon so that the benefits do not accrue solely to the donor country.

Baba (1996) notes that in small countries such as Fiji, the best forms of foreign aid are those which ensure sustainable development utilising local resources, local institutions and personnel. The USP remains the premier institution of higher learning in the South Pacific region. It is unfortunate that formal links were not set up during the Project period so that there could be continuing professional and collegiate liaisons and support.

With regard to retention of local staff, the lesson learnt is that the local staff should have been taken seriously from the beginning of the project i.e. their terms and conditions should have been clearly stipulated both in the Project Design Document and Project Implementation Document. Local staff must feel equally valued in terms of their expertise and contribution if they are to remain in their jobs. This needs to be reflected in their remuneration and other related work conditions when working side by side with overseas consultants.

Finally, the incident about the teaching practice model shows the importance of taking into account local perceptions and ideas. Eurocentric biases need to be carefully checked by consultants. Spitzberg (1978) similarly noted that in aid, there is often a Eurocentric bias and that the focus should be as much on local counterparts as on the expatriate. Thaman (1992) also notes that, in aided projects, curriculum development should take into account local realities and knowledge. Teasdale (1994), on the same note, insisted that "outsiders" in an aided project should shed their "intellectual ethnocentrism" and accept that people of developing countries (recipients) have other realities, world views and epistemology that are equally rational and valid.

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