

Faculty of Education

Pacific Indicators for Disability-Inclusive Education (Pacific-INDIE)

» Fiji for disability-inclusive education

Achieving disability-inclusive education within Fiji

Through the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) approved by all Pacific Island Education Ministers in 2009, special and inclusive education is seen as a priority across the region.

To achieve disability-inclusive education within Fiji, schools, Ministries, non-government and disability peoples organisations and communities need to work together to ensure equality of access for children with disabilities to education.

The Pacific-INDIE has been developed collaboratively as part of a research project commissioned by the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Pacific-INDIE is an important framework for supporting the development and implementation of effective Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks to measure disability-inclusive education.

Fiji has been one of the four key countries involved throughout the whole development process and in trialling draft versions of the indicators.

Fiji is now in an excellent position to use the indicators to help establish disability-inclusive practices across the nation.

Fiji: country context

Fiji is a diverse community comprising of different ethnic groups, which includes the Indigenous people [iTaukei], people of Rotuma, the descendants of indentured labourers from India, Chinese settlers and other Pacific Islanders.

Each group of people including all ethnic groups embraces their own cultural and customary identity which they practice in the course of their daily lives.

The Island group gained independence from Great Britain on 10 October, 1970. Fiji is currently governed by a democratically elected government since the 2014 general election.

The population is divided into 14 provinces and spread out among the two major island groups; Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and their adjacent smaller islands.

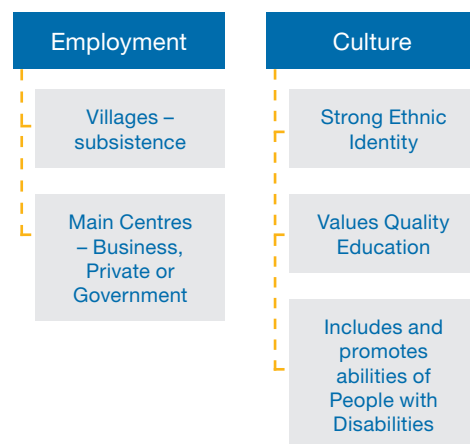
Some Fijians, like the iTaukei, live among relatives in groups in villages and practice subsistence living. A good percentage of the iTaukei population lives in the main centres together with the other ethnic groups and engages in business activities or receives employment in either private or government job opportunities.

Over recent generations the entire population of the nation has begun to realise the value of education and each ethnic group attempts to place their children in a situation where they pursue higher and quality education.

People with disabilities have always been part of our community and have always played a significant role in bonding family relations. Fiji as a nation embraces the rights of people with disabilities which has been enshrined in our national constitution.

The national education policy for special education has been viewed as very supportive towards the implementation of inclusive education in all regular education institutions.

In Fiji, people with disabilities are encouraged to enrol alongside their brothers and sisters without disabilities in regular school settings.



Partnered Organisations



Funding body



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Fiji is leading the way towards disability-inclusive education



Inclusive education begins with a positive mindset. Using the indicators will help Fiji to motivate educators to move disability-inclusive education forward.

- The introduction of inclusive education in all schools is a priority for Fiji. Sports, churches and pilot primary schools are becoming inclusive.
- The schools piloting the indicators have an 'Inclusive Education Committee' (4–6 members). On enrolment the team participates to collect information about children with disabilities. This means that the data are always available and the process for collection is so easy.
- By using the indicators we can collect more information than the indicator itself – it identifies the gaps. This allows teachers to better meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- The indicators provide evidence that identifies how inclusive schools already operate in Fiji, as it focuses on existing children with disabilities in schools. It also gives us access to information about out-of-school children so the community is more aware and opportunities can be provided for children with disabilities to enrol in schools.
- Data can be used for future planning. It can help focus changes on strategies and policies. It can contribute to provide information to other agencies including information about accommodations for exams for students with disabilities. Data provides opportunities to help us gather information to monitor the success of disability-inclusive education in Fiji.
- Because of the massive awareness of disability-inclusive education in Fiji more children with disabilities are being included in regular schools. A lot of children with disabilities who were out of school are now in school, particularly in some cluster schools which surround a special school. Numbers in special schools have started to decrease as children with disabilities start to be included in regular schools.
- More children with disabilities are in schools now than ever before. More parents are bringing their children to schools. Decisions are based on a child's abilities and not on their disability.



Challenges for Fiji

- More time is required for all teachers to become well-versed in inclusive education. Teachers training to work in primary schools study a three year Diploma in Education which includes a compulsory unit in inclusive education. The University of the South Pacific's three year Bachelor of Education course for training secondary teachers also includes a compulsory unit in inclusive education.
- A current lack of support in staff services means that some children with disabilities are being left out in the learning process taking place in the classroom. Schools could develop support groups and teachers could work collaboratively to enhance learning for all children.
- Teachers may lack confidence to really identify which children have disabilities – especially for existing children with disabilities who may have not been previously identified. We need a lot of professional development amongst staff members to make inclusive schools. Including all stakeholders in decisions will help schools to identify how they can become better skilled in inclusive education. Schools which are inclusive should share their knowledge and experience with other schools.
- Inclusive education is already happening in rural schools but urban schools must now also work towards becoming inclusive.

- There are many positive outcomes of disability-inclusive education which contributes to changing of negative mindsets. These include reducing stigma and attitudinal barriers and changing the system to fit the child. Children with disabilities are now seen as capable of learning in the regular classroom; and teachers are making disability-inclusive programs.

“Inclusive education all starts with the heart. It is a commitment and leaves no one behind. In Fiji the heart is good.”

– Primary school principal

“A student (with disability) is a student of the school and the school includes those with special needs.”

– Inclusive secondary school principal

“It seems that you are standing alone... but with input from everyone we can go on and make a difference.”

– Ministry of Education

“If we see success in our Primary School it can happen in any school.”

– Primary school principal

Future directions for Fiji

We want a nation where all of our children are able to become productive citizens and a resource to our country.

All schools need to become welcoming of children with disabilities.

All children with disabilities should be provided a chance to be enrolled in regular schools, because it inspires and molds their personality to face their everyday challenges the same as their peer group members in the community.

We want Fiji to be a nation that stands and promotes a sustainable environment for all people regardless of whom they are. To recognise that all children can learn irrespective of their ethnic group, size, age, background or gender and that we will meet the diverse educational needs for all children.

“Disability should not be tagged to money. We need to be proactive and start accepting all children into our schools NOW.”

– DPO representative



Fijian group working on refining the Pacific-INDIE



Savaira Tinaivunivalu
Associate Investigator



Kitione Ravulo
Associate Investigator

International Associates:

Umesh Sharma, Manjula Marella and Chris Forlin

In partnership in Fiji with:

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More information

For more information about this program please contact the Principal Investigator:

Umesh Sharma
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
Clayton Campus
29 Ancora Imparo Way
Monash University
Victoria Australia 3800

Phone +61 3 9905 4388
Email umesh.sharma@monash.edu