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The experiences, perceptions and expectations of teachers,
students and parents of the Community High School Model in
Solomon Islands: A Case Study

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the Master of Educational Leadership degree at the Faculty of
Education

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study considers students' educational needs in the Solomon Islands' education system. In particular it explores the experiences, perceptions and expectations of teachers, students and parents of the Community High School model. While research has been done on some educational aspects of Community High Schools, none has been carried out amongst the teachers, students and parents. We therefore know very little about their experiences, perceptions and expectations of the Community High Schools in Solomon Islands.

Research data were gathered using qualitative case study methods. Specifically, interviews were conducted with four teachers, three students, three parents and four Education Officers. The teachers and students were from an urban Community High School, and the parents had children enrolled at the school. Data gathered were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The data gathering was conducted in the Solomon Islands in May 2010.

The key findings revealed that a number of social justice issues impacted on the majority of students in Community High Schools. They include improved access to secondary education, unbalanced curriculum, teacher-centred teaching and learning practices, poor preparation of students for the future, limited resources, democratic school leadership practice, a mutual school community partnership and a strong School committee. Other key findings which related to the future aspiration encompass more Rural Training Centres, expansion of tertiary education, and inappropriate education policies in general. This study also found that while there is advocacy for Community High Schools to be more responsive to the needs of the majority of students, many of which are rural children, this is not happening. Moreover, while the participants preferred to contextualize school practice to cater for all students however current educational policy does not allow this to happen.

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I would also like to thank the participants for sharing their stories about the Community High School model in the Solomon Islands. I hope that as a result of this report, the concerns of all students may be realised and recognised so that some changes are made to encourage and promote the development of all students' potential for life. That is, social justice issues in the education system can be addressed in the Solomon Islands' education system.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An overview

There is some concern amongst parents and communities in both urban and rural communities in the Solomon Islands about the increasing number of students leaving the school system not adequately prepared for their lives in the Solomon Islands (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004; Pollard, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). This suggests that the formal academic education system caters only for the academically capable students while the majority are pushed out of the school system by the highly selective, competitive and pyramidal structure. The education system appears to privilege the most academically able students at the expense of the majority of students. The Community High Schools were introduced as a remedial model so more students could access education to develop their potential for life. However, the Community High School model appears to perpetuate the situation rather than improve it. In view of this concern I believe there is a need to explore the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the main stakeholders, the teachers, students and parents, about whether the Community High School model prepares students for life.

This introductory chapter will present the context of the study and highlight the main areas to be studied, my reasons for undertaking this study and also the significance of this research. Also the structure of the thesis will be presented.

1.2 The context of the study

1.2.1 Geographical features

Solomon Islands is a scattered archipelago with a total land area of 28, 368 square kilometres. It lies between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu and is about 1, 900 kilometres northeast of Australia. The nation comprises a double chain of six large islands and many smaller ones. The capital Honiara is situated on Guadalcanal. Other

major islands include Choiseul, Isabel, Malaita, New Georgia and San Cristobal (Makira). All these islands are mountainous and sparsely populated (Pollard, 2005).

1.2.2 Socio - cultural context

The Solomon Islands comprise diverse cultures, languages and customs. In 2009, the total population was about 515, 870 with a population growth of 2.3% (*Solomon Star*, 2010); 93.3% are Melanesian, 4% are Polynesians and 1.5% Micronesians (Malasa, 2007). In addition, there are small numbers of Europeans, Chinese and other Pacific Islanders. There are about eighty to ninety different cultural groups each with a distinct language and territory. Christianity is the dominant religion in the Solomon Islands with Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Church, South Seas Evangelical Church, and Seventh-day Adventist Church as the predominating denominations in terms of populations.

Only about 16% of the population lives in the urban centres while the greater part, about 84%, live in rural areas and still maintain a subsistence livelihood (Pollard, 2005). Most people still rely on gardening, fishing and hunting for survival. They live in communities and in most communities there is a strong attachment of the people to the land. Most Solomon Islanders maintain this traditional social structure and have their roots in village life.

1.2.3 The Education System

The education system of the Solomon Islands was established according to the provisions of the National Education Act 1978. The Act provides the legal basis for administering and meeting the goals of education for the country, with much administration being decentralized to the education boards of the nine provinces and to Honiara City Council (Akao, 2008; Malasa, 2007). The decentralisation was seen as necessary because of the country's geographical isolation and cultural diversity, and additional issues relating to transport and communication (Sikua, 2002). More importantly, it has enabled greater access for rural children and more parental and community involvement in their children's education, which was intended to make the schools more responsive to the needs of their communities (Malasa, 2007; Sikua,

2002). The types of schools that are provided for under the Act are primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions, with early childhood education and vocational training centres recently included (Fito'o, 2009).

Despite the decentralisation of the education system, most of the main functions are still centralized and determined by the state (Fito'o, 2009). This includes the establishment and approval of new schools as well as designing, developing, and financing of the curriculum and dissemination of resources. The present education system is responsible for ensuring the operation and development of schools and training institutions in Solomon Islands (Malasa, 2007). The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development manages over 600 primary schools with a student enrolment of 85, 000, 140 secondary schools with a student enrolment of 29, 000 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004) and a teaching establishment of over 4, 000 teachers.

The school system in the Solomon Islands aims to achieve several purposes. In the pre- and post-colonial period, the primary goal of education for Solomon Islands was to prepare students for work in the offices essential to maintaining the functions of the colonial government (Fito'o, 2009). Even after independence, the school system continued to develop students' competencies through the formal school academic curriculum to take up the official responsibilities that were left by the colonial government. The legacy of the past colonial academic tradition could be observed in the desire of the government and people of Solomon Islands to maintain the formal academic school system. The desire for Solomon Islands to develop students with knowledge and skills to fill the jobs that were left by the colonial government meant the education system was acknowledged as the main route to paid employment (Beuka, 2008; Fito'o, 2009; Pollard, 2005).

The changing educational needs of the Solomon Islands pose several challenges for the government. One of the main issues is the high population growth rate of about 2.3 percent (*Solomon Star*, 2010). This suggests the expansion of the school system to cater for the increasing number of school children annually. To meet these demands,

the secondary education system has expanded rapidly since the 1990s with the fast growth of Community High Schools (CHS) in addition to the initial older National Secondary Schools (NSS) and Provincial Secondary Schools (PSS). For example, there were nine CHS in 1995, and 93 by 2002 (Sikua, 2002); 105 CHS in 2003, 109 in 2004, and 115 by 2005 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004). The increase in the number of secondary schools has in turn increased students' access to secondary education, the introduction of Community High Schools policy and their growth. However, despite this greater access to secondary education, many students are pushed out at earlier levels and only very few complete the final stage of secondary education.

The table below shows the trend of student numbers as they move from primary school to senior secondary school.

Table 1. Enrolment by class level in 2005

School level	Total enrolled
Kindergarten	11, 251
Preparatory	21, 082
Standard 1	17, 389
Standard 2	15, 220
Standard 3	13, 941
Standard 4	12, 352
Standard 5	11, 053
Standard 6	9, 319
Form 1	6, 522
Form 2	5, 839
Form 3	4, 854
Form 4	3, 703
Form 5	3, 029
Form 6	881
Form 7	189
Total	136, 624

(Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008, p.54)

Such scenarios raise important issues and concerns. If the education system caters for only the very few academically capable. "What about the majority of the students?" This is a social justice issue.

1.3 Statement of the issue

The Community High School model, which was intended to enhance greater access to secondary education, is advocated and seen as a success (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2008, 2009; Sikua, 2002). While there has been growing support for the Community High School model, as more students access secondary education, however, the high number of students who are unable to further their education beyond Year 9 is a concern for teachers, parents and communities (Dorovolomo, 2005; Fito'o, 2009; Pollard, 2005). Opportunities for them to further develop their knowledge and skills are also limited as a consequence.

It has been shown that the number of students enrolled in education decreases as they move from the lower levels to the higher levels of the school system (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005, 2008, 2009). This is a social injustice, and raises important questions such as “What happens to the students after they leave the school system at different points of the education system?” “Are they prepared for life?” Very limited research has been done on Community High Schools on the issue of equal access to education, with the exception of work by Sikua (2002) and Sanga, Pollard and Jenner (1998). In addition, no research has been undertaken within the Community High School context to explore the underlying issues hindering access for all students to develop their potential for life. This study is therefore underpinned by the following question:

What are the teachers, students and parents’ experiences, perceptions and expectations of the Community High School model?

1.4 My interest in the study

My observation and experience as a secondary school teacher saw reduced numbers of students continuing their schooling while many others were lost from the education system every year forced me to ask myself: Am I preparing the students for their future lives? Have I failed to make a positive difference in the lives of my students? Am I encouraging and promoting social justice for all students so that they can

develop their interests and potential, and become self-reliant and useful in their communities? What is the role of the schools, including the Community High Schools?

My passion and concern for the majority of students that are failed by the education system every year and then labeled as school drop-outs with limited opportunities generated my interest in undertaking research into the Community High School model. Initially, parents and communities envisaged the Community High School as a model that would be more responsive to the educational needs of all students, many of whom will return to the rural areas, and prepare them for the future. I believe there is a need to explore the underlying issues which hinder the social justice principle of access to relevant education for all students. The needs of the majority of students need to be recognised, realised and considered in the Solomon Islands education system.

1.5 Significance of the study

The information gathered from the study will be useful for government organisations in the Solomon Islands such as the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, and the Ministry of Planning; it will be useful to political leaders, policy makers, Education Authorities, school leaders, parents, communities, teachers and students. These stakeholders may be aware of this issue, but there is much to be done to encourage and promote access to relevant education for all young people. The knowledge gained from this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on how education varies in different social, political, economic and cultural contexts. As such, the findings generated from the study may be used in the formulation of policies, curriculum and practice which suit the needs and backgrounds of all students. This supports what Dorovolomo (2005) highlights: “it is pertinent that a country should ensure that its citizens are equipped with appropriate capabilities to contribute effectively to the national productivity and stability” (p. 164). Therefore, the research project sets a platform for developing Solomon Islands education system especially the Community High Schools to become responsive to all citizens. More importantly, the study aims to highlight how the influence of current education

policies, curriculum and practice promotes or hinders social justice in the education system.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

There are six chapters in this report. In this chapter, I have introduced the thesis and stated why I am interested in exploring the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the teachers, students, and parents associated with Solomon Islands Community High Schools. Chapter two examines current literature on the purposes of education, education in developing countries and Pacific Islands, and the education system in Solomon Islands, with a particular focus on Community High Schools. Chapter three presents the research design used in this research project. It includes the research methodology, ethical considerations relevant to the research and a description of the research process. The fourth chapter presents the findings that illustrate the themes and ideas that have emerged as a result of the study. The fifth chapter is a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature in this area. Lastly, the conclusion brings together and summarizes the research, examines some limitations of this study, provides suggestions for further research and presents my recommendations to initiate change.

In the next chapter, I firstly examine literature on the purpose of education, educational leadership and the community, education in developing countries and the Pacific Islands and the education system in Solomon Islands, with a particular focus on the Community High School model.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the main areas of this study. Initially, this section will focus on literature that discusses the meaning of education in different contexts. Next, literature relating to the purpose of education will be reviewed. This is fundamental, given that education has multiple purposes in different contexts, times and spaces. The literature on educational leadership and the community will also be reviewed, as will the literature on developing countries and Pacific Island countries' school curricula and practices. The literature relating to the Solomon Island's education system and practice will be presented, with a particular focus on Community High Schools, school governance, Rural Training Centres and citizenship education. Finally, this chapter will examine some of the expectations and challenges that teachers, students and parents experience in relation to the Community High School model in Solomon Islands.

2.2 Definition or description of education

Beliefs, value systems and cultural norms influence what people mean by 'education'. (Bishop & Glyn, 1999; Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Thaman, 1993, 2009). What is valued and considered relevant education in one context may not be of the same value in other contexts (Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Jowett, 1998; Thaman, 1993, 2009; Veramu, 1998). This explains why, in the complex field of education, the term itself has varying meanings in varying contexts, times and places. For instance, Thaman (2009) defines "Education as worthwhile learning and school education is worthwhile learning that is organised and institutionalised as opposed to non-formal education which is not institutionalized" (p.1). Sanga (2000) considers "education as a value-laden phenomenon which serves different purposes for different people that epitomise certain world views" (p.4). This definition suggests that education has various

purposes and exemplifies how people and the communities they are part of perceive and view what education is in their contexts.

According to Hodgkinson (1991, cited in Sanga, 2000) the most common functions of education are three-fold: the aesthetic, economic and ideological. The aesthetic aspect encompasses education as a way to experience enjoyment and personal fulfillment through learning the art of singing, dancing and speaking another language. The extent to which the activities that make up education provide enjoyment to children during their education transitions varies in different contexts. The economic purpose of education appears to refer to vocational training which has an economic motivation, such as the training offered at tertiary institutions for students wishing to become lawyers, accountants, teachers and doctors with the aim of advancing their personal economic situation. The ideological function of education refers to its overall purpose, that is, to transmit the culture of the society within which the education takes place. This is done through both the formal and the unwritten curriculum (Sanga, 2000).

2.2.1 Purpose of education

First, one of the purposes of education is the preparation of citizens for life locally and globally (Blankstein, 2004; Snyder, Acker-Hocevar and Snyder, 2008); Tanner, 2007; World Bank, 1995). In general, the literature defines education as providing knowledge, skills and values to children, and teaching them to become productive and useful citizens in their communities locally, nationally and globally (Hicks, 2007; Holden, 2007; Naidu, 2005; Veramu, 1998; World Bank, 1995). Education is a life-long process that is a socio-cultural, collaborative and relational endeavour (Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito & Bateman, 2008; Nabobo, 1998; Simanu-Klutz, 1997).

Second, there is growing advocacy for the concept of education including citizenship. It appears that people, communities and nations have varying perceptions of what citizenship is (Fito'o, 2009). That is the value and meaning attached to what constitutes citizenship. There is a growing body of literature suggesting that the

constituents and importance of what citizenship is varies, and that the essential elements of citizenship in one context may be different from those in another locality (Fito'o, 2009). While this is debatable, there are suggestions that global citizenship is centred on a human philosophy of caring and compassionate citizens (Snyder et al., 2008; West-Burnham, 2003). Consequently, some scholars have suggested that the relevance and significance of global citizenship needs to be debated globally. The deteriorating nature of human values, environmental, ethical and social issues in some societies is also becoming a concern globally (Fito'o, 2009; Snyder et al., 2008; West-Burnham, 2003).

The literature also notes the importance of introducing citizenship education in schools to encourage young people to develop into caring and compassionate citizens (Snyder et al., 2008; West-Burnham, 2003). Some scholars are suggesting that citizenship education is crucial to alleviating the growing global issues affecting humanity through the development in young people of an ethic of compassion and service to the world. Consequently, there is growing advocacy for global educational partnership in nurturing global citizenship for the increasing multi-cultural ethnicities of societies (Power, 2000). Chimombo, 2005 reiterates that:

In culturally and religiously diverse societies which are undergoing industrialisation, and in which the external family system is breaking down, an education system can only be relevant if it provides individuals with the intellectual equipment, moral values and skills needed to cope with the changing world. (p. 144)

West-Burnham (2003) says: "...education should be about the full development of human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (p.2). That is, education should encompass the promotion of understanding, respect, caring, tolerance and friendship. This perspective has been recognised globally: "The purpose of education is to enhance the personal, social, physical, mental, cultural, ethical and spiritual development" (West-Burnham, 2003, p.2). This implies that the positive development of human personality plays an active part in shaping citizens in a democracy.

Third, increasing attention is being drawn to the nurturing and development of moral beliefs, attitudes, and values for civic order and citizenship in schools (Claire, 2007; Fullan, 1993, 2001; Hicks, 2007; Snyder et al., 2008; World Bank, 1995). Educators and employers are calling for schools and higher education to integrate work ethics, attitudes and values into their programmes (Hicks, 2007; Richardson, 2007; World Bank, 1995). The increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of society globally places more emphasis on the development of citizenship education that underpins care, respect, tolerance, trust, responsibility, and social justice (Claire, 2007; Hicks, 2007; Naidu, 2005; Power, 2000; World Bank, 1995).

Fourth, people have their own way of defining culture. Thaman (2009) describes culture as “the way of life of a people which encompasses their language, values and knowledge systems” (p.1). In western countries, many social scientists theorise that culture serves as an agent in shaping people’s beliefs, attitudes, role expectations and world views (Eagly & Chaiken (1998, cited in Thaman, 2009). This draws scholars to support the role of education in transmitting culture (Ministry of Education, 2009; Sanga, 2000; Thaman, 1993; 2009). The importance of culture in education justifies educators’ argument that to ignore learners’ cultures in the teaching and learning process is unethical (Thaman, 2009).

Fifth, one of the moral purposes of education is to make a positive difference in students’ lives (Fink, 2005; Fullan, 1993, 2001). According to Fullan (2001):“The moral purpose of education encompasses both the means and the ends in making a positive difference in the lives of students” (p. 13). Furthermore, many educators suggest that the school system is about more than the strong emphasis placed upon academic achievement, and includes all human development aspects (Blankstein, 2004; Fink, 2005; Hicks, 2007; Snyder et al., 2008).

Sixth, many scholars and international organisations highlight the promotion of social justice in facilitating students’ equitable access to quality education and argue that this should be a nation’s priority (Fullan, 2001; Hicks, 2007; Kugelmass, 2004;

Tanner, 2007; Theoharis, 2009; World Bank, 1995). These multiple purposes make education a key focus in public policy in many developing countries, resulting in a growing support for ‘Education for All’ as echoed in the World conference on Education For All (World Bank, 1995). Furthermore, education in the form of schooling should be for the common good of all and should make success accessible to all students (Blankstein, 2004). Such perspectives suggest the need for schools and teachers to make a positive difference as a legacy to the children and their communities.

2.3 Educational Leadership and the Community

Scholars interpret the concept of leadership differently (Yukl, 1998). However, this study intends to adopt the definition given by West-Burnham (2003): “...the active promotion of a society based on positive acceptance and engagement” (p. 9). In schools there is increasing advocacy for educational leadership that is democratic, collaborative and relational (Beerel, 2009; Gronn, 2002; Sanga & Walker, 2005). This is because according to scholars school leadership that encourages and promotes democratic, collaborative and relational aspects tends to enhance student learning. Furthermore, according to Bauch (1994, p. 53- 57; Khan, 1996, p. 61; Rambiyana and Kok, 2002; Wolfendale, 1992, p. 55) cited in Bender and Heystek (2003, p. 150) stakeholders’ engagement and participation in school development appears to contribute to student success. This suggests that teachers, students, parents and community need to collaboratively and interactively engage in all aspects of student learning through shared vision, ideas, values and beliefs to create bonds of fellowship (Sergiovanni 2001). For this reason, school leadership practice is central to the success of students. The principal, as school leader, has to make sure that all stakeholders fully understand their roles and responsibilities towards children’s learning and development. This implies that school policies and procedures are to be clear, shared, and understood across the school and its wider community (Gelsthorpe, 2003; Ranson, 2008).

Furthermore, Gelsthorpe (2003) suggests that “...community engagement in schools lies at the heart of the processes of educational leadership” (p. 15). This is because the

engagement of parents and the community enables them to consider how they can help meet their children's educational needs, values and aspirations. People are empowered to identify their needs, values and aspirations as they participate in making decisions about their children's education. Such community involvement in student learning can pave the way towards social justice (Gelsthorpe, 2003; Ranson, 2008; Theoharis, 2009). Gelsthorpe (2003) claims that "It is obviously essential that values and principles are drawn from the interface between the school and the community" (p. 17). This suggests that the school is a very important part of a community and its development. In turn, community participation is essential for the development and realisation of a school's vision.

A growing body of literature asserts that "the basis for students' success is for parents, students and teachers of schools to have control over their own destinies and to have distinctive norms and approaches for realising their goals" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 18). Such a model can encourage and promote social justice and the moral purpose of education as parents, teachers and students contextualize students' learning in what is relevant (Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Jowett, 1998; Teaero, 1999; 2002; Thaman, 1993, 2000, 2009; Theoharis, 2009). Sergiovanni (2000) notes that "when the parents, teachers and students have control and distinctiveness, it enhances the purpose, identity, sense, and meaning for organisational participants" (p. 23). In this sense, the school tends to display its distinctive character when the purposes, hopes, and needs of its individual members are taken seriously by its social culture. A school's distinctive character helps encourage people involved with it to be committed to the common good (Blankstein, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000).

Research literature also advocates that decentralisation of the education system enables communities to have a shared vision in terms of their school's core business, the students' learning (Boubkir & Boukamhi, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Mantilla, 2005; Sikua, 2002). Community involvement in school affairs gives parents some control over their children's learning. It can also consolidate the community's commitment to the school's organisational goals (Blankstein, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1994, 2000). Educators also note that having a sense of community ownership enables the

community to develop and nurture contextualised educational needs (Al-Bataineh & Nur-Awaleh, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Sanga et al., 1998; Sikua, 2002; Thaman, 2009). They suggest that such community ownership of the school encourages the community to participate in matters pertaining to the learning of their children. According to some, teaching and learning becomes more holistic when all stakeholders are involved (Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Sikua, 2002; Thaman, 1993, 2009).

The benefits of involving local communities in schools' core business of student learning underscore the underlying philosophical wholeness of what education is in terms of children's integral human development (Fullan, 2001; Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Thaman, 1993, 2009). This appears to be congruent with literature on schools with positive community involvement (Fullan, 2001; West-Burnham, 2003). For instance, studies reveal that the schools that encourage and promote community involvement tend to improve in terms of student learning outcomes (Al-Bataineh & Nur-Awaleh, 2005; Ranson, 2008; Sikua, 2002; World Bank, 1995).

2.4 Education in developing countries

The concept of what constitutes education for life in developing countries varies geographically and socio-culturally (Chimombo, 2005; Jowett, 1998; Thaman, 1993, 2009; World Bank, 1995). Even within a country there may be differences in contextual educational needs geographically, socially and culturally (Gould, 1993). This suggests that developing countries need to emphasise approaches, priorities, strategies and policies tailored to each country's educational, economic, historical, socio-cultural and political contexts (Chimombo, 2005; Jatta, 2009; Thaman, 2009; World Bank, 1995). In addition, in developing countries advocacy for civic education is becoming more salient in light of the diverse cultures within communities and nations (Chimombo, 2005; Jatta, 2009; Power, 2000; World Bank, 1995).

According to the literature, in Africa one negative impact of schooling on rural communities is the undermining of the local economy (Chimombo, 2005; Gould, 1993; Jatta, 2009). Studies in developing countries, for example, Kenya and Morocco, reveal that the formal education programme appears to provide knowledge,

skills, attitudes and values that focus on the modern urban sector rather than the rural sector where the majority of the population lives (Gould, 1993). Jatta (2009) affirms that the reality in far too many developing countries is that students are forced to memorise facts and figures from overloaded curricula with outdated content. The outcome is that students are insufficiently skilled to be productive in their rural communities and to meet the demands of the workplace (Chimombo, 2005; Gould, 1993; Simanu-Klutz, 1997).

Studies indicate that for effective teaching and learning to be nurtured and developed, educational policy, processes and practices must vary from country to country and from school to school (Chimombo, 2005; World Bank, 1995). What is perceived as relevant and useful education in one country or context may not be useful elsewhere (Jowett, 1998; Thaman, 1993, 2009; World Bank, 1995). This has created shifts in national policy frameworks to cater for both urban and rural development needs (Chimombo, 2005; Power, 2000). The educational curricula of a growing number of developing countries including South Africa, Rwanda and Tunisia are shifting from overloaded and outdated content to forging stronger links between technical and academic skills. Gambia, Ethiopia and Tanzania have shifted focus to competencies in key knowledge and life skills areas (Jatta, 2009).

2.5 Education in the Pacific

According to some literature, the Pacific Islands school curriculum is outdated, with content and teaching and learning processes inherited from the former colonial education systems; that is, the curriculum in most Pacific Island countries is alien and irrelevant to their national contexts (Coxon & Tolley, 2005; Jowett, 1998; Thaman, 1993, 2009; Veramu, 1998). Such perspectives suggest that there is a need to gauge the real educational needs of Pacific nations and initiate constructive responses to these needs. Thaman (2009) indicates that "...the teaching and learning environments of most Pacific Islands Nations are culturally undemocratic. They do not take into consideration the way most Pacific people think, learn and communicate with one another ...including the way in which student learning is assessed and evaluated" (p.1). Research also reveals the need for local education systems to consider teaching

and learning patterns that are harmonious with local or indigenous ways (Nabobo, 1998; Peer, 2005; Sanga, 2000; Thaman, 1993, 2009). Simanu-Klutz (1997) suggests that “An integrated curriculum based on real-life tasks, is much more akin to Pacific cultures and their traditional ways of teaching and learning than a standard curriculum approach” (p. 3).

Second, the literature highlights the lack of contextualised indigenous teaching and learning paradigms, discourses and epistemologies in Pacific Island nations’ education system (Nabobo, 1998; Sanga, 2000; Teairo, 1999, 2002; Thaman, 1993, 2000; 2009). For instance, Thaman (2009) notes that:

The school curriculum in many Pacific Island nations continues to be euro-centric in its value underpinning, content, pedagogies and assessment of students, causing many learners to be pushed out of school and some parents to refuse to send their children to school as teachers are increasingly expected to bridge the gaps between the expectations of the school curriculum and those of the home cultures of their students. (p. 2)

For this reason, many scholars are suggesting the need for Pacific Island countries to integrate indigenous paradigms, discourses and epistemologies in their school curriculum and practice (Gegeo & Watson, 2002; Nabobo, 1998; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009; Peer, 2005; Thaman, 1993, 2009).

One study of a successful rural youth project in the Solomon Islands employing indigenous knowledge and epistemologies highlighted the extent to which indigenous knowledge and epistemologies are useful in the rural contexts it served (Gegeo, 1998; Gegeo & Watson, 2002). The project employed the traditional paradigms of observing and listening to the instructors and then imitating and trialing under the guidance of the indigenous knowledge expert through communal interactions. This helped the youths to successfully utilize the indigenous knowledge and epistemologies.

Third, there is increasing literature advocating for the need to contextualize teaching and learning approaches in Pacific Island countries to cater for students (Jones, 1998;

Jowett, 1998; Luteru & Teasdale, 1993; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009). For instance, according to scholars, it is essential to localize strategies so that they are based on indigenous culture, traditions, and practices that work well for the Pacific communities (Luteru & Teasdale, 1993; Naidu, 2005; Sanga, 2000; Thaman, 1993, 2000, 2009).

Also, the communal nature of the Pacific communities fits well with contextualised teaching and learning strategies such as group work as it encourages and promotes cooperative and interactive activities (Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Jowett, 1998; Nabobo, 1998). Hunkin-Finau (2010) commented that “Contextualised strategies are teaching and learning strategies that have been localized so that the teaching and learning process is relevant for Pacific children” (p. 28). That is, culturally appropriate learning strategies in most Pacific Islands involve collaborative observation, imitation, and trial and error rather than the dominant instruction strategy of the classroom (Nabobo, 1998; Teaero, 1999, 2002; Thaman, 1993, 2009). Such contextualized teaching and learning paradigms encourage meaningful learning because the Pacific Island way of learning about gardening, building, weaving, fishing, carving values, chores and etiquette is through communal, collaborative observation, imitation, and trial and error. The communal interrelatedness and interpersonal relationships underpin these philosophical cultural learning approaches.

Fourth, studies indicate that there is a need to change teaching and learning practices in schools to accommodate students’ contextual learning needs (Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Jowett, 1998; Nabobo, 1998; Thaman, 1993, 2000, 2009). For instance, the lack of contextual teaching and learning paradigms and discourses in the Pacific Island nations’ contexts clearly demonstrates the need for inclusive teaching and learning practices (Simanu-Klutz, 1997; Teaero, 1999, 2002; Thaman, 1993, 2009). According to the literature, shifting teaching and learning approaches to a more harmonious pattern with local or indigenous ways is essentially to cater for all students (Hunkin-Finau, 2010; Nabobo, 1998; Sanga, 2000; Simanu-Klutz, 1997; Thaman, 1993, 2009). Varghese and Stritikus (2002, cited in Hunkin-Finau, 2010) note that “culturally responsive instruction and conducive environments that integrate students’

needs and culture are central to students' efficacy and learning" (p. 74). This is because they give students a sense of identity, belonging and recognition, which in turn motivates them in their learning endeavours. They also encourage students to aspire to meaningful learning experiences and success because a sense of cultural identity can give one confidence. According to Tausie (1979, cited in Teairo, 2002) "culture is a measure by which a particular group can assert itself and develop confidence and the cultural expression allows for greater fulfillment of the potential of everyone" (p. 5).

Fifth, according to scholars, the Pacific Island nations need a curriculum that caters for all students and not just the academically capable (Jones, 1998; Jowett, 1998; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009; Veramu, 1998). Educators highlight the need for a curriculum that meets the needs of the majority of students, who will return to the village at the end of their secondary education (Coxon & Tolley, 2005; Jones, 1998; Jowett, 1998; Veramu, 1998). There are calls for a Pacific curriculum that recognizes the many talents of Pacific Island children which the formal, academic curricula neglect (Athanasou & Torrance, 2002; Jones, 1998; Jowett, 1998; Veramu, 1998). This notion embraces the view that a Pacific curriculum will cater for both individual and national needs (Jowett, 1998; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009; Naidu, 2005).

2.6 Education in the Solomon Islands

As previously mentioned, the education system in the Solomon Islands is made up of early childhood centres, primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions. The education system is highly selective and competitive as there are limited places at the higher levels (Beuka, 2008; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009; Pollard, 2005; Sikua, 2002). Therefore, students have to sit national examinations in order to progress to the next level. This highly competitive and pyramidal system results in only the few academically capable students progressing through the schooling system and being fortunate enough to be awarded with scholarships for tertiary education.

The early childhood, primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary institutions and technical and vocational education such as Rural Training Centres (RTC) were established to meet the educational goals of the country. The three strategic goals proposed for the Solomon Islands National Education Action Plan are:

To provide equitable access to quality basic education for all children in the Solomon Islands; to provide access to community, technical, vocational, and tertiary education that will meet individual, regional and national needs for a knowledgeable, skilled, competent and complete people; and to manage resources in an efficient, effective and transparent manner. (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008, p. 13)

The concept of early-childhood was realised in the late 1980s. The government recognised the importance of early childhood in 1996 and appointed a national early childhood coordinator and subsequently put early childhood teachers on its payroll in 1999. Children now are encouraged to receive early childhood education before progressing on to primary schools. Early childhood education enrolment appears to be gradually increasing since its establishment (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009).

The primary schools offer preparatory levels and six years of primary education from Year 1 (grade one) to Year 6 (grade six). In Year six, students sit for the Solomon Islands Secondary Entrance Examination (SISEE) for secondary school placement. The limited number of places in secondary schools limits the number of students that can progress on to secondary education. For instance, though increased numbers of children are progressing to secondary schools as a result of the introduction of Community High Schools, many are still unable to access secondary education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009). Primary school children net enrolment increased steadily from 92% in 2006 to 94% in 2008 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009, p. 16). Out of this net enrolment, only 30% in 2006 and 31 % in 2008 progressed to secondary schools after sitting SISEE (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009, p. 16).

Secondary education in Solomon Islands begins in Year 7 and schools with Year 7 to Year 9 are categorised as Junior Secondary Schools while secondary schools that have Years 10 to 13 are senior secondary schools. There are three types of secondary schools in the Solomon Islands: National Secondary Schools (NSS), Provincial Secondary Schools (PSS), and Community High Schools (CHS). Generally, National Secondary Schools and Provincial Secondary Schools are given senior secondary school status while Community High Schools are classified as junior secondary schools. The National Secondary Schools were initially intended to provide a more academic curriculum than had previously been available. Student intake for National Secondary Schools is from the whole country for primarily the academically capable students. According to Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2009) only 21% of the total number of students who sat SISEE progresses and enrolled in senior secondary schools in 2006, 18% in 2007 and 19% in 2008 (p. 16).

The Provincial Secondary Schools (PSSs) are controlled by the Provincial Education Authorities. Provincial Secondary Schools enrol most students from their respective Provinces. The major review of the education system in 1973 shifted the focus of Provincial Secondary Schools to a more rural vocational oriented skill development for self-employment rather than an academic secondary curriculum (Sikua, 2002; Treadaway, 2002). However, pressure from parents forced the Provincial Secondary Schools to adopt an academically oriented curriculum offered by National Secondary Schools. The Community High Schools which are the main focus of this research project were introduced 1995 (Sikua, 2002). Most Community High Schools offer Years 7 to 10. Community High Schools offer the same curriculum as the National Secondary Schools and Provincial Secondary Schools. The net enrolment rate of junior secondary schools (Community High Schools) indicates an increase from 30% of students in 2006 to 31% in 2008 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009, p. 11). This shows that more students were able to access secondary education than before the introduction of Community High Schools.

2.6.1 Tertiary institutions

Apart from the University of the South Pacific (Solomon Islands Campus centre), The Solomon Islands has one nationally owned tertiary institution, the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE). This makes “tertiary education in Solomon Islands a scarce opportunity” (Beuka, 2008, p. 11). Furthermore, the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education only provides tertiary education to meet the lower and middle level human resources of the country (Sikua, 2002). The spaces offered by SICHE are limited while the number of students entering senior secondary education is increasing. This clearly makes it increasingly difficult for many senior secondary students to access tertiary education (Beuka, 2008).

2.6.2 Community High Schools

In the 1990s, the secondary education sector could not cater for the high population growth rate of 3.5% (World Bank, 1995, cited in Sikua, 2002), which resulted in an increasing primary school enrolment (Dorovolomo, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Pollard, 2005; Sikua, 2002). The highly competitive schooling system has few places, with the majority of students leaving earlier (World Bank, 1993 cited in Sikua, 2002). According to Sikua (2002), this has resulted in “a literacy rate of only 27%” (p. 25) despite the introduction of formal education nearly a century ago. Latest statistics show that adult literacy rate have increased to 76.6% (UNESCO, 2009). Also, at no time in the history of the Solomon Islands have all primary school children been able to access secondary education after sitting the Solomon Islands Secondary Entrance Examination (SISEE). The high population growth rate will reduce the number of places in secondary education (Sikua, 2002). According to Ministry Of Education and Human Resources Development (2009) performance analysis, the trend of early school drop-out appears to be increasing: “Drop - out rates in 2008 have clearly increased at all school levels with senior secondary schools more than half of the students about 63% drop out” (p. 11). This suggests that the number of places in secondary schools will not be able to match the high population growth rate.

The Solomon Islands government realised the challenges of the pyramidal exam-oriented education system and gradually developed education policies to encourage

and promote equitable access to education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008; Sikua, 2002). The search for what constitutes relevant education in the face of contextual needs and development priorities culminated in the Education Act as espoused in the Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006, National Education Action plan 2007-2009 and the Education Strategic Framework 2007-2015 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008). These policy frameworks were advocated as transparent and accountable strategic directions for the promotion of social justice in terms of equity for basic secondary education which would prepare students for life. The vision is to “...develop children to possess knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to earn a living and to live harmoniously with fair and equitable opportunities for life” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008, p. 12). These educational issues consequently led to the introduction of the Community High Schools in 1995.

In response to children’s secondary education needs, the Solomon Islands further decentralised the secondary education sector through the development of some primary schools by introducing Years 7 to 9 with support from the communities (Dorovolomo, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008; Sikua, 2002). One of the main aims of the decentralization was to enable children to have equitable access to secondary education (Malasa, 2007; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008; Sikua, 2002). It was also suggested that the establishment of Community High Schools would reduce the cost involved for parents and the schools in sending children to schools in other provinces and urban centres (Malasa, 2007; Sikua, 2002). The concept was seen as a cost-sharing policy by the government, education authority, schools and the parents (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008; Sikua, 2002).

The inability of the government to sustainably fund new secondary schools similar to the NSS and PSS coupled with the high population growth encouraged the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development to plan and initiate “a coordinated

expansion and upgrading program to effect qualitative and quantitative education” (Sikua, 2002, p. 25). The proposal generated huge interest nation-wide in both rural and urban communities. Advocacy for the Community High School model grew, and many local communities organised and developed their primary school infrastructure Community High School status without proper procedures: “The growth of Community High Schools has largely been unplanned by authorities as most have been established due to pressure from the community and not through proper analysis and planning” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005, p. 10). This was because the Community High School model was espoused as appropriate as it was claimed it catered for the Solomon Islands geographically, demographically, socio-culturally and culturally (Beuka, 2008; Malasa, 2007; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008).

2.6.3 Decentralisation and equity

Globally, there is increasing support for the decentralisation of education, based on the belief that it encourages and promotes equitable access to education. (Al-Bataineh & Nur-Awaleh, 2005; Boubkir & Boukamhi, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Mantilla, 2005; Sikua, 2002). Malasa (2007) and Sikua (2002) note that in the Solomon Islands there is still enormous advocacy for the Community High School model in terms of social justice. Although “Community High Schools have significantly increased access to secondary education they are still under resourced in terms of trained and qualified teachers, equipment and resources” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005, p. 10). This implies that Community High Schools lack the facilities and resources to deliver quality education in almost all junior subjects as most teachers are untrained. Additionally, the high population growth rate means that “the country does not have the capacity to provide full education and meaningful employment for its people” (Fakaia, 2005, p. 232).

The establishment of Community High Schools has increased access to secondary education for girls (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009; Pollard, 2005). However, despite girls’ improved access to secondary education, “opportunities at junior and senior secondary levels are still less as well as boys”

(Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009, p. 11). This was because many parents were reluctant to send their children to secondary schools that were outside their province especially female children. This is one of the major reasons why there is more parental and community support for Community High Schools in terms of school fundraising activities and school infrastructure development (Malasa, 2007; Sikua, 2002). Parents and the communities were and are still the driving force in initiating and undertaking fundraising activities towards school infrastructure development. They also provide free labour and resources in the development of Community High Schools. Pollard (2005), for instance, notes that “the creation and expansion of most Community High Schools” (p. 177) was due to parental or community initiative and participation. It is claimed that the introduction of the Community High School model tends to encourage and promote more community and parental involvement in the learning of the children than previously (Malasa, 2007; Sikua, 2002).

2.7 School Governance

School boards operate at the school level, and have various names, such as Board of Trustees, Board of Management, Board of Governors and School Committee. In this research project, the term used is Board of Trustees. The establishment of a Board of Trustees is seen as a decentralization strategy aimed at involving more local communities in the governance of schools (Bush, 2002; Land, 2002; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinberg, 1999, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010; Robinson, Ward & Timperley, 2003). It is viewed as taking education to the local level in terms of governance (Land, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010 Sikua, 2002).

The fundamental aim of the Board of Trustees is to encourage and promote the involvement of parents and the local communities in the teaching and learning process (Bush, 2002; Land, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010; Robinson et al., 2003). This is based on the belief that the involvement of parents and communities is crucial to the educational success of students (Land, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010). Furthermore, there is increasing literature indicating that parental and community input contributes to students’ achievement, attitude and aspirations (Land,

2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004).

The role of a School Board of Trustees is similar in most aspects in developed and developing countries. For example, one of the main roles of the Board of Trustees is to formulate and establish school strategic and policy direction, in consultation with the parents and communities, in a document known as the school charter (Land, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010). The Board of Trustees oversees the overall governance of the school and ensures that students have access to quality education (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010). The Board of Trustees is also responsible for the management, organisation and administration of the school according to specific Education Acts. For example, the role of Board of Trustees is legally required to ensure the school is governed in the best interests of the students and communities (Land, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010). In this sense, the Board's role is to ensure the school meets the students' educational needs, by including and incorporating the cultures and cultural values of the students and their local communities. One of the differences between the Board of Trustees of New Zealand and Solomon Islands is that the former is the employer (Ministry of Education, 2009) and while in the latter, it is the Solomon Islands Teaching Service Commission role (Akao, 2008; Malasa, 2007; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008; Sikua, 2002).

In the Solomon Islands context, the names commonly used are the School Board of Management and School Committee (Malasa, 2007; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2008; Sikua, 2002). The role of this body is similar to that of the School Board of Trustees. Most Community High Schools in the Solomon Islands have School Committees made up of local community members. They work with the principals, teachers, students, parents and the communities on matters related to Community High School development. School Committees have some influence on the recruitment of principals and teachers, and with parents and the community may make recommendations to Education Authorities on which principals and teachers to appoint (Malasa, 2007; Sikua, 2002).

2.8 Rural Training Centres in the Solomon Islands

Globally, there is growing evidence that education should be inclusive in order to respond to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and should give appropriate weight to the abilities, skills, and knowledge children bring to the teaching and learning process (UNESCO, 2004). This encompasses formal, informal and non-formal education. In the Solomon Islands, the concept of informal and non-formal education is gradually becoming recognised in the education system. Institutions providing these forms of education are called Rural Training Centres. Rural Training Centres are non-formal institutions offering rural knowledge and skills training to young and adult Solomon Islanders (Fakaia, 2004; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005). The Rural Training Centres programme focuses on rural life skills and knowledge, encompassing gardening, fishing, home-economics, hygiene and religious values. “The idea was initiated and established by the main churches in the 1960s in response to the rapid increase of the population and the inability of the formal education system and employment sector to absorb those increases” (Fakaia, 2005, p. 225). Most of the Rural Training Centres were originally established from the conversion of former mission centres. Since then, the churches have retained control of the rural centres in terms of administration and management. The Rural Training Centres enrol only a small number of school leavers. Many people perceive them as having low educational status as they focus on rural knowledge and skills.

The concept of the Rural Training Centre gradually evolved in terms of policy, curriculum and practice to cater for the school leavers’ educational needs and life skills through the integration of non-formal vocational training (Fakaia, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). The rural life and vocational and practical skills, knowledge and values are espoused to enhance rural community livelihood as the majority of the population live in the rural villages (Beuka, 2008; Fakaia, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004; Pollard, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). Some advocate that life and practical knowledge, skills and values offered in rural training centres would enable young people pushed out from the formal

education system (school dropouts) to become self-reliant, productive and useful members of the communities.

There has been growing recognition of the importance of non-formal vocational education such as Rural Training Centres (RTC) (Beuka, 2008; Fakaia, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004; 2005; 2008 Pollard, 2005). In 2003, this led to the establishment of a unit in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development to oversee the affairs of non-formal education (Beuka, 2008; Fakaia, 2005). Vocational training was also featured as an urgent priority in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2004-2006 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004). The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development through the acceptance of the Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006 acknowledged that the current academic education system did not meet the real needs of the vast majority of students, who will spend their productive lives in a rural rather than urban setting (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004). However, Fakaia (2005) noted that “despite the calls for wider recognition of the importance of non-formal education in ensuring the future social and economic well-being of the country, very little attention is paid to non-formal education” (p.223). Some consider that the non-formal education offered by the Rural Training Centres provides the opportunity for many young Solomon Islanders who would not otherwise have had an opportunity to broaden their potential. They say that Rural Training Centres need to expand to cater for the increasing number of school leavers every year (Dorovolomo, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005; Treadaway, 2002).

One of the main features of the Rural and Vocational Training Centres’ curriculum materials is that “they are simple, understood by everyone, highly practical, and oriented strongly towards self-sufficiency in the village” (Fakaia, 2005, p.229). However, they are highly gender-specific, that is, more males than females attend and they take stereotypical courses. Some of the life and practical knowledge and skills training courses encompass carpentry, agriculture, gardening, fishing and home economics. Another essential aspect of the Rural Training Centres is the integration

of religious instruction based on the doctrines of the respective Christian church authority as part of the non-formal education curriculum (Beuka, 2008). Because the Rural Training Centres are church-controlled institutions, the doctrines of the churches concerned are encouraged and promoted through them.

2.9 Citizenship education

Citizenship education is about the nurturing and development of values believed to mould and shape individuals and children to become law-abiding citizens. Such values include understanding, respect, caring, tolerance and friendship (Snyder et al., 2008; West-Burnham, 2003). For this reason, there is growing recognition globally of the importance of developing “personal, social, physical, mental, cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects in schools” (West-Burnham, 2003, p.2). The nurturing of such values in schools is fundamental to character development. Furthermore, increasing multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and diversity both globally and nationally necessitates the introduction of citizenship education in a nation’s education system. Because of this, there is international agreement that citizenship education can strengthen respect for human rights and multi-ethnic and multi-cultural diversity and promote peace among the diverse world (Snyder et al., 2008). It can also encourage individuals, communities, nations, organisations and multi-corporations to observe, respect and care for their environment and to work towards a safe and peaceful global environment.

2.9.1 Citizenship education status in Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands education policy emphasises the adoption of citizenship aspects in its Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006 and National Education Action Plan 2007-2009 (Ministry of Education of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2008). However, in practice, the school system perpetuates the alienation of citizenship education due to the dominant academic curriculum emphasis (Pollard, 2005). It appears that the social and cultural aspects of communities that serve as the life blood of their way of life are sidelined in the Solomon Islands education system (Malasa, 2007; Sanga, 2000). Such perspectives have raised some concerns amongst

some scholars for the recognition and integration of cultural values with citizenship aspects in school curriculum especially social science (Fito'o, 2009). Some people believe that the promotion of Western values and attitudes in the education system divorces people from their social and cultural values and is the root cause of ethnic tension (Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Pollard, 2005). Although this is debatable, In the Solomon Islands context, Malasa (2007) notes that:

...the current education system has increased tensions within communities, especially between younger people and their more conservative and traditional elders, by its promotion of and focus on economic advancement. The education system is seen by many as being unconnected with and antagonistic to the social and cultural values on which Solomon Island communities and society are based. (p.7)

This perspective puts educational emphasis on economic benefits in the name of academic success than all other human development. Many argue that the social, cultural and moral values which underlie the social and cultural fabric of societies deserve recognition and integration in the school system (Malasa, 2007; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004; Sanga, 2000; Sikua, 2002). According to Fito'o (2009), there is a need to increase awareness, understanding and acknowledgement of Solomon Islands' diverse cultures and communities.

2.10 Challenges

Research studies of the various secondary education models the Solomon Islands Education System nurtured and developed since independence reveal that the majority of the students leave the secondary education sector unprepared for life (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Sikua, 2002; Treadaway, 2002). This suggests that the education policies and practice do not take into account all students' educational and contextual needs. That is, despite some evolution in the education system in the name of adapting to the contextual needs of students, the school system still appears to be irrelevant to the majority of students (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Treadaway, 2005). The Pacific Human Development Report (1999) highlights that Solomon Islands has

an extraordinary high number of school-leavers unemployed (10, 000 in 1991), and with “few employable skills” (UNDP, 1996, p. 35).

Moreover, despite attempts to develop more appropriate education policies to address all students’ educational needs through curriculum review, the challenge to prepare students with the relevant skills, knowledge and values for life appears to become peripheral as the educational needs of the few able students are given more attention in the education system. As Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2009) highlights, there appears to be “increasing drop outs at all levels in 2008 and the rate continues to increase at higher levels of secondary education” (p. 11). This illustrates that more students leave the education system every year regardless of whether they are prepared for life or not. The increasing school dropouts are causing concern. Pollard (2005) notes that:

The highly competitive system leaves the majority of the students perceiving themselves as failures, pushed out from continuing their education, even dislocating them from their communities and their social structures. The growing disillusionment with the education has some parents choosing not to send their children to school at all. The unanswered question is “Education for what? What constitutes basic education and how it can be achieved are continuing challenges. (p. 169)

This scenario demonstrates the need to re-think the relevance of the curriculum offered in secondary schools. For instance, there is growing advocacy for a balanced curriculum (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). As Beuka (2009) says that there is a “need to balance both academic and practical subjects in the secondary education system” (p. 72). This is because there was concern over the lack of development in the practically oriented subjects. In spite of this, there is still general preference for the predominately academic curriculum (Beuka, 2008; Fakaia, 2005; Fito’o, 2009; Pollard, 2005).

2.11 Parents and students' expectation

Parents and students' expectation of formal employment as a way to earn an income and become self-reliant is not met and is unrealistic (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). According to Beuka (2008), "more and more secondary graduated students are without any form of formal employment" (p. 60). Moreover, Pollard (2005) highlights that "there is continuing and growing concern about the relevance of the current education system to the lives of the majority of students (p. 169). Furthermore, studies reveal that there appears to be conflict between the education policies, practice and the communities' expectations (Fakaia, 2005; Treadaway 2002). The major challenge for the Community High School model appears to be the alignment of the educational policies and practice with community expectations that schools reflect the values and beliefs of their communities and society (Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Treadaway, 2002).

The current schooling practice in Community High Schools and secondary level education generally gives no evidence of this happening (Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Pollard, 2005). Consequently, there appears to be "...low opinion in the Solomon Islands secondary education in the preparation of students for work" (Beuka, 2008, p. 30) because the secondary curriculum only provides 'general' education with "emphasis on academic subjects" (Sikua, 2002, p. 278). That is, most of the students would not be able to find employment with their general knowledge and do not have the knowledge and skills to become self-reliant.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed the literature on the role of education. Researchers have found that education is perceived and defined in different ways according to context, times and place, and what is valued as relevant education in one context may not be similarly considered in other contexts. The chapter has also looked at the literature on leadership and the community, and on education in developing countries. It has considered education in the Pacific Island nations, and then focused on Solomon Islands. The overly academic, highly competitive and pyramidal nature of the

Solomon Islands education system advantages academically capable students while the majority of students leave school with limited knowledge and insufficient skills to become productive and self-reliant.

The chapter also examined research into school governance, with particular reference to findings which demonstrate how it can encourage and promote the development of the potential of all students rather than just the few. It also looked at research on Rural Training Centres and citizenship education in Solomon Islands.

Most importantly, the literature gives insight into the influence of education policies, especially the predominant academic curriculum and assessment policies. The limited literature on Community High Schools shows how education policies governing practice in Community High Schools are affecting students in the Solomon Islands. In addition, it seems to suggest that education policies and practice are not aligned with the expectations of teachers and parents and the needs of students.

In the next chapter, I discuss my project's research design and the methodology that was used.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The search for an appropriate research tool is grounded in the issue of “fitness for purpose” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007, p. 49). This encompasses the authentic and appropriate strategy that underpins the theoretical, analytical and practical aspects on which the study will be based. Research is defined as the systematic and controlled investigation of a phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007) and encompasses the employment of experience and reasoning in pursuit of the search for the truth with numerous, broad and multi-faceted benefits and evidence (Gilmore, 2002). The qualitative research paradigm is a research approach that purposely employs flexible and sensitive data gathering methods to ethically nurture a moral dialogue that respects the dignity of the participants (Bell, 2005; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Cohen et al., 2007; Otsuka, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). This study is located within the qualitative research and talanoa research paradigms. The research approach for this research project was a case study using intensive, semi-structured interviews and talanoa research approach.

This chapter explains and justifies the methodologies, research methods and ethical considerations chosen for this study. The research question which this research project focuses on is:

What are the teachers, students and parents’ experiences, perceptions and expectations of the Community High School model?

First, I explain the theoretical perspectives that cover research methodologies and the theoretical framework that underpins the research project. Second, I examine the characteristics of qualitative and case study research. Third, the semi-structured interview using talanoa research methodology is described and justified. Fourthly, I focus on the ethical considerations identified as pertinent to this research project and

the data gathering methods employed in the study. Finally, I describe the research process and end the chapter with a summary.

3.2 Educational research

Educational research is defined as a systematic method of enquiry and investigation to generate new knowledge relevant to education in order to increase one's own knowledge of the world or to solve problems (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007; Liberty & Miller, 2003). This research project adopts Stenhouse's (1984) definition of educational research as a systematic activity that is directed towards providing knowledge, or adding to the understanding of existing knowledge which is of relevance for improving the effectiveness of education. Therefore, from researchers' perspectives this study takes into consideration Bassey's (1990) cited in (Wellington, 2000) further definition of research as the "systematic, critical and self-critical inquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge" (p. 35). Such perspectives make educational research "ultimately concerned with people and is perceived to be best shared when those concerned are involved" (Wellington, 2000, p. 11). Hence, in educational research the involvement of stakeholders, teachers, students and parents contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the research project (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Mutch, 2005; Wellington, 2000). This appears to fulfill one of the major purposes of educational research, "which is to provide a principled basis for 'knowing' to guide policy and practice" (Freeman, 2003, p.20). For instance, educational researchers can employ empirical inquiry to test out theoretical ideas that inform practice. Also, educational research has been used to inform, advance, or obstruct policy and practice in education (Freeman, 2003). However, one of the goals of educational research is social justice that is, access for young people to relevant education, as is the case for this study.

3.3 Research methodology

The search for an authentic and appropriate research methodology underlies the authenticity and holistic approaches that would yield the desired information (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). Different research approaches provide different

perspectives and parameters for what constitutes relevant data gathering methodologies based on the research purposes. My intention with this research was to obtain trustworthy data using a socio-culturally appropriate data collection method. To achieve this, I employed qualitative research using semi-structured interviews and talanoa research approaches as the methodologies most appropriate for the context of the participants.

3.4 Research paradigms

Research paradigms are sets of values, beliefs, practices and philosophies shared by communities of researchers, purposefully to regulate inquiries pertaining to a particular discipline (Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina, 2006; Donmoyer, 2006). Cohen et al., (2007) note that paradigms serve as lenses through which researchers view reality. They claim that understanding the research paradigms provides the researchers with a clearer picture of what is involved in a research process. The paradigms have their own ethics (values), ontology (view of reality), epistemology (way of knowing), methodology (method of acquiring knowledge) and form of evidence (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 245). Conceptual approaches to the construction of knowledge in the various disciplines also vary (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Lather, 1992; Popkewitz, 1984).

3.4.1 Interpretive-constructivist paradigm

This section describes the interpretive-constructivist paradigm, which was used as the philosophical research framework of this study. The interpretive-constructivist paradigm emphasizes that knowledge is a human construct that arises out of the world of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Donmeyer, 2006; Lather, 1992; Smith, 1998). According to Creswell, 2003 "...meaning is constructed by human beings as they, interpretive-constructivist researchers do not begin with a theory but they generate or inductively develop a pattern of meanings throughout the research process" (p. 9.). This is because of the assumption that people have feelings and understandings and these affect the ways that they perceive and interpret the world (Creswell, 2003). Such perspectives hold that participant's experiences, views,

interpretations, values, cultural beliefs and actions are fundamental and meaningful to the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

The interpretative-constructivist paradigm also takes into consideration how people differ from each other in terms of views and different conceptions of social reality. For example, in this study, the experiences, views and expectations of the teachers, students and parents regarding the Community High School model are considered on the basis of how the subjects view and make sense of their natural and social worlds.

3.5 Qualitative research

Qualitative research methods always seek a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2003; Freebody, 2003). They aim to “study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings and experiences people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 4) and they use a holistic perspective which preserves and respects the complexities of human behaviour and integrity (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research sets out to explore a particular aspect, collect data through relevant and suitable gathering methods then generate ideas and hypotheses from these data largely through inductive reasoning. The strength of qualitative research lies in trustworthiness (Cohen, et al., 2007; Creswell, 2003; Freebody, 2003). It uses relevant and contextualised strategies to gather descriptive accounts pertinent to the lived experiences of the participants to enhance understandings of specific phenomena (Mutch, 2005). Additionally, in qualitative research, the examination of the words and actions participants use in their narratives and descriptions allows a close representation of their context and experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Therefore, good qualitative research, as a selection of data collection methods, should reach the core of what is going on rather than just skimming the surface.

Also, according to Creswell (2003), qualitative data gathering methods require “increasing involvement and active participation by the participants and sensitivity to the participants in the study” (p.181). This implies the need for the researcher’s creativity and sensitivity in establishing and nurturing an ethical and collaborative

partnership during the data gathering process. If the researcher is able to be transparent and accountable rapport is established which is the prerequisite for authenticity of the data collection. This is the underlying research philosophy the researcher should uphold, and “systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (Creswell, 2003, p.182). Qualitative research characterises the acknowledgement and minimising of biases, values and interests that can be challenging (Creswell, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 1999). The employment of qualitative research methodologies in this research project enhanced the active involvement of the participants and allowed them to freely express their experiences, views, perceptions and expectations as fully as possible. Also, as a researcher, during data collection I made sure that I was aware of my biases by doing my best to minimise them through constant reflection.

3.6 Case study research methodology as qualitative research

Yin (1984) defines case study research methodology “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p.23). The case study is a qualitative research tool. Yin (1993) distinguishes three forms of case study: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. The case study as used in this research is within the parameters of descriptive, with some elements of the exploratory and explanatory functions.

Case studies are often employed to extract first-hand rich information on the particular social reality under inquiry (Bouma, 1996; Merriam, 1998). A case study presents a detailed description of the lived experiences of specific cases or individuals and offers an understanding of how these individuals perceive the various phenomena in their social world and how these phenomena affect them (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1998). This suggests what kind of research approach needs to be conducted in an environment where the researcher can access the case to be studied.

A case study provides a unique portrayal of real people in a real social situation by means of vivid accounts of events, feelings and perceptions. It is the study of an

instance in action (Adelman, Kemmis & Jenkins, 1980 cited in Basit, 2010), one instance meant to illuminate other similar cases or phenomena, and intended to demonstrate a more general notion of the social world. Basit (2010) expands on this and suggests that “it is perfectly legitimate to conduct a case study of a single individual as well as a group of individuals seen as a single case” (p. 19), as I selected to do in this research project. One of the features of the case study according to Stake (1995) is that “The researcher seeks greater understanding of the case in order to appreciate its uniqueness and complexity, and its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts” (p. 16). Such perspectives further indicate that the emphasis upon the uniqueness of events or actions as shaped by the contexts of the research participants underlines the importance of studying a unique case or instance (Stake, 1995). This feature also appears to suggest that “in a case study, the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its contexts” (Yin, 1993, p. 3).

In this qualitative case study, qualitative interviewing was employed. Qualitative interviews are social encounters that nurture and construct knowledge through exchange between two or more persons on themes of mutual interest (Kvale, 1996; Cohen et al., 2007). These interviews are highly purposeful undertakings which go beyond mere conversation and demand the researcher to keep the research purpose in the forefront of his or her mind when conducting an interview (Cohen et al., 2007). In this case study, the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the teachers, students and parents of one Solomon Islands Community High School will be explored.

3.7 Semi-structured interviews and the talanoa research approach

This section describes and explains the semi-structured interview strategy and its subset the talanoa research approach, and justifies their use in this study.

The semi-structured interview strategy is a data collection method that employs an informal and flexible guideline in the interviewing process (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2003). This suggests that it is used as a guide while the actual interview is employed using the talanoa research approach. That is, the interview questions serve

as a guide in initiating the interview and are then followed by talanoa storying according to the social and cultural contexts of the participants.

3.7.1 Talanoa research approach as a sub-set of the semi-structured interview

Talanoa is informal storytelling about the researched aspects at the participants' level of social and cultural understanding, with contextual protocols utilised to enhance authenticity (Kana & Tamatea, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). It can also be highly formal in some contexts. The talanoa research approach is within the parameters of the qualitative research paradigm (Bishop, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Kana & Tamatea, 2006; Smith, 1998; Vaioleti, 2006). The employment of a talanoa research methodology in accordance with pertinent cultural contexts nurtures and develops a collaborative approach that values the relationship and the contributions of the research participants (Bishop, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Kana & Tamatea, 2006; Smith, 1998; Vaioleti, 2006). According to Vaioleti (2006), the talanoa research approach is a highly interactive, informal, flexible and ecological approach to research that allows the researcher to engage more meaningfully in Pacific islands context. Malasa (2007) notes that:

Solomon Islands still have a very strong oral tradition where the most powerful mode of communication is by word of mouth. Even most traditional customs and beliefs are not written down or recorded but are mostly handed down from one generation to the next through an oral tradition. (p.42)

This illustrates the appropriateness of the talanoa research approach for this research project. Most communities in the Solomon Islands still practice the talanoa storytelling in almost all spheres of their lives. Mara (1999, cited in Mutch, 2005) identified “cultural knowledge as central to research in the Pacific Island context” (p.70). As an insider I was able to employ the talanoa research approach in a way that contributed to the authenticity of the data gathered. This was because I observed the expected social and cultural protocols with respect during the data gathering process. The participants noted and acknowledged the ethical consideration employed, and reciprocated. The researcher's acknowledgement of the participant's social and

cultural values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings develops trust and helps build rapport. This is central to the talanoa research approach.

Vaioleti (2006) notes that, fundamentally, “talanoa removes the distance between the researcher and the participants, and provides research participants with a human face they can relate to” (p. 25). This supports what Mara (1999, cited in Mutch (2005) notes, that “...face-to-face methodologies are the most appropriate for collecting authentic and trustworthy information” (p. 69). The face-to-face interaction makes it possible for researcher and participants to understand and value each other at a deeper level (Carpenter & McMurchy-Pilkington, 2008). This can reduce the hierarchical distance between the participants and the researcher and enables the participants to express their experiences and perceptions freely and naturally. These features categorise talanoa as an authentic and ethical research approach in Pacific Islands’ context. For instance, studies using talanoa in Fiji (Otsuka, 2006) and Samoa Morrison, Vaioleti & Vermeulen (2002, cited in Vaioleti, 2006) identified its appropriateness in those contexts. The studies advocate talanoa as an ideal method of research because relationship is the foundation on which most Pacific activities are built (Otsuka, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006).

The talanoa research approach is informal and indirect, and there is reciprocal respect between the participants and the researcher in terms of who they are and what they are during story-telling or oral dialogue (Matakitofi, personal communication, May 27, 2010). The flexible time-frame allows for a relaxed approach for the researcher and the participants, in contrast to restricting the participant’s response to fixed schedule time-frames, which results in incomplete fragments of responses and data rather than completeness. Undertaking the talanoa research approach according to the participants’ social and cultural protocols helps to yield rich and authentic data (Otsuka, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). This naturally fulfills the purpose of the case study that underpins this research project, which requires what Merriam (1998) describes as “a rich and ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (p.29). Therefore, the talanoa research approach enabled the participants in this study to express their

experiences, views, perceptions and expectations freely and naturally and contributed to the authenticity of the data.

Semi-structured interviews and talanoa interweave conversation and storytelling and complement one another. The integration of semi-structured interview and talanoa is perceived as an appropriate strategy because it takes into account the participant's social and cultural contexts (Bishop, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Kana & Tamatea; 2006; Otsuka, 2006; Smith, 1998; Vaioleti, 2006). This supports Mears' (2009) suggestion that "a successful interview does not only occur when there is rapport and relationship established but more importantly through the building of trust to connect researcher and the participants so that there is safety in disclosure" (p. 20).

Furthermore, "intensive interviewing requires the researcher to be interested in making meaning with another, bridging borders of experience to bring "insider" information to the outside so that those who have not lived the experience can better understand it" (Mears, 2009, p. 20). The employment of semi-structured interviewing using a talanoa approach enhances the interviewer's listening and thus his or her ability to find meaning in another's words, silences, and postures. This points to Mears' (2009) suggestion that "effective interviewing also requires that the researcher enjoy interacting with people and the researcher must effectively relate to people during interview and while attending to the process" (p. 21). This supports what Bishop and Glynn (1999) and Vaioleti (2006) highlight, that recognising and realising the importance of meaning and interpretation of people's lives within their cultural context using talanoa can enhance reciprocal benefits. For example, the appropriate employment of talanoa in most Pacific communities can allow contextual interactions with Pacific participants to occur that creates more authentic knowledge and data. Importantly, the consideration of the respondent's social and cultural context during the data collection process would reveal the researchers desire and interest to relate, experience and make meaning with the participants and not only to collect the intended information.

In this research project, the semi-structured interview using talanoa research approach is an intensive data gathering methodology that follows what Seidman (2006, cited in Mears, 2009) claims:

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to “evaluate” as the term normally used... At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (p. 29).

In the Solomon Islands where the research was undertaken, the employment of semi-structure interview using talanoa approach enabled me to contextualise the interview process to suit the participants. This allowed for authenticity in the generation of relevant and intended information (Bell, 2005; Bishop, 1997; Cohen et al., 2007). It also permitted greater flexibility for the research participants to express their views on the research questions and the issues surrounding them and helped establish rapport, transparency and accountability between the researcher and the participants.

3.8 Limitations of the semi-structured interview

While semi-structured interviews are well known for their appropriateness and adaptability (Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2007), there are also limitations. They can be time consuming (Basit, 2010; Bell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2000). There is time spent in arranging interviews and travelling to do them with potential delays. Also, time is used during interviews in phrasing the questions and clarifying the points made by the respondents. In addition, Basit (2010) comments on “the process of interview as a subjective experience for the interviewer and the interviewee and so there is a possibility for bias, both in the way the questions are asked and the way they are answered” (p. 115). For instance, the interviewees may desire to please the interviewer by saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear and therefore gives the official view point rather than their personal view. Moreover, disturbances can arise such as “outside interruptions and people knocking on the door and asking too personal questions, embarrassing questions and summarizing too early or closing off an interview too soon” (Field and Morse cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 280). The use of tape recorders to record interviews can be problematic. It can sometimes

obstruct good questioning and listening skills as the researcher may become complacent and think that he/she can hear the interview again when transcribing (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). In addition, tape recorders sometimes do not work and the researcher may not get an opportunity to repeat the interviews in order to put together any omissions.

In addressing the above limitations, I made sure arrangements and all pertinent formalities were followed within my data collection timeline. Also, during the interview, I paused so participants could elaborate on what they were referring to. Additionally, I constantly employed self-reflection on the purpose of the research during interview and story-telling sessions and throughout the research process. Moreover, I checked the tape recorder to make sure it was working well before recording the interviews. I also made some notes during the interviews of the body language and facial expressions. Furthermore, I believe that the semi-structured interview using talanoa approach is a socially, culturally appropriate data gathering method because according to Bell (1999), Bishop (1997), Otsuka (2006) and Vaioleti (2006) is capable of yielding rich and authentic data for my research project.

3.9 Trustworthiness

Maintaining quality in educational research refers to how validity, reliability and trustworthiness are achieved and maintained in the research study (Basit, 2010; Cohen et al., 2007, Patton, 2002). The nature of research paradigms plays a significant role in determining and maintaining quality in educational research. This is because it influences the researcher's value and belief system and role. This can in turn influence the methodologies that would be involved in data collection and how the data will be analysed and presented (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Cohen et al., (2007) and Patton (2002), validity refers to whether the questions or method employed really measure what they are intended to measure. In qualitative research, reliability is unique and particular to a setting, and does not seek duplication to claim reliability. Instead, it encompasses trustworthiness, honesty, distinctiveness of context, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail and depth of responses, and significance to the participants (Basit, 2010). Some scholars reject the term reliability

in qualitative research and suggest other concepts such as credibility, neutrality, confirmability, dependability, consistency, applicability, trustworthiness and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This is because in qualitative research, reliability reveals the uniqueness of a setting that cannot be replicated but encompasses qualities of the trustworthiness of the research.

Talanoa storytelling methodology contributes to the trustworthiness of the data and research. This is because talanoa is a respectful and reciprocating interaction that is based on meaningful relationships (Bishop, 1997; Otsuka, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). The talanoa storytelling approach is a good conversation whereby one listens to the other. Also, during conversation the researcher and the participants mutually observe when to speak and what one says depend upon what the other has to say. Such approaches are aligned with what Vaioleti (2006) states:

...the reciprocity embedded in Talanoa will raise the expectations that researchers and participants have of each other, promoting mutual accountability, which adds to the trustworthiness and quality of the research. The effect of reciprocity is such that when people give their time and knowledge they expect it to be respected and honoured, and to be used well. Developments will be followed with interest. The researcher will not want to let down participants with whom he or she has developed a relationship. (p. 26)

Such inherent aspects of talanoa storytelling methodology contribute to the authenticity of the data and quality of the research (Otsuka, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). This indicates that the Talanoa research approach is appropriate for many Pacific peoples. As Otsuka (2006) suggests: “It is essential to conduct culturally appropriate research with indigenous people such as Pacific Islanders” (p. 2).

3.9.1 Checking and confirmation with participants

The process of checking and confirming data with the participants contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the data. The participants in this study were given the transcripts to check and make changes they thought appropriate. This supports what Basit (2010) suggests, that “...sending the interview transcripts to the interviewees subsequently after transcribing for checking can ensure that the data are

reliable and trustworthy” (p. 71). In addition, informal and verbal discussion with the participants during the checking and confirmation of the interview transcripts enables the researcher to further clarify information respondents are not clear with and vice versa. Such a collaborative approach during data validation adds to the credibility and authenticity of the data.

As an insider with access to the participants’ social and cultural backgrounds I was in a good position to undertake the research. My situation fulfilled what Vairoletti (2006) identifies when he says “It is vital, then, for researchers and their sponsors to fully appreciate the essential underpinning for the context in which special knowledge is gifted to them” (p. 29). The researcher’s awareness of appropriate social and cultural protocols contributes to the authenticity of the data gathered (Bishop, 1997; Kana & Tamatea, 2006; Otsuka, 2006; Smith, 1998; Vairoletti, 2006). Such ethical considerations, according to Lofland and Lofland cited in Mutch (2005) are essential underpinnings to “remind the qualitative researcher that they must enter, remain in, and leave the field with sensitivity and respect” (p. 125).

Vairoletti (2006) also notes that “researchers must have credibility within the community” (p. 29). As a trusted member within the researched community I was given support during the data collecting process. This was evident when the Education Authority Officers voluntarily offered to share their experiences, perceptions and expectations of the Community High School model. They were confident that I was undertaking the research project for the benefit of students and their communities. Also, the initial meetings and consultations with the participants before the actual interviews and talanoa sessions gave the participants a clear picture of the reciprocity involved in the research project. That is, the research project’s outcome was for the betterment of all stakeholders, the participants, and people in terms of education and not just for my personal gain. I was someone from the community where the research project was undertaken and this reflects Bishop and Glynn’s (1999) educational planning model activities: who initiates; who benefits; whose cultural reality is represented; whose realities and experiences are legitimated; and who is accountable? This is important because as an insider initiating this

research for the benefit of the people whose cultural identity is represented consolidates participation and support. This was manifested when some members of the Community (Education Officers) voluntarily shared their experiences, views and expectations. Such practice authentically shows that the realities and experiences of the people are recognized and legitimated, and this will in turn make the participants and the researcher accountable in the research process. This was apparent in the generation of authentic and rich data during data gathering process.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is the notion that the generalisation or external validity of results of a research should be left in the hands of the readers and the users of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Firestone (1993) calls it case-to-case transfer. Walker (1980) further explains that “it is up to the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply?” (p. 34). Scott and Morrison (2007) suggest that “transferability is considered as one of the four trustworthiness criteria for a constructivist inquiry process and demands of the researcher a thick description of the setting in which the setting is being carried out” (p.251). Such descriptive details help to give readers confidence in the study’s results. As transferability is considered an essential feature of qualitative case study research, the researcher has an obligation to provide sufficiently detailed description of the study’s context to enable readers to compare the “fit” with their situations. This is because “the final judgement about the transferability of the findings is vested in the person seeking to make the transfer” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 217). Hence, in the case of this research project on the Community High School model, the detailed accounts given by the teachers, students and parents contribute to the trustworthiness of the data and research.

3.10 Maintaining quality in educational research

Minimising bias is important in achieving and maintaining high validity in educational research (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). The sources of bias may include the attitudinal characteristics of both the researcher and participants

and the nature of the content of questions. Cohen et al., (2007) argue that the human interactions involved in the semi-structured interview research method may have some influence on the respondents and on the data. The interviewer may show what he/she strongly feels when interviewing and so affect the intentions of the research. However, the holistic employment of the reflexivity approach that encompasses transparency and accountability can enable participants to reduce bias and increase the validity of a research study (Bishop, 1997; Golafshani, 2003; Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). This is because the reflexivity approach enables interviewer and respondents to keep the aims of the research undertaking always in mind. Reflexivity can involve the building of rapport between the participants, collaborative reflection, co-understanding of the meaning of questions, power sharing and equality in minimising bias. For instance, maintaining the comparability of the responses can avoid varying responses which can negatively affect the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected (Cohen et al., 2007; Golafshani, 2003). Also, after the interview, the scripts can be returned to the participants for comment and verification.

3.11 Data analysis strategies

Qualitative data analysis is inductive and interpretative (Wellington, 2000). That is, in qualitative data analysis findings generated from the raw data are then transformed into new knowledge as the researcher analyses those data (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2008). There are many data analysing strategies (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2008). This research project adopted the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis identifies themes and patterns of living and behaviour that emerge from the data (Bell, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Mutch, 2005). It is commonly used and is particularly suitable for analysing and reporting personal qualitative interview data (Mutch, 2005). During my data analysis in this project, I assigned different coded letters for different themes that emerged from the data. That is, similar themes were labeled with the same coded letter. I then selected the common emerging and recurring themes as the main themes of the results chapter. They included improved access to secondary education for rural children, unbalanced curriculum, teacher-centred teaching and learning practices, poor preparation of students for the future, limited resources, democratic school leadership practice,

mutual school community partnership, strong school committee, future aspirations, more rural training centers, expansion of tertiary education and inappropriate education policies.

3.12 Ethical considerations

Research ethics are the researcher's guiding principles. They are based on respect for the people involved in a research project: the participants and the stakeholders. They will "promote and safeguard the integrity of all persons for the good of all without sacrificing the interests of any, so that the research outcomes represent a progress worthy of the time and resources expended" (Vallance, 2005, p. 198).

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) note that the research process has two key ethical dimensions. They are procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics encompasses the first stage of the research process: submitting a research ethics proposal to the relevant research ethics committee for analysis, suggestions, improvement and approval. Different institutions and organisations have their own research ethics regulations. For instance, the University of Waikato has its own requirements for research ethical conduct in human research and related activities, to maintain the quality and validity of any research conducted by any university researcher. Ethics in practice also refers to the ethical practice that governs the actual undertakings involved in the research process. To effectively apply and maintain appropriate ethical requirements in the course of the research process, Bell, (2005), Guillemin and Gilliam (2004) and MacNaughton and Smith (2001) suggest the employment of the reflexivity approach.

3.12.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is an important ethical principle in the research process. It is the obtaining of prior consent and approval of the participants who are to be involved in the research process (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to provide informed consent, the participants must fully understand the process involved in the research. That is, the participants must have adequate knowledge about the research project (Cohen et al.,

2007; Finch, 2005). This can be achieved through clearly presented information about the research.

This should be undertaken with care, transparency and accountability (Bishop, 1997). The researcher needs to actively involve the participants in learning processes which provide them with sufficient knowledge to understand what the research activities involve. The approaches would vary in different cultural contexts. For instance, in Maori contexts, there would be major emphasis on cultural protocols. It is essential to inform participants if there are risks involved (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007; Wilkinson, 2004). Participants have to voluntarily give their consent and have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process (Bell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007). Failure to provide all the important and relevant information regarding the research process could cause suspicion and result in the participants' refusal to take part in the research if they consider some aspects of their personal lives are threatened. Similarly, the status and identities of institutions such as schools need to be protected (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007).

For my project all the participants were fully informed and their signed consent forms obtained before interviewing.

3.12.2 Access and acceptance

Good access to the participants and the institution is an essential part of the research process, as the researcher reveals and reaffirms the purpose, aims, benefits, risks and the actual procedures involved in the research (Bell, 1999). This is important as it demonstrates the trustworthiness of the researcher in undertaking the research (Bell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007; Bell). It also demonstrates genuineness and transparency as the researcher reveals the nature of the research and provides an opportunity for the participants to ask questions and make comments about the research process. This allows them, as Bell (2005) and Cohen et al., (2007) have noted, to overcome any suspicion they may have about the researcher. This is also the time for the researcher to explore the ethical guidelines, regulations and expectations of the participants and institutions. For instance, if a researcher intends to undertake a sex education related

research project in Solomon Islands, it is important for him/her to be aware that cultural protocols forbid closely related male and female students from the same family or tribe being in the same class when learning about sex related issues such as family planning. Understanding such ethical guidelines in advance helps the researcher to devise appropriately contextualised research methodologies before the actual research process begins.

During the access and acceptance phase the researcher and participants collaboratively participate in decision-making, develop a shared sense of purpose, engage in collaborative work and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of the research. Thus, as Finch (2005) and MacNaughton and Smith (2001) noted, attention must be paid to achieving the participant's rights to fully understand and be given sufficient knowledge of the research process. Undertaking a collaborative-approach helps create conditions for mutual learning and respect. For example, as Danby and Farrell (2004) noted, talking to the children who were to be their participants and observing, listening and responding to their views enhanced the children's understanding and knowledge about the activities in which they would be engaged in the research. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity and context for the researchers to reflect on the research design in order to improve the research practice to suit the context (Finch, 2005; MacNaughton & Smith, 2001).

3.12.3 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

Privacy is the withholding of some aspects of someone's personal life from public knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007). This demands that the researcher respect the participants' right to privacy in the research process. For instance, in this research project, the identity of the participants, school and the information they provided was treated as confidential throughout data collection, data analysis and the writing process. Respect requires the researcher to undertake approaches that will not reveal the participants' identity. Such approaches include anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity is assured by the use of codes or symbols to represent the participants instead of their real names, and not including information that would identify them (Bell, 1999). Similarly, confidentiality is concerned with maintaining participants'

right to privacy through a promise to keep certain information confidential (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). When sincerely respected by the researcher and participants' confidentiality, anonymity and privacy develop trustworthiness. This in turn promotes and nurtures mutual accountability of researcher and participants, and helps maintain trust throughout the research process (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007).

3.12.4 Social and cultural sensitivity

Solomon Islands is a country of diverse cultures and ethnicities with eighty different languages. This poses challenges for researchers, and demands great care and sensitivity in adhering to the social and cultural norms of the people and their communities. I therefore paid close attention to the ethical considerations presented in the *University of Waikato Human Research Ethics* (2009) and the relevant sections of the Solomon Islands Research Act of 1982, which provides guidelines governing any research activity in the Solomon Islands.

For me as an indigenous Solomon Islander and insider it was easy to adhere to the social and cultural values and protocols that underlie the success of any information gathering as they are what constitute who and what I am. The authentic and appropriate social and cultural protocols were observed and acknowledged according to the pertinent social and cultural norms during the data collection phase and throughout the research data analysis and writing process (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Smith, 1998). For instance, the local community leaders and chiefs were informed of the research purpose and benefits prior to the actual collection of data for their approval to contact suitable individuals in their local communities. Furthermore, being an insider put me as a researcher in a good position to make effective use of the talanoa research approach. That is, it enabled me to be sensitive to the views, perceptions and experiences expressed by the participants in terms of who they are and what they are, using the socially and culturally appropriate form of story-telling (Otsuka, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006).

3.13 Research process

In this section, I describe the research process I used for this project. It includes access to institutions, selection of participants, and the methods employed to collect and analyse information.

3.13.1 Access to institutions

In order to conduct research in any school in the Solomon Islands permission must be sought from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD). I completed the Solomon Islands Research Application Form with all the required details and submitted it to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (appendix 1). This was done after I had received an Ethics Approval from the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee and identified the participants and Community High School in which the case study was to be undertaken. I was granted permission (appendix 2) to conduct my research project in the school. I then sought permission to conduct my study from the relevant Education Authority and the Principal of the Community High School, and it was granted.

3.13.2 Selecting the participants

I selected the stakeholders within the Community High School's context: the school principal, three teachers, three students and three parents. Most pleasingly, when I approached the Education Authority to seek permission the officers were so interested in the research question that they voluntarily asked to share their experiences, views and perceptions. I interviewed them as a focus group after I had interviewed the initial ten participants. Their experiences, beliefs, perceptions and expectations were also included in this study.

I sought permission from the Community High School principal through letter and personal conversation. During the conversation I explained the research project's purpose, the research process and the preferred participants, based on the research project's purpose. This then followed an intentional selection of the participants (Creswell, 2003), teachers and students as they suited the research purpose (Mutch,

2005). The principal selected the participants. I then sought permission from the participants through a letter (appendix 3) and personal communication. I explained the intention of the study and the research process and allowed the participants to ask for further elaboration and questions. All the selected and intended participants agreed to participate. Before the interviews the participants signed the consent form (appendix 4) to indicate that they had read and fully understood their role in the interview research process and were willing to participate. To avoid subject bias, I selected two academic subject teachers and two practical subject teachers, including the principal. One teacher was a female. Out of the three students, one was a female and two were male. The parents were selected from the surrounding catchment communities of the Community High School. I approached the village elders or chiefs of three catchment communities to seek permission to interview a parent whom they thought suitable from each community, through the pertinent social and cultural protocols. I then saw the parents individually to explain what the research project is about and ask for their consent to be interviewed. All the parents were males because these were recommended to me by village elders and the school.

3.13.3 Conducting the interviews

All the interviews were conducted at venues convenient for the participants. The teachers and students' interviews were conducted in the school, while the parent interviews were done in their homes. There were face-to-face interviews and talanoa with all the participants, each lasted approximately one hour. In the case of the Education Authority officers, I interviewed them as a focus group in their conference room. The interview questions (appendix 5) were derived from my core research question (appendix 6) which was:

What are the teachers, students and parents' experiences, perceptions and expectations of the Community High School model?

All the interviews with the selected participants and the focus group were done in pidgin (the *lingua franca* of the Solomon Islands) and tape recorded. Apart from the

recording version, I also made some notes on aspects that were not captured by the recorder such as facial expressions.

3.13.4 Data transcription and participant checking

All the individual interviews were transcribed and translated into English. I had to transcribe and simultaneously translate them into English. I then met the participants again individually and gave each of them their transcribed version to check, make comments, clarification, reflection and validation. I also transcribed and translated the focus group's interview, discussion and talanoa and gave them their transcripts, likewise, for comment and validation. Some participants made some changes to the transcribed scripts. For the students and one parent, I explain the meaning of the transcribed and English translated versions to them in pidgin while the other two educated parents had no difficulty in understanding the transcribed English version.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the methodologies that are relevant to this research. The qualitative approach was important because it was essential to get a descriptive account of the lived experiences, perceptions and expectations of the teachers, students and parents. A case study strategy which encompassed a semi-structured interview with a talanoa (oral story-telling) approach authentically and ethically placed the participants at the centre of the research to tell their stories from their own perspectives. The notion of reflexivity has been highlighted in the project as an integral part of this case study. The chapter also covered ethical issues relevant to this research project: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and social and cultural sensitivity.

The research method used to generate data in this research was the semi-structured interview. In particular, the talanoa approach was used as it is grounded in Pacific Islands' social, cultural and ethical contexts.

In the last section of this chapter I have presented specific details of the research process. This included the selection of the participants, and how and where the interviews were conducted. This chapter also touched on the limitations of the interview research method. For this research, the thematic approach to data analysis was used. The findings from the data analysis will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This research project explored the experiences, perceptions and views of teachers, students and parents associated with the Community High School model in Solomon Islands. The research question is:

What are the experiences, perceptions and views of teachers, students and parents on the Community High School model in Solomon Islands?

The emerging and recurring themes that appear of significance to this research project include improved access to secondary education for rural children particularly girls, unbalanced curriculum, teacher-centred teaching and learning practices, poor preparation of students for the future, limited resources, democratic school leadership practice, mutual school community partnership, a strong school committee, future aspirations, more rural Training centres, expansion of tertiary education and in appropriate education policy.

To maintain confidentiality of the participants in this study, codes are used. The principal is included as a teacher. The codes used to represent the teachers are T1, T2, T3 and T4. S1, S2, S3 are used to represent the students. Similarly, the codes used to represent the parents are P1, P2, P3; and EO1, EO2, EO3, EO4 are used to represent the Education Officers.

4.2 Improved access to secondary education for rural children

All the teachers, students, parents and Education Authority officers in the study acknowledged that the Community High School model enabled more access to secondary education than at any other time in the history of Solomon Islands. This included greater access to secondary education for rural children and also for girls.

Most of the participants commented on this improved access. One of the parents (P1) elaborated:

There are more rural children having greater access to secondary education than before. The children in the rural areas are now able to access secondary education in or near their villages. For example, there are more children from my village enrolled in secondary education now in this Community High School than before its introduction. Furthermore, the Community High Schools have encouraged and motivated the children to aim high and work hard while still in primary school for they know they will proceed on to secondary education in Community High Schools.

The participants pointed out that the availability of more places in secondary schools was due to the introduction of Community High Schools, and addressed the issue of equal access for all students. That is, it also enabled many of the low ability students who would have previously been unable to access secondary education. They said that this was an important step in the direction towards Education for All (MEHRD, 2005; 2008). As one of the teachers (T3) explained:

The Community High Schools have enabled more of the low ability students to have access to secondary education. These are the students who would have otherwise missed the opportunity to access secondary education if there were no Community High Schools because of the exam-oriented schooling system. This Community High School accepts and enrolls many of the students who got low pass marks in the SISEE in the secondary sector.

Furthermore, the teachers, parents and Education Officers said that the introduction of Community High Schools not only provided increased access but also enabled students to have more years of education. This allowed them to acquire knowledge, skills and values that would not previously have been available to them. One of the Education Authority Officers (EO2) mentioned:

Access to ten years of education including secondary is a good thing because it delays and prevents students from resorting to undesirable behaviour as they are in a disciplined institution. Though there are more school dropouts, at least the students have learnt some knowledge, skills and values they would not and may not have had the opportunity to explore and be exposed to in their life time.

The participants said that more girls were now accessing secondary education than before because of the introduction of Community High Schools. One of the parents (P1) explained:

From my experience and observation, most parents used to prioritise male children's access to secondary education because of society's patriarchal norms. In addition, parents were reluctant to send children especially female children to schools that are far away and in other provinces if they were selected to attend. Moreover, when it comes to school fees issues, parents prioritised male children's school fees. However, the introduction of Community High Schools in the vicinity of the rural communities enables parents to send more female children to secondary education than previously.

It appears that the strong parental support for the Community High School development is due to this increased access for all to secondary education, including female students. The participants also acknowledged that the establishment of Community High Schools near where they lived had enabled them to supervise and support their children while at secondary school. As one of the parents (P2) commented:

In my community, there is greater support for the idea and development of Community High Schools because all our children, both male and female children, are able to access secondary education near us [parents], so we can still supervise and support them. There are now more girls from our community accessing secondary than before the introduction of Community High Schools. We are glad that all children in our community have equal access to secondary education.

The greater access to secondary education including rural children was acknowledged by most of the participants.

4.3 Unbalanced curriculum

All the participants in the study spoke a great deal about the unbalanced curriculum in the Community High Schools. They said that the curriculum is not balanced and is academically oriented. As one of the teachers (T4) explained:

The curriculum is more academic because there is more time allocated for academic subjects like English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies in

our school programme. The practical subjects have less time in our school timetable.

A student (S3) said:

The greater emphasis on academic subjects makes us think of academic subjects as more important than practical skill based subjects. Also, academic subjects are the only subjects examined in Form 3 national examinations, which indirectly tells us [students] that they are more important for us to learn in order to get a job or work when we leave secondary education. We look forward to further studies after secondary education at tertiary level. I see practical subjects such as small poultry and piggery projects, agricultural skills such as growing food gardens for consumption and monetary purposes and making furniture, and carpentry skills as useful at home in the village.

The participants were concerned about the curriculum being strongly academic. Their concern was whether the academic curriculum caters for all the students. Those interviewed preferred a curriculum that caters for all students, the academically capable and the low ability students. It appeared that participants were concerned that the academically oriented curriculum with limited practical skill development catered only for the few academically capable students. One of the teachers (T2) expressed it this way:

From my observation and experience as a teacher, not all the students are academically capable. Only a few students are academically capable while the majority of students are low ability students as most of the low pass marks students are placed in Community High Schools. Following this, most of the school dropouts are from Community High Schools. This suggests that the academic curriculum does not cater for all students but only the very few capable students. Some students have potential in practical skills but because more emphasis is placed on academic subjects, those students do not have a chance to further develop their practical skills.

The issue of many students dropping out of the Community High School and returning to their rural villages was spoken of by most of the teachers, parents and Education Officers. From their experience, they revealed that the majority of the students found it difficult to apply the academic curriculum they learnt at secondary level, including at the Community High Schools. A parent (P3) explained:

In my village, most of the students coming back home from secondary schools are finding it hard to apply what they have learnt in high schools to help themselves, their families and their communities, compared to students coming out from Rural Training Centres. I observed that the majority of post-secondary school students were the ones that drift to urban centres like Honiara looking for jobs and hanging around there.

The participants revealed the need for a curriculum that also included practical skills. They view it as essential in order to cater for all students, both the academically able and the low ability students. The participants, particularly teachers, parents and Education officers, took into account the different abilities and interests of students, and thus tended to give equal weight to academic and practical subjects. As one of the Education Authority Officers (EO3) said:

There is a need for a balanced curriculum that puts equal emphasis on both academic and practical subjects. Such a balanced curriculum can at least cater for the majority of students. This is to enable some of the students who would be returning to their rural villages to apply some of the practical skills to help themselves, their families and their communities after they leave school. In addition, the students can further develop the practical skills in Rural Training Centres or tertiary education. There is land to develop in the rural areas, but people do not know how to develop it. Some of the practical agricultural skills such as how to make food gardens for selling and how to develop their land with cash crops such as cocoa and coconut and some furniture and carpentry skills would be useful.

The high dropout rate from high schools including Community High Schools which leaves individuals with limited opportunities to further develop their potential was a major concern for most of the participants. This is clearly a social justice issue.

4.3.1 Teacher-centred teaching and learning practices

In this section, I present the experiences, perceptions and expectations of teachers, students, parents, and Education Authority staffs regarding teaching and learning practice in the Community High School.

The participants commented that the teaching and learning practice were academic and exam-oriented, as a consequence of the curriculum's weighting towards academic subjects. They said that the education policy emphasised academic subjects as the

only examinable subjects for all students in order to proceed on to the next level from Year 9 to Year 10 and so influenced the teaching and learning practice. One of the teachers (T1) explained:

The teaching and learning is geared towards examinations. The parents and school board expect us [teachers] to make sure we prepare students well to pass exams. If the students do not pass national exams, they will not be placed in Form 4 because there are not enough spaces in the upper levels of the schooling system.

The students also spoke about the teaching and learning practice being theoretically oriented with little practical emphasis. This in turn meant that teaching and learning tended to be teacher-centred. Such teaching and learning practice can only partially promote student learning. The teachers should be facilitators of student learning who encourage students' participation and involvement in the teaching and learning process. The teaching and learning practice needs to be student-centred. The following is one of the students (S3) comments:

The teaching and learning practice is teacher-centred. Most of the time only the teachers talk then write notes and exercises on the chalk-board for us to copy into our books. That is, we [students] learn theory most of the time with less practical skills activities. We sometimes find learning boring and feel sleepy.

Rather than encompassing the holistic education of students the teaching and learning practice is predominately coaching them to pass examinations in order to move on to the next level. As one of the teachers (T2) said:

The challenge of time constraints to cover all the topics on time before the examinations forces us [teachers] to teach according to the examination specifications. That is, only teach students with the topics that were likely to be examined and leave out the other knowledge and skills. This is what I do if I do not have enough time when it comes closer to the examinations.

For the teachers, teaching and learning means passing exams and moving on to the next level, so that at the end of secondary education students will be awarded with scholarships and then move into paid employment. Coaching and teaching according to the tests and exams seems to be increasingly common practice in all secondary

schools. This is because passing exams appears to be used as a criterion to judge teachers, and schools, on their performance to gain and maintain their status as industrious teachers, and good schools. In addition, teachers as products of the education system perpetuate the examination-oriented teaching and learning practice. One teacher (T3) commented:

The examination-oriented schooling system tends to assess teachers' work performance on the number of students passing exams and proceeding to the next level. Generally, the parents and school board will not be happy when there is a low student pass rate to Form 4 and would blame the school and the teachers for student failure. To fulfill this in the face of time constraints and parental pressure we [teachers] do coaching instead of proper teaching and learning, to prepare students to pass exams, instead of holistic teaching and learning. From my experience and observation, we tend to teach only certain topics that will be examined, rather than the whole curriculum.

Although teaching and coaching to the test is practised it appeared that some of the teachers were quite aware of the negative effects of orienting teaching and learning towards examinations. They acknowledged that the teaching and learning was not holistic and did not prepare all the students for life after secondary education. Some of the teachers spoke about the need to change the teaching and learning practice. One of them (T1) explained:

Currently, the teaching and learning is not contextualised according to students' potential and interests. There is a need to shift teaching and learning practice from teacher-centred to student-centred. That is, teaching and learning practice should encompass the identification of students' potential, capability, talents and interests and then develop them for their future.

The teachers' perspectives on the teaching and learning practice were influenced by the structure of the education system. The shifting of teaching and learning towards examinations was done in response to the requirements of the education system. The pyramidal education system as reflected in the limited number of places higher up the school system puts the teachers in a position where they have to make a choice between preparing students to proceed to the next level of secondary education and the holistic education of students. The examinations are seen as the major

determinants of students' prospects for moving on to the next level. This significantly influences the teachers' practice.

4.3.2 Poor preparation of students for the future

When asked whether the Community High School model prepared students for life, the participants believed that this was true only to a limited extent. Though there is advocacy for the preparation of all students to become self-reliant and useful in their communities, this does not really happen. One of the Education Officers' (EO2) commented:

I see that the nature of the education policy that determines the curriculum and practice as academic and exam-oriented coupled with lack of resources hinders the preparation of students for life. The curriculum is academically oriented with limited practical skill development. This implies that the educational practice in Community High Schools is not holistic. Though there is emphasis in the education policy for preparing students for life, in practice this is not the case. The Community High School model does not prepare students for life.

The teachers and Education Officers also pointed out that the curriculum, education policy and practice are the same as those in other models of secondary schools such as Provincial and National secondary schools. Such perspectives indicate that though there is further decentralisation of secondary education in the form of Community High Schools the education policy and practice do not adapt to accommodate evolving circumstances and contexts. One of the teachers (T2) explained:

The schooling system in Community High Schools is the same as in Provincial and National Secondary Schools. That is, the education policy, curriculum and practice are similar and do not cater for contextual needs.

The teachers and Education Officers further highlighted that there was limited time and space to accommodate teaching and learning of skills and values for life after secondary education in the Community High School programme. As one of the Education Officers (EO4) explained:

The school programme is stretched out and occupied with the formal academic timetable. As a result, there is lack of time and space to

accommodate some of the important social and cultural knowledge, skills and values of the surrounding communities in the school programme. The communities' social and cultural values such as ways of behaving and showing respect, cultural conflict resolution, traditional gardening methods, fishing, building and making canoes and artifacts are left out. I think such knowledge, skills and values are essential for the promotion of social and cultural values and maintaining the identity of the students and their communities for harmonious and peaceful co-existence and survival in the face of changing times.

It would appear that the educational policy and practice in Community High Schools are not adapted to the students' educational needs. This raises a major concern: How can the Community High Schools encourage and promote social justice unless they encourage and promote education for all students to develop their potentials and interest for life, rather than just the academic elite? What are some of the ways to improve the Community High School model in order to prepare all students for adult life?

4.3.3 Limited resources

Those interviewed highlighted limited resources of Community High Schools. The concept of the Community High School was seen as a means to give access to secondary education with little consideration for the provision of resources. While the government through the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development had planned to introduce Community High Schools according to some set policy guidelines, communities and parents tended to look at the concept as a simple undertaking without much serious thought for the complexities involved. Most of the Community High Schools were introduced in response to parental and community pressure. Most of them do not have the necessary resources. The participants emphasised this was a major impediment to preparing students for life. One of the teachers (T1) said:

Almost all Community High Schools lack the basic resources to enhance the preparation of students for life. The rapid growth of Community High Schools is beyond the government's capacity to supply the necessary resources. Despite the government inability to provide Community High Schools with

resources, there is pressure by parents and the communities for their primary schools to be upgraded to Community High School status.

The participants viewed the lack of resources as one of the major obstacles to student learning. Both academic and practical subjects were affected. Moreover, the local resources are considered as inadequate for meaningful learning and therefore are not fully explored in terms of its potential. The limited resources was viewed as one of the major factors negatively impacting on the educational practice in the Community High Schools. The issue of teacher-centred learning was seen as being perpetuated by the limited resources because proper teaching and learning cannot take place when only limited resources are available. Furthermore, the high number of students dropping out of the Community High School every year with limited knowledge and skills was also seen as an effect of the lack of resources. As one of the teachers (T4) said:

I am finding it hard to teach my students well because there are no resources (tools and equipment) to use for demonstrating and for practical skill development. Therefore, I only teach the students theoretical concepts in practical subjects. I am aware that the students are not learning well and could learn more than what they are learning but I cannot do anything as there are no resources.

Clearly, the lack of adequate resources was considered a major problem. Essentially, the fund-sharing formula initiated by the government for all stakeholders to be partners in funding and resourcing the Community High Schools is a measure to address the issue of lack of resources. Such initiatives legitimised parents and communities being more involved in the development of Community High Schools and in matters pertaining to student learning. However, this was not happening as expected because the parents are not aware of their roles and responsibilities towards Community High Schools' development.

4.4 Democratic school leadership practice

In this section, I present the experiences and perceptions of the teachers, parents and Education officers regarding how the school is managed, particularly democratic,

shared and collaborative leadership, school community partnership and a strong school committee.

4.4.1 Democratic, shared and collaborative leadership practice

The participants said a great deal about leadership practice that is democratic, in other words, collaborative and involving all stakeholders in the leadership and management of the school. They considered collaborative leadership as pivotal in the management of Community High Schools, and stressed that democratic leadership practice encouraged and promoted open dialogue amongst the teachers, parents, and the communities. For instance, through open dialogue the parents and community were encouraged to give their views on matters pertaining to the school and student learning. One of the teachers (T1) explained:

I look at a shared and collaborative leadership practice that involves all the teachers in decision-making as important when it comes to school issues that need the teachers' voice. Similarly, when it comes to matters that require parents and the communities' collective voice, parents and the communities should be consulted for their views. This is important because all the teachers, parents and the communities have important roles to play in the learning of students. For instance, the nature of Community High Schools as day schools requires the collaborative partnership amongst the teachers, parents and the communities on matters pertaining to students' learning in order for sound learning to take place. That is, the teachers fulfil their role, leading teaching and learning practice in the school with the formal school programme while the students are in the school, while the parents supervise their children at home in their studies after school hours.

Transparency and accountability on matters pertaining to school development and the need for all stakeholders to be aware of their respective roles towards the development of the Community High Schools were considered important by the teachers, parents and Education Officers. All recognised the collaborative roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders in the development of Community High Schools and in student learning. The participants highlighted the importance of a shared and open leadership and management practice in promoting transparency and accountability amongst all stakeholders, including the Education Authorities and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development.

According to those interviewed, being transparent and accountable involved making known to stakeholders how the school fund and grant is spent, and details of the school's strategic plan. It included establishing communication networks to keep all stakeholders updated on matters pertaining to students' learning and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in the development of Community High Schools. An Education officer (EO3) commented:

I think it is important for the school management to recognise and acknowledge the importance of parents and the communities in the development of Community High Schools. For this to happen, school leadership and management practice needs to get down to the parents and the community. This can be done in the form of awareness programmes on the goals of the school and the role of Community High Schools, teachers, parents and the communities. I look at school leadership and management as practical leadership and management that needs to get down to the level of the parents and the communities rather than be confined within the boundaries of the school.

The participants viewed leadership as relational, speaking about the importance of nurturing and maintaining a good and mutual relationship amongst all the stakeholders. They considered that democratic leadership that nurtures and develops relationships amongst all stakeholders fundamental to the development of Community High Schools and student learning. As one of the parents (P2) put it:

I consider the establishment of a good and communal relationship amongst the teachers, students, parents, the communities and Education Authority as important to the development of Community High School and for meaningful student learning. This is because all stakeholders have profound influence on student human development and are essential for nurturing children's holistic education. Moreover, the relationship must be meaningful to all stakeholders. Such good, mutual and meaningful relationship would encourage everyone to work together towards whatever common goals they aspire to in preparing students for life.

In addition, the participants saw collaborative leadership as appropriate to address the complex issues pertaining to the Community High Schools and student learning. Participant T4 elaborated:

I view a good relationship amongst all the stakeholders of the school as important for the development of Community High Schools in terms of addressing the complex issues facing the Community High Schools. The complexity of the many issues surrounding the Community High Schools requires collaborative and shared responsibilities of all stakeholders, which can be encouraged and promoted when there is a good relationship.

4.4.2 Mutual school community partnership

As mentioned above, the teachers, parents and Education Officers stressed the need for a school community partnership in preparing students for life. They pointed out that the many issues and challenges facing Community High Schools required the school to work together with parents and the community to address them. For instance, the school could work collaboratively with the parents and communities to raise funds to address the resources deficit. One of the Education Officers (EO3) said:

I view lack of resources as one of the major issues that can be gradually addressed to some degree if the school is working together with the parents and community in partnership. For this to happen, the school needs to make the parents and community aware of the required resources and plan ways of getting funding for the resources, such as fundraising activities. From experience and observation, schools that have an active school community partnership tend to have more parental and community support and there is progress in their Community High School classrooms and other resource development.

Participants also acknowledged the importance of parents in the holistic development of the students. They saw a good school community partnership as essential to student learning. For example, the school does its part in educating the students while at school and the parents and communities are to encourage and support their children with their homework when they are at home. Also, a collaborative approach to student discipline can contribute to the positive development of the students. The participants viewed good discipline as fundamental for students to learn well and for their wellbeing. One of the teachers (T1) explained:

I see that parents as the first educators of their children do have a tremendous influence on children's integral human development. Education for children begins at home and parents are the first teachers of their children. Furthermore, learning does not take place only at school but also at home in

informal social and cultural interactions with parents and the communities. Therefore, I consider it important for Community High Schools to work in partnership with the parents and the communities on matters pertaining to student learning.

Furthermore, the teachers, parents and Education Officers said much about the importance for the school and community to work in partnership to teach the students the social and cultural knowledge, skills and values of their communities. One of the teachers (T2) elaborated:

I look at the establishment of Community High Schools near most rural parents and communities as a prerequisite for teaching and learning of social and cultural knowledge and values of the communities. The schools are in a better position to encourage and utilise the parents and local community chiefs, elders, health personnel, church leaders, social workers and police officers to provide teaching and give awareness programmes on social and cultural knowledge, skills and values, health, religious and citizenship education. Such informal teaching and awareness programmes should become part of the school programme.

The participants said, however, that there was little parental and community involvement on matters pertaining to student learning. This is because of the perception that student learning and development is the responsibility of the school and the teachers. However, those interviewed believed that the holistic development of students cannot be achieved without parental and community involvement. This shows the importance of parents and community to work in partnership with the school and teachers on preparing students for life.

4.4.3 A strong school committee

The teachers, parents and Education Officers spoke of the importance of a school committee in the development of Community High Schools. The participants believed that a school committee that is strong and effective was essential for addressing the many issues and challenges facing the Community High Schools and also playing an important role in enhancing the school-community relationship. The school on its own could not solve the problems hindering the proper preparation of students for life. Those interviewed saw the school committee's role as empowering

the school, parents and community in ways to improve the resources of the Community High Schools. An Education Officer (EO1) explained it this way:

I see the importance of the school committee in the positive development of Community High Schools, particularly in the process of addressing the issue of lack of resources. The stronger the school committee, the more effectively it will draw together and mobilise the school, parents and the communities towards the development of the school. This is because the committee represents the school, parents and the communities and they can sometimes have different views and perspectives on how to develop the Community High School. This can be challenging if the school, parents and the community do not have a common vision and goal for the Community High School.

While commenting on a strong and effective school committee, the participants acknowledged the importance of employing democratic and collaborative decision-making in matters relating to the development of Community High Schools and student learning. The teachers, parents and Education Officers considered open dialogue and collaborative decision-making essential in overcoming the different views and perspectives the parents, teachers and communities may have on Community High School issues. As one teacher (T2) said:

I see the importance of the school committee in negotiating, encouraging, promoting and establishing a democratic, collaborative and communal leadership practice that involves all stakeholders in decision-making. This is because from experience and observation the teachers, parents and the communities tend to become reluctant and isolate themselves from the affairs of the school when they are not included in school planning and decision-making. Therefore, such shared and collaborative decision-making can enhance a common vision and goals for the Community High School.

The participants' perception of a strong and effective school committee with collaborative decision-making principles reflects the desire to align all stakeholders on a common vision and goal so they will be committed to working together to achieve it. An Education Officers (EO3) commented:

From my experience as a Community High School Committee member, when the school and school committee do not have a common vision and goal, the school and school committee will not work together. The parents and the

communities will not work together with the school. This can slow down the development of Community High Schools. On the other hand, when there is a common vision and goal for the school and school committee, everyone works together and there is progressive school development.

The participants saw cooperation and commitment of all stakeholders on Community High School matters as very important to moving the school forward. This may well have prompted the teachers and Education Officers to mention the need for all stakeholders to recognise and advocate interdependence of the school, teachers, students, parents and the community on matters relating to student learning.

4.5 Future aspirations

In this section, I present the views and expectations of the teachers, students, parents and Education Officers on how they want the future to be.

4.5.1 Expansion of Rural Training Centres and tertiary education

The teachers, parents and Education Officers wanted to see the expansion of Rural Training Centres. They wanted to see the many students coming out of the education system able to apply their knowledge and skills to help themselves, their families and communities. They saw the high dropout rate of secondary level students as evidence that the education system was not preparing the majority of students to develop their potential and interests for life.

The participants suggested the importance of expanding tertiary education and Rural Training Centres to cope with the high population growth rate which has already affected expansion at secondary education. Currently the opportunities for tertiary education are limited and cater for a very small number of students, mainly the academically capable. A teacher (T2) elaborated:

The increasing population growth rate of about 3% has resulted in the expansion of secondary education through the upgrading of primary schools into Community High Schools. I see there is also a need to expand Rural Training Centres. This is because there are few Rural Training Centres in the country, which enrol only small numbers of students. This is essential so that students who are low ability but have potential and interests in practical skills

can further develop their practical skills in the Rural Training Centres. This is also important to absorb the high number of students pushed out of secondary schools.

According to those interviewed, the government must provide more support and recognition of Rural Training Centres. They raised the issue of the lack of resources in most of the Centres. They viewed the Rural Training Centres as important for those students who are not able to complete secondary education successfully but who have an interest in practical skills. In addition, most of the courses offered at Rural Training Centres were seen as relevant for rural contexts. Initially, the concept of Rural Training Centres was developed to prepare students and people from rural communities to become useful and productive in rural settings. One of the teachers (T1) said:

At the moment, some of the Rural Training Centres lack the necessary resources to offer practical skills training. The government needs to support the development of Rural Training Centres because it can cater for the majority of students pushed out of the education system. This is important so that the practical skills students initially developed at Community High Schools can be further developed at Rural Training Centres after secondary education.

The issue of developing courses that cater for both male and female was also raised by the participants. This implied that the courses at Rural Training Centres were stereotyped and suited to males only, and there is very low enrolment of females in Rural Training Centres. They believed that developing non-stereotyped courses was vital to encourage more females to enrol at Rural Training Centres.

A parent (P3) commented:

I think the curriculum and syllabus of Rural Training Centres also needs further development in order to cater for both males and females. Currently, the curriculum and syllabus is stereotyped and there are more males accessing Rural Training Centres than females. I wanted to send my female children to Rural Training Centres but could not because of the stereotyped courses and programmes offered there.

The participants considered that the further development of Rural Training Centres and tertiary education through government support was necessary to cater for the many students who were currently excluded too early from the education system.

The participants were keen to see the expansion of the tertiary education sector because at the moment there are very limited tertiary education opportunities for students coming out of secondary schools. The main tertiary institutions, Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and the University of the South Pacific, enrol small numbers of students. A teacher (T1) explained:

The primary and secondary sectors are expanding but there is no expansion of tertiary education to cater for the increasing number of secondary students leaving the education system every year. This reflects the pyramidal nature of the schooling system. I see this as one of the factors that hinder access for the majority of students to tertiary education and to fully develop their potential. Hence, there is a need for education policy to change to take into consideration the high population growth rate.

One of the Education Officers (EO3) said:

The education policy in Solomon Islands needs a review to expand the tertiary sector in terms of tertiary education opportunities to accommodate the high population growth rate. The current tertiary education sector does not offer greater opportunities for the increasing number of secondary students coming out at different levels of secondary education. I see the current tertiary education sector as being biased towards the few academically capable students while the majority is denied access to tertiary education opportunities. The issue of access should not be seen as access to basic education only but also for tertiary education. There should be policy development aimed towards this direction.

It appeared then that the issue of the lack of tertiary educational opportunities for many students was of significant concern to the participants. This is a social justice issue.

4.5.2 Inappropriate education policies

According to the participants, the current education policy is a hindrance to the promotion of social justice in the schooling system for all students, as it caters only

for the few academically capable students. Those interviewed commented on the importance for an education system that caters for the majority or all students' educational needs. Current policy calls for equal access for all students to basic education to develop their potential in order to become self-reliant, useful and productive citizens. However, this is not happening. It appears that the current education policy and practice are incompatible. One of the teachers (T4) explained:

The Education Act and policy that governs the education system is a hindrance to the learning and development of all students' potential. Though there is greater access for secondary education, the kind of education offered at secondary schools, including Community High Schools, does not cater for all students. It only caters for the few academic elites. This is reflected in the majority of school dropouts being unable to use the knowledge, skills and values necessary to help themselves for the future.

An Education Officer (EO2) elaborated:

From my observation, the current education system is producing more school dropouts who are unable to apply the knowledge, skills and values to further sustain themselves. The highly competitive schooling system only serves the bright students. Moreover, the high population growth rate puts further pressure on the education system. Faced with these challenges, in my opinion, there is a need to change the education policy in order to encourage and promote the preparing of all students' potential for life.

The education policy and the Education Act that govern the education system appear incompatible with the pace of change the country is going through in terms of population growth, high unemployment, and development priorities and issues of social justice and equity. Clearly, the high number of school dropouts poorly equipped to help themselves, their families and their communities and become useful citizens reflects the inappropriateness of the education policies and the Education Act. This has serious social justice implications. It appears that the Solomon Islands adopted the education system from the former British coloniser with minimal amendments to suit the Solomon Islands context.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter I have presented the study's findings on the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the teachers, students, parents and Education Officers regarding the Community High School model in Solomon Islands. The key themes which emerged after analysis included a demand for greater access to secondary and tertiary education, revision of teaching and learning practice, effective management of the school based on collaboration of all stakeholders, limited resources and hopes and expectations for the Community High School model's future.

The teachers, students, parents and Education Officers spoke about the greater access to secondary education provided by the Community High School model for all students, including rural children and girls. They revealed that despite this greater access the Community High School does not prepare the majority of students with the relevant knowledge, life skills and values. This was due to the unbalanced curriculum, teacher-centred teaching and learning practices and limited resources. The participants agreed that democratic leadership practice that is collaborative and communal is essential for nurturing and establishing a school community partnership. They saw a mutual school community partnership in education as fundamental for the development of Community High Schools and for preparing students for life. The participants spoke about their aspirations for the model, particularly the need to change education policy and practice to cater for all students. They also considered there is a need to expand access to tertiary education and Rural Training Centres. They view this as essential for promoting social justice for all students to develop their potential.

In the next chapter I discuss these findings in relation to the literature

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

There has been an assumption that the current education system inherited from the British colonial system is suitable for the Solomon Islands. However, this is not so because of the nature of the Solomon Islands context (Coxon & Tolley, 2005; Dorovolom, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2008; Pollard, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). This suggests that some aspects of the education system need to be changed to suit the Solomon Islands context. What is valued and considered as relevant education in one context may not be of the same relevance and value in other contexts (Coxon & Tolley, 2005; Jowett, 1998; Thaman, 2009; Veramu, 1998).

Another assumption has been that the education system has been in place with minimal changes since Solomon Islands gained its independence in 1978 is appropriate for all students' educational needs. While there has been some research done on education decentralisation in Solomon Islands Sikua (2002) and Sanga, Pollard & Jenner (1998), little has been done on equal access to education for all students to develop their potentials, nor, before this study has any research looked into the challenges and constraints faced by students at the Community High School level. This study explored the experiences, perceptions and expectations of teachers, students, parents and Education Officers on the Community High School model in the Solomon Islands. It therefore helps to fill a significant gap in the literature.

5.2 Improved access to secondary education

The findings of the study indicate that young people have greater access to secondary education than before the introduction of Community High Schools. This supports the Solomon Islands education policy on education for all (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008). More children are now able to access secondary education, including rural children and girls who had limited

opportunities before the establishment of Community High Schools. This is congruent with many scholars and international organisations' advocacy of the promotion of social justice through students' access to quality education and equity (Fullan, 2001; Hick, 2007; Tanner, 2007; World Bank, 1995).

It appears that access to secondary education in the Solomon Islands was enhanced by the decentralisation of secondary education in the form of Community High Schools (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005, 2008, 2009; Sikua, 2002). The greater access to secondary education is therefore seen as attributed to the establishment of Community High Schools near or in the vicinity of rural communities. Such expansion at the junior secondary school level enabled more rural children, particularly girls and low ability students, to access secondary education. The participants in my study acknowledged this as one of the achievements of the Community High School model.

The study also showed that there are more girls accessing secondary education than previously. The finding is supported by those of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2005, 2008, 2009) and Sikua (2002). A possible explanation for this may be that the introduction of Community High Schools created more places in the secondary education sector than before. Furthermore, the establishment of Community High Schools in most of the rural areas encourages parents to put more emphasis on all of their children's education. That is, parents are now gradually putting equal emphasis on both male and female children's education because of the establishment of Community High Schools in the vicinity of their rural villages (Sikua, 2002). In addition, the introduction of Community High Schools as day schools coupled with the free education policy introduced in 2009 tends to ease the parents' financial burden.

While the issue of greater access for rural children and female children was well articulated by the teachers, students, parents and Education Officers in this study, access for girls still decreases at higher levels of secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009). It does also for

boys. However, it is more pronounced for girls. This is a social justice issue. Though the participants were aware of this trend, they acknowledged that at least there is an improvement in girls' access compared with before the introduction of Community High Schools. This study found, too, that access to education for both male and female students rapidly decreases at higher levels of secondary and tertiary education. This is similar to findings in the 2009 Performance analysis of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009). The facts remains that there simply are not enough secondary schools. It appears that Solomon Islands cannot afford more schools so the situation would not change quickly.

Although the issue of improved access to secondary education was acknowledged by the participants, the study showed that they were also concerned about the nature of what students are learning in school. This is similar to what Dorovolomo (2005), Fakaia (2005), Malasa (2007) and Treadaway (2002) suggest, that the high dropout rate means that many students leave school are not so well prepared and therefore unable to help themselves, their families and communities, or to become useful citizens. This is a major issue, example, access for what? Some of the participants considered that the initial goal of the education policy of access to secondary education was not being followed through into the development of students' life potential. This may be because the majority of the students leave school unable to use what they have learnt (Fakaia, 2005; Malasa, 2007; Pollard, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). So while access to education has improved there is still a social justice issue, the usefulness and relevance of knowledge after they leave school. What is the point of them staying on longer at school if it does not help them live productive lives in their communities?

5.3. Unbalanced curriculum

This study found that the Community High School curriculum is not balanced. It is seen as academically oriented, with limited attention given to practical skills. The findings of this study indicated that while the curriculum has been revised to be less academically oriented, this was not reflected in the teaching and learning practice.

For instance, assessment policies in Year 9 still focus on academic subjects in order to progress to the next levels. This finding is in agreement with those of Beuka, (2008), Dorovolomo (2005), Fakaia (2005), Malasa (2007) and Treadaway, (2002). The emphasis is on an academic curriculum that is examination oriented (Beuka, 2008; Fito'o, 2009; Pollard, 2005). This is because of the limited number of spaces available higher up the schooling system.

Also of concern was the issue of academic subjects as the determining factor in selecting students for the next level. The student participants in particular commented on this as having an impact on how they view academic subjects in relation to practical skill based subjects. The school is faced with the dilemma of how to meet the needs of all students while maintaining the academically oriented curriculum that caters only for the few academically capable students. In practice, the preference for an academic curriculum takes precedence over the desire for a balanced curriculum. This is an issue that essentially needs attention because such academically focused preferences are unrealistic for most students. Therefore, to address this issue, there is a greater need for parents and communities to have some familiarity with the education system and the curriculum offered at Community High Schools, given that, as Beuka (2008) found, many parents do not fully understand the education system. This is important so that they are not pushing their children to do academic subjects but according to their potentials and interests. One suggestion is for the school leaders and teachers and School Committee to undertake parental and community awareness programmes on the Solomon Islands education system, education policy, practice and the curriculum.

Another important finding is that the desire for a more balanced curriculum was expressed by most of the teachers, parents and Education Officers, as it would cater for all students, the academically capable students and low ability students. This finding is similar to those of Fakaia (2005) and Treadaway (2002). Such perspectives suggest the need to have an integrated curriculum approach that takes into account all students' educational needs. A possible option would be to have an integrated curriculum that is both academically and vocationally oriented. The vocational and

practical curriculum component needs to link to students' real life contexts. For example, the knowledge gained from a vocational and practical curriculum encompassing life skills, carpentry and agricultural practical skills and knowledge can be useful in the building of people's homes, water supply maintenance and agricultural farm management knowledge and in teaching practical skills to the rural communities to improve their crop production and livelihood. This would go some way towards ameliorating what Simanu-Klutz (1997) observed some years ago, that "in numerous [Pacific Island] classrooms of today, students learn bits and pieces of knowledge, and too many leave formal education with little idea of how to apply to real life what they have learned in their lives" (p.1). Another issue that emerged from this finding is that the high rate of school dropouts coming from the Community High Schools that enrol most of the low ability students reflects the inappropriateness of the academic curriculum for many students regardless of their academic capability. Importantly, this suggests that the notion of one-size-fits-all-students perpetuates the alienation of students from relevant knowledge, skills and values for life in their communities. This is another social justice issue: is this the only form of curriculum relevant for all students to develop their potential for life?

Such social justice questions essentially call for all the stakeholders, particularly the school principals, to work more closely with the parents and communities. As one of the participants commented, the school cannot work on its own without the parents and communities because they also have the right to influence their children's education. This suggests the need for parents and communities to be made aware of their roles and responsibilities and their empowerment to realize and recognise their rights to question and contribute to the educational development of their children.

Furthermore, there is a need to change education policy, especially curriculum and assessment policy, by making some provision for schools particularly Community High Schools and their communities to integrate such curriculum content as they see relevant according to their contexts (Sikua, 2002). This could also encompass pedagogy and assessment. It would not mean diluting the liberal academic curriculum component but encouraging an integrated curriculum that is balanced academically and vocationally to suit all students' potentials and geographical contexts. For such a

change to happen, the principals' association and teachers unions should be involved in pushing for a change. The principals' association and teachers unions need to work together with the parents and communities on what they foresee as the way forward for the education system in the Solomon Islands and push for a change. According to the findings, the teachers were aware of the imbalance but because of the education policy, any alteration of practice would be seen as illegal as they are only policy implementers, hence they perpetuate the school practice.

Fundamentally, there is a need to encourage the involvement of parents and communities in education policy-making, especially curriculum development. This is because rural parents and communities are knowledgeable about their contexts. Moreover, rural parents and communities are capable of reasoning and planning, and able to make sound decisions pertaining to their children's educational development. Principals and teachers need to get the parents' views and aspirations integrated in the curriculum development process. This is essential for holistic curriculum development approach and a prerequisite for community development. Currently, curriculum development is centralised by the government in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development through the Curriculum Development Centre, neglecting the parents and communities. This supports what Luteru and Teasdale (1993) highlighted, that "most Pacific Island countries maintain the centralisation of core functions including policy and curriculum development and administration, with inefficient and ineffective bureaucratic formalities hindering the developmental progress of their education systems" (p. 302).

5.3. 1 Teacher-centred teaching and learning practices

The structure of the education system and education policy has affected teaching and learning practice. This creates a dilemma for teachers and schools, who are required to prepare students for examinations and also for life. The preparing of students for examinations is a priority because it determines the length of time students attend school and continue their education. This supports Thaman's (2009) suggestion that "the inappropriate pedagogies and assessments cause many learners to be pushed out of schools and is causing some parents not to send their children to school" (p. 2).

Many parents in Solomon Islands regard this situation with concern (Dorovolomo, 2005; Pollard, 2005).

The findings also indicate that the pressure of time to cover the curriculum coupled with parental pressure obliges teachers to do extra coaching. It also puts more emphasis on the examinable subjects rather than the whole curriculum, with some teachers tending to cover only certain parts of the curriculum and leave out the other non-examinable parts of the curriculum. Moreover, this practice results in teaching and learning becoming teacher-centred rather than learner-centred, meaning that, as Simanu-Klutz (1997) states: “students tend to become passive receivers of knowledge handed down by teachers, rather than active seekers of problems to be solved” (p.1). Consequently, memorising of facts and figures is common in the school system. This is similar to Jatta’s (2009) findings that learning in developing countries is predominantly about memorising facts and figures from an overloaded curriculum with outdated content. The outcome of being taught outdated school curricula and content is that students leave school insufficiently skilled to be productive in their rural communities and to meet the demands of the world of work.

The study findings also showed that there is a need to contextualise teaching and learning to students’ potential and interests. This supports what Nabobo (1998) and Thaman (1993, 2009) suggest, that local education systems need to consider teaching and learning patterns that are harmonious with local and indigenous ways. This implies the identification of students’ potential, talent and interests and then applying the appropriate teaching and learning strategies to suit their learning needs. Additionally, the issue of taking into account students’ different learning abilities and potentials essentially indicates the need for teaching and learning to be contextualised (Jones, 1998; Jowett, 1998; Naidu, 2005; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009, Sanga, 2000; Teaero, 1999, 2002; Thaman, 1993, 2000, 2009; Veramu, 1998). For instance, in the Pacific Island countries there are suggestions for teaching and learning practices to take into consideration the social and cultural contexts of students. This may be because the predominant teaching and learning practice tends to be western-based and incompatible with Pacific Island pupils’ way of learning

(Nabobo, 1998; Thaman, 1993, 2009). The challenge in harmonising western teaching and learning paradigms with indigenous teaching and learning practice is becoming an issue in the formal school system. This could be one reason why students find it difficult to have meaningful learning experiences in the schooling system in the Pacific Island countries, including Solomon Islands.

5.3.2 Poor preparation of students for the future

The findings of the study revealed that the educational policy and practice in the Community High School does not develop the majority of students' potential for life. This is congruent with some studies highlighting that the majority of students' educational needs are not catered for (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fakaia, 2005; Treadaway, 2005). Though the education policy in Solomon Islands emphasises the development of all students' potential for life, to become self-reliant and useful citizens in their communities (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008), this is not happening. This poses the question of what type of curriculum will cater for and be appropriate for all students?

The findings also indicated that education for life includes the holistic development of students' potential. The present findings are consistent with Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2008), "which advocates the development of the physical, mental, social and religious aspects of life of all children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion and location" (p.14). Importantly, such a view appears to be similar to Snyder et al., (2008) recommendation that "education in its wholeness is more than education for success in the world of work and career but also about making a difference in enhancing the life-success potentials of all" (p. 5). They further suggest that education should encompass the essentials of human development, such as caring, humility and citizenship, for the common good of all, locally and globally. Such educational outcomes are not being achieved, which is why the participants see the Community High Schools as not preparing all students for life.

The participants also mentioned that what they perceive as the initial aim of the Community High Schools, that is, to prepare students to become self-reliant and useful in their communities after they finished secondary education, was not happening at all. Many studies have suggested that education in the form of schooling essentially encompasses making a positive difference in all students' lives which enables them to become useful in their communities regardless of their age and gender (Fink, 2005; Fullan, 1993, 2001). Similarly, this study's participants considered that Community High Schools should develop their students in such a way that they could give something back to their communities as useful, productive and responsible citizens.

5.3.3 Limited resources

The study findings highlighted the limited resources in Community High Schools. Such resources include school buildings, specialised classrooms, teaching and learning resources, text books, tools, and trained teachers. Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2004, 2005, 2008) and Treadaway, (2002) also describe the lack of required resources in most of the country's Community High Schools. It has been attributed to the government's inability to provide the necessary resources for the increasing number of Community High Schools established throughout the nation. Initially, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development set out policy criteria for establishing Community High Schools; however, pressure from parents and communities resulted in the establishment of Community High Schools without fulfilling the policy criteria (Fakaia, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004; 2005, 2008; Pollard, 2005). The criteria include building the schools in high population catchment areas, and adequate school buildings and other resources. Complying with the cost-sharing formula proposed by Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is seen as a national duty for all stakeholders, as part of becoming more involved in the development of the education system. It is therefore viewed as a decentralisation function for all stakeholders, particularly the Education Authorities, parents and communities, to have a bigger role in the school system, particularly in the Community High Schools. The participants saw this cost-sharing formula

initiative as a way to address the issue of lack of resources. However, according to the teachers and parents it was not really working. It appears that the parents are realising that the concept of Community High School is not as simple as they had expected. It is a complex concept that requires partnership amongst all stakeholders.

The study found that the limited resources had a negative effect on the teaching and learning process and was seen as contributing to the lack of preparation of students for life. That is, students' potential and interests were not enhanced and developed as expected. The teachers mentioned that the lack of resources hindered them from effectively enhancing the teaching and learning practice, encouraging them instead to emphasise theoretical aspects of the examinable curriculum. In the case of practical subjects, it is becoming increasingly common for Community High Schools to teach only theoretical aspects without practical skill development (Fakaia, 2005; Pollard, 2005; Treadaway, 2002). This suggests that Community High Schools are finding it difficult to effectively engage students in their learning. This could be one reason why many students leave Community High Schools ill-prepared for adult life.

5.4 Democratic school leadership practice

The findings of this study and the literature reveal that democratic leadership practice that is shared, collaborative and interactive is important for the positive development of Community High School as they face changing and challenging times (Beerel, 2009; Gronn, 2002). This is because school leadership that encourages and promotes democratic, collaborative and relational aspects tends to enhance students' learning (Beerel, 2009; Gronn, 2002). The teachers saw democratic leadership as the art of encouraging more involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making processes on matters pertaining to the learning of students. This can be viewed as the empowerment of teachers, students, parents and communities on matters that require their voice (Snyder et al., 2008). This may be because teachers have observed and experienced in the school leadership practice does not encourage shared decision-making. Akao (2008) and Malasa (2007) found that the schooling system in Solomon Islands is hierarchical with most decisions made at the top by the Principal and

Deputy Principal, and the teachers are then usually asked to formalise it for implementation, with little room for collaboration and interaction.

As highlighted by West-Burnham (2003) and Sergiovanni (2001), shared and collaborative leadership practice can be a prerequisite for aligning all stakeholders towards a common vision and goal. Such perspectives may be perceived as essential for encouraging and promoting shared and collaborative leadership practice in the development of Community High Schools. Snyder et al., (2008) say that “a partnership model of power is necessary now for shared leadership and accountability, one that distributes resources and decision-making among all role groups in education for transforming the lives of many students” (p.xvi) as a way of addressing the complexities of evolving education systems. The teachers believe that having wider consultation amongst the stakeholders on how to address issues relating to preparing students for life should be encouraged and promoted (Pollard, 2005). For example, the teachers and Education Officers highlighted the need to openly discuss important educational issues facing the school system. Also, the teachers, parents and Education Officers saw all stakeholders as accountable for making the education system more responsive to the needs of all students rather than the few. This agrees with Theoharis’ (2009) recommendation that school leadership needs to encourage and promote equal access, equity and social justice in all aspects of the school programmes.

Another issue identified in this study was the importance of establishing good relationships amongst the teachers, students, parents and communities. This is in agreement with Beerel (2009), Sanga and Walker (2005) and West-Burnham’s (2003) suggestion that establishing and maintaining a cordial relationship amongst the school, parents and communities is important for student learning. The teachers saw this as the role of leadership the nurturing and development of mutual relationships and connections amongst all stakeholders in order for them to work together as a team towards a common vision and goal. This may be because they see such a relationship as a demonstration of the interdependency of all stakeholders for the

positive development of students. It also indicates that education of students is a holistic process that requires all stakeholders' involvement.

5.4.1 Mutual school community partnership

The findings also indicated that having an effective school community partnership is pivotal to the development of Community High Schools. This supports the findings of Bender and Heystek (2003), Gelstrophe, (2003), Sergiovanni (2000) and West-Burnham (2003), suggesting that there is increasing advocacy for schools to work in partnership with parents and communities. The teachers commented that education in the form of personal human development and learning takes place not only in the school but at all times, including at home. As West-Burnham (2003) points out, learning also take places through informal social and cultural interactions with parents and the community. The teachers and Education Officers saw parents as the first educators of their children, with tremendous influence on children's basic human development. Education of children appears to be a collaborative and holistic undertaking that requires the involvement of parents and community (Bataineh & Nur-Awaleh, 2005; Gelstrophe, 2003; West-Burnham, 2003).

Furthermore, some scholars advocate giving voice and creating space for teachers, students, parents and communities to engage in reflection and dialogue about how they can enhance students' educational needs (Snyder et al., 2008). In the past, children's education has been perceived as the responsibility of schools. This could be because many of the parents had very little education and did not see it as their role to involve themselves in the education of their children. However, this is changing. For example, the school does its part in developing the students while at school and the parents are to encourage and provide a suitable environment for their children to do homework. The lack of school community partnership may contribute to the failure to achieve of many school dropouts. In the past, children's education has been perceived as the responsibility of schools.

While the concept of school community partnership has been a practice in many countries for some time, in the Solomon Islands it is a new concept. This may be because of the recent introduction of Community High Schools that are day schools

situated within the communities. The teachers, parents and Education Officers in this study commented on the lack of awareness of their role in developing Community High Schools. This could also be why many parents and communities lack an understanding of the education system. The parents elaborated that they prefer to work collaboratively with the school on matters relating to their children's educational needs despite a limited understanding of the education system. Moreover, although the concept of school community partnership was quite new to the parents, their advocacy for such a relationship indicates their desire to see their children become useful and productive members of their communities. Pollard (2005) says, "The creation and expansion of most Community High Schools was due to the parents and communities' initiative and participation" (p.177). This suggests that the parents are eager to render support towards the learning of students in whatever ways they can. In addition, such a partnership makes it possible for the school and parents to share information on the students' academic performance, potential and interests to develop for their future.

The participants commented that the concept of school community partnership is required for the teaching and learning of social and cultural knowledge, skills and values. This is congruent with what Thaman (2009) suggests, that to ignore learners' culture in teaching and learning can be seen as unethical. Importantly, Sanga (2000) suggests that the ideological purpose of education is also to transmit the culture of the society within which that education is placed. This highlights the importance of considering the social and cultural aspects of the students and their communities. Snyder et al., (2008) say that schools need to:

...keep a sense of connection to community, moral, social and family values and cultural heritage at the forefront of students' human development. Failure to do so may result in a future lacking in humanitarian values and sense of community connectedness. (p. 184)

The participants raised these points. For example, the teachers said that people with local knowledge and village expertise could be encouraged to come to the school and teach the students and teachers some of the cultural and traditional knowledge, skills

and values. These might include local and traditional methods of conservation, gardening, fishing, carving weaving, and building, and ways of showing respect and maintaining peace and harmony in their communities. This is seen as essential for preventing students from losing the social and cultural knowledge, skills and values of their communities. As Malasa (2007) highlighted, many students coming out of the education system are decontextualised from their communities and therefore find it hard to understand their traditional social and cultural values. This is one likely explanation for why many students are drifting to urban centres like Honiara.

5.4.2 A strong school committee

The findings of the study indicated that a strong school committee was important for the teaching and learning process that takes place in schools. This supports what Land (2002) and the Ministry of Education (2009) suggest, that school committees as the governing bodies of schools are responsible for the educational practice that takes place in schools. While in some countries this body is referred to as the School Board of Trustees in the Solomon Islands it is called the Board of Management or the School Committee, and is the governing body of all schools including Community High Schools. It is responsible for the development of the school vision, mission, policies, school strategic direction and charter, in consultation with the parents and communities. This implies that school committees oversee the overall governance of the schools and ensures that all students have access to quality education, and explains why there are calls for the school committees to ensure schools govern in the best interests of students and parents (Land, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010).

Another finding that emerged was that the school committee is seen by the participants as a bridge that links the school, parents and communities on matters relating to the teaching and learning practice that occurs in the school. This is similar to the findings of Bush (2002), Land (2002), Leithwood et al., (1999), Ministry of Education (2009, 2010) and Robinson et al., (2003), that the boards of trustees are to encourage and promote the involvement of parents and the local communities in the positive development of students. Additionally, the school committees are perceived

by the teachers and parents as the main agent in encouraging and promoting the alignment of the schools, parents and communities' views on matters pertaining to teaching and learning practice. This explains the participants' advocacy of a strong school committee. School committees may be seen as the main agents that make all stakeholders, schools, parents and communities, education authorities and the Ministry of Education recognise and support the interdependence of one another in the success of students.

5.5 Future aspirations

The study findings showed that the participants would like to see the majority or all students able to develop their potential beyond secondary education. This suggests that the traditional perception and practice of schools need to give way to more adaptable approaches to suit students' individual educational needs. Importantly, Snyder, et al., (2008) highlight that "the missions of schools have to change so that students coming out of the school system can become citizens who are both knowledgeable and skillful and who care about the human community and its sustainability" (p. 4). Such perspectives are seen as appropriate for shaping the education system in Solomon Islands to cater for all students' educational needs, in accordance with the country's millennium development goals. This supports the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2004, 2005, 2008) requirement for all students to have access to education that develops their potential. For this to happen would require changes in education policy especially the curriculum and assessment framework and practice. Pollard (2005) says, "The growing disillusionment with the education system has some parents choosing not to send their children to school at all" (p.169), which essentially questions the relevance of the education system. That is, school will not prepare students for life if the overly academic curriculum is not altered to accommodate the educational needs of the majority (Beuka, 2008; Dorovolomo, 2005; Fito'o, 2008; Treadaway, 2002). Moreover, there is a need to review technical and vocational education and training (in the Rural Training Centres) and tertiary education, if education policy and practice are to be made more compatible with Solomon Islands social, cultural, economical

and political contexts (Akao, 2008; Fito'o, 2008; Pollard, 2005; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004).

5.5.1 More Rural Training Centres

This study found there was advocacy for the development of Rural Training Centres (RTCs) to absorb some of the students coming out of the education system. This finding is in agreement with Dorovolomo (2005), Fakaia (2005), Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2004) and Treadaway (2002), who suggest raising the profile of Rural Training Centres through the development of a uniform curriculum and course programme for all RTCs. Previously, as Pollard (2005) has noted, "Vocational education has not been given the priority it might deserve in a rural and primarily subsistence-based society such as Solomon Islands" (p. 170). Currently, some of the training centres offer their own curricula and course programmes (Fakaia, 2005). The practical and life skills based subjects offered at Rural Training Centres are useful and applicable in rural contexts; however, the current small number of Rural Training Centres appears to enrol very few students. The participants supported the establishment of more Rural Training Centres. Many people have a low opinion of the Rural Training Centres as they are perceived to be producing low skilled graduates. This may be because there is a preference for higher paid careers that are academically oriented (Beuka, 2008). This is not realistic within the Solomon Islands context. Another possible explanation may be because of the vocational education provided by the Rural Training Centres is perceived as an option for those whom the formal education system has failed (Pollard, 2005).

An issue that emerged from this study is that the emphasis on academic subjects in primary and secondary schools may have caused students and parents to have a low opinion of practical skill-based subjects. This is similar to findings of Dorovolomo (2005), Fakaia (2005) and Treadaway (2002), who found emphasis on academic subjects makes students regard those subjects as the most important subjects. This may explain why many students do not want to attend the Rural Training Centres when they leave secondary school. A balanced curriculum that puts equal emphasis on academic and practical skill development may gradually reverse the perception of an academic curriculum as the only route to employment and economic wellbeing.

More importantly, there is a need for a change in mindset, to see secondary academic and practical skills as pivotal to nurturing all students' potential for their survival and sustainability and that of their communities.

5.5.2 Expansion of tertiary education

As highlighted by the teachers and Education Officers, there is very limited opportunity available for students in the tertiary education sector. This is another social justice issue. This is in agreement with Beuka (2008). The Solomon Islands has only two tertiary education institutions in the Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and The University of the South Pacific Centre. These cater for the more academically capable students. Many school dropouts have limited chances to access tertiary education, and this can label some of them as failures. Furthermore, the high unemployment rate (UNDP, 1996) suggests that many school dropouts' opportunities for employment are minimal, which limits their opportunities to become self-reliant and productive. The high birth rate will only increase this problem. Beuka (2008) is correct in describing as very minimal the tertiary education opportunities in the Solomon Islands.

This clearly means that entry to tertiary institutions is very competitive. The two tertiary institutions have their own enrolment and entry requirements. In the 1980s and early 1990s the minimum entry requirement to SICHE was completion of Year 9 upwards. From the late 1990s, the minimum entry requirement has been Year 12 and 13 and those with the highest grades have greater access. In the case of Year 11 only those with exceptionally high grades have some chance to access tertiary education. This clearly provides easier access for the academically capable students and very limited access for the less academically able. Although there are some avenues for Year 9-13 to upgrade at USP, the high fees involved limit many students from further education, which further limits the opportunities for many students. This is a social justice issue.

5.5.3 Inappropriate education policies

When asked about what hinders the preparation of all students for life, the teachers and Education Officers identified education policy as the obstacle to the promotion of social justice in the school system. This is supported by what Akao (2008), Malasa (2007) and Pollard (2005) describe as inappropriate education policies, particularly curriculum and assessment policies. Though there is emphasis on the need for equal access to education as the goal of education policy to enable all students to develop their potential (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2004, 2005, 2008), this is not happening. This agrees with Akao's (2008) statement that "the Education Act is in dire need of review to accommodate the changing needs of the national education system" (p. 6).

Another important finding is that education policy, particularly curriculum and assessment policies and the Act (1976) that governs the education system, appears to be incompatible with the country's pace of change in terms of population growth, high unemployment rate, development priorities and issues of social justice and equity. As Pollard (2005) has noted, "Education was perceived to lack clear direction and philosophy" (p. 175). Clearly, the high dropout rate reflects the inappropriateness of education policy generally. There is a need to involve teachers, parents and communities in decision-making regarding the education system as they are the implementers and the policy target groups rather than confining policy formulation to those such as politicians and their education advisers. The National Examinations and Selections Unit (NESU) of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development has also stressed the need to change assessment policy (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2009). More importantly, there is a need for rational and accountable review and analysis of educational policy rather than its being based on expediency or political preference (Luteru & Teasdale, 1993).

5.6 Summary

The above discussion has highlighted how the current educational policy and practice affects the Solomon Island school system. In particular, it has identified and discussed aspects of teachers, students, parents and Education Officers' experiences

and views of what the Community High School model does to encourage and promote social justice in terms of students' access to secondary education, curriculum, teaching and learning practice, preparing students for life, managing the school and the future prospects. This study's findings are significant in at least three ways. They reveal that there is greater access to secondary education than before. They identify the negative impacts of the current academic curriculum coupled with lack of resources on the majority of students' preparation for life. They demonstrate that current teaching and learning practice favours only the few academically capable students.

Most importantly, the study has highlighted the significant effect of the academically oriented education system inherited from the former colonial era with minimal changes to suit the Solomon Islands context. This suggests that the school system will continue to cater for the few academically capable students while the majority of students' educational needs are marginalised. The education policy, particularly curriculum and assessment policies need to change to cater for all students' educational needs. The predominantly formal academic education system needs to evolve to a more balanced and holistic school system that hinges on a responsive and balanced curriculum encompassing academic and vocational education to cater for all students.

The notion of social injustice for the under-served thus appears to be present within the education system. In this case, the under-served constitute the majority of students in the Solomon Islands. The concern now is how the education system can evolve to cater for the majority of students. These are issues for all teachers, parents, communities, leaders, education authorities and the Ministry of Education and Resources Development, especially the government leaders who are policy makers. Further studies on the topic are therefore recommended.

The concluding section of this report gives further suggestions for future research, notes the limitations of this research, and makes recommendations about what can be done to address the issues arising from the study.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

These findings of this study add to the growing body of literature on the issue of social justice on the education system in developing countries - especially students in the Pacific region, and in particular Solomon Islands. The current findings add substantially to our understanding of the education system in Solomon Islands and especially how it favours the few able students while the majority of students' educational needs are at the periphery. As such, the study has gone some ways towards enhancing our understanding of how the education system perpetuates social injustice in the school system. This research will serve as a base for future studies, especially for educational leaders and scholars from Solomon Islands and other Pacific Islands who are advocates of social justice pertaining to the school system.

6.2 Limitations of the current study and further research

On reflection, there are limitations related to this research. First, the current study included the experiences, perceptions and expectations of teachers, students, parents in an urban area. Teachers, students and parents in other provinces and rural schools, and their experiences, perceptions and expectations may or may not be similar to those teachers, students and parents in urban counterparts. A second limitation was that I was unable to engage other Community High School principals, teacher, students and parents due to transport difficulties. People from other Community High Schools might contribute other view- points especially in reference to the perceptions and expectations of the Community High Schools curriculum and teaching and learning practice. Therefore, further research on Community High Schools needs to be done so as to include all students' educational needs and context. Rural Community High Schools in particular need to be studied so that all stakeholders can really get a clearer picture about the relevant educational needs of all students in Solomon Islands. Also, further research needs to be done on how parents and

communities can be involved in curriculum development, a bottom-up curriculum development approach to reduce the social justice issue in the education system.

6.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. These are outlined below.

1. It is recommended that to address the imbalance in the curriculum offered in including Community High Schools there is a need to review curriculum policy and assessment. There should be equal emphasis on academic and practical skill based subjects in terms of assessment, to provide equal opportunities for all students to develop their potential for life. Though there is a shift from objective based curriculum to an outcome based curriculum, more educational awareness still needs to be done in order to make the shift achievable, realistic, tangible and measurable in terms of outcomes. More emphasis needs to be on developing all students' potentials.
2. It is also recommended that there is a need to change Solomon Islands societal perception of formal academic achievement and success as the only route for employment, survival and success. This implies the planning, organising and implementing of awareness programmes about the education system and what education for life means to break the mentality across all sections of society from policy makers down to the rural communities.
3. It is recommended that the government establish effective collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Education authority, schools, parents and communities on how to make the education policies and practice promote social justice in the education system. Foremost, the principals associations, teachers associations, parents and communities need to work collaboratively on pushing for a change in the education system. Parents and communities should also be involved in curriculum planning and development in the Solomon Islands. This would require the encouragement of bottom-up

approach in the development of the education system policy, particularly in curriculum planning and development and school practice.

4. It is recommended that there is a need to establish stronger school community partnership for the positive development of Community High Schools in matters relating to student learning. This would include providing opportunities for schools particularly teachers and parents to collaboratively discuss and share information on students' performance, potentials and interests so as to focus on developing them rather than superficially concentrating on unrealistic and unachievable expectations. For example, academic academically capable students may be encouraged to pursue academic curriculum while less able students can be encouraged to focus on the Technical and Vocational Education and life skills component of the curriculum.

5. It is also recommended that the government demonstrate its awareness of the importance of Rural Training Centres by developing them. There is a need for an expansion of Rural Training Centres to cater for the increasing number of school leavers and interested adults. Such recognition needs to encompass educational awareness of the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training offered by Rural Training Centres nationally in urban and rural areas.

6.4 Conclusion

It is hoped that the findings of this research will be useful for all stakeholders of the education system especially the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, The Ministry of Planning, Education Authorities, School Boards, School leaders, teachers, students, parents and communities. To bring about change regarding the social justice issue of equal access and equity for all students to education to develop their potentials for life, will need understanding, hard work, commitment and dedication from all stakeholders. It is hoped that the key findings of

this study may start to initiate some positive steps towards remedying this social injustice.

There are a number of important changes which need to be made. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and Education authorities need to work together with schools, school boards, teachers, students, parents and communities on a more relevant education policy and practice to address the social justice issue of equal access for all students to relevant education. Although this is one solution, the mindset which prefers the formal academic curriculum coupled with the highly selective, competitive and pyramidal education could continue to influence education policy and practice. All stakeholders must work to change the notion of education from one that privileges the few to a fairer one that gives all students access to relevant education. While it takes time to formulate relevant education policy to guide such practice, the immediate task is to encourage and empower Community High Schools and communities to undertake a collaborative school community practice that caters for all students' educational needs within their contexts by means of a balanced curriculum. It is becoming a practice in the Solomon Islands that policy development happens after the practice has been established. This was the case with the Community High Schools, for which the concept was implemented without a policy framework being in place until 2010.

Bureaucratic, structural and communication complexities can hinder the timely process of formulating relevant education policy to promote social justice in the education system. Some of the barriers need to be removed. One of the tasks is to encourage the involvement of all stakeholders in policy development especially those involved in implementation and affected by the policy - the schools, particularly the teachers, students, parents and communities. The decision making process that confines decision making to those at the top of the hierarchy needs to change. More importantly, more participation and collaborative decision making amongst all stakeholders also requires the voice of the least heard stakeholders who are implementers and policy target groups, the schools, teachers, students, parents and communities regardless of gender, to promote social justice in the school system.

Addressing social justice issues in the Solomon Island's education system should start with exploring the schools, teachers, students, parents and communities' experiences, views and expectations of the educational needs of their students and communities. There is a need to strike a balance between academic and vocational skill based subjects to provide a holistic and achievable education outcome that caters for all students. Therefore, an effective partnership amongst all stakeholders in pursuit of a relevant curriculum and assessment policy and practice to ensure all students have access to relevant education in Solomon Islands is essential.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Solomon Islands Research Application Form

SOLOMON ISLANDS

FORM RA

RESEARCH APPLICATION

1. NAME

2. ADDRESS(es) (if more than one give all)

3. Curriculum Vitae

4. Subject(s) to be studied.

5. Areas/locality where research work is to be conducted.

6. Funding

- a. Who is funding this Research?
- b. What is the level of funding?

7. Method of Research

8. My Research will involve Please tick

Filming	Collecting Sample/Specimen	
Recording		
Photographing	Others (Please specify)	x

Others:

9. Arrangements for Accommodation in the place(s) of Research

10. How will the research results be used? List

11. List benefits of Research to Solomon Islands.

12. Name and Address of any person/organization/institution who is willing to assist you while you are doing your research. (A letter from local host will be useful).

13. How long will the research take? Specify dates if possible.

14. Any additional specific information you consider useful for our perusal of your application may be described below.

15. Give us two referees certifying your research application and background. (Two separate statements expected) refer to references or support letters attached).

1. Name :

Address :

2. Name :

Address:

16. Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 2: Research Permit

THE RESEARCH ACT 1982 (No.9 of 1982)

RESEARCH PERMIT

Permission is hereby given to:

1. **NAME:** James Memua

2. **COUNTRY:** Solomon Islands

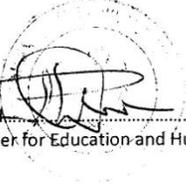
3. **To undertake Research** in "The experiences, perception and expectations of the Principals, Teachers, Students and parents on the Community high School model.

4. **Places of Research:** Makira /Ulawa Province

5. Province: Makira Province

6. Conditions:

- a) To undertake research only in the subject area's specified in 3 above.
- b) To undertake research only in the ward (s) and province(s) in 4 and 5 above.
- c) To observe with respect at all times the local customs and the way of life of the people in the area in which the research is carried out.
- d) You must not at any time, take part in any political or missionary activities or land disputes.
- e) You must leave 4 copies of your final research in English with the Solomon Islands Government Ministry responsible for research at your own expense.
- f) A research fee of SBD300.00 and deposit sum of \$200.00 must be paid in full or the research permit will be cancelled. (see section 3 subject 7 of the Research Act).
- g) The permit is valid until 31/05/2010 provided all conditions are adhered .
- h) No live species of plant and animals may be taken out of the without approval from relevant authorities
- i) A failure to observe the above conditions will result in automatic cancellation of this permit and the forfeit of your deposit,

Signed: 
Minister for Education and Human Resource Development

Date: 8/3/10

Appendix 3: Invitation letter to teachers and principal

(English version)

4/40 York Street
Hillcrest
Hamilton 3216
New Zealand
5th January 2010

Dear _____

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project

I wish to invite you to participate in a research project I am undertaking under the supervision of Associate Professor Jane Strachan at the University of Waikato, School of Education. The research is part of my Master of Education degree.

The research intends to explore the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the teachers, students and parents of the Community High School model. I believe, by exploring the teachers, students and parents' experiences, perceptions and expectations, the research findings will shed some light on the overlooked core educational issues and the obstacles and constraints that hinder the Community High School model from preparing students for life. The question I intend to focus my research on is:

Does the Community High School model prepare students for life?

It is hoped that the findings can be used as a platform for more contextualized educational policy framework analysis, formulation and implementation in terms of the Community High School model leadership and educational practice in pursuit of preparing students for life. Essentially preparing students for life is pivotal for them and their communities to survive, thrive and sustain in the face of changing and challenging times locally, nationally and globally.

The research will involve interviewing two principals, three teachers, three students from one Community High Schools and three parents from their surrounding

communities. The research process will involve a face to face interview at your school or place of your choice between 19th April and 21st May 2010. The interview will be conducted either in English or pidgin and will be tape recorded and transcribed after the interview. Each interview session is expected to last approximately one hour. A copy of the transcribed interview will be returned to you for checking, confirming and adding any other detail you believe as relevant. The research project will strictly adhere to the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008) and the pertinent sections and requirements of the Research Act of 1982 of Solomon Islands (Research Act, 1982, Solomon Islands) which provides guidelines governing any research activity in the Solomon Islands. If you agree to participate and at later stage you decide not to, you can withdraw from the project at any stage up to the point that you confirm the accuracy of your interview transcript no later than 21st May 2010.

Any information shared will be solely used for academic purposes of this research, unless your permission is obtained for other uses. Neither you nor your school will be referred to by names, only identification codes or pseudonyms.

In the Solomon Islands, it can be difficult to ensure complete anonymity because of the communal culture. However, I will do my utmost to protect your privacy.

An electronic copy of the thesis will become widely available, as Masters theses are required to be lodged in the Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database.

I am aware of how busy you are. However, I do hope you will consider being part of this research project. For enquiries please feel free to contact me through mobile no: 00642102981930 or email: jm207@student.waikato.ac.nz. Alternatively you can contact my Supervisor Associate Professor Jane Strachan at phone:006478384500 Ext 6356 or email: jane@waikato.ac.nz.

If you are willing to participate, please indicate this by signing the consent form attached and return to me before Friday 16th April 2010.

Yours faithfully

James Memua

Appendix 3: Invitation letter to students and parents

(pidgin version)

4/40 York Street
Hillcrest
Hamilton 3216
New Zealand
5th January 2010

Dear _____

Subjek: Invitasion fo paticipati lo research projek

Mi hapi fo invitem iu fo tek pat lo risech projek mi duim unda supavison blo Professor Jane Strachan lo University of Waikato sukulu blo Edukeson. Risech ia hemi pati blo masta digri blo mi.

Risech ia hemi fo findem sa'ave tinting wetem lukuluku blo olketa pricipol, tisa, sukulu pikinini wetem parensi lo Komuniti Hae Sukulu. Mi karem stron fala tinting taem mi findem sa'ave tinting wetem lukluk blo olketa prinsipol tisa sukulupiki wetem parensi bae makem umi lukusa'ave lo samfala gud samting fo lanem wetem samfala hemi stopem komiuniti fo no preparem gud fala sukulu pikinini fo laefu . Bik fala questen mi bae fokasem risech lohem i

Wasue Komuniti Hae Sukulu hemi preparem sukulupikinini fo laefu tu ?

Mi hopu wanem risech i findem bae sa'ave stap olsem kaetii lani fo wakem gudfala sukulu polisi fo wakem gudfala waka blo olketa Komuniti Sukulu for makem olo sukulu pikinini lanem samtin bae helpem olgeta lo laef blo olgeta wetem komuniti blo olketa lo pelesi wetem kaonteri na big fala wol ia.

Risech ia bae hemi intaviu wan fala prinsipol tirifala tisa tirifala sukulu pikinini watem tirifala parensi. Bae hemi fasi to fasi intaviu lo sukulu olo pelesi ufula na bae chiusum betwin 19th Aproz kasem 21st mei 2010.

Intaviu bae lo langusi wea ufala sa'ave gud lo hem. Bae mi recotem ana transcripum afta intaviu. One fala intaviu bae hem takem one fala aoa. Kopi blo transcripu scriptia bae givim ufala fo chekem confirmem o adem ani ting you sa'ave hem fitim fo adem.

Risech projek bae folomu olgeta we'e blo University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (2008) wetem olgeta rulu fo

duim risech blo Risech Act of 1982 of Solomon Islands (Research Act, 1982, Solomon Islands wea hem guidem risech waka lo Solomon Islands. If u agrii for take parti ten u deciti fo no take parti u sa'ave widrau kasem taem u confirm ologeta intaviu transcipu lo 21st aprot 2010.

Everi informison iumi sharem bae usim fo risech ia o if u alaom fo olgeta nara samting. Namem blo u watem namem blo sukulu blo u bae no usim samfala coti na bae usim fo identificason.

Lo Solomon Islani, hemi hardi fo keepim sometin secreti becos lo communal bond. Buti mi bae duim besti blo mi for keepim privasi blo iu.

Electronic copi blo thesis bae becom availabal olsem Mastas theses olgeta requirem fo lodgem lo Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database.

Mi sa'ave u sa'ave busi olowe bati mi hop bae u sa'ave konsitarem fo tekepati lo risech projek ia. Fo iu sa'ave moa plis fil fri fo kontaktem me lo mobileno: 00642102981930 o emelem: jm207@student.waikato.ac.nz. O iu sa'ave kontaktem supavisa blo mi Associate Professor Jane Strachan lo telephoni: 006478384500 Ext 6356 or email: jane@waikato.ac.nz.

Sapos iu likem fo teke part, plis ritem nemu lo konsen fomu mi atachem ana retenem comu lo mi bifo Faraite 16th Aporol 2010.

Yours faithfully

James Memua

Appendix 4: Consent form for principal and teachers

(English version)

Dear James

I.....have read and understood:

(Please print your name)

1. The nature of the research project and have agreed to participate as requested.
2. The regulations governing this research project and grant consent for my interview to be tape recorded.
3. That my identity and that of my school will be kept anonymous and any information provided by me will be treated as confidential.
4. That my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time but up to the point where I confirm the accuracy of the interview transcript by 21st May 2010 and the analytical process begins.
5. In the Solomon Islands, it can be difficult to ensure complete anonymity because of the communal culture. However, I will do my utmost to protect your privacy.
6. An electronic copy of the thesis will become widely available, as Masters theses are required to be lodged in the Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database.

Signed..... Date.....

Appendix 4: Consent form for students and parents

(pidgin version)

Dear James,

Mi.....mi readim ana sa'ave gud fala

(Plis piritim / raitem nemu blo iu)

1. lo wanem na risech projek hemi abaot ana mi agri fo take pati olsem iu likem.
2. lo olgeta rulu fo duim risech ia ana gri fo intaviu blo mi fo tepu rekotem.
3. dati identiti blo mi wetem sukulu bae no mekemu eni wani sa'ave ana ani infomesoni mi givim bae no mekem eni wani sa'ave.
4. dati patisipesoni blo mi hemi volitari ana mi sa'ave wedrau lo ani timu bata kasem nomoa lo taemu mi konifemumi akiuresi blo intaviu taranscripu lo 21st Mei 2010.
5. Lo Solomon Islani, hemi hardi fo keepim sometin secreti becos lo communal bond. Buti mi bae duim besti blo mi for keepim privasi blo iu.
6. Electronic copi blo thesis bae becom availabal olsem Mastas theses olgeta requirem fo lodgem lo Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database.

Signed..... Date.....

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule.

Welcome statement and introduction to interview.....

Questions

1. What are the teachers, students and parents' experiences of Community High Schools?

- a) What are your experiences of how the Community High School model prepares students for life after secondary education?
- b) Does the Community High School model prepare students with the relevant knowledge, skills, competencies and values for life?
- c) What are your views on the educational curriculum offered at Community High Schools?
- d) What are your views on the teaching and learning practice in the school?
- e) What are some of the challenges and constraints that hinder Community High Schools from preparing students for life?

2. What expectations do the teachers, students and parents have of the Community High Schools?

- a) What expectations do you have of the Community High Schools?
- b) What knowledge, skills, competencies and values do you view as relevant to nurture and develop students for life?
- c) What is your opinion on how the school is able to meet the expectation of parents and students?
- e) Does the school committee work with the school Principal towards the common goal of preparing students for life?
- f) What is the relationship between the school and the school committee?
- g) What resources are needed?
- h) How does the Community High School model encourage and promote social justice in terms of the social and cultural values of their societies and communities?

3. What are the teachers, students and parents' views (perceptions) of the Community High School model and Rural Training Centre model?

- a) How does the Community High School model compare with the Rural Training Centres?
- b) How does the Community High School model's policy and practice compare with Rural Training Centres' policy and practice?

4. What are the teachers, students and parents' views (perceptions) of how the Community High School model can best be implemented?

- a) What are some of the knowledge, skills, competencies and values the Community High School model should nurture and develop in their leadership and educational practice?
- b) What are some of the ways the Community High School model can be nurtured and developed to cater for preparing the majority of students for life?
- c) What leadership and educational practices are appropriate for nurturing and developing Community High Schools?
- d) What are some of the ways to improve the Community High School model?

Prompts:

What do you mean by that?

Can you explain what you are referring to?

Can you give an example of that?

Why would you say that?

Do you have any other comments on that?

Appendix 6: The Core Research Question

What are the teachers, students and parents' experiences, perceptions and expectations of the Community High School model in Solomon Islands?