INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION

RESEARCH PAPER

Graduates' perception of a Leadership Program for Teachers and Aspiring Leaders in the South Pacific

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The postgraduate leadership program (PGLP) offered by the Education Department at The University of Fiji is aimed at immersing teachers and aspiring leaders into a world of educational entrepreneurship. The aim of this study is to explicate the impact of the PGLP on its relevance as perceived by its graduates. A survey using five point Likert type scale and open-ended questions was administered to a cohort of graduates of the PGLP from 2008 to 2013 to explore their perceptions of the PGLP. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic approach while SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data. All data collected was synthesised according to the mixed methods conventions and findings are discussed according to the research questions and pertinent emerging themes. Results indicate that in general graduates are pleased with the theoretical and practical components of the leadership program. However, findings reveal there is room for improvement in regards to the provision of assessment feedback and student services. The study concludes by elucidating certain recommendations for improvement that in turn can make the leadership program more relevant to the needs of teachers and aspiring leaders in Fiji and beyond.

Keywords: innovation; leadership styles; capacity building; professional development; leadership strategies

Introduction and Rationale

Leadership of today is quite different from that of the past as today's leaders employ strategies like power-sharing, trust, team-building, and empowerment (Fullan & Borst, 2004). The PGLP consists of Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership (PGDEL) and Master of Educational Leadership (MEDL) offered by the Education Department at The University of Fiji. The PGLP is a practice-focused and evidence 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.

Principals and Head Teachers as teacher leaders set the foundation for increasing teacher quality and advancement in teaching and learning. Subsequently, this expertise becomes more widely available when accomplished teachers model these instructional practices, by mentoring new teachers and by collaborating with teaching colleagues (York-Barr, & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders' expertise about teaching and learning is needed to direct and guide instructional enhancement and increase teacher quality in adopting technological advancement and change. 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 toward higher standards of achievement for themselves and the students (Childs, Moller & Scrivner, 2000).

Pillar Number 3 of the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress (PCCPP) a working document in the absence of a constitution highlighted the importance of ensuring effective, enlightened and accountable leadership in Fiji (Government of the Republic of Fiji, 2008). It 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. It strongly believes that former leaders had frequently failed to engage ordinary Fijians in making major decisions that had direct impact on their wellbeing and daily lives. It recommends that Fiji needs inspiring leaders who are positive in thought and action and have a unifying vision for Fiji. 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 and the bad. This study hopes to reveal the perceptions of the graduates of the Leadership program offered by The University of Fiji and how it has equipped them with knowledge and skills in making a difference in their lives and at their work places.

Background and Context

The leadership program introduces participants to the importance of leadership in education and looks at the crucial role of leadership in school improvement efforts as we take on the challenges of equity and access, and the introduction of new technologies to the teaching learning milieu. As stated earlier, this program is only offered at The University of Fiji in the South Pacific. As Fiji's only private university, with campuses in Saweni and Suva, it is an important institution in Fiji's higher education scene (The University of Fiji, 2014).

Setting and Location

The University of Fiji is located about 16 kilometers from Nadi International Airport and about 8 kilometres from Lautoka City on the main island known as Viti Levu (Figure 1). The University of Fiji was established in December 2004 by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji and opened its doors to students in March 2005 (The University of Fiji, 2014).

Figure 1: Map of Fiji https://maps.google.com/maps

The University of Fiji is in its tenth year of operation and is one of the main providers of tertiary education in Fiji. Tertiary education is of great importance in today's competitive and

globalised world. The workplace is becoming more and more competitive, and tertiary qualifications are now a basic requirement for securing good jobs. More so, tertiary education leads to the expansion of knowledge and the development of industry related skills (Doval & Doval, 2009). Therefore, the provision of affordable, high-quality and ethical tertiary level education is particularly important in Fiji.

The tertiary education market in Fiji is not large, and in the past has been generally catered by The University of the South Pacific (USP) with its main campus located in Suva. The University of Fiji entered the Fijian tertiary education scene in 2005. More recently there has been an amalgamation of a number of tertiary Government institutions into the new Fiji National University (FNU) established in 2010. On 22nd December 2006, The University of Fiji and the Ministry of Education signed a Memorandum of Understanding giving the University conditional recognition and provided a framework for both parties to work through towards resolving other issues, one of which was the legal framework to govern The University. This led to the Public Service Commission, Fijian Affairs Board and Multi Ethnic Affairs Scholarships being tenable at The University of Fiji. Currently majority of the students enjoy the benefits of Tertiary Education Loans Scheme, which has replaced previous scholarships offered by the Government. Accordingly, The University of Fiji enjoys full recognition and offers a multitude of courses and programs in different disciplines and is proud to have a cutting- edge well equipped medical school on the campus.

Program Recognition

From the onset, the University has been conscious of the need to establish a quality educational institution capable of attracting quality staff and able to deliver internationally recognized qualifications at an affordable cost (The University of Fiji, 2014). The University has sought arrangements for cooperation and collaboration with reputable foreign universities like The University of New England in Australia. The Council has approved the University's quality management and accreditation policy to monitor and regulate the content quality and delivery of courses and programs. The University Senate also requires that internationally renowned scholars are appointed as external advisers to teaching departments. Examination papers and results are externally moderated by professors and senor academics from universities around the world. Institutional research has begun to better inform teaching, learning and student support systems. The programs offered by the education department have the endorsement of the Ministry of Education in Fiji and the Fiji Higher Education Commission.

Leadership Program

Master of Educational Leadership is an innovative, practice-focused and research based Postgraduate Degree that prepares teachers, aspiring leaders and school administrators for leadership positions in schools and other educational institutions (The University of Fiji, 2014). The degree aims to support serving teachers and educators seeking to achieve Masters level accreditation for their studies. The leadership program offers the opportunity for in-depth study of research relevant to educational headship and the chance to critique and contribute to the educational research that is shaping Fiji's educational policy and practice (The University of Fiji, 2014). It endeavours to provide practising teachers with the theoretical understandings and practical skills needed to become better leaders in the school system.

The Master of Educational Leadership program tends to expand the knowledge and professional practice skills of educators and leaders, equipping them to contribute to the development of professional educational practice. Likewise, it 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

Course Code	Course Name
EDU401	Educational Leadership in the 21st 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

Each course introduces teachers and aspiring leaders 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 (The University of Fiji, 2014).

Aim of the Study

The quality of teachers prepared by education institutions depends largely on the practical and theoretical components of the program they undertake (Pridmore, 2006). The aim of this research is to develop an understanding of the graduates experiences and relevance of the leadership program to their work environment. It is aimed at capturing the views of the graduates in regards to the leadership program as a leverage towards career improvement and enhancement of promotional opportunities.

The following section discusses the significance of the present study in light of its contribution to the nation.

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 of Fiji. Since there is a dearth of local literature available on school leadership, 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 learning program.

The findings will also be of value to classroom based 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 assist the curriculum planners at the Curriculum Advisory Section (CAS) of Fiji to better understand the role of educational leadership and inform the school heads of any changes in the preparation of curriculum materials for use at future leaders workshops (FLW). Future leaders' workshops are organized by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Fiji to educate new and would be leaders with effective leadership strategies. It will also provide valuable information to the MOE to give due recognition to the leadership program and award teacher leaders with relevant promotional opportunities. The findings of this study could 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 of Fiji. 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 should also provide relevant information to the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and other donor agencies about the impact of the leadership program. Findings will enable them to make constructive decisions when offering scholarships to school leaders to complete suitable programs to become better educational leaders in their respective schools.

The following section provides pertinent literature regarding issues related to the prevalence and significance of educational leadership programs worldwide.

Literature Review

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 (Hargreaves, 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood, Pattern & Jantzi, 2010).

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. 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 not 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 of Fiji complements the efforts of the Ministry of Education. 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, Boone, Ãƒlvarez, Topete, & 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; Hancock, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Heckman & Mantle-Bromley, 2004; Lambert, 2005).

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, Murgatryod 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 Educational arena every teacher needs to be viewed as a potential leader (Dinham, 2005).
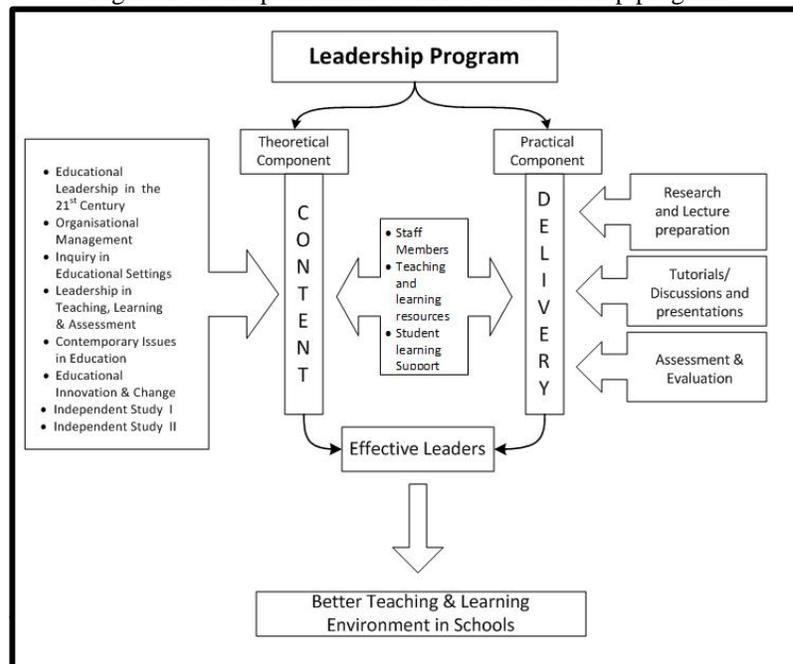
Dinham (2005) further proclaims that educational leadership programs should enable teachers to understand that seeking glory for self is immature as it destroys potential for future contribution and growth. Good leaders know how to respect and keep confidence of staff members. Effective leaders assist 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 (Lewin, Hlupic, & Walton, 2010; Morrison, 2007). 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). 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 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 this study hopes to fill in through its findings. The plethora of literature on educational leadership contributes to the conceptualization of this study (Dinham, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hargreaves, 2008; Kutz, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2003). This study analyzes the practical and theoretical components of the leadership program in view of the content and its relevance to the education system. Based on research evidence that leadership is a key determinant of teachers' professional growth and improved teaching and learning, led to the formulation of the following conceptual framework (Dinham, 2005).

Figure 2: Conceptual framework for the leadership program

Research Methodology

Given the purpose of the research, this study is guided by the following research question: *How effective is the Postgraduate Leadership Program and how has it contributed towards graduates professional growth and career improvement?*

This research question will help guide the study to develop a better understanding of the leadership program and its relevance to school organisation and the career development of the graduates.

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 interpretive paradigm as the key concern is understanding the phenomenon under study from the participant's perspective (Merriam, 1998).

Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual, and is focused on meaning making. This paradigm is based on a relativist ontology, which "asserts that there exist multiple socially constructed realities ungoverned by any natural laws" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 84). The interpretivist paradigm considers the researcher as an integral component of the inquiry; therefore, the real issue lies with finding ways in which the inquiry can be enhanced with the researcher's presence taken into account. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest that an interpretivist worldview is useful in understanding and comparing data gathered from different methods. Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that the interpretivist approach is that which is concerned with providing a practical understanding of meanings and actions. As such this research was conducted from within an interpretive paradigm, and this has implications for the selection of an appropriate research design.

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 asking questions of respondents (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 phenomenon 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 (Brinia, 2011; Viviane, 2008). 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 his study of sustainable leadership in New Zealand, Notman (2012) also used a survey with some follow up interviews. As such, 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 program while open ended questions were used to gather finer points

about the leadership program. Table 2 shows all the study constructs and variables of each construct.

Table 2: Study Constructs and Variables

The Theoretical aspects of the Leadership program (Likert type)
The program presented leadership strategies that have been useful in my teaching and learning
The program provided me with adequate theoretical knowledge on leadership and management
The program assisted me to provide support to staff members and become a better leader
The program prepared me to perform better leadership and administrative duties
The program developed my ability to understand that leadership is about leading by example
The Practical aspects of the Leadership program (Likert type)
Different courses were..........
Presentations by lecturers were..........
Lectures were..........
Tutorials and examples discussed were............
Feedback provided by College lecturers after assessment was …
Resources in the library were.....
Opportunities to share ideas and experiences with fellow students was …
Information provided in the readings was …
Lecturer's knowledge about the content was...
On the whole the program has been..........
Overall impact (Open ended)
How has this program benefited you to become a better leader?
What type of leadership you believe is best for educational leaders in Fiji? Why?
Did completion of this program contribute towards any promotional ortunities? Please explain.
Now that you have had time to reflect on your study at the University of Fiji, are there any general comments or observations that you might like to make about, for example, library resources, student affairs or any other issue you liked the most or believe can be improved.

Research Sample

Selecting research sample is an imminent issue frequently raised by researchers and students (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). According to Fraenkel & Wallen (2006) researchers are always concerned with what can be labelled as an adequate size for a sample especially in qualitative research. 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 whole target population was used. The target population is the entire group a researcher is interested in and in this case the graduates of the PGDEL and MEDL program from 2008 to 2013. The section that follows explains the data recording and analytical procedures that were used in the research.

Data Analysis and Results

The nature of the research questions and the aim of the study underpin the data analysis procedures. The survey that had been developed had both open ended as well as closed ended questions. Thus, the questions were analysed separately using mixed methods approach. The responses for the closed questions were analysed by coding and entering the information into SPSS while the qualitative data was analysed using thematic approach using coding. The three C's of data analysis as recommended by Lichtman (2006) was used to move from the raw data to meaningful concepts. Coding, categorising and concept identification made the reporting of the data more meaningful and comprehensive. As suggested by Yin (2003) Seemingly, 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. The following section establishes the quality aspects of the research.

Reliability 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 theoretical impact was .529 while that of practical impact was .861. Table 3 shows the Cronbach's Alpha values of each of the variables of Theoretical impact. The higher values of Cronbach's Alpha reveal that the constructs are reliable to examine the two aspects (i.e. theoretical component and practical component) of the study program.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics of Study Constructs

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Theoretical impact	
Leadership Strategies	.535
Theoretical Knowledge	.355
Provide Support	.467
Improved Performance	.428
Leading by Example	.535
Practical impact	
Quality of Courses	.859
Presentations by Lecturers	.856
Quality of Lectures	.856
Tutorials and Examples	.844
Quality of Feedback	.836
Library Resources	.856
Collaborative Learning	.842
Relevance of Information	.840
Content Knowledge	.844
Programme Relevance	.849

The paragraphs that follow discuss the items in the table with reference to pertinent literature wherever possible.

Quality and Ethical Considerations

In order for a research to be considered important, the findings need to be significant and be trustworthy. Likewise trustworthiness was enhanced by triangulation of data sources; that is the use of qualitative data to exemplify the quantitative information. Triangulation is a technique used to fully exploit the richness and complexity of human behaviour by using two or more methods of data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulation is important because the exclusive use of only one method may bias or distort the researcher's understanding of reality. Moreover, 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 confidentially and anonymity of the participants. To further maintain the ethical practices 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.

Limitations of the Study

There was a lack of local literature on educational leadership as such international literature has frequently been quoted. Additionally, the time available for this research was very limited as certain deadlines had to be met but a more detailed research will be initiated in the near future. In addition, a lot of data has been collected that cannot be analysed due to time limitations but writing further research papers focusing on more detailed leadership aspects will be looked at in time to come.

Findings and Discussion

The Leadership program is well accepted by the major races living in Fiji as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents in the Survey by Race

Race	No. of respondents	Percent
I taukei	52	41.9
Indo Fijian	60	48.4
Others	12	9.7
Total	124	100.0

Altogether 142 teachers had graduated in either postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership or in Master of Educational Leadership from 2008 till 2013. The Survey was sent to all the graduates and 124 responded resulting in a response rate was 87% which is acceptable for discussion.

Program Enrolment

Findings reveal that most of the teachers enrolled in the Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership program were mostly assistant teachers. Table 5 shows that majority of the teachers (61%) were assistant teachers. Assistant teachers are both primary and secondary school teachers who do not hold any positions of responsibilities in their schools. Subsequently, this program sets a platform for the assistant teachers towards future promotions apart from professional development. While lesser number of position holders in primary (23%) and secondary (17%) schools enrolled in the leadership program.

Table 5: Program Enrolment

Position	No. of respondents	Percent
Assistant Teacher	75	60.5
Assistant Head Teacher	19	15.3
Head Teacher	9	7.3
Assistant Principal	17	13.7
Vice Principal	3	2.4
Principal	1	.8
Total	124	100

The table further reveals that the least number (8%) of teachers enrolled in the leadership program were head teachers and principals. This low enrolment may partially reflect head teachers and principals work commitments. Moreover, having reached the pinnacle of their hierarchical ladder, they may have decided to enroll in the leadership program for solely for professional development.

More so, the educational leadership program is one of the pioneer programs offered by the Education Department. About 90% of the respondents stated that they heard about the program by word of mouth while 10% stated they had read about the program in the newspapers. The program seemed to have been liked by the graduates who are mostly teachers as 89% of them highly recommended it while 11% recommended it to be taken by teachers and aspiring leaders in order to become effective teachers and educational leaders.

Leadership Strategies

The respondents believe that the Leadership program presented a wide range of leadership strategies that could 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. Table 6 shows that almost all the respondents consider the leadership program to be effective in equipping them with various leadership strategies.

Table 6: Effectiveness for Leadership Strategies

Effectiveness	No. of respondents	Percent
Program is highly effective	99	79.8
Program is effective	25	20.2
Total	124	100.0

The strategies covered in the program enable individuals to be more accountable and show interest in the professional development of the staff members.

Theoretical Knowledge

The content of the leadership program has evolved over the last six years and has been revamped to include an increasing and more robust curriculum. The theoretical knowledge covered in the different courses emphasizes on concrete concepts and practical tools in order to promote agents of change in the school system. About 93% of the respondents concur that the theoretical content of the leadership program provided the respondents 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. While responding to the open ended question: How has this program benefited you to become a better leader? Most of the respondents stated that they were pleased with the content due to its relevance to the classroom situation (Table 7). Contents are important as they enhance teachers' leadership skills and many countries have special leadership programs (Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014).

Table 7: Contents of Educational Leadership Programs for Aspiring Leaders

North Carolina (LPAP)	Ontario (PQP)	England (NPQH)
Leadership	Leadership	Strategic direction and development
Communication and public relations	Communication strategies	
Personnel management	Human resources	Leading and managing staff
Self knowledge	Interpersonal skills	
Curriculum	School programme	Teaching and learning
Students	Students with exceptionalities	
	Resource management	Resource management
Technology		

Adapted from (Bush & Jackson, 2002, p. 421)

Places such as North Carolina, Ontario and England have established their own leadership programs. Mostly the courses in educational leadership focus on understanding and formulating vision and mission statements and discovering strategies how they could be achieved. Some of the leadership courses give prominence to issues of learning and teachings, often described as instructional leadership, and incorporate consideration of the main task areas of administration or management (Bush & Jackson, 2002). The topics most liked by the respondents in the educational leadership offered at the University of Fiji are different types of leadership, leadership and change, capacity building and communication and planning. Misla (2014) supports the views of Normore (2004) that teachers need to be prepared for change and development. On a similar note, all the respondents (67%) affirmed that the lectures and tutorials were helpful in enabling them to comprehend the leadership issues.

Capacity Building

The leadership program empowered the teachers to gain knowledge and expertise enabling them to provide guidance and support to other teachers in their schools. Teachers in schools depend a lot on leaders for their success on the motivations and capacity building of teachers. Teachers undertaking leadership program provide staff development for their colleagues in schools.

Table 8: Provide Support and Guidance to Staff Members

Support and Guidance	No. of respondents	Percent
Very high Support and Guidance	85	68.5
High Support and Guidance	37	29.8
No Support and Guidance	1	0.8
Unsure	1	0.8
Total	124	100.0

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 (Table 8). 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 of Fiji recognizes the need for specific preparation for aspiring and practicing school leaders, to generate the positive effects in school administration and leadership.

Improve Performance

Educational Leadership programs in colleges and universities are designed to prepare futuristic and credentialed school heads who according to Dinham (2005) constantly remind the staff and the students that "the core purpose of the school is teaching and learning" (p. 354). Previous research on school effectiveness show that excellent leadership is primarily one of the main features in high performing schools (Bush & Jackson, 2002). 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 (Table 9).

Table 9: Better Prepared to become Educational Leaders and Administrators

Improvement in Performance	No. of respondents	Percent
Strongly Agree	96	78.0
Agree	28	22.0
Total	124	100.0

While elucidating the benefits of the leadership program, respondents overwhelmingly mentioned the relevance of the program in assisting them to become improved school administrators and better leaders in the community. Some of the teachers stated that after taking up leadership program they were able to understand the importance of implementing educational reforms as leadership impacts change and innovation. 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 the 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). All the respondents (100%) agreed that the leadership program had developed their understanding of the concept of effective leadership and that leaders needed to be practical and lead by example.

Enhanced Promotional Opportunities

All the graduates acknowledged that they had gained a lot of knowledge and skills from the PGLP offered at the University of Fiji. The graduates unanimously agreed that the program had contributed directly and indirectly towards improved leadership and school administration. Findings support the views of Greenlee (2007) that leadership programs should enable participants to recognize theoretically and practically the complex nature of leadership and the multifaceted systems in which it operates. While the program had enabled them to become better leaders, it also enabled them to get accelerated promotions and transfers to higher positions of responsibility (Table 10). As discussed earlier, assistant teachers are those primary and secondary school teachers who do not hold any leadership positions in schools and may just hold a basic Diploma or Degree in teaching wishing for postgraduate qualifications for better promotional opportunities.

Table 10: Substantive Positions pre and post Leadership Program

Position	Position before enrolment		Position after graduation	
	No. of Respondents	Percent	No. of Respondents	Percent
Assistant Teacher	75	60.5	25	20.2
Assistant Head Teacher	19	15.3	34	27.4
Head Teacher	9	7.3	24	19.4
Assistant Principal	17	13.7	7	5.6
Vice Principal	3	2.4	13	10.5
Principal	1	.8	5	4.0
Other	0	00	16	12.9
Total	124	100.0	124	100.0

Majority of the graduates (60%) were either normal primary or secondary school teachers without any major positions of responsibility. Subsequently, after graduation the number decreased to 20%. This decline in percentage indicates that 40% of the graduates got promoted to higher positions of responsibility. In the primary sector similar increases (12%) were noted in the

number of assistant head teachers being promoted to head teacher positions and head teachers from small schools to head teachers of larger primary schools in Fiji. Likewise there was a decrease of 7% in the positions of assistant principals after graduation as they may have had promotions to vice principals or principals' positions. Significant increases (9%) were noted in the positions of the vice principal and principals whilst considerable amount (13%) of them had accelerated promotions or even had promotions to the higher administration positions such as that of Education Officers and Principal Education Officers. On the whole, the findings present a robust source to establish the significance of the leadership program towards enhancing the promotional opportunities of the graduates.

Impact of the gender on theoretical component of the program

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine how gender has impacted on the perception of the theoretical component of the program. Table 11 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents' perception of theoretical component of the program: both male and female have a positive perception of the theoretical component of the program ($p=.013(1)$; $p=0.715$)

Table 11: One-way ANOVA results on the impact of gender on the theoretical component of the program

Gender	No. of respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Male	59	4.2746	.28014		
Female	65	4.2954	.34660		
One –way ANOVA statistics					
	Sum of Squares		*df*	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.013		1	.133	.715

The following sections discuss with the practical aspect of the leadership program.

Feedback and Discussion

Feedback is an essential aspect of effective teaching and learning process. It helps students understand the subject being studied and gives them clear guidance on how to improve their learning. There was slightly mixed reactions by the respondents while responding to the usefulness of the feedback provided by lecturers (Table 12).

Table 12: Quality of Feedback provided by lecturers after Assessment

Nature of Feedback	No. of Respondents	Percent
Very Useful	41	33.1
Useful	63	50.8
Least Useful	18	14.5
Not Useful	2	1.6
Total	124	100.0

While majority of the respondents (89%) agreed that the feedback provided after assessment was useful and constructive some of them (11%) considered it of not much help. Similar sentiments were shared by respondents while responding to the final open ended question; *Now that you have had time to reflect on your study at the University of Fiji, are there any general comments or observations that you might like to make about, for example, library resources, student affairs or any other issue you liked the most or believe can be improved.*

About 20% of the respondents stated that at times they did not get any feedback or got them late. A few of them (5%) stated that the feedback was not meaningful at all while a few (5%) were not happy with the feedback at all. They considered that comments and suggestions contained within feedback need to be focused, practical and based on a professional assessment of what they could be capable of achieving.

It is important to consider that if feedback is negative, it can discourage student effort and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In some cases bad feedback can be worse than when no feedback is provided. If feedback is to be effective it needs to be frequent, constructive and instructive. With reference to previous research (Ayres, Dinham, & Sawyer, 2004; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) an important dimension of feedback is its immediacy and the longer the time gap is between the completion of the work and its feedback, the less effective the feedback becomes. Preferably, feedback should be provided promptly after the assessment of a task so that students can learn and appropriate corrective measures could be taken. A study in this regard of highly successful senior secondary teachers in Australian public schools has demonstrated the importance of feedback in influencing student achievement (Ayres, Dinham, & Sawyer, 2000).

Teaching and Learning Resources

Teaching and learning resources play a very vital role in tertiary teaching. Without resources, the whole teaching process could become dreary, and there would be a scarcity of rich in-depth information (Collard, 2005). The provision and effective use of high quality learning resources facilitates students' construction of understanding through inquiry so they are better able to explore, analyze, and evaluate information. These processes and skills enhance deeper understanding of the content and promote information literacy and lifelong learning. The respondents appeared to be quite pleased with many of the teaching learning resources, such as the use of Moodle, lecture room environment, discussion boards and other ICT facilities.

However, many of them (35%) feel that library resources could be improved on (Table 13). They feel that more relevant texts and journals are needed in the library. While responding to the

final open-ended question some of them (20%) mentioned that there were not ample copies of the text books. At times they had to wait or were at the mercy of their colleagues. One of the respondents expressed his dissent as "I had to wait for one of the books until the end of the semester and submitted my assignment late and was also penalized by the lecturer". The respondents also stated that at times they were promised that "the books would be arriving soon" but this hardly materialized. On the whole majority of the students (65%) were quite happy with the resources in the library as they found them useful in addressing their needs.
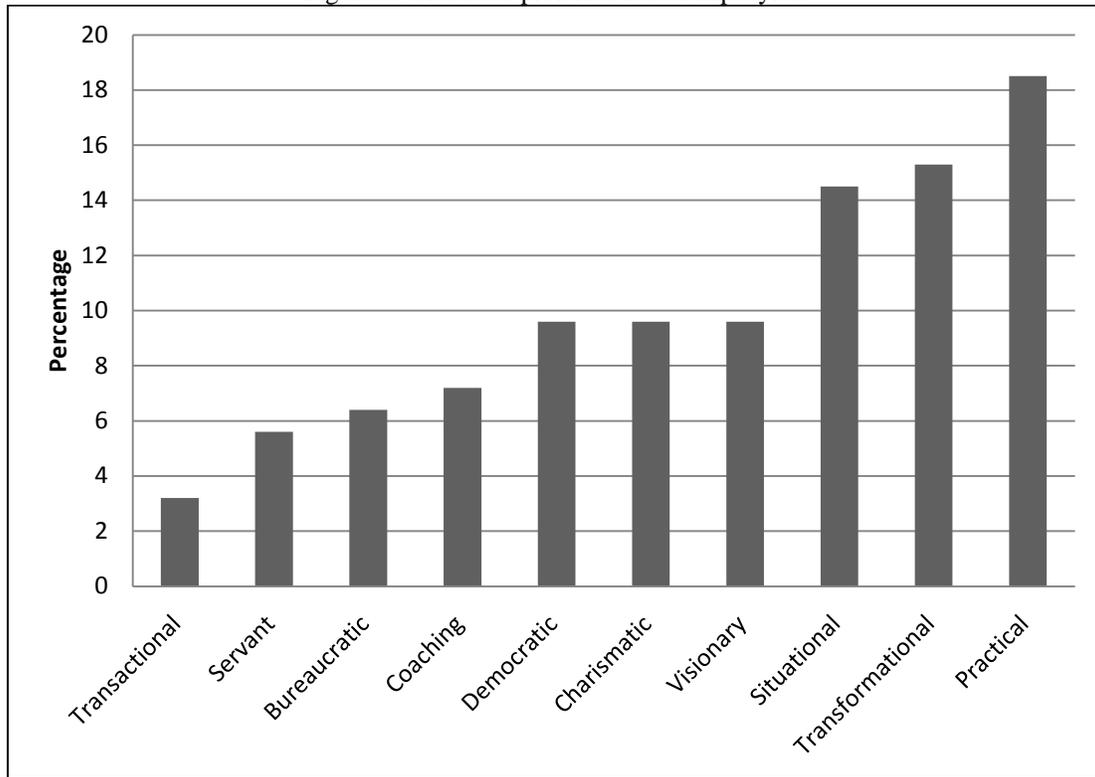
Table 13: Library Resources

Library Resources	No. of respondents	Percent
Very Useful	38	30.6
Useful	42	33.9
Least Useful	35	28.2
Not Useful	9	7.3
Total	124	100.0

Universities at times need time to fully upgrade and have all the required resources. Research shows that students in another University were not satisfied with the services and collections of their school library. They specifically wanted more relevant text books to meet the varying needs of the tertiary students and educators (Udoh-Ilomechine, 2008). University libraries ought to provide information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. They must be able to equip students with lifelong learning skills and develop their imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens.

Ideal Leadership for Fijian Schools

School leaders are today expected to perform a wide-range of academic and non-academic duties and hence the job does not merely revolve around completing syllabus, managing school properties and teacher supervision. Teachers were asked about the style of leadership they believed was best for educational leaders in Fiji. The qualitative data was quantified into numerical data according to relevant leadership styles (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Graduates preferred leadership styles.

Most of the graduates opted for more conventional styles of leadership as compared with those that endorse rigidity and high levels of bureaucracy. About 30% of the graduates consider democratic, charismatic and visionary styles as best suited in Fiji schools. The rationale behind their preference is their belief that teachers are builders of a new dawn by implementing the reforms and changes brought about by the Ministry of Education in Fiji. Similar sentiments have been echoed by Lingam (2012) that "due to various reforms in Pacific schools, the need for professionally prepared school leaders is greater than ever before" (p. 123).

One of the graduates claimed that "visionary leadership is ideal for Fijian school system as it will enable to take to school to reach greater heights". Some of the graduates (15%) assume situational leadership would be ideal for the school system because it is flexible and takes into consideration the situation when any decision needs to be made. Another 15% anticipate transformational leadership style to be ideal for the school system because they inspire and expect best from the team as well as themselves.

Majority of the graduates (19%) presume that leaders need to be practical. Practical leadership, similar to situational leadership does not just fall into a single preferred style instead it encompasses the pragmatist world view (Fullan, 2002). It encompasses aspects of the pragmatist paradigm that proliferates logical thinking dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical situation. The education system in Fiji is undergoing massive transformation, as classroom based assessments are introduced with a new national curriculum framework. In-depth studies on leadership reveal that effective of leadership

occurs when leaders can accurately diagnose the development level of subordinates in a task situation and then exhibit the prescribed leadership style that matches that situation (Dinham, 2005; Greenlee, 2007; Hancock, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2003; Msila, 2014). As such practical leaders are needed who can ensure lasting performance and adjust their leadership style to influence others to achieve the required results.

Impact of gender on practical component of the program

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine how gender has impacted on the perception of the practical component of the program. Table 14 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents' perception of theoretical component of the program: both male and female have positive perception of the practical component of the program ($p=.010(1)$; $p=0.791$)

Table 14: One-way ANOVA results on the impact of gender on the practical component of the program

Gender	No. of respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Male	59	4.5492	.28014		
Female	65	4.5308	.34660		
One –way ANOVA statistics					
	Sum of Squares		*df*	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.010		1	.071	.791

A quick overview of the theoretical and practical components of the leadership program reveals the acceptance and approval of it by both the genders. This is convincing as many of the school heads in Fiji are females and the leadership program can effectively contribute towards up skilling their knowledge base with effective leadership strategies.

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 of Fiji endeavours to provide the opportunities for teachers to prepare for taking 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 management and the Ministry of Education.

This study provides ample support for the relative merits of the leadership program offered by the Education Department at The University of Fiji. 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.

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

- The leadership program to maintain its rigor and relevance to the school system while at the same time improve on the feedback process and improve the resources in the library.
- Student support system be improved to cater for student's needs especially for those from rural and remote areas;
- Improved rapport is built with the Ministry of Education as they are the line employers of the teachers in Fiji. They need to be aware of the content of the courses and their advice and guidance can be taken into consideration when reviewing the course contents to see they conform to the needs of the educational leaders in Fiji;
- Program advisory committees to be set up to advice and provide technical guidance to make the program appropriate to the needs of the aspiring leaders, the students and the school at large and
- Further research be initiated to establish if there is any correlation between graduate's performance and student achievement at school level.

The Post graduate Leadership Program offered at the University of Fiji has faced the test of time since its inception in 2006. A total of 142 teachers have graduated and have been serving in primary and secondary schools in Fiji while some have migrated abroad. The leadership program has been duly accredited and endorsed by the Fiji Higher Education Commission and has undergone two external reviews by well qualified academics from recognised Universities in the world. The University of Fiji is the only university in Fiji that offers a specialized post graduate degree in educational leadership. Despite certain shortfalls the leadership program has become well endorsed and liked by aspiring educational leaders in Fiji and with the realization of the recommendations stated earlier, the leadership program can become a model for good practice for Fiji, the region and beyond.

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