

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**What is the Socio-linguistic Context for
Teaching English Writing to Senior High
School Students in Fiji?**

A thesis completed in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

Master of Philosophy (Humanities and Social Sciences)

In

Second Language Teaching

Massey University

Palmerston North, New Zealand

Lynn Nicholls

2014

Abstract

This study explores teaching practices for expository writing in a developing world context. A qualitative approach draws on a grounded theory model with three different high school case studies in Suva, Fiji. The participants were teachers and students from Form 6 English classes.

The linguistic landscape is diverse, with the two majority ethnicities comprising of indigenous Fijian and Fijian both learning different vernacular languages as mediums of instruction for the first three years of school. Standard Fijian and Standard Hindi taught in schools are not always the languages these students speak at home. While English is the medium of instruction taught in schools from Class 4, there is no official language of instruction policy.

Students who have English as their second language face challenges in achieving the academic genre of writing. A pass criterion for English proficiency comes with high stakes for success in tertiary studies, with writing for examinations being the only method of assessment.

The study found that teachers lacked appropriate resources for teaching this genre of writing, and therefore resorted to teaching more simple formal writing options. Teacher training and professional development in the areas of second language teaching and unit writing appear inadequate in supporting the teaching and learning writing process, and as a result students may not be adequately prepared for their aspirations of going to university.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to the process of developing, participating, reflecting and completing this project.

I am grateful and have appreciated the support from Massey University School of Language Studies. In particular, I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr Gillian Skyrme and Dr Ute Walker, for their excellent supervision and timeless hours they have dedicated to giving guidance, advice and support to me over the last two years.

I am thankful to those who participated in the study and hope their experience was as valuable as my own. I very much appreciated the assistance I received from the Ministry of Education in Fiji, in particular the Curriculum Development Unit, English Department, for providing relevant information and introducing me to the participant schools. Also to the University of the South Pacific, in particular Mr Paul Geraghty, Head of Linguistics, for giving up his time in providing guidance and advice on essential knowledge about the project. I am thankful to the Principals of the participant schools for allowing me access to their teachers, students and school resources. Finally, I would especially like to acknowledge the teachers and students who participated in this project. Their willingness to give up time in their very busy schedules and openness to share their personal experiences and journeys made a great impact on me. I have many fond memories from becoming part of their classroom communities, and I am so grateful for the rich cultural experiences that I have gained.

This has been a long project through which family and friends in both New Zealand and Fiji have been encouraging and patient. In particular, I thank my husband Graeme for giving me space when I have needed it, and supporting me through this work.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background Information of Fiji.....	1
1.2	Languages.....	2
1.3	Local Setting.....	3
1.4	Purpose of the study	3
2	Literature Review	6
2.1	The Linguistic Landscape in Fiji.....	6
2.1.1	Language Use.....	7
2.1.2	Language Use.....	7
2.1.3	Languages of Education in Fiji.....	8
2.1.4	Mediums of instruction in Fiji.....	9
2.1.5	English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI)	11
2.2.1	Pedagogical Writing Approaches	16
2.2.2	Teaching Writing Processes in Fijian High Schools	19
2.2.3	Discussion of Writing in Other Education Systems	22
2.2.4	Writing for Second Language Learners in High Schools.....	24
2.3	Teachers' Beliefs.....	26
3	Methodology	29
3.1	Setting and Population.....	32
3.2	Participants	32
3.2.1	Selection	32
3.2.2	Characteristics of Participants and Setting	35
3.3.	The Research Approach	38
3.3.1	Case Studies.....	38
3.4	Instrumentation.....	39
3.4.1	Initial Teacher Interview	40
3.4.2	Teacher Final Interviews	43
3.4.3	The Student Questionnaire	44
3.4.4	Classroom Observations.....	45
3.4.5	Focus Group	47
3.4.6	Documentation	48
3.5	Sequence of Research Instrument Activities	49
3.5.1	Research Activity Procedure	49
3.6	Data Analysis.....	51

3.7	The Researcher in the Process	51
4	Findings.....	53
4.1	Setting up the Practice.....	54
4.1.1	Teachers Training and Experience.....	54
4.1.2	The Linguistic Landscape	58
4.1.3	Educational Context.....	64
4.1.4	The School Context.....	67
4.1.5	Teacher challenges.....	74
4.1.6	Student Challenges.....	77
4.2	Classroom Writing Process and Practice	78
4.2.1	Methods for teaching (expository) writing	80
4.3	Reflective Practice	93
4.3.1	Purpose for teaching English	93
4.3.2	Teaching Approach Reflections.....	95
5	Discussion and Implications	100
5.1	Teacher Training.....	101
5.2	Language Diversity	103
5.3	The Educational Context.....	105
5.4	Classroom Writing Practice	108
5.5	Final Reflections and Limitations.....	112
	Appendices.....	116
	References.....	149

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Fiji.....	1
Figure 2: Comparison of languages of instruction.....	61
Figure 3: Students' preferred use of language for formal writing	61

List of Tables

Table 1: Suggested use of L1 and L2 for Fijian urban schools.....	14
Table 2: Sequence of research activities undertaken in each school.....	50
Table 3: Comparison of teachers' training and teaching experience.....	55
Table 4: Comparison of teachers' ethnicity and languages	58
Table 5: School comparison student ethnicity/ gender issues.....	59

Table 6: Use of mother tongue with English writing	62
Table 7: Focus group comparison of essay writing difficulties.....	77
Table 8: Focus group comparison of teacher feedback on essay writing	91

Table of Appendices

Appendix 1	Letter of Approval from the Ministry of Education in Fiji	115
Appendix 2	Letter of invitation for school participation	116
Appendix 3	Information for participants	117
Appendix 4	Letter of permission for focus group participation	120
Appendix 5	Consent Forms:	121
	(a) Individual participant	121
	(b) Focus group participant	122
	(c) Confidentiality agreement	123
	(d) Authority for release of transcripts	124
Appendix 6	Protocol Instrument Documentation:	125
	(a) Interview protocol for teachers	125
	(b) Interview guide for English high school teachers	127
	(c) Questionnaire – Form 6 high school students	129
	(d) Interview protocol for focus group students	131
	(e) Interview questionnaire for HOD of English	134
	(f) Initial classroom observation protocol	135
	(g) Classroom observation protocol	136
Appendix 7	Sample of visual prompt for final teacher interview	141
Appendix 8	Ministry of Education Form Five and Six English writing course objectives	142
Appendix 9	Sample of Form Six Scheme of Work for English	143
Appendix 10	Ministry of Education Form Six Fiji School Leaving Certificate Examination- 2011 Formal Writing English Sample	144
Appendix 11	Teachers' essay writing marking schedule	146
Appendix 12	Expository writing unit overview	147