REGIONAL POLICY SEMINAR 2014

Teacher Effectiveness in Support of Quality Learning in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Improving Teacher Motivation and Performance – (Fiji Case)

Introduction:

Teachers are always regarded higher in the society in Fiji as this is one of the noble professions. In the rural set-up communities always consult teachers for any issue as they are perceived as learned people and should know everything.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the lives of the students in terms of their performances in schools. Teachers interact directly with students on a daily basis and thus play a strategic role in influencing their performance. It is therefore important that all teachers have at their fingertips, all the necessary resources that they can utilize to optimize student achievement. The communities are always blaming teachers for the poor academic results or for the poor performances of the students. Teachers are always at the helm of ridicule from society for being a non-performer, which always resulted in the transfer of teachers to new schools.

With the paradigm shift in learning and teaching and the increase number of initiatives, teachers are being overloaded with extra work as compared to before. Therefore, improving teacher motivation and performance to bring about quality learning and teaching is a policy issue and is taken into consideration which will involve a lot of costs, time, resources etc.

Attracting the best into the teaching profession:

Attracting the best into the teaching profession in Fiji is arguably a difficult task as there are lucrative offers elsewhere. However, one of the incentives is the starting salary package, which is the highest in the Civil service at the same level or grade. This attracts more graduates, however to some teaching is regarded as a "transit lounge" whereby they will work for a while until they get the job that they have been waiting for, careers that they have passion in, this is especially for secondary teachers. This drastically affect the quality of learning and teaching as these type of teachers are not fully committed to their work as they have a different agenda.

One of the strategies that we are working on at the moment to solve this and to attract the right people is to employ graduates who are double major with GCE (Graduate Certificate in Education) or PG)CE (Post-graduate Certificate in Education. This ensures quality teachers are being employed who had the passion to teach in the first place.
Teachers in Fiji have more holidays than any other civil servants. They enjoyed 12 weeks of school holidays in addition to other leave privileges and entitlement, which is given to them. This attracts more females who need more time to be at home with the family.

Currently the rural and maritime allowances have been revised to attract more teachers to teach in the rural areas. One of the criteria for selection of teachers for in-service training or further education is their rural services, which attracts more teachers to teach in the rural areas.

In Fiji, there are more females in the teaching profession as compared to males especially in the Primary Schools (Figure 1.0). This is one area that needs to be addressed on how we can attract more males in the teaching profession. There is a disparity in the key positions whereby there are more male Principals and Head Teachers than females. In alignment with the Equal Employment Opportunities, the Ministry of Education is encouraging more Female teachers in higher positions. At the top Ministerial Positions there are 45% female which is marked increase compared to the previous years.

Proportion of teachers in Primary and Secondary Schools by gender for 2000-2012

Figure 1.0: Teacher proportion for Primary and Secondary Schools in Fiji

[Source: Ministry of Education Annual report]

The tables and the figure above indicate that there are more female teachers in both primary and secondary schools. It is also noted that there is a heavy concentration of female teachers in the primary schools. The results above may be the result of a high attrition rate of male teachers from the teaching field than the female teachers.

Teachers in Fiji also work few hours compared to other civil servants. Primary Schools starts at 8.00am and finishes at 2.30pm whereas in Secondary schools it finishes at 3.30pm this allows more time for preparation for teachers.
There’s still a struggle in Fiji on the amount of paper work or documentation that is required especially in the internal assessment. Teachers are required to document all the classroom based assessment that they carried out which most felt that is an additional load compared to the norm that they were used to whereby assessment were carried out in an adhoc manner and were not documented.

**Enhancing the status of teachers**

Once regarded as a noble profession and highly respected by the society which is now slowly declining with the increase in the number of teachers being convicted of inflicting corporal punishment, indecent behavior etc. and not following the code of conduct. This has led to a number of teachers being terminated from the service and has painted a negative picture to the society.

The Ministry in its quest to enhance the status of teachers has come up with a few strategies such as recruiting the right type of people for the profession. This to recruit teachers who have the passion for teaching, who has teaching qualification such as Graduate or Post Graduate certificate in Education, graduates with high GPA, graduates with excellent character reference etc.

The Ministry also developed the Teacher Competency Framework, which will provide a tool for self-reflection/self-assessment for improvement of teachers. It should be used to assist in identifying areas of strength and direction for improvement.

**Professional Development and Collaborative Learning**

Teachers in Fiji needs to be registered with the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority and one of the criteria for the renewal of the teachers registration is the 20 hours compulsory professional development. The PD is identified through the learning and development needs plan and the skills audit, which is carried out yearly.

The Ministry of Education in Fiji has a Professional Development Unit, which coordinated the learning, and development need and organizes courses for teachers for up-skilling and upgrading of knowledge and skills. One of the courses that has been running for a number of years and have been successful is the Leadership training for Future and Current leaders.

In addition there are new initiatives that needs training of teachers such as training on the new Fiji National Curriculum Framework, Fiji Assessment Framework Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Strategies (LANS), Mainstreaming of Vocational into the secondary system etc. which is carried
out by the Curriculum Development Unit, Technical Vocational Education and Training and the Examination Unit.

There are additional skills training which goes with the new curriculum such as ICT skills, maintenance and repairing of computers and other equipment used in the TVET subjects, using of different musical instruments, different techniques used in Physical education, empowering teachers on different skills in the usage of science equipment and the list goes on. Most of these skills training are done in collaboration with the Universities in Fiji.

Teachers are being privileged with the provision of scholarships, short and long term courses for specific needs, which aims at increasing teacher effectiveness and efficiency.

**Enabling Working Environment**

Majority of the Schools in Fiji are administered by committees, religious organization and few state or government schools therefore there’s gap in the provision of an enabling working environment for teachers.

The Ministry of education allocated about FJD$4.6M towards the improvement of physical infrastructure in schools. It will undoubtedly improve learning environment, which is crucial for quality education. Improved infrastructure also includes the improvement of living conditions of teachers through the upgrading of teachers quarters.

The Government also provides free education for all children in Fiji this year which includes tuition, bus fare etc. This provides an opportunity for teachers to get teaching aid/materials, which will be used in the classrooms which most have been complaining of in the past years. The provision of these learning and teaching resources increase teacher effectiveness and efficiency. Teachers’ creativity enables them to re-arrange the classrooms so that it is very interactive and conducive to learning.

With the implementation of the Fiji National Curriculum Framework and the revision of the syllabi to more student centered, the introduction of the thematic approach in Years 1 & 2, the classroom are arranged in such a way that collaborative learning and inquiry based learning is encouraged. Since it’s the first year of implementation, there are still teething problems, which we are addressing while carrying out evaluation.

Currently tabled in cabinet the reduction in the student: teacher ratio, which will enable the teacher to work effectively and efficiently. Currently the classrooms are being overcrowded and so teachers are overworked and overloaded with the number of documentation that they need to do with the increase in the number of students in a class.
School Leadership and teacher management

The standard of education in Fiji is highly dependent on the quality of school leadership in our schools, and indeed, the outcomes produced by the students and the schools are reliant on the standards set by Head Teachers and Principals.

School leadership plays a pivotal role in teacher motivation and performance. The Ministry of Education in Fiji developed Current & Future Leaders Modules and conducted training throughout the year for potential leaders and the current ones since 2009. The main aim is to improve performance and effectiveness as a leader and to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of learning and teaching in the classroom. In addition, a Leadership Competency Framework has also being developed for self-reflection/self assessment for improvement of school leadership and is also used to assist in identifying areas of strength and direction for improvement.

The quality and the performance of the leaders determine the quality of the school in terms of academic achievement and other achievements. This is evident in Fiji, e.g. one of the secondary schools has been underperforming for eight consecutive years despite numerous attempts to improve the quality of the results. After various analysis of the results, and teacher performances it has been decided to change the leadership therefore in 2013 a new principal was posted to the school.

A team visited the school at the beginning of the year and spent a week with the teachers and students. We started with the teachers staff room and ensure that it is clean and conducive to work. The principal and the staff did an extreme makeover of the whole school. The teacher’s welfare was the priority of the Principal and once the teachers are happy with their house/accommodation, conditions given to them, classrooms and accessibility to other services such internet etc. adequate teaching aid etc. they are sure to perform. The Principal requested the PM’s office for the provision of a boat, solar system, a new classroom improvement of the teachers’ quarters etc. that had an impact on the total performance of the school. The external examination results of the schools rose to 80% from 35% in the past eight consecutive years. This proved that the leader makes a difference in any set up. The Principal trusted the teachers and ensure that their needs are met and they are happy when they are at work and produced results.

On the other hand, despite numerous strategies put in place, there are still complaints from teachers with regards to poor leadership. An area, which hopefully can be resolved from the Leadership training that, is continuously being conducted.

The Ministry of Education in Fiji has developed a teacher management system whereby all staffing needs and information are all entered in the Fiji Education Staffing Appointment (FESA) database. This records the
qualification of all teachers, bio data, staff movement and other records, which at a press of a button a Teacher administrator will be able to determine all about the teacher. In addition, the Ministry of Education with the assistance of a developing partner, has tried to amalgamate all its data into the new Fiji Education Management Information System [FEMIS] so that there is integration of its existing databases. This is somewhat provide an extensive analysis of the education system which has educed some significant findings that will help in the planning and decision making for the future.

To conclude, the Fiji 2014 EFA report stated that the improvement of the quality of education by ensuring that students have access and retaining the students in the school system would continue to be a priority for the Ministry in years to come. Little or nothing has been mentioned on how to improve teacher motivation and performance, which is the important part of the equation for improving quality of education.

Therefore, there’s a dire need to strengthen some of the processes that has already in place and implement some strategies with regards to improving teacher motivation and performance. This is a policy issue that needs be addressed at the national level. As one of pillars in the People’s Charter is to make Fiji a Knowledge based society, Policy should be in place for the recruitment of the right type of people to become teachers who will contribute effectively to make Fiji a knowledge based society, increase remuneration of teachers to meet the demand, flexi time for teachers, reduce the load, more incentives for further training, more consultation and encourage two-way communication with teachers on the new initiatives rather than a one-way communication and bombarded them with what the education system wants etc. This will lead to teacher effectiveness and efficiency and ultimately lead to the delivery of quality learning for quality education.

Alumeci Tuisawau (Fiji)