

A Methodological Approach to the Study of
Sociocultural Influences on the Teaching of English in Fiji

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This is an ethnographic study of Second Language teaching in the Fiji Isles. It shows that the different cultural expectations of Fiji's two main ethnic groups, the indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians, are manifested in different teaching practices that result in their differential attainments. It uses an extended Grounded Theory methodology that has allowed for (i) empirical generalisation of its findings by further ethnography and census and (ii) for generalisation of its theoretical constructs by further mixed method analysis.

The motivation that emerged for the study was the local concern over the differential educational attainments of the two groups. The ethnography used historical archival and current documents, together with community and institutional interviews and observations over a four year period, to contrast Fijian and Indian socio-cultural expectations, and their matching behaviours, for teaching and learning English as a Second Language. The methodology resulted in the recognition of three major cultural constructs that describe the different behaviours serving the differential social expectations and cultural intentions of the two groups. The constructs were validated both ethnographically and by census and allowed the identification of social fractionalisation and cultural incursion. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data from the study enabled the three constructs to be developed into a generalisable conceptual framework for predicting differential classroom behaviours in multicultural societies.

During the study, innovative methods and a generalisable instrument were developed. These included:

- (i) a method of quantitative data collection and analysis, namely collection of proportional ratings allowing calculations of grounded preferences for more rigorous analysis;
- (ii) methods of qualitative analysis to resolve issues of etic/emic confounding, namely separation of etic and emic meanings during analysis and a method of validating emic meanings that minimised etic intrusions;
- (iii) methods of qualitative reporting, using bipolar and modal grounded composites to maintain validity during extensive ethnographic data reduction; and
- (iv) a generalisable 'Cultural Index', which is an efficient grounded instrument consisting of Primary and Relative cultural indices used for defining cultural identity and for predicting culturally-determined behaviours.

This study evidences the paramount influence of cultural expectations on differential educational attainments in multicultural societies.

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