The educational and career aspirations of Solomon Island's parents for their children

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Abstract

This study used the qualitative semi-structured interview method to collect data to discover Solomon Islands parents' educational and career aspirations for their children and their perceptions of formal secondary education in the Solomon Islands with respect to their children's preparation for meeting these aspirations. In carrying out the research, four couples were selected as participants and categorized into two groups according to their educational attainment (well educated and less educated).

What was found was that, although parents have educational and career aspirations for their children, not all parents were specific. The findings also suggested that the career aspirations parents have were mainly influenced by economic and social factors rather than internal factors.

In relation to parents' perception of the formal secondary education system in terms of preparing students for work, the findings suggested parents have both a positive and low opinion of formal secondary education in the Solomon Islands. There was also a mixed feeling and point to the idea that there are other factors such as teachers and curriculum subjects that impacted on the perceptions of success or vice-versa of the secondary education system.

The findings also suggested that while parents appreciate the vocational curriculum and education system as preparing students for work (than secondary education), preference however was given to secondary education first and foremost.

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TAGIO TUMAS NAO EVRI WAN

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. 1 Introduction

Since the Solomon Islands was subjected to British rule as a British Protectorate and then again after independence in 1978, there has been a constant and steady growth in the population of rural sub-urban Honiara (the main town) due to internal migration from other island provinces (Alasia, 1989). One of the major reasons for recent migrating was the ease of access within the town to the basic and essential services of the central government. Indeed, for most parents, one of the main attractions was formal education, particularly at a secondary level. Parents were seen to be more involved in their children's education if they transferred them to schools in Honiara and themselves sought employment to help meet their children's financial needs for a formal education.

This is not a new phenomenon nor is it confined to the Solomon Islands alone. In their study entitled '*Parental Perception of the Education of their Adolescent Children in Greece,*' Saiti and Mitrosili (2005), noted that in the transition from compulsory secondary education to post-compulsory secondary education, parent involvement in their children's education and choice of career gained momentum. This was reflected in the creation of associations and governing bodies within the schools in which parents were connected and represented.

In the Solomon Islands context, where enrollment of secondary students was steadily increasing (Sikua, 2002) as well as high rates of unemployment, general secondary education (which will eventually lead on to post-secondary education), was seen by parents as the means to children securing a comfortable and well-paid job. The economic value of education was evidenced by the fact that well trained and qualified skilled individuals were those who, in most instances, were fortunate to secure better paid employment and occupations with status and prestige. Those who were pushed out of the education system at the different levels of the system (Grade 6, Forms 3 and 5) as a result of national examinations, and those who were pushed out of the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA, Forms 6) and University

Foundation (Forms 7) were insecure in terms of employment because of their lesser amount of formal education and formal employment scarcity.

1.2 My interest in the study

As an indigenous Solomon Islander, I have observed over the last two decades a trend for the majority of students attending secondary education to not become formally employed. I also noticed that students with secondary education were flocking into Honiara (the capital of the Solomon Islands) at the beginning of every year in search of formal employment opportunities only to find, to their disappointment and frustration (and that of their parents), that opportunities were scarce. Even those students who stayed back in the villages were often considered as 'good for nothing' by the parents and the community. In other words, the education system created a group of partly educated individuals who did not fit well into either the rural village or town life.

While there are other economic factors which impact on this trend, my interest in undertaking the study was sparked by the knowledge that parents' perceptions of the education system and their aspirations for their children in relation to education and work, were assumed to be understood. No research had been carried out to explore whether the formal education provided in the Solomon Islands was what parents really wanted for their children or conversely whether the parents understood the education system itself. Furthermore, the curriculum in use (particularly at the secondary level) in the past two decades was designed before independence. Although, curriculum changes are currently happening, it will be sometime before they are fully implemented. This suggests that the curriculum may be out of date and not suit the preferences that parents have for their children.

The question of whether the Solomon Islands education system is providing enough to prepare students for future careers or professions or even just for life, as seen by parents, has not been formally investigated in the Solomon Islands. Therefore, this research was undertaken to explore the following question:

What are parents' educational and career aspirations for their children and what are their (parents) perceptions of the formal secondary

education in Solomon Islands with respect to their children's preparation for meeting these aspirations?

As a Solomon Islander and a primary teacher by profession, I perceive that there is the need to explore parents' understanding of the Solomon Islands education system (particularly at the secondary education level) and how they view it in relation to preparing their children for future careers. This is because, with the introduction and continuing increase of Community High Schools in the country, the number of students who will finish formal education at the secondary level will increase. Furthermore, as a mother of three children, one of whom is currently in secondary education, it is important to me that parents' aspirations and views for their children's future are formally researched. This will help the Solomon Islands parents (including myself) to plan how best my children can succeed through the secondary education system. I consider that unless there is wide consultation and note taken of parents' views, then any changes to the education system and curriculum development, may still be looked at with suspicion by parents and other education stakeholders.

1. 3 Background to Solomon Islands education system

In order to understand the present secondary education system in the Solomon Islands, it is important to understand education during the different eras throughout the Solomon Islands history. People's perception of education or schooling does not exist in a vacuum but is the result of influences relevant to education.

1.3.1 Traditional education system

Today, the traditional Solomon Islands education system can be erroneously interpreted as a system of education that no longer exists. In light of the emergence of the formal education system about a century ago, the word 'traditional' may connote something that is past and long forgotten and in need of reviving. While to some extent, some elements of traditional education may need to be formally revived in the Solomon Islands education system, such as traditional ceremonies, generally traditional education in the Solomon Islands is still very much alive and continues to be part of the everyday lives of the people, particularly in rural villages where 84 percent of the Solomon Islands total population live (Sikua, 2002).

Traditional education, in the context to which I am referring here, was the type of teaching and learning that existed and was part of the society prior to the emergence and establishment of formal education. In the context of the Solomon Islands, the traditional education system has evolved over thousands of years and continues to evolve despite the introduction of modern tools such as knives and axes, and formal classroom teaching (Wasuka, 1989). Children were trained through physical demonstration with hands on the job and what was learnt was contextual. Teachers were mostly older relatives whose ambition was for the younger generation to be successful individuals within the community of relatives and to outsiders who perceived them. Ki'i (1995) sees the traditional education system as a participatory process in that all relatives helped in the training of the child to enable the child to productively participate in the society for its wellbeing.

The traditional education system thus aimed(s) to equip the younger generation with skills necessary for survival and to acquire social status (Wasuka, 1989). In some contexts, particularly in the Solomon Islands patriarchal societies such as in Malaita, the parents hidden agenda was for the child to be more productive and to be able to accumulate wealth and to become a recognized 'bigman' in the community (Keesing, 1992). In other words, the Solomon Islands traditional education system existed with the aim not only to enhance the survival of the human population but also to acquire social status and dignity compared to others.

1.3.2 Education during the missionary era

Education in the missionary era was established with the introduction of Christian mission schools by Christian churches (Bennett, 2000; Fangalasu'u, 1994; Seare, 1970). This meant that the first formal education system to be established in the Solomon Islands was provided by Christian churches. Although, the different church education authorities may have their different aims, and as such education during this era can be characterized by fragmented efforts, generally their (churches) objectives were twofold. Fangalasu'u (1994) noted these as firstly, to literate the locals in the Bible and to convert them to Christianity so that secondly, they (locals) would in turn help in Christianizing their own people and hence spread their (churches) doctrines.

Although it is difficult to date precisely when this formal education during this era began, it can be said that the initial formal education in the Solomon Islands, which occurred during the early missionary era, was not extensive. Palmer (1980) noted that the Bible was the only text. The training was, in most instances, "in line with local adaptation" (Liligeto, 2001, p. 29). There were also discrepancies in the amount of education received with reference to gender. Since the Solomon Islands was mostly a patriarchal society, men were the ones who were mostly introduced to reading and writing and some basic mathematics. Palmer (1980) further noted that because there were different Church education authorities seeking their own interests first and foremost, formal education during this era lacked any coordination. Instead, churches, acted in competition as rivals.

In the later stages of the missionary era, the missionary schools were delegated national duties as national schools by the protectorate/colonial administration. This meant that instead of serving the interests of the churches alone and the districts/province in which the schools were located, the churches were recommended and requested, by the protectorate government, to serve the wider Solomon Islands community (Sikua, 2002). The changing economic system and the need for locals to serve in the administrative mechanism of the protectorate, led protectorate administrators to suggest to the church authorities that an education system that would serve both the church and the administrative needs of the colony be established. So, rather than letting the churches alone educate the people, the protectorate government perceived that the colony needed to play a more active role in an education system which had common goals for the whole colony rather than just to serving the purposes of the different churches. This new dimension of education, as service to the protectorate, required some of the church education authorities to revisit their traditional aim of just converting locals from heathenism, to equipping the locals with knowledge and skills to operate in the newly introduced economic system.

1.3.3 Education through the colonial/protectorate era

Education through the colonial era in this context is considered to have commenced with the establishment of King George VI School in 1954. While it can be argued that the protectorate commenced influencing schools early during the missionary era, Groves (1939, cited in Liligeto, 2001) noted that it was a passive influence. The

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establishment of King George VI School which was directly owned and administered by the protectorate government was, in my opinion, the first physical reflection of the colonial masters changing their role and influence or power in education from being passive to active educators.

The education system during the colonial era was not an indication of non-appreciation of the missionary established schools by the colonial masters. In fact, through the basic education (reading and writing) provided by the churches, the government utilized the skill and knowledge of those locals who completed some form of formal education (Fifi'i, 1989) with much appreciation because of the Christian morals and values such as 'peace' and 'love' that had been promoted in the education provided. Even to date, the main schools during the missionary era are still considered as National Secondary Schools.

The need for an active role in education by the protectorate was more apparent however, with the introduction and pace of emerging new ideologies and social values associated with politics, capitalism and economics (Palmer, 1980). The common goal of education during the colonial era was reflected in the functional education practiced during this era (Ki'i, 1994). The goal was to educate people who would be able to function in the newly introduced economic system and who could particularly serve the interests of the British (Keesing, 1992).

Because of its (education system) functional role, the education system during this era was simple. Students who attended formal education, at least up to Class 7, or who had formal secondary education, went on directly into the workforce. There were very rare opportunities for students to get a scholarship to study outside the country. Most people who had a formal education during this era, got white collar jobs. The administrations demand for purely literate people (those who could read and write) was high. Even after the political independence of the Solomon Islands, individuals without degree qualifications continued to hold onto the top government positions. For the purpose of this study however, this era of the education system reliance on reading and writing as sufficient ended in 1978 with the political independence of the Solomon Islands as a state.

1.4 The Present Education System

The present Solomon Islands general education system reflects a conventional structure which is inherited from the British. It consists of early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and non-formal education levels.

1.4.1 Early-Childhood

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) was first introduced into the Solomon Islands in the late 1980s (Solomon Islands National Report on Education For All (EFA) (2000). However, its recognition by the central government was only evident in 1996 with the appointment of a national coordinator for ECE and the inclusion of the salary of early childhood teachers in the central governments payroll in 1999 (EFA, 2000). Since ECE had been operating as private entities before then, the cost of their running the ECE was high because there was no direct support from the central government in any form. Private ECE schools were mostly found in the urban centers. The composition of students likewise, was made up mostly of children whose parent(s) would be considered to have high salaries. The high cost of ECE compounded by a lack of knowledge of the importance of ECE meant parents, in general, viewed it as a waste of time and money.

The appreciation of ECE and their subsequent incorporation and amalgamation into the primary system (Sikua, 2002) was perhaps, in my opinion, a result of three reasons. Firstly, there were informal comparisons made between children with and children without ECE experience before going into primary education and this seemed to generally favor the former. Secondly, there was a steady increase in the younger generation going to school, (at least more people go through formal education than previously) hence there was an appreciation of the role and experience of ECE before primary education. Thirdly, for some parents ECE was and is considered to be both an education and a baby-sitting service particularly where both parents (husband & wife) are employed. For the combination of these reasons, there was a demand in education for space for children as early as three years old. Gradually therefore, ECE came to be considered as a necessary component of the education system.

1.4.2 Primary Education

These days the primary education in the Solomon Islands officially accommodates children from preparatory level to Class 6. However, the ages of the students at this level range from 5 – 16 years. This, according to Sikua (2002, p. 21), was because of the "ambiguity about the formal role of the preparatory year where there is wide variation in the entry age (between 5 – 9 year olds)" and furthermore, many students repeat classes at various class levels. The ambiguity in preparatory entry age and students repeating at different classes allows some students to spend eight to nine years in primary education alone in government or private schools.

To add to this complexity is that matter of education administration. All primary schools in the Solomon Islands are registered under twenty different education authorities (Sikua, 2002). This means that each school or education authority may have its own educational philosophy. However, despite the various educational authorities, most schools and or education authorities can simply be considered as 'agents' of the central government (World Bank, 1993). The reason being, that under the Agency Agreements stipulated in the PGA (Section 31 Parts (1), (2) and (3) (a) and schedule 6, (cited in Sikua, 2002), the overall operation and maintenance of primary schools is the responsibility of the educational authorities on behalf of the central government. With the exception of few schools which are totally private, for example the Honiara International School which does not use a local Solomon Islands curriculum, all primary schools are part of the national education system.

1.4.3 Secondary Education

There are three types of secondary schools in the Solomon Islands; National Secondary Schools (NSSs), Provincial Secondary Schools (PSSs) and Community High Schools (CHSs).

National Secondary Schools

The NSSs are schools that are either directly controlled by the central government (2 schools) or by different Church Education Authorities (7 schools). Historically, these schools, with the exception of Waimapuru which was opened in 1984, are some of the oldest established schools in the country as most are operated by the Churches. They

were the schools which were requested to take on national duties to teach a national curriculum during the colonial/protectorate era.

Equipped with administrative experience, and often previously expatriate teachers, NSSs normally take in the best students nation-wide who sat the Solomon Islands Secondary Entrance Examination (SISEE), and later the national Form 4 Entrance Examination. In 1999, the NSSs could accommodate only seven percent of students (Sikua, 2002) yet their preference for taking in the academically best students is still maintained.

The NSSs normally offer full academic secondary courses up to Form 5 (Sikua, 2002). So, parents view the NSSs as the most desired school for their children. Recently, with the growing demands for higher secondary courses (Forms 6 and 7), most NSSs are now offering Pacific Senior School Certificate (PSSC) and a University Foundation year. In some instances, Su'u NSS for example, junior forms (Forms 1-3) have been removed to cater only for the senior secondary forms (Forms 4 – 7).

Provincial Secondary Schools

The PSSs are controlled by Provincial Educational Authorities. Traditionally introduced in response to a major review of the education system in 1973, the PSS's focus more on a rural vocational oriented rather than an academic secondary curriculum which basically encourages development of skills for self-employment (Sikua, 2002). However, some parents do not highly regard the PSS curriculum. Reinforced with the knowledge that the PSS's curriculum is an elective/optional subject in the NSS, parents prefer that their children too, attend schools that primarily offer academic rather than vocational subjects. This preference is because, in my opinion, Solomon Islands history had shown that academic children were better rewarded later in their careers.

In response to some parents' preferences for academic subjects, the PSS have slowly introduced academic along with vocational subjects and so created the opportunity for PSS students to come back into the academic stream after sitting the Form 4 Entrance Examination (Liligeto, 2001).

Currently, all the PSSs are now offering the same academic courses as the NSSs (EFA, 2000) with some up to Forms 5, 6 and even 7, such as in Honiara High School. This is a major change as PSSs used to offer secondary education only up to Forms 3 (Liligeto, 2001). This broadening of secondary education through the PSSs caters for more children to be enrolled in the academic stream.

Community High Schools

The introduction of Community High School (CHS) in 1995 was a result of international comment on the Solomon Islands highly competitive pyramidal education system that, according to the World Bank (1993, cited in Sikua, 2002), had so few places that intending students were continually pushed out. As a consequence it reported "there was a literacy rate of only 27 percent" (p. 25) although formal education was introduced nearly a century ago. According to Sikua (2002), since the Solomon Islands Secondary Entrance Examination (SISEE) (formerly known as Hicks Test) was introduced, because of a weak national economy to sustain all children in secondary education, there has been no time in the country's history that all primary school children gained direct entry into secondary education. In other words, not all children who attended primary education have the privilege of secondary education. With a very high birth rate of 3.5 percent (World Bank, 1995, cited in Sikua, 2002), by 1990 spaces for secondary education continued to decline by two percent per annum (Sikua, 2002). In 1994 for instance, only 26 percent of primary education students who sat for the SISEE progressed on to secondary education, 74 percent were pushed out (ADB, 1998).

The high population growth, coupled with the government's lack of capacity to fund new secondary education to the same effect as the NSSs and PSSs, prompted the planning sector of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) (cited in Sikua, 2002) to plan to initiate "a coordinated expansion and upgrading program to effect qualitative and quantitative education" (p. 25) where community support and initiative is expected. The initiative sparked a huge interest in different communities nation-wide and as a result, according to Sikua (2002), though only nine CHSs had been opened in 1995, by 2002, 93 CHSs were operating either as separate schools or as part of an existing primary school. And, as is the case with some PSSs, some CHSs also (for example, Bishop Epalle and Florence Young

Christian School) began offering up to Form 5 and Form 6 courses in subjects where teachers are available.

1.5 Tertiary Education

Tertiary education in the Solomon Islands is a scarce opportunity. In fact, the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) provides tertiary education to meet the lower and middle level human resources of the country (Sikua, 2002). Understandably, the chance of getting into the SICHE is slim. With limited space and the increase in the intake into senior secondary level (Forms 4 – 6), increasing number of students with senior secondary education are unable to access tertiary education.

While the University of the South Pacific in Fiji is also providing tertiary education through its Flexible Distance Education mode in Honiara, the timing to complete a qualification is, on average, longer than usual. However, it (USP distance centre) is seen as an opportunity to get a higher qualification as potential students with finance can get entry by meeting the minimum entry requirements for the different levels. (University of the South Pacific Handbook, 2005)

There are students who also go outside of the country to study. However, this accounts for only a very small proportion of the students who start primary education. The ADB report (2002) for instance, noted that less than eight percent of all students who start primary education eventually get scholarships to study overseas.

1.6 Non-formal Education

Non-formal education has recently been recognized by the central government which was reflected in the establishment of a unit responsible for the welfare of non-formal education in the Ministry of Education in 2003. Known as Rural Training Centres (RTC), all RTCs are operated by the main churches. According to Sikua (2002), most RTCs offer courses that aim at developing vocational or rural-living-skills. This includes carpentry, home economics and agriculture. Furthermore, as they are operated by the churches, religious instruction in varying amounts based on the doctrines of the respective church authority is often a part of the non-formal education curriculum.

The composition of students in the schools is predominantly members of the church authority, but students from other denominations are also taken in. Most students, however, are primary school (Class 6) leavers. Nevertheless, with more students now leaving formal education at the end of Forms 3, students with the respective secondary education are now entering into non-formal education.

1.7 Conclusion

Despite some differences in the Solomon Islands education system during the different eras in terms of approach as well as in curriculum content, there are certain characteristics in the systems that are common. An important common aspect is that in all the education systems, education is promoted as an end result that should be achieved. In other words, the teaching learning process in the different eras in the Solomon Islands is performed for certain purposes. In the traditional education system for instance, education imparts skills that should be acquired to be a successful member of society. In the missionary era, converts were tasked with converting others and promoting peaceful co-existence. In addition, the colonial masters promoted formal education as a means of obtaining labour for the lower levels of formal employment and particularly of their administration.

The common aspects in all the education systems in the different eras have had a lasting effect and have left a legacy. It could be claimed that the present hierarchical education system continues as its predecessors, to promote higher education and a subsequent well-paid job as a goal to which the Solomon Islands parents and children should aspire.

In the next chapter, I will review literature on parents' aspirations for their children and their perceptions on how well the secondary education prepares their children for future careers.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Having presented the background to the Solomon Islands education system, this chapter will review the literature in relation to three areas relevant to this study. First, it will review literature in relation to perception. This is seen as significant as parents' educational career aspirations for their children and their views on education and education systems are assumed to be influenced by components related to perception. Next, the review of literature will be on parents' educational and career aspirations for their children. This is based on the assumption that, in light of different education systems and the ideology that 'education is for work,' parents may have different or similar educational and career aspirations for their children. Finally, the chapter will explore literature on parents' perceptions of formal secondary education in relation to how it is preparing children to meet parents' educational and career aspirations for their children or children's educational career aspirations.

2.2 Perception explained

Perception, as a concept, has been described and defined in many ways. Among the many descriptions and definitions, Forgus and Melamed (1976) for instance, describe perception as "the process by which an organism receives or extracts information about the environment" (p.3). Rock (1984), as another example, defines perception as "the result of a series of stages of processing that occur between reception of a visual stimulus and achievement of a percept" (p.231). Bartley (1958) on the other hand, defines it as "any act or process of knowing objects, facts or truths by sense, experience or by thought" (p.8). Further still, Schneider, Hastorf and Ellsworth (1979), defined perception as "the process demanding active participation by the perceiver who selects and categorizes, interprets and infers to achieve a meaningful world in which action is possible" (p.15).

These definitions, although they may seem simple and straight forward, do not necessarily mean that perception, as a concept, is that simple (Barley, 1958; Rock, 1984; Sekuler & Blake, 2002). The question of how one sees or understands something is complicated. This, according to Sekuler and Blake (2002), is not only

because of a lot of "components" (p. 2) (for example, biophysical and environmental) that are part of how one acquires perceptions, but also because the process of how these components effect each other to eventually result in a perception is also difficult and is still not fully understood. Sekuler and Blake (2002) thus noted that "perception arises from a complex inter-play of mutually interdependent events" (p. 2) and these components make it difficult to completely understand perception.

2.2.1 Theories of perception

Rock (1984), in contributing to the debate on the difficulty of understanding perceptions highlighted four traditional conflicting theories of perception. These are: the "Inference/Empiricist theory," (p. 9) "Gestalt theory," (p. 11) "Stimulus theory" (p.12) and the "Information Processing theory." (p. 13). In the Inference/empiricist theory, Rock (1984), suggested that a person's perception is the result of "sensory experience and the association of ideas" (p. 9). He cited the argument of Hobbes, Locke and Hume that when a person is born the "mind" is empty, but starts and continues to fill as a person experiences things through his/her senses. In the Gestalt theory, Rock noted a direct conflict with the former theory by raising the view of Descartes and Kant that the mind is not empty at birth but that it has inborn or "innate ideas" (p. 11). He suggested that the mind simply "imposes its own internal conception of space and time upon the sensory information it receives." In other words, the innate ideas of the mind sort out what it experiences into "meaningful concepts" (p. 11).

Under the 'Stimulus theory' Rock (1984), showed further conflict and difference by suggesting (under this theory) that perception is best understood when one looks at the environment for possible answers. He highlighted that the external factors of the environment always provides information that one needs to examine closely to identify those environmental factors that are significant in influencing perception. Perception, in this theory, is considered to not exist in a vacuum but is the result of environmental factors. In the 'Information Processing theory' however, Rock (1984) suggested that while the environment, as in the stimulus theory, provides information in the form of "stimuli," the information is "processed" by the brain which then becomes perception (p.13). There is an "inter-play" of external (environmental) factors and the biological system.

2.2.2 Summarized description of perception

Despite the different theories of how perception is developed and the difficulty in explaining the concept, (Barley, 1958; Gordon, 1997; Rock, 1984; Sekuler & Blake, 2002), it can be said that perception is something of and in the mind (as it can make interpretations and inferences), and it can also be considered as related to "sensation" (Schneider, Hastorf & Ellsworth, 1979, p. 15). The latter is because it is from the senses, that a selection and categorization process of environmental events can take place which then results in a perception (Barley, 1958; Green & Swetts, 1966; O'Neil, 1977; Sekuler & Blake, 1985). Sekuler and Blake (1985), stated that whatever perception a person may have, it is simply "the final product or link in the chain of events" (p. 1).

In all the theories of how perception is developed, (whether it considers perception as influenced by innate or external (environment) factors and/or as a combination of both), there is the appreciation of people as individuals (Sekular and Blake, 1985). In this regard, there is the implied notion that all individuals have the potential to have different perceptions on the same or different issues. This is because, as individuals, people have different personal experiences and histories (Sekuler & Blake, 2002).

The assumption that individuals have different perceptions is considered important for this research study. This is because not only does it explain and appreciate why individuals have different perceptions (Rock, 1997), but that more importantly, the perceptions are the result of an "inter-play" of different components which are personal to the individuals (Sekuler & Blake, 2002, p. 2).

2.3 Influences on perceptions

Despite the potential for individuals to have different perceptions on particular issues, events and concepts, this does not necessarily mean that there is no space for shared or popular common views. While individuals may perceive differently (Bartley, 1958; Norrekit, 1973; Rock, 1995; Sekuler & Blake, 2002), there are perceptions on certain subjects, concepts and or issues that may generally be somewhat similar to a large number of people. Otto (2000), in asking male students how close their idea of education is related to their parents for instance, found that 92% of male students

agree that their idea is similar to that of their parents. The result indicates that there are common values held by male students in relation to their parents.

Such similarities in perception held by different individuals can be considered to be the result of similar external or internal influences on individuals. In relation to elements that are external to people, (and this is how much of the perceptions in this literature review will be viewed) Deregowski (1980) and Marshall (1977), suggested that there are principles, values and ideas in relation to issues and concepts held by the general public that have helped to make perceptions similar.

2.3.1 Cultural conventions as an influence

One influence that impacts on the similarity of perceptions is related to the tradition of cultural practices and values (Deregowski, 1980; Field & Widmayer, 1981). Culture as defined by Anderson (2006) is the way of life, the customs and beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organization have in common. Sergiovanni (2006) described culture as what holds a society or organization together because of the boundaries it sets on how people should behave to each other and to the surroundings under different situations. Given these definitions, cultural conventions may often restrict people to think and perceive in a certain way. This is because according to Deal and Peterson (1999), "culture is a powerful, pervasive and notoriously elusive force...and unwritten rules and traditions, norms and expectations that seem to permeate everything" (pp.2-3).

 In four studies carried out to assess the cultural differences in perceptions of consequences of events between East Asians and people from Western cultural backgrounds, cited by Maddux and Masaki (2006), it was identified that in all four studies, because of culture, there were differences in how the two cultural grouping perceived. The Asians, it was reported, were more aware of the indirect events that resulted in the occurrence of an incident, whereas their counterparts saw things directly. Cultural beliefs also seem central to the way Solomon Islanders act. Some ethnic groups and individuals for example, still hold on to the cultural tradition that boys should be given priority over girls in opportunities which lead to recognition and status. In some Solomon Islands cultures, women are accorded with a lot of respect because of the matrilineal system practiced (Keesing, 1992). This means the way

people behave and perceive is often largely influenced by the cultural norms that existed in the society.

2.3.2 Social influence on perception

Another major influence on perception is also related to cultural conventions and is derived from the idea that there are connections between social processes and perceptions (Barley, 1958; Rock, 1995). Barley (1958) in relation to this idea, considers that social influence on perception are brought about through two means. Firstly, "directly through people" and secondly, "through people's responses to socially meaningful and socially originated properties" (p. 387).

In relation to social influences, Barley (1958) stated that they are "operative through the presence of other people, the examples of other people, the wishes of other people or the prestige of other people though not present" (p.386). People are central as perceptions are developed in reference to people. However, Barley admitted that these influences are not easily seen, and it is often difficult to point out precisely, when and how it is involved in a perception. Sekuler and Blake (2002) thus suggested that perceptions developed through this influence depend on the personal need of the perceiver.

In relation to the second means of social influence, Barley (1958) stated that there are "socially meaningful properties" (p. 387) that people relate to objects such as size or shape and values. Perception is thus seen as guided by these socially meaningful properties which can be termed as "concepts" or "ideals" (Barley, 1958, p. 388). For instance, if some people see formal education as possessing some value and others perceive it differently, then it is a reflection of a social influence by different societies or organizations attached to formal education.

2.3.3 Intimate sources of influence

A very significant social influence on perception however, are the more private or intimate sources such as family and friends. In research studies carried out to find who or what plays a critical role in a child's career development and aspiration (Guerra & Braungart-Rieka, 1999; Otto, 2000), evidence suggests that family, peers, friends and schools have a lot of influence. This means that the concept of

dependency, a trusting relationship and of not letting your friends down (Znaniecki, 1965), are elements in intimate relations that may have found their way into the development, modification or change in perception.

However, these intimate sources of influence, just like other influences, do not control perception. But, unlike other sources of influence, intimate sources of influence are more stable sources through intentional and/or unintentional providers of advice, support in decision-making and/or just by simple constant regular interaction (Trusty & Watts, 1996). The values and philosophies shared through informal interactions may impact heavily on perceptions (Sekuler & Blake, 2002).

2.4 The dilemma of perceptions

Given that there are lots of different influences on perception, both from public and intimate sources, perception will not always remain the same but is flexible and changeable (Bartley, 1958). At times, individuals may be rigid about their perception and not receptive of others ideas while at other times their perceptions might change. Just as how one sees and understands the world changes, so also one's perceptions can also change. According to Weintraub and Walker (1968), as a person progresses through life (maturation process), a lot of incidents and experiences take place that effect his/her perception. These incidental experiences can result in an expansion, modification and/or a change in an original perception. This means that a person's perception of an issue or a concept now may not necessarily be the same tomorrow.

2.5 Importance of knowing perception

For the purpose of this study, an understanding of the nature of perception is considered important for the following three reasons. Firstly, there is no theory that fully explains perception (Rock, 1995; Schneider, Hastorf & Ellsworth, 1979). Whatever perception parents may have in relation to education; whatever are their career aspirations for their children; and whatever perceptions parents may have on how the education system is preparing children for meeting these aspirations, should be appreciated as the result of "a complex process" (Sekuler & Blake, 2002, p. 2).

Secondly, the complex process involved in perception development, modification and/or change should and will weave an understanding of why there may be different

or similar parents' perceptions on education and their career aspirations for their children and it can prepare children for future careers.

Thirdly, this research was undertaken in a specific period in time and in a certain context. This means that even if the research participants were to be interviewed a second time, there is no guarantee that their response will be similar to their previous responses.

2.6 Parents' views/perceptions on education

Because there are different theories of perception and many sources of influence, it is appropriate to say that, parents may have different or similar perceptions on education, career aspirations for their children and how they view school in relation to preparing children for career development. This section explores parents' views of education.

For the relevance of this study, the literature review on this section will focus on the positive views parents have in relation to education. This is based on the assumption that in the context of the Solomon Islands (as may be elsewhere), formal education is considered as important and necessary, and a way to gain social and economic advancement.

2.6.1 Brief definition of formal education

The definition of education as provided by educationists (Eisele, 1980; Sprague, 2006) includes the process of teaching and learning. Although there has been some debate about the term education and it is defined in many ways (Teachers Mind Resources, 2006), Corson (1988) confirmed this view when he noted that "it is difficult to conceive of education without thinking about the transfer of knowledge and acquiring understanding" (p. 49). Sanga (2000) considers education as "a value-laden phenomenon" because in both the "formal and unwritten curricula" (p, 4) education has aims to be achieved which include popular world views.

However, although formal education is defined generally as a process of teaching and learning (Eisele, 1980), most people normally associate formal education only with academic teaching. As Saiti and Mitrisoli (2005) noted in Greece, parents prefer

secondary education over vocational education. However, for the purpose of this study the term 'formal education' also includes technical/vocational education because of its organized and structured form (Liligeto, 2001).

Although there is some agreement among scholars (Eisele, 1980; Sprague, 2006), parents' view of education or what education means to them, in relation to their children, is not always heard. Whilst parents may agree in principle with the scholars' general definition of education, there is however, more that parents attach to their meaning of education.

2.6.2 Education as an investment

In the general literature, one of the perceptions parents have in relation to education is that it is a form of investment. The idea of education as an investment is not new. Politically independent states invest in education because of the assumption that an educated population can provide a sound basis for its economic growth (Shirley, 1988). In the context of the family as an economic unit, education (i.e post-secondary education) is also seen by some parents as a form of investment. This is not only in the sense of giving time and effort to help children succeed in education, but also, as related to politics, in the sense of expecting returns (financial and social security) from children when they get employment after school.

In the Solomon Islands, parents send their children to school in the hope that through a formal education, and especially a formal qualification, children will be able to secure a well paid job and be able to support the family (Sikua, 2002). Among other factors that motivate parents in sending their children to formal education is the expected remuneration that will hopefully be gained after children obtain a formal qualification. Education is seen as the vehicle to getting better pay, and as such, is seen as a form of investment. This is partly the reason for parents prioritizing boys' education over girls' education as well as distant relatives helping in school fee payments. Solomon Islands being mostly a patriarchal society (Benette, 1987), investing in girls are often considered as investing in the groom's family.

In the context of the Solomon Islands, education as an investment is also further reflected in the payment of bride-price for a bride. While bride-price is part of most of

the Solomon Islands tradition (Keesing, 1992), the component of 'refund of school fees,' is fairly new. However, it is becoming more common to be included in the bride-price package. Of course some blood relative opportunists may simply take advantage of 'school fee' as a means to make money. However, its (school fees) inclusion in the bride-price package is foreign and as such can be considered as a means of financial saving until the appropriate time (marriage) emerges.

2.6.3 Education as preparation for children's future

Another perception of parents in relation to education is that it is a means of preparing children for the future (Chomsky, 1988). In a study undertaken to analyze the impact of higher education in Bedouin in North Africa, Givati-Teerling (2007) noted that parents of the Negev sub-tribe consider that education is not only about teaching and learning, it is also about preparing and equipping children for the future. In a society where people have high expectations, education is seen as the key to succeed.

Although among the Bedouin there is a cultural bias towards boys' education, the idea of children's preparedness for the future is also true of other countries and societies. In Greece for instance, Saiti and Mitrosili (2005) identified that parent's involvement in secondary education was high. They also noted that there was a high increase in the enrolment of students in secondary schools. The increase in parent involvement and student enrolment showed that parents had a concern for their children's future. According to Saiti and Mirosili (2005), in a poor economy that does not meet the rate of unemployment and employment opportunities is associated more with higher educational qualifications, children's future employment is at stake without proper education.

2.6.4 Education as preparation for work and the work place

Before looking into parents' perception of education as preparation for work, it is important that a definition of 'work' for this study is identified. This is because work is seen differently by different people. For instance, Anderson (1964, p. 133) highlighted work as "academically related, as technical, as labour, as occupational and as recreational."

For the purpose of this study however, Attfield's (1984) definition that work is "the meaningful work …one does to get the best chance in life and the necessary good of self-respect" (p.142), is used. This is because, as Attfield puts it "in any society where formal education is well established, work and the self-respect that goes with it are usually linked with employment" (p.143). Although the definition 'to get the best chances in life' may not always be applicable in the context of the Solomon Islands, fulltime formal employment as associated with status is. In other words, work in the Solomon Islands is fulltime employment with a regular salary or wages on which people perceive your social status against respectively. For instance, teaching as work, is viewed highly and carpentry less so. Different types of work are given a different social status.

In the context of this definition of work, parents' perception of education as preparation for work and their (parents) perception of education as preparation for the future are somewhat related (Willis, 1980). However, education as preparation for the future is also related to how one will "apply" knowledge for a "worthwhile form of life" (Corson, 1988, p.89). Education as preparation for work and the workplace on the other hand, is perceived in relation to how education/schooling prepares students directly for the workplace and type of work (Corson, 1988; Wringe, 1988). It is to do with imparting knowledge and skill to be effective at work. In other words, since work (employment) is a "social value," parents perceive education as preparing students for work and the workplace (Corson, 1988, p. 49).

While education as a preparation for work and the workplace is commonly associated with imparting knowledge and skill to function effectively at work (Corson, 1988; Wringe, 1988), Corson (1988) also sees education in relation to enabling students to have an understanding of, commitment to and efficiency at work. This means that education is not only about equipping students with practical skills and knowledge but also with the right attitudes to work and the work place.

2.7 Parents' educational and career aspirations for their children

Having looked at some of the parents' perception in relation to education, this section will look into parents' educational and career aspirations for their children and their role in the career development of their children. Before venturing into this however, it

is important to note that these educational and career aspirations will be looked at together. This is deemed necessary on the understanding that in an era where education is "identified with work and work types" (Corson, 1988; p. 48) it is often difficult to separate the two.

2.7.1 Difficulty in identifying parents' career aspirations for their children

While there is an assumption that parents possess educational career aspirations for their children, not many studies have sought what specific educational and career aspirations they may have for their children. A lot of studies have simply concentrated on family demographic issues such as socio-economic (Crochet & Bingham, 2000; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Teachman & Paasch, 1998), parents' education and occupation (Trice, 1991) and family size variables (Marjoribanks, 1997) to identify parents' influences on educational career aspirations for their children.

Although some studies (Boatwright, Ching, & Parr, 1992; Seligman & Weinstock, 1991) have looked into how the family interacts to identify how they influence children's career aspirations, these studies are mostly geared towards finding out how these family interactions influence career choices. They are not so much about identifying parents' specific educational and career aspirations for their children (Boatwright, Ching & Parr, 1992). This difficulty might be because the researchers are sensitive about probing into what may be considered as private areas (Punch, 1986).

However, in Bardick's, Bernes', Magnusson's and Witko's (2005), review of literature on parents' perceptions of their role in the career decision processes of their children, it was noted that parents perceive their role as only "supportive," "informative" and "educative" (p.1). Although Trice's (1990) study in Virginia in the United States on *Stability of Children's Career Aspirations* showed similarities in parents and their children's views on careers, which may have direct influence on parents' educational career aspirations for their children. Richard and Friesen (1992) noted that parents felt that children need to develop an important "self-concept" (p, 202) image of themselves in career decisions. This means parents refer to children as more important in making career decisions for themselves.

According to Mau and Bikos (2000), the parent's response is simply implying that they may be reluctant to be specific about their educational career aspirations for their children. They can only admit being an influence, along with other influences, in their children's career development and decisions. This means that because of ethical issues such as intruding into family private issues identifying parents' specific educational career aspirations for their children might be difficult.

2.7.2 Parents do have career aspirations for their children

Despite at times the difficulty in getting parents to be particular about their educational career aspirations for their children (Trice, 1991), parents do have aspirations for their children. According to Richard and Friesen (1992), "parents engage purposefully in their interaction with their children …. and their (parents) actions are guided by mentally represented intentions" (p. 198). In the case of education then, parents undoubtedly send their children to have a formal education with intentions. Although, in other countries other than Solomon Islands, the intentions may not always be educational and/or career related (Best, 1980), the relationship between education and employment, where education is seen as a means to what type of job one may perform, particularly in the United Kingdom (Corson, 1988; Kogan, 1988), was a major influence in sending children to have a formal education (Shilling, 1989).

The relationship between education and employment can be reflected in the way parents impact on their children's choice of career not only indirectly through family demographics such as family size and income (Boatwright, Ching & Parr, 1992; Penick & Jepsen, 1992), but also more importantly through how the family interacts with each other (Trusty & Watts, 1996).

But what are the parents' educational career aspirations for their children? In the next section, I explore the literature that focuses on specific influences on career aspirations.

Career aspirations related to parents' occupations

One indicator that parents do have educational career aspirations for their children is reflected in the similarities in the adolescents and parents' values in relation to their parents' occupation. Lapan, Hinekeman, Adams and Turner (1999), in their study of adolescents in rural mid-western high schools in United States, found that adolescents perceptions of the way their parents support them to pursue certain job types related to their parents' occupation had a big influence in adolescents' interest and valuing of those occupations. Among the middle-higher class, Lapan and Turner (2002) also indicated a son's occupation is often co-related to his father's occupation. A similar pattern was obvious when mother's influence on their daughter's occupational aspirations was examined in the United States (Eccles, 1987). There were similarities shown in the chosen careers.

While the similarities may also be considered as a result of parents who act like a "value-socialiser" (Astin, 1984, cited in Turner & Lapan, 2002, p.1) whose values may have filtered down to their children respectively (Boatwright et al, 1992; Eccles, 1987; Mau & Bikos, 2000), the results of these studies can also be said to indicate that parents often aspire for their children to pursue careers or occupations related to the parents' interest and occupation.

Career aspirations outside parents' occupations

There are parents who also want their children to pursue careers or professions that are different from their own. In questioning the validity of family demographics only as an influence in children's career decision-making for example, Peterson, Stivers and Peters (1986) asked how a student from a low-class family background can traverse to a very high social class. In their study to identify those who influence career decisions among low-income white youth of Southern Apalachia and black youth from the rural south, they identified that parents are the significant influence to whatever career youths may pursue. The question of how a low class student emerged out of the social class to a higher social class raises the important point however, that a child's career-choice and decision may not only be the result of parents being value-laden with their own occupation, but is the result of a number of different influences on parents' perceptions of career (Clark & Horan, 2001).

One explanation is seen as related to the theory of parents as 'expectancy-socializers' (Lapan & Turner, 2002, p. 36). That, "parents influence their children's self-perceptions of academic or vocational competence through their (parents) expectations of them" (Turner & Lapan, 2000, p.145). In other words, when parents place high expectations on their children, their children respond accordingly. In this way students can pursue careers outside their parents' occupation but with their parents' academic or vocational expectations for them.

Although 'expectancy-socialisers' are seen here against children's "academic or vocational success and competency" (Eclles, 1987, p. 148) the theory can also be applied to persuading children to follow careers outside of a parent's occupation. In the situation where parents have other occupational expectations for their children beyond the parents own occupations for instance, these career expectations can be filtered down into their children's career decisions (Peterson et al., 1986).

Career aspirations compatible with social influences

Parents' aspirations for their children's future educational careers are also based on the conception or ideals of the social environment (Eccles, 1994). This means parents want their children to get jobs which the parents would consider as worthwhile and with social status (Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005). According to Corson (1988), human beings fit into groups that reflect "ability levels which parallel the hierarchical work requirements of modern society" (p. 57). The work requirements are the measure of respect one has in relation to others. Corson (1988) thus suggested that a person is measured by the type of work he/she performs. The values that are attached to the different job types, according to Young and Friesen (1992), pressure parents to want their children to at least find employment with status.

In a study of Greek parents' perception of the education of their adolescent, Saiti and Mitrossili (2005), stated that there is a difference in how parents perceive general (secondary) education to technical and vocational education. They also noted that the main reason for parents' preference was the general public's lesser opinion of technical and vocational education as compared to secondary education. This is because the academic curriculum (which consists of English, Mathematics, Science

subjects and Social Sciences) was considered for the academically bright students while the technical/vocational curriculum was regarded for the less able students.

According to Eclles' (1994) study on 'Understanding Women's Educational and Occupational choices' her findings assumed that "individuals are more likely to select tasks with higher subjective value than tasks with lower subjective value" (p. 597). Given this finding, the special treatment or social concepts and ideals the public attach to academic rather than to vocational education influences parents' career aspirations for their children.

Other bases for parents' aspirations for children

Sometimes parents' educational career aspirations for their children are based on the academic ability of the child (Karen, 1996/1997) and the attitudes and behaviors the child adopts (Eccles, 1994; Karen, 1996/1997; Kerr, 1997). In a study by Karen (1996/1997) on *Parents Conception of Academic Success: Internal and External Standards* of families from middle-upper-class socioeconomic white and other minority parent groups in the United States for instance, results indicated that parents define academic success by two means. Firstly, by reference to "internal" (academic) success and secondly, in relation to "external" (attitudes and behavior) standards (p. 3). The study also showed that parents were motivated and attempted to influence their children towards certain careers based on the internal (academic) and external (social and vocational) interests of their children. While there may be a change in the parent's initial aspirations and those after the parent has some more knowledge of their child, the change in aspiration shows that there are other influences that also influence parents' aspirations such as the gender of the child and/or cultural conventions (Eclles, 1987).

In the Solomon Islands for instance, because of the patriarchal Bigman system (Keesing, 1978), it is common for some cultural groups to see some jobs as specifically fit for men or for women. Although there are some recent changes in the cultural practices, as now shown by women being involved in jobs that used to be stereotyped as for men, as also evident in Papua New Guinea (Kilavanwa, 2005), generally women are still not expected to be trained as mechanics, carpenters or to work on ships. Men likewise, are not expected to be home-economics or early

childhood teachers. The traditional sex-role stereotypes are powerful influences indeed.

The influence of culture on career aspirations also occurs in the western world. Although, it may be assumed that the western world may have already gone past the gender-stereotyped role cultural mentality, according to Eccles (1994), "socialization expectations" (p. 156) which encourage gender-role stereotype still exists. Eccles (1994) further noted that teachers and parents still have "sex-typed beliefs regarding boys' and girls' abilities and they communicate this through various subtle and explicit behaviors" (p. 156). One example which Eccles cited which is also filtered down into parents careers aspirations is related to the belief that girls are better at English than boys and vice versa for Mathematics.

This section has looked at parents' educational and career aspirations for their children. It noted that a lot of factors influence the process of parents developing, modifying or changing their educational career aspirations for their children. The pattern of parents' educational career aspirations for their children seems to suggest that parents often prefer their children to keep their family tradition, seek careers outside of family traditions or at least give in to the social and cultural norms/pressures around them.

The next section will review literature, pertaining to how well formal secondary education is preparing children for work or to meet parents' educational and career aspirations for their children. It is based on the assumption by Corson (1988, p. 52) that:

> Because human work is … performed in social contexts where issues of power and control, profit and lose, and even life and death are important ones, it is impossible to separate education from work….

2.8 Perceptions of secondary education preparation for career aspirations

The importance of education as a process for imparting and acquiring knowledge is recognized by professionals and layman (Eisele, 1980). Its importance is beyond any difference between education authorities, systems and policies. This is evident generally in the common aim of education which, according to Chomsky (1988), is to prepare and equip students/individuals for life outside the classroom. Sneddon (1924,

cited in Corson, 1988) sees educations ultimate aim as "the greatest decree of efficiency" (p. 57). In relation to secondary education and career aspirations, in a world where education and employment are linked (Corson, 1988), parents see secondary education as the link to greater opportunities in education (Saiti & Mitorsili, 2005). But, where does secondary education begin and end? How important is it in preparing students for the work place?

2.8.1 Formal secondary education and its boundary

Secondary education is described as the stage of formal education that children go to after primary education (Steeves & English, 1978). This description is quite as obvious as well as general as different countries may have different stages between primary and secondary education. In New Zealand for instance, secondary education is from Year 9 to Year 13. Years 7 and 8 (intermediate schools) are not considered as secondary education (Baker, 2002). In the Solomon Islands, Sikua (2002) noted that secondary education is seen to start at Form 1 (Year 7) and ends at Form 7 (Year 13) although at the end of Forms 3, 5 and 6 students are pushed out of or excluded from the system if they fail national tests. Forms 1 – 3 (Year 7 – 9) are regarded as junior secondary while from Forms 4 – 5 (Year 10 – 11) are normally referred to as senior secondary classes. While Forms 6 and 7 (Year 12-13) are also part of the Solomon Islands secondary education system the curriculum content however, is not prepared by the Solomon Islands Curriculum Development Centre (SICDC). They are part of the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA) or the University of the South Pacific foundation (Form 7) courses respectively.

Given the different entry and exit points, it is difficult to define secondary education boundaries on which perceptions will be based. In other words, when referring to parents' perceptions, this study acknowledges the difficulty in defining precisely at which level the perceptions are made.

For the purpose of this research however, secondary education will be considered as from Forms 1-5 (Year 7-11). This specified boundary is basically chosen because of its relevance to the Solomon Islands (the context of this study). It is at Form 5 (Year 11) that students sit the Solomon Islands School Certificate (SISC) in the Solomon Islands (Sikua, 2002). Although Forms 6 and 7 are part of the Solomon Islands

secondary system, as mentioned earlier, the curriculum content is prepared outside of the Solomon Islands.

2.8.2 General views of secondary education

The secondary education school years are often considered as the most important years in a person's school life. According to Steeves and English (1978, p. 11), this is because students are "emerging teens" and there is so much excitement, challenge and exploration going on. It is during these challenging years that the secondary institutions are given the educational responsibility for teens. However, there are different perceptions of the secondary education system.

A low opinion of secondary education

A low opinion in the Solomon Islands of secondary education, relevant to its preparation of children for work, was that the secondary education curriculum is not specifically geared towards equipping students for particular jobs or careers. The secondary education curriculum only provides "general" education with "emphasis on academic subjects" Sikua (2002, p. 278). Academic subjects are seen as not always useful if children do not become employed. Taking history as a curriculum subject at secondary education for instance, Kogan (1988) suggested that because of change in attitude and the now "considerable value … accorded to numeracy and computing experience," (p. 34), history is becoming less demanded in employment circles. In reference to people employed in fields directly related to history, only a few students eventually become professors in history or history teachers (Kogan, 1988).

Although there are other academic subjects (for example English, Mathematics, Physics) taught at the secondary level, in Hong Kong and Shanghai, Cheng and Yip (2006) noted that the purpose of secondary education is perceived as simply to give "common knowledge" (p. 2) and to prepare students for either higher education (tertiary) or vocational training. In other words, the secondary education curriculum is perceived as for preparing students not just for work, but with the "capacity to be further trained for work/careers" (p. 2). This means that secondary education can be illustrated as the process where the soil is cultivated in preparation for planting.

Secondary education curriculum a convenience

Despite the low opinion of secondary education curriculum by some people, in countries where even basic literacy (being able to read and write) is found wanting among the population, and where higher educational (tertiary) opportunities and qualifications are scarce, the secondary education curriculum is seen as sufficient (Fifi'i, 1989; Kesing, 1992).

In the Solomon Islands for instance, Fifi'i (1989), Keesing (1992) and Sikua (2002), noted that during the missionary and protectorate/colonial administrative period, most if not all indigenous people employed in the colonial administrative machinery or the private sector were primary or senior primary education (equivalent to present-day junior secondary schools) leavers. Although, this can be attributed to the fact that the curriculum then was functional (Liligeto, 2001), because the secondary education curriculum prepared students to be further trained on-the-job. In this context then, some consider that the secondary education curriculum provides sufficient basics for students to be able to adapt to the workplace. The knowledge acquired at the secondary education level thus is a convenient tool to be used in the work place.

Secondary education as lifelong learning

Some perceive secondary education as an institution for lifelong learning and this broadens the concept of what is considered to be secondary education. Whilst preparation for academic life is considered as a paramount function of secondary education (McMullen, 1978), some people consider secondary education is also important in impacting on the quality of the person. In other words, secondary education as lifelong learning involves both academic and social learning. In relation to social learning, Cheng and Yip (2006) noted that in Hong Kong and Shanghai, different perceptions of student behavior emerged as a result of children being students at the secondary education level. Although the specific quality attributes of a person is not specified and encompassed in the primary aims of higher secondary education, Cheng and Yip (2006) noted that some people expect students to show quality behavior to reflect their education. There is a mixture of perceptions of the secondary education role as preparation for lifelong learning depending on how individual students behave.

In the Solomon Islands, and other countries, this is also evident in parents having different preferences for enrolling their students in schools which promote and enforce morals and values that are parallel to what parents want. Furthermore, it is reflected in the generation of parents of students in the Solomon Islands who can make reference to the older generation of Class 6 leavers who later held important government positions compared to many secondary school students today who are without employment. So, when parents compare previous generation Class 4, 5, 6 and 7 leavers' success with today's secondary education students, it is an indication of previous education as a preparation for the lifelong journey.

2.9 Parents' role in their children's career development and planning

This section of the literature review focuses on the role parents play in their children's career development and planning and their (parents) perceptions of their roles.

2.9.1 Parents' different roles in career planning

The roles parents play in relation to their children's career development and meeting their (parents) career aspirations is not always the same. Apart from being "value-socialisers" and "expectancy-socialisers" (Turner & Lapan 2002, p. 36), Young, Valach, Pasiluikho, Dover, Mattes, Paroski and Sankey (1997) noted that for those parents with little education and/or little knowledge of careers, what they can do is limited to being "educative" and "supportive" (p. 82). This means they can teach general values in relation to careers and provide support for education such as encouragement and positive reinforcement for school attendance and achievement. For the well-educated, career-knowledgeable parents however, Young et al., (1997) identified that, in addition to the roles played by the parents with less knowledge about careers, they can play an "informative role" such as in "providing career related information" (p. 82).

Despite how parents play their role (either directly or indirectly), they do assist their children in career development and planning (Kotrlik & Harrison, 1989; McDaniels & Hummel, 1984). According to Peterson, Stivers and Peters (1986), students rely more on parents for help in career decisions. Although Peterson et al's., (1986) study was more focused on low income parents of Southern and rural South Appalachia, at all socio-economic levels, parents help their children when making career and occupation

decisions. In studies carried out by Blau and Duncun (1967), Blau (1992), and Conroy, (1997) (Cited in Taylor et al., 2004) it was suggested that indirectly parents "educational level, socioeconomic, occupational and earner status" (p. 1) did have a lot of influence on and implications for children's career aspirations. Directly, Boatwright, Ching, and Parr, (1992) identified elements of family interactions such as parenting style as impacting on adolescents career choices.

2.9.2 Parents' perception of their role in children's career planning

Although studies (Koltlik & Harrison, 1989; McDaniels & Hummel, 1984) have shown that parents are major influencers in their children's career development and planning Peterson et al., (1986), suggested there are different perceptions that parents have of their own roles. Morrow (1995) found that in schools where career counseling services or guidance programs were available, parents often felt "helpless and uninformed about their children's career decision making" (p. 314). McDaniels and Gysbers (1992, cited in Trusty & Watts, 1996) also suggested that, in such a situation, parents consider that children tend to be more inclined towards utilizing counseling service programs as both adolescents and parents think it is the duty of the counselor. Others are appreciative of these services as career guiding services provide a guide and information on which career aspirations and decisions can be made (Trusty & Watts, 1996).

Although there is no relevant literature from the Solomon Islands, in the context where professional career guidance services are not available in or outside of school, it can only be assumed that parents would have felt that their children were only somewhat or even not at all prepared for career planning and decisions. Although, the Solomon Islands parents can investigate career options and course requirements as well as provide information and emotional and financial support to help children make responsible career choices, this is not equally available to all parents. According to Sikua (2002), this is because there are differences in parents' educational background as reflected in the low literacy rate (27 percent) in the Solomon Islands and other factors, such as differences in exposure to different types of work.

2.9.3 Careers as opportunities

The absence of career guidance services, particularly in the Solomon Islands, often results in people being involved in jobs/careers not by choice but by opportunity. In the Solomon Islands a lot of teachers, particularly in science, are not qualified teachers but have opted for teaching as there are only few job opportunities in their respective area of specialization. That is to say a person may be inclined to undertake a job because it is one of the only few options available. On the other hand, there are teachers who exit teaching when other opportunities arise.

This is not only true in the Solomon Islands but also in situations where parents are not knowledgeable about careers, where no career services are available and more importantly where job opportunities are a scarce commodity. In England for instance, Pearson (1985) noted that "until the economic recession, more than half the graduates were employed in jobs that are not related to their qualification" (p. 1). The implication is that there are not many jobs or career options to choose from. The parent's role in influencing their children's career aspirations is limited to what is assumed to be readily available as in teaching and nursing in the Solomon Islands.

In the context of the Solomon Islands, children who find or pursue careers other than those more common in the country, such as in teaching, administration and medical related fields, have either had external exposure or are fortunate because of a scholarship availability in the respective area. Otherwise, some get employment by opportunity.

2.10 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on perceptions, parents' educational and career aspirations for their children and parents' views on secondary education in terms of preparing children for future careers. It identifies perceptions by individuals on issues or concepts can either be different or similar depending on what influences the perception. It also highlighted that some parents have a low opinion of the secondary education system while others view the secondary education system positively. Parents also play different roles in the career planning of their children.
The next chapter will present the research methodology of this paper.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The suggestion that "fitness for purpose" should be the paramount factor in deciding what type of research a researcher should undertake (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 1) is worthwhile advice. Ever since people have tried to understand their environment, different research data generation methods have emerged. Unless a researcher understands the different aspects of research typologies and applies them in and to the appropriate situations, aspects of research methodology may have implications on the validity and reliability of the study (Mutch, 2005). For the purpose of this research, in reference to fitness for purpose, I have chosen to approach the study using the qualitative, semi-structured interview method.

In this chapter, I firstly give a general overview of research and research paradigm. This is with the understanding that the semi-structured interview method I use for the study is derived from the constructivist research paradigm. In this respect, I explain the constructivist research paradigm and show why this paradigm was chosen. Secondly, I explore and examine the semi-structured interview method as a research methodological option and show why it was used.

3.2 Research

Research is more than just merely finding information. In its scientific specialized meaning, Depoy and Gitlin (1998) referred to Kerlinger's (1973) definition of research as "a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory and hypothesis about presumed relations among phenomena" (p. 6). This definition is in line with Gay's (1981) traditional scientific view of research which implies research is strictly scientific and is beyond casual observation. According to Burns (2000, p.3), scientific research is "an activity that is exclusive and removed from everyday life and as one that occurs in laboratories or in secluded scholarly libraries."

Cohen et al., (2000), along with the scientific definition of research which consider research as "best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to

problems through planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data" also further stated that research is an "important tool" to understand the environment and to "relate" to it (p. 45). In other words, they suggested research is also about discovering the world around us through social methods of research.

These scientific and social definitions of research bring to light particular ways of thinking and reasoning which are referred to as research paradigms.

3. 3 Research paradigms

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), a research paradigm is "a set of overarching and interconnected assumptions about the nature of social reality…that provides the basis on which we build our verifiable knowledge" (p. 4). This means that a research paradigm is a set of ideas which are considered by a group of researchers as those that should be adhered to while carrying out research. Cohen et al (2000), defines a research paradigm as "numerous branches and schools of thought embraced by different research groups" (p. 22) to guide their research. These definitions imply that there are different research paradigms which according to Guba and Lincoln (1989), are "fundamental regulative principles which guide the research process" (p. 114).

In educational research, there are competing paradigms. This is not only because of the shifts in knowledge and or in reference to what Cohen et al (2000), stated as "scientific intellectual violent revolutions" (p. 396), which mean perceptions are continuously modified or replaced by another, but also because the question of 'how do I view the generation of knowledge' is neither simple nor straight forward. Different research types require different approaches to research because of the contrasting assumptions attached to the paradigms. For the purpose of this study and its relevance to the context of the participants I choose the constructivist paradigm.

3.3.1 Constructivist paradigm

The constructivist paradigm is one that values each individual perception (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and appreciates that there are more than one interpretation of the same data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This is also appreciated by Hittleman and Simon (2006) when they suggested that "knowledge and reality do not have an objective or absolute

meaning" (p. 6). There are different perceptions and interpretations of what is reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994) thus noted that the paradigm takes a "relativist stance" (p. 11). This means that because there are "multiple constructed realities" (Krauss, 2005, p.759) that are relatives, the only way to find the unknown is to seek out individuals' perceptions to find the multiple realities. In other words, there are many realities to a phenomenon depending on peoples' social construction (Guba, 1992). The constructivist paradigm thus appreciates individual views based on their experiences and perceptions.

Because of the importance placed on individual views according to Krauss (2005), methodologically researchers try to gather qualitative data that would reveal how the world is perceived, experienced and constructed by people from people. This is because of the assumption that knowledge is something that is social and it is through people's perceptions and interpretation that knowledge can be verified (Dixon & Banwell, 1998). Knowledge or reality can be found and is established through the meaning people attach to the phenomenon studied which is dependent on the context (Hittleman & Simon, 2006).

Coll and Chapman (2000), noted that one of the significant characteristics of the constructivist paradigm is that, during the research process, the researcher interacts with the subjects of the study to obtain data. The methodology used in the paradigm is considered by Pickard and Dixon (2004) as "hermeneutics" (p. 4). This means, as Pickard and Dixon (2004) further explained, there is an "empathetic interaction" and "interpretation" (p. 4) process that takes place between the researcher and the subject. The research outcome leads to understanding.

3.3.2 Choosing the constructivist paradigm

The choice of the constructivist (qualitative) paradigm for this research is based on the premise that, according to Coll and Chapmann (2000), people are the key elements in organizing the world while trying to construct meaning. Meaning is an individual cognitive process and is not necessarily found in what is external to humans. Given this value placed on individual views, the perceptions of parents in relation to this study can be seen with many possible interpretations all of which can be potentially meaningful (Pickard, and Dixon, 2004). The choice of the paradigm is

further consolidated by a goal of this research project which is to find out/discover parents educational and career aspirations for their children and their perception of the secondary education system in the Solomon Islands in relation to preparing students for future careers. The constructivist research recognizes data collection as a discovery process (Krauss, 2005) and in this respect the constructivist paradigm allows me, the researcher, to take the point of view from the participants through an interactive interview.

Although the qualitative constructivist paradigm is chosen, there are however different methods of generating data within the paradigm. The next section looks into qualitative interviewing as one of the methods for data generation within the constructivist paradigm. It will subsequently demonstrate why a particular interviewing mode (semi-structured interview) was chosen ahead of others.

3. 4 Qualitative interviewing

The most common method of collecting data in the constructivist paradigm is qualitative interviewing (Cohen et al., 2000). This is defined as a way in which researchers try to understand peoples' meanings and experiences of the world through the participants' point of view (Cohen et al., 2000; Weiss, 2004). Cannel and Kahn, (1968, cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 268) defines the qualitative research interview as:

> a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him [sic] on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.

This means, as Burns (2000) simplifies, the interview is a "verbal interchange…face-to-face… in which the interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person" (p. 423).

Morrison (2000, cited in Cohen et al., 2000) suggested different ways of conceptualizing interview. He suggested that interviews can be placed along a continuum from where there is extreme quantitative emphasis at one end moving to

extreme qualitative interviews at the other. His suggestion of an interview continuum means that qualitative interview is a very diverse method. LeCompte and Preissle (1984) for instance, identified five types; in-depth, ethnographic, elite, life history and focus groups interview. Oppenheim (1992) added exploratory interview while Patton (2002), includes into the list conversational and standardized–open interviews. Given the diversified nature of qualitative interview as a data collection method, the choice of an appropriate interview method is significant for this research if responses and data are to be valid. For this research, I used the semi-structured interview method.

3.4.1 Semi-structured Interview

In semi-structured interviews, the questions are prepared in advance, but as Oakley (1988) noted that questions do not necessarily have to be in the sequence put down. They (questions) can be considered simply as a checklist that serves as a guide to ensure that all relevant topics and questions are asked. In addition, in the semi-structured interview method new questions can also be brought up during the interview process as a result of what the interviewee may say (Burns, 2000). Brenner (2004, cited in Green et al, 2004) termed this as "follow up questions that build on the responses received" (p. 362).

Although Kvale (1996, cited in Scott, 2004) considers the interview as 'asymmetrical' (p. 38) in that the researcher initiates and controls the conversation, Burgess (1984) sees the interviewer and interviewee as operating at the same level. It may be difficult to state precisely the interview questions that ought to be asked and when the questions are to be either asked or dropped. Question sequence and/or questions arose or are excluded depending on the context of its relevance during the interview process.

3.4.2 Choosing the semi-structured interview

This method of interviewing was considered as the most appropriate for this study. The chief reason is that it is a means of collecting data which "permits flexibility" (Burns, 1999, p. 424), and that it is a social and free-flowing conversation between the researcher and the participant (Brenner, 2004, cited in Green et al., 2004; Burns,

2000; Cohen et al., 2000). It is easy for the respondents to follow on as individual interviewees are considered for who they are.

Aligning with Malasa's (2007) perception of the Solomon Islands (the context of this research) as having a very strong oral tradition, any research carried out in the Solomon Islands (on topics on which very little or no research has been done) needs to take into account the participants' socio-cultural context. The semi-structured interview model, in this context, is conversational and informal in nature (Scott, 2004) and as such it enhances the relevance of questions to the individual and the situation (Cohen et al., 2000).

3.4.3 Considerations when using semi-structured interviews

There are a number of considerations that impact on using semi-structured interviewing. One important area is power relations (Fontana & Frey, 1998). In the case of this research, this can be identified in two areas. First, the power relations between the formally well educated (in this, myself) and the less formally educated, and secondly, power in gender relations (men over women). In relation to the former, participants' freedom to express their views (particularly the less formally educated participants) may be inhibited by shyness because of the difference in educational levels. In the latter, males may have less regard for research being undertaken by a female researcher (Kilavanwa, 2005) and may participate just for the sake of taking part. This is because the Solomon Islands is predominantly a patriarchal society (Keesing, 1992).

According to Cohen et al., (2000), power differences can never be completely eliminated although they may be reduced. I attempted to reduce the power differences in this study by ensuring that a flat and non-hierarchical relationship was established between me and the participants and the immediate community where the participants are derived. Being an indigenous Solomon Islander helped.

Another consideration noted by Cohen et al., (2000), is the flexible nature of questioning and question sequence of the interview method. They noted that, because of the flexibility in questioning and in sequencing questions, this may result in some important questions not being asked or as Brenner (2004, cited in Green et al., 2004)

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added "multiple questions" being asked at one time (p. 363). The researcher must avoid being side-tracked and develop the skill to probe and not to repeat questions already asked or have already been answered indirectly (Cohen et al., 2000). Researchers have to be also aware of asking sensitive and vague questions (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). Using a question checklist helps avoid omitting important questions.

Another important consideration is the researcher needs to be careful not to ask leading questions (Bell, 1999; Bishop, 1997). Bell (1999) for instance, cited Selltiz (1962) as referring to this as "bias creeping into interviews" (p. 139) in the sense of the interviewer asking leading questions to get intended response from the interviewee instead of allowing interviewees to supply their own point of view. A similar consideration is in asking questions that, according to Brenner (2004, cited in Green et al., 2004), "encourages the interviewee to talk expansively" (p. 362). In respect of these considerations, as the researcher, I am fully aware that while explanations and elaborations are significant in the dialogic process of this research, my role is simply to 'discover' from the participants, and not to guide or lead the participants to arrive at any point I intend. I am also conscious of the fact that open–ended questions must be asked to allow the participants to share their views without influence in any form from me, the researcher (Hittlemna & Simon, 2006).

Perhaps the most important consideration in the semi-structured interview method in the context of the Solomon Islands is that the participant's responses to some questions may not always be direct but may simply be implicit if questions are sensitive. As Hammersly and Artkinson (1983), noted in relation to qualitative interviews "even the most willing informant will not be prepared, or perhaps even able, to divulge all information available to him or her" (p. 176). In the case where questions may be considered as probing into areas considered as private and sensitive, responses may not even be sincere. For this reason, as the researcher, I invested in establishing a mutual and trusting relationship which would result in a fruitful and useful data collection.

3.5 Summary

In summary, the choice of qualitative semi-structured interview is and was considered appropriate for this study because of its context relevance to the oral tradition of the Solomon Islands community. Using this methodology, I was able to access the

perceptions of parents in relation to the education system in the Solomon Islands and its preparation for children's future career.

The next section will describe the research process followed.

Chapter 4

The Research Process

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I show procedures used in engaging participants for this research and the respective ethical considerations. This will include courtesies, consent matters, the language of the interviews, transcription, translation and data analysis.

4.2 Before the research

The field work for this thesis, as mentioned earlier, was based in the Solomon Islands. However, before and during the field work, ethical considerations, courtesies and consent matters were significant in order to undertake the research. According to the Tri-council Ethics Statement, "academic freedom to conduct research carries with it the responsibility to undertake research that is based on honesty and search for truth," (SSHRC Policies: Ethics Guidelines – Research with Human subjects – FAQs, from the Tri-council Policy Statement web page). This research followed the research ethical guidelines of the University of Waikato and was approved by the ethics committee, (Appendix 1).

4.3 The participants (four males & four females)

The four couple participants for this study were selected based on my prior knowledge of the parents who were living in and around Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands. While this selection procedure may be considered as biased (Hittleman & Simon, 2006), this was one method employed to level out the 'power relations' between the researcher and the participants in the semi-structured interview mode, as mentioned earlier. Besides that, it was anticipated that a prior informal knowledge and a trusting relationship with the participants would help in quickly accessing participants (Brenner, 2006; LeCompte, 1984) since I had a limited time back in Solomon Islands for data collection.

In recruiting the participants, two categories of parents/couples were considered. Those who, I believed had a good understanding of the Solomon Islands formal education system (formally well educated and have tertiary qualifications) (Category

1) and those who, I believed had less understanding of the formal education system as compared to the former as they were less formally educated (those who may have secondary education only up to Form 3) (Category 2). There were two couples in each category, eight people in total.

4.3.1 Ethics of access to participants

Since potential research participants were in the Solomon Islands and I was in New Zealand, for accessibility, I sent letters requesting participation and explaining informed consent. These were initially sent through the mail and through a contact person who signed a confidentiality agreement form (Appendix 2). By reason of the participant's different educational background levels, two versions (English and Pigin-English) of the same letter were issued to different couples depending on their English readability level (Appendix 3). However, there was no early response although pre-addressed envelopes and sufficient money for stamps had been sent. This meant that I had to hand-deliver another copy of the letters to potential participants upon arrival in the Solomon Islands. No other authority's permission was sought at that time as the selected participants were not members of any organization.

4.3.2 Ethics of informed consent and voluntary participation

Discussion of the ethics of informed consent is an important requirement for any research study (Brenner, 2006; Cohen et al., 2000; Depoy & Gitlin, 1998). Despite the participants being known to me, as Cohen et al., (2000) noted, "when research participants are to be exposed to physical or emotional injury, invasions of privacy or physical or psychological stress, informed consent must be fully guaranteed" (p. 50).

In compliance with this ethical requirement, after initial contact was made, a period of three days was also designated for potential participants to consider voluntary consent for participation. This duration was sufficient as all eventual participants gave consent immediately or soon after. The wait however, was seen as significant based on the assumption that any participant's instant positive disposition may have been influenced by the presence of the researcher, especially when the researcher is someone who is known to the potential participants (Mutch, 2005). Furthermore, Anderson (1998) also noted that participants may feel obligated to participate because of the social or power relationship that exists.

Participants were informed of the focus of the research and the possible implications of participating in the study both by letter (Appendix 3) and the face to face meeting. Apart from the request, participants were also asked verbally for voluntary participation and were informed of their rights to either decline or withdraw (Burns, 2000; Depoy and Gitlin, 1998). In other words, their signature on consent forms was a reflection of their consent.

4.3.3 Ethics of confidentiality and the methods used to respect it

Confidentiality is difficult in the context of the Solomon Islands. Research participants' identity is often difficult to conceal perhaps because of the lack of value placed on confidentiality and because the Solomon Islands has a small population. In contextual non-sensitive social research, participant's identity is often revealed through social networks and even by the participants themselves. Nevertheless, Cohen et al., (2000) highlighted that it is the responsibility of the researcher to attempt to ensure that the identity of the participants remain anonymous. Any revealing of a participant's identity must not be seen as a consequence of the researcher. Researchers must protect the anonymity of the participants at all times (Stringer, 2004).

In complying with this ethical requirement, the participants in this study (Appendix 3) were assured that any information provided for the study will be used only for the academic purpose for which it is collected (Cohen et al., 2000; DePoy & Gitlin, 1998). This is vital because there is information that may be released which is family sensitive information and these must be respected (Bishop, 1996; Smith, 1998).

Although in the context of the Solomon Islands, confidentiality is not so much an issue, in the interest of anonymity and especially considering the small size of the community and the 'community living' context of the Solomon Islands where contact among community members is almost always daily, request was made for interview sessions to take place elsewhere rather than at the homes of the participants. The fact that some participants were employed while others were not however, resulted in some interviews (particularly for the well-educated and employed) being conducted at work places while for others (the non-employed) at home because of their (participants) preference. This, however, was after the participants agreed and signed

an agreement form to participate and to have their views recorded on tape (Appendix 4).

In writing this report, the identity of the participants is concealed with no mention of names. Since the number of participants was small (only eight people), there is a slight chance that participants can be easily identified by those readers who might know the participants personally. In this respect, participants' views are presented without reference to educational background.

4.4 Conducting the interviews

Since the semi-structured interview was a face-to-face meeting, I needed to be aware of the duration of the interview, accuracy of keeping responses and the language of interview. These are important considerations as participants need to know what is involved. Brief information on these aspects was contained in the letter requesting participation (Appendix 3).

The timing of interview sessions was based on two things, the time of the day and the day the participants wanted to be interviewed. Although prospective participants were informed through letter of the likely timing (duration) of the interview, before the actual meeting, participants were again alerted to the fact that the interview for each partner may take an hour. Some were interviewed in their work places and others in their homes.

For the individuals interviewed at home (where both individuals are unemployed), both partners were interviewed separately but consecutively with 20 minutes between each interview. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

The language used in the interview sessions with all participants was Pigin-English which is the lingua franca of the Solomon Islands. The choice of Pigin-English as the language of interview is significant because all participants can understand and communicate comfortably in that language. This is considered an important element in research as should an interview be undertaken in a language not well understood by respondents the meaning of questions may not be clear to the participants (LeCompte & Preissle, 1984).

4.5 Translation

The data collected from the interviews was later translated into English. According to Cohen et al., (2000), the process of translation is often negatively considered as having impact on the validity of the data because of the "potential for data lose, distortion and reduction complexity" (p. 281). Furthermore, the quality of translation depends on the linguistic competence of the translator (Nida, 1976) and the influence of the background and feelings of the translator during translating (Triandis, 1976).

In the context of translating Pigin-English into English, two difficulties were anticipated and encountered. The first was the difficulty in maintaining meaning and structure in both Pigin-English and English. This sometimes resulted in sentence structures being altered but with every attempt to keep meaning in the context and as original as possible.

The second challenge was associated with pigin-English originating from English. Most pigin-English words were simply English words. Pigin-English can be considered as a variation of English. The difficulty lay in whether to change the Pigin-English/English words into their English correspondents or to maintain the Pigin-English words.

Despite the difficulties, my advantage in the translation process was that I come from the Solomon Islands and a native fluent speaker of Pigin-English. Further to that, being a Solomon Islander, I am part of the language and have an intimate knowledge of the culture. This means the difficulty of "equivalent meanings of the constituent morphemes of language" (Bislin, 1975, p. 4) and comparable meanings (Cohen et al., 2000) are not so much an issue. This is because the assumptions, values and feelings that language carries with it (Temple, 1997), in this case pigin-English, are also part of me.

4.6 How did I transcribe the interviews

In reference to the anticipated difficulties, the whole process of transcribing took two stages. In the first stage, a literal Pigin-English transcription (transcribing word-by-word) was made. This was returned to the participants who acknowledge it as a true and accurate copy of the interview. While this stage has its advantages such as

allowing participants to recap on their interview (Cohen et al (2000), it however reduces the readability of the text.

For readability purposes, stage two was undertaken after permission was sought from and granted by the participants after each interview session with the participants. This transcription, which is also the translation into English, was derived both from the literal (Pigin-English) transcription and the audio recording. While, according to Bislin (1975), at this stage, "translators would have no concern other than getting information across in the second language" (p. 3), in the case of this research, the order of interview questions and response remained the same. Special care and attention was taken to not misinterpret the meaning of conversation and not losing information from the original.

4.7 Analysis of the data

The reason for analyzing data was to identify parents' career aspirations for their children and their view of the formal secondary education in the Solomon Islands with respect to their children's preparation for meeting these aspirations. As the semi-structured interview method was used to collect data, after the transcription and translation process, the initial task was to organize the questions and responses in line with the original structure of the interview-question guide. This is because the raw data needs to be organized into themes (Cohen et al., 2000). During this process precautions were also taken to avoid de-contextualization of response.

The second task was to examine the content of the participant's responses. According to Kitwood, (1977, cited in Cohen et al., 2000) for this stage to be successful, the researcher needs to be well familiar with the received interview content. In this respect, I started by identifying the common views shared and differentiating them from the different ones. Since the most revealing analysis were those of least and most popular items (Kitwood, 1977, cited in Cohen et al., 2000), after the common and different views were identified, all views were then categorized into common themes. In most cases, the common themes are presented in the findings and discussions whilst the common views were presented as illustrations of the themes. In other words, in the analysis of the data I used the thematic approach.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the process used in carrying out the research. The next chapter focuses on the findings of the interviews.

Chapter Five

Findings

5. 1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this study, I highlighted that the reason for undertaking this research was because parents' educational career aspirations for their children and their perception of how well secondary education prepares their children for meeting these career aspirations has not been investigated in the context of the Solomon Islands. In addition, I wanted to investigate parents understanding of the Solomon Islands education system and their knowledge and view of the vocational education. To discover parents understanding and views in these areas respectively, I selected four couples.

To maintain confidentiality, the participants' names are not mentioned. However, pseudonyms are used to represent each individual. M1, M2, M3 and M4 are used to represent each male participant and F1, F2, F3 and F4 are used to represent the female participants. These pseudonyms do not necessarily have any relationship with educational attainment of individuals. Also, that the pseudonyms M1 and F1 do not mean that they represent married couples. The views of the husbands and wives are mixed so that they could be considered as individual views rather than the views of a couple.

I also used the semi-structured interviews to enable parents to share their aspirations and perceptions in their own words. The interview questions were divided into three sections. These being:

   a) Parents' educational and career aspirations for their children;
   b) Parents' understanding of the Solomon Islands Education System; and
   c) Parents' view of vocational schools and the curriculum.

This chapter presents the research findings under these three sections. Common themes that emerged from the participants' responses are used to illustrate and support an identified theme.

5.2 Education and aspirations

In this section, four main areas of findings are presented including: parents' educational and career aspirations for their children; what influenced those aspirations; parent's perception of their children's preparedness for careers as a result of being in the secondary education; and, the parents' views of their own involvement in preparing their children for future careers.

5.2.1 Parents' educational and career aspirations for their children

The following four themes emerged from the parent's educational and career aspirations for their children:

a) Parents were specific about their career aspirations for their children;

b) Parents had a sense of the type of career they did not want their children to pursue;

c) Parents had careers in mind but had respect for their children's views; and

d) Parents did not have careers in mind as yet.

Parents were specific about their career aspirations for their children, the careers which were specifically mentioned were teaching, nursing, office/administration accounting, doctor, pilot and a career related to agriculture. Interestingly, one parent mentioned any careers relating to the mining industry although mining is still a remote type of industry in most of the Solomon Islands. Some parents' comments:

> *I would like my children to do either nursing, teaching, office work or agriculture job which is easy for village life.* (F1)

> *I want my children to have a good education and become a doctor, a pilot or get a job within the certificate level.* (F3)

> *I want my children to take up careers in accounting and in mines or in other vocational careers in which they can be self employed.* (M2)

The parents specifically mentioned teaching, nursing and a medical doctor because these careers, in the Solomon Islands, are ones people (especially the less educated parents) could easily think of. For instance, among the less educated parents, despite where they live, they only have contact with people from these professions. Furthermore, despite being exposed to life in the town (as in the case of all the less educated participants), their view on careers is very general. For instance, although there are many careers people pursue while working in office buildings, participants can only say they want their children to do office work rather than being specific on what type of office job.

A probable reason for the specificity of the careers is that, in the Solomon Islands now, medical doctors and graduates with teaching or nursing qualifications have always been able to get a job in those professions. Parents therefore were not reluctant to be specific about these careers because of the guarantee (at least up until the time of the research) that their children would most likely be able to get jobs in those areas. In relation to being self- employed, parents may have perceived that they could earn more money

Some parents wanted their children to pursue careers other than those that they were themselves involved in. This is not uncommon. In the Solomon Islands, parents want their children to excel in different careers. Parents who did not have secondary education for instance, intend that their children get a secondary education and subsequently get a well paid job as compared to them. Some parents with secondary education or higher education with well paid jobs wanted their children to get different jobs other than the type that they are doing. One educated parent with well paid job for instance, stated:

> *I do not want my children to take up the career [I am doing] anymore. Other careers yes, they can go for it.* (M1)

When asked why, the parent's response was:

> *There are other careers with better conditions that children can explore*. (M1)

Another parent's comment was:

> *I was directed by my parents to take up this career because my parents cannot afford to continue to pay my school fees. Now that I can afford to pay up my children's school fees, I do not want to limit their careers to what I want.* (M4)

These responses indicate that parents did not want their children to pursue the careers they (parents) are doing because of their experiences in relation to those jobs and because they did not want to deprive their children of other opportunities.

In the third theme, parents have career aspirations for their children but would rather respect any career choice and decision their children make based on their (children's) interests. One parent made the following comments:

> *I have some careers in mind. However, I cannot force my children to take up those careers. Children have interests in other careers too, besides those I have in mind. So because of this, I will leave it up to them to make their choice.* (M3)

These parents had reasons for allowing their children to make their own career choice. Some parents genuinely felt that children should make their own career choices, with support from parents, because it is the children who need job satisfaction and enjoyment in the careers they pursue. Also, some parents were not as educated as their children hence they felt that the children's choice, being through formal secondary education, would be an educated choice as compared to themselves. Finally, parents may have careers in mind but were reluctant to be specific to me because they saw me on a personal level (someone who knew them) rather than in my professional capacity as a researcher. For instance, when parent M3 was asked if he could be specific about the career he had in mind, the response was:

> *I do not want to be embarrassed around you if you know that my children did not achieve what I aspire for them.* (M3)

However, in relation to parents who did not have particular careers in mind for their children, one parent made this comment:

I want my kids to do well in school. With regards to career however, I haven't had any thought about that yet. (M1)

The parent's focus, at this stage, is on how well children will perform in their academic work. Whatever career aspirations parents may have depends on their children's academic performance and development. Furthermore, since their children were still at the junior secondary education level (Forms 1 – 3), it was often considered too early to think about careers for them. For instance, when parent (M1) was asked why he did not have any thought about careers for his children, his reply was:

The kids are still at the junior secondary school and it is too early to plan for their future careers.

5.2.2 Influences on parents' career aspirations for their children

On the question of what influenced the career aspirations the parents had for their children, four themes were identified, these were:

a) Better pay and future financial security;
b) Usefulness and appropriateness of a career in urban and rural situations;
c) Preparedness for future job opportunities; and
d) Cultural values.

Firstly, the influence of better pay and future financial security was a dominant influence on parents' career aspirations for their children. Money was equated with a better standard of living and parents want to be able to see that their children's future career is well paid. Parents' intentions were for their children to have the most chance to secure a job with a good remuneration package. This may also be a reason for parents wanting their children to pursue vocational careers where they can make a profit out of their self-employment.

However, apart from self-employment in a vocational career, findings of the study suggested that better pay and future financial security were mostly associated with

academic related type of careers rather than vocational careers. Two parents for instance, stated:

> *If they [children] get the job, [doctor, pilot] they will be able to support their own family. It is also for the betterment of their own future.* (F3)

> *I want my children to be educated and have a well paid job so that they could be self-reliant. At school they learn knowledge that might be helpful for their future. As a parent, I see education as the only way to invest our children for better living in the future.* (F4)

Academically related types of jobs are associated with the high status accorded to people with academic qualifications and jobs. In the context of the Solomon Islands, a person is defined by the type of job he/she does. In this respect, parents aspire that their children get academic related careers where they can be looked at with envy especially when only the academic elite get academic qualifications because of the pyramid education system.

Parents were also influenced by the usefulness and appropriateness of a career in urban and rural situations. Parents aspired that their children undertake certain careers on the understanding that the children can still use the knowledge they gain in those careers in both urban and rural areas, including regular salary or source of income. In this respect, careers in an agriculture related field for instance, were seen as useful because, with the knowledge, a person can make better use of his/her land (customary) to maximize his/her yield. On a similar token, a career in teaching or in nursing is not only found in the urban areas but also in the rural areas. Parents aspire that their children are in careers where they can get employment not only in town but in the rural areas as well. For instance, a computer expert cannot find employment and regular income when retiring to the rural areas and village setting whereas a teacher or a nurse can stay in the village and can be employed at schools and clinics with a regular salary. The following comments are reflective of this view:

> *I want them [children] to take up a career in teaching and nursing because they can still be teachers or nurse's even if they go back to the village.* (F2)

I would like any of my children to have a career related to agriculture which is easy and useful for village life. (F1)

The [children] can earn more money, get quick cash and the job fits both the town and village life. (M3)

This belief has been influenced by the ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands. During this period of time (1998- 2002) people who were employed in the private sector in other professions (for example, computing, accounting) were those who were deeply affected. When they escaped from the town, there were no jobs for them in the rural villages. However, teachers and nurses were attached to the nearest schools and clinics/hospitals and were still able to get employment respectively.

Thirdly, parents career aspirations for their children were influenced by what they perceived would be to the advantage of their children in the near future. This is in terms of finding employment, particularly in the context where job opportunities with good pay are currently scarce in the Solomon Islands. The following quotes indicate this:

For [work in the] mines, I heard rumors that the land (customary) to which I am related have minerals. I think that its good that one of my children is trained in this area while the mineral is still to be confirmed and no prospecting has been done yet. When the development eventuates, we already have someone who is qualified in the area. (M2)

In relation to accounting, as a developing country, there will be a lot of investments coming in and more economic activities taking place. Therefore the demand for knowledgeable and skilled people in this field will be very high. (M4)

Such an influence was evident more among those parents who were conscious of the economic activities that are going on around them and who read newspapers to update themselves on what might be the future trends for employment. In other words, those parents who have contact with discussions of 'what might be' in the future are also those who are influenced by these future trends.

The three previously mentioned themes can be seen as a response to the Solomon Islands national economic crisis and high unemployment rate in the country. It is also influenced by well paid jobs being attached to people with formal qualifications and that well educated people are those who get jobs with status and better pay.

However, some parents thought that it was also important not to be negligent of cultural values when pursuing a career. Although financial rewards were important, they did not want to break the cultural norms of the immediate community or society. One parent commented:

> *I want my children to get jobs that are suitable to both village and town life and where they can earn more money and get quick cash. There are other jobs however, that fit only boys or girls.* (F2)

Such comments are not new, especially to parents of the older generation or to parents who have had recent contact with the need for education and who are still very much part of their cultural traditions. Cultural stereo-type of job restrictions is a very strong influence in the type of careers they aspire for their children. For instance, girls are not expected to do carpentry as it is to do with climbing up houses which is strictly a forbidden territory for the girls.

5.2.3 Secondary education preparation of children for future careers

The question of how well the parents thought the secondary education was preparing their children for career planning to meet their career aspirations was met with indirect but descriptive responses. Two parents for instance, did not think that the school alone should be responsible for preparing children for careers. They thought that it should be a joint effort between formal secondary education and the parents. One parent said:

> *The school is not the only way that will help the children to get the types of jobs we want. It is just part of the partial learning process which children go through. It is also a system which is required for children to go through in order to get a job in the future. As parents we should not depend entirely only on the school but we should also actively educate our children at home*

because that is their first place to learn...The school only provides general knowledge. As parents, we should help our children with their subjects especially when it comes to choosing optional subjects. Try to help them choose the subjects that will help to gear them towards the type of career you want for them. (F4)

Another parent commented:

The school, with my assistance alongside, will help children to be prepared. Since the education system is 'bottle-necked' (meaning that it is a pyramidal/elimination system) my input is very important. (M1)

Two other parents, thought that secondary education only provides the foundations that are important, not only for careers immediately after secondary education, but also for going on to further higher educational institutions. The comments of the two parents are as follows:

Schools are important because they provide some guidance to children and equip them towards different jobs. Before you work, you must know how to read, write and to do other things both mentally and physically. When children go on to further education, they would also then gain some more knowledge that will help guide and equip them towards the job they would do. (F1)

School is a place where we acquire knowledge and the knowledge will help us make our decision. (M2)

The parent's comments were made with reference to the fact that students with higher education qualifications have to go through the secondary education system. Similarly, secondary students who were fortunate to secure employment are building on what they acquired from the secondary education system to be effective in their jobs. The findings suggest that secondary education gives students the basics that needed to be built on.

Other parents however, were not sure whether to consider a school as an individual unit or school as an education system responsible for students' preparation for future careers. One parent mentioned the influence of individual teachers as well as subjects that were taught in the schools. He stated:

It depends on the teachers. Some simply do their job because of the fortnightly salary they receive. They do not really have a passion for the kids they teach. For these types of teachers, their students might end up not pursuing any career or getting a job after completing the school years…Apart from the teachers, it also depends on the type of subjects taught in the school. The subjects will help guide the student towards the career he/she wants. (M3)

Another parent however, thought that some children had never thought about careers whilst at school. The children were so busy with academic work or with other immediate activities and issues that they did not often reflect on the type of career they would want to pursue. When asked about this, one parent responded:

From my point of view, sometimes children did not think about their career or set their aim when they were at school. They go to school just for the sake of schooling or just want to complete the year. I think most children did not think about career planning. Although parents might have aims or plans for their children, they [children] sometimes did not achieve the aims and plans. (M4)

Despite different responses from parents in relation to how well the school is preparing students for career planning, there were some common responses from parents about their perceptions of their children's preparedness for entry into the workforce. One of the common views was that, despite children attending secondary education, little regard was given to the secondary school certificate awarded to the students by employers as compared to tertiary or vocational qualifications. This means that, parents often question the ability and competence of students who left formal education at the end of secondary education level. If potential employers do not have confidence in the student's ability to work or their attitude to work, how can the parents have confidence in what was taught at the secondary education level? One parent commented:

From my observation and personal point of view, children leaving school from these levels (Forms 3, 5, 6 and 7) did not get jobs. Most of them just roam the streets. Even if we want them to do some kind of job, they did not meet the required standards and are just wasting their time as well as their parent's money on school fees. (F1)

When asked if economic factors (few job opportunities) may be a contributing aspect to this, the parent said:

There are not enough jobs in town to cater for these students. But besides this, companies and even the government sectors only look for people with qualifications and who have further education than secondary. In other words, people who meet their requirements. Students who are pushed out of the secondary schools will just be ignored or rejected by the employers. (F1)

Another two parents stated that:

If children leave school (secondary) now, they won't be able to get a job. It is advisable for them to complete secondary education and go into specific job training before they can be able to get a job. (M1)

If they are pushed out at the end of Forms 3 or 5, it will be hard for them to get into the careers we have in mind for them. (F3)

The sentiments parents shared here is becoming a big national concern. Before parents pushed for compulsory secondary education and with the introduction and establishment of community high schools the rate of students being pushed out of the education system at the primary education level in the Solomon Islands has dramatically reduced. Beside that, some of the community high schools have introduced senior secondary forms (Forms 4 – 5) into their system which means increased numbers of students with Form 5 secondary school certificate. However, the rate at which these students get employment is not the same. More and more secondary graduated students are without any form of formal employment. Unless they get some further specific job training, they might not be able to even employ themselves.

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Another common view of the parents was that secondary school students were still very young physically and in their attitude in relation to employment. The public institutions and private sectors want to hire people with the right attitude to work with the mental and physical capacity to meet their working conditions. A lot of these attitudes however, were not evident in most secondary education students. Their physical stature alone might also make it difficult to get employment.

One parent said:

> *My general view is that children are very young mentally and physically when they leave school at the end of Grade 6, Form 3 and 5 with no qualification. It would be hard for them to get a job.* (F4)

When the parent was asked about the probability if the student was able to do vocational types of job other than 'status' jobs, the response was:

> *For practical jobs which require working with the hands, maybe they can. For instance, in carpentry, they can just assist by holding timbers. But for other jobs, they would definitely need further training.* (F4)

When parents were asked about how they expected the school to prepare children for careers, the responses indicate three important aspects. The first was the inclusion of all curriculum subjects in schools and the recruitment of specialized well qualified teachers in all subjects. This is a concern in most of the Solomon Islands secondary education schools because of the shortage of teachers and a lack of facilities and resources. It is not uncommon to find schools not offering science or practical subjects such as home-economics or industrial arts. In addition, most teachers who teach up to Form 5 are Diploma graduates of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, School of Education. This programme was designed to train teachers for junior secondary education levels (Forms 1 – 3). In relation to this one parent made the following statement:

> *As a parent, I would like to see that the schools offer all curriculum subjects that should be offered at the secondary level. This is to expose students to the bigger picture of the opportunities available out in the world related to the*

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subjects. It is also important that these subjects are taught by teachers who are specialized not only in the theoretical aspect of the subjects but practical as well. (M2)

Another parent commented:

Schools should introduce subjects with practical skills. This should be taught by specialized people alongside the academic subjects. In this way, children will learn and acquire life skills that are not academic related. Besides that, by doing practical subjects, if a student is not good in academic subjects, he/she may follow the practical (vocational) stream. (F2)

Some parents saw the importance of not only teaching academic and vocational subjects but the teaching of values, virtues, principles and work ethics. In as far as the education curriculum was concerned there was no curriculum subject that was directly concerned with social values, virtues and principles that can be directly linked with work. Although these can be assumed to be incorporated into other subjects such as in Christian Education and Social Studies, the exam oriented approach to teaching, because of the pyramidal education system, often meant that examinable content was more emphasized at the expense of values, virtues, principles and ethics. What is lacking in the curriculum is the direct teaching of the right attitude to work and the work place. In relation to this one parent said:

Currently, I put my children in a private church school. This is because of the values and things in life taught by the school which I value and want my children to learn and know. In secular government schools, I think they do not cover this aspect. (M1)

The third issue raised was the importance of introducing new subjects or subject content that is practically useful in the computer age. Rather than retaining the curriculum that has been in place for sometimes with only minor changes taking place in content, one parent thought that new subjects should be introduced alongside the current or, that new content be added into the existing curriculum. These changes should take into account what is currently happening in relation to work and in life in general. One parent said this:

Schools should have computers for student usage and they should also have computer sessions for children. By doing this children will be able to build on the basic knowledge gained from secondary schools by seeking knowledge from computers and doing studies in computing. (F1)

5.2.4 Parents' involvement in children's career planning and choice

While parents considered the school as important in preparing children for career planning and meeting their career aspirations, the parents saw they needed to be also practically involved in influencing children towards career aspirations. This should not only be indirectly through family demographics (such as in how the educational background of parents, income of parents, or size of family influenced children's career choice and decisions) but through direct means such as family interactions as well.

In relation to direct means (family interactions), when parents were asked about their view on their involvement in the education and career choice of their children, the parents indicated that their role was one of being encouraging, supportive, educative as well as informative.

In relation to being encouraging and supportive two parents stated the following:

I provide them with school stationary and I encourage my children with their school work and have a talk with them about their class results. (F3)

It is good to ask our children every evening about their experiences at school that day. This is also a way we monitor our children's school attendance as well as having a time with them at home. Parents should also provide a conducive environment for their children at home. (F4)

In relation to being educative two parents said:

I find their [children] weak areas in school and help them with it. It is not good for us just to tell children to go to school but don't care about their education or the knowledge they gain. We should acknowledge that we care

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by helping them in their weak areas and in giving praise to them. I help my kids with their homework. (F1)

Parents should give extra school work for children to do in their own time. (F4)

With regards to being informative, the following comments were made by one parent:

I talk about different types of jobs to my children and discuss the careers they want to do with them. (F2)

These roles are important for parents in the area of career development as they help, along with school, to guide children to career choices and decisions. However, the findings of the research indicate that not all these roles are played by all parents to a similar extent. Some help was limited to encouraging and supporting because of parental lack of a formal education background. If information about careers were given in this case, concerned parents were not sure whether the information was correct. However, even the parents with a good formal education background were not always knowledgeable about careers.

5. 3 Parents' understanding of the Solomon Islands education system

This section presents the parents understanding of what their children were being taught at the secondary level (subjects/curriculum) and what they think secondary schools should do to best help prepare children for future careers. It also presents parents' views about the education system where students are eliminated at different specified levels based on national examinations.

5.3.1 Parents' understanding of the curriculum

Parents' understanding of what is taught seemed to be related more to the core examinable subjects at the different levels. All responses to the question specifically mentioned English and Mathematics without hesitation. Only one parent included Christian Education and Science along with English and Mathematics and another parent included Social Science and Science. The mention of these subjects however, are without any explanation of subject content or any other understanding about the subjects.

The parent's responses may have two implications. One is that, for the less educated (and even the educated), the content of curriculum subjects, is not a topic of discussion but is simply considered to be important because the subjects are determined subjects for progression to the next level in the education system. This means that parents may not necessarily know the content of the curriculum and hence may not be able to conclusively say that the curriculum is either helping or not helping towards career development of children.

One parent commented:

> *I am not really sure of what is taught in the classroom but the main subjects we know about are Mathematics, English, Christian Education and Science.* (F3)

The other implication was that for the educated, a list of the subjects and a detailed explanation of subject content would be very time consuming. Besides there is the assumption that both the researcher and the participant knew about the content of the subjects and as such there is no need to go into details.

5.3.2 Helping prepare children for future careers

When the parents were asked to explain how they thought what was taught at the secondary level was either helping or not helping to prepare children to meet parents' career aspirations for them, the responses indicated two themes. Firstly, the findings indicated that some parents seem to view the secondary system positively and were generally happy with the academic focus. This is particularly in the sense of enabling children to improve their mathematical knowledge, reading and writing ability and to be creative. All these skills/knowledge were considered as important as they (skills/knowledge) could be used by the student when called upon in different areas. One parent for instance commented:

> *Some of the subjects taught at the examinable levels seemed alright to me. For instance, mathematics helps in preparing children for accounting type of jobs.* (M3)

While another parent stated:

> *The school curriculum is alright. Academic-wise, it helps children to be better readers and writers. I also strongly believe that the curriculum made children to be creative academically. These are all round skills that are applicable in many different work situations.* (M1)

The positive comments about the academic focus of the curriculum are a reflection of the value placed on academic education rather than on vocational education. In the Solomon Islands, where education is seen as the means to secure jobs of status and high pay, academic focus of the curriculum gives equal opportunity for employment in academic related fields. In this context, parents appreciate the academic focus. Furthermore, in the Solomon Islands, being literate (able to read and write) and numerate (basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) are skills expected to be displayed by students leaving secondary education. In this regard, when students leave secondary education with literacy and numeracy skills, they are reflections of the success rather than failure of secondary education. The literacy and numeracy skills provide a comparative advantage over those students who leave school without a secondary education. Getting employment however, is another matter.

The second finding shows that some parents consider that, whilst the secondary education curriculum and the schools were trying their best to help children, what is offered was not enough. They felt that what was learnt at secondary education was only good for school work but was not enough to meet the varied nature of the work place. One parent for instance stated:

> *The emphasis on the four core subjects, (English, Mathematics, Science and Social Science) is good. However, they do not really sufficiently equip children to meet the high demand of the work place. When children are pushed out of the education system, I do not think they will be able to do any good at all with the knowledge gained. I would say, it only prepares students for academic stream but not for work.* (M2)

This finding indicates that, despite both the satisfactory and somewhat unsatisfactory view of the secondary education curriculum, parents wanted a balanced secondary education system which offers equal opportunities in both academic and vocational fields. The common important aspect raised by all the parents was the need to see that technical subjects are taught and treated in such a way that they are seen to be just as important as the academic curriculum. As an example, one parent commented:

The school academic curriculum is alright. It helps students prepare for work. However, this [help] is not seen in relation to everyday practical life skills. I think some more emphasis needs to be put on the practical skills subjects. (F4)

This argument is seen as significant in the Solomon Islands because it is not only unrealistic for all students to pursue academic related careers, but that opportunities for all students to pursue careers in the academic stream are very much limited.

In the Solomon Islands there is only one local national higher education institution (Solomon Islands College of Higher Education) which also controls its intake. Apart from that there are also other issues that impact on the need for a balance in academic and technical subjects in schools. For instance, some parents might not have the financial resources to continue to fund students in the academic stream which is very expensive. Furthermore, realistically, some students are good at practical skills and they should be given the opportunity to be exposed and to excel in those areas rather than limiting their opportunities early.

5.3.3 A general intention for the secondary education curriculum

When asked what they thought schools could do that would help to prepare students for future work aspirations or careers, three parents highlighted that schools need to put some more emphasis on practical subjects to enhance their importance as compared with the academic subjects. Currently, the practical subjects which are also known as 'optional' subjects (if offered in schools) are allocated fewer numbers of hours per week as compared to the academic subjects. Previously, they were not even considered as an important subject in the selection process to get a place in Form 6 as well. This implies the kind of value placed on academic rather than on practical subjects in schools. One parent in relation to the question stated:

Balance the emphasis on all subjects taught as an imbalance will indirectly tell students which subject is more important than the other. Besides that a balance in the subjects will create confidence in students to find jobs in relation to their practical subjects. (M4)

Another parent stated:

Introduce skills subjects such as electrical wiring into our schools other than just woodwork, so that when our children leave school, at least they can do small jobs. Those who wish to pursue those careers further can do so at the college or other technical institutions. (M3)

5.3.4 Common views of the pyramidal education system

The findings showed parents had a common view of the pyramidal education system in the Solomon Islands. The parents thought that all children should be allowed a full secondary education. Although different levels were suggested as to where students should be examined nationally and subsequently be selected for further education, the common view however, was that universal education be allowed from primary education up to no less than Form 5.

Some of the parents commented:

I think that the elimination education system should no longer be practiced. Some children are slow in their cognitive development and as time goes on their brain development will improve. If the system pushes them earlier, it will have a great impact on their future. (F4)

It is something for the government to seriously consider. We cannot afford to allow our younger generations to be pushed out of the education system early and become a bunch of failures. (M2)

Another important but seldom thought of idea surfaced. The Solomon Islands parents wanted their children to be given the opportunity in later (senior) secondary education

to make responsible decisions for themselves. Secondary education is especially considered as an important necessity that increases the opportunity for children to succeed in the future. Furthermore, leaving formal education before Form 5 was considered as early, particularly in the context of urban Honiara, where not many social activities and entertainments were organized and, with time on their hands, it can result in students resorting to criminal activities.

When parents were asked to give reasons as to why they wanted an education system without student elimination until at the senior secondary level, five parents stated that if children are pushed out earlier, the chances for them to get a decent job would be very remote. This is not only because of the level at which the students finished formal education (in this case secondary), which may impact on the self-esteem of the student, but also finding a way back into the system is difficult and expensive. One parent for instance, commented:

> *I think the elimination education system is not good. If the education system pushes out students earlier, it will have a great impact on their personality. There might be ways of coming back into the system such as the University of the South Pacific extension services, but this is very expensive and only those who can afford the costs are blessed with the second chance.* (F1)

5. 4 Parents' view of the vocational education and curriculum

This section presents the parent's perception of vocational education as compared to academic secondary education.

5.4.1 What is vocational education

The findings showed that despite vocational education being recently recognized by the government, parents related vocational education to the learning of vocational skills. They associate vocational education and/or schools as institutions where the method of knowledge and skill acquisition is more related to the traditional ways of learning in which students learnt knowledge and skills by doing. One parent stated that:

The main focus of vocational schools is on skills development on specific trades. (M1)

A common opinion identified in the research was that parents wanted students who go through the vocational education system to be able to go further than the vocational education. While vocational education prepares students for life, students with vocational training should be given the opportunity to go to higher technical institutions. One parent for instance, stated:

It would be good if vocational schools improve to another higher level so that when children finish from there, they can move on further through higher vocational schools. (M2)

This is a concern for a lot of potential vocational students. Currently students who get vocational qualifications have very limited number of scholarships awarded to them. Even at the School of Industrial Development at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, almost all students would be self sponsored. After completing their studies, however, unlike some teachers or accountants, most technical students would not go on to long term in-service training.

5.4.2 Secondary education or vocational education

When parents were asked how they viewed the vocational schools/system as compared to formal education (secondary) system in terms of preparing students for work and life however, the findings showed two dominant views. First was the view that vocational schools were doing far better than formal secondary education. One parent stated:

The good thing about vocational schools was that children learn a particular skill. And so when they leave school, they have more chances of going straight into the job type in which they acquired their skills. In formal education (secondary level) student do not acquire any specific skill. The certificate which is awarded to students is just general and most times is simply rejected by companies in favor of students with higher qualifications or students with specific skills qualification. (F1

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The obvious reason for this view was that skills learnt at vocational schools were, most times, physical and observable at the accomplishment of the task. Academic knowledge or skill however, may not always be observable and is measured differently to physical skills. Another explanation was that since secondary education was academically focused, parents expect an academic related job for students unlike vocational schools where skills taught is practically observable.

The second view however, considered both systems as equally helpful in preparing students for future careers. One parent said:

> *Both types of school are good. Vocational schools prepare students with skills for skills-related type of work while formal education prepares students for the academic related professions.* (M1)

Another parent argued that:

> *The two systems are both good. Although vocational schools are said to be skill-focused, going straight to vocational schools without being through academic (secondary or primary) schools will not be very helpful.   It would be good if skilled subjects are integrated into the academic stream as well so students can learn both academic and preferred skills with equal prestige.* (F2)

Given the two schools of thought however, when parents were asked under what circumstances would they choose between vocational or secondary education for their children's career choices, the finding showed there was overwhelming preference given to formal secondary education. The following are two examples of parent's preferences:

> *As a parent, I prefer formal secondary education. This is because if the [children] go to the vocational stream, they might not get into the career I aspire for them.* (F4)

*I prefer the academic stream. If my children are able to go further through the formal system, I would leave them to continue on. Besides this, working people can still do further training as in-service trainees. For the vocational students, if they finish and get a job, that's it. It is uncommon for them to go back into formal education. (*M3)

The response was anticipated in reference to the trend in which people with academic qualifications are those that are currently holding positions of prestige and are assumed to be earning good salary. In other words, this phenomenon influenced the value now placed on academic rather than on vocational education.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter I have presented the findings under three sections; parents' educational aspirations for their children, parents' understanding of the Solomon Islands education system and the curriculum, and parents' view of the vocational education system in the Solomon Islands.

The findings showed that parents' educational career aspirations for their children are mainly influenced by the need for their children to be able to meet the challenges of the future. They also indicated that whilst parents appreciate secondary education as important and a significant contributor in preparing students for career aspirations, parents should also play an important role in developing and guiding students towards careers. In relation to the curriculum furthermore, there is a need to balance both academic and practical subjects in the secondary education system.

Although the formal vocational education system had just been recognized by the government, parents view it as more directly preparing students for careers than formal secondary education. However, the findings also indicated that parents would prioritize formal secondary education over vocational education.

In the next chapter I discuss the findings of the study.

Chapter Six

Discussion of the Findings

6. 1 Introduction

The focus of my study was to explore the question: *What are parents' educational and career aspirations for their children and what are their (parents) perceptions of the formal secondary education in Solomon Islands with respect to their children's preparation to meeting these aspirations*? This chapter discusses the findings of the study.

6.2 Parents' aspirations for their children

In reference to the question of whether parents have educational career aspirations for their children, the findings suggested that parents do have educational career aspirations for their children. This is not new. In Otto's (2000) study on youth perspectives on parental career influence in North Carolina, it was generally acknowledged that, although mothers are those that children mostly turn to for help in career guidance (an indication of parents having career aspirations for their children), both parents as "allies" (p. 111) have career aspirations for their children.

However, unlike in the western world where it can be difficult to get from parents their specific career aspirations for their children (Bardick, Berne, Magnussion & Witko, 2005; Mau & Bikos, 2000), in the context of this study, some parents were very specific about their career intentions for their children. Parents' specificity in this regard is attributed to the difference in the sensitivity attached to the question; what are your career aspirations for your children? For instance, in the Solomon Islands, parents whose children are seen to be academically bright by reference to being regular recipients of school academic awards, may openly mention their intentions for their children. This is because in a pyramidal education system the child is among the academic elites who would most likely achieve his/her dreams. Parents who are not sure of the future of their children in academic related jobs however, may not be keen to be asked such question.

Although the research findings showed some parents being specific about their career aspirations for their children, the study also indicated, that some parents were also not willing to give specific information about their career aspirations for their children. This finding is not isolated to this study. Although not related to this study, in the field of anthropology, researchers in the Solomon Islands for instance, were often restricted from entering custom worship sites on the basis of traditional tribal or custom issues (Keesing, 1978). In relation to parents' career aspirations for their children however, this finding supports Mau's and Bikos' (2000) finding that it can be difficult to get parents' career aspirations for their children. This is because parents can only refer to children as important in career decisions rather than being specific about their career aspirations for their children. In other words, in issues that are considered as private there are different types of response. Sometimes there are direct responses to certain questions. For 'other' sensitive questions however, there can either be a response which meaning can only be implied; no response at all; and or that if there was an answer, the truthfulness of the response is still questioned. In other words, there is an ethical dilemma in play here.

Some parents wanted their children to pursue careers other than their own which supports the theory that parents are "expectancy- socializer's" (Lapan & Turner, 2002, p. 145) and influence their children through their expectations for their children. These expectancy-socialiser aspirations could be the result of a parent's positive view of other careers as having more status and pay and/or their negative experiences in the careers they were in. For instance, some parents may discourage their children from careers in marine (e.g., seamanship) because of the experience of frequently working out in the sea at the expense of precious time with the family.

In relation to parents not yet having any careers in mind for their children, this can be said to apply only to parents not having any 'specific' or 'particular' careers in mind. In this regard, it is not uncommon for parents to be indecisive about careers they may intend for their children to pursue. This finding is in line with Trice's (1991) study in which he suggested that while parents may not have particular careers in mind for their children, he also showed that parents do have intentions for their children to be employed in some sort of formal employment. It is often the case that parents' specific career aspirations for their children would be further developed after a more thorough understanding of their children is established (Kogan, 1988).

Eccles (1994) and Karen (1996/1997), found that parents career aspirations for their children were sometimes based on the academic ability of the child and the attitudes and behaviors he/she (child) adopts. Since these abilities, attitudes and perceptions in children are still not matured and are subject to changes because of the maturation process (Bartley, 1958), parents specific career aspirations for their children can still be further developed and influenced by continuous school reports of the academic, social and personal attributes of the child (Eccles, 1994) as well parents' observation of the child. This helps explain why parents do not yet have any specific careers in mind.

In the context of the Solomon Islands however, while children's academic and attitude may impact on parents' career aspirations as seen in their specificity of their career aspirations for their children, not having specific careers in mind yet can be seen as due to being indecisive about the few career options available. Parents may also want their children to pursue careers that would be different from the usual ones such as teaching and nursing, but which can still accumulate social status. For instance, careers labeled as 'engineering' and 'computer technician' although not new in the western world, are appealing terms and command some status in the Solomon Islands. These, besides the youthfulness of children, may impact on why parents in the Solomon Islands are not having any career aspirations for their children yet but will later.

On the whole however, the concept of parents having career aspirations for their children can, according to Clement (1995), be considered as the result of human nature. According to Clement (1995), parents have a natural instinctive obligation to ensure that their offspring are able to survive and to continue to maintain their genes with success. This is relevant in the Solomon Islands, where education is seen as an important means through which one could get a well paid job and subsequently accumulate success such as social status and financial security (Corson, 1988). Whether the children are successful in meeting these or related aspirations or not however, is another matter.

6.3 Influences of parental career aspirations

The finding that suggested parents' career aspirations for their children were influenced by the social status and the high pay assumed to be attached to careers which require higher education and qualification is also not new. In Marjoribanks (1997) 'Family Context Model' of examining relationships between parents and their children's career aspirations, he suggested that "culturally defined goals, purposes and interests held out as legitimate objectives for all" (p. 120). In relation to parents' career aspirations for their children, Marjoribanks (1997) suggested that, in societies, there are traditional or introduced cultural values attached to the importance of social status in different careers. As such, the means to achieve the social status and higher pay is a worthy cause to pursue.

In the literature reviewed however, better pay was not specifically mentioned as an influence in perceptions in relation to careers. Nevertheless, the concept of social influence (Bartley, 1958) which considers perception as influenced directly through "peoples responses to socially meaningful properties" (p. 387) implied that better pay can be indirectly incorporated into the aspirations for jobs with social status. When Eccles (1994, cited in Lapan, Hinkelman, Adams & Turner, 1999) asserted that "individuals choose careers so as to fit a defined hierarchy of occupational values" (p.109), better pay is undoubtedly a significant influencing component. This means that it is often difficult to differentiate higher status from higher pay.

The direct specific mention of future financial security and particularly better pay as an influence in the context of the Solomon Islands is also related to social influence, and can also be said to be the result of the current economic crisis in the Solomon Islands. Where the cost of living is high and the rate of unemployment is booming (Sikua, 2000), financial security through better paid job is paramount. The economic situation coupled with the idea that education can consequently lead to better pay is a major influence in parents' career aspirations for their children.

The usefulness and appropriateness of careers to both urban and rural areas are major influences for the parents in this study who still have a very strong attachment and connection to their rural villages. According to Keesing (1972), in most of Melanesia and the Pacific Island countries, indigenous people in the urban areas refer to 'home'

as the village in the rural province where one is surrounded by blood relatives and have rights to customary land. This view of the 'home' as a vital influence is not only because it is where people would intend to eventually stay after retirement, but more importantly people go out of the 'home' in search of employment. In this regard, parents aspire that their children pursue a career so that they would still get employment at 'home.'

Most of the formal types of jobs such as in management and accounting, through which people can earn a regular salary are not found in the rural outlying provinces but are found only in the urban centers. This, according to the Solomon Islands Form 4 social studies syllabus is one of the attractions to the urban centers. This is not only true for developing countries but in the developed world as well. In studying parents influence on their children, in cases where children pursue their parents' careers to sustain family business, Schulenberg, Vondracek and Crouter (1984) identified that children opted to stay far outside of the urban centers to take up careers that are relevant to the context of their preference. Where one prefers to stay for convenience and be formally employed at the same time is an important determinant in career choice.

Although, in the context of the Solomon Islands, it is different in the sense that people go back to their customary rural village where they have customary rights to the land (Fifi'i, 1989; Keesing, 1972), the phenomenon of aspiring for careers that would suit or still give you employment wherever you live (urban or rural) is a significant influence in the aspirations for career types.

The possible future trend of job opportunities as an influence in parents' career aspirations for their children is also important. According to Schulenberg et al., (1984), although the influence of 'status careers' is still a significant influence for career aspirations in economies where job opportunities are scarce, specialized training in fields of possible future job opportunities (though not associated with status) is seen as necessary. The assumption that people can still be employed in work not related to their qualification, as was the case in England (Pearson, 1985) and currently in the Solomon Islands (where most science teachers do not have education/methodology content), is seen as outdated or that opportunities for individuals without related qualifications to excel in those fields would be few. Being

prepared for a career where you are most likely to get employment in is seen as important. In the Solomon Islands for instance, it was noted that some people opted to become language (English) teachers because of internationalization/globalization. English is an international language so more non-English speaking people would want to be taught the language.

In relation to technology related careers, because of the international recognition now given to technology (Gradwell, 1999), and also parents' focus on academic rather than technical subjects (Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005), the demand for well qualified people in technology is high. This could be why some parents want to enroll their children in technology related subjects because of the likelihood of better pay and because of a better chance of getting a job as soon as the job training is over. The finding of this study that parents want their children to pursue vocational careers in which they may be self-employed perhaps is influenced by the phenomenon of job security as an employee or as self-employed. Parents are aware that since the academically bright students will pursue academic related careers, there may be chances for children to excel in vocational related careers.

The influence of cultural conventions on career aspirations is also important. Although in this respect, the findings of the study may be seen as the Solomon Islands being in an early transitional stage of emerging from traditional cultural practices, cultural influence on career aspirations is an international phenomenon. According to Eccles (1994), one reason for women to be "underrepresented" in many high status jobs and the difference in ratio between male and female in education and career choices is partly due to "gender role socialization" (p. 585). She asserted that gender role socialization led men and women to have different values which affect their occupational aspirations. Nash (1979) similarly stated that gender roles influence the views people hold on which roles are seen for women and those for men.

The findings of this study supports the international literature not only in relation to students themselves making career decisions based on cultural gender role influences but that parents also influence children by developing the "schema regarding the proper roles of men and women" (Eccles, 1994, p. 597) as indirectly spelt out by the values of the culture. The difference between the gender role socialization influence in the western world and that in the Solomon Islands however, is that gender role

socialization influence in the western world is more indirect (Eccles. 1994) in the form of conceptions. Parents can be considered as disassociated from the tradition of which role belongs to which sex at work and perhaps in their daily lives (Fox, 1976, cited in Eccles, 1994). In the Solomon Islands however, because parents are still strongly part of a culture that perceives different roles as related to different genders, and because the culture is still very much directly part of the people's everyday lives, parents aspire and directly encourage their children to pursue careers within these assumed cultural boundaries.

In the context of the Solomon Islands (EFA, 2000) as in Papua New Guinea (Kilavanwa, 2004), the direct cultural stereo-typing of some occupations as restricted to men or to women is still strongly observed and a very powerful influence in career aspirations. Although, women are now taking up roles that were traditionally considered for men such as in management and leadership positions (Kilavanwa, 2004), women are still very much under-represented in many high status occupational fields. The findings of this study thus support the theory that culture is a major influence on perception.

As noted by Anderson (2006) and Segiovanni (2006), culture is what keeps the society together because it is the beliefs and attitudes that a defined group of people have in common. It is on the basis of cultural commonalities of a defined group of people that influences parents to the kinds of careers they aspire for their children

6.4 Parents' view of the secondary education system and curriculum

The finding that suggested Solomon Islands secondary education curriculum as general but provides the foundations both for careers immediately after school and higher education supports Steeves and English (1978) suggestion that secondary education (also primary and intermediate education), is simply a preparation for the next level. In the context of the Solomon Islands, this finding supported Sikua (2002) when he stated that students going to secondary education simply have "nine years of basic education" (p. 174).

The finding that the curriculum, despite being basic, prepares students for further academic studies such as in Form 6 (for those who are academically able) and/or the

Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE); and that it should also prepare students to be able to further develop the skills or knowledge learnt in secondary education is also supported by Solomon Islands literature. Liligeto (2001) in studying students' views on subjects as preparing them for future careers for example, noted that most students (92%) said that subjects taken at high school prepares them to continue on to the next level of study. It "establishes a solid foundation for future careers" (Liligeto, 2001, p. 127).

This study found that from the parent's perception, employers would rather take in students with specific or higher qualifications than secondary education. This finding supported McMullen's (1978) findings. In reporting to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) about innovative practices in secondary education, McMullen (1978) found this to be true for the member countries of the OECD. In his report, McMullen (1978) stated that "employers increasingly question the value and efficacy of the education that their potential employees have received, particularly those applying from …secondary schools" (p. 14). He also cited that the employers based their criticism on "low standard of literacy and innumeracy attained" (p. 15) and that too much academic emphasis resulted in the able students concentrating only on academic related courses.

The inconsistency in the student's preparedness for future careers and employers' negative view of secondary education leavers in the Solomon Islands is perhaps because of two reasons, Firstly, students have the confidence to take on jobs with the secondary education knowledge they acquired but were frustrated that employers have less regard for them. Secondly, because of the pyramidal system, secondary students employed by the employers are those that logically are pushed out because of lack of academic competence (this may not always be true). Given this, push-out students give a negative impression to employers resulting in a negative perception of secondary educated students.

In a pyramidal education system like in the Solomon Islands, which eliminates students as early as Class 6 and Form 3 based on two academic subjects (English and Mathematics), the academic stream and type of work was considered as the much favored course to pursue (Sikua, 2002). This means that anyone who pursues careers other than those seen as academic could be considered to be not academically capable.

The academically able students were expected to continue on through the academic stream and hence meet societal expectations. This could result in employers either rejecting secondary education students or if secondary students were employed, this would be after a thorough comparison with other students of the same educational level in all areas relevant to the job.

6. 5 Parents' view of how education could prepare students

Parents perceived that there is the need to include all curriculum subjects in schools, introduce new subjects or curriculum content relevant to the changing work environment and to recruit specialized well qualified teachers in all subjects. These concerns have also been identified by education stakeholders internationally. In the United States for instance, Steeves and English (1978) noted that, in relation to curriculum subjects, society wanted a varied curriculum for the schools. Steeves and English (1978) noted that apart from the major subject fields (English, Science, Mathematics, Social Science) there were demands for "programs for preparation leading to an increased variety of skilled jobs…for physical education as well as for academic studies...for increased emphasis on science, on commercial studies, and on fine arts" (p. 14). In other words, the education system was asked to devise ways of incorporating most "menial occupational fields" (p. 15) and to give students every opportunity in all available employment fields.

In the context of the Solomon Islands, this was also what the parents in this study were suggesting as important for students for the preparation for future careers but they identified as lacking. Although economically, the Solomon Islands may not be able to provide all that parents want included, this findings supports Sikua (2002), when he highlighted that in the Solomon Islands secondary education structure there was much "emphasis on academic subjects" and because of this it is "causing concern given an environment of stagnant employment opportunities" (p. 278). In other words, Sikua (2002) emphasized the need to expose students to different opportunities and values and more importantly to prepare students with important skills for self-employment.

However, in relation to the academic emphasis, not all secondary schools in the Solomon Islands offer all the academic curriculum content prescribed by the

Curriculum Development Centre (CDC). With particular reference to most community high schools out in the provinces for instance, there are no science labs. In this respect, if students have science as a subject, most practical experimental component may not be done. The same could be said to be applied to practical subjects such as home economics and industrial arts. There are no tools or facilities to enhance proper practical teaching of these subjects. Malasa (2007) in his search for factors that inhibit effective school leadership in Solomon Islands highlighted poor facilities and the infrastructure as inhibiting factors. In other words, the lack of facilities to facilitate learning in different curriculum subjects may impact on students' preparation for future careers. Not only does this limit the scope of students to choose different subject options, but it limits the scope whereby students can explore other areas that would best suit them.

The parents' belief that there was a need to recruit well qualified specialized teachers is also noted by Liligeto (2001). He highlighted that, because of the need to make changes in the technology curriculum to match the technology changes that are currently taking place, technology instructors need to be prepared to meet the challenges of any possible new curriculum. While technology teachers in the Solomon Islands can be seen to have advantages especially because most are qualified in their subject areas before getting a teaching qualification (Liligeto, 2001). This, however, is not applicable to all subjects in the secondary curriculum.

As Malasa (2007) noted, quality teachers are a scarce commodity in the Solomon Islands. If there were teachers with first degree qualifications such as in science, most would be unlikely to also have a teaching qualification. They often take up teaching because of the job opportunity as there are scarce job opportunities in science. On the other hand, if there were teachers with teaching qualifications such as a Diploma in Teaching from the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), Malasa (2007), noted that their competence to teach senior secondary forms (Forms 4 – 6) were also even questioned by their superiors. The Diploma program at the SICHE was initially designed to train teachers for junior secondary education levels (Forms 1 – 3) and most of the intake for the program were themselves only Form 5 and Form 6 students. Against this background, the concept of recruitment of quality teachers is seen as significant. Unless the education system offers all curriculum subjects and introduces new curriculum material relevant to today's working context, secondary

education will be considered simply as an avenue to keep students from roaming the streets.

The teaching of values, virtues and other principles of life are important and need to be included into the secondary curriculum was also reflected in the demand by parents in the United States for secondary education to be used as means of "preparation for citizenship" (Steeves and English, 1978, p. 14). Steeves and English (1978) highlighted parents wanted the education system to be balanced in its approach to develop not only academic/mental and physical abilities but also positive attitudes to work and life. The need for the development of a positive attitude was also mentioned by McMullen (1978) as one of the basis for employer's criticism on secondary students of the OECD countries then. He stated that, because of too much emphasis on academic subjects, prospective employers identified that secondary students have insufficient "personal qualities such as the inability to cooperate with a group, ability to mix with others and the ability to show initiative when faced with an unexpected problem" (McMullen, 1978, p. 15).

What occurred in the United States and the OECD countries is also found to be a need in the Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands education system needs to address this problem. During the ethnic crisis in the Solomon Islands, youths (particularly from the conflicting parties) were exposed to violence and were involved in criminal activities. Further to that, unemployment may have implications on the potential for increased criminal activities by the youth (Sikua, 2002). The churches, which were important institutes in preaching and educating people in this regard (Palmer, 1980) and which were revered, are seen to be declining in the number of youths attending. Youths however, now have access to the night clubs in the urban centers. Unless the Solomon Islands education system provides more appropriate curriculum content, there is the likelihood of increased criminal activity in the future.

6. 6 Secondary education, an academic curriculum

The secondary education curriculum being considered as primarily academic is not unique to this study. Although, as in the case of the United States, other 'menial occupational fields' were offered in secondary education or by different secondary schools, these were demanded to be included in the secondary education system to

simply enhance a "comprehensive nonselective system" (Steeves & English, 1978, p. 15) which caters for pupils of all levels of ability (Gordon, 1980). However, it is not uncommon for parents to first associate secondary education with academic curriculum subjects before other curriculum subjects as is the case in the Solomon Islands.

In studies carried out by Holt (1980), it was suggested that despite a comprehensive non-selective education system, the academic curriculum component of the secondary system is what makes the school for the secondary aged children a secondary education school. If an institute for secondary aged students does not offer academic subjects or has other subjects, such as sports as its main focus, it might be termed differently.

In this respect, the finding of this study that parents associate secondary education with academic subjects first and foremost, can be understood as the result of the prevailing belief that secondary education is an academic institute to help improve the literacy and numeracy competency of students. This finding supports the idea by Holt (1980) that secondary education focus is firstly academic. If students are not literate and numerate as expected at the secondary level, the parents may question the secondary education system and particularly the curriculum. Although vocational subjects are also taught alongside the academic curriculum in secondary education in the Solomon Islands, these were considered to be only very basic and were offered just to give the students who cannot make it up through the academic stream a possible alternative (Liligeto, 2001). Furthermore, the academic subjects are the determining subjects for progression to the next level in the Solomon Islands formal education system (Sikua, 2002) which reinforces the importance of academic subjects resulting in the association respectively.

The Solomon Islands government through the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) recent recognition of vocational education, as separate from formal secondary education which primarily focused on vocational content, also impacted on the view that secondary education is an academic institution. With two separate systems recognized by the government, it is not surprising that parents will distinguish between the two. In this respect, parents perceive secondary education as academic while vocational education as vocational.

With the recent recognition endowed on vocational education, the term 'vocational school' in itself may be considered to define the boundary between secondary education as an academic stream and vocational education as dealing with practical skills development.

6.7 Secondary education, preparation for future careers

The two themes arose from parents' view about how they thought what was taught at the secondary level was either helping to prepare children to meet their career aspirations. In relation to the positive view about the secondary education for instance, Gordon (1980) stated that the secondary education system in England gives students the foundations for technical and academic training. While Gordon's view was on a comprehensive education system where education is seen as supposed to give equal opportunity to all children, this is also the case in the Solomon Islands where the education curriculum was considered to be biased towards academic rather than vocational studies (Sikua, 2002).

Such positive comments about the secondary education curriculum however, as found in this study were deemed to be made by parents who were open-minded, not rigid, had seen the success of their children through the formal secondary system or are currently satisfied with the on-going academic performance of their children. Parents did not look at the process but the products of the secondary education system. The success of children during or more importantly after secondary education is the yardstick used to measure the secondary education curriculum in terms of preparing students for future careers. For the less educated parents, understanding the curriculum content is not a point in contention. If children are reported to be performing at above average as reflective in a student's subject grade achievements, parents are generally satisfied with the secondary education curriculum. Their understanding of the curriculum is dependant on hearsay.

Parents' perception on the formal secondary education as only good for academic work rather than to meet the varied nature of the work place was also identified by Saiti and Mitrosili (2005). In their study of parental perception of the education of adolescence children in Greece, they noted that while parental involvement in their children's education increased, this was geared more towards academic related fields.

This was because of the "strong trend towards general education"(p. 2) where focus was on academic than vocational courses. This was also evidenced in studies by McMullen (1978) when he cited that employers are not sure about the competence of secondary school leavers. In other words, secondary students are not well equipped to meet the demands of the work place. In the case of the Solomon Islands where the focus of the secondary education curriculum is on academic rather than on vocational jobs (EFA, 2000; Sikua, 2002) this can also be said to be true.

6.8 Common views of the education system

The common view by the parents in this study that there was a need to see the technical subjects in the Solomon Islands curriculum be treated with similar prestige as the academic subjects in schools is also shared by different countries. According to researchers (Eliophotou-Menon, 1997; Kassotakis, 1991, 1999; Kazamias & Kassotakis, 1995, cited in Saiti and Mitrosili, 2005) education policy makers in Greece for instance, have identified problems related to the shortage of technical-vocational people and there is the fear that the trend may continue if nothing is done about it. What these researches imply then was that, as in the Solomon Islands, because of social, economic and employment factors, less regard was given on technical subjects. This has resulted in the difficulty of getting trained technical people although opportunities to excel in technical-vocational areas were there.

This issue is also a major concern for the Solomon Islands. This is not only because it is unrealistic for all students to pursue academic related careers, but that, in reference to the rate of unemployment, opportunities for all students to pursue careers in academic related fields are very limited. For instance, apart from the University of the South Pacific, there is only one local national academic institution, the SICHE. The SICHE however, also controls its intake through a quota system. Furthermore, attending these institutions is expensive. As in Greece (Reppa & Fotiadou-Zahariou, 1997, cited in Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005), there are also other issues that impact on the need for a balance in academic and technical subjects in schools. On the other hand, parents might not have the financial capacity to continue to fund students in the academic stream but can do so through the vocational stream. Furthermore, some students are good at practical skills and they should be given the opportunity to be exposed and to excel in those areas rather than limiting their opportunities early.

The view by the parents in this study that all students should be allowed secondary education up to Form 5 is one that is applauded by education systems in other countries. For example, according to Steeves and English (1978) the idea of the comprehensive education system in the United States was to offer all possible avenues for careers to children in schools to terminate the elimination education system in place then. It is appreciated that an early push-out of students from secondary education or halfway through the secondary education system is not in the interest of the child. Some children need time for their cognitive development to get up to par and keeping them in school gives them the opportunity to improve in their development before important decisions and choices are made. In the case of the Solomon Islands, the exams may not always be a true measure of the academic ability of the children. Some students are pushed out of the system as a result of other factors such as illness and social pressure.

6.9 Parents' view on vocational and secondary education

The findings of this study that suggested parents prefer secondary education to vocational education is not surprising. This was a result of two things. Firstly, social structure influence (Barley, 1958) and secondly future career opportunity influence. The social structure influence is found among parents in societies where social status is a valued phenomenon. Barley (1958) stated that social concepts or ideals valued by the social environment influence perceptions on issues. In the context of the Solomon Islands where prestige and status are associated with academic related jobs, parents preference for their children to first pursue academic education before switching into vocational (if unable to continue on through the academic strand) is made on this understanding. In fact international studies (Gordon, 1980; Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005; Steeves & English, 1978;) are supported by the findings of this study which suggest that any change of an education system from an elimination (pyramidal) system to a comprehensive system is a indication that parents prioritize secondary education over vocational education because of the general social status of secondary academic education.

On the second influence of future career opportunity as a basis for parental preference for secondary education over vocational education, this is also found to be true

internationally. Saiti and Mitrosili (2005) for instance, noted that in Greece, technical education is usually seen as limiting opportunities for career development. It is also considered as preventing students from getting into higher education. Although in the findings of this study, parents thought that vocational education prepares students better than secondary education for work, their preference does not match their view. The major reason here may be assumed to be related to future career opportunities with better pay which is possible with a higher education qualification.

6.10 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the important questions that are related to the intent of this research. Parents in the Solomon Islands, as their western counterparts, do have career aspirations for their children. However, the influences of the aspirations may not always be similar. Generally however, parents' aspirations for their children are that their children have the most opportunity to be able to have financial and social security through the type of education they receive. In the Solomon Islands, this is considered to be very possible through a formal academic qualification.

The next chapter will summarize this study by showing its importance. It will also make recommendations that are important for responsible authorities within the Solomon Islands education system to consider in the effort to make relevant aspects of secondary education in the Solomon Islands as having a direct input from parents. It will also make recommendation for future improvement in the event that the same study or a similar study is undertaken in Solomon Islands or anywhere for that matter.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

7. 1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, it indicates the importance of the study. Secondly, it suggests recommendations that are important for responsible authorities within the Solomon Islands education system to consider in the effort to make secondary education in the Solomon Islands having a direct input from parents. Finally, it makes suggestions for future improvement in the event that the same or a similar study is undertaken in the Solomon Islands or anywhere for that matter.

7. 2 Importance of the study

The results of this study are considered important because they will provide curriculum developers and education policy makers an insight into parents' view of the education system and their (parents) expectations of the secondary education system. Curriculum developers and policy-makers as noted by Liligeto (2001) "need concrete evidence of what people view as being appropriate for their citizens" (p. 6). With the study results important relevant decisions career-wise can be made in reference to parents' views by responsible education authorities both within the government and private sectors.

Another reason for the study is associated with secondary teachers. With an insight into parents' views of the secondary education system and its preparation for their children's future careers, teachers will need to take those aspirations and views into their classroom teaching. However, perhaps one of the most important reasons for this study is that it is one of the few studies carried out about Solomon Islands education by a Solomon Islander. In the developing world where there is little documented research, it is difficult to find contextualized scholarship. This study can be used as a reference for future researches not only for the Solomon Islands context but internationally as well.

7.3 Recommendation for Solomon Islands education Stakeholders

In view of the research findings and the importance of the study the following recommendations are suggested as means to improve the secondary education in terms of preparing students for work and for life.

- That the current secondary curriculum needs to reflect the current changes that are taking place both locally and internationally in education and employment. It should also provide children with skills that employers (job market) required at the secondary level and in so saying, employers need to define the qualities they are looking for in students. (This is an area for further research.)

- That all secondary schools need to offer all curriculum subjects available in schools to give students a wide scope of options. This means that all schools need not only to be equipped with the facilities and equipment that would enhance proper teaching of all subjects but with more well qualified people in their teaching subjects to meet the demand of secondary education.

- That the current secondary education curriculum needs to include common values, virtues and principles in life and work in an organized way either directly as part of other compulsory subjects or as a curriculum subject on its own.

- That secondary schools or the secondary education system embark on educating secondary parents about the curriculum content taught at schools. This is on the understanding that a lot of parents do not really know what their children are being taught.

- That the secondary schools have a career counseling system set up to help guide students or answer students' questions in relation to careers guidance. This would assist parents who lacked knowledge of different academic or vocational careers.

- That the government should also sponsor more students to pursue specific training on specific vocational education just as it does for teachers and nurses or other academic fields.

- That the government should develop policies that are directly related to the welfare of vocational employees to attract academically bright students to pursue careers in the vocational area as well. This would also be an influence for parents and children to aspire to vocational careers.

- That all students be allowed secondary education up to Form 6.

7.4 Suggestions for further research

The reason for this study, as stated in Chapter 1, was to explore parents' perceptions of the Solomon Islands secondary education in terms of preparing children for meeting parents' career aspirations for their children. Since this is the first research study to be undertaken on the subject in the Solomon Islands, information from the study could be used as a base for further related studies. For further studies on the same subject or a similar one however, the following suggestions are made.

The first is, that in the selection process of participants, with due respect to all the participants in this study, it is important to take on board parents whose contribution will reflect a good understanding of the Solomon Islands education system. In researches that attempt to discover people's view on issues or concepts, particularly in this case, it is people's perception derived from an understanding that is sought.

Secondly, with participants who have a good understanding of the education system, the in-depth interview mode within the qualitative constructive paradigm would be more likely to draw in-depth responses.

That further research is carried out on potential employer's view of secondary students in relation to preparation for the workplace and to find from them the academic, vocational and attitudinal requirements they expect from secondary

students. On the same token there is the need to undertake the same or similar study to find the point of view of students in this area respectively.

7.5 Concluding remarks

This research is considered as timely for the Solomon Islands. With the positive increase in secondary education places for students and changes in the work environment, parents' perceptions of the secondary education system are important. Even if the economy may not cope with the demand for employment, parents will always be the first point of contact for their children. They need to know that the secondary education system and curriculum has equipped their children with the right tools (academic and/or vocation-wise) to function in the ever demanding and challenging world.

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Appendices

Appendix 2

53A Barrie Cres
Hillcrest
Hamilton
New Zealand

26th April, 2007

Dear ………………

Good afternoon and greetings to you and the family. I hope you and the family are all well. Here in New Zealand, my family and I are all alright.

I have just completed the course requirements for a post graduate Diploma in Education (Behavior Management) and now starting with the thesis for my masters degree. As part of my research I will be coming over to Honiara (Solomon Islands) in late July or early August this year 2007 to carry out my field research.

For the purposes of my research, could you please, if possible, be my contact person with my potential research participants? This is basically to;

- Hand deliver to them (potential participants) any correspondence I may make with them
- Briefly explain (on my behalf) what the research is all about if necessary (I will supply some brief information later)

As a contact person, an important ethical necessity is that the potential participants identity will remain confidential. I trust you in this area hence your selection. If you agree to be my contact person then please sign the agreement form below and send to me as soon as possible.

Thank you and I hope to see you and the family when I come over.

Sincerely,

Rose D Beuka.

………………………………………..Cut Here…………………………………………

CONFIDENTIALY AGREEMENT FORM

Dear Rose,

I (……………………….) have read and understood the contents of your letter.

I (agree /do not agree) to be your contact person. I also (agree / do not agree) that I will not reveal the identity of your research participants before, during and even after the research is completed.

Signature:………………………………………………. Date:…………………….

Appendix 3

Participants information letter (English Version)

53A Barrie Crescent
Hillcrest
Hamilton
New Zealand

26th April, 2007

Dear ………………….

Hello, and greetings to you and the family. I am happy and pleased to talk with you this afternoon. I hope you and your family are alright.

As you may have already been aware, I am currently in New Zealand and doing a Masters degree at the University of Waikato. To complete my masters degree I intend to do some research and for this I seek your assistance to answer some questions in an interview in late July or early August, 2007.

My choice of research is based around the question of:

> *What are parent's educational & career aspirations for their children and what are their (parents) perceptions of formal secondary education in Solomon Islands with respect to their children's preparation for meeting these aspirations?*

In exploring this question, specific areas on which your perception will be investigated are:

- What are your educational and career aspirations for your children?

- Your view of the school curriculum up to the different levels of the education system and their view of how prepared their children are for career planning

- Your view of the pyramid formal education system of Solomon Islands where at specified levels students are eliminated based on intelligence tests.

- Your view of the newly introduced vocational/technical system recently introduced and increasingly recognized by the government

- Your involvement in their children's choice of career and of available career planning programs and services available.

There are no wrong or right answers to the questions. All I'm interested in are your ideas and thoughts on this topic which will be recorded on tape.

For your information, I will make every effort to maintain your anonymity. Furthermore, data gathered from you will only be used for the research. You also have the right to withdraw should you feel that the research is not for you but I will need to be informed before signing your transcript.

If you agree or not to be a participant in the research, please fill in the return slip and post in the envelop as attached.

Thank you for talking with you through this letter. Hope to see you soon for the interview and I wish your family well.

Sincerely,

Rose D. Beuka

Appendix 3

<p align="center">Participants information letter (Pidgin Version)</p>

53A Barrie Crescent
Hillcrest
Hamilton
New Zealand

26th April, 2007

Dear………………………

Halo and gud fala dei go lo iu and famili. Mi hapi tu mas fo toktok watem iu lo dis fala aftanun.

Mi kam lo New Zealand and mi duim masta digri blo mi lo Waikato University. Fo finishim mastas pepa blo me, wan fala risech nao mi wande fo duim. Bae mi hapi tu mas sapos iu save help fo ansarem samfala kwesten insaed lo intaviu eni taem lo July or August, 2007.

Big kwesten lo risech nao olsem:

> **What nao ting ting blong iu, olsem dadi and mami, lo hao nao olketa sekondri skul blo iumi lo Solomon Aelan, I redim olketa pikinini fo taem olketa finis and go waka fo selen?**

Oloketa big eria bae mi askem kwesten lo iu nao olsem:

- Wanem nao ting ting blong iu lo olketa samting (Karikiulam) wea oloketa pikinini lanem lo skul. Iu tingim hem redim olketa fo taem olketa livim skul and go and waka fo seleni tu?

- Wanem nao ting ting blong iu lo diskaen skul wea olketa pikinini olketa pas o fel afta olketa duim samfala test lo standad 6 fom 3, 5, 6 and 7?.

- Wanem nao ting ting belong iu lo dis kaen niu taep skul wea gavman ka map wetem wea olketa pikinini lane fo duim samting wetem hand blong olketa?(example, Kapenta, sawing)

- Wanen nao ting ting blong iu (dadi and mami) lo hao iu fala (dadi and mami) helpem pikinin blong iu fo chusim taep waka iu fala laekem pikinini fo duim. Iu tingim sam fala wei and ples fo helpem pikinini pripea fo waka hem stap tu?

Olketa kwesten ia no garen eni raet o rong ansa ia.   Mi laekem fo save nomoa long ting ting blong iu long olketa eria ia so iu no fraet. Evri tok tok blong iumitufala bae mi rekodim long teip and bae mi usim fo risech seleva nomoa. Bae mi no talem eni wan tu abaotim iu and stori blong iumitufala..

Sapos iu les fo tek pat or iu tek pat finis den iu les, iu save talem mi, mekem mi no iusim ansa blong iu taem mi raetim ripot.

Sapos iu wiling fo tek pat lo risech o iu les, den iu filim ap fom lo daon ia, and sendem kam lon envelop mi putim kam waitem leta ia.

Tagio tumas nao fo tok tok waitem iu. Mi hop fo kolsap lukim fo intaviu and hop nomoa famili blong iu alraet nomoa.

Sincerely,

Rose D Beuka.

Appendix 4

Potential Participants Consent Form (English Version)

Name: ..…………………………………………………...

Dear Rose,

I have read and understood the information you have provided about the research.

I (agree/do not agree) to be a participant in your research and (agree/dot not agree) to have my interview recorded on tape

Signature: …………………………………………..   Date: ……………………..

_____

Potential Participants Consent Form (Pidgin Version)

Name: ..……………………………………………………...

Dear Rose,

Mi ridim leta blong iu and mi save and minim nao wat iu talem kam abaot risech blong iu.

Mi (wiling/les) fo tek patlo risech ia and mi (wiling/less) fo iu rekodim tok tok blong mi insaed long teip.

Signature: …………………………………………..   Date: …………………………..

Appendix 5   **Interview Questions Guide**

Section 1 (Education and career aspirations)

1. What are the educational and career aspirations you have for your children

2. What influences the aspirations you have for your child(ren)?

3. How well do you think the school (secondary) is preparing your child(ren) for career planning to meet these aspirations?

4. How do you expect the school to prepare your child(ren) for meeting your children's career aspirations?

5. What is your view on your involvement in the education and career choice of your child(ren)? Do you view your role during career planning as supportive, informative, educational or any other? If any of the above or all, how?

6. What is your perception of your children's preparation for entry into the workforce?

7. In what ways can you support them?

Section 2 (Understanding of Solomon Islands Education system)

1. How familiar are you with what is taught in schools at the different examinable levels of the SI education system? (i.e grade 6 Forms 3, 5 and 6)

2. Explain how you think what is taught is either helping or not helping to prepare your children plan for future careers?

3. What do you think will help prepare students for future work aspirations?

4. What is your view on the examination system and the way it eliminates many students at specified levels of the education system? What implication does it have on planning future careers?

Section 3 (Vocational schools)

1. What do you know about the newly introduced vocational schools recently recognised   by the government? (Follow-up)

2. How do you view the vocational system as compared to the formal education system in terms of preparing students for work and life?

3. Under what circumstances would you choose

     a. Vocational schools
     b. Academic schools