



LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL: SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES AND EMERGING IMPERATIVES

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Abstract

This study explicates successful leadership practices and emerging issues in educational leadership as perceived by the graduates of a postgraduate leadership program (PGLP) in Fiji. The learning experiences purportedly immerse teachers and aspiring leaders into a world of educational entrepreneurship. A survey using five point Likert type scale was administered to a cohort of graduates of the PGLP from 2010 to 2014. The items of the quality dimensions in the studied framework were analysed with Cronbach's Alpha and were found to be statistically reliable. SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data and findings are discussed according to pertinent emerging themes. Results indicate that generally, graduates are pleased with the leadership experience in relation to the leadership practices and found emerging imperatives such as changing demographics, educational technology, dealing with diversity and impact of social change very relevant. The findings reveal that robust leadership is an impetus for educational renewal that in turn inspires staff morale and positively influences student learning and achievement. The study concludes by discussing some recommendations for improvement that subsequently can make educational leadership and management more applicable to the needs of teachers and prospective leaders in Fiji and beyond.

Keywords: Innovation, Management, Capacity Building, Professional Development, Leadership Strategies, Student Achievement, Teacher Leadership.

1. Introduction and Rationale

It is no doubt that leadership matters a lot more in the current effusion of educational reforms and initiatives worldwide. Education, today, requires leaders who are willing to foster student achievement in some of the most complex environments. The focus on technology, innovation and the shift to the development of competencies has implications for educational leaders for establishing a vision of commitment to high standards in teaching and learning (Dinham, 2005). Subsequently, interest in educational leadership preparation programs have increased over the past decades as leadership of today is quite different from that of the past. Today's leaders employ a broader spectrum of strategies like power-sharing, trust, team-building and empowerment (Fullan & Borst, 2004). According to Kowch (2009), leaders these days are multidisciplinary and independent and like to team up and synergize on each other's competencies in addressing educational issues. Subsequently, the PGLP purports to prepare educational leaders who are able to take charge of educational institutions integrating technology with a trajectory of leadership knowledge.

The PGLP consists of Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership (PGDEL) and Master of Educational Leadership (MEL) offered by the Education Department at The University. The

PGLP is a practice-focused and research based postgraduate degree that prepares teachers and school administrators for leadership positions in schools and other educational institutions. The degree aims to support serving teachers and educators seeking to achieve Masters level accreditation for high standards of critique and application of theories of educational leadership to practice. The influence of teacher leadership is vital in order to implement successful educational reforms and this study builds on and contributes to the work of Darling-Hammond(1988, 2000), Lambert (2005), Gifford (2009) and Fullan (2009). Teacher leaders can assist in guiding fellow teachers, as well as the school at large towards higher standards of achievement for themselves and the students (Childs, Moller & Scrivner, 2000).

2. Background and Context

The Leadership Program is based on the assertion that Fijian people have suffered because of the type of leadership that had existed in Fiji over the last decades (Government of the Republic of Fiji 2008). The idea is replicated in the new constitution of The Republic of Fiji. As such, Fiji needs to have leadership programs as it needs leaders who can facilitate progress and are accountable and take responsibility for the good of the nation. This study hopes to reveal the perceptions of the graduates of the PGLP offered by a private university in Fiji and how it has equipped them with knowledge and skills in making a difference in their lives and at their work places. The leadership program introduces participants to the importance of leadership in education and examines the crucial role of leadership in school improvement efforts in light of new technologies to the teaching learning milieu.

Likewise, the leadership program is designed to help educators develop a critically reflective understanding of school improvement concepts and research. It is a comprehensive program that is supposed to respond to the education sector’s need for qualified future leaders, leaders and effective classroom practitioners. As advocated by Darling-Hammond (2000), Dinham (2005), Greenlee (2007) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), this PGLP program intends to deliver curriculum and experiences to ensure teachers develop the knowledge and skills required to function as effective leaders within complex and challenging educational environments. The leadership program consists of six course work units and two independent projects. Table 1 shows the different courses in the Master of Educational Leadership program. Students graduate with a Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership upon successfully completing the four course work units and a Master of Educational Leadership degree upon the completion of all the eight prescribed courses.

Table 1: Courses in the Master of Educational Leadership Program

EDU401 Educational Leadership in the 21 st Century EDU402 Organisational Management EDU403 Inquiry in Educational Settings* EDU404 Leadership in Teaching, Learning & Assessment EDU405 Contemporary Issues in Education EDU406 Educational Innovation & Change EDU407 Independent Study I EDU408 Independent Study II
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Source: The University Handbook(2014)

Each course introduces students to the importance of sound educational leadership and prepares them to take on the challenges of equity and access, innovation and change and the introduction of new technologies in teaching and learning. The leadership program also provides opportunities for participants to develop proposals, conduct research and present findings in project form that can later be developed as research papers or book chapters for publication in journals and text books.

3. Aim of the Study

The quality of teachers prepared by education institutions depends largely on the practical and theoretical components of the program which they undertake (Pridmore, 2006). The aim of this research is to develop an understanding of the graduates' experiences and their perceptions about the best practices and relevance of the leadership program to their work environment. It is aimed at capturing the views of the graduates in regards to some of the emerging issues in educational leadership. The following section discusses the significance of the present study in light of its contribution to the nation and the educational fraternity at large.

4. Significance of the Study

There are several reasons why this research is considered to be significant. There has been a paucity of previous research regarding leadership issues faced by school heads in Fiji. The present research will be significant because it will address the above issue and highlight issues involved in educational leadership, especially, the pedagogical practices and the dimensions of the leadership program offered by The University. This study will contribute to local literature on the subject, which in turn could be used by Ministry of Education towards improving their leadership and professional development programs.

The findings will also be of value to teachers as they are leaders in their own classrooms despite not holding any leadership positions. Classroom based teachers may realize the importance of undertaking studies in educational leadership as a means of up-skilling their leadership qualities. This study will provide important insights into educational leadership and the professional learning enabling teacher education institutions to strengthen the pre-service teacher preparation program to better prepare teachers to cope with varying demands of leadership in schools.

The study will also inform the Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts (MOEHA) of Fiji to better understand the content and relevance of the leadership program for all teachers aspiring for leadership positions. The program can inform the MOEHA in the preparation of curriculum materials for use at future leaders' workshops (FLW). Future leaders' workshops are organized by the MOEHA of Fiji to educate new and aspiring leaders with effective leadership strategies. It will also provide valuable information to the MOEHA to give due recognition to the leadership program and award teacher leaders with relevant promotional opportunities. The findings will empower MOEHA to revisit its earlier decision not to consider PGDEL program for promotional purposes for teachers (Taloga, 2015).

The findings of this study will also highlight elements related to leadership and the professional learning which could be integrated into the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) Program currently offered by the University. The findings will inform the department to appraise its leadership program to make it more pertinent to addressing leadership issues such as, teacher workload and implementation of educational reforms. Finally, it will also provide relevant information to International Funding Authorities and other donor agencies about the impact of the leadership program in developing quality leaders. Findings will enable them to make constructive decisions when offering scholarships to school teachers to complete suitable programs to become better educational leaders in their respective schools and the community. The following section provides pertinent literature regarding issues related to the prevalence and significance of educational leadership programs worldwide.

5. Literature Review

Educational leadership is challenging in today's volatile climate of policy makers' endless demands and constant attacks on the standard of teaching and learning. The literature presented discusses the importance of leadership in education and looks at the crucial role of leadership in school improvement and development. The literature also discusses the importance and relevance of leadership programs in education in Pacific societies and beyond. Leadership is very broad and at times difficult to define (Kutz, 2012). It is widely accepted to be a process by which a person influences the thoughts, attitudes, behaviors and actions of others (Fullan, 2010a). Without good leadership discussions, can quickly degenerate into arguments and conflicts, because people have different perceptions and lean toward different solutions. Furthermore, there is ample literature to ascertain that good leadership does not only provide guidance to staff members but also contributes to enhanced student learning (Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood, Pattern & Jantzi, 2010; Hargreaves, 2011).

Hargreaves and Fink (2008) stress the significance of sound leadership in energizing people to work towards common goals. As such, leaders need to have followers in order to be able to implement change and innovations effectively. Fullan (2002) concurs that without followers a leader isn't perceived as a leader and may be called a rejected head. Accordingly, leadership skills can be perverted to pursue bad ends by not undertaking leadership programs. For nearly a decade leadership development programs have helped agencies prepare teachers, aspiring leaders and school heads for positions of greater responsibility (Greenlee, 2007). Cumulative evidence on the efficacy of leadership provides strong justification for the present study that is aimed at addressing the knowledge gap relating to the effectiveness of the leadership program in the Fiji context (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Leadership programs are a necessity in many of the countries around the world and Fiji is not an exception. It is no longer a choice based on educational reasons (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 2003). In an era of technological revolution, Fijian school systems are facing severe challenges to implement pedagogical innovations and reforms brought about by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2014). In view of this, the Ministry has undertaken provision of training and capacity building for teachers, leaders, and future leaders by holding workshops and seminars. However, all teachers are unable to get this training as such the leadership program offered by the University complements the efforts of the Ministry of Education. Subsequently, within the strict practices of accountability, teaching about educational leadership has its own complexities in seeking to prepare aspiring leaders to be effective, let alone transformational leaders (Batagiannis, 2009). Findings will; however, provide useful information about the relevance of the program leading to appropriate implications.

Leadership programs are important as they equip school heads to coordinate instructional process and ensure that student's opportunities to learn and perform are in accordance with required standards (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Through extensive studies, researchers Hallinger and Heck (1998) have supported their notion that school heads who undertake leadership programs make significant improvements in the performance of their teachers, as well as the students. The aim of most educational leadership programs is to enable teachers to become better leaders and improve outcomes and craft effective solutions to school requirements (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Collard, 2005; Slater et al., 2006). Recent research has examined the attributes that are necessary for leadership to meet the educational reform challenges and the ever mounting threat of competition by the increasing popularity of educational institutions (Onorato, 2013). Driven by agency needs and shaped by leader input, leadership development programs promote the kind of expansive thinking and personal change needed to move organisations in new directions.

Similar sentiments have been shared by Bush and Jackson (2002) that leadership matters a lot in effective school administration and management. Effective leadership helps our schools through times of change and development (Greenlee, 2007). It makes school organisation successful by enabling students become productive adults. Hallinger and Heck (1998) warn that the absence of leadership is equally dramatic in its effects as without leadership, organisations move too slowly, stagnate, and can even lose their focus. This advice is supported by Leithwood et al. (2003), and much of the literature implies that if decision-making is timely, complete, and correct, then policies and procedures can be well implemented and monitored. Likewise there is ample evidence that sound leadership programs prepare novice and aspiring leaders to implement changes and get tasks completed in timely and effective ways (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heckman & Mantle-Bromley, 2004; Lambert, 2005; Hancock, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Bearing in mind the importance of leadership programs, the contents need to be carefully crafted and synchronized to make such programs effective and practical. According to Greenlee, (2007) the importance of leadership programs in guiding and leading people towards the path of success is a great call. Hargreaves and Fink (2008) argue that leadership programs need to promote creativity and be able to empower people to maximize full potential and bring out the best from team members. This is supported by Fullan (2010b) who strongly endorses that leadership programs should enable leaders to become instruments of change and make the realization that what they do make a difference and are meaningful. The very essence of leadership programs should be preparing individuals to appreciate and respect a very important resource that at times get overlooked, the human resource. In order to avoid this happening, Murgatroyd and Gray (1984) strongly endorse that leadership programs should focus on developing personal and interpersonal qualities of the participants that in turn will empower them to respect and appreciate the work of other colleagues. Subsequently, in an Educational arena, every teacher needs to be viewed as a potential leader (Dinham, 2005).

Dinham (2005) further proclaims that educational leadership programs should enable teachers to understand that seeking glory for self is immature as it destroys potential for future contribution and growth. Good leaders know how to respect and keep confidence of staff members. Effective leaders assist in developing the ability to inspire staff and keep in mind that people are your most valuable assets in contributing towards the overall performance of the school (Hancock, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008). The view that leadership programs should allow participants to develop broad and deeper understanding of organisational issues such as leading increasing accountability and creating a service-driven organisation is widely accepted by many leadership advocates (Morrison, 2007; Lewin, Hlupic & Walton, 2010). This reinforces the need for leadership programs to be consistent to the needs of the context and this has compelling implications for tertiary institutions.

Tertiary institutions have often been criticized for not preparing students for the realities of the work world (Laura, 1993). Sometimes programs are even changed and revised to meet the needs of the industry. According to Laura (1993) one of the state reports affirm that stakeholders have requested an educational institution to change its traditional approaches to lesson delivery as students need to be educated to fill the “need for workers who can think and learn, gather, organize and analyze information and apply it to problem solving” (p. 1)(p. 1)[36](p. 1)(p. 1)(p. 1)(p. 1)(p. 1)(p. 1)(p. 1). The report by Laura (1993) further states that leadership programs offered need to emphasize the type of personal skills that make employees successful in the corporate world. This reinforces the views of Leithwood (2003) and Lambert (2005) that leadership programs need to accentuate decision making, problem solving and creative thinking

skills as they are dealing with one of the most important resource known as the human resource. This study will reveal whether the present leadership program addresses issues regarding teachers and other stakeholders.

In an article that appeared in both *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution*, it stated that chancellor for the University System of Georgia, endorsed that universities need to prepare students for information technology jobs (Maria, 1998). The article further stated that programs offered by universities need to be relevant to the market demand be it in technology or in leadership. Accordingly this study will depict the relevance of the leadership program for the graduates in carrying out their responsibilities effectively in the schools. These are some of the gaps that this study hopes to fill in through its findings. The plethora of literature on educational leadership contributes to the conceptualization of this study (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2003; Dinham, 2005; Hargreaves, 2008; Kutz, 2012). This study analyzes the theoretical components of the leadership program in view of the content and its relevance to the education system. Subsequently, the current study was conceptualized based on literature that leadership is viewed as a key determinant of teachers' professional development and improved teaching and learning. The following section will present the methodological orientation adopted for this study.

6. Research Methodology

Given the purpose of the research, this study is guided by the following overarching research question:

What are some of the successful leadership practices and emerging issues in educational leadership as perceived by graduates in the Postgraduate Leadership Program?

Education research, as well as research in other similar areas of inquiry, is typically conducted within a number of competing paradigms. "Paradigms are belief systems that are based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions" (Coll & Chapman, 2000, p. 2). A paradigm is a worldview or a set of beliefs shared by a community of researchers. Some of the competing or alternative paradigms are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and interpretivism/constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Robottom & Hart, 1993). This research falls within the positivist paradigm as the key concern is data collection and interpretation through an objective approach. According to the principles of positivism, it depends on quantifiable observations that lead themselves to statistical analysis. It has been noted that as a philosophy, positivism is in accordance with the empiricist view that knowledge stems from human experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). As such, this research was conducted from within a positivist paradigm and this has implications for the selection of an appropriate research design.

6. 1 Survey Research Design

Survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research. The broad area of survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve seeking responses from participants (Peter, 2006). Different types of surveys are actually composed of several research techniques, developed by a variety of disciplines. Survey research does not belong to any one field and it can be employed by almost any discipline (Nardi, 2006). A survey design was most appropriate to collect ample information in a short duration of time. Surveys are a favoured tool for many who are engaged in research as it provides a quick and effective way of collecting data (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

In the current study, the nature of the research questions posed and the experience under study warranted the use of a survey research as survey was also used by Arredondo and Bauch (2006)

in their study about graduates' perception about a leadership program. A number of advocates of leadership and change have used survey (Viviane, 2008; Brinia, 2011). Webber and Robbertson (2004) used similar instruments to gather information in their study regarding the effects of international professional dialogue on educators' understanding of issues in educational leadership. In this study of sustainable leadership in New Zealand, Notman (2012) also used survey as a research tool. Subsequently, five point Likert type scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) was used in the survey to address theoretical and practical impact of the leadership program. Table 2 shows all the study constructs and variables of each course.

Table 2: Study Constructs and Variables in the Study

		SA	A	U	D	SD
A	The Course EDU401 Educational leadership for the 21st Century has enabled me to:					
1	Identify the different styles of leadership					
2	Become more considerate of my teachers wellbeing					
3	Understand that leadership is not power but ability to influence					
4	Implement leadership strategies that have been useful in my teaching					
5	Become a better leader in the school					
B	The Course EDU402 Organisational Management has enabled me to:					
6	Develop collaborative approach with school management					
7	Demonstrate a better understanding of management issues					
8	Gain skills in addressing management issues in schools					
9	Model exemplary practices in managing resources in school.					
10	Become a better school administrator					
C	The Course EDU403 Inquiry in Educational Settings has enabled me to:					
11	Understand what research is all about					
12	Realize the importance of research for teachers					
13	Implement knowledge in designing proposals for school level projects					
14	develop a research proposal for further research					
15	Become a better researcher as a Leader					
D	The Course EDU404 Leadership in Teaching Learning & Assessment has enabled me to:					
16	Apply knowledge to assessment in my work					
17	Understand the functions of reforms in assessment					
18	Align assessment tasks to the learning outcomes					
19	Develop proficient assessment tasks for students					
20	Make improved difference in student achievement					
E	The Course EDU405 Contemporary Issues in Education in Fiji has enabled me to:					
21	Become aware of current developments in education globally					
22	Analyze impact of globalization on schooling					
23	understand the implications of ICT for educational leaders					
24	Change the mindset of teachers in regards to professional development					
25	Reflect to become a better leader in the school					
F	The Course EDU406 Education Innovation & Change has enabled me to:					
26	Understand the importance of educational reforms					
27	Identify directions for change in response to MOE requirements					
28	Positively change teachers' attitudes towards embracing change					
29	Appreciate the importance of implementing the changes					
30	Effectively implement the educational reforms in my school					
G	The Independent Studies EDU407 & EDU408 have allowed me to:					
31	Identify prospective research areas					
32	Critique research information to establish credibility					
33	Encourage teachers to do research work to inform their teaching					
34	Appreciate the importance of research					

35	Prepare better written reports for MOE requirements					
H	The leadership program:					
36	Prepared me to become a better leader in the community					
37	Had a relevant content to the work we do as teacher leaders					
38	Enabled me to prepare authentic learning tasks for the students					
39	Increased my chances for promotion					
40	Enabled me to positively influence academic performance of the students					

6. 2Research Sample

Selecting research sample is an imminent issue frequently raised by researchers and students (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) researchers are always concerned with what can be labelled as an adequate size for a sample. They further suggest that despite shortage of time and financial constraints into consideration, it is advisable to obtain “as large a sample as they reasonably can” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 104). For the purpose of this study, the five year graduates from 2010 to 2014 were targeted. The target population is the entire group a researcher is interested in and in this case the graduates of the PGDEL and MEL program. The survey was administered to 240 graduates of the program and 189 of the graduates attempted the survey resulting in a response rate of 79% which is acceptable for discussion according to statistical analysis (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Table 3: Respondents as per their graduation years

Year of Graduation	Frequency	Percent
2010	24	12.7
2011	46	24.3
2012	42	22.2
2013	30	15.9
2014	47	24.9
Total	189	100.0

The section that follows explains the data recording and analytical procedures that were used in the research.

6. 3Reliability of the Study Constructs

Five variables were considered for the theoretical impact of the program while there were ten variables for the practical impact of the program. The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha (α) was used to assess the reliability of the study constructs as it is widely used for assessing the reliability of measurement scales with multi-point items. Thus, the overall reliability of the constructs was .867 while the Cronbach’s Alpha based on standardized items was .932. Table 4 shows the Cronbach’s Alpha value of the study constructs. The high value of Cronbach’s Alpha reveal that the constructs are statistically reliable and sufficient to address the research question (Hair et al., 1998; Malhotra & Birks, 1999).

Table 4: Reliability Statistics of Study Constructs

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.867	.932	40

The nature of the research questions and the aim of the study underpin the data analysis procedures. The survey consisted of 40 closed ended constructs. Thus, the questions were

analysed by coding and entering the information into SPSS. As suggested by Yin (2003), all care was taken to ensure that appropriate interpretation of the information and techniques used in data analysis process were of the highest quality.

6. 4Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were taken into consideration throughout the course of this study. A number of commentators of educational research have stressed the importance of adopting a set of ethical procedures. This is in line with the views expressed by Fontana and Frey (1994), that is, research should not exploit informants, but enhance their confidence by voluntarily sharing worthwhile information with the researcher. The participants have not been identified in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. To further maintain the ethical etiquettes relevant information such as the aim and the purpose of the study were communicated well in advance to the participants of the present study. The survey was mailed to the graduates and no direct contact or interference was made with them in order to uphold ethical standards.

7. Findings and Discussion

The Leadership program has been offered since 2006 and the first batch of nine students graduated in 2008 with PGDEL degree. Since 2008 till 2015, 250 students have graduated with PGDEL and from them 79 students have successfully completed MEL degree. This study focuses on the perceptions of the graduates about the successful practices and emerging issues in regards to educational leadership. Subsequently, this study focuses on the views of the graduates from 2010 to 2014 for practical reasons discussed earlier in the limitations section. Table 6 presents the sample for this study.

Table 5: Yearly Graduates in different Programs

Year	PGDEL	Masters (MEL)	Total
2010	23	6	29
2011	44	7	51
2012	35	16	51
2013	33	16	49
2014	48	12	60
TOTAL	183	57	240

The sample includes all the graduates in both the programs. It needs to be noted that the 57 graduates in the MEL program had to complete PGDEL first, as part of their study. The leadership program consists of six course work units and two independent projects. Table 1 shows the different courses in the Master of Educational Leadership program. Students graduate with a Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership upon successfully completing the four course work units and a Master of Educational Leadership degree upon the completion of all the eight prescribed courses (See Table 1).

Each course introduces students to the importance of leadership in education and prepares them to take on the challenges of equity and access and the introduction of new technologies to the teaching learning milieu. The leadership program also provides opportunities for participants to develop proposals, conduct research and present the findings in project form that can later be developed as research papers or book chapters for publication in journals and text books.

Table 6: Respondents in the Leadership Program

Program	Frequency	Percent
Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership	138	73.0
Master of Educational Leadership	51	27.0
Total	189	100.0

Altogether, 240 teachers had graduated in either postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership or in Master of Educational Leadership from 2010 till 2014. The Survey was sent to all the graduates and 189 of them responded resulting in a response rate of 79% which is acceptable for discussion as the minimum recommended size was 148 for this survey according to statistical analysis (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

The following sections present the findings in relation to the different learning experiences students were provided during their study.

7. 1 Educational leadership Styles

Educational leadership for the 21st Century is a course of study which introduces participants to the theories associated with the different leadership styles. It enables them to examine the crucial role of educational leadership in view of the introduction of new teaching methods and technologies to the teaching learning milieu. As advocated by (Kowch, 2013) this means integrating what we do in a more interdisciplinary, participative and less institutionally-bound manner. All the respondents either strongly agreed (71%) or agreed (28%) that this course enabled them to identify the different leadership styles and become more considerate of the needs of the staff members. Findings further reveal that this course has enabled almost all (96%) the respondents to understand that leadership is the ability to influence and successfully implement leadership strategies in teaching and learning.

Table 7: Enhancing Leadership Qualities

Become a Better Leader	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	135	71.4
Agree	53	28.0
Unsure	1	.5
Total	189	100.0

Subsequently, almost all the respondents affirmed that the learning experience as very relevant and pragmatic. The findings conforms to the views expressed by Murgatryod and Gray (1984), Leithwood et al. (2003), and Greenlee (2007) that leadership programs need to be relevant and contextual in order to make any positive impact on the learning environment. With emerging issues such as rapid changes occurring in both education and the workplace today, leaders need to be practical and be able to ‘work the talk’. It means to be practical. The root of the word is practice. So, practical leadership is about leading people by demonstrating their values through their actions. These leaders build relationships by mentoring and providing guidance, creating cohesive teams and earning the loyalty of their colleagues (Greenlee, 2007). Most of the respondents agree that the course has developed their understanding of the concept of effective leadership and that leaders needed to be practical and lead by example. The connection between the quality of leadership and school effectiveness is demonstrated by research in many parts of the world (Mortimore et al., 2000). In order to become effective leaders, teachers need to be trained and all the respondents agreed that the Post Graduate Leadership program had thoroughly prepared them to perform better leadership and administrative responsibilities.

7. 2 Organisational Management

Apart from teaching, teachers who hold leadership position are also tasked with the organisational management of the schools. Management requires a mix of professional knowledge and expertise along with the ability to develop and manage good systems to sustain quality teaching and learning. All the students either strongly agreed (86.2%) or agreed (13.8%) that they were able to demonstrate a better understanding of management issues currently confronting educational leaders. Leaders need to view organisational components of schools and systems as an integral part of the culture of learning, requiring collaboration and context awareness to enable effective implementation and delivery of the school program. Purposeful structures support and sustain the school and community vision. The school leader skillfully interprets shared values and goals in implementing the school plan and vision in a structurally sound manner. Majority of the students (96%) acknowledged the importance of the course in enabling them to develop collaborative approaches with the school management and all of them admitted they had gained valuable knowledge and skills in addressing management issues in their schools. The course has been an eye opener for the respondents as it has empowered them to model exemplary practices and become better school administrators (See Table 8).

Table 8: Better School Administrators

Become a better school administrator	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	187	98.9
Agree	2	1.1
Total	189	100.0

Sound practices are employed to acquire, deploy and sustain the human, physical, technical and financial resources. For when it comes to organizational performance, leaders matter. According to (Eacott & Asuga, 2014) “without significant attention to the preparation and development of school leaders, government initiatives aimed at building world class education systems are unlikely to succeed” (p. 919)(p. 919)[60](p. 919)(p. 919). School leadership preparation and development is one of the ‘hot topics’ in both the practice and scholarship of educational leadership, management and administration. There has been special issues of some of the field’s leading journals (see Educational Administration Quarterly 47 (1); Journal of Educational Administration 46 (6); and School Leadership & Management 29 (3), published in the USA, Australia and UK, respectively).

7.3 Inquiry in Educational Settings

The Inquiry aims to shape debate, inform policy and influence practice by investigating the contribution of research in teacher education. It addresses the foundational knowledge needed to understand and conduct educational inquiry and research. The topics of study include general epistemology in the human sciences, the philosophical foundations of modern research strategies, and the general classes of research investigations in education. At a time when teacher education is under active development across the globe, an important question for all those seeking to improve the quality of teaching and learning is how to boost the use of research to inform the design, structure and content of teacher education programmes. Majority of the students strongly agree (98.4) that the study has enabled them to realize the importance of research in planning and teaching. The broad intentions of this course are for students to demonstrate evidence of having gained knowledge of the nature and methods of conducting educational research; issues associated with undertaking educational research in a range of educational settings; how research can improve teaching, learning and assessment and how research is a part of teachers' everyday work (see Table 9).

Table 9: Relevance of Research Knowledge

Implement knowledge in designing proposals for school level projects	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	177	93.7
Agree	12	6.3
Total	189	100.0

Teachers are equipped to conduct their own research, individually and collectively, to investigate the impact of particular interventions or to explore the positive and negative effects of educational practice. The entire sample agreed that this course enabled them to design and implement research proposals to examine how their research plans can be used as stepping stones to help improve educational outcomes. It enables them to draw up well founded research plans intended for their own educational settings in order to try and better understand how practice influences learning, and the development of teacher knowledge through a teacher as researcher approach. There has been a strong focus on the use of data to inform teaching and instruction over the past 20 years (Lather, 1992; Wellington, 2000; Creswell, 2008). There now needs to be a sustained emphasis on creating ‘research-rich’ and ‘evidence-rich’ schools and classrooms. Teachers need to be equipped to interrogate data and evidence from different sources, rather than just describing the data or trends in attainment.

Table 10: Teacher as a Researcher

Become a better researcher as a Leader	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	176	93.1
Agree	8	4.2
Unsure	5	2.6
Total	189	100.0

Only a few (3%) of the graduates were unsure about the impact of the course while majority of them perceived it to have transformed them into better researchers (Table 10). The overarching goal of this course is to provide the knowledge and skills related to research inquiry through quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research. The course is geared towards broadening an advanced understanding of research approaches in ways that can be explored through diverse models of research and methodology.

7.4 Leadership in Teaching Learning & Assessment

It is tempting to view teaching, learning and assessment as something of an indefinable concept due to the complexities and demands attached to it. Studies in this domain bring together contemporary ideas and literature in making a critical exploration of the relationships among learning, curriculum and assessment in light of the expectations on the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents, students and aother social services organizations. The concept of teaching, learning and assessment encourages students to analyse current policies and practices, local and national; introduces an important comparative, international aspect through readings and discussions. 2015 alone saw an influx of education reforms especially in teaching learning and assessment. One such reform is the removal of the Classroom based Assessment (CBA) and the reintroduction of the External Examinations in years 6, 8, 10, 12 and 13 in Fiji and this course has enabled respondents to understand the reforms in educational assessment (See Table 11).

Table 11: Unprecedented Educational Reforms

Functions of reforms in assessment	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	185	97.9
Agree	4	2.1
Total	189	100.0

Leadership in the area of teaching, learning and assessment presents further insights into how policies and practices can be judged; and provides the tools and resources to evaluate and develop views of learning and apply them to the development of practice. Findings further reveal that respondents were able to align assessment tasks to the learning outcomes and develop proficient assessments tasks for students. This course has enabled them to understand the reasoning behind the reforms and take an ownership in implementing the changes effectively. The respondents affirmed that the reforms had made positive impact on student achievement (see Table 12).

Table 12: Improvement in Student Achievement

Make improved difference in student achievement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	183	96.8
Agree	6	3.2
Total	189	100.0

According to research, school leadership has been shown to exert a positive influence on school and student outcomes (Orphanos & Orr, 2014). Presently, there is great interest in how quality leadership preparation is related to leadership practice and improved teacher leader outcomes. This course has really benefitted the respondents as they were able to successfully implement the reforms and achieve better student achievement during the internal as well as external examinations. Almost all the respondents agree that the program enables them to acquire leadership knowledge and skills that in turn allow them to provide support and guidance to their colleagues in respective schools. It is now widely accepted that while teachers need initial training to be effective classroom practitioners, they also need to engage themselves by continuing professional development throughout their careers to become effective leaders in the schools and the community at large (Mortimore et al., 2000). The leadership program offered by the University recognizes the need for specific preparation for aspiring and practicing school leaders, to generate the positive effects in school administration and leadership.

7.5 Contemporary Issues in Education in Fiji

This course examines current issues affecting education in Fiji, Oceania and beyond through the perspectives of history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology and politics of education. It covers interesting and relevant topics in Education globally and blends them with contemporary issues and reforms currently implemented in our schools. The topics of study include teacher preparedness, the changing face of education, reforms and resources, education for all and education for sustainable living. Table 16 reveals that all the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to analyze the impact of globalization on schooling and fully recognize the implications of ICT for educational leaders.

Table 13: Impact of globalization on schooling

Analyze impact of globalization on schooling	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	183	96.8
Agree	6	3.2
Total	189	100.0

Students are presented a coherent and focused collection of texts to introduce the contemporary issues that are prevalent in our education system. A key feature of this course is the critical exploration of education in times of rapid change, with links made between such developments in wider social, cultural, political and economic contexts. Grounded in a strong conceptual, theoretical framework and presented in an accessible way with the use of features such as case

studies, activities and visual devices to encourage and support student learning and the application of new concepts, this course will provide avenues and a platform for addressing the contemporary issues affecting the teachers and the students in the education sector in Fiji. On a similar note, all the respondents affirmed that the lectures and tutorials were helpful in enabling them to comprehend the leadership issues.

Table 14: Implications of ICT for Educational Leaders

Understand the implications of ICT for educational leaders	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	185	97.9
Agree	4	2.1
Total	189	100.0

Table 14 shows that the students are empowered to comprehend the implications of ICT in lesson preparation and delivery. They have realized that they need to be computer literate as most of the reporting to the MOE is by online submission. The impact of globalization, ICTs, consumerism, individualism, economic rationalism, diminishing natural resources and the rise of fundamentalisms are just some of these realities. The effects of these challenges are felt in educational institutions both locally and globally and technology in education really synergizes the learning process (Kowch, 2013). In the past, education has often focused on one's own regional views. In a society with no interaction with the outside world, this might suffice. However, in our global society requiring different kinds of skills - an awareness of cultures, and collaboration across borders - a regional view may not be enough. The current demographic shift among students, the globalization of the economy and the technological demands of the information age are all converging to create challenges and opportunities for school systems that are unique and unprecedented. This course examines current and emerging global and local issues and trends impacting on education. It includes demographic shifts; globalization; information and communications technology; inclusion of diverse learners in schools; and recent research on student achievement when influenced by race, gender, and poverty.

7.6 Emerging Imperitives

Study in the ambit of Education Innovation & Change provides a platform for exchanging experiences and knowledge about educational innovation and change in professional education and development. It promotes publications that deal with pedagogical issues that arise in the context of innovation and change of professional education. This course explores the particular characteristics of educational innovation and change and findings reveal that majority (93%) of the respondents agree that it has enabled them to positively change their attitudes towards embracing change (See Table 15).

Table 15: Change teachers' attitudes towards embracing change

Positively change teachers' attitudes towards embracing change	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	170	89.9
Unsure	13	6.9
Agree	5	2.6
Disagree	1	0.5
Total	189	100.0

The findings also reveal that only a few (7%) of the respondents were unsure and this is very explicable as change cannot be forced and needs to be administered in a systematic manner. Research evidence shows that the process of change is difficult and frustrating at times because it requires leaders to change their mind sets (Fullan, 2010). The course has been designed to

create an awareness of emerging issues in educational leadership (see Table 16). According to Fullan (2004) principals who are equipped to handle complex and rapidly changing environment are able to successfully implement reforms that lead to positive improvement in student achievement. This course presents a number of emerging trends in educational leadership. One such trend in educational leadership is network leadership. Network leadership has the potential to redefine educational leadership through an expansion of connectedness and collective impact (Tremblay, 2012).

Leadership for change, then, calls for a different kind of school leader. The trend is far from the individual great man approach that focuses on leaders and their capacities and actions to a focus on leadership as shared capacity and attributed status. In this age when conventional boundaries are disappearing, the challenge of leading calls for a new paradigm that promotes movement beyond the walls of tradition.

Table 16: Implementation of Education Reforms

Effectively implement the educational reforms in my school	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	140	74.1
Agree	39	20.6
Unsure	10	5.3
Total	189	100.0

Most of the students agree that this course provides opportunities to understand the reforms and implement them effectively (see Table 16). There is ample research evidence that effective school leaders are key to large-scale, sustainable education reform (Normore, 2004; Fink & Stoll, 2005; Fullan, 2009). For some time, educators have believed that teachers need specialized leadership courses so that they can successfully implement the changes. Majority of the students (94%) agree this course has been able to acquaint them with knowledge to understand the change process in wake of changing demographics, educational technology, dealing with diversity and impact of social change.

7.7 Independent Research Studies

Research projects are undertaken after a student completes major coursework units and they are the final hurdles in completing a Masters degree. It comprises of two Independent Research Studies resulting in the development in-depth research projects of around 15 000 words each. These are basically independent projects, but students are guided upon request and classes are taken as and when required as these projects are follow-up from the course on research methodology. Findings show that the all the respondents have appreciated the importance of research in their work as reflective teachers (See Table 17).

Table 17: Importance of Research

Appreciate the importance of research	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	146	77.2
Agree	43	22.8
Total	189	100.0

The projects are expected to make a new and creative contribution to a field of study and to demonstrate the student's expertise in research. Research projects are academic works that reflect the preparation of an individual to understand and create scholarship through intellectual endeavor and use of research skills. Graduates are able to demonstrate the ability to undertake action research and conduct using qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach. This feature has been very well reflected in Table 18. All the participants recognize the

relevance of the two projects in enabling them to prepare better written reports for MOE. This course has enabled the participants to realize the importance of research for teachers.

Table 18: Teacher as a Researcher

Realize the importance of research for teachers	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	158	83.6
Agree	31	16.4
Total	189	100.0

Education in a research setting is done to improve school practices and the teaching learning process. There has been a strong focus on the use of data to inform teaching and instruction globally (Anderson & Burns, 1989; Coll & Chapman, 2000; Lewin & Stuart, 2003; Kervin et al., 2006). There now needs to be a sustained emphasis on creating ‘research-rich’ and ‘evidence-rich’ data for schools and classrooms. Teachers need to be equipped to interrogate data and evidence from different sources, rather than just describing the data or trends in attainment. The two independent studies have successfully enabled graduates to use scientific methods to study best practices in teaching and learning.

8. Overall Leadership Experience

The overall leadership experience aims to support serving teachers and educators seeking to achieve Masters level accreditation for the highest standards of critique and application of theories of educational leadership to practice. ICT application, cultural diversity, good governance, ethical considerations and (human & financial) resource management are integrated into the courses where appropriate and majority of the respondents (83%) strongly agreed that the content of the different courses were very relevant to their work as teacher leaders (See Table 19). This result is supported by earlier findings by McGregor(2011) that the content of leadership programs need be relevant and focus on creating a creating positive learning environments.

Table 19: Relevance of the Leadership Program

Had a relevant content to the work we do as teacher leaders	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	157	83.1
Agree	32	16.9
Total	189	100.0

The Master of Educational Leadership offers the opportunity for in-depth study of research relevant to educational leadership and the chance to critique and contribute to the educational research that is shaping Fiji’s educational policy and practice. It provides practicing teachers with the theoretical understandings and practical skills needed to make a difference to the quality of education in their current and future workplaces. Findings reveal that all the respondents (100%) agreed that the leadership program had contributed positively in preparing them to become better leaders.

The different courses equip students to lead educational organisations and become well qualified teachers and positively impact academic performance of students. Various researchers have tried to study the influence path in the principal leadership and student achievement relationship to identify essential leadership skills and teacher experiences, as well as to identify potential moderating and mediating factors (Leithwood et al., 2003; Bryk et al., 2010; Thoonen et al., 2011). Significantly, such researchers have identified how leader practices have influenced teachers and, together, how teachers and leaders have positively influenced student

achievement. Over the past 20 years, research in the USA, and elsewhere, has consistently shown that school leaders have a positive but indirect influence on school and student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck 1998; Hoy et al., 2002; Leithwood 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson & Timperley 2007; Jacobson & Bezzina 2008).

Findings reveal that the majority of the respondents found the PGLP very relevant to their work as teachers and as leaders in the school system. The different courses in the program present a wide range of leadership strategies that can be implemented in the schools. This program views leadership as a journey where learning keeps on taking place. People continuously build and refine leadership skills and this enhancement of skills guides and inspires them to become better leaders. The content of the leadership program has evolved over years and has been revamped to include an increasing and more robust curriculum. The theoretical knowledge covered in the different courses emphasizes the pursuit of concrete concepts and practical tools in order to promote agents of change in the school system.

Subsequently, most of the respondents concur that the theoretical content of the leadership program provided them ample knowledge and skills to become effective leaders and managers. The contents of the leadership program helps students to develop their understanding of practical leadership and learn the skills they need to employ effective teaching methods and practice in the classroom. Contents are important as they enhance teachers' leadership skills and many countries have special leadership programs (Ntshoe & Selesho 2014). Mislá (2014) supports the views of Normore (2004) that teachers need to be prepared for change and development and this PGLP endeavours to do the same at the University.

9. Recommendations & Conclusion

Educational leadership programs do not only empower teachers, but enable them to realize their untapped or largely unused potentials to positively affect school organisation and management (Greenlee, 2007). The leadership program at The University prepares teachers and prospective leaders to take up leadership positions in schools. The focus of this investigation was to determine the effectiveness of the leadership program towards graduates professional growth and career improvement. There are some important conclusions that can be drawn from this study that may have implications for leadership program, its relevance to school administration and for MOEHA.

This study provides ample support for the relative merits of the leadership program offered by the Education Department at The University. Results suggest there is a comparative relationship between knowledge and skills acquired by the leadership graduates and improved performance in school administration and leadership. The leadership strategies learnt in different courses in the leadership program has enabled the graduates to upgrade and develop their teaching and learning. In other words, they became enhanced interpreters of curriculum and classroom management strategies. The relevancy of the course contents assisted the graduates to give guidance and advice to other staff members. The graduates were able to enhance their performance and become practical leaders leading by example. The PGLP has been able to provide leverage to about 80% of the graduates in their aspiration for promotion to higher positions of responsibility.

While the educational leadership preparation program has its fair share of praise and commendation, it also has scope for improvement in regards to its rapport and service delivery. As such it is recommended that:

- Improved relationship with the MOEHA so that they are more aware about the relevance of the PGLP and give due consideration to graduates during processing of vacancies;

- Improved rapport is built with the MOHEA as they are the line employers of the teachers in Fiji. They need to be informed about the contents of the different courses and their advice and guidance can be taken into consideration during reviews;
- Further research be initiated to establish how student support system can be improved as many of the students enroll in the leadership program in a hybrid mode; and
- A more holistic study using a mixed methods approach to be employed in future to get more in-depth information about the content and its relevance.

The Post graduate Leadership Program offered at the University has faced the test of time since its inception. A total of 240 teachers have graduated from PGLP and have been serving in primary and secondary schools in Fiji while some have migrated abroad since 2010. The leadership program has undergone external reviews by well qualified academics from recognised Universities in the world. This is the only university in Fiji that offers a specialized post graduate degree in educational leadership. The leadership program has become well endorsed and liked by aspiring educational leaders in Fiji and with the realization of the recommendations stated earlier, it can become a model for good practice for Fiji, the region and beyond.

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