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**Inclusive Education in Fiji:
Pre-service and In-service Primary Education Teachers'
perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive Education**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Disability and Inclusion Studies

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by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a recent idea of the Ministry of Education Fiji, through which they hope to provide disabled children the opportunity to receive a quality education in mainstream schools. However, are pre-service and in-service primary education teachers in Fiji sufficiently trained to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher? The international literature claims that mainstream teachers, the key people to implement inclusive education, are least prepared and are unwilling to meet the educational needs of disabled children. Is this also true for Fijian teachers?

The aim of this research study was to gather Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education that has begun in some mainstream primary schools in Fiji and will gradually expand to other mainstream primary schools in the country. An interpretive paradigm guided the research methodology, since the purpose was to gather participants' perspectives and consensus of how prepared they are for inclusive education. A qualitative research approach which utilised a face-to-face semi-structured interview method was used to collect data. Twelve individuals were interviewed comprising of eight final year (Year 3) pre-service primary education teachers from two teacher training institutions, together with one inclusive education and three special education in-service teachers.

Data gathered from participants reveals that teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive education in Fiji and are enthusiastic about taking up the role of inclusive education teacher. This positive attitude was native to the understanding that disabled children have rights to a high quality education, and secondly, it was because of the experiences they had with this group of children and adults before, during and, for some, after their initial teacher training. However, all participants also perceive they have insufficient training and limited skills to teach disabled children. In keeping with international findings, this research initiative shows that teachers' positive attitudes weaken when they face an adverse environment such as large class size and lack of teacher support for daily teaching tasks.

These findings indicate that all trainee teachers must receive the opportunity to learn about, observe and practice teaching this group of children during their initial teacher training, so that they graduate having adequate skills to teach disabled children. Teachers must also work towards improving their professional skills after initial training, as the data reveals there is high chance that teachers' attitudes will deteriorate further when they address the challenges of time and classroom management.

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GOD BLESS YOU ALL

DEDICATIONS

Primarily this thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mrs Prabha Wati and the late Mr Surendra Singh, my wife Evanzling Singh, my siblings, and to all the special education teachers and children with special needs in Fiji.

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.0 Chapter overview

This chapter introduces the research setting. At the outset, it presents the provisions that the Fijian government and the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Fiji have made for inclusive education. This chapter discusses the Fijian Constitution and the rights of disabled people, the principles of inclusive education, convention and disability-specific legislation, and the disability-related policies. The background to this study and the research context is also presented in this chapter. The background section discusses the role of teachers, and teacher training, in Fiji. In addition to this, this chapter presents the history of special education in Fiji, definitions of disabled children/people in the Fijian context, special schools in Fiji, education practice for the disabled children in Fiji, and disabled children and their future. The impetus, aim, justification, significance, and scope of this study and its limitations are also presented. The chapter ends with an overview of this thesis.

1.1 Fiji in preparation for inclusive education

1.1.1 The Constitution and the rights of disabled people

The Fijian Government (2013), in Chapter 2, Section 42, Clause 1 and 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, states that:

A person with any disability has the right—to reasonable access to all places, public transport, and information; to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication; and to reasonable access to necessary materials, substances and devices relating to the person's disability.

A person with any disability has the right—to [the reasonable] adaptation of buildings, infrastructure, vehicles, working arrangements, rules, practices or procedures, to enable their full participation in society and the effective realization of their rights. (p. 26)

1.1.2 The principles of inclusive education

According to the Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (2013), Fiji has based the idea of inclusive education under the following four principles.

All children belong–this implies that the nearby mainstream schools should accommodate all children irrespective of their physical, sensory and intellectual condition.

All children can learn–this suggests that all disabled children can learn if given a suitable learning environment, necessary resources, proper stimulation and parental support. This also seems to infer that even though the learning style of some disabled children, for example those with intellectual impairment, differs from their non-disabled peers, the curriculum can still be reasonably adapted and modified by teachers to meet these children’s educational needs.

Disabled children have the right to participate–this infers that this group of children should receive the opportunity to live a barrier-free life.

Education is a lifelong journey–this indicates that it is never too late for disabled children to start learning.

The Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (2010) states that disability adds to the risk of poverty, and the state of poverty increases the risk of invalidity. This statement infers that disability and poverty are intertwined, and they both need to be looked at and dealt with equally to improve the lives of people behind them. Further, it sets the parameters for the call for the provision of a fully inclusive education system in Fiji.

1.1.3 Convention and disability-specific legislation

According to the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (2010), Fiji signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010. The Council add that the signing of the CRPD was a milestone achievement for it and their affiliated organisations, as well as all disabled people in Fiji. However, it could be argued that intensive advocacy needs to

be done, particularly outside of Suva, the capital city of Fiji, so that people start to recognise the existence of disabled people.

Even though the Fijian government has started to acknowledge the presence of individuals with disabilities, this group of people still need to be involved in all activities of life so that their abilities and appearance get recognised in society. Tavola and Whippy (2010) claim that disability is low on the policy agenda and consequently, this area of government spending receives only a meagre proportion of the national budgetary allocation.

Similarly, the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (2010) stresses that the passing of comprehensive legislation concerning disabled people and their integration in society is slow in Fiji, and as a result, stakeholders find difficulty in eradicating barriers that stop inclusion. An example is the inaccessibility in many of the buildings which provide the basic services to the people (Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, 2010). Nonetheless, Tavola and Whippy (2010) points out that Fiji is the only Pacific Island country that has disability-specific legislation: “the 1994 Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (FNCDP) Act” (p. 37). They add that the primary role of the FNCDP is to “serve as a coordinating mechanism on disability matters, formulate national disability policies and plans, mainstream disability into government functions and promote disability prevention measures” (p. 37).

1.1.4 Disability related policies

1.1.4.1 National disability policy

Fiji, in 2008, endorsed the National Disability Policy with an aim of providing a framework for addressing disability issues (Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, 2010). This initiative is the Fijian Government’s collective effort to develop an inclusive society for all, create awareness of the needs of people with disabilities, and identify and eradicate barriers that obstruct the full participation of disabled individuals in the social and economic life of Fiji.

1.1.4.2 Policy on special and inclusive education

The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Fiji, in 2010, endorsed the *Policy on effective implementation of special and inclusive education in Fiji* and subsequently reviewed and improved it to cover the needs of all disabled children (Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2013). An amended policy titled, *Policy on special and inclusive education*, which was made effective on 29 November 2016, has now replaced the old policy (Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2016). Through the new policy, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is calling on the mainstream schools to make the necessary changes within their schools to allow the enrolment of disabled children. Changes are proposed to meet the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) and the United Nations Development Agenda: Development for All (UN, 2007). These goals posit that teachers should be ready to assist and teach disabled children, as this group of children have the right to receive a quality education in an inclusive classroom. Given this, the content of the policy now covers a broader range of the rights of disabled children.

The purpose of the new policy is to permit disabled children to access quality education in any school of their choice in their neighbourhood (Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2016). Also, this policy will allow disabled children to have access to quality education that shall “reflect the spirit of equity, inclusion, access, progress and achievement of educational outcomes” (p. 2) that will guide and direct their lifelong learning. Hence, quality education will provide disabled children with the opportunity to have access to a quality life. The policy will see that all children receive the chance to learn together wherever possible regardless of their difficulties, disabilities or differences. The Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (2016) states that this policy reflects the rights of people with disabilities, which is in accordance to the CRPD. Further, this policy will facilitate meaningful assessment in all schools to identify challenges in inclusion that the schools are facing. The evaluation result will enable these schools to promptly receive the necessary support regarding staffing, learning and teaching resources, and infrastructure. Most importantly, the policy will help

strengthen the pre-service and in-service teacher training and prepare high quality teachers for mainstream as well as special schools.

1.2 Background to this study

1.2.1 The role of teachers

There is little doubt that teachers are the key people who can effectively and efficiently facilitate positive changes within their school for inclusive education to take place. Many people infer that the mainstream schools should be inclusive, and educators must be ready to take up the challenge of teaching and assisting disabled children. However, Sharma (2011) claims that the mainstream teachers, who are the key people to implement inclusive education, are the least prepared and are also reluctant to address the educational needs of disabled children. Most people would agree that teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education vary depending on the type of training they receive at teacher training institutions, their personal experiences, and their exposure to disabled children. This point is reiterated by Daveta (2009), who affirms that the "professionals ... have different perspectives on the inclusion of children with disabilities" (p. 18).

The Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (2007) claims that the Fiji National Curriculum Framework (official school curriculum in Fiji), is very flexible and can easily be adapted to suit the educational needs of disabled children in schools. However, Daveta's (2009) findings question whether the pre-service teachers who are in their final year of training at the teacher training institutions have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt the curriculum for disabled children who they will encounter and must teach at some point in time during their teaching career. She adds that the teacher training institutions should prepare teachers satisfactorily so that they can effectively and efficiently identify and teach disabled children in their classroom.

1.2.2 Teacher training in Fiji

Fiji currently has three registered primary school teacher training institutions that not only meet the quota of the primary level teachers for the schools in Fiji, but also a portion of teacher demands of the adjacent Pacific Islands.

Although being at the forefront to meet the quota of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Fiji for more qualified primary education teachers each year, it appears that these institutions' teacher training programs give very minimal focus to the preparation of teachers for inclusive education. A search on each of these primary school teacher training institutions' websites reveal that they only have one taught paper on inclusive education. Hence, the assumption is that teachers who graduate from these teacher training institutions may not have adequate knowledge about disabled children and inclusive education and, therefore, will be reluctant to take on the challenge of teaching disabled children. According to Ward (2013), teachers are the agents of change, and inclusive education can work well if teachers have the right perspectives and are prepared to take on the challenge of teaching disabled children.

1.3 The research context

1.3.1 History of special education in Fiji

According to the Pacific Disability Forum and Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (2011), non-governmental and charitable organisations in the mid-1960s were the primary influence and providers of disability services in Fiji. The Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (2010) assert that non-governmental and charitable organisations like Fiji Crippled Children's Society, the Fiji Red Cross Society, and the Society for the Blind were the forerunners of disability services in Fiji. These organisations started providing services to disabled children through the establishment of "special schools, community-based rehabilitation programs, advocacy groups and vocational institution" (Pacific Disability Forum & Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support, 2011, p. 4). It adds that the non-

governmental and charitable organisations who started specific special schools continue to own and operate them to date.

Special education in Fiji first started for children with physical disabilities, and gradually it was made available to children with hearing, vision, and intellectual impairments. Special education is now available to children with a broad spectrum of disabilities.

1.3.2 Definitions of disabled children/people in the Fijian context

The Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (2016) defines disabled children as those “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society” (p. 7). The severe physical conditions in these children adversely affect their natural capacity to the degree that they cannot receive education in mainstream school without additional support and special services. From a special education teacher’s point of view, a good example of additional assistance is when teachers give attention and one-to-one support to this group of children so that they can meet their educational and developmental needs. Moreover, in some cases, teacher-aides are assigned to a general education class so that they can provide additional support to disabled children. Similarly, special services also come in many different forms. An example of exceptional service for children with hearing impairment is the availability of qualified sign language interpreters who can effectively and efficiently interpret for them in an inclusive education classroom.

Moreover, the Fijian government, through the National Disability Policy, defines disabled people as those whose involvement in everyday life, as well as privileges of human rights, is limited. These limitations are because of their “long-term physical, mental, learning, intellectual and sensory impairments” (Government of Fiji, 2008, as cited in Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, 2010, p. 5).

1.3.3 Special schools in Fiji

Fiji currently has 16 special schools, of which one is an Early Intervention Centre that caters for the children with multiple disabilities whose ages range from eight months to eight years. The Early Intervention Centre in Suva (the capital city) aims to prepare disabled children for the mainstream classrooms, and it has managed to integrate several of their students into the nearby mainstream schools. The remaining disabled children, based on their disabling conditions transition into various special schools in the central division. Similarly, the other special schools around Fiji also aim to prepare disabled children for transition into mainstream schools.

The special schools in Fiji are located only in the town and city centres, and their accessibility excludes the majority of the disabled children who live in the outer islands and rural areas (See Figure 1.3.3). Therefore, strengthening of inclusive education seems important, as it may allow disabled children to receive education in their neighbourhood schools: the schools they would be attending if they did not have a disability. It is the aim of this research to add to the information relevant to the Fijian Government's commitment to inclusive education.

Key: ● Indicates towns and cities which have special schools

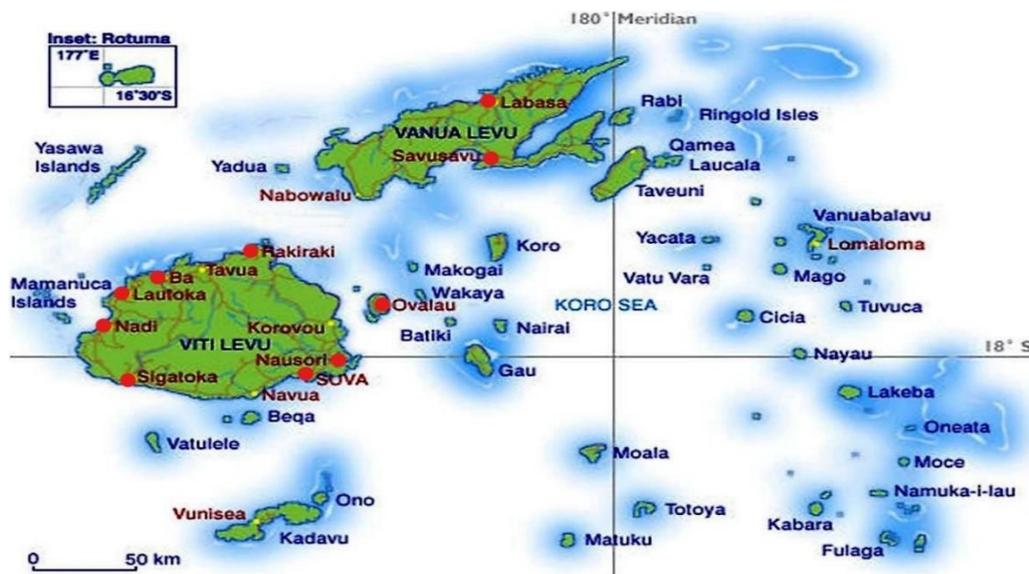


Figure 1.3.3: Location of special schools on the map of Fiji

Tourism Fiji (2009)

1.3.4 Education practice for the disabled children in Fiji

The trend in Fiji over the last four decades is that most of the disabled children are enrolled in special schools where individual education programs are used to help them meet their educational and developmental needs. Ultimately, on their teacher's recommendation, disabled children who have acquired the necessary literacy and numeracy skills are transitioned to mainstream schools. However, from personal experience and observation over the years, there appears to have been a shift in this practice. The Ministry of Education is now moving towards inclusive education, where mainstream schools are encouraged to enrol disabled children from their neighbourhood and make necessary adaptations within their school for continuous learning, teaching, and development. However, to meet this requirement, some educational practices may need to change.

According to the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons (2010), approximately 24% of disabled people identified in their 2010 survey did not attend school or were denied the opportunity to acquire further education. The finding was that the inaccessibility of the physical environment of many schools around the country, including the standard mode of teaching used in class, hinders the academic attainment of disabled children. Further, many disabled children stopped attending school or dropped out of school because of financial difficulties (Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, 2010). This scenario has changed, as the Fijian Government, through the Ministry of Education, now provides free education to all children from pre-school right up to Year 13. Disabled children also benefit from such provisions. Additionally, all children whose parents' annual income totals less than \$15,000 per annum are allowed to travel using public transport free of charge. Many of the parents have welcomed these initiatives.

1.3.5 Disabled children and their future

Despite numerous changes to the education system, the majority of disabled children still do not have access to proper education and are thus deprived of the opportunity to have a sustainable adulthood (Tavola & Whippy, 2010). According to these authors, there is a significant difference

between the services provided to disabled children and the non-disabled children. The services provided to disabled children are usually fragmented and are of low quality. The probable reason for this is that the service providers lack understanding about the various types of disabilities that exist in society and, thus, any coordination between them is adversely affected.

As Tavola (2012) points out, only a few disabled people are in a decision-making position at any level, and this lack of representation reflects the lack of empowerment in almost every aspect of their lives. It is the contention of this thesis that these scenarios can change if disabled children are fully accepted by the society, and are empowered and given the opportunity to receive education in their neighbouring school.

1.4 Impetus for the study

1.4.1 Personal experience as a special education teacher

Teaching disabled children has been and will always be a challenge as a special education teacher, especially when in most scenarios disabled children have varied developmental and educational needs and require an individualised education plan to meet these requirements. Nevertheless, special education advocates that all disabled children, despite the level of their disabling condition, have abilities that should be utilised to help respond to their needs. It is important to create opportunities for disabled children to socialise and receive education together with their non-disabled peers.

Disabled children have the right to education, and teachers should not live with the perception that one size fits all. Instead, programs should be tailor-made to help disabled children meet their developmental and educational needs. Nevertheless, this has never been that easy in Fiji because of the limited availability of resources. Teachers need to be ready to sacrifice personal time and use the naturally available resources to make teaching aids for disabled children's use. In special education, teachers also need to remain patient and win the hearts of disabled children so that they can help this group of children succeed.

Fiji has a multicultural society where people live with the norms and beliefs of their culture. Certainly, disabled children who enrol in special schools also come with their own cultural background. Therefore, one of the challenges for a special education teacher is to become well versed with the cultural background of every student in the class. On many occasions, the class is made up of children from various cultural backgrounds, and teachers should be mindful of all children's cultural backgrounds when designing programs and activities for them.

Through personal experience, I have observed that the special schools in Fiji are well established and are in a good position to create conducive learning environments where disabled children are accepted and given the opportunity to utilise their rights as citizens. However, outside of the special school environment, many of these children are segregated, neglected and deprived of their opportunity to participate in the society. The main reason for this behaviour is that many of the cultures in the society treat disability as a curse, and some even look at it as a punishment for the parents for the sins committed in the past.

Successful integration and the transition of disabled children into mainstream schools has always been a challenge due to the restrictive enrolment criterion of most of the mainstream schools. The mainstream schools want this group of children to have sufficient literacy and numeracy skills before they can be enrolled. In addition, many of the mainstream schools refuse to enrol disabled children in their school because of the fear that teachers are not trained and will not be able to handle and cater for the general needs of disabled children. Also, many of the mainstream schools are not physically accessible, and this has become one of the main excuses of head teachers and principals of mainstream schools for not accepting disabled children.

Overall, though disabled children may receive better treatment in special schools, the recommendation is that many of the disabled children should receive their education in mainstream schools because it is still a better learning environment than a segregated setting.

1.4.2 Interest in the research topic

There is no doubt that inclusive education is a response to diversity and prejudices that exist against disabled children in our modern society. Inclusive education has become part of the global agenda, and international organisations like UNESCO (1994, 2000) and the UN (2007) called on all governments to practice inclusive education in their mainstream schools. Inclusive education in Fiji is at an emerging stage, and the feeling is that a lot still needs to be done to take inclusive education to a level where it can start in all mainstream schools around the country.

Ward (2013) states that teachers are the change agents, and inclusive education can work well if teachers have the right attitude and skills, and are prepared to accept the challenge of teaching and assisting children with disabilities. Through personal experience, I have noticed that the primary education teachers in Fiji have a neutral view of inclusive education. Many feel disabled children's educational and developmental needs can only be met in special schools. Now that the Ministry of Education is calling on all mainstream schools to make the necessary changes within their schools to allow the enrolment and education of disabled children, it is crucial at this stage that an interrogation of pre-service and in-service primary school teachers' perspectives and their preparedness for inclusive education is carried out.

1.5 The aim of the study

The main purpose of this research is to gather data on pre-service and in-service primary school teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education that has begun in some mainstream primary schools in Fiji and will gradually extend to other mainstream primary schools.

1.5.1 The research question

This research is guided by the question, "what are the perspectives of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers on inclusive education, and how prepared are they to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher?"

The hope is that the data gathered will support the hypothesis that pre-service and in-service primary school teachers have a neutral attitude about inclusive education and are less prepared to take on the challenge of teaching disabled children in an inclusive classroom.

This research will ask participants questions about their personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education, professional opinions about inclusive education, training and their preparedness for inclusive education. Finally, participants will be asked questions to gather their opinions on the contemporary issues about inclusive education in Fiji.

1.6 Justification of the study

UNESCO (1994), through the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (SSFASNE) advocates that all disabled children must have access to mainstream classrooms which should be able to accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting their developmental and educational needs. SSFASNE further expresses that the mainstream schools with inclusive orientation are the most efficient way for “combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an [adequate] education to the majority of [the] children” (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix). Further, through SSFASNE, UNESCO is calling on all governments to make a systematic change to their teacher education program so that both the pre-service and in-service teachers can be prepared to address the developmental and educational needs of disabled children in mainstream schools.

Similarly, the United Nations (2006), with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is endorsing, protecting and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people with disabilities. The convention, giving particular emphasis to the education provisions, has asked governments to make the necessary changes in their state so that all disabled children can have full access to quality education and to society (United Nations, 2006). The convention also posits that all

disabled children's personal requirements should be acknowledged, and they should be given assistance promptly so that they can secure their future.

1.7 Significance of the study

This research will not only produce data on pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education but will also inform and enable the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, who is the major employer of teachers in Fiji, to facilitate necessary changes right from the grassroots level.

The research findings will provide the teacher training institutions with a basis from which they can review and reform their teacher education programs, and effect changes so that they prepare quality teachers who will be able to provide quality education to all.

The findings will also indicate the type of professional development programs that the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts will need to prepare and run to help develop the necessary skills in teachers who are already in the mainstream schools and are finding ways to cater for the disabled children.

The results will allow the universities to introduce or improve on the existing inclusive education in-service courses so that more teachers can be encouraged to upgrade their qualification to equip themselves for an inclusive classroom.

Lastly, perhaps the most important stakeholders will be the disabled children. They will benefit greatly if their teachers are better trained and well informed about inclusive education.

1.8 Scope of this study and the limitations

This research involved a total of twelve participants—eight pre-service final year (Year 3) primary education trainee teachers from two teacher training institutions in Fiji (four participants from each institution), and three junior in-service teachers from three different special schools (one participant from

each school), and one junior in-service teacher from an inclusive school. The special and inclusive education teachers were graduates from the third primary school teacher training institution. These participants were used in the research because they are important stakeholders in the inclusive initiative in Fiji, who can set the platform for inclusive education to start, be strengthened and retained in mainstream schools.

A semi-structured interview method was adopted to gather qualitative data from participants, and this thus raised the level of reliability of the results and finding of the study (For further discussion of the methodology, see Chapter 3).

During the study, several limitations arose, but they were all dealt with in a professional manner. Financing home-based research was a concern in the initial stage. Nevertheless, full travel and fifty percent of additional expenses were met by a NZAID scholarship. The valuable assistance given by the award is acknowledged. The second half of additional expenses came from personal savings. Secondly, the intention was to use participants from the three primary education teacher training institutions in Fiji in this research. Unfortunately, access to potential participants from the third teacher training institution was not possible due to their personal reasons. Thus, with the supervisor's advice and consent, the head teachers (principals) of three special and one inclusive education school in the central division were approached. A request was made to these head teachers so that four junior in-service teachers who were graduates of the third primary school teacher training institution could be recognised and invited to participate in the research. The understanding was that these junior in-service teachers would be able to provide similar information that this study intended to gather from the pre-service primary education teachers from the third teacher training institution.

1.9 Overview of this thesis

Five chapters make up this thesis. Chapter 1 has introduced and outlined the context of the study. Within this chapter, the scene of the research was set out with a discussion on what provisions the Fijian Government and the Ministry of Education Fiji have made in preparation for inclusive education. This chapter also presented the background to the study and the research context. Further, the section made the discussion on the impetus, aim, justification, significance, and scope of the study and its limitations. The chapter ends with a summary of the main highlights.

The relevant literature reviewed for the study is presented in the second chapter. The themes discussed in this section include definitions of disabled children, society's attitude towards disabled children, and the influence of disability experiences on mainstream teachers. This section also examines definitions of inclusive education, goals of inclusive education, the rationale for inclusive education, education of disabled children—special school versus mainstream schools—and the challenges of teaching disabled children in the mainstream classroom. The remainder of the chapter highlights the key considerations for developing and strengthening inclusive education, teachers' preparedness for inclusive education, and what changes are necessary for full inclusion. This chapter also ends with a summary.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology. The chapter starts by providing details about the research methodology under the following topics: The research question, research paradigm, and qualitative research approach. This chapter then discusses the research process and ethical considerations. Additionally, the chapter presents the data collection method for this study, data analysis, and quality of research—which details the issues of validity and reliability. Like the previous two chapters, this chapter ends with a summary.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the finding of the study. This chapter starts with a discussion about the significance of the demographic information collected during the research. The rest of the chapter presents

and discusses the major themes that emerged from this research. These topics include teachers' definition of disabled children, identification of disabled children, teachers' opinion on the presence of disabled children in Fijian society, and disabled children's access to quality education, which also discusses the education for disabled children—special school versus mainstream school. Moreover, the chapter discusses teachers' understanding of inclusive education, whether teachers' attitudes and skills are a major obstacle to inclusive education, and challenges of teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom. Presentation on teachers' preparedness for teaching disabled children, changes needed to make full inclusion possible, and emerging issues is made last.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, details the limitations of the research and presents the research conclusions. The section also presents the implications of the study. The implications section discusses the following sub-topics: Adoption and implementation of the policy on special and inclusive education; the introduction of school inclusion policy; and framing a national definition of disabled children within the medical-social model of disability. The discussion continues under the sub-topics: improving pedagogical approaches, parents to be made partners in education, continued research on inclusive education and universal design for learning. This section also provides recommendations for awareness, and further research, before summarising the main highlights.

1.10 Chapter summary

The legal documents in Fiji such as the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and the disability-related policies posit that the disabled children's presence in Fijian society is to be acknowledged. Further, they assert that disabled children deserve to receive the privileges of quality education and life. However, these are just guiding documents that frame the rights of disabled children and adults. How widely these materials have been understood, adopted and implemented for the benefit of all disabled children is a big question. The understanding, acceptance and implementation of disability-

related policies are crucial, so that everyone can help in eradicating the barriers that exist in our schools and the society.

Teachers' roles and positive attitudes are vital when it comes to the acceptance and education of disabled children. For this, it is important that the three registered primary education teacher training institutions in Fiji provide their trainee teachers with the appropriate training, so that they graduate having adequate skills, positive attitudes and dispositions to accept the challenge of teaching disabled children.

The special education in Fiji started in mid-1960, and since then the school system has improved. Nevertheless, inclusive education is a new idea of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Fiji; hence, it is crucial to measure the perspectives of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary school teachers on inclusive education, and how prepared they are to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher. My experience as a special education teacher and special interest on inclusive education has motivated me to research on this important yet not so common area of education. Even though this is a small study, it is still seen necessary to gather this information, because it will help me to notify the education stakeholders on how ready teachers are and what changes are needed for inclusive education to start and continue in mainstream schools in Fiji.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter overview

This section presents the literature relevant to inclusive education, and pre-service and in-service primary school teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education. The themes discussed in this chapter include definitions of disabled children, society's attitude towards disabled children, and the influence of disability experiences on mainstream teachers. This chapter also presents a definition of inclusive education, the goals of inclusive education, and the rationale for inclusive education. Further, it discusses the education of disabled children: special school versus mainstream schools, and the challenges of teaching disabled children in the mainstream classroom. Finally, the chapter highlights the key considerations for developing and strengthening inclusive education, teachers' preparedness for inclusive education, and what changes are necessary for full inclusion.

2.1 Definitions of disabled children

Ash, Bellew, Davies, Newman and Richardson (2005) emphasise that it is important to learn how education stakeholders comprehend disability before entering into any discussion about the inclusion of disabled children in society and mainstream schools. Current comprehension on disability, especially what it means to people, involves ideas contained in two contemporary models out of the many—the medical model of disability and the social model of disability (Reiser & Mason, 2005, as cited in MacArthur, 2009). The next section gives descriptions of the two models.

2.1.1 Medical model of disability as it relates to children

The medical model of disability associates disability with damage and disease in children that compromises some of their normal bodily functions (MacArthur, 2009). According to Kearney (2013), the medical model sees disability as an individual problem, illness or deficit. Similarly, MacArthur (2009) states that people who view disability from the medical model lens see disability as an issue of the disabled children, which stems from their

impairment. Impairment is the functional limitation of children, which leads to the deficit in them (Jenene, 2015). Some of these traits are: difficulty in hearing and seeing, a problem moving independently, and needing extra time to learn, understand, and apply acquired knowledge in their daily lives.

Further, the medical model of disability views disability as a medical phenomenon that needs treatment and accommodation (Liasidou, 2012). Kearney (2013) adds that the medical model constructs ideas, values, and beliefs about disability that forces disabled children to become the “object of remediation, therapy, treatment and cure” (p. 46). In addition, Liasidou (2015) highlights that disabled children historically were seen as deficient and as a “less-than-human species” (p. 152) and, therefore, were rehabilitated so that their disability gets treated, and their emotional and intellectual development normalised by the medical professionals. Full acceptance of the medical model leads to the institutionalisation of many children with disabilities (Mutasa & Ruhode, 2015). Institutionalisation is when people with disabilities who were seen as a threat to themselves and others around them were put in private settings so that they could be treated or helped to gain normalcy.

Over time, the medical model of disability has led to the labelling of disabled children around the globe based on their disability and being separated from non-disabled children, so that they can have specialised teaching (MacArthur, 2009). MacArthur (2009) adds that the therapeutic approach allowed the removal of disabled children from their neighbouring schools when they were identified with disabilities. Schools were not required to adapt to meet the needs of these children. Further, disabled children were often placed in special schools, as the perception was that disabled children needed specialised programmes and specialist teachers to respond to their learning and developmental needs (MacArthur, 2009). The medical model of disability promoted discrimination and exclusion of disabled children (Mutasa & Ruhode, 2015). Moreover, it created a “culture of silence” (Liasidou, 2015, p. 152), where disabled children and their parents did not have much of a voice but had to accept that the special schools were the only places where their children could receive their education.

2.1.2 Social model of disability

The social model of disability views disability as a socially constructed phenomenon, where children with impairments are expected to overcome barriers that are not a hurdle to the non-disabled children (Jenene, 2015). Finkelstein (2004) claims that children with disability face many challenges in society as a result of their disability and not their personality traits. Similarly, MacArthur (2009), from a social model point of view, explains that children experience disability by living in a society that sees people with impairment as abnormal and fails to respond to their needs.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that the “disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society” (United Nations, 2006, p. 1). Liasidou (2015) notes that the social model of disability gives priority to the rights of disabled children and challenges the discrimination regime to change for the good of all children.

The social model of disability encourages the utilisation of friendlier terminologies that indicate to the disabled children that their presence is valued, and they deserve to enjoy the privileges of life just like the non-disabled children in society. An example of this is the replacement of the term “students with disabilities” with “students in difficulties” (Berhanu, 2011, p. 106).

According to Liasidou (2015), the social model of disability exemplifies the struggles that disabled children face in society. This model suggests that there is no need for the disabled children to change to fit into society, but rather it is the society that needs to change. Society needs to get rid of the ideas about normal and abnormal and become more respectful towards the inclusion of diversity (Ash et al., 2005).

2.1.2.1 Impact of model on schooling

In education, the social model of disability allows the development of an education system that encourages mainstream schools to make necessary changes and adaptation within their school to allow for the enrolment and education of disabled children (Ash et al., 2005). Claughton (2015) believes that the social model of disability analyses and breaks down social barriers that can disable children with impairment.

Researchers who support a social model of disability claim that inclusive education is the way forward, as it encourages the growth of individuals and social relationships, and creates positive attitudes based on the consensus that disability is part of and not outside the ordinary range of human diversity (Ash et al., 2005). MacArthur (2009) states that there is still a need for teachers to consider the effects of children's impairment on their learning and social experience as teachers try to create a friendly and a barrier-free school and classroom environment. The social model of disability is now a widely accepted phenomenon that emphasises that it is the society that makes people disabled because of their over concern with the concept of normalcy (MacArthur, 2009).

2.2 Society's attitude towards disabled children

Disability is a phenomenon that is not acknowledged and welcome in many communities (Mutasa & Ruhode, 2015). According to Oliver (2013), discriminatory attitudes towards disabled children still exist, and these continue to function as "disabling barriers" (p. 1024) that deny disabled children their right to quality education and a place in society. The attitudinal barriers that exist in society need to be identified and challenged for the good of all (Walton, 2015).

Disabled children, over the years, have been "disregarded, pitied and treated as subhuman or animals" (Reynolds, 2010, pp. 202-203), and this treatment has affected how the community accepted disabled children. Mutasa and Ruhode (2015) argue that disabled children will only be able to receive preferential treatment from society once the community starts to

acknowledge their existence and holds a positive attitude towards them. Oliver (1996) states that there is nothing wrong with disabled children that needs to be put right or corrected; instead, there is a need for the society to change (as cited in Mutasa & Ruhode, 2015). It follows from this that barriers that exist in society must be removed rather than seeing how disabled children can be made to fit in the society (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010).

2.3 Influence of disability experiences on mainstream teachers

2.3.1 Positive influence

There is evidence that teachers who have close contact with disabled children and are involved in supporting and teaching disabled children during their initial teacher training mainly have a positive attitude about disabled children and inclusive education (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009). Forlin (2010) adds that the experience of newly qualified teachers with disabled people makes them more receptive to inclusion. Further, Kaikkonen (2010) argues that teachers who get the opportunity to work with disabled children in mainstream schools make a positive influence on these teachers self-esteem, which makes them confident about their professional competence.

2.3.2 Negative influence

However, Kaikkonen (2010) also states that having knowledge of the different types of disabilities and the difficulties disabled children face in their life may cause student teachers to become resistant to inclusive education. Also, it is evident that some student teachers who have a positive attitude to inclusion at the beginning of their teacher training become less enthusiastic to teach this group of children after they experience them in special and inclusive education classrooms (Lambe & Bones, 2006).

2.4 Definition of inclusive education

Inclusive education may sound like a simple concept; nevertheless, defining and interpreting inclusive education is a challenging task because of the views that surround it (Kearney, 2013). Shyman (2015) highlights that the professionals in the field of education lack a clear, precise and comprehensive definition of inclusive education that is globally sensitive and based on social justice. Inclusion means different things to different people, and the way it is perceived determines how the inclusive education concept is utilised (Armstrong et al., 2010). Over time, people have often defined inclusive education using the understanding gathered from their current context (Torombe, 2013). Similarly, MacArthur (2009) states that inclusive education is usually redefined depending on the nature of the school and the community.

Booth and Ainscow (2011) define inclusive education as increasing participation of disabled children in society and curricula by reducing all forms of barriers and discrimination. Moreover, to increase participation in curricula of the local setting, the curriculum should be adapted and school environment changed accordingly. To Kearney (2013), inclusive education is when attention is given to the school culture and necessary changes are made so that everyone in the school gets included.

Liasidou (2015) states that inclusive education is a recent policy phenomenon that gives disabled children the right to quality education through the utilisation of effective education approaches and strategies to respond to learner diversity. Holland (2015) states that inclusive education is about a child's "right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child" (p. 46). Moreover, inclusive education is about valuing all children's presence, participation and achievement in the mainstream classroom (MacArthur, 2009).

According to Liasidou (2012), inclusive education originates from the social model of disability, and it refers to the restructuring of social and educational settings to meet the developmental and educational needs of all learners

irrespective of their “diverse biographical, developmental and learning trajectories” (p. 5).

Similarly, Booth and UNESCO (2003) describe inclusive education as a “process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (p. 7). They add that inclusive education processes involve changing and modifying the content, methods, building, and approaches, with an aim to allow all children to access quality education in the mainstream classroom.

To Mutasa and Ruhode (2015) and Vayrynen (2015), inclusive education is a contemporary educational perspective where all learners, irrespective of their ability, disability and learning needs, get to receive education in their neighbourhood school, where they are given the necessary support by their class or subject teachers.

2.4.1 What inclusive education is not

Liasidou (2012) argues that inclusive education is not integration and mainstreaming, or a subsystem of special education where disabled children are placed in a mainstream classroom for a short period of time and returned to their special education classroom afterwards. Inclusive education is also not placing disabled children in the unchanged class, but rather it is “about how, where, and why, and with what consequence, we educate all pupils” (Barton, 1997, p. 234). Walton (2015) argues that inclusive education is not about enrolling previously excluded students into the unchanged schools where policies, attitudes and practices stop this group of children from experiencing success. Instead, it is about identifying and attending to the exclusionary pressures so that all learners can learn.

Furthermore, inclusive education does not imply disabled students changing or becoming ready for the mainstream school; rather, it is the schools that need to change to accept the students (Mathias, 2015). Brownell, Smith, Crockett and Griffin (2012) affirm that inclusive education

does not require disabled children to achieve near grade level without support before they can be accepted in the mainstream school.

2.5 Goal of inclusive education

The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2004) describes education as a fundamental component that helps develop the potential for people to enjoy the full range of privileges in life. Access to quality education is an essential human right, and inclusive education is the foundation that provides this right to disabled children (MacArthur, 2009). Ravet (2007) adds that learner rights, especially those of disabled children, are necessary for the creation of an inclusive environment (as cited in Shelvin, 2010). The inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools should be a priority, to reinstate disabled children's' right to become equal and valued member of the society (Liasidou, 2012).

2.6 The rationale for inclusive education

Many people believe that inclusive education may solve many of the problems that disabled people face at every phase of their development. According to UNESCO (1994), the mainstream schools with inclusive orientation are the most efficient way for “combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an education to the majority of children and improves the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire system” (p. ix). Armstrong et al. (2010) state that inclusive education creates an authentic learning and living environment, which permits disabled children to have positive self-esteem and become contributing members of the society and the nation. It could be argued that these provisions are not fully available in special education schools.

In addition, inclusive education acknowledges the difference in every individual, and this being part of the human rights approach helps to identify and remove all forms of obstacles that hinder individuals' progress (Liasidou, 2012). Inclusive education recognises children's diverse abilities, disabilities, and developmental trajectories, and this accounts for a real

appreciation of their difference for a socially just and fair society (Liasidou, 2012). Moreover, Liasidou (2012) affirms that inclusive education improves the destiny of all disabled children by providing them access to quality education in their neighbourhood school. Zhang (2014) adds that inclusive education increases the employability of this group of children, which thus reduces the inequality they face in society. Consequently, disabled children may live a better and more independent life.

2.7 Education of disabled children: special school versus mainstream school

Where disabled children should receive their education is a highly contested topic, although mainstream and special education schools remain the two main options for parents today (Walker, 2015). Annan and Mentis (2013) state that the perspectives of education stakeholders shape practice. They add that the positive attitude of education stakeholders towards inclusive education may lead to better inclusive education practices. Nevertheless, attitudes of people may vary depending on the knowledge and understanding they have about a specific disability. The following section discusses parents' and teachers' perspectives on where their children should receive their education.

2.7.1 Parents' perspectives

Hornby (2010) highlights that parents' involvement in the education of their disabled children is highly recommended by governments around the globe, since parents' attitudes and support are a crucial factor to the inclusion of their disabled children in mainstream classrooms. However, Alur (2010) points out that many parents are sceptical and hesitant about the transition of their children from special schools to mainstream schools. A few parents have reservations about the inclusion of severely and profoundly disabled children. These parents see the special schools as a more caring and supporting environment, and, thus, they do not want to risk losing this when it comes to inclusive education (Alur, 2010). Further, Anderson, Falkmer, Joosten and Falkmer (2015) highlight that many parents' fears pertain mainly to the following issues. First, apprehension around how non-disabled

children will react to the presence of their disabled child in the mainstream classroom, and, secondly, the teasing and bullying their child might go through when receiving education in an inclusive education classroom. These parents also have reservations over the attitudes general education teachers will have, and whether the mainstream school environment will be supportive enough to enable their children to cope academically.

Nevertheless, Alur (2010) adds that after the inclusion of disabled children in education, the overall attitudes of parents are transformed, and many parents have become extremely confident and have taken ownership of the transition and retention of their disabled children in inclusive classrooms.

2.7.2 Teachers' perspectives

Many of the mainstream teachers who know the challenges of teaching disabled children in inclusive classrooms posit that this group of children should receive their education in special schools. Mainstream teachers reason that the special education teachers are experts in the education field and have the time to deal with disabled children on a one-to-one basis or in a small group, and, therefore, it is not the mainstream teachers' responsibility to provide education to this group (Florian & Rouse, 2010).

The mainstream teachers' fear of teaching disabled children stems from the fact that disabled children need one-to-one assistance and how they will address the national curricula demands while having this group of children in their class (Kaikkonen, 2010). MacArthur (2009) affirms that some mainstream teachers have little expectation for disabled children's learning, and claim that they are unable or untrained to cater for their educational needs, and thus they should be in special school.

However, studies also show that many of the beginner teachers who have had the opportunity to experience and teach disabled children during their initial teacher training have a positive attitude about the presence of disabled children in their classroom; thus, these teachers contend that this group of children should receive their education in mainstream classrooms (Forlin, 2010). These teachers reason that disabled children are humans

first, hence they have the right to receive their education in the mainstream classroom together with their non-disabled peers. Disabled children will be able to learn more by being in the mainstream classroom (Coutsocostas & Alborz, 2010).

2.8 Challenges of teaching disabled children in mainstream classroom

According to Forlin (2010), the beginner mainstream teachers often face numerous challenges when teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom. These challenges include time management, negative attitude of teachers and students, limited disability-related knowledge, limited resources, and large class size. The following sub-sections will discuss these challenges.

2.8.1 Time management

Time management becomes a problem for many general education teachers when they are required to adopt the standard curriculum to collectively teach disabled children as well as their non-disabled peers (Lambe & Bones, 2006). Brownell et al. (2012) affirm that the general education teachers often lack adequate time to design and implement instructions, and this challenge can worsen if these teachers do not get access to internal and external support. In response, de Beco (2016) states that inclusive education is a process, hence, teachers will need to be ready to continuously adapt the general school system and the curriculum for the developmental and educational needs of all disabled and non-disabled children in the class.

2.8.2 Negative attitudes of teachers and students

Coutsocostas and Alborz (2010) state that the negative attitude of other educators and students in mainstream schools is another hurdle that general education teachers must overcome. Experienced teachers and non-disabled children in mainstream school settings often make fun of disabled children and start calling them names when they realise this group of children are slow in understanding and engaging in school activities. Moreover, senior teachers in mainstream schools perceive that it is not

sensible to place disabled children in mainstream classrooms when specialised teachers who understand and can cater for this group of children better are present in special school settings (Lambe & Bones, 2006).

2.8.3 Limited disability-related knowledge

Further, limited disability-related knowledge is also a challenge that beginner inclusive education teachers must overcome. de Beco (2016) affirms this when he states that general education teachers are not knowledgeable enough to meet the educational and developmental needs of disabled children in a general education classroom. According to Lambe and Bones (2006), international studies in the area of inclusive education also reveal that mainstream teachers need to be well trained so that they acquire adequate disability-related knowledge to assist and educate disabled children in inclusive settings.

2.8.4 Limited resources

Scarce resources are yet another challenge that general education teachers must be ready to face. Yadav, Das, Sharma and Tiwari (2015) state that lack of resources in mainstream schools often limits general education teachers from adopting multiple approaches and strategies to educate disabled children. Because of this, disabled children often perceive that their class teacher is not motivated to help them meet their educational needs (Day, 2012).

2.8.5 Large class size

Large class size is another factor that affects mainstream teachers' productivity in classrooms. A study on elementary school teachers in Gurgaon, India, reveals that large class size is a barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education programs in mainstream schools (Yadav et al., 2015). These authors add that if the problem of large class size remains, then this may lead mainstream teachers to acquire negative attitudes about the concept of inclusive education, which can make them reluctant to teach disabled children.

2.9 Key considerations for starting and strengthening inclusive education

Some of the key factors to consider when starting and enhancing inclusive education are as follows: redesign and implement necessary policies, improve teachers' attitude and skills, make parents of disabled children partners in education, provide professional development to pre-service and in-service teachers, and facilitate adaptation of the classroom, curriculum, and the general school environment. This section will present these key considerations.

2.9.1 Redesign and implement necessary policies

Holland (2015) highlights that although all children and young people's rights to inclusive education are being recognised and considered in legislation and policies, the practice of this is in question. It is important for stakeholders to reflect on these policies and legislation from time to time so that policies undergo necessary changes and are made responsive.

2.9.1.1 Government policies

A key finding of the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report is that "progress towards the EFA goals is ... undermined by the failure of governments to tackle inequality based on income, gender, location, ethnicity, language, disability and other markers of disadvantage" (UNESCO, 2008, as cited in Florian & Rouse, 2010, p. 186). UNESCO (2008) adds that unless the governments decide to reduce this difference once and for all through effective policy reform, this problem will remain.

However, Moonsamy (2015) states that inclusive education policies alone cannot make education inclusive, but they can become a medium for inclusive education to progress in mainstream schools. Liasidou (2012) posits that the constitution and legislation of a nation can immensely influence formulating and implementing inclusive education policies. Similarly, she adds that legislation alone is not sufficient to produce inclusion, but it is a necessary factor in the change process.

2.9.1.2 School policies

Shelvin (2010) supports the notion that many established school policies and practices fail to account for how disability is conceptualised within the school, and what effect this underpinning belief system makes on the provision of inclusive education. He adds that the voices of young people should be given significant recognition when writing a policy and putting it into practice. Moreover, policies should be reviewed from time to time to make them more authentic and suitable for the context. In most scenarios, while children's education "context may seem equal, fair, and inclusive on paper, there appear to be [significant] discrepancies between policy and practice" (Holland, 2015, p. 45).

Armstrong et al. (2010) add that policies are meaningless without practice. The Education for All Global Monitoring Report argues that there should be equity in policy so all children, including the disabled, can have access to quality education in mainstream schools. Further, Armstrong et al. (2010) suggest that the concept of inclusive education must be made to fit within various school development plans, and policies should be developed accordingly to increase the participation and learning of all children. These authors point out that unsupportive policies can restrict schools' attempts to improve their inclusive education practices. Nevertheless, the policy on inclusion is often difficult to implement because of insufficient training and limited skills in teachers, and the unavailability of support service for these teachers (Florian & Rouse, 2010).

2.9.2 Improve teachers' attitude and skills

Research in inclusive education shows that teachers' approaches and expertise are crucial factors that can either promote or hinder inclusive practices in the classroom (Claughton, 2015; Fourie & Hooijer, 2015; Kaikkonen, 2010). Attitudes either take a negative or a positive form depending on how teachers see disabled children or infer inclusive education.

A study conducted in India reports that many pre-service teachers hold negative attitudes towards inclusive education, and have a degree of concern towards the inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream classroom (Sharma, Moore, & Sonawane, 2009). Palmer (2006) emphasises that teachers' attitude in class is influenced by teachers' efficacy, expectation, and belief in what strategies will work for disabled children. Some teachers have little hope for disabled children's learning and claim they are unable or untrained to cater for this group of children (MacArthur, 2009). MacArthur (2009) asserts that teachers who believe disabled children are deficient and need fixing face difficulty in becoming effective teachers. According to Dharan (2015), teachers' negative attitudes stem from the fear of the unknown, and their competence level determines their lack of enthusiasm towards the inclusion process.

On the contrary, Kaikkonen (2010) claims that many teachers support inclusive education even though they state they lack the right skills to support inclusive practices in their classroom. Teachers who view disabled children as competent ensure they provide this group of children the opportunity to exercise their capacity (Shelvin, 2010). Hence, it is important for the teacher training institutions to ensure that the trainee teachers who are not so ready and supportive of inclusive education graduate with a positive attitude about the inclusion idea (Forlin, 2010). Dharan (2015) adds that with time, teachers may acquire positive attitudes and may love to work with disabled children. She adds that teachers' awareness and experiences with disabled children play a crucial role in strengthening their positive attitudes. Stella, Forlin and Lan (2007) claim that a single course on inclusive education can make a positive change in attitudes and practices in teachers. Nevertheless, teacher educators have to assure they not only arouse confidence in trainee teachers to teach disabled children but are around to support associate teachers who mentor novice teachers (Dharan, 2015).

2.9.3 Make parents partners in education

Disabled children's parents' participation in education is significant because they can become a great source of information and a valuable human resource for the inclusive education teachers.

2.9.3.1 Information

All parents have valuable information about their children, and, therefore, teachers should be in constant contact with these parents so that they can successfully assess information and plan the educational and developmental needs of their disabled children (Hornby, 2010). This author also claims that parents hold valuable information about "children's special educational needs, strengths, and weaknesses, along with any relevant medical details" (p. 78), which teachers can collect during parent-teacher meetings. Alur (2010) adds that teachers can even make parents feel heard by taking full advantage of their knowledge about their children. In so doing, teachers will empower parents to involve themselves in their children's education actively.

2.9.3.2 Resources

According to Matthews (2008), many parents have the ability to become volunteer teacher aides and assist their children's teacher in class. Further, these parents can become a great source of information and support to new parents who have disabled children. Parents and educators can equally learn from such exposure, and understand and help the disabled children (Hornby, 2010).

2.9.4 Professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers

Professional development is all about enhancing learning opportunities that deepen teachers' professional aptitudes, including "knowledge, beliefs, motivation and self-regulatory skills" (Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2014, p. 98). Petrie and McGee (2012) emphasise that the professional development is not a one-off course, but rather an on-going learning process where, over time, the staff are required to reflect the skills

and knowledge acquired from such training in their work practices. Professional learning and development broaden teachers' knowledge and understanding. Thus, professional development is crucial.

To create rich learning environments and enhance the learning of disabled children in schools, teachers should develop their professional competencies, knowledge, and pedagogy. According to Acedo, Ferrer and Pàmies (2009), teachers gain their expertise from pre-service and in-service training programs.

2.9.4.1 Pre-service teacher training program

Pre-service teacher training takes place in colleges and universities (Margolin, 2011). Glazerman et al. (2008) state that the pre-service teacher education program provides beginner inclusive education teachers the formal and informal learning opportunities, which can ease their transition from teacher training colleges to classroom teaching.

Dharan (2015) emphasises that teachers who are familiar with and have a positive attitude towards disabled children have more pedagogical interaction in the inclusive classroom. Hence, it is necessary that the teacher training colleges and universities provide a proper foundation to the beginner teachers so that they can support inclusion in classrooms.

Armstrong et al. (2010) argue that while some teacher training colleges and universities are preparing beginner teachers at a more advanced level for inclusive education, the majority need a major review of their teacher training strategies. As in most cases, the teacher education program is not linked to any national education reform for inclusive education, which thus infers that these colleges and universities are entities which operate in isolation (Armstrong et al., 2010). Similarly, Forlin (2010) states that many of the teacher training institutions in the Pacific region have been slow to make the necessary adjustments to their teacher education program, and as a result, teachers fail to acquire the right knowledge and skills to work well with disabled children in inclusive education classrooms. Florian and Rouse (2010) highlight that on many occasions the inclusive education

course is decontextualised by teacher training colleges and universities, because they see this course as an addition to and different from the standard program. Consequently, this creates a gap between what knowledge and skills beginner teachers acquire from their teacher training and what is required of them to become an inclusive education teacher. Inclusive education courses should be an essential component of the teacher education program rather than an extra element or an elective which is optional to trainee teachers (Florian & Rouse, 2010, p. 193).

According to Forlin (2010), there is no quick fix to the inclusion problem. Nevertheless, he does indicate that an analysis of the current programs reveals three most common methods through which teacher educators can address the inclusion problem. These include, “conforming to a set of government standards to enable teacher registration, conforming to state requirements for including specific programs within [initial teacher education] courses, [and] independent decision making by the training institution” (Forlin, 2010, p. 157).

2.9.4.2 In-service teacher training program

The intervention needs of the learning and the social environment govern the professional development agendas (Vermunt, 2014). O’Gorman and Drudy (2010) state that any school-based professional development program is an on-going education activity which focuses on the educational needs of all the students, including the disabled students, and the school. Shulman (2007) sees professional learning as the apprenticeship of the “head (knowledge), hands (skill, or ‘doing’) and heart (attitude and beliefs)” (as cited in Florian & Rouse, 2010, p. 185). Hence, it is important for the teacher training institutions to see that the newly qualified teachers graduate having a balance between knowledge, skills, and attitude to promote inclusive practices in schools (Florian & Rouse, 2010).

Armstrong et al. (2010) state that in-service professional development helps inclusive education teachers recapture and improve their knowledge and skills, and apply them in their current situation. Moreover, professional learning is used to keep teachers and the education stakeholders abreast

of significant development in policy and practice that occur at all levels (Armstrong et al., 2010).

Teachers who through professional development are made knowledgeable of the changes in the education system successfully achieve the goals of inclusive education (Jones, 2012). Consequently, Forlin (2010) emphasises that day-to-day experiences, and support and advice from experienced colleagues in the area of inclusive education contribute to increased confidence in newly qualified teachers during their induction period. Therefore, it is important that the newly qualified inclusive education teachers get supervision and assistance from experienced mentors who can move beyond procedural learning and pass on exceptional skills to trainee teachers (Dharan, 2015).

2.9.5 Adaptation of the classroom, curriculum, and the general school environment

Adaptation is an umbrella term that refers to any accommodation and modification done to the learning environment, instruction or teaching materials to enhance students' performance and help students meet their learning outcomes (Darrow, 2008). When making adaptations, emphasis should be given to individual students' learning needs, strengths, and weaknesses (Darrow, 2008). Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) state that adaptation is crucial for optimal student learning as it helps promote student engagement, processing, and critical thinking.

Inclusive education classrooms are likely to contain children exhibiting substantial diversity in cognitive abilities, language skills, learning styles and behaviour, and, therefore, it is important that teachers make necessary adaptations to physically and socially integrate students with disabilities (Parsons, Williams, Burrowbridge, & Mauk, 2011). Students learn more and participate better in classroom activities where teachers use adaptation (Kurth, 2013). O'Gorman and Drudy (2010) further state that teachers who are flexible and make the necessary adjustment to the students learning environment are better teachers in the eyes of the administrators and society.

The next section will focus on classroom adaptation, curriculum adaptation, and adaptation in the general school environment to bring clarity to this subject matter.

2.9.5.1 Classroom adaptation

Classroom adaptation refers to the physical modification of the classroom layout to minimise obstructions that hinder students' engagement and progress (Peters, 2007). Parsons et al. (2011) state that classroom adaptation is an important practice of general education teachers, as it helps them create a learning environment where all students, including the disabled, feel accepted.

Classroom adaptations take many forms depending on the disabling conditions and the learning needs of the students, and the teachers' knowledge to make the necessary adjustments (Kurth, 2013). For example, disabled students who need a good role model or peer support can be made to sit with appropriate peers. Similarly, students who are disruptive can sit at a desk which is in close immediacy to the teacher (Darrow, 2008). The teachers will also need to adapt their posture, tone of voice, and how they dress to connect with students in the class (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2010). Moreover, if a student in the class uses a wheelchair, then the teacher will have to arrange the classroom in such a way that the student can enter the classroom and manoeuvre around without any difficulty (Darrow, 2008).

Studies reveal that disabled students face difficulty adjusting and learning in a classroom which is disorganised and, therefore, classroom adaptation is necessary (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2010). Liasidou (2015) points out that disabled students feel accepted when they receive education in a less restrictive classroom. According to Gause (2011), teachers who proactively adjust their classroom environment create a sense of belonging for their disabled students; consequently, students do not feel like aliens in the class. Teachers' adaptation skills are not limited to the way they organize their classroom environment but also includes adapting the curriculum (Parsons et al., 2011).

2.9.5.2 Curriculum adaptation

According to Operti and Brady (2011), curriculum adaptation is a process where the teachers do technical analysis of the current curriculum content, teaching methods, and outcomes, and make necessary adjustments to their instructional practices to meet the specific learning needs of all children in the class.

Wedell (2008) claims that the national curriculum of London, which should be flexible and inclusive in content, does not have the breadth to effectively and efficiently facilitate the educational needs of disabled students. Therefore, curriculum adaptation is crucial, as it will lessen the stigma that disabled students may face if they use a curriculum that is heavy in content and fails to meet their specific learning needs (Florian, 2008). Curriculum adaptation is carried out by active teachers to meet the educational needs of diverse learners in their classroom, and this is an important strategy as it facilitates inclusive education (O'Gorman & Drudy, 2010). Armstrong et al. (2010) emphasise that teachers can workshop different ways of adapting the curriculum in order to meet the educational needs of students in a manner that is relevant and economical (p. 130).

Kurth (2013) suggests that the curriculum can be made user-friendly through accommodation and modification. According to Causton-Theoharis (2009), accommodation is adaptation done to the curriculum while making sure its content remains intact. This adjustment is made to meet individual students' learning needs. For example, curriculum accommodation may include breaking the classroom activities into parts so that the students can complete the task on time, or giving students more time to finish the assigned activity (Kurth, 2013). Modification, on the other hand, is alteration done to the curriculum to help disabled students with specific learning needs meet their learning outcomes. An example of modification includes "changes in the course content, timing, or test presentation" (Causton-Theoharis, 2009, p. 34).

Peters (2007) states that schools in developed countries have a higher chance of retaining disabled students in schools because of their advantage

of having access to adequate resources to facilitate curriculum adaptation and, secondly, having teaching materials and facilities to nurture the diverse learners in school. This author further adds that these provisions are not readily available to teachers in developing countries, and, they thus face many difficulties in their classroom. Hence, it is important that the governments in developing countries identify the problems teachers in schools face and adopt culture-friendly strategies to address them.

Apart from adopting the curricula to meet diverse learners' education needs, it is also necessary to adjust the general school environment, because this equally contributes towards disabled students' retention, learning and participation in school (Peters, 2007).

2.9.5.3 Adaptation of the general school environment

According to Operti and Brady (2011), an adaptation of the general school environment refers to the adjusting of the public school setting to create a barrier-free learning environment.

These adjustments may include the architectural restructuring of the classrooms, such as making doorways wider with proper ramps to ease accessibility for students in wheelchairs (Operti & Brady, 2011), and also having walkways with railings constructed in schools to reduce mobility problems faced by visually impaired students. Wedell (2008) argues that the current structure of the mainstream schools has been found to be one of the main potential impediments to inclusion. Even after countries have restructured their initial teacher training course to prepare newly qualified teachers for inclusive education, the movement towards inclusion in schools is slow, because many of the mainstream schools still need to make their general school environment inclusive (Forlin, 2010). A stronger emphasis should be given to the restructuring of the general school environment to accommodate learners with a broader range of educational needs (Forlin, 2010). Shelvin (2010) states that schools are key agents in addressing the marginalisation experienced by disabled students. Thus, an adaptation of the general school environment is essential, as it reduces the probability of difficulties that evolve in inclusion (Peters, 2007). Naukkarinen (2010) and

Armstrong et al. (2010) believe that by creating a barrier-free environment, teachers will make disabled students feel accepted, and this will thus build their self-esteem and increase their capacity to explore their true potentials.

2.10 Teachers' preparedness for inclusive education

Teachers play a crucial role in making education inclusive (Walton, 2015). Various studies in the area of inclusive education reveal that the majority of the mainstream teachers are not very confident to teach disabled children (Singal, 2010). According to Armstrong et al. (2010), the majority of the teachers feel that the training offered by teacher training colleges is too theoretical and sways mainly towards formal education or educational ideals rather than the actual education practice in classrooms. Similarly, Florian and Rouse (2010) highlight that most of the mainstream teachers believe they have had insufficient training and, as a result, have limited skills and knowledge to cater for disabled children.

According to Shelvin (2010), many of the mainstream teachers are aware of the challenges they will have to face to promote learning of disabled children. Hence, these teachers do not regard meeting the educational needs of disabled children as their primary responsibility (Singal, 2010). Furthermore, the high academic demands of many schools put much pressure on teachers' shoulders, which makes them reluctant to accept disabled children in their class (Kaikkonen, 2010, p. 173).

Many teachers in mainstream school see special education teachers as those who are specially trained to teach disabled children and, therefore, state that the special education teachers are responsible for providing education to members of this group (Copfer & Specht, 2014). Mainstream teachers also fear how they will address the national and local curricula demands while having disabled children in their class who need one-to-one attention (Kaikkonen, 2010).

Nevertheless, teachers who are for inclusive education mainly show support for the inclusion of children with a mild disability rather than those with moderate and severely disabling conditions (Forlin et al., 2009). Also,

teachers have shown support for the inclusion of children with physical and social or behavioural disabilities (Dharan, 2015). The recommendation is for all teacher training institutions to incorporate inclusive education papers into their teacher education program so that trainee teachers are trained more efficiently (MacArthur, 2009).

2.11 What changes are necessary for full inclusion?

The literature proposes several changes within schools to make full inclusion possible. These changes include pedagogical approaches, parents made partners in education, continued research and advocacy, and universal design for learning. The following sub-sections discuss these themes.

2.11.1 Pedagogical approaches

For full inclusion to take place, it is important that teachers' accept the challenge of teaching all disabled children irrespective of the degree of their disabling condition (Dharan, 2015). Liasidou (2015) states that teachers' pedagogy is at the core of learning and teaching, and, therefore, they must effectively utilise them for the educational benefit of all learners.

Inclusive setting requires student-centred learning, and it is crucial for teachers to realise that their role is to facilitate learning rather than transmit knowledge (Berhanu, 2011). Liasidou (2015) highlights that inclusive education is a reform agenda; hence, inclusive classrooms require teachers to review their current pedagogical approaches and adopt new ways to facilitate the process of learning to enable all students to flourish and reach their full potential. To facilitate personalised learning which can meet the educational needs of all children, it is crucial that teachers understand that "one size fits all" and "take it or leave it" ideas are unacceptable (Wedell, 2008, p. 130).

Wedell (2008) claims that assessment for learning is yet another professional and personal skill that teachers need to acquire and efficiently and effectively practice to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. This strategy will allow teachers to construct a working individual education

program that will utilise students' strengths to improve their weaknesses. Having such provisions in education will enable the students to develop holistically.

2.11.2 Parents made partners in education

Parents are an essential ingredient for effective inclusive education (Copper & Specht, 2014). According to Mutasa and Ruhode (2015), the combined role of parents with and without disabled children is crucial, especially in the inclusion process, as their cooperation will help create a conducive learning environment. Moreover, parents of children without disability play a vital role in empowering and enhancing the self-esteem of their children, which helps their children to respect others and be able to share, whether it be at home, school or any other environment.

2.11.3 Continued research and advocacy

Moonsamy (2015) highlights that schools that are embracing inclusive education or are leaning towards inclusive education should serve as advocates for other schools that are yet to begin the process. It is important for schools and other educational institutions to plan and implement inclusion in small measures rather than waiting for all required criteria to be in place before starting inclusive education (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

2.11.4 Universal design for learning

Tobin (2014) describes a universal design for learning as an approach to the creation of teaching materials and instructions in such a way that students with a variety of differences in learning, moving, hearing, seeing and understanding language can engage with content and people, access information, and express skills and knowledge. Similarly, Liasidou (2012) articulates that universal design for learning is the introduction of teaching methods that will help improve education accessibility for all learners without the need for much variation and support. Further, universal design for learning uses technology and assistive devices to help extend learning opportunities for disabled children as well as non-disabled children (Glass, Meyer, & Rose, 2013). Tobin (2014) agrees with this when he states that

universal design for learning allows us to do much more than merely accommodate disabled children. According to the Center for Applied Special Technology (2013), universal design for learning provides all individuals equal opportunity to learn, as it motivates teachers to adopt, customise and adjust instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments based on learners' needs. This approach thus discourages teachers from diverging towards "one-size-fits-all solution" (p. 14) for children with diverse educational needs.

2.12 Chapter summary

The definitions of disabled children presented in the literature are within the medical and social model of disability, and the definition used by people determines the type of treatment this group of children receive in society and schools. Many communities see this group of children in need of medical care and correction. The community also sees disabled children as a burden, and as a result, this group of children are given unfair treatment and are denied access to quality education. However, those who have encouraging experiences with this group of children make a positive influence by treating them well.

The inclusive education idea is seen as positive because it provides disabled children with their right, and the opportunity, to receive a quality education with their non-disabled peers in a less restrictive environment. It is important that teachers are given proper training so that they acquire positive attitudes and skills to overcome the challenges they may face as an inclusive education teacher.

Thus, this research aims to find out Fijian teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education that has begun in some mainstream primary schools in Fiji and which will gradually extend to other mainstream primary schools. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology that was used to gather data in this research.

Note: After going through varied literature, I have decided to use the term “**disabled children**” as a reference to children with disability or children with special needs. The use of the term disabled children confirms that I give preference to the social model of disability, which sees children as being born with or acquiring impairment, but it is the social barriers that make them disabled. Discussion on the social model of disability is made earlier in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview

This section thoroughly presents the research method used to collect data in this study. The chapter starts by providing details about the research methodology under the following themes: the research question, research paradigm, qualitative research approach, research process, and ethics consideration. Moreover, this chapter also discusses the data collection method for this study, data management, data analysis, and the quality of this research. Like the previous two chapters, this chapter also ends with a summary.

3.1 Research methodology

3.1.1 The research question

The question, “what are the perspectives of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers on inclusive education, and how prepared are they to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher?” guided this research (this question is a replica from Chapter 1, Section 1.5.1).

3.1.2 Research paradigm

According to Schnelker (2006), a paradigm is a lens through which individuals view the world. Moreover, it is a set of values, beliefs, practices, and philosophies that guide researchers during their research. To Newby (2014), it is a way of thinking about a subject and conducting research which is acceptable in that field of study. Further, a paradigm is a way researchers view or comprehend present knowledge, and investigate the integrity of specific knowledge or problems through research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Guba (1990) states that the research paradigms guide how researchers make decisions and carry out research to validate current knowledge and search or generate new insights. Each paradigm has its rulebook and procedures, which govern researchers in their research practice (Guba, 1990; Newby, 2014).

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), human behaviour is complex, elusive and intangible because of personal choice, freedom, and individuality. To accurately understand individuals' perspectives about a subject, their views need to be interrogated and interpreted comprehensively. This research study was designed to gather views of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers on inclusive education, and how prepared they are to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher. Thus, the interpretive paradigm fitted well. The next subsection makes a discussion on the interpretive paradigm.

3.1.2.1 The interpretive paradigm

The interpretive paradigm is mostly concerned with the knowledge that individuals and a group of people hold about the world (Cohen et al., 2011). The central endeavour in the context of an interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Daveta (2009) highlights that the interpretive paradigm provides in-depth knowledge and understanding of people's behaviour and relationships. Moreover, an interpretive paradigm allows researchers to retain the integrity of the phenomena under investigation by offering them the opportunity to indirectly enter the conceptual world of the research participants and understand them from within (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Researcher integrity on how they manage these understandings during the actual research is paramount and, hence, are briefly discussed in the next paragraph.

Cohen et al. (2011) highlight that "people create knowledge and meaning about the world around them based on their past and present experiences" (p. 43). The interpretive paradigm allows for the construction of knowledge in a democratic process, as it involves both the researcher and the research participants; moreover, it generates knowledge from multiple perspectives (Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2008). The interpretive paradigm permits the usage of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, and also a mixed method, to investigate a research question (Guba, 1990). A qualitative research approach was adopted in this research to gather information from the study participants.

3.1.3 Qualitative research approach

Since the focus of this research was to gather teachers' perspectives on inclusive education, the use of a qualitative research approach to collecting data was considered relevant. The qualitative research approach provides research participants the opportunity to respond to research phenomena using their point of view and experiences rather than using options supplied by the researcher (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Hence, this enabled me to do an in-depth study on the research topic, which improved the quality of the data produced.

According to Creswell (2012), a qualitative approach considers processes such as learning, change, and professional development. It is more reliable as it encourages the researcher to make contact, and establish an ethical and collaborative partnership, with research participants before conducting the research (Briggs et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012). In so doing, I enabled the study participants to take ownership of their responses, which thus improved the validity of the data produced. Tarosa (2013) argues that the collection of data is meaningful when researchers are transparent, accountable and form a good rapport with their research participants before conducting research. The next section discusses the research process.

3.2 Research process

3.2.1 Approval from the Research Ethics Committee

Ethical consideration pervades the whole process of research, and researchers need to prioritise ethics approval when human subjects are used in research (Cohen et al., 2011). I made the research ethics application to the University of Waikato, School of Education Research Ethics Committee for ethical review and approval. I was given ethics application approval once I met all the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1).

3.2.2 Approval from the Ministry of Education Fiji

I made a request to conduct research in Fiji (see Appendix 2) to the Permanent Secretary of Education through the Office of the Senior Education Officer Research based at the Ministry of Education headquarters in Suva, Fiji. An introduction letter, which presented me and my research intentions, as well as a request for permission and authorisation to do research in Fiji, was submitted to the office of the Senior Education Officer Research. I supplied the following support documents with this application: Request to Conduct Research in Fiji, University of Waikato Research Ethics Application Approval, Research Proposal, Curriculum Vitae and Research Approval Letter from two primary education teacher training institutions.

The initial intention was to use participants from three primary education teacher training institutions in Fiji. Thus, I prepared the introduction letter by aligning it to the aim of the research. After the Senior Education Officer Research had gone through my application, he asked me to also submit research approval letters from the third primary teacher training institution. I explained to the Senior Education Officer Research that unfortunately, access to potential participants in the third teacher training school was not possible due to their personal reasons. I then enlightened the Senior Education Officer Research about my next plan, which was to approach the head teachers of five special schools and one general education school in the central division. The intention was to identify four junior in-service teachers who were graduates from the third primary education teacher training institution and could give their informed consent and provide me the same information that I intended to gather from the pre-service primary education teachers. For a favourable consideration of my request, the Senior Education Officer Research asked me to make the necessary changes to my research proposal and introduction letter and resubmit so that he could present them to the Ministry of Education's Research Vetting Committee. Adhering to the advice of the Senior Education Officer Research and meeting the entire requirements, I was given official approval to conduct research in Fiji (see Appendix 3).

3.2.3 Consent from the principals and school head teachers

Work on getting permission from the three primary education teacher training institutions in Fiji was started soon after the University of Waikato's School of Education Research Ethics Committee gave me Ethics Application Approval for this research. I initially approached the principals of two, and the dean of the third teacher training institution via an email. These administrators were informed about the purpose of my study and how I was going to involve participants in this research, before making a request for the use of potential participants from their teacher training institution. An introduction letter was used to supply the information to these school administrators (see Appendix 4). I also provided the principals/dean of the teacher training institutions with a Consent Form so that they could record their permission (see Appendix 5) for the use of potential participants. I also supplied the other supporting documents to the school administrators via the initial email.

Before my travel to Fiji for this research, I had received approval from the second teacher training institution for the use of four potential participants from their institution. Further, the principal of the first teacher training school notified that I would be given approval once I met with him and signed a memorandum of understanding. The agreement was that I, as the researcher, would provide a copy of my thesis to the institution after its completion. I agreed to this and signed the memorandum of understanding when I met with the representative of the principal at the facility. Following the signing of the memorandum of understanding, official approval was given to me by the school administrator to access four potential participants from his institution for this study. Unfortunately, support from the third teacher training school was not possible because of their personal reasons.

Getting support from the head teachers of special education schools and general education school was not hard, because they all fell within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education Fiji. The same procedure as above was used to approach the head teachers of five special education and one general education school in search of the final four potential participants for

this study. Two out of five special education school head teachers informed me via an email that none of the teachers in their school met my selection criteria to participate in this study. The criteria were to select junior in-service teachers who were graduates of the third teacher training institution. Luckily, the head teachers from the other three special education and one general education school also got back to me via email within two to three working days. They indicated that they each had a suitable candidate in their school, and would like to meet with me in person so that they could learn more about my research project, and, secondly, so that I could introduce myself to the potential participants. I made an appointment and approached these head teachers in person. During the meeting, I received formal approval to use one junior in-service teacher from each of these institutions.

3.2.4 Selection of study participants

This research used eight final year (Year 3) trainee teachers from two teacher training institutions (four members from each institution) together with one junior inclusive education and three junior special education teachers from Fiji. I chose this set of participants because I saw them as important future stakeholders in the inclusive initiative, who can create the environment for inclusive education to start, be strengthened and retained in mainstream schools in Fiji.

The principals/head teachers' help was essential for the successful recruitment of potential participants for this research. The principals and head teachers in Fiji hold supreme power in their institution/school and, therefore, were key people to give permission for the use of potential participants from their school. The principals' and head teachers' support and guidance were crucial, as this allowed this study to be carried out in an effective and efficient manner. Through the introduction letter, I informed the principals and head teachers that I, as the researcher, envisaged interviewing a total of twelve participants—four participants from each teacher training institution and one in-service teacher from one inclusive and three special education schools. As evidence of support and permission to

recruit potential participants from their school, the principals and well as head teachers were asked to fill in the Consent Form (see Appendix 5).

The potential participants from the teacher training institutions were given a copy of the Participant Information and Invitation Letter (see Appendix 6) and the Participant Informed Consent Form (see Appendix 7) by the administrators of the institutions. I supplied the potential participants in the special and inclusive education schools with a copy of each of these vital documents when I met with them in person, on the day of the meeting with the school head teachers. I thought the potential participants would fill and sign off Participant Informed Consent Form and email them to me, but this did not happen. While waiting for the signed Participant Informed Consent to arrive from potential participants, I received an email from the second teacher training institution. The email stated that the school administrator would choose four potential participants from their institution for this research. The explanation was that the school knows every trainee teacher personally and professionally and, therefore, would pick four participants who they thought would be able to provide information during the interview. Another condition of this institution was that their institution would be the meeting venue because of the remote location of their school, which would be more convenient to the participants. I agreed to these arrangements because I understood that this would not negatively affect the quality of data collected, since participants would have control of their thought processes. While signing the memorandum of agreement at the first teacher training institution, the representative of the school administrator informed me that they would also choose the potential participants from the institution to participate in this study.

Even though I could select the potential members from the special education schools at my free will, I did not have much choice in two special education schools. This was due to the reason that the participants chosen from these two special education schools were the only potential members who met the participant selection criteria. In the third special education school, there were two potential members, but I chose the male participant

because this balanced the gender in this research project. Moreover, the school administrator of the general education school decided which teacher would provide information for this study. This school administrator selected this participant for the reason that she was a junior inclusive education teacher.

I met participants from the two teacher training institutions and the inclusive school on the day of the interview. As for participants from the special schools, I was introduced to them when I first visited the special school to discuss my project with the head teacher. I met with these participants in their respective schools for the second time to discuss the research project. After participants had agreed to participate in the research, we came to common terms and agreed to a day and time when we were going to meet for the face-to-face semi-structured interview. The interviews with special education teachers were held in each of the participant's classrooms after the students had gone home in the afternoon. Participants from the two teacher training institutions were interviewed in the institution's staff room.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical review is a way of being sensitive to status, religion, race, ability and age of individuals, and considering their rights as research participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Bell and Waters (2014) argue that though ethical consideration is called by differently names and sometimes used in a less formal way, it is still an integral component in any research project. Cohen et al. (2007) stress that ethical consideration in a study is worth considering as it helps to "protect the well-being of participants from any harm or danger that would affect them whether physically or psychologically as a consequence of the interview" (p. 382). For this study, ethical consideration was given emphasis since I used human subjects in my project.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) highlight that the research process has two important ethical dimensions: procedural ethics and ethics in practice. They stress that procedural ethics is the first stage of the ethical process. Procedural ethics is when researchers submit their research ethics

application to the relevant research ethics committee for analysis and approval. The researchers are only given ethics application approval once the research ethics committee are satisfied with the ethical integrity of the ethics application; otherwise, researchers are asked to make the necessary changes to their request before the committee gives their approval. Ethics in practice refers to the utilisation of ethical procedures that investigators have discussed in their ethics application relating to when they are out in the field doing their research or making relevant changes, and taking a professional approach when the scenario changes.

Ethical consideration central to this research project included: informed consent, participants' right to withdraw self and data from the research, anonymity, and confidentiality.

3.3.1 Informed consent

The approval process is a primary element in educational research (Finch, 2005). Cohen et al. (2011) describe informed consent as a way of receiving and documenting prior approval from potential participants to willingly participate in the research. The twelve participants involved in this research were informed about the research project through the Participant Information and Invitation Letter. I gathered the informed consent from participants in person on the day of the interview. Being present in person during the signing of the informed consent form enabled participants to ask questions and have their queries sorted before agreeing to participate in the research. I reminded participants that their signature on the informed consent form was an acknowledgment that they had read and understood what the research would involve and that they had decided to participate in the study of their free will. No potential participants whatsoever were coerced to participate in the research.

I assured every participant in this research that the information gathered from the interview would only be used for this study, which may later be used by me in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas. They were also made aware that new consent would be gathered

from them if the information they provided needed to be used for another purpose.

3.3.2 Participants' right to withdraw self and data from the research

Before the signing of the informed consent and again at the start of each interview, I reminded participants that they had the right to withdraw from this research until such time they approved their interview transcript. I also informed participants that no adverse consequences whatsoever would be inflicted on them if they decided to withdraw from this research.

All participants were made aware that I would record the face-to-face semi-structured interview on a voice recorder, and their response to each of the questions would be used to write up the transcript, which would then be made available to them for verification. Transcript verification was when I provided participants the opportunity to review their interview transcript, make amendments wherever necessary, and make a request for the removal of parts of the information from their transcript. One of the participants from a special education school made changes to his transcript and returned it to me via email. The remaining of the eleven participants notified via text message and returned email that they were happy with their interview transcript, and I could put their transcript through the analysis process.

3.3.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Before starting the interview, participants once again were assured that it was going to be completely safe for them to share personal opinions and use personal experiences to answer questions, as codes would be used to keep their identity and the locations they mention anonymous.

I knew that it was important to respect the confidentiality of participants and be transparent with them since they gave their valuable time to share information during this study. I reiterated to the participants that all possible means would be adopted to protect their identity, but this could not be guaranteed, as the information gathered from this research would be used to write up the thesis, which would then be published and made available to

the public. The issue of confidentiality was clearly pointed out in the Participant Informed Consent Form, so that there was no room for surprises. Confidentiality of people involved with participants, for example their lecturers, classmates, and parents, were safeguarded. Before starting the interview, participants were asked to use pseudonyms if they wished to mention names during the interview. When any breach of confidentiality agreement was evident, I respectfully reminded participants and that I would appreciate if they remembered to use pseudonyms. Most importantly, all identifying information was saved on my personal laptop and protected using a password. I kept all non-identifying information in a locked cabinet at my home.

3.3.4 Cultural and social considerations

My own experiences as a special education teacher helped me develop sensitivity towards the issue of culture and social difference of people around me in ways that I would not have otherwise. These experiences helped me substantially during the research. I was aware that for some participants, talking about their personal and professional experiences would lead to stress and anxiety. To handle such situations, during the interview I reminded participants that they did not have to share information which they were not comfortable discussing. Nevertheless, I prompted them that they would be most welcome to share this information after the initial interview. I was mindful of all this and took all possible steps to respectfully present each interview question to the participants during the interview. Since I conducted this research in Fiji, efforts were put forth to balance participants regarding gender, age range, and ethnicity. I, as the researcher expected to interview participants with Indian, Fijian, and Rotuman ethnic backgrounds, but, during the study, I also interviewed a participant who was from the Solomon Islands. The participant from the Solomon Islands was in his final year of primary education teacher training at the second teacher training institution. I was extremely conscious of culture during the interviews; I acknowledged Indian, Fijian, Rotuman and Solomon Island cultures, ways of being and their perspectives of life as I carried out the interviews and interpreted the research data. No need arose for me to take

advice from a cultural advisor about the cultures mentioned earlier. All participants in this study were very friendly, humble and down to earth people.

To achieve the aim of this research project, I employed a face-to-face semi-structured interview method. Participants were asked to freely express their experience, views, and expectation primarily through the interview. The following subsection provides a justification as to why I used a face-to-face semi-structured interview as the method for collecting data in this research.

3.4 Data collection method for this study

3.4.1 Face-to-face semi-structured interview method

A semi-structured interview is a research tool mainly used in social science and educational research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A semi-structured interview is administered using a set of predetermined questions to gather information from participants. Hinchey (2008) highlight that a semi-structured interview method is more flexible as it permits researchers to bring probing questions into the interview depending on how participants respond to the fundamental issues. Probing questions are useful in research to get a better understanding of participants' views and explore the research topic further (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, & Lowden, 2011; Whiting, 2008). Also, a semi-structured interview is open for change and researchers can utilise this provision to further the process of gathering quality and reliable data (Mutch, 2013). Menter et al. (2011) emphasise that in a semi-structured interview, participants respond by talking, instead of writing, and they are also able to expand on their comments when they feel necessary.

A face-to-face semi-structured interview was chosen over a questionnaire format in this research, because it helped in the collection of valid and authentic data from the participants. Mutch (2013) states that interviews have an advantage over questionnaires, because the participants' reading ability does not become a concern for researchers. Hence, this increases the chance of successful completion of the research. Cohen et al. (2011) explain that the semi-structured interview research method is unique

because it allows researchers to collect data from participants through verbal interaction, where the answers to the questions are either written or recorded by investigators. Conducting interviews with the participants allowed me as the researcher to gauge the reliability of the information provided. When the participants indicated that they did not understand the question or when the answer they provided was not clear, the question was repeated or explained to collect valid answers. Mutch (2013) affirms that the response rate is usually high when participants are actively involved in the interview process. She adds that participants provide more information than expected during interviews because many of them feel more comfortable talking than writing. Thus, the use of a questionnaire would have compromised the amount of information gathered in this study.

For successful use of the face-to-face interview in this research, as the researcher, I adopted the following processes: I scheduled each of the face-to-face interviews at a designated time and place based on the preference of participants, and the interviews lasted no more than one hour. I recorded each of the interviews on a voice recorder; and the interviews were organised using a set of predetermined questions (see Appendix 8).

Before the interview, participants were asked to fill in a Demographic Information Form, which used a checkbox to record their personal information such as their name (optional), gender, and age range (see Appendix 9). I assured participants that the information gathered on the Demographic Information Form would be used for the purpose of this thesis write-up, and the viewers of this thesis in no way would be able to use the information to trace back or identify them. During the interview, I remained attentive so that I could pick up emerging themes and ask probing questions to gather quality data. Whiting (2008) emphasises that it is important for researchers to remain attentive during interviews so that they can enquire on themes emerging from the dialogue. The emerging themes helped in the development of probing questions, which facilitated further inquiry. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed the participants to express their views freely and this enriched the quality and quantity of data collected during the interview.

Before and again after the interviews, I thanked the participants for their support and participation in this research. I also recorded this acknowledgment on the Dictaphone. After I had written the interview transcripts, I emailed each of the transcripts to their rightful owners together with a Return of Transcript Letter (see Appendix 10). The Return of Transcript Letter formally acknowledged the participant's participation in the research. Moreover, the letter requested the participants to review, amend and, if need be, make a request for the replacement or removal of certain parts of information from the transcript. Also, through the same letter, the participants were given a cut-off date for change and withdrawal of information from the interview transcript. Participants were given notification of this email via a text message on their personal cell phone. Again, on the day before the cut-off date, I once again text-messaged participants and reminded them that their transcript was due for return on the following day. Participants were also contacted on their cell phone to notify them of return of transcript cut-off date. I assessed the request for an extension of transcript return day on an individual case basis. Only one participant asked for an extension of the transcript return day. I gave an extension to this participant, as her request was genuine. Additionally, through the same letter, I informed participants that if they failed to return the interview transcript by the allocated return day, and neither had they requested an extension of the interview transcript return day, then I would assume they are happy with their transcript. After I had received approval from each of the participants, their interview transcripts were analysed

3.5 Data management

A Dictaphone was used to record each of the twelve interviews. A copy of each of the audio recordings was then securely transferred to my personal computer, which was protected using a password. A backup copy of these audio recordings was made on a portable hard drive and kept in a locked cabinet at my home. Signed Participant Informed Consent Forms together with Demographic Information Forms from participants were also stored and locked in the cabinet. Only my supervisor, Dr Carol Hamilton, and I had access to these data. All non-identifying data gathered and produced from

this research, such as interview transcripts, used codes to protect the identity of the participants. These documents would be securely kept in Dr Carol Hamilton's office for the required five years to allow for academic examination, challenges, and peer review if necessary.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is an integral part of research methodology. Data analysis is when researchers thoroughly study the data to make sense of the information collected. According to Creswell (2012), the information taken from the raw data get transformed into new knowledge.

Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight that there are five crucial steps to consider when carrying out data analysis after qualitative interviewing. They emphasise these actions as attentively listening to the recordings and preparing interview transcripts, re-reading the transcripts to grasp the content, coding the transcripts to keep the identity of participants confidential, summarising the transcripts, and interpreting data to present research findings effectively. There are many strategies and approaches to analysing qualitative data. Four most frequently used approaches to analysing qualitative data are thematic analysis, semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, and visual analysis (Mutch, 2013). This research project adopted the thematic analysis approach, which is the most commonly used approach when analysing text (Mutch, 2013).

Given these, the interview recording of each participant was transcribed word for word. I made sure no extra or new words appeared on the transcript that could affect the validity of the data gathered. I used letters from the English alphabet and numbers to code each of the interview transcripts. These are what the codes represented: Teacher Training Institution (TTI), Special School (SS), Pre-service Teachers (PST), In-service Teachers (IST), and Primary School (PS). The numbers placed after institution and school code represented the institution and participant number, respectively. For example, TTI 1 – PST 1 described the first pre-service teacher from the first teacher training institution. I used this code system to

maintain confidentiality and quickly identify participants during the analysis process.

I used NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, to analyse the data I collected from this study. The software allowed me to import all the interview transcripts together under a standard folder titled *source*. Moreover, as highlighted by Franzosi, Doyle, McClelland, Putnam Rankin and Vicari (2013), this software had editing compatibility that allowed me to make changes to the text without exiting NVivo. Further, as Julia (2006) states, the NVivo software allowed me to do an in-depth analysis of the transcripts to identify the dominant and emerging theme. The text highlighting feature of the software was used to code segments of data that were similar. I then copied and transferred these segments of data under specific nodes (themes) that emerged when each of the transcripts was analysed. Through this process, I came up with the main themes. As an illustration, I placed the participants' definition of disabled children under the theme: *Definition of disabled children* (see Chapter 4 for other themes). When all the data were segmented, I once again read through each node, but this time to better interpret and understand them. I placed the new issues that emerged from data analysis under the theme *emerging issue*. The data from the nodes were then used to present the findings and the discussions.

3.7 Quality of research

The main idea of doing research is to produce quality knowledge through bias-free practices (Cohen et al., 2011). Mutch (2013) emphasises that when using a qualitative research approach, researchers need to convince their readers that their study is valid and reliable. As this study used a qualitative research approach and interpretive paradigm, I had put in maximum effort to make this research trustworthy and credible. The other researchers in the field of education would ultimately judge the quality of this investigation and would either accept or reject its legitimacy.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

Mutch (2013) defines research trustworthiness as the clear documentation of the “research decision, research design, data gathering and data analysis techniques” (p. 109). The researcher establishes the reliability in qualitative research by considering all the necessary ethical aspects of the research project (Menter et al., 2011).

Taking note of this, I had successfully received ethics application approval from the University of Waikato’s School of Education Research Ethics Committee before starting this research project.

Also, proper procedures were followed to access potential participants for this study. Potential participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw their participation from this research until such time that they had signed their interview transcript. I even gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions about this research project before they provided their informed consent to participate in this research. Although the principals the teacher training institutions and head teachers of the special education school and general education school had a hand in identifying the potential participants for this research, they did not coerce participants to take part in this investigation. Moreover, there was no interference or pressure from the principals and the head teachers during and after the interviews. Participants were in total control of their thought process, which allowed this research to gather information from them.

I maintained transparency, accountability and a good rapport with the participants at all levels during this research project. This personable approach of mine enabled participants to trust me and provide their full cooperation during the interview, despite having a busy study and work schedule. As planned, none of the interviews went beyond the duration of one hour and this allowed participants to return to their education and work programs after they had finished the interview.

Moreover, all possible steps were taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants in this research. For example, codes were used to

keep the identity of participants' anonymous. I have made my best attempt to provide a rich description of the findings and discussion so that readers find this reported outcome trustworthy. I understand the translation of the results of this study would be scrutinised and challenged by other scholars in the field.

3.7.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to ways in which researchers ensure the “findings resonate with those in, or who are familiar with, the case or setting” (Mutch, 2013, p. 110). I maintained credibility in this research by sending the interview transcripts to participants for verification before putting the interview transcripts through the analysis process. The findings of this study are presented and discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Further, to enhance credibility, I, as a researcher, declared my general and novice status. I also reported my personal orientation towards this research under the *impetus and significance of the study* section in Chapter 1. This study does not attempt to arrive at a generalisation but hopes to provide perspectives that would stimulate further dialogue and inquiry. Lastly, this research attempts to present valuable information that could be understood by the readers.

3.8 Chapter summary

In this section, I discussed the research methodology that this study used to collect data. An interpretive paradigm was employed in this study, since the aim was to gather pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for the role of an inclusive education teacher. Further, due to the nature of this research, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out to gather the information from the participants. The issues of validity and reliability and ethical consideration were also given eminence in this research. I used the NVivo software to analyse the gathered data. The next chapter presents the findings and provides a thorough discussion of what this study collected.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Chapter overview

This section presents the data and discusses the results of this research project, which investigated Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives on and preparedness for inclusive education.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect data from 12 participants—eight pre-service primary education, one in-service primary education and three in-service special education teachers (see Table 4.1 for details).

The discussion in this section starts with a closer look at the participants' demographic variables—gender, age, and experience with disabled children and/or adults—and these variables' influence in this research. Ten significant themes emerged from the analysis of the data, which this section presents and discusses under four broad areas, namely: personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education, professional opinions about inclusive education, training and preparedness for inclusive education, and finally, contemporary issues around inclusive education. Numerous themes and sub-themes are discussed under each of these four broad areas.

The presentation of data and discussion under the first key area branches out into the following themes: teachers' definition of disabled children, identification of disabled children, teachers' opinion on the presence of disabled children in Fijian society, disabled children's access to quality education, and education for disabled children—special schools versus mainstream schools.

Further, the second key area presents and discusses teachers' understanding of inclusive education, whether or not teachers' attitudes and skills are a major obstacle to inclusive education, and the challenges of teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom.

The third critical area presents and discusses teachers' preparedness for the teaching of disabled children.

The fourth and final key area presents and discusses the changes that are crucial for full inclusion to become possible. Disability awareness, which falls under emerging issues, is discussed at the end.

4.1 Significance of demographic data

A collection of demographic data was made to show aspects of the relationship between the primary variables and the interview data. These variables were participants' gender, age category, and experience with disabled children and/or adults (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Demographic data

Particulars	Participants	Gender	Age category	Experience with disabled children/adults
Teacher Training Institution (TTI) 1	TTI 1-PST 1	Female	18 – 23yrs	Yes
	TTI 1-PST 2	Female	18 – 23yrs	Yes
	TTI 1-PST 3	Male	24 – 29yrs	Yes
	TTI 1-PST 4	Male	18 – 23yrs	Yes
Teacher Training Institution (TTI) 2	TTI 2-PST 1	Male	30 – 30yrs	Yes
	TTI 2-PST 2	Female	30 – 35yrs	No
	TTI 2-PST 3	Male	36 – 41yrs	Yes
	TTI 2-PST 4	Female	30 – 35yrs	Yes
Special School Teachers (SS)	SS 1-IST	Female	24 – 29yrs	Yes
	SS 2-IST	Male	18 – 23yrs	Yes
	SS 3-IST	Male	30 – 35yrs	Yes
Primary School Teacher (PS)	PS-IST	Female	24 – 29yrs	Yes

The data gathered from this research revealed a pattern of relationships in participants' demographic areas.

Variable 1: Gender

This study maintained a gender balance. Of the 12 participants, 6 were female and 6 were male. The gender balance was crucial to make a comparison on participants' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education.

The gender of participants made an impact on the attitudes they had about inclusive education and their readiness to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher. The female participants appeared to be more sensitive in comparison to their male counterparts when it came to the discussion on subjects of care, protection, and education rights of disabled children in the mainstream as well as special schools. This finding is not surprising, since many cultures in Fijian society see women as the nurturers.

The male participants took the enrolment of disabled children in mainstream schools positively. They reasoned that in so doing, mainstream schools could progress towards making their schools inclusive. However, it was the female participants who made comments that mainstream schools and teachers should be ready for inclusive education before the enrolment of this group of children in their schools. The female participants reasoned that disabled children could suffer if placed in an environment which is not ready to wholeheartedly receive and cater for their developmental and educational needs. Here, both gender groups comments are noteworthy, but it is important that the mainstream schools make a start at some point in time.

Variable 2: Age category

The age of participants in this research study ranged from the early twenties to early forties, and it was evident from the data that with age, participants had a clearer understanding of inclusive education and what it meant to them.

Like gender, the age of participants also played a role in the research findings. Participants whose ages ranged from the early thirties to early forties showed more enthusiasm for the welfare and future of disabled children. Nevertheless, having the knowledge of the challenges of inclusive

education, they wanted the teacher training institutions to train them thoroughly so that they could become fully prepared for the challenges that inclusive education would bring in their teaching career.

The younger group of participants aged from the early twenties to late twenties, despite having the knowledge of the challenges of inclusive education, were ready to accept disabled children in their classroom. Nevertheless, for the success of inclusive education, these participants want the class size in mainstream classrooms, which currently sits at an average of forty-five to fifty students, to be reviewed and reduced, especially in those classes which have disabled children.

However, for this to be realised in practice, it would be important that the head teachers in mainstream schools make an effort to reduce their inclusive class size so that teachers who teach these classes get enough time to equally assist and cater for all children without bias. Unfortunately, in the current environment, this is not going to be achievable until such time as the schools start controlling their enrolment, and have additional classrooms, teachers and assistant teachers.

Variable 3: Experience with disabled children and/or adults.

It was apparent from this study that the participants' experience with disabled children and/or adults assisted them to plainly articulate their perspectives on inclusive education and their preparedness for the role of being an inclusive education teacher. The experience of participants in this context refers to the opportunity they had to spend time with and observe disabled children and/or adults, or teach disabled children.

The data revealed that the majority—11 out of 12 participants in this research—had limited to satisfactory experience with disabled children and/or adults. Their experience covered three areas, being the result of them having a disabled family member, having had the opportunity to spend time with and observe disabled children in the community, and their exposure to disabled children in their school/classroom. It was evident that some participants had experience in more than one area. Three participants

had a close family member who had a disability, but none of these family members were children.

All participants from the first teacher training institution stated that through field visits to special schools in their second year of teacher training, they received the opportunity to spend time with and observe disabled children. These field visits were a useful experience for this group of trainee teachers. Thus, it would be beneficial if the other teacher training institutions in Fiji also encouraged similar field visits, so that their trainee teachers could benefit equally. In addition, all the special school teachers and the only primary school teacher who participated in the research highlighted they had gained experience with disabled children from their exposure to this group of children in their classroom and school.

Participants' length and frequency of experience with disabled children and/or adults before, during and, for some, after their teacher training was the most significant variable within the demographic aspect of the data gathered. As a result of these experiences, participants were able to process and articulate their thoughts openly and freely when discussing the themes that emerged from this research. Also, participants who had experience with disabled children and/or adults were enthusiastic to accept the challenge of teaching this group of children, even though they perceived they were not well trained for inclusive education. In contrast, the participant with no previous contact or experience with this group of children and/or adults was also reluctant to have disabled children in her class. Experience seems to play a critical role in the inclusive education idea. Thus, it is important that the teacher training institutions create opportunities for all trainee teachers to experience teaching this group of children.

Overall, collating of demographic aspects of the data reveals three important points. The sensitivity of the women teachers in this study is seen in light of the role of women as nurturers in many countries of the world. Further, teachers who were younger seem surer about having disabled children in their class. Here, these teachers may have been influenced by the positive changes in international thinking about inclusion. Finally, the

role of experience within the disability demographic shows that it is imperative that all teachers receive the opportunity to encounter and experience teaching this group of children during their initial teacher training so that they can adequately prepare themselves for such challenges in their teaching career.

PERSONAL VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE WITH DISABLED CHILDREN AND THEIR ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

4.2 Teachers' definition of disabled children

The participants in this research provided a range of definitions of disabled children. They all agreed that this group of children are different from their non-disabled peers in terms of their physical, intellectual, emotional and social capacity. Overall, it was evident that participants used a medical model of disability to come to this conclusion. The medical model of disability associates disability in children with damage, disease, and difficulties that compromise normal bodily functions such as seeing, hearing, walking, and talking (MacArthur, 2009). As could be seen from the comments made, each participant had a slightly different way of describing this difference and what it meant to them.

Disabled children are individuals who are special and different from the rest of their peers. TTI 1-PST 1 defined "special" as being diverse, where the child is not able to perform tasks that others of the same age complete without much difficulty. Similarly, participant TTI 1-PST 4's definition indicated that disabled children have impairments, which consequently affects their performance in the classroom. "For example, a student who is blind is not able to see, so a student who is not blind will be able to see and write quickly" (TTI 1-PST 4). Here, TTI 1-PST 4's definition compares the disabled student to a non-disabled student, suggesting that all students who have normal vision will be able to write quickly. This type of comparison is common in people, but it is important to mention here that disability is only one of many ways children can be different from their peer. For some children, it can be completely natural to have a few weaknesses, but they usually find ways or seek help to overcome these difficulties. It is also true

that some children who have an impairment have extreme potential and they can perform equally well or even better than their non-disabled peers. For TTI 1-PST 2, disabled children are those who are “emotionally, socially, and physically delayed in growing.” This statement includes a definition involving more or less apparent disabilities, whereby aspects of disability are those that could easily be identified through continuous observation. Another participant who had experience teaching disabled children saw this group of children as those who have physical impairments (TTI 2-PST 1). “For example, they sometimes have broken legs or have polio legs, or maybe one of their arms is cut off, or one of their eyes is badly impaired” (TTI 2-PST 1). Even though this is true, teachers should also understand that impairments in children do not become a physical disability until such a time as these impairments starts to impede their physical performance. Participant TTI 2-PST 1 further articulated that those who have an intellectual disability are usually slow and may take a longer time to grasp a concept. “Sometimes some of these children in the classroom while you are teaching them they cannot learn because their mind is not in the classroom, it is somewhere else” (TTI 2-PST 1). It is apparent that teachers often form conclusions that a child who is slow in class and requires remedial work to grasp the concepts has intellectual impairment. However, this is not true all the time, since the environmental factors can equally affect these children’s performance in class. Moreover, three participants from the second teacher training institution, TTI 2-PST 2, TTI 2-PST 3, and TT1 2-PST 4, stated that disabled children are those who have mental, physical, social and emotional problems and, therefore, need to be well looked after. They added that these children need adequate support so that they can overcome these challenges to some extent. All participants from the special schools and the only participant from the primary school, through their experience teaching this group of children, defined disabled children as those who have a single to a combination of impairments. Their definition included children with physical, intellectual, visual, hearing, and emotional or social impairment, which can affect their performance in class as well as in the society.

On the contrary, some participants stated that disabled children are no different from their non-disabled peers: “nowadays, many people use the term disabled people and crippled, but for me, disabled children are just like us, and they need support” (TTI 1-PST 3). The statement “... disabled children are just like us, and they need support” generates a sense of inclusiveness. Further, it infers that disabled children, just like their non-disabled peers, need help from time to time to carry out certain tasks that they are assigned to do. However, the use of the word “crippled” also signals that this participant saw disabled children as those who were different from other children in the class in their physical makeup. Participant SS 1-IST asserted that disabled children need special attention and care. She added that teachers should be conscious so that they do not end up creating stressful situations which can cause these children’s impairment to become a disability. Though this participant did not directly mention that environmental factors can make children disabled, the idea that environmental support is useful is evident in her response. Participant SS 3-IST shared a similar notion, where he stated that disability “hinders someone to do things in an appropriate way.” He indicated that these children need assistive devices to improve their bodily functions. “There are some assistive devices or other things that are in place that can help/assist them in work or job” (SS 3-IST).

All in all, it is evident that the in-service teacher participants from the special schools, who had a lot more experience with disabled children and/or adults before, during, and after their teacher training, could give an in-depth definition of disabled children compared to participants from the two teacher training institutions. While participants from the teacher training institutions saw this group of children as those having a single but more visible disability—for example, physical disability—participants from the special schools saw disabled children as those having either a single or a combination of disabilities. Special education teachers’ views of disability also incorporates the hidden conditions. This finding suggests that teacher training institutions must provide trainee teachers enough opportunity to experience disabled children and/or adults, because the more time these

teachers spend with this group of children the further it will enhance their understanding. Dharan (2015) affirms this point when she highlights that teachers' awareness and experiences with disabled children can strengthen their positive attitudes as they engage themselves with disabled children. Participants' definitions also include the idea that assistive devices can help this group of children learn. All participants talked about disability as a condition that slows children down and hinders their learning. As the example of TTI 1-PST 1 shows, all teachers need to be mindful that in special education, "special" can also represent gifted and talented children who are better, greater, and different from what is usual.

4.3 Identification of disabled children

Early detection of disabled children is crucial, because it will enable this group of children to receive quality assistance in a timely manner. Silver and Silver (2010) affirm that the earlier disabilities in children are detected, and appropriate interventions are put in place, the better it will be for these children. They add that without early identification and intervention, academic problems can multiply for these children, which can lead them to fall further behind academically. The majority of participants in this study claimed that they would be able to identify disabled children with a more visible disability, such as those with physical impairment, hearing impairment and those who are blind, from the first time they see them—as this example indicates.

Like if they are in a wheelchair I will know they have physical disabilities, and if they are visually impaired, they will use some stick to move around and find direction. Those who have hearing impairment will be using hearing aids to help them hear. (TTI 2-PST 2)

However, it is not obvious that the behaviours mentioned by TTI 2-PST 2 in the statement above would be evident in disabled children all the time. Many disabled children try to hide their disabled identity, so that they do not become subjects of prejudice but become friends with and receive education together with their non-disabled peers. Further, it is important to

note that disability in children does not affect all aspects of their development and learning. Some who have disabilities also have extreme abilities, which they habitually use to hide their disability. Lovett, Nelson and Lindstrom (2015) articulate that this strategy of this group of children usually makes the presence of hidden disabilities the hardest to identify. Moreover, participants were aware that for some children, they must go beyond the surface to determine their disability. Their comments indicated that they understood that some children have hidden disabilities, and some have intellectual impairments, which can be mistaken for laziness. Thus, to identify these children, teachers must do a thorough and continuous observation, as indicated in the international literature, where O'Leary (2014) confirms that observation is a ubiquitous mechanism that all teachers must master, because it is a crucial component of the teaching profession. Participants in this study knew that observation plays a significant role in identifying disabled children, and many commented on this aspect of the identification process.

The physical disabilities in children are much easier to identify. Participant TTI 1-PST 1, TTI 2-PST 4, and SS 3-IST stated that they would be able to identify children with physical disabilities by their look, but to tell whether this group of children have emotional or mental impairment would be hard. Mental impairment cannot be identified overnight, because sometimes the children who possess these impairments “[entirely] shut out [and other times] they throw tantrums” (TTI 2-PST 4). This infers that teachers should be more observant in class, because it is going to be hard to identify those who have an intellectual impairment or mental disorder. Participant SS 2-IST, who had reasonable experience teaching children with intellectual impairment, stressed that children with intellectual impairment mostly face difficulty in remembering “concepts that are being taught in class.” He further stated that this children are the hardest to teach, because they have short attention spans, and, thus, they quickly forget what they learn in class. Nevertheless, people should know that not all children with memory problem and short attention span are identified as children with intellectual impairment. Some children with these problems can be perfectly all right

and have a normal lifestyle. TTI 1-PST 4 stated that in a classroom situation, most disabled students are not very active. He explained that many of these children “cannot write correctly, some cannot read, [nevertheless] some are fast and are in the same year group [as their peers].” As mentioned earlier, it is not obvious that disability in children affects every aspect of their learning. Some children can be very capable in class and it will be a challenge for the classmates to notice their disability. Continuous observation needs to be done to identify the aspect of this group of children’s learning that is inhibited by their disability.

Observation plays a crucial role when it comes to identifying disabled children. Participants in this study stated that they would be able to identify disabled children with less obvious disability through observation. Participant SS 1-IST, a special school teacher, highlighted that a child with autism can be identified in their early years of life. She added that autistic “[children are] reluctant to communicate, make friends, and socialise with others.” She further stated that children with autism “can also be diagnosed by doctors” (SS 1-IST). As a special education teacher, the belief is that teachers who have limited to no knowledge about autism may see these children as stubborn and disobedient. Thus, diagnosis by a qualified and licensed physician remains the most effective and efficient way to identify disabled children. Sadly, the medical reports supplied by doctors in Fiji are usually open to scrutiny, because in many occasions, the assessment of these children is done by inexperienced physicians. Secondly, the medical report is put together after only collecting superficial information, which mainly includes interviewing the child’s parents. Hence this makes the report unreliable and incomplete. In addition, SS 3-IST stated that “in a classroom situation, it [is] easy to identify children who are non-readers, who are poor readers, who cannot write, and [those] who cannot hold their pencil properly.” This participant remarked that identifying what might seem to be laxness in these children helped him “[realise that these children have] some form of disability.” This statement advocates that teachers should gather enough information about children before giving them a disability status, because a wrong label can affect these children’s education and

future.

Overall, participants' comments suggest that physical disability is the easiest to identify, because one just needs to compare the appearance of these children with others of the same age around them. Further, to determine children with emotional, intellectual or mental impairment, teachers need to have trained eyes and excellent observation skills. Participants in this study understood that some children have hidden disabilities, and this idea indicates that teachers can face many challenges when teaching this group of children. Intellectual impairment and learning disabilities are less common, and this can lead teachers to falsely identify this group of children as naughty or lazy rather than disabled. So, it is important for teachers to have good observation skills when they come to their classroom, because this would help them identify this group of children. Further, teacher training institutions should prepare teachers well and provide trainee teachers the opportunity to experience observing, as well as teaching, disabled children. It is considered that this experience will allow beginning teachers to come to their classroom with necessary knowledge and observation skills.

4.4 Teachers' opinion on the presence of disabled children in Fijian society

Disabled children want to be a part of a society which recognises and values their difference, and accepts them as a person. Finkelstein (2004) claims that the social obstructions that exist in our society make children with impairment and their personal traits disabled. Participants in this study agreed that this group of children should not be marginalised. They claimed that the community should make necessary changes so that this group of children can live and share the same space as their non-disabled peers. This finding indicates a positive shift in the idea around inclusion. It challenges the impression where disabled children are seen as a curse and are not acknowledged and welcome in society (Mutasa & Ruhode, 2015). What participants had to say to support this notion is included on the next page.

A negative attitude towards disabled children still exists in many societies, which is pushing disabled children away from their right to education and a barrier-free society (Oliver, 2013). However, participants in this study were optimistic about the presence of disabled children in communities. Having the consensus that disabled children are humans first encouraged participants to acknowledge their existence, and maintain a positive attitude towards disabled children's well-being in society. According to TTI 1-PST 1, "if disabled children are kept separate then that is going to be a big discrimination." This statement throws light on our current education system, which is keeping disabled children separate in standalone special schools with the idea that these schools are an ideal place for this group of children to receive education because of their user-friendly infrastructure and readily available resources. From inclusive education supporters' points of view, this is discrimination. Thus, as a start, mainstream schools should welcome disabled children in their schools, so that they can receive education together with their non-disabled peers, and at the same time advocate and create a society that they want for themselves. Oliver (1996) states that there is nothing wrong with disabled children that needs to be put right or corrected. Instead, there is a need for the system to change (as cited in Mutasa & Ruhode, 2015). To participant TTI 2-PST 3, disabled children are human beings just like everyone else, and, therefore, they deserve equality. Even though this group of children may be delayed in their development, this does not mean they should be treated differently from their non-disabled peers (TTI 1-PST 2 & TTI 2-PST 1). Participant TTI 1-PST 1 added that disabled children "should be addressed equally, [and]...accepted in the society." Further, TTI 2-PST 1 stated that some disabled children "have potential and [special] abilities, so we should recognise and make good use of their abilities." This implies that it is important for teachers to see the abilities of this group of children rather than their disabilities since disabled children deserve equal opportunity to participate and make their identity known in society. For PS-IST, this opportunity will undoubtedly benefit both parties. She added that by "having them in the same environment as the regular people has numerous benefits. One of the [advantages] is that they will be able to observe the [ordinary

citizens] and learn from them” (PS-IST). Undoubtedly, everyone spends a reasonable amount of time in life watching and learning from others. Thus, it is important that disabled children also receive the same opportunity. Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2010) highlight that by including disabled children in the society, we can enable them to acquire positive self-esteem and become contributing members of the community and the nation as a whole.

Overall, the positivity of participants towards disabled children is welcome. Nevertheless, a lot of advocacy needs to be carried out at the grassroots level so that everyone in schools and the community can be readied to accept them. The understanding is that an inclusive society is only possible if everyone plays their small role in creating an environment that is welcoming and rewarding to all. The social model of disability suggests that there is no need for the disabled children to change to fit in the society, but rather it is the society which needs to change and get rid of the ideas about normal and abnormal (Ash et al., 2005). In this study, disabled children were seen as having abilities which could supersede their disabilities, if given the opportunity to prove their capability. Mutasa and Ruhode (2015) affirms that disabled children will only be able to receive preferential treatment from society once the society starts to acknowledge their existence and hold a positive attitude towards them. Some participants in this study recognised that they had a role as teachers in making changes in the community as well as at school level. The recommendation is for people to see disabled children’s abilities and not disabilities when discussing their inclusion in society.

4.5 Disabled children’s access to quality education

Academics and practitioners in the education field use the term *quality education* to refer to the schooling that education stakeholders and society approve off (Ng, 2015). All participants in this study agreed that disabled children, irrespective of their disabling condition, must be permitted to access quality education. This finding is not surprising, seeing the beginner teachers’ enthusiasm for the opportunity to help disabled children

experience being a part of society in the earlier section. The perception that education is a universal right and no one should ever be denied access or stopped from taking advantage of the available education provisions governed the positive change in participants' attitudes towards disabled children's access to quality education. This point also appears in international literature, where MacArthur (2009) emphasises that access to quality education is a fundamental human right, and inclusive education is the foundation that provides this right to disabled children.

Disabled children themselves want to be part of a school system, where they would be able to receive quality education. Liasidou (2012) adds that quality education will allow disabled children to appreciate their difference, making for a more humane and fair society. Participant TTI 1-PST 1, recalling her experience with her disabled uncle, admitted that disabled children "want to feel normal, and they want to feel accepted. Just like normal children, disabled children also look forward to having their dreams fulfilled. Like attend primary education and then secondary school before going to the University" (TTI 1-PST 3). Participant TTI 1-PST 4 asserted that disabled children "have a future ... to secure," and having access to quality education can certainly help this group of children secure their future. Similarly, TTI 1-PST 1 mentioned that having access to quality education would enable disabled children to "find a job and have a family." This group of children can achieve their dream if we as teachers empower and provide them the opportunity to access quality education right from the beginning. Participant SS 1-IST stated that all disabled children have potential and it would be wrong for us to assume they are good for nothing and stop them from accessing quality education. She urged that everyone should give disabled children "a chance to fulfil their dreams." Similarly, another participant added that "we need to look at what disabled people can do and disregard or put away what they cannot do" (SS 3-IST). Apart from having disabilities many disabled children have extreme abilities. TTI 2-PST 1 stated that disabled children "have skills and potentials, and if we have the heart for them then we should provide them the opportunity to get access to quality education." Shelvin (2010) affirms that some children, despite

having disabilities, have infinite capacity, and teachers who support the notion that these children have the potential ensure they provide them the opportunity to exercise their ability. This opportunity is important, because it can enhance disabled children's skills and build their self-esteem. People's negative perspectives can lead to the devaluation of disabled children in schools and society. Participant PS 1-IST remarked that having a physical disability does not necessarily mean that the child cannot read and write. She justified this by saying "there is a boy with a physical disorder in year seven, but he is the smartest in his class. So, we [should not just] look at their disability, but also ... check their knowledge and other things" (PS 1-IST). Children's looks should never be used to judge their abilities. Also, teachers should understand that quality education is not only about excelling academically, but it is also about developing talents and skills that are usually dormant in individuals. TTI 2-PST 4 stated that disabled children "who have talents ... [but] are not good academically ... can [improve] their other interest areas and live as normal [life] as possible in the community."

The issue of rights of disabled children was also mentioned in this study. TTI 1-PST 4 stated that "everyone has the right to education regardless of whether you are physically disabled or whether you are fast. Everyone deserves a quality education, and that is why they are saying education for all." He added that his thoughts on this subject became clearer after his field visits to the special schools. To clarify his point, participant TTI 1-PST 4 remarked, "when I went to the special schools and saw what they could do, I realised I was wrong. They deserve better treatment because some of the things they do are much better than what we can do." If a single field visit can make such a positive influence in attitude, then trainee teachers will currently learn a whole lot more if given the opportunity to spend quality time with this group of children. Further, this infers that disability experience during teacher training is influential and should be encouraged. According to Forlin (2010), it is also important for teacher training institutions to ensure trainee teachers who have a negative attitude about disabled children during their teacher training to finish their training with a positive attitude that will enable them to provide disabled children the opportunity to access

quality education. Another participant stated that for the severely disabled children, getting access to quality education may become difficult; nevertheless, she insisted that the disabled children should still be allowed to prove their potential, because of their right to education (TTI 1-PST 1). This finding is not new, as “lately experience has shown that [severely disabled] learners can be placed in mainstream schools although many countries provide Special Units for them” (Mariga & McConkey, 2014, p. 20).

The negative attitudes of parents can also stop disabled children from getting access to quality education. According to TTI 1-PST 1, the negative attitude of parents towards their children education is a big problem, and “at times is hard to get around.” Alur (2010) highlights that many parents’ negative attitudes towards their disabled children’s education are generated from the fear that their children would not fit in well in a mainstream school and, that their children would be given inappropriate treatment by the non-disabled children and teachers in the school. These claims are true on many occasions, but parents need to take chances at some stage for the education benefit of their disabled children. Moreover, it is crucial that the mainstream schools give assurance to parents that they are ready to accept and cater for the developmental and educational needs of their disabled children.

All in all, disabled children, despite having disabilities, also have extreme abilities, which schools need to consider when parents try to enrol their disabled children in the nearby mainstream school. Moreover, these children’s abilities should be utilised to enhance their personal and professional development. Participants’ comments uphold the idea that education stakeholders need to make changes at all levels so that disabled children can access quality education and have a sustainable and secure adulthood. All children were seen as qualifying for access to quality education in mainstream schools. A quality education is about developing every disabled child holistically so that they can become a contributing member of society and the nation. More effort is needed so that disabled children get recognised by their abilities and not by their disabilities.

4.5.1 Education for disabled children—special school versus mainstream school

The majority of participants agreed that no two disabled children are the same. Hence, they suggested that teachers should assess all disabled children individually before determining whether they should receive their education in a special school or a mainstream school. Nevertheless, it is never easy to evaluate disabled children who have a communication problem or severe disabling conditions. Wedell (2008) states that assessment for learning is a professional skill that all teachers must master and then efficiently and effectively utilise to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Some participants in this study had equal approval for both special as well as mainstream school setups. These participants used the theory of severity of disability, accessibility, and resources to recommend special school as the ideal platform for the education of disabled children. What the participants had to say is presented below.

A special school generally is more welcoming for the education of disabled children with severe and profound disabling conditions. A small group of participants stated that disabled children should receive their education in special schools because of the qualified special education teachers and readily available resources. This point also appears in international literature, where Kaikkonen (2010) reports that human resources are essential for the learning and teaching of disabled children. TTI 1-PST 2, TTI 2-PST 2 and SS 2-IST articulated that it would be beneficial for the severely and the profoundly disabled children to receive their education in special schools. TTI 1-PST 2 further reasoned that extra attention is possible in a special school because of the smaller class size. Experience shows that the majority of the mainstream schools in Fiji have a large school roll with limited number of classrooms; thus, this leads these schools to have larger class sizes. TTI 2-PST 4 added that children who are blind and deaf need trained teachers to help them meet their educational needs, so these children should receive their education in special schools.

However, for inclusive education to be successful disabled children should receive their education in the nearby mainstream school. Participants in this study claimed that the mainstream school environment is authentic for inclusive education. The majority participants stated that all disabled children irrespective of the severity of their disabling condition, should receive their education in the mainstream school. Participant SS 1-IST stated that a mainstream school environment often creates challenging learning situations, which are crucial for motivating disabled children and accelerating their learning. Further, the mainstream school environment also enables disabled children to learn useful skills from their non-disabled peers. TTI 1-PST 3 claimed that the education in mainstream school is beneficial for both disabled as well as non-disabled children, because it allows them to observe and learn useful skills from each other. PS-IST added that the mainstream school environment would allow disabled children to feel normal. According to TTI 2-PST 1, disabled children should receive their education in mainstream schools because “if we continue to put them in a special school, then this mentality of discrimination will continue.” This participant posited that it is about time we discarded the shallow thinking that disabled children cannot learn, as “this type of thinking contributes to limited access to the education of these children.” Further, SS 2-IST, a special education teacher, articulated, “we are moving towards inclusive education,” thus, “all special children should be included in the mainstream schools.” He stated that by keeping disabled children in special schools, “we as teachers are creating exclusion.” Further, like SS 2-IST, participant TTI 1-PST 4 highlighted that all disabled children should receive their education in the nearby mainstream schools because of the “education for all” agenda. This is a good idea, since traveling a long distance to the nearest special school in town or city centres is often an extra financial burden on parents. Thus, disabled children should be enrolled in the nearby mainstream school, because this is a cost-effective strategy that can help solve this problem. TTI 1-PST 1 reasoned that mainstream schools are an ideal platform for inclusive education because “there are so many of those ... [and] for the special schools [to be made] inclusive I don’t think an average student would want to attend [a] blind school [if] he is not blind.”

This participant raised a valid point that it is unlikely that non-disabled students would want to receive education in a special school. People should be in the right learning environment, and for many disabled students, a special school is just as wrong for them as it is for non-disabled students.

Nevertheless, placing disabled children in an unprepared mainstream school environment would lead to the segregation of many of the disabled children.

If they are in the same classroom as the average students, automatically the teacher is going to differentiate and separate them from whatever they will do in class. I have seen it—this child is neglected because he cannot read, he cannot write, and the teacher just focused on the faster ones in the classroom. (TTI 1-PST 4)

This scenario is typical when teachers are not prepared and have a negative attitude towards disabled children. Disabled children should receive their education in mainstream schools where teachers are ready for the challenge of teaching this group of children. The chances of segregation and deprivation of these children's rights to quality education become high when we place them in an unprepared mainstream school. To help solve the problem, TTI 1-PST 2 insisted that all teachers "need to have [specialised] training so that they can meet the needs of disabled children." The literature also recommends this, and MacArthur (2009) articulates that teacher training institutions should incorporate inclusive education papers in their teacher education program to prepare teachers for inclusive education. "If these teachers are trained to cope, then these children will benefit" (TTI 2-PST 3). Until such time the mainstream teachers are made ready to teach all disabled children, participant TTI 2-PST 4 suggested that the disability type of a child should be used to determine whether he/she would fit well in a mainstream school or a special school. "For example, disability like dyslexia and ADHD can be handled in the mainstream classroom" (TTI 2-PST 4). Participant SS 3-IST concluded that the placement of disabled children in special and mainstream schools should be carried out after an intensive assessment.

Overall, all disabled children need a conducive learning environment, where teachers acknowledge their difference and are skilled enough to make substantial changes within the school and their teaching style for disabled children to receive a quality education. However, much depended on the degree and type of disabling conditions of the children when deciding which of the two school placements would provide the best education provision for this group of children. Disabled children with mild and moderate disabling conditions are perceived ideal by participants for placement in mainstream schools. This point is also found in international studies, where Forlin et al. (2009) indicate that teachers who are for inclusive education mainly show support for the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabling conditions, rather than those who are severe. Further, class size emerged as a factor that pushes teachers away from inclusive education. Kaikkonen (2010) claims that many mainstream teachers fear of teaching disabled children is generated from the consensus on how they will address the national and local curricula demands while having disabled children in their class who need a lot of one-to-one assistance. These points came out as part of the tensions for some participants around special versus mainstream school placement. Participants could see that a mainstream school placement would help with social adjustment but that this arrangement might make it harder for disabled children to get the additional assistance they required. Thus, assessment of disabled children before their placement in special and mainstream school sounds promising, but it will be time-consuming and challenging to execute. Nonetheless, this will enable the successful placement of this group of children in a school which can meet their educational and developmental needs. Interestingly, no participants in this study offered the solution of smaller classes in mainstream schools if a severely disabled child was present.

PROFESSIONAL OPINIONS ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

4.6 Teachers' understanding of inclusive education

This section presents a range of definitions of inclusive education that participants provided in this study. These definitions reflect participants' understanding of the inclusive education idea. It is a common adage that inclusion means different things to different people, which consequently determines how the inclusive education approach is utilised (Armstrong et al., 2010). This section also discusses the benefits of inclusive education and makes recommendations for the valuing of inclusive education.

Inclusive education is a strategy that encourages the placement of disabled and non-disabled children together under one roof, so that they could learn and work together. Participant TTI 1-PST 1 stated that "inclusive education is when everybody is included ... despite [difference in] gender, race, disabilities or abilities." To TTI 2-PST 1, "inclusive education is a process in which we ... bring together disabled and the non-disabled children." These three participants' definitions reflect a conventional understanding of the inclusive education idea. The consensus is that inclusive education is an education strategy that sanctions mainstream schools to eradicate barriers which can stop disabled children from enrolling and taking full advantage of education provisions in their schools. Liasidou (2012) points out that inclusive education acknowledges the difference in every individual, and this being part of the human rights approach, it facilitates the recognition and removal of all forms of oppression that hinder individuals' progress. Other participants shared similar consensus. To TTI 1-PST 3, disabled children are "different, and therefore, inclusive education means to involve/include all these children," whether they are in special schools or mainstream schools. The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2004) describes inclusive education as a fundamental component that helps develop the potential in disabled people to enjoy the full range of privileges in life. This suggests that inclusive education should be made an essential practice of the school system. Supporters of inclusive education envision this, because of the many benefits inclusive education brings for disabled children.

In contrast, some participants seemed to have ideas that were not consistent with standard definitions of inclusive education. Participant TTI 1-PST 2 stated that “inclusive education is designed for children who are ... delayed with their spirituality, their social and emotional development.” To TTI 1-PST 4, the inclusive education concept stops disabled children from being chased away from schools. Nevertheless, for mainstream schools to accept disabled children, it is important that these schools understand the inclusive education concept, its benefits and prepare themselves for such encounters. Further, PS-IST highlighted that “inclusive education simply means removing diverse learners who are slow in a regular classroom, and teaching ... and supporting them in different ways so that they can learn.” It is possible that this participant sees inclusive education as either providing extra resources to certain learners, or removing them completely to specialised learning environments. As such, it is fine to remove disabled children from the mainstream classrooms for a period or two during the day so that they can be given one-to-one support by a qualified inclusive education teacher in a particular subject area. However, the participant may not have recognised that inclusive education does not encourage removal of this group of children from the mainstream classrooms for special education in standalone special schools.

There are numerous benefits of inclusive education for both, disabled and non-disabled children. TTI 2-PST 3 articulated that “the goal of inclusive education is to [create] opportunity for all children to participate and be treated equally.” Similarly, Holland (2015) states that inclusive education is about a child’s “right to participate and the school’s duty to accept the child” (p. 46). Participant TTI 1-PST 2 stated that the inclusive schools would enable disabled and the non-disabled children to “learn from each other, like for some they can change by observing and imitating others right behaviours and skills.” This is true, since we all from time to time watch others and imitate what seems right for us, and a lot is learned this way. Smidt (2009) affirms that “ideas and concepts are often mediated by more experienced learners,” (p.14) and learning primarily takes place through social interactions. According to TTI 1-PST 3, “disabled children need to be

with their non-disabled peers so that they can feel accepted, because every time in the village, in the community and town ... people think of disabled children as the lower caste.” The assumption is that disabled children would be understood and accepted once this group of children are formally introduced to people in the community, and these people are given the opportunity to see disabled children’s potentials. Furthermore, the chance to study in mainstream schools can enable non-disabled children to come down to their disabled peers’ level, to understand, to help, and to support each other as they progress towards the future. This would allow disabled and non-disabled children to have the right attitude towards each other. Hence, a conclusion reached from personal experience is that if all mainstream schools were to run inclusive education programs, then disabled children may have no difficulty when it comes to education. Inclusive education could become the norm if this thought became universal. UNESCO (1994) affirms that the mainstream schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes. Participant TTI 1-PST 3 raised this important point when he stated that the non-disabled children would become politer and more respectful towards disabled peers if they were given the opportunity to spend time with this group of children. The idea of educating disabled children in mainstream schools is great, but it is important that the teachers, the students, and the whole school understand how to treat disabled children. Everyone needs to make disabled children feel that they belong. This is a hurdle that we need to overcome for inclusive education to be started, improved and retained in mainstream schools. Participant TTI 2-PST 2 reasoned that inclusive education would allow disabled children in mainstream schools to study the same subjects as their non-disabled peers, and this would help them benefit academically. In mainstream school, disabled children will get to “mingle with the rest of the children in the classroom [and this will make them] feel accepted” (TTI 2-PST 4). Moreover, this will help this group of children to “open instead of just closing themselves within their disability” (TTI 2-PST 4). These points resonate with international studies that suggest that disabled students feel accepted when they receive education in a less restrictive classroom (Liasidou, 2015).

Further, creating a barrier-free environment makes disabled students feel accepted, which thus builds their self-esteem and increases their capacity to explore their real potentials (Armstrong et al., 2010; Naukkarinen, 2010). Participant SS 1-IST and SS 2-IST asserted that disabled children would benefit more in mainstream schools because these schools follow the national curriculum, which makes the environment more competitive for disabled children's learning. SS 1-IST added that this would allow disabled children to "have a positive feeling every time."

The recommendation is for teachers to be trained well so that they can implement and retain inclusive education in mainstream schools. This would stop mainstream teachers from sending children who are slow learners to a special school on the basis that they would benefit more in a special setup. In addition, retention of disabled children in mainstream school on the grounds of inclusive education will help disabled children retain their self-respect, and this would encourage them to put maximum effort into whatever they do in school and in future. According to TTI 2-PST 1, "if we consider [inclusive education] necessary, then it should be made part of the curriculum in every teacher training college." Florian and Rouse (2010) agree with this statement when they state that inclusive education courses "should be the core of the curriculum for all student teachers rather than an additional element or an elective selected by only some students" (p. 193). TTI 2-PST 1 admitted that teachers in mainstream schools face difficulties in implementing inclusive education because the inclusive education "concept is taught only in some universities and colleges." (For a discussion on this subject, please refer to section 4.9.) SS 3-IST highlighted that a less restrictive environment is needed for inclusive education to be successful. This participant claimed that mainstream schools could be transformed into a less restrictive environment only when teachers have received the necessary training and hence are ready for the challenge of teaching disabled children.

On the whole, all participants, irrespective of their degree of understanding of inclusive education support the concept. They see inclusive education as an idea that can benefit both the disabled children as well as their non-

disabled peers. Mainstream schools are considered to be an ideal platform for successful implementation and retention of inclusive education. Nevertheless, reasonable changes in these schools must be made to improve accessibility for all disabled children. Forlin (2010) articulates that stronger emphasis should be given to the restructuring of the general school environment to accommodate learners with a broader range of educational needs. Participants suggested that further training at teachers colleges would be necessary, and this training should be woven into all areas of learning. Similarly, on an international context, Florian and Rouse (2010) highlight that in many situations, the inclusive education course is decontextualised by teacher training colleges and universities, because they see this course as an addition to and different from the standard program. Apart from training teachers for inclusive education, all non-disabled children should also receive training so that they can help create a non-discriminatory school environment for all disabled children.

4.7 Are teachers' attitude and skills a major obstacle to inclusive education

Eleven participants in this research agreed that teachers' attitude and skills are crucial for effective implementation of inclusive education. Similarly, international literature affirms that teachers' attitudes and skills are significant for the promotion and retention of inclusive education (Claughton, 2015). Teachers' could either have a positive or a negative attitude towards inclusive education, and this may be determined by the experiences these teachers may have had with disabled children or associate teachers. Participants in this study used a range of examples to advance their discussion on the subjects of attitude and skills.

Positive attitude and skills are crucial for successful implementation and retention of inclusive education in mainstream schools. Providing trainee teachers the opportunity to spend time with and observe disabled children and special education teachers is seen as a positive prospect. This study infers that these experiences would enable trainee teachers to develop positive attitude towards this group of children and their education.

Participant TTI 1-PST 1, using her special school field trip experience, stated that the special school teachers “go the extra mile to educate their students and it’s so inspirational.” She claimed that there are hardly any “teachers like them [in mainstream schools].” TTI 1-PST 1 further stated that teachers’ attitude towards disabled children would take a positive turn once teachers learn about disabled children. Moreover, teachers in special schools “devote more time for children with special needs and [those who] need extra attention” (TTI 1-PST 2). As highlighted in the previous section, this may be the reason why many parents find special schools more caring and supportive than the mainstream schools when it comes to the education of their disabled children.

However, some teachers experience with disabled children may lead these teachers to have a negative attitude towards inclusive education. Participant TTI 1-PST 2 stated that “some mainstream teachers ... they neglect [the slow learners], they put them on one side and just forget about them.” She added that on many occasions, teachers concentrate on the average to above average students because they lack knowledge and skills on how to teach slow learners. Participant TTI 1-PST 2 further stated that her attitude may also take a negative form if she comes across some very challenging students who she is not able to teach or help, because of her insufficient knowledge and skills. One of the participants from the special school stated that many of the mainstream teachers “do not want to devote time to special needs children” (SS 1-IST). PS-IST, who had inclusive class experience, affirmed this when she stated, “we often feel that [disabled children are] a burden to us [as they cause us] to do extra work.” Teachers in mainstream schools in Fiji are already facing many challenges in teaching because of the large class size of forty-five to fifty students, and having to teach disabled children without giving much emphasis on reducing the class size will certainly lead many teachers to have a negative attitude about the inclusion idea. Moreover, devoting extra time to disabled children in a large class is close to impossible. According to TTI 2-PST 4, for the past two years during his practicum, he had noticed that children who were not able to read, probably because of dyslexia, were left on their own at the back of the

classroom. This participant also mentioned that she had witnessed teachers giving students names, because they were slow learners. This implies that negative attitude is going to be a major obstacle to inclusive education. TTI 2-PST 1 alleged that many of the “teachers still have the mentality that disabled children are not important.” Similarly, TTI 1-PST 4 pointed out that some teachers neglect students in class “because in their heart they think they are just wasting their time teaching them.” This infers that having limited knowledge about a disabling condition is an obstacle that could lead to the negative attitude in teachers. It is likely that the negative attitude of teachers would worsen when they would actually encounter this group of children in their classroom. SS 3-IST claimed that many of the mainstream teachers have a negative attitude towards inclusive education for the following reasons. These included attitudinal, training and environmental issues.

First, they do not have proper education or the knowledge about [various types of] disabilities. Secondly, they are trained in teachers college where less special education courses are offered, and more are concentrated on normal children. Third, the class roll in mainstream setup [is too large]. (SS 3-IST)

This participant further claimed that many teachers do not have the passion for teaching disabled children, whether they be in mainstream schools or the special schools. Thus, with this attitude and confined skills, inclusive education is not possible, since it would have an adverse impact on the disabled student’s performance. Participant TTI 2-PST 3, who was not so sure if teachers’ attitude and skills can be a major obstacle to inclusive education, conceded that teachers would face problems teaching disabled children with inadequate knowledge and training.

To ease this problem, quality training should be given to all trainee teachers at teacher training institutions, so that they graduate having enough knowledge and skills to start and retain inclusive education. Participant TTI 2-PST 4 and SS 2-IST claimed that many of the mainstream teachers have limited training to handle disabled children. Therefore, it is certain that these teachers could have a negative attitude towards disabled children and

inclusive education. They added that a conducive learning environment is equally important for inclusive education to be successful. Sharma, Forlin and Loreman (2008) accept that the initial teacher training plays a significant role in ensuring that teachers have the right attitude and skills to facilitate inclusion. TTI 1-PST 3 stated that proper studies would prepare teachers to accept the challenge of teaching children with diverse learning needs.

Overall, positive attitude and advanced teaching skills are essential characteristics that all teachers must have for successful implementation and retention of inclusive education. However, when faced with an adverse environment such as too many students and not enough support, positive attitudes can change. According to MacArthur (2009), some teachers have low expectations for disabled children's learning and claim that they are unable or untrained to cater for their educational needs, while Dharan (2015) emphasises that teachers who are familiar with and have a positive attitude towards disabled children have more pedagogical interaction in the classroom. These findings are evident in the remarks given by participants in this study. This study reports that teachers in mainstream schools may be underprepared, and, thus, they may lack the right attitude and skills to teach disabled children in inclusive classrooms. Participants claimed that many teachers in mainstream schools believe disabled children cannot learn, hence, teaching them in the mainstream classroom would be a waste of time. Thus, training of mainstream teachers, children, parents and the people in the community is necessary for the success of inclusive education. However, large class size is one of the major factors that schools will need to overcome, because it can lead mainstream teachers to have a negative attitude towards inclusive education. Unfortunately, this factor is outside of the control of individual teachers in Fiji.

4.8 Challenges of teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom

Participants in this research mentioned numerous challenges that they as teachers would face when teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom. These challenges, in descending order of occurrence in this study, are as follows: time management, classroom management, limited disability-related knowledge, limited resources and inaccessible infrastructure, and maintaining school standards.

Most participants stated that time management would be their biggest challenge. Participant TTI 1-PST 1 and SS 3-IST said that keeping up with the “syllabus and day to day timetable” would be one of their biggest challenges. International literature affirms that inclusive education is a process; thus, it cannot be achieved overnight (de Beco, 2016). This author adds that teachers will need to put in long-term efforts to adapt the general education system to the developmental and educational needs of all disabled and non-disabled children in class. TTI 1-PST 1 added that apart from her regular teaching time, she would also be required to sacrifice some of her personal time to do home visits, so that she could understand the living conditions of disabled children, and help them in areas where assistance is desperately needed. TTI 1-PST 2 stated that she would have to give more time to disabled children, and then end up not having enough time to assist other children in her class. “So, I [would] need to schedule myself well so that I can help all children” (TTI 1-PST 2). Participant TTI 1-PST 3 further stressed that disabled children would require more one-on-one sessions with their teacher. This participant concluded that all these would certainly consume a lot of time. Thus, time management would be an issue. Brownell et al. (2012) agree that inclusive education teachers often lack sufficient time to plan and implement instruction. This issue of time management was not just confined to classroom practice. Providing extra time for students was also mentioned. According to PS-IST, “when it comes to exams. When I see the marks, I feel like ... giving them extra time which I don’t have, and I don’t know how to cater [for] them.” In this type of situation, it is important for teachers to consult professionals or take advice

from the senior and experienced teachers in the field to gather strategies that can help them overcome such problems. Participant TTI 1-PST 4 and TTI 2-PST 2 remarked that having disabled children in class would mean that they would need to move at these children's pace, and this certainly would affect the progress of non-disabled children in class. This problem can become worse if teachers do not have access to teacher aides. If teachers care for disabled children, then they may end up assisting this group of children at the cost of non-disabled children's time, and it is going to be a problem.

Further, the already large number of children in mainstream classrooms topped up with disabled children will unquestionably make time management a challenge (TTI 2-PST 4, SS 1-IST, SS 2-IST & SS 3-IST). "We as teachers would have to face this challenge because we cannot push any of the students away" (SS 2-IST). While this may motivate some teachers to go out of their way and give up their personal time to assist students in their class, it may also lead to the development of negative attitudes in teachers towards inclusive education, which can then cause them to be reluctant to engage in inclusive education practices. A study on elementary school teachers in Gurgaon, India, revealed that large class size was a major barrier to the implementation of inclusion education programs in their schools (Yadav et al., 2015).

Classroom management was the second challenge that participants mentioned they would encounter when adopting the role of an inclusive education teacher. Participant TTI 1-PST 1 and SS 1-IST claimed that many non-disabled children in mainstream schools are not accustomed to disabled children and, therefore, are not aware how they should treat this group of children. Here, awareness is perceived as necessary, because it will make the classroom a conducive learning environment where the presence of all students is acknowledged and appreciated. TTI 2-PST 2 admitted that she would have to learn how she is supposed to treat all disabled children in her classroom before she can pass her knowledge and skills to other children in the class. Mariga, Myezwa, McConkey and Project (2014) posit that non-disabled children in inclusive classrooms should be

equally supported and taught how to treat disabled children in and out of school. It is perceived that this understanding will help non-disabled children appreciate their disabled peers and welcome them in their classrooms with open arms, since disabled children often become a victim of a bullying in many of the unprepared mainstream classes. TTI 1-PST 1 claimed that non-disabled students who do not appreciate disabled students would “make fun of disabled children,” which would create a negative classroom environment for disabled children, and push them away from school. This suggests that managing this type of situations is vital, and teachers should be ready to go out of their way to look for strategies that can solve the problem at hand. Participant TTI 1-PST 1 further stated that she would have to seek help from her students’ parents to manage the disruptive behaviours in her classroom. Brownell et al. (2012) affirm that parents hold a lot of valuable information about their children, and, thus, teachers should make them an active partner in their children’s education, and the classroom management.

On the issue of classroom management, participants also touched on how disabled children themselves may be the cause of difficulties. TTI 1-PST 2 highlighted that disabled children could be a “disturbance to the class because they ... are attention seekers.” She added that she would have to give these children more “activities to keep them busy all the time so that they won’t disturb the class.” Here, it is important for teachers to work out the motives of disabled students’ disruptive behaviours, because on many occasions they display these characteristics just to gain the attention of their peers and teacher. Thus, teachers should carefully work on the strategies to manage such behaviours so that they do not end up rewarding these students for their disruptive behaviours.

Inclusive education teachers would need to have a lot of patience because many disabled children, especially those with learning difficulties, may struggle grasping concepts taught in class, because of their difficulty in processing and memorising information. Participant TTI 1-PST 3 articulated that from time to time he would be required to “teach and re-teach so that [disabled] children can grasp the concept. So, I [should] have a lot of patience to [teach] these children [repeatedly].” This situation is common in

classrooms where there are disabled children. Inclusive education teachers will need to have a lot of patience and tolerance when teaching this group of children. TTI 2-PST 3 stated that he, as an inclusive education teacher, must keep his emotions under control, because disabled children can go to the extreme to test the emotions of people around them

Having limited disability-related knowledge was yet another problem mentioned by some participants. Participant TTI 2-PST 2 admitted that she had no knowledge about different types of disabilities that children face. She stated that it would be a challenge learning about the specific types of disability. According to de Beco (2016), teachers are often not equipped to deal with disability-related issues, which as a result leads them to face difficulty in meeting the educational and developmental needs of disabled students in class. TTI 2-PST 3 articulated that it would be a challenge for him to focus more on a student's abilities and not disabilities, as encouraged by special education teachers. Having limited knowledge about children's disabling conditions and how they can affect their learning often restricts teachers from preparing a working program and planning activities for their class.

Furthermore, limited resources and inaccessible infrastructure is also a challenge that inclusive education teachers must overcome. A participant in this study stated that "inclusive education is a new thing, so all the resources and equipment should be made available in schools for the disabled children's use" (TTI 2-PST 1). It will be a big challenge for teachers to cater for all disabled children in their class with the limited availability of resources (TTI 2-PST 1 & TTI 2-PST 4). Yadav et al. (2015) accept that lack of resources in mainstream schools often restricts inclusive education teachers from adapting their teaching methods. Lack of resources also limits disabled children from realising their rights to inclusive education. Having scarce resources in place and inaccessible infrastructure was a major issue for one participant, as seen below.

When the facilities and resources are ready for them, then I know catering for disabled children won't be a major problem. For example,

like most of the schools are built on the hills or slope, and there is no space for the children who use a wheelchair. There are no ramps for them, and maybe inside the classroom, there is just a blackboard, and this is not good for children who have visual problems. Inside of the classrooms are too crowded, which prevents free movement of children with disabilities. (TTI 2-PST 1)

This statement infers that the mainstream school needs to make a lot of structural changes within their school to allow the enrolment and education of disabled children. Unfortunately, in developing nations, resources may not be forthcoming, so teachers may need to rely on their personal and professional instincts and skills to transform locally available materials into useful resources to use in their classroom. Teachers need to modify the classroom space so that they can make it friendlier for all students, including the disabled. Research shows that structural changes in schools should be given preference, because it will not only benefit disabled children but non-disabled children as well. When the facilities are ready for disabled students—for example, ramps for those in the wheelchair, and computers and whiteboards for the visually impaired—then catering for these students will become much easier. Unfortunately, structural change to improve accessibility is out of the teachers' control. Nevertheless, they can make reasonable requests for assessment and modification of the school structure to the school management via the school head teacher.

Maintaining school standards is another challenge that teachers would encounter when teaching an inclusive education class. Participant SS 3-IST stated that many mainstream schools “want their school to be identified as the top school,” so they always aim to enrol students who can perform at a maximum level. This participant acknowledged that this is the reason why many mainstream schools are hesitant to transform their schools into inclusive education schools. Many mainstream schools fear that disabled children will push the level of education down (de Beco, 2016). Furthermore, if by chance these schools do enrol disabled children, then teachers who teach these students can be put under a lot of pressure as they have to make sure this group of students performs to their maximum level so that

the school can maintain their standards. Executive understanding and collective effort are needed to overcome this problem.

Overall, time and classroom management are the two top challenges out of the many that teachers could face when teaching an inclusive education class. Apart from adapting themselves and the classroom for the benefit of all children, the teachers must also spend quality time teaching and assisting disabled children in class, even if it means sacrificing their personal time. Inclusive education teachers will need to be active so that they can give all students in class equal attention with the limited time they have on hand. Further, apart from training the teachers for inclusive education classrooms, non-disabled children should also be educated about inclusive education so that they can understand the concept and be of assistance to their teacher and other students in class. Large class size in mainstream schools can force teachers to adopt a one-size-fits-all model, which certainly is not beneficial for disabled children in inclusive classrooms. Also, teachers themselves need good support from colleagues and school management so that they can do their job well. Hence, it is crucial that the head of the school reduces the number of non-disabled children in inclusive education class so that teachers can successfully help all children.

TRAINING AND PREPAREDNESS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

4.9 Teachers' preparedness for the teaching of disabled children

The majority participants indicated that they had gained knowledge about disabled children from their teacher training; however, after understanding what it takes to become a quality special and inclusive education teacher, they found their training insufficient. They confirmed they did not receive any specific training to identify and teach disabled children. Hence, they concluded they were not ready for the challenge of teaching disabled children in special and inclusive education classrooms. This finding was not new, because other studies in the area of inclusive education reveal that the majority of the mainstream teachers are not very confident to teach disabled children (Singal, 2010). These are what participants had to say to support these claims.

Teacher training program adopted by teacher training institutions in Fiji mainly focus on preparing teachers for the mainstream classrooms. Participant TTI 1-PST 1 articulated that, “we should be taught how disabled children learn [so that we can teach them], otherwise, we will only know how to teach non-disabled students.” Having said this, this participant indicates that she is aware of what it takes to become an inclusive education teacher, and is also certain that she needed to prepare herself more for such classroom situations. She stated that she lacked special techniques and skills, which are necessary to teach disabled children in an inclusive education classroom. Reflecting on one of her second-year teaching practicums, TTI 1-PST 1 pointed out that she had three students with autism in her class. She mentioned that she did not know about these students until she was told about them by her associate teacher, and that was when she was about to complete her practicum and return to college. She stated that she had read about autistic children during her teacher training, but did not receive any training on how to teach them. Furthermore, when she tried to acquire knowledge from her associate teacher on how to teach autistic children, she was told, “you just go on with the lesson and I will help these children.” Hence, Dharan’s (2015) suggestion is noteworthy, when she articulated that teacher educators should ensure they not only arouse confidence in trainee teachers to teach all children but also that they support associate teachers who mentor trainee teachers so that they can change the attitudes and beliefs of trainee teachers towards inclusive practices. Similarly, TTI 1-PST 2 stated that she had learned ways to deal with disabled children during her teacher training, but it was not adequate to prepare her for what lay ahead. This participant stated that she took the inclusive education course for one whole semester. Nevertheless, she still felt she was “not that much prepared.” “Most of the teachers are scared to go and teach in special schools. If [teacher training institutions] can prepare us more, then we can ... teach in special and inclusive education schools” (TTI 1-PST 2). This suggests that teachers’ negative attitudes may stem from the fear of the unknown. Another trainee teacher from the first teacher training institution admitted that he was only taught the basics about disabled children (TTI 1-PST 3). “For example, we learned the actions

hands (referring to sign language), basic counting, and the English alphabets using hand" (TTI 1-PST 3). This participant admitted that there is so much more to learn before he becomes ready to teach disabled children. He added that he "will need to communicate with disabled children because this is important. It is ... easy to communicate with [non-disabled] people, but [communicating] with [disabled] children is a little bit tricky" (TTI 1-PST 3). This implies that this training is insufficient, because it takes a whole lot more to effectively and efficiently communicate with this group of children. Teachers must understand that it is never easy to talk to and understand disabled children who have a communication problem, especially those who have a hearing impairment. Teachers need to learn sign language, so that they are able to communicate with this group of children. It is important for teachers to effectively communicate with and understand children with hearing impairments so that they are able to provide them the assistance they need. Hence, it is crucial that all trainee teachers receive adequate training during and after teacher training so that they can have enough sign language skills to assist this group of children. TTI 1-PST 3 further mentioned that the teacher training institution should have sent him to a special school for a practicum so that he could learn from the special education teachers. Exposure to and the opportunity to see special education teachers in the act of teaching is necessary for all future special and inclusive education trainee teachers. TTI 2-PST 2, another participant from the second teacher training institution, also stated that she was not prepared well for inclusive education. This participant claimed that she had "only learned the basics, like how to deal with students [who had mild conditions]." For example, she had been taught to make students with vision problems "sit in front of the classroom and make videos or bright pictures which are in line with the topic we are teaching so that the child can easily understand" (TTI 2-PST 2). She admitted that she does not "know how to teach a blind student," and neither has she any experience on how to teach children with other disabling conditions. Also, a participant from a special school stated,

When I did Diploma in Primary Education from my teacher training institution they only had one inclusive education unit through which I learned the basics, but it did not cover everything that a teacher should learn about children with disability and their education. I also did my Bachelor in Primary Education and during my in-service bachelor's studies, [there wasn't] any inclusive unit at all. (SS 1-IST)

Participant SS 1-IST reported that she was not ready to teach in a special school because she had insufficient training to do so.

We were only prepared to teach children without disabilities in mainstream schools. Since my first posting, I have been teaching in a special school. At first, I was not ready at all to take the challenge of teaching children with special needs, but now I am confident. (SS 1-IST)

Similarly, participant PS-IST, an inclusive education teacher, stated, "I think I was not prepared well because I feel there is so much to learn." She added:

Well I did only one unit, and that was psychology, and apart from that, I am not aware, like I was not prepared for inclusive education. I think they (teacher training institutions) should teach us in detail like how to go about teaching disabled children and how to plan activities in an inclusive education school, and how to cater for these children. When I was first sent to [my current] school I was just lost, I didn't know what to do in the classroom, but now I can handle these children. (PS-IST)

Teachers acquire a lot of knowledge about disabled children and learn important skills when they are placed in an authentic environment. Participant SS 2-IST asserted that he had "grasped enough knowledge by [teaching] in a special school for ... two years." He claimed that he "now have enough knowledge ... to teach in an inclusive education school." Nevertheless, this participant admitted that he had had no idea how he was going to teach disabled children after graduating from the teacher training institution, and when he received his first posting in his current special

school. "I think more knowledge should have been given to us on how to deal with special children" (SS 2-IST). Another participant from a special school articulated that he was briefly introduced to inclusive education when he was at a teacher training institution (SS 3-IST). He added that he has learned a lot by teaching in a special school. The statements from the four participants—one inclusive education and three special education teachers—reveal that they acquired the necessary knowledge about disabled children and how to prepare a program and teach disabled children from their current school and not from their teacher training, as was supposed to be the case. So, it is necessary that the teacher training institutions give equal emphasis to inclusive education and prepare trainee teachers for the teaching of disabled children, since disabled children are present in every classroom in mainstream schools.

On the contrary, some participants appreciated their training, because it was through their training that they learned about disabled children and the importance of inclusive education. The teacher training helped these trainee teachers acquire a positive mental attitude about disabled children. Participant TTI 2-PST 4 remarked, "we have been introduced to the different types of disability that we might come across in any classroom." She stated that this knowledge helped her identify and assist this group of children when she was in mainstream school doing her teaching practicum. "I was able to help those who have problems with reading, attitude problems, [and] emotional impairment, but I think I need [to learn] more ... because I do not know where I will be posted to" (TTI 2-PST 4). According to TTI 2-PST 3, the module covering inclusive education at teachers college had broadened his knowledge about different types of disabilities. Nevertheless, he did not indicate whether he was ready for the challenge of teaching disabled children.

The suggestion is for the inclusive education course in teacher training institutions to be spread over the duration of the teacher training. "I think this course should be taken from year one right up till the third year of training" (TTI 1 – PST 4). He stated that this would have allowed him to learn a lot more about disabled children and inclusive education. This participant's

statement to some extent validates Stella et al.'s (2007) claim that a positive change in attitude is possible by undertaking just one course on inclusive education. However, this also makes teachers realise that there is so much more to learn about disabled children and inclusive education, which in turn makes them reluctant to take up the challenge of teaching an inclusive education class.

In general, participants in the research were aware that they as teachers would need to have the right training, knowledge, and skills to become an inclusive education teacher. This study shows that teachers who have closer contact with disabled children and get themselves involved in supporting and teaching this group of children during their initial teacher training make a positive impact on teachers' attitudes, which hence makes them more enthusiastic to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher. The pre-service teachers are presently inadequately trained to accept the challenge of teaching disabled children in special and inclusive education classrooms, since the teacher training institutions only offer one inclusive education or disability related paper for the duration of the teacher education program. Thus, the recommendation is for teacher training institutions to give equal emphasis to disabled children, and ensure teachers are equally ready for the challenge of teaching this group of children in inclusive education classrooms. For this, the teacher training institutions need to increase the number of inclusive education papers and, if possible, extend the duration of the inclusive education training for the entire teacher training program so that trainee teachers can learn as much as possible about inclusive education by the time they graduate. These teachers also need to be given special training on how to communicate with the disabled. Further, trainee teachers should also be allowed to have their teaching practicum in special schools.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AROUND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

4.10 Changes needed to make full inclusion possible

To make full inclusion possible, the participants in this study proposed that the teacher training institutions and mainstream schools should make several changes. The following subsections discuss the proposed changes.

4.10.1 Proposed changes at teacher training institution level

Even though most participants agreed that their teacher training had provided them sufficient knowledge about various disabling conditions which restrict children from accessing quality education, most participants claimed that their teacher training had failed to provide them adequate skills to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher. To adequately prepare teachers for inclusive education, the teacher training institutions should expand or increase their inclusive education course. Further, they should give the task of training teachers for inclusive education to professionals with a special education background. Lastly, teacher training institution should give trainee teachers opportunity to have one of their practicums in special schools, so that they get to observe, learn and teach disabled children. This section presents and discusses these proposals.

The teacher training institutions should expand or increase the inclusive education unit for the duration of the teacher training. TTI 1-PST 1 mentioned that she took the inclusive education unit only for a semester in year 2 of her teacher training.

We should begin it from year 1 because no matter what class level we teach we will be having this kind of children in our class, and the big question is ... how do [I] go about teaching ... [this group of] children? (TTI 1-PST 1)

Here, this participant infers that in any class there are likely to be students with disabilities. Hence, teacher training institutions should prepare teachers so that they are skilled enough to identify and assist these students. Cohen et al. (2011) highlight that “people create knowledge and

meaning about the world around them based on their past and present experiences, and knowledge” (p. 43). Thus, it is crucial that the trainee teachers are introduced to disabled children and inclusive education right from the start of their teacher training, so that they can build their knowledge and skills in this embryonic area of education. However, if for some reason teacher training institutions do not agree to this, then they should incorporate the idea of inclusion in the important areas of teacher training so that trainee teachers graduate having adequate knowledge and skills to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher. TTI 1-PST 3 reasoned that the extension of the inclusive education training over the duration of the teacher training would enable him to “acquire necessary skills ... and knowledge ... to meet the educational needs of [disabled] children.” A comprehensive, inclusive education program should be made compulsory in all teacher training institutions (TTI 1-PST 4 and TTI 2-PST 3). Even UNESCO (1994), through the Salamanca statement, is calling on all governments to ensure that the teacher training institutions make a systematic change to their teacher education program so that both the pre-service and in-service teachers become skilled enough to address the developmental and educational needs of disabled children in mainstream schools. International literature affirms that the teacher training institutions in many regions have been slow to make the necessary adjustments to their teacher education program. Thus, teachers fail to acquire the right knowledge and skills to work well with disabled children in inclusive education classrooms (Forlin, 2010).

The teacher training institutions should give the task of teaching inclusive education units to a professional with a special education background. Daveta (2009) affirms that the professionals with special education experience have a better understanding of the inclusive education idea. Consequently, they will be able to train teachers and influence positive change in attitude, which thus will make trainee teachers enthusiastic to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher. TTI 1-PST 4, SS 2-IST, and SS 3-IST suggested that the teacher training institutions from time to time should invite special education teachers to their school so that they can

share their experiences with trainee teachers. This way useful knowledge and skills can be disseminated to trainee teachers.

Teaching practicum is also an integral component of teacher training programs, because it helps trainee teachers to prepare themselves for the authentic classroom environment. TTI 1-PST 1 reported that she had enough practicum experience to prepare herself for the mainstream school environment. However, she insisted that practicum provision for trainee teachers should also be made in special schools, so that they can prepare themselves for inclusive education. Glazerman et al. (2008) affirm this when they state that all trainee teachers should be placed in authentic situations so that they can learn holistically. TTI 1-PST 1 further stated that the special education teachers are “just extraordinary,” because they have so much knowledge and skills to offer when it comes to inclusive education. Participant TTI 1-PST 3 and TTI 2-PST 1 stated that both theory and practice should be given equal emphasis during teacher training. “So, whenever we refer to the books it is also important for us to go out and experience what we have been learning so that we can master the skills” (TTI 1-PST 3). Certainly, practicums are as important as theory, and teacher training institutions should make sure they give preference to practicums in special schools, because training in special schools can help trainee teachers understand and serve disabled children better. All participants involved from the second teacher training institution admitted that they needed more hands-on experience, which they inferred was only possible if they were allowed to have their practicums in special schools where most of the disabled children are currently receiving their education. This statement has weight. Hence the teacher training institutions should consider this, if they want their teachers to be equally proficient in teaching disabled children. Participant TTI 1-PST 4 claimed that trainee teachers “should be given more time to observe disabled children in special schools,” so that they can understand them better and prepare themselves to accept this group of children in their classrooms. He added that in doing so, he would develop enough confidence to teach disabled children. Disabled children are a reality, and they are present in all schools. Thus, all teachers

should be ready for such encounters. Participant PS-IST admitted that giving trainee teachers opportunity to have their practicum in special schools would allow them “to get a feel of [what it is] like to deal with special children in the standard classroom, and ... how to handle them” if they do come across them. This provision will also provide trainee teachers the opportunity to put their theory about inclusive education into practice, so that they can understand the inclusive education concept better.

Overall, this research shows that reasonable changes need to be made at the teacher training institution level to prepare teachers for inclusive education adequately. First, the teacher training institutions must expand or increase the inclusive education courses that they offer to their trainee teachers from a single semester to the duration of their teacher training, so that these teachers graduate having enough knowledge and skills. Further, the task of training trainee teachers for inclusive education should be given to professionals with a special education background, so that they can holistically prepare trainee teachers for inclusive education. Lastly, teacher training institutions should provide trainee teachers the opportunity to have at least one practicum in a special school so that they can have first-hand experience in how to teach disabled children. This experience will help teachers acquire positive mental attitudes towards inclusive education, which, will subsequently boost teachers’ self-esteem and enable them to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher.

4.10.2 Proposed changes at mainstream school level

This research suggests that the mainstream schools should also make necessary changes to accommodate disabled children for inclusive education. Similarly, international literature advocates that stronger emphasis should be given to the restructuring of the general school environment to help children with diverse learning needs (Forlin, 2010). Apart from improving the infrastructure to improve accessibility, the teachers as well as non-disabled children in mainstream schools should be equally taught about disabled children and inclusive education, so that they can understand, accept and help in creating a conducive learning environment

for inclusive education. This section presents and discusses change at the mainstream school level.

All mainstream school infrastructure should be made user-friendly for disabled children. SS 1-IST highlighted that the inaccessibility of mainstream schools stops many parents from enrolling their disabled children in these schools. “For example, there are no ramps in mainstream schools for children in a wheelchair” (SS 1-IST). She explained that she experienced a case in the mainstream school where a child [who was] okay intellectually, but because she was in a wheelchair was denied access. SS 1-IST suggested that all mainstream schools should build ramps and pathways in their school, because this will not only benefit children in a wheelchair but all other children as well. TTI 1-PST 2 stated that disabled children should be “treated equally and they also need to be educated holistically like other [non-disabled] students, and for this, the [mainstream] school should change and prepare themselves for this type of children.” One of the participants remarked that “all schools [need to] accept the fact that they should be inclusive because we cannot afford to send these children to far away special schools for education” (TTI 2-PST 4). This participant articulated that sending disabled children to far away special schools is usually very expensive for parents. If the nearby mainstream schools make the necessary structural change and start enrolling this group of children, then it can help parents save money for other useful things. She added that disabled children “will be more comfortable staying close to home” (TTI 2-PST 4). This suggests that there is an urgent need for the mainstream school infrastructure to be adjusted so that it becomes friendlier for all disabled children, which, thus, will enable their enrolment in these schools.

Further, teachers as well as non-disabled children in mainstream schools should equally learn about disabled children and inclusive education, so that they can understand, accept and help in the transition and enrolment of this group of children. According to TTI 1 – PST 1, teachers should change their attitudes towards special and inclusive education, and open doors for disabled children. Attitude change will need to start from the head teachers then move down to the teachers, and for this, workshops should be run so

that these teachers can prepare themselves for inclusive education. Head teachers in schools are important people who can influence change from within the school through professional development. Petrie and McGee (2012) emphasise that professional development is not a one-off course but rather an ongoing learning process where, over time, the staff are required to reflect the skills and knowledge acquired from such training in their work practices. Professional development sessions should be organised on regular intervals so that everyone involved benefits.

All in all, this study suggests that all mainstream schools need to work towards creating a barrier-free learning environment, so that more disabled children can be enrolled and receive their education in these schools. Naukkarinen (2010) and Armstrong et al. (2010) believe that creating a barrier-free environment makes disabled children feel accepted, and this builds their self-esteem and increases their capacity to explore their real potential. Moreover, restructuring the mainstream school environment for inclusive education will not only benefit disabled children but it will also be an advantage to non-disabled children. For example, ramps in schools will make classrooms more accessible for all children. Further, while wider corridors help children in wheelchairs move around easily, it will also create enough space for other children to get around freely. Mainstream schools also need to run ongoing professional development sessions so that teachers, as well as non-disabled students, can learn about disabled children and inclusive education. It is important to train teachers as well as non-disabled children, because they are the key people who can create a conducive learning environment for disabled children to receive a quality education in mainstream schools. Parents will be keener to enrol their disabled children in mainstream schools where everyone is equally ready to accept and help their children. Also, it will allow parents to save a reasonable amount of money if they get to enrol their disabled children in the nearby mainstream school.

4.11 Emerging issue

4.11.1 Disability awareness

Some participants indicated that awareness about disabled children in the community should be given priority, because it would help people understand disabled children, improve attitudes, and contribute towards their holistic development. Points presented and discussed in this section are also evident in international studies—for example, as Mutasa and Ruhode (2015) mention, parents play a crucial role in empowering and enhancing the self-esteem of their children, and this thus enables disabled children to become contributing members of the society. This section presents what participants said on this important subject.

Raising disability awareness in families and the community was seen important in this study. According to TTI 1-PST 3, “we need to raise awareness about disabled children in villages because what we know in towns and cities or urban areas is different from what people know in the villages.” Participant TTI 1-PST 3 articulated that people’s knowledge about disabled children in the village is narrow and “they always look at disabled children as a lower [caste].” Sharing his experience from one of the villages in Vanua Levu (the second largest island in Fiji), participant TTI 1-PST 3 reported about a disabled girl who was locked inside her family house twenty-four hours a day.

She was kept locked because she was disabled. They only gave her food whatever time they wanted to do so. [They thought] that’s the way she should be treated. So, what I am suggesting is for families to have some awareness and for us to learn how to deal with these scenarios so that when we see disabled children being treated this way we can approach and support the family, and help them learn what is right for them to do. It is important for these families to know that disabled children are no different from us and they need to be treated equally. (TTI 1-PST 3)

This suggests that awareness in rural areas is essential, because many individuals in the villages are backwards in terms of disability-related information, since most of them do not have access to proper health services and the internet. Subsequently, they think it is all right to keep disabled children separated or locked up in homes. Participant TTI 2-PST 1 emphasised that the experts in the special education field are a valuable community resource, and their expertise should be used to raise awareness in villages. Participant TTI 2-PST 1, together with SS 3-IST stated that it is about time the authorities also understood the importance of inclusion and took the necessary steps to enhance inclusion in society.

Moreover, many parents may need to learn how to treat their disabled children and make them feel accepted at home and in society. Many parents have a negative attitude about their disabled children, because they think their children will not be able to receive a quality education and secure their future. So, the suggestion is for families to be made conscious and given assistance by professionals in the field, on how to deal with and treat this group of children. Participant TTI 1 – PST 1 stated that disabled children's development would become easy when they felt they were loved and accepted by their parents. Parents are important people in disabled children's lives, because they can either make or spoil children's future. TTI 2-PST 4 claimed that all "young mothers ... need to know that they have to take precautions during pregnancy to prevent their child [being born with a disability]." However, she also added, "if it turns out [that they give birth to a disabled child] ... then they should accept that it is God given."

Awareness is a must so that all people in society and parents learn about disabled children and make reasonable attitudinal changes to accept them in their life and community. Special education teachers are seen as a valuable resource in this endeavour, and, thus, they should be used to raise awareness in society. Moreover, parents' love and affection towards their disabled children is crucial, as it will make their children feel accepted. This love consequently will empower disabled children to put maximum effort into securing their future.

4.12 Chapter summary

The demographic aspect of the data shows a significant yet unsurprising relationship. It confirms that women participants are extra sensitive when it comes to discussion about disabled children and their right to quality education. Moreover, participants whose age ranges from the early twenties to late twenties are more enthusiastic to accept disabled children in their class than participants in their early thirties. Further, the experience of participants with disabled children and/or adults before, during, and after teacher training plays a significant role, because it makes them more receptive to inclusion, even though they feel they are not prepared well for the challenge of teaching disabled children. The earlier two variables are out of teacher training institutions and teacher educators' control. Nevertheless, teacher training institutions can give trainee teachers the opportunity to experience teaching this group of children during their initial teacher training so that they can adequately prepare themselves for such challenges in their teaching career.

Participants' consensus about disabled children falls within the medical model view of disability where disabled children are perceived as being different from their non-disabled peers and in need of support and assistance. Proper training and advocacy of teachers is necessary so that they can have a good grasp of the social model of disability. Further, support is important, because acceptance of the need to alter the current environment will help in the reduction of the level of prejudice that exists against disabled children, and this will enable this group of children to live in a less restrictive environment.

Observations and a few comprehensive medical tests are seemingly the most common ways to identify visible and hidden disabilities in children. It is also crucial that trainee teachers graduate from the teacher training institution with adequate observation skills so that they can detect and provide intervention to these children promptly. Additionally, the suggestion is for teachers to take their own initiatives to improve their observation skills during their teaching career.

Positive change in the attitudes of participants towards disabled children is welcome. However, intensive training and advocacy need to be done at the grassroots level so that everyone in schools, as well as the community, come to acknowledge and accept this group of children. The social model of disability suggests that there is no need for the disabled children to change to fit into society, but rather it is the society which needs to change so that this group of children can become part of the society. The recommendation is for people to see disabled children's abilities and not disabilities when discussing their inclusion in society.

The understanding is that disabled children, apart from having disabilities, also have abilities that are dormant in them, which teachers will need to identify and transform into their strength. Acceptance is crucial, because it will help these children to access quality education. Furthermore, the endorsement by participants is for the education stakeholders to make necessary changes at all levels in mainstream schools, so that disabled children can feel accepted.

All disabled children need a conducive learning environment where teachers acknowledge their difference and have the right skills to make necessary changes to the school and teaching style to accommodate and efficiently cater for these children. However, this research shows that much depends on the degree of the students' disabling condition and their ability to cope when it comes to their placement in schools. Participants find disabled children with mild and moderate disabling conditions more ideal for placement in mainstream schools. It is evident that large class size is one of the environmental factors that stops many teachers from accepting disabled children in their classroom. Teachers' fear towards inclusive education is generated from the thought of how they will complete the syllabus if they have disabled children in their class who need one-to-one assistance most of the time. However, this placement is still seen as rewarding, because it will allow these children to develop holistically. Assessment of disabled children before their placement in the special and mainstream classroom sounds promising. Nevertheless, it will be time-consuming and challenging for teachers to execute, but it will enable the

successful placement of this group of children in a classroom where their educational and developmental needs are recognised and fulfilled.

Participants in the research have a reasonable understanding of inclusive education. They see that successful implementation of inclusive education will not only benefit disabled children but non-disabled children as well. Mainstream schools are an ideal platform for successful implementation and retention of inclusive education. Nevertheless, necessary changes must happen at these schools so that they become more accessible to disabled children. In addition, both, teachers as well as non-disabled children need to be equally trained so that they become ready for inclusive education.

A positive attitude and enthusiasm to teach disabled children are seen in participants, even though they perceive they have insufficient training and limited skills to do so. A positive attitude and advanced teaching skills are essential characteristics that all teachers must have for successful implementation of inclusive education. However, when faced with adverse environments such as large class size and lack of teacher support, the positive attitude can change. Thus, to enhance and maintain confidence in teachers, it is important that they receive the right training and the opportunity to observe, take charge, and experience teaching disabled children in special education schools. These skills will also allow trainee teachers to witness that these children, apart from having disabilities, also have abilities. It is important for teachers to see this, because many of them have a low expectation and believe that disabled children cannot learn and it will be a waste of time teaching them.

Time and classroom management are the two top challenges out of the many that participants infer they will face as an inclusive education teacher. To overcome these challenges, teachers need to become proactive so that they can adapt themselves and their classroom for the benefit of all children in class. They should also be ready to sacrifice some of their personal time to help this group of children. Moreover, it is equally important to train non-disabled children in mainstream schools so that they can assist their class

teacher in creating a conducive learning environment. Teachers need good support from colleagues and management to do this job well.

This research shows that participants are aware that they as teachers need to have the right training, knowledge, and skills to become an inclusive education teacher. Pre-service teachers perceive they are inadequately trained to accept the challenge of teaching disabled children in special and inclusive education classrooms, since the teacher training institutions only offer one inclusive education or disability related paper to them for the duration of the teacher education program. Thus, the recommendation is for the teacher training institutions to expand or increase the inclusive education courses they offer to their trainee teachers from a single semester to the duration of their teacher training, so that these teachers graduate having enough knowledge and skills. Further, the task of training teachers for inclusive education should be given to professionals with special education background, so that they can use their experience to prepare teachers for inclusive education adequately. Moreover, teacher training institutions should provide trainee teachers the opportunity to have at least one of their practicums in a special school, so that they can have first-hand experience on how to teach disabled children. The understanding is that these provisions will help teachers acquire positive mental attitudes towards inclusive education, which will boost teachers' self-esteem and enable them to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher.

Also, changes need to be made in all mainstream schools to create a barrier-free learning environment, allowing disabled children to enrol and receive a quality education. It is evident that modification or restructuring of the mainstream school environment for inclusive education will not only benefit disabled children but non-disabled children as well. The mainstream school also needs to run ongoing professional development sessions so that teachers, as well as all non-disabled students, get to learn about disabled children and inclusive education. Teachers and non-disabled children's support is important, because these are the key people who can create a conducive learning environment for disabled children to receive a quality education in mainstream schools.

Lastly, awareness is crucial so that everyone in the village, including the parents of disabled children, can learn about this group of children and make necessary attitudinal change to accept them. The understanding is that special and inclusive education teachers who have a positive mental attitude towards disabled children are a valuable resource in this endeavour, and, thus, they should be used to raise awareness in society.

CHAPTER FIVE: LIMITATION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Chapter overview

This section presents the limitation, conclusions, and implications of this research. This section also suggests a strategy that could be used in Fiji to raise awareness about individuals with disabilities, and the difficulty they face in education and society. The recommendation section also proposes further research that could generate additional information about inclusive education, raise awareness and improve inclusion of disabled children in society and schools in Fiji. Moreover, this section goes on to discuss the implications of this research under the following themes: adoption and implementation of the policy on special and inclusive education, the introduction of school inclusion policy, and framing the national definition of disabled children within the medical-social model of disability. The discussion on implications continues under the following subtopics—improving pedagogical approaches, parents made partners in education, continued research on inclusive education, and universal design for learning.

5.1 Limitation of this research

The information gathered on Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education cannot be generalised to the entire teacher population in Fiji since this study only used 12 participants, which is a small number.

5.2 Research conclusions

This study concludes that participants have a positive perception of the inclusive education idea. They see inclusive education as an education strategy that could benefit both the disabled as well as their non-disabled peers, since it would permit them to receive a quality education under one roof. Participants' positive attitude towards inclusive education was influenced by the understanding that access to quality education is disabled children's rights. Moreover, participants' experience with disabled children

and adults before, during and, for some, after their teacher training also contributed to their positive attitude. However, this study also concludes that the positive attitude in teachers, towards inclusive education, may weaken over time because of large class size, challenging school environment, the degree of disabling condition in children, and lack of teacher aide or support from senior teachers. The international literature is in support of this notion.

Having seen the positive attitude in participants for disabled children, it was not surprising to see that these participants also had an encouraging attitude towards disabled children's access to quality education in inclusive education classrooms. Further, participants are enthusiastic to accept the challenge of teaching disabled children with mild and moderate disabling conditions in general education classes, despite the consensus that they feel they have received insufficient training, and thus, have poor skills to adequately cater for the developmental and education needs of this group of children.

Reservations around the inclusion of severely and profoundly disabled children in inclusive schools remain. The severely and profoundly disabled children are seen to need special attention, support, and care on a one-to-one basis, which participants assume can only be given by special education teachers in special schools since they are specialised in the area and have smaller class size. Further, this research discovers that for correct placement of disabled children in a classroom that would best meet their educational and developmental needs it is important for teachers to assess this group of children accurately. Nevertheless, the understanding is that this assessment will be time-consuming and will also be a challenge for novice teachers to execute.

The need to raise awareness about disabled children is seen important, because it is going to allow everyone in the society, including the parents of disabled children, to learn about this group of children and make a necessary attitudinal change to accept them. The understanding is that special and inclusive education teachers who have a positive mental

attitude towards disabled children are a valuable resource in this endeavour, and, thus, they should be used to raise awareness in society.

In addition to this, to make full inclusion possible, the teacher training institution should revise their teacher training program so that teachers graduate having adequate skills to equally cater for all disabled children in special and inclusive education classrooms. Also, changes at teacher training institutions need to be made so that teachers graduate having adequate knowledge and skills to take up the role of a special and inclusive education teacher. These changes include expanding or increasing their inclusive education course, and giving the task of training teachers to a professional with a special education background. Finally, they should give trainee teachers the opportunity to have one of their practicums in a special school, so that they can observe, learn and practice teaching disabled children.

Changes also need to be made in all mainstream schools for inclusive education to start and be retained. This research highlights that the mainstream schools must undergo necessary modifications and restructuring to improve accessibility and be able to accommodate all disabled children. Further, teachers, as well as non-disabled children in these schools, must be equally trained about disabled children and inclusive education, so that they can understand, accept and help in making a conducive learning environment for all.

5.3 Implications of this research

Even though this was a small study, it was still able to indicate the changes that the teacher training institutions and the mainstream schools will need to make to speed up the inclusion process. This research further implies that many changes must also take place at a national level. The additional changes include adoption and implementation of the policy on special and inclusive education, the introduction of a school inclusion policy, and framing a national definition of disabled children within the medical-social model of disability. Also, changes should be made to improve pedagogical

approaches, parents should be made partners in education, and there needs to be continued research on inclusive education.

5.3.1 Adoption and implementation of the Policy on Special and Inclusive Education

The *Policy on Special and Inclusive Education* is a new guiding document from the Ministry of Education Fiji through which they hope to ensure all disabled children access quality education in any school of their choice (Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2016). For this objective of the Ministry of Education to be met, it is crucial that the new policy is fully understood, accepted, adopted and implemented by all mainstream schools in Fiji, because this is where the old policy titled–*Effective Implementation of Special and Inclusive Education in Fiji*, lacked. Consequently, the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream school has been slow to Fiji.

The Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (2016) state that the full implementation of the new policy will enable disabled children to receive quality education together with their non-disabled peers regardless of their difficulties, disabilities or differences. This policy will also help disabled children to strengthen their self-esteem, develop holistically, and access and live a quality life. Moreover, it will facilitate meaningful assessment in all schools to identify challenges in inclusion they are facing, which, thus, will enable schools to receive the necessary support regarding staffing, learning and teaching resources, and funding to improve their school infrastructure promptly. Most importantly, the policy will sanction teachers training institutions to review and improve their pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, so that they can prepare quality teachers for mainstream as well as the special schools.

It is evident from the national literature that despite being a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Fiji government has been slow in its process to bring about the necessary changes to make the full inclusion of disabled children and adults possible in Fijian society.

5.3.2 Introduction of school inclusion policy

All mainstream schools in Fiji must use the Policy on Special and Inclusive Education to develop their school inclusion policy, which they should use to guide them as they work towards creating a barrier-free school environment for all children. Also, when developing a school inclusion policy, it is central that this document gives a clear picture of how the school conceptualises disability. A precise definition of disability is important, because it will voice what changes the school will need to make in their roadmap to full inclusion. Additionally, the schools must give strong recognition of disabled children's voice in the policy, so that this group of children gets empowered to take ownership of this policy implementation. Further, the schools should review their policy from time to time to make it more inclusive, authentic and suitable for the academic context. The policy analysis is necessary, because on many occasion it may seem equal, fair and inclusive on paper when in reality there may be significant discrepancies between theory and practice (Holland, 2015, p. 45). A policy is meaningless without practice.

International literature shows that the policy on inclusion is often difficult to implement because of insufficient training and limited skills in teachers', and the unavailability of support service for these teachers (Florian & Rouse, 2010). Hence, it is important that the schools run regular professional development, so that all teachers are equally ready to practice the school inclusion policy. The suggestion is for schools to embed the concept of inclusive education in all curricular and non-curricular activities and school development plans. Unsupportive policies can restrict schools attempt to improve their inclusive education practices (Armstrong et al., 2010).

5.3.3 Framing national definition of disabled children within medical-social model of disability

The Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (2013) defined disabled children using a medical model point of view of disability. They saw disabled children as those who are diagnosed and are medically proven to have a physical, hearing, visual, and speech impairment. Moreover, the definition also included children with severe emotional disturbance, specific learning

disabilities and other health impairments that adversely affected their physical capacity to the degree that it stopped them from receiving education in mainstream schools without additional support and special services. With the writing and endorsement of the *Policy on Special and Inclusive Education* in Fiji in 2016, it is extremely pleasing to see that the definition of disabled children now encapsulates the medical-social model of disability. In the new policy, this group of children is defined as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society [and the school]” (Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2016, p. 7).

Participants’ definition of disabled children in this research reflected a medical model point of view of disability. Thus, it is crucial that the Ministry of Education and the Special and Inclusive Education Unit understand the new policy thoroughly before going out to run the necessary advocacy and professional development sessions for all education stakeholders. Special workshops should be run for all teachers around the country so that they too fully understand about disabled children and the Policy on Special and Inclusive Education, since they are the key people who will implement this policy in schools.

5.3.4 Improving pedagogical approaches

As participants in this study are ready to accept the challenge of teaching disabled children with mild and moderate disabling conditions in inclusive education classrooms, it is important that for them to understand that they as teachers should be equally ready to adopt appropriate pedagogical approaches for the education benefit of this group of diverse learners. Also, it is important for these teachers to realise that in an inclusive school setting, they must adopt student-centred learning approaches, and understand that their role is to facilitate learning rather than transmit knowledge. Furthermore, inclusive education is a reform agenda. Hence, teachers should always review their pedagogical approaches to effectively promote the education of all students so that these students can flourish and reach

their full potential. Teachers also need to understand that they must support personalised learning to meet the education requirements of this group of children, thus having the consensus that “one size fits all” and “take it or leave it” (p.130) concept no longer applies (Wedell, 2008).

Assessment for learning is yet another professional and personal skill that these teachers must acquire, and efficiently and effectively practice, to identify disabled students’ strengths and weaknesses. These skills would allow teachers to construct a working individual education program that would utilise students’ strengths to make improvements in their weaker skill areas. Having such provisions in education will enable the disabled students to develop holistically.

5.3.5 Parents made partners in education

Parents’ support are supreme in inclusive education, since they have valuable information about their children, which is crucial when designing children’s programs. Secondly, these parents can become a valuable resource for the general education teacher.

When teaching an inclusive education class, teachers should be ready to be in constant contact and maintain a good relationship with the parents of disabled children. This relationship is significant, because valuable information about disabled children, such as their educational needs, strengths, and weaknesses, along with any relevant medical details that are important when drawing up individual education plan, can be collected from the parents promptly. Further, making full use of these parents’ knowledge when planning for their children will make them realise that they are of great value, and this would thus empower them to involve themselves in their children's education actively.

Also, many parents can become volunteer teacher aides in the inclusive education classroom. Parents have a lot of knowledge and experience, and their experience can be utilised to provide support to other new parents. Having such exposure will be beneficial to parents themselves, because it

would strengthen their self-esteem, which would allow them to understand their children even better.

5.3.6 Continued research on inclusive education

All pre-service and in-service teachers, irrespective of the quality of their general education teacher training, must continuously exercise their own initiative to research into inclusive education. This research is necessary, because in so doing, teachers can gain valuable knowledge and ideas on how they can improve their teaching style and approaches, which will not only benefit disabled children but non-disabled children as well. This research shows that teachers' who have positive mental attitudes and are enthusiastic to take up the role of an inclusive education teacher are a great asset to schools. Apart from making necessary changes within the classroom for the benefit of all students, these teachers can also influence positive change in their colleagues mentality and attitudes, and the school environment.

It is important for education stakeholders to understand that inclusion is a process. Hence, overnight achievement is impossible. Thus, the schools should plan and implement inclusion in small measures rather than wait for all required criteria to be in place before starting inclusive education.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 For awareness

It is important that the education stakeholders take the initiative of interviewing disabled people so that they can gather their stories, which can then be published in the local newspapers to portray the type of difficulties and problems disabled people face in education and in society to reach their rightful status. This strategy, apart from raising awareness in society, will also facilitate necessary changes for the good of all disabled children. In the process, the Ministry of Education can also consult disabled adults on the types of changes they foresee in the current education system to enable the full inclusion of all disabled children and adults. The information gathered

will enable the education stakeholders to ensure the public education programs reflect all aspects of the principle of full participation and equality.

5.4.2 Further research

There is a need for research to be conducted to find out how the *Policy on Special and Inclusive Education* is understood and implemented in mainstream schools in Fiji.

Further, research also needs to be done on pilot inclusive schools in Fiji to gather qualitative data on how these mainstream schools prepared themselves for inclusive education, and what challenges they faced or are currently facing as an inclusive education school. This information can then be made available to other mainstream schools who are preparing for inclusive education.

5.5 Chapter summary

The participants in this study have adequate knowledge and positive mental attitudes about disabled children and inclusive education; nevertheless, they lack sufficient skills to assist and teach this group of children in inclusive classrooms. Hence, the study suggests that significant changes should be made at teacher training institution level so that trainee teachers can graduate having satisfactory skills to adequately cater for the development and educational needs of this group of children. The teacher training institutions should expand or increase their inclusive education course. Further, the teacher training institutions should assign the task of training teachers for inclusive education to a professional with a special education background. It is also important that trainee teachers receive the opportunity to observe and teach disabled children in special schools, so that they can learn from such exposure.

In addition, the mainstream schools should work towards eradicating barriers in their school so that all students can access and receive a quality education. Apart from the school infrastructure—attitudes, lack of teacher training, large class size, and lack of teacher aides are additional barriers that mainstream schools should work on reducing so that disabled children

can access quality education. Further, the non-disabled children should equally be educated about disabled children and inclusive education, so that they can help create a conducive learning environment and welcome disabled children with open arms.

Assessment of disabled children is significant for the proper placement of this group of children in inclusive education classrooms. Nevertheless, it is going to be time-consuming and difficult to execute for novice teachers.

Further, this research shows that disabled children with mild and moderate disabling conditions are ideal for placement in mainstream classrooms for inclusive education, since they are easy to handle and teach compared to children who have severe and profound disabling conditions. The latter group of children is a tough group, since they need support from specialist teachers together with specific resources if they are to develop and learn.

Also, the research implies that to speed up the inclusion process, it is equally important for education stakeholders to understand, adopt and implement the policy on special and inclusive education.

Awareness in inclusive education is also marked as important because it makes everyone in the school, as well as the society, understand disabled children, which motivates them to make necessary attitudinal changes to accept this group of children. For full inclusion to be made possible, all education stakeholders' support is paramount. The recommendation is for the Ministry of Education to take advantage of the mass media to raise awareness about disabled children and to present their rights and the advantage of accessing quality education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethics Application Approval

Dean's Office
Faculty of Education
~~Dean's Office~~ *Tangata*
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: Deepak Sanjay Singh

cc: Dr Carol Hamilton
Simon Archard

From: Dr Carl Mika
Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee

Date: 23 May 2016

Subject: Request for Research Ethics Approval – Student (FEDU037/16)

Thank you for your request for ethics approval for the project:

Disability-inclusive education in Fiji: Pre-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for disability-inclusive education

I am pleased to advise that your application has received approval.

Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if any further changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Carl Mika'.

Dr Carl Mika
Chairperson
Research Ethics Committee

Te Oranga
School of Human Development and Movement
Studies
Te Kura Toi Tangata - Faculty of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand



Appendix 2: Request to Conduct Research in Fiji

22 May 2016

The Permanent Secretary for Education,
Ministry of Education,
Senikau House,
Suva.

u.f.s. The Senior Education Officer – Research
Ministry of Education,
Senikau House,
Suva.

Dear Sir,

Re: Request to conduct research in Fiji

My name is Deepak Sanjay Singh (**TPF xxxxx**), and I write to seek your permission to do research in Fiji from **3 June 2016 to 6 August 2016**. As part of my Master of Disability and Inclusion Studies thesis at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand, I anticipate to research and gather information on the perspectives of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' on inclusive education. This study will also collect information on how qualified these teachers are to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher.

The title of my thesis is ***Inclusive education in Fiji: Pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for disability-inclusive education.***

I anticipate collecting data from a total of **twelve participants**; eight final year pre-service primary school teachers who are studying at two teacher training institutions in Fiji, namely: the [Names of teacher training institutions] (four trainee teachers' from each training institution). Moreover, four junior in-service primary education teachers from [Name of primary school] (one junior teacher from each school) will also be used as participants in this research. Potential participants from these institutions/schools will be invited to participate in this research.

This set of participants will be chosen because they are important future stakeholders in the inclusive initiative in Fiji, who can establish the platform for inclusive education to start, be strengthened and retained in mainstream schools.

Approved for this research have been received from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. For your reference, as an attachment, please find a copy of the Ethics Application Approval.

Additional information about this research is available in the attached Participants Information and Invitation Letter and the Ethics Application Approval.

I give assurance that this study will be carried out for my master's thesis, which may later be used in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas.

Before the research, potential participants will be a copy of the Participant Information and Invitation Letter, and Participant Informed Consent Form. This way the potential participants can understand what the research entails and thus would be able to provide their informed consent to participate in the research. For your information, if I am not able to get the desired number of participants for this research then I will use a snowball technique to recruit the envisaged number of participants for this research. Snowball technique is when I will ask participants from the two teacher training institutions, who have given their Informed Consent to help me

make contact with other potential participants who they think might be interested in the research, even if it means including the second year trainee teachers.

At this point, I anticipate that the interviews would take place either at the teacher training institutions/schools or a venue chosen in consultation with potential participants. A face-to-face semi-structured interview will be adopted to collect information from potential participants. It is perceived that the data gathered will support my hypothesis that pre-service and in-service primary education teachers have a neutral attitude about inclusive education and are least ready to take on the challenge of teaching disabled children in an inclusive classroom.

To collection information, participants will be asked questions about their personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education, professional opinions about inclusive education, training and preparedness for inclusive education, and finally, contemporary issues about inclusive education in Fiji.

Personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education

1. What is your definition of disabled children or how would you define disabled children?
2. How will you know a child has a disability?
3. Do you have any experiences with disabled children?
4. What opinion do you have on the presence of disabled children in Fijian society? Do disabled children belong in our society or should they be kept separate?
5. Do you think disabled children should have access to quality education? Why?
6. Where should disabled children receive their education? Why?

Professional opinions about inclusive education

7. Tell me what you understand about inclusive education?
8. Where do you think this inclusive education program should be run?
9. What do you think about the concept of educating disabled children in an inclusive education classroom?
10. Teachers' attitudes and skills have been identified as a major obstacle in the inclusion of disabled children. How would you comment to this?
11. What challenges do you think you may face when teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom?

Training and preparedness for inclusive education

12. How has your teacher training prepared you for inclusive education?
13. Do you think you have enough practicum so that you can prepare yourself for inclusive education?
14. Do you think there should be provision for the practicums to be held in special schools?
15. Do you feel ready for the challenge of teaching disabled children? What makes you say this?
16. Did you expect more from your teacher training program to prepare you for inclusive education?

Contemporary issues about inclusive education

17. In ten years' time, what will need to change to make full inclusion possible?
18. Are there any relevant issues or concern that you wish to share in this research project? Anything that you think is important for me to add to this research project so that people are made aware of that?

Throughout the data gathering phase, participants will be aware that participation in this study is voluntary and they will be free to withdraw from the research until such time they approve their interview transcript.

Participants will also be informed that during the thesis writing phase while every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, this cannot be entirely guaranteed. The identity of your institution/school will also be kept anonymous. All data gathered from the research will be kept confidential.

The finding of this research will be made available at the University of Waikato Research Commons which can be accessed using the URL: <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz> upon completion of my thesis.

Should you have any questions or queries regarding this application, please do contact me using the detailed given below. I would also be happy to call you and answer your questions if you leave me a message.

I am looking forward to a favourable response from your office.

Yours faithfully,

Signature

Deepak S. Singh

Email: dss19@students.waikato.ac.nz

Phone: +6799256055

Appendix 3: Research Approval from the Ministry of Education Fiji



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, HERITAGE & ARTS

Quality Education for Change, Peace and Progress



Resident Address: Marela House, 19 Thurston Street, Suva, Fiji.

Ph: (679) 3314477

Postal Address: Private Mail Bag, Government Buildings, Suva, Fiji.

Fax: (679) 3303511

Our Reference: RA 16/16

Date: 15th June 2016

Mr Deepak Sanjay Singh
School of Human Development and Movement Studies
University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Re: Official Approval to Conduct Research in Fiji

Dear Mr Singh

We are pleased to inform you that the approval for the request to conduct research in Fiji has been granted on the topic: "Disability-inclusive education in Fiji: Pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for disability-inclusive education"

The approval is granted for the period of 3 months from June 2016 – August 2016 as specified in your request.

It is also noted that in this research, you will be working closely with the Ministry of Education who would be assisting you with facilitating your research. Please liaise with the relevant personnel and organizations with regards to the logistics and the conduct of your research and be further advised that the Government of Fiji's legislations, procedures, policies and protocols must be unreservedly adhered to.

As a condition for the research approval, you are not to disclose the findings of the research to the public and to use the research only for Masters Study. A copy of the final research report must be submitted to the Ministry of Education (MoE) through this office upon completion, before the commencement of any publication. Only after the MoE Research & Ethics Council has endorsed the report, shall you be allowed to do any publication of the report. The report will be reserved in the MoE Research Library and will be availed for reference by Senior Ministry and Government officials.

Moreover, it is important to note that the Ministry of Education reserves a right to publish the final report or an edited summary of it.

We further wish you success in your research study.

.....
Ranish Nitesh Chand (Mr)
for **Permanent Secretary for Education, Heritage & Arts.**

cc. MoE Research File

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION,
NATIONAL HERITAGE, CULTURE & ARTS

Te Oranga
School of Human Development and Movement
Studies
Te Kura Toi Tangata - Faculty of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand



Appendix 4: Introduction letter to Principal/Dean/Head Teacher

[Date]

[Name of Principal/Dean/Head Teacher],

[Address]

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Deepak Sanjay Singh, and I am studying Master of Disability and Inclusion Studies at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. As part of my master's thesis, from **3 June 2016 to 6 August 2016** I will be conducting research to gather information on the perspectives of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' on inclusive education. This study will also collect information on how qualified these teachers are to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher.

The title of my thesis is ***Inclusive education in Fiji: Pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for disability-inclusive education.***

I am anticipating collecting data from the final year trainee teachers/junior in-service teachers from your institution/school because they are important future stakeholders in the inclusive initiative in Fiji, who can set the platform for inclusive education to start, be strengthened and retained in mainstream schools. Your institution is chosen alongside two other teacher training institutions because of your role in training teachers to meet a proportion of the Fiji Ministry of Education's teacher demand, on an annual basis/ your school is chosen alongside three other schools because of your capability to cater for disabled children.

Approved for this research have been received from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. For your reference, as an attachment, please find a copy of the Ethics Application Approval.

Additional information about this research is available in the attached Participants Information and Invitation Letter and the Ethics Application Approval.

I anticipate working with four final year primary education trainee teachers from your institution/one junior in-service teacher from your school, and for this, I am seeking your consent. Your consent will allow me to get access to potential participants so that I can gather appropriate information and complete my master's thesis, which may later be used in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas.

If you grant me permission to use the final year trainee teachers from your institution/junior in-service teachers from your school for this research, then may I kindly ask that copies of the attached Participant Information and Invitation Letter, and Participant Informed Consent Form be made through your institution. Would it be possible for you to make these copies available to potential participants? This way the potential participants can understand what this research entails and provide their informed consent to participate in the research. For your information, if I am not able to get the desired number of participants for this research then I will use a snowball technique to recruit the envisaged number of participants for this research. Snowball technique is when I will ask participants from your teacher training institutions/school, who have given their Informed Consent to help me make contact with other potential participants who they think might be interested in the research, even if it means including the second year trainee teachers/senior in-service teacher.

It would also be greatly appreciated if you can fill the attached Principal/Dean/Head Teacher Consent Form and send it back to me as an evidence of your agreement to me interviewing trainee teachers from your institution/school for the mentioned purpose.

At this point, I anticipate that the interviews would take place either at the teacher training institutions/schools or a venue chosen in consultation with potential participants. A face-to-face semi-structured interview will be adopted to collect information from potential participants. It is perceived that the data gathered will support my hypothesis that pre-service and in-service primary education teachers have a neutral attitude about inclusive education and are least ready to take on the challenge of teaching disabled children in an inclusive classroom.

To collection information, participants will be asked questions about their personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education, professional opinions about inclusive education, training and preparedness for inclusive education, and finally, contemporary issues about inclusive education in Fiji.

Personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education

1. What is your definition of disabled children or how would you define disabled children?
2. How will you know a child has a disability?
3. Do you have any experiences with disabled children?
4. What opinion do you have on the presence of disabled children in Fijian society? Do disabled children belong in our society or should they be kept separate?
5. Do you think disabled children should have access to quality education? Why?
6. Where should disabled children receive their education? Why?

Professional opinions about inclusive education

7. Tell me what you understand about inclusive education?
8. Where do you think this inclusive education program should be run?
9. What do you think about the concept of educating disabled children in an inclusive education classroom?

10. Teachers' attitudes and skills have been identified as a major obstacle in the inclusion of disabled children. How would you comment to this?
11. What challenges do you think you may face when teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom?

Training and preparedness for inclusive education

12. How has your teacher training prepared you for inclusive education?
13. Do you think you have enough practicum so that you can prepare yourself for inclusive education?
14. Do you think there should be provision for the practicums to be held in special schools?
15. Do you feel ready for the challenge of teaching disabled children? What makes you say this?
16. Did you expect more from your teacher training program to prepare you for inclusive education?

Contemporary issues about inclusive education

17. In ten years' time, what will need to change to make full inclusion possible?
18. Are there any relevant issues or concern that you wish to share in this research project? Anything that you think is important for me to add to this research project so that people are made aware of that?

It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Throughout the data gathering phase, participants will be aware that participation in this study is voluntary and they will be free to withdraw from the research until such time they approve their interview transcript. Participants will also be informed that during the thesis writing phase while every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, this cannot be entirely guaranteed. The identity of your institution will also be kept anonymous. All data gathered from the research will be kept confidential.

The finding of this study will be made available at the University of Waikato Research Commons which can be accessed using the URL: <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz> upon completion of my thesis.

Should you have any questions or queries regarding this request, please do contact me using the detailed given below. I would also be happy to call you and answer your questions if you leave me a message.

I am looking forward to a favourable response from your office.

Yours faithfully,

Signature

Deepak S. Singh

Email: dss19@students.waikato.ac.nz

Phone: +6799256055

Inclusive Education in Fiji: Pre-service and In-service Primary Education Teachers' perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive Education

Appendix 5: Principal/Dean/Head Teacher Consent Form

Please check in the active checkbox to confirm it being read and acknowledged.

- I have read and understood the purpose of Deepak Sanjay Singh's research.
- I had the opportunity to ask questions and have had all the issues fully answered.
- I give permission for Deepak Sanjay Singh to work with the final year trainee teachers/junior in-service teachers from my teacher training institution/school to gather information on their perspectives and preparedness for inclusive education.
- I understand the final year trainee teachers'/junior in-service teachers willing to participate in the research will give their informed consent and will be able to withdraw from this study until the time to approve their transcript has passed.
- I understand, that if participants and I have any concerns regarding this research initiative that we prefer not to discuss with Deepak, we can contact his supervisors

Principal Supervisor

Dr. Carol Hamilton

Email: carol.hamilton@waikato.ac.nz

Phone: +6478388578

- I am happy for Deepak Sanjay Singh to use the information he gathers from this research for the purpose of his master's thesis, which may later be used in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas.
- I understand, while every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, but this cannot be entirely guaranteed.
- I am aware that all data gathered will be kept confidential with Deepak Sanjay Singh and his supervisor.
- I am mindful of the fact that I will be able to access the completed thesis at the University of Waikato research commons using the URL: <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz>, and I will be notified when this becomes available.

Signed:

Date:

Institution rubber stamp:

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The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand



Inclusive Education in Fiji: Pre-service and In-service Primary Education Teachers' perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive Education

Appendix 6: Participant Information and Invitation Letter

My name is Deepak Sanjay Singh, and I am studying Master of Disability and Inclusion Studies at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. As part of my master's thesis, from **3 June 2016 to 6 August 2016** I will be conducting research to gather information on the perspectives of Fijian pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' on inclusive education. This study will also collect information on how qualified these teachers are to take on the role of an inclusive education teacher.

The title of my thesis is ***Inclusive education in Fiji: Pre-service and in-service primary education teachers' perspectives and preparedness for disability-inclusive education.***

My personal experience as a special education teacher in the field of teaching over the past 15 years has inspired me to research on this topic. This research will allow me to gather information on pre-service and in-service primary school teachers' personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education, professional opinions about inclusive education, training and preparedness for inclusive education, and finally, contemporary issues about inclusive education in Fiji.

No research of this nature in Fiji has been identified in my literature review, and it is hoped that the findings from this study will add and record the growing knowledge around inclusive education in Fiji.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato (ref: FEDU037/16) and by the Fiji Ministry of Education. The information gathered from this research will be used for the writing my master's thesis, which may later be used in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas.

It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete, and will either be conducted at the participant's school or anywhere more convenient which will be decided after informed consent from the potential participant have been received. Participation in this project is voluntary, and there is no pressure on the part of the participant to involve himself/herself in this research if they do not wish to do so.

The interviews will be recorded, which will then be transcribed. Transcripts will then be sent to participants for review and approval. During the consideration process, participants will be able to amend, add or remove information from the transcript that he/she does not like. The review of the interview transcript will be carried out before data analysis begins. Any reference to participant's name, location or any other identifying details from the transcript, and notes taken during the interview will be removed to maintain anonymity and protect participant's identity. Moreover, codes will be used in the transcripts and thesis so that participants who will provide information in this study cannot be traced. Please note: While every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, this cannot be entirely guaranteed. Participants will be able to withdraw information he/she provides this research at any time before approving his/her interview transcript, without any negative consequences.

The data collected from participants will also be kept confidential. Moreover, all non-identifying data gathered from the research will be held securely for the required five years to allow for academic examination, challenge, and peer review.

My research supervisor will ensure that I maintain confidentiality and follow the ethical procedures of the University of Waikato.

I will now like to invite you to participate in this research formally

Your input into this project will be of great value as the information gathered from this research will narrow the gap that exists in the literature on inclusive education in Fiji, as well as generate new information for other scholars in the education arena. If you without any external pressure are willing to participate in this research, then please complete the attached Participant Informed Consent Form and return it to me via my registered email as soon as possible so that I can register you for this research.

Should you have any questions or queries about this research before or after signing the Participant Informed Consent Form, you can contact my research supervisor using the contact details provided below or me. My supervisor and I will try to answer your questions and respond to your queries at the earliest time possible.

Researcher

Deepak Sanjay Singh

Email: dss19@students.waikato.ac.nz

Phone: +6799256055

Principal Supervisor

Dr. Carol Hamilton

Email: carol.hamilton@waikato.ac.nz

Phone: +6478388578

Please note the receipt of the Participant Informed Consent Form emailed to me will be acknowledged as soon as it is received.

Thank you so much for your time to read through this letter and providing your informed consent to participate in this research.

Signature

Deepak Sanjay Singh (ID 1255481)

University of Waikato

Hamilton NZ

Email: dss19@students.waikato.ac.nz

Ph: +6799256055

Inclusive Education in Fiji: Pre-service and In-service Primary Education Teachers' perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive Education

Appendix 7: Participant Informed Consent Form

Please check in the active checkbox to confirm it being read and acknowledged.

- I have read the Participant Information and Invitation Letter and have understood the purpose of Deepak Sanjay Singh's research. By signing this form, I agree to participate in the research.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.
- I am aware that the interview will be recorded, transcribed and analysed for the purpose of this research.
- I know I can withdraw from this research up until such time I have approved my interview transcript.
- I understand, while every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, this cannot be entirely guaranteed.
- I am aware that all data gathered will be kept confidential with Deepak Sanjay Singh and his supervisor.
- I am mindful of the fact that I will be given a chance to review and make amendments to my interview transcript, and that I may request for a change and withdraw my responses up until the time I have approved my interview transcript.

- I understand that all soft copies of data produced during the study will be stored in Deepak Sanjay Singh's personal computer, which is protected by a password. Further, all paper printouts will be kept in a locked and secure place for five years, after which the transcript or summary notes will be destroyed.
- I am aware that the data gathered from the interview will be used by Deepak Sanjay Singh to write his master's thesis, which may later be used in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas.
- I understand that I will own the raw data produced from the interview until such time I approved my interview transcript, while Deepak Sanjay Singh will own the data which has been analysed, and the thesis which will be written to document the research.
- I understand I can contact Deepak Sanjay Singh or his supervisor, Dr. Carol Hamilton, using the contacts given below if I have any questions, queries, concerns or comments about the research.
- I also understand that if a problem arises, that cannot be reconciled between Deepak Sanjay Singh and I during data gathering then I will be directed to his supervisors Dr. Carol Hamilton for advice and assistance. If necessary, they will work in consultation with the University of Waikato, Faculty of Education, Head of School for Te Oranga Associate Professor Sally Peters for advice and guidance.

Researcher

Deepak Sanjay Singh

Email: dss19@students.waikato.ac.nz

Phone: +6799256055

Principal Supervisor

Dr. Carol Hamilton

Email: carol.hamilton@waikato.ac.nz

Phone: 6478388578

I am aware that I will be able to access the completed thesis at the University of Waikato research Commons using the URL: <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz> and I will be notified when this becomes available.

I understand should Deepak Sanjay Singh, or his supervisor need to contact me I can be reached on

Phone: Email:

I would like to be informed about this research when it is complete (please check only one active checkbox).

Yes No

Name of participant:

Teacher Training Institution:

Signature:

Date:

Name of researcher: Deepak Sanjay Singh

Signature:

Date received:

Inclusive Education in Fiji: Pre-service and In-service Primary Education Teachers' perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive Education

Appendix 8: Interview Guide

Setting the scene

- Greetings...
- Refer the participant using the pseudonym he/she preferred.

First, I would like to thank you greatly for providing informed consent to participate in this research and secondly, for making yourself available today for this face-to-face interview. I am now kindly requesting if you could fill in the Demographic Information Form that will record some of your personal information like your name (optional), gender, and age range.

Thank you. I would like to reiterate that you will be able to withdraw from this research until such time you have approved the interview transcript. Be reminded no negative consequences whatsoever will be inflicted on you if you decide to pull out from this research.

Please be informed this interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone, and I am expecting this interview to finish in approximately 45-60 minutes.

Please be advised that it is going to be completely safe for you to share your opinion and use personal experiences to answer questions, as codes will be used to keep your identity and the locations you mention anonymous.

The information you provide in this interview will be used for my master's thesis, which may later be used in oral presentations, seminars, and conferences in Fiji and overseas. Please be informed that I will take additional consent if I want to use the information gathered from this interview for another purpose.

I also assure you that all possible steps will be taken to maintain confidentiality, but this cannot be guaranteed, as the information gathered from the research will be used to write up my master's thesis, which will then be published and made available to the public.

I am kindly requesting if you can use pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of people that you will want to mention during this interview.

Having said this, I would like to thank you for giving in your time. I know it is a very busy time when you are preparing yourself for your teaching practicum/next day's work, but you have given yourself in so that you can be interviewed. So, I thank you greatly for this. Before I move on to the actual discussion, let me formally introduce myself. My name is Deepak Sanjay Singh, originally from Savusavu, but I have been teaching here in Suva. I have spent about fifteen years in Suva Special School teaching children with intellectual impairment, and in 2014 I was transferred to Hilton Special School where I taught for one year before going to Hamilton, New Zealand for my studies. This research is part of the Master of Disability and Inclusion Studies program. So yeah, thank you once again for giving in your time. Before we move on can you briefly introduce yourself so that I get to know you better?

Personal views and experience with disabled children and their access to quality education

1. What is your definition of disabled children or how would you define disabled children?
2. How will you know a child has a disability?
3. Do you have any experiences with disabled children?

4. What opinion do you have on the presence of disabled children in Fijian society? Do disabled children belong in our society or should they be kept separate?
5. Do you think disabled children should have access to quality education? Why?
6. Where should disabled children receive their education? Why?

Professional opinions about inclusive education

7. Tell me what you understand about inclusive education?
8. Where do you think this inclusive education program should be run?
9. What do you think about the concept of educating disabled children in an inclusive education classroom?
10. Teachers' attitudes and skills have been identified as a major obstacle in the inclusion of disabled children. How would you comment to this?
11. What challenges do you think you may face when teaching disabled children in an inclusive education classroom?

Training and preparedness for inclusive education

12. How has your teacher training prepared you for inclusive education?
13. Do you think you have enough practicum so that you can prepare yourself for inclusive education?
14. Do you think there should be provision for the practicums to be held in special schools?
15. Do you feel ready for the challenge of teaching disabled children? What makes you say this?
16. Did you expect more from your teacher training program to prepare you for inclusive education?

Contemporary issues about inclusive education

17. In ten years' time, what will need to change to make full inclusion possible?

18. Are there any relevant issues or concern that you wish to share in this research project? Anything that you think is important for me to add to this research project so that people are made aware of that?

Thank you so much [Name of participant], I am so grateful to have interviewed you, you have provided some valuable information. The information gathered is surely going to contribute towards the knowledge gap that exists in inclusive education in Fiji. So once again, thank you so much for your contribution.

Please be informed that the transcript of this interview is going to be prepared at the earliest time possible and emailed or hand-delivered to you, based on your preference. Once you receive the transcript, you will be required to review, amend and withdrawal any information from the transcript that you are not happy with. Moreover, you will also be given the opportunity to request for parts of the information to be changed or removed. **Note:** You will be given five working days; counting onwards from the day you receive the transcript in your inbox or your hand. Please be informed that I will send a text message on your cell phone to remind you when the transcript is emailed to you. Moreover, on the fourth day, I will once again text message you to tell you that the transcript is due on the following day.

An application for an extension of transcript return day will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If you fail to return the transcript by the allocated return day and have not requested an extension of transcript return day, then I will take that that you are happy with the transcript and therefore, it will put it through the analysis process.

Once you agree to the interview transcript, you will be required to sign the transcript to give approval for its use.

Thank you

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The University of Waikato
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WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

**Inclusive Education in Fiji: Pre-service and In-service Primary
Education Teachers' perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive
Education**

Appendix 9: Demographic Information Form

Name of participant (optional):

Pseudonym preferred:

Gender: Male Female

Age: 18 – 23 years 24 – 29 years 30 – 35 years
 36 – 41 years 42 – 47 years 48 – 53 years

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Inclusive Education in Fiji: Pre-service and In-service Primary Education Teachers' perspectives and preparedness for Inclusive Education

Appendix 10: Return of Transcript Letter

[Insert date]

[Name of participant]

[Address]

Re: Return of Transcript

Dear [Name of participant],

Attached please find the interview transcript of the face-to-face interview which was conducted on the [Date of interview] at the [Place of interview].

Please note that no new words have are added nor any words deleted. The names of people and places mentioned during the interview are replaced with codes. The rest of the data is transcribed directly from the interview recordings.

You are kindly requested to review the transcript, make amendments wherever necessary, and if need be, make an application for parts of the information presented on the transcript to be replaced or removed. If you wish to replace or remove information from the transcript, then please do let me know before the cut-off day. You are to return this e-copy of the transcript to me via email within five working days; counting onwards from this day. **Please note:** If you do not return the transcript by the end of the fifth day, and have not requested an extension of the recovery day then I

will take that you are happy with the transcript and therefore, it will be put through the analysis process.

Thank you so much for your participation and support.

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Deepak Sanjay Singh

Phone: +6799256055

Email: dss19@students.waikato.ac.nz