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# **Perceptions of Quality in Pre-school Education:**

**How do the teachers, parents and children in one pre-school in Samoa  
perceive the quality of the pre-school education they have?**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Education at Massey University, Palmerston North**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis used a case study approach to examine how three different stakeholder groups in early childhood education in Samoa perceived quality in early childhood education. A case study provides a picture of how a group of people interact with their environment at a particular time. This case study was located in one pre-school in Samoa and looked at how three groups (teachers, parents and children) in that pre-school perceived their pre-school in terms of the quality of the education that was offered there. It is a documented account of the factors these three groups in Samoa considered to be of value when they assessed the quality of the pre-school they participated in.

A pilot study was used to trial questionnaires and adapt a methodology appropriate to the Samoan community. The research was then undertaken in another Samoan pre-school. Observations were carried out in the study pre-school followed by interviews and questionnaires for the three stakeholder groups. The beliefs these three groups had regarding their perception of quality in pre-school education in Samoa were explored in their own right. Beliefs about what makes a quality pre-school and the factors that contribute to a high quality pre-school were examined. The Samoan pre-school was assessed in terms of how the participants within it view quality pre-school education rather than by imposing some externally defined factors that contribute to a high quality pre-school in a more western society. This was also important when considering the need for development or modification of teacher education programmes for early childhood teachers in Samoa.

This study was a cross-cultural study in that the researcher was from a different cultural background to the stakeholders in the pre-school. The implications of having a researcher from a different background is discussed as part of the significant findings of this study. The teachers, parents and children in this study perceived their pre-school to be high quality because it fulfilled their major expectation, that of preparation for school. While this may not be regarded in a western society as being a significant factor in determining quality it was an important factor within this local community and must be valued in this respect. An unexpected outcome of this study for both the pilot group and the study group teachers was the increased level of awareness of professional development.

## Preface

In mid 1998 my husband was offered a job working with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme based in Apia so the family packed up and went to live in Samoa for three years. This provided me with an opportunity to take time out from a hectic New Zealand life style and extend my interest in education. A teaching job in Samoa in a year one and two class combined with Master's papers in Education led me to think more about how education was perceived in different ways by different groups both within a society and between societies. The school that I was teaching in was not suitable for the kind of study I had in mind due to the exclusive nature of the school and the mixed cultural nature of the school population, expatriates from a range of countries, wealthy Samoan families and those who struggled to pay fees in order to give their child the best possible chance.

It was at this school that a colleague of mine suggested that looking at a pre-school in Samoa might present a better opportunity to look at the differences in perception between various stakeholder groups on the quality of the education received in the pre-school. It was a better opportunity than the primary school I was teaching in because the people involved in the Samoan pre-school were all from a similar cultural background and thus there was less chance of the results from this study being influenced by cultural variability. My colleague became a senior lecturer in pre-school education at the National University of Samoa and she was later to become a liaison between the pre-school and myself should the occasion arise.

My background is in the primary education field and while this study was based in a pre-school the major focus of the study was how different groups perceived the quality of the education they were offered or were offering. My training is in primary education and the majority of my teaching experience has been with children under eight years old. It is possible that the data that I gathered was influenced by my background in primary education and a pre-school trained teacher might have focused on different aspects of the study pre-school. Although I do not have specific experience in a pre-school, my experiences in teaching were not too dissimilar from those of the head teacher at the study pre-school. This study did not attempt to assess the quality of the pre-school programme or make judgements on how well the pre-school was operating in relation to external standards. It looked at how the quality of the programme was viewed by three important stake-holder groups in the Samoan study pre-school, and what constituted a good quality pre-school in their opinion.

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This study has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/22.

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Figure 1. The study pre-school.

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