CUSHIONING THE SHOCK OF EARLY RETIREMENT POLICY

A human resources management perspective of revitalising the teaching workforce

Govinda Ishwar Lingam

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on developing and managing the teaching workforce in Fiji. Specifically, the paper examines the sudden lowering of retirement age of public servants including teachers and the need for the employing authorities to manage their teaching workforce more effectively. Teachers are the most significant resource in schools, especially in developing contexts as they play a key role in children’s education and school improvement efforts. Based on the premise that teachers deserve the most attention, the paper highlights potential risks of inappropriate strategies for developing and managing the teaching workforce, which could have far-reaching effects on all spheres of a nation’s development. The paper argues the putting in place of mechanisms to avoid premature loss of teachers from the profession. The findings from the literature discussed in this paper have implications of relevance to education policies and plans, and identifies practices necessary to improve the management of teaching resources, an essential forerunner to improvement of the quality of education in Fiji.
INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession, like other professions, requires an experienced and well-seasoned workforce to deliver education of quality to the nation's children. Teachers reach their full potential, that is, become efficient and effective practitioners in their work, as they develop competence and master suitable pedagogical knowledge and skills. This is a long process as learning continues throughout their teaching career. Teachers further acquire experience that enables them to handle the emotional facets of the job that are characteristic of the teaching profession (Hargreaves, 1997). Novice teachers at the start of their careers lack many of the requisite skills teachers acquire over their longer term career (Britzman, 2003; Zeichner, 1983).

The importance of the contribution by experienced teachers in children’s educational success and the education system as a whole warrants paying close attention to ensuring that they are retained in the teaching system. Without well experienced and distinguished teachers in the teaching service, the education system suffers. The services of experienced workforce in all sectors of the economy including education are vital for national development initiatives such as the creation of a robust economy and a healthy society. In this regard, it is essential to retain qualified and experienced teachers in the teaching service to ensure children continue to receive the best possible education. Instead of finding opportunities to retire them from the service, the employing authority should try to find practical strategies to develop and retain the best possible teachers.

This paper discusses aspects of teacher workforce planning in Fiji, a small developing country in the Pacific. More specifically, it discusses the impact on teaching of the abrupt lowering of the legal retirement age, arguing that the policy is leading to a loss of teaching experience and expertise that the education system can ill afford. Given Fiji's scarcity of trained human resources, this is sufficiently problematic to warrant an in-depth study to determine and monitor the impact of teacher supply, appointment and retention on the country.

LITERATURE

TEACHER PLANNING

To cope with the high demand for education necessitates a planned provision of teachers in all contexts, both developed and developing. It has been stressed that both short- and long-range planning activities are essential to meet the present and future demands for qualified teachers in the education systems (Castetter & Young, 2000). In particular, if there is to be qualitative growth in education at all levels, planning for teacher supply is important. A first requirement is a comprehensive approach to planning teacher supply in relation to the demand for an improvement in the quality of educational provision: quality is not merely 'a numbers game'. An adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers in schools is vitally important because shaping as it does what goes on in the classrooms, it is ultimately a – perhaps the – major determinant of the overall quality of education (OECD, 2006; World Bank, 2000). Teachers are probably the single most important input to the educational process: in children’s education, taking account of qualitative facets relevant to teacher workforce planning is paramount.
NOVICE VERSUS EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

Studies conducted in developed countries such as Australia, for example, indicate that new teachers have difficulties in a number of areas such as classroom management, administration, dealing with parents and catering for the needs of children from different cultural backgrounds (Burke & Notar, 1985; Hitz & Roper, 1986). Rutter and his colleagues (1979), conducting a study using observation of a third-year class for probationary and experienced teachers in six schools, found that the probationary teachers had experienced difficulties in class management. In a study in the USA, Zientek (2007) found that novice teachers did not feel prepared in areas relating to assessing student learning and multicultural curriculum. Similarly, in a study conducted in Fiji, Logavatu (2003) found beginning teachers did not receive much support and as such faced considerable difficulties in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. All dimensions of teachers’ work are important and inadequate preparation of teachers in these areas can have a negative effect on the core business of learning and teaching.

The consensus is that trained and experienced teachers have a better ‘know-how’ of their professional work. They generally possess relevant knowledge of the curriculum as well as pedagogy appropriate for conducting the teaching and learning process. Apart from this, they are familiar with the expectations of the various stakeholders with whom they work, such as the children, parents and the employer. Broadly speaking, experienced teachers have a better capacity to work effectively in a wide range of school contexts and with a wide range of students, parents, colleagues and other stakeholders (Martinez, 2004). On the other hand, beginning teachers who enter the teaching profession generally lack the experience of work in the field and thus tend to encounter more difficulties and problems (Flores, 2006). Overall, entry into classroom work is being made more demanding and complex due to changing work requirements (Hargreaves, 1997). Beginning teachers are likely to be faced with difficulties and obstacles, which can demoralise them and affect their performance badly. Further, the particular circumstances of the school may necessitate a different approach to teaching from the one they learnt at their teacher education institution. The on-the-ground realities of schools are also different and as such no pre-service teacher education program can prepare teachers for all the eventualities that they are likely to face in the school system. In addition, new attitudes, skills and methods take a long time to develop in any profession, teaching no less than any other. Generally, beginning teachers take some years despite having up-to-date knowledge and skills before they become fully immersed in the range of duties and responsibilities expected of them and seasoned enough to react flexibly to the different or the unexpected.

New incumbents will take some time to become conversant with the work expected of them as well as to carry it out effectively and efficiently. With reference to beginning teachers, Martinez (1994: 174) reminds us that they ‘are not finished products, complete in theoretical, philosophical and practical knowledge’. Following this line of reasoning, we can appreciate that novice teachers are likely to encounter difficulties in performing effectively their primary as well as adjunct roles and responsibilities. Their initial professional preparation, no matter how good, may not equip teachers adequately to meet the variability of work they are required to carry out. As aptly stated
by Martinez (2004: 99):

*Teachers are also faced with increased diversity of student resources and needs in schools, and with hugely expanded curricula. With such complex knowledge bases and such diversity of contexts for teaching, the very best of teacher education programs will only ever be able to prepare graduates to begin to teach.*

Martinez’s comment with reference to teachers and teaching in Australia applies equally to the Fiji educational landscape. The curricula have expanded over the last decade both within existing subjects and as new ones have been introduced, such as inclusion of citizenship education and computer education (Koya, 2008). Due to the rising demands and complexities of teaching in all contexts, workplace mentoring of novice teachers is all the more necessary (Hargreaves, 1997; Martinez, 2004). For this reason, newly appointed teachers are placed on probation and their performance monitored before they acquire full teacher status in the profession, giving their teaching career a better start (Martinez, 2004; National Education Association, 2002). However, in the case of Fiji, this is not so, as Logavatu (2003: 125) reports:

*A disastrous start characterizes the experiences of the majority of first-time teachers in our country where there is no policy to induct beginning teachers into their first schools. It must be noted that ultimately, students suffer the consequences of inadequate support for beginning teachers. An effective induction program is needed in Fiji to ease the transition from student of teaching to teaching of students.*

The Ministry of Education lacks any policy document on teacher induction (Logavatu, 2003). This shows that beginning teachers in Fiji are left entirely on their own without any assistance coming forth from the principal stakeholder or the school in which they are posted to teach. By contrast, in New Zealand teacher induction forms part of the two-year period of provisional teaching (Moskowitz & Kennedy, 1997). Induction programs enabling beginning teachers to have a smooth transition to the range of duties and responsibilities expected of them in schools are vital. Otherwise, their school work could be affected and they may later decide to leave the teaching profession altogether.

**TEACHER PREPARATION**

In a nutshell, the services of well-trained and experienced teachers are needed to help achieve high levels of educational benefits for the children and the nation as a whole. A sudden outflow of trained and experienced teachers from the education system results, therefore, in an adverse impact not only on education but also on the entire economy. Failure to address this could lead to using expedient measures to fill the teaching positions. For example, in the late 1980s Fiji’s Ministry of Education had to launch an emergency scheme known as the Special Teacher Training Scheme for training of primary school teachers due to serious policy-created teacher shortages at the primary level (Lingam, 1996).

In this scheme, school leavers with Form 7 qualifications were selected and employed as teachers. These young people were later provided with short training programs during the school holidays in their first year of teaching. The following year they were offered a year’s full-time training
program at the then government-owned and -run Lautoka Teachers’ College.

Similarly, at the secondary level, the demand outstripping the supply of teachers necessitated expedient measures to prepare teachers. The introduction of a Bachelor of Education pre-service program to prepare teachers in three years with a major in one teaching subject, gave an opportunity to a large number of students to graduate with a major in only one subject area, regardless of the fact that in most overseas countries, the preparation of secondary teachers is of four years’ duration. As a consequence, a number of graduates found themselves without jobs, contrary to their expectation, because the Ministry of Education and even the schools now need graduates who have majored in two subject areas. Thus, such expedient arrangements can affect the teaching profession. With reference to ad hoc teacher preparation programs, the Fiji Education Commission (1969: 4) report had already cautioned that ‘It give(s) teachers a recipe to follow in “cookbook” approach to education long since outmoded’.

To improve the quality of education and to uplift the standard of the teaching profession adequate professional preparation of teachers is vital at all times. Ad hoc and short-cut approaches to preparing teachers maybe expedient but they are not a sound solution for meeting teacher shortages. Even the two-year duration of the pre-service primary teacher education program has received a lot of criticism as it is no longer possible to develop teachers adequately within a two-year timeframe. The relevant authorities need to realise that teachers mature and develop over time. Schools and the country stand to enjoy great gains by retaining the services of these qualified and experienced teachers. Besides, schools will have the teachers available at the right time to provide the services. Evidence strongly suggests that the priority should be to help retain qualified and experienced teachers rather than pushing them to quit the profession (Johnson, 1986; Halliday, 1989, Chapman, 1994; Beaudin, 1995). Halliday says aptly (1989: 96):

… a teacher retained is a teacher gained. To induce a present teacher to stay will probably be much cheaper than training a new one and will provide a teacher now instead of two to four years’ time.

Those authorities responsible for employing teachers should find ways and means, at all costs, to reduce teacher wastage, especially through resignations. As a long term measure, succession planning is vital in the teaching workforce for the good of children’s education.

TEACHER WASTAGE

Generally speaking, teacher wastage is of two types. One is a temporary wastage whereas the other, which Halliday (1989) terms ‘casualty’, is permanent. Temporary wastage may be due to sickness, maternity leave or study leave. On the other hand, ‘casualty’ implies that teachers are leaving the profession for good, such as through resignation or retirement. Reports suggest that a major cause of wastage in Fiji is resignation from the service with the intention of emigrating. Such migration of teachers is an added advantage to those receiving countries as they gain a pool of trained teachers who enrich and sustain their education systems, a veritable ‘brain gain’ for the recipient, in most cases developed countries (Paul, 2007). A study conducted by Lingam (2010) found that prospective teachers from New Zealand would like to take up teaching positions in
other developed countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom, showing that teachers, too, move to places with better terms and conditions of work. The relevant authorities would do well to pay attention to premature loss of teachers in ways such as through resignation, if they are to respond effectively to the issue and have a quantitatively and qualitatively adequate supply of experienced teachers on hand at any point in time serving in the teaching profession.

The preceding discussion, though brief, illustrates the need for on-going planning in relation to teacher supply and demand for the purpose of sustaining education systems. The supply of teachers is a concern not only in small developing countries, such as Fiji and other Pacific Island states but also in developed countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom (OECD, 2006). The literature highlights the importance of planning for teacher supply on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Against this literature background, we now turn to a review of the teacher workforce planning situation in Fiji.

THE CASE OF FIJI

Over the last two and a half decades, Fiji has faced a variety of problems; most were to some extent self-imposed, although others were the result of developments elsewhere. In particular, the political events of 1987 and the on-going political uncertainties have had a substantial detrimental effect on the country. These events have not only impeded economic growth and social development but have also had a considerable adverse impact on all spheres of people’s lives. The resulting floundering economy has caused many hardships for workers as many of them were laid off from their jobs. The loss of skilled manpower from the different sectors of the economy is another area of great concern. Many organisations experienced loss of experienced and skilled people, who emigrated particularly to Australia and New Zealand, the two most popular destinations. Emigrants have included many professionals – accountants, nurses, teachers, people with computer skills and many top public servants. Both major ethnic groups have contributed to the tide of population movement; however, the figures for Indo-Fijians are relatively higher than those for the indigenous Fijians (Voigt-Graf, 2003).

THE TEACHING SERVICE

A developing country like Fiji needs the services of skilled people in all walks of life including education in order to contribute and enhance developments in all sectors of the economy. Despite the undoubted progress in all levels of education made since independence, the value of that progress can be compromised if there is an inadequate supply of suitably qualified and experienced teachers in the teaching service. The extent to which children benefit from schooling depends ultimately on the availability of teachers suitable in terms of both numbers and quality. The present situation is alarming: more and more experienced teachers are retiring because of the abrupt lowering, from 30 April 2009, of the legal retirement age from 60 to 55. As a result, a total of 787 teachers retired from service in 2009 and the Ministry of Education, through the Public Service Commission, made the decision not to re-engage any of them (Bole, 2009). To make matters worse, the Permanent Secretary for Education stated that ‘teachers will spend their last day of teaching on the day they turn 55 and will be replaced immediately’ (Jitoko, 2010).
This not only affects the continuity of the service but also affects staff morale of both the retirees and those remaining in the service. Added to this, such acts by the employing authority adversely affected the feelings of the children. The Executive President of the Fijian Teachers Association, Tevita Koroi, in an interview with Radio Australia (2010) had this to say regarding the lowering of the retirement age:

*Our concern here is that as teachers retire on their 55th birthday and are not even allowed to finish the week or the year, we are finding it very difficult to cope with a replacement. One thing with a replacement, one thing is having the suitable people with the qualifications and the experience to replace those who have been retired. It's really a concern mostly for our primary schools in the country, that is, where we are having a lot of problems, especially with numbers, but quality wise it is right across all education sectors particularly the primary and secondary schools.*

Most of these teachers, having contributed enormously for many years, were not psychologically ready for their unceremonious removal from the profession. Planning for teacher supply and demand should focus not only on selection of students for teacher training, recruitment of teachers for teaching posts, induction and up-skilling of teachers, but also on responsible succession planning and psychological preparation of teachers for retirement.

Observations I have made in a number of schools show that the Ministry of Education has not supplied the required number of teachers to schools. The Executive President of the Fijian Teachers Association, Tevita Koroi, in the same interview with Radio Australia (2010) claims that the abrupt lowering of retirement age has created an acute shortage of teachers in the classrooms. This suggests the Ministry is encountering considerable difficulty in finding suitable replacements to fill the vacancies created by those involuntary retirements at the age of 55.

Later, in May 2010, the Permanent Secretary for the Public Service Commission, Parmesh Chand (2010) announced that ‘teachers would officially retire when they turned 55 but would still be engaged until the end of the year. It is largely to ensure continuity … Since April last year [2009], head teachers and principals had to leave on the day they turned 55’. The case of engaging the teachers until the end of the year should have been practised since 2009. It appears that the employing authorities, faced with difficulties in finding replacements to fill the vacancies, intend to engage teachers until the end of the year. Such mundane practices and Band-Aid solutions are not consonant with the Ministry’s aim of improving the provision of good quality education and long-term planning of the teaching workforce.

Many of these experienced teachers still have what it takes to provide excellent service to the education fraternity. This pool of teachers has gained professional wisdom over the many years of their service in the school system but to define ‘dead wood’ solely by years of service is not sound pruning: to find immediate replacements overnight for these knowledgeable and skilled people is not possible. The Minister for Education, Filipe Bole (2009), stated:

*The Ministry has taken this opportunity to reduce the number of its human resource … to comply with the 10 per cent reduction in the size of the civil service without compromising the quality of education.*
Such an economic drain, through loss of trained human resources, carries a heavier price tag than most of the nation realises and the country cannot afford to continue ignoring the issue (Voigt-Graf, 2003). The limited financial resources and poor economic growth make it unwise if not impossible for Fiji to continue to invest in human resources training to replenish such profligate and avoidable wastage of trained talent. Government policies have also contributed toward an early exit of experienced workers from the civil service. This loss is one of the areas of serious concern, as there is an inevitable risk of decline in the quality of schools. An example, of teacher wastage for the year 2008, is shown in Table 1. When compared to types of teacher wastage, resignation stands out as significant, especially at the secondary level.

**TABLE 1: Summary of teacher wastage for 2008 (n)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF WASTAGE</th>
<th>PRIMARY</th>
<th>SECONDARY</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resignations</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirements</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>206</strong></td>
<td><strong>187</strong></td>
<td><strong>393</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Among the highly skilled workers, teachers are the largest professional group migrating to overseas countries (Voigt-Graf, 2003). The government spent considerable sums on the training and development of this workforce and such a loss cannot help but be of great concern, especially to a developing economy. The argument that these teachers’ professional experience and expertise should be used even after their retirement is rather convincing. In some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, retired and experienced teachers are re-employed under a part-time employment scheme, on a reduced salary (OECD, 2006). In fact many countries are now trying to increase the normal age of retirement due to rising life expectancy and rising pension costs (OECD, 2006). Retaining experienced teachers’ skills in schools should be the top priority for the employing authority in Fiji, because human resource capacity is limited and inviting adverse effects on the quality of education afforded to children is unfortunate to say the least. The Executive President of the Fijian Teachers Association was blunt with the government about the teaching workforce (Koroi, 2010):

*We had suggested to government that the Ministry of Education be given special preference, special treatment, and if civil servants were to be retired at 55 years perhaps the teachers would be exempted. We had given all these options. I think some people could not accept the loss and all that the country was going to miss when the policy came into place. It’s really a very serious matter particularly for education.*

The union’s proposal to the government was professionally sound. It clearly demonstrates the union’s stand on education, especially the importance of teachers in children’s learning and the need to ensure proper management of trained human resources. Otherwise, Fiji too may
begin to experience teacher shortages, as developed countries such as Australia and the United States do (Martinez, 2004). Already two Pacific Island nations, namely Nauru and Marshall Islands, have sought human resources assistance in the teaching profession from Fiji. Under the innovative program known as the Fiji Volunteer Scheme (FVS) retired teachers were recruited by the government and sent over to the two countries to teach. This is a clear indication that retired teachers can still offer quality services to the teaching profession. For the two small island nations, the recruitment of teachers is a brain gain for them as these experienced teachers can further enrich learning and teaching.

SCHOOL LEADERS

The sudden reduction in the retirement age in April 2009 required all school leaders reaching 55, both head teachers and principals, to leave on the day they turned 55. Tevita Koroi (2010), speaking as union president, had this to say relating to the severity of the loss of teaching experience and skill:

> When we retired the people between 55 and 60, we lost not only teachers from the teaching profession in Fiji, together with that, we lost experience, we lost expertise and skills and all the knowledge that went out. One thing is getting the numbers, the other thing is getting the skills and the knowledge and the experience. The teachers that were retired last year [2009] as part of that policy were not ordinary assistant teachers who were at that age, they were mostly senior people in senior positions … Now I think it is going to be some time, maybe it will probably take another five years to probably come back and try and retain that knowledge that we once lost last year overnight.

Recognising that teachers do, through experience, build up precious knowledge about their duties and responsibilities, it is a fair comment from the union. The impact on children’s education is likely to be incalculable.

Concern that newly appointed school leaders at both primary and secondary school levels may lack the training needed to manage schools effectively is widespread. School management is a new and demanding job, subject to ever increasing pressure from various stakeholders for schools to perform better and entailing expansion of the roles, functions and responsibilities of teachers (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992). Demands on schools and teachers are becoming increasingly complex not only in Fiji but globally (OECD, 2006). With reference to the Pacific region, various observers, researchers and commentators on education have highlighted the need for competent school leaders in schools (Chandra, 2000; Lingam, 2012; Tavola, 2000). They have quite rightly commented that resources, facilities and curriculum, for example, no matter how good they are, will not achieve desired results unless leaders at different levels of the education system are competent in their job. It is at the school level that the actual educational policies and plans are implemented, and a competent leader can make all the difference in achieving them. The considered opinion of eminent scholars and academics is that teachers should not be appointed to leadership positions without proper training. To improve school performance and give the children a good quality education, we must ensure that school principals and head teachers are trained. In the past decades we have witnessed in Fiji teachers being appointed to
headship positions with limited hands-on experience on the job and without any training in school management (Tavola, 2000). Only recently has the Ministry of Education, with funding assistance from the Australian government, embarked on school leadership training. Overall, it is unfortunate that over the years there has been no concerted effort to nurture a pool of appropriately qualified people for school leadership positions and schools were led by people ‘unprepared’ for the job.

BEGINNING TEACHERS

Another concern resulting from the sudden lowering of retirement age is the use of probationary teachers in schools to conduct teaching as though they are already ‘finished product’ full-time teachers. In all fairness to them, though, such teachers should be working under the close and mentoring supervision of experienced teachers during the probationary period, which is really a learning period in which their performance should be overseen, in a helpful spirit, before they are granted full teacher status. This is not the way it works out in the case of Fiji: they are treated as full-fledged teachers in the education system, from the first day.

The use of people without teaching qualifications to teach in primary and secondary schools is also a matter of concern. It has come to light that graduates from the former Fiji College of Advanced Education have been posted to teach in primary schools. These teachers are prepared for secondary schools and their posting to primary schools does not accord well with their professional preparation. At the primary level these teachers are required to be generalists, that is, responsible for the teaching of all subjects in the school curriculum, at the primary level. This may pose difficulties to them in teaching, for their training has been focused on teaching specialist subjects at secondary level. Even graduates from the University of the South Pacific with majors in Public Administration and Information Systems have been posted to teach at the primary level. Such cases are a clear demonstration of what can happen if proper planning of teacher supply and demand is neglected. Undesirable consequences can include the employment of untrained or undertrained teachers in the teaching profession as well as the adoption of ad hoc measures to fill teaching positions. The need for teachers is not only in terms of numbers but also of desired quality, as the Executive President of the Fijian Teachers Association, Tevita Koroi (2000), reiterated.

All levels of education deserve attention but ultimately, it is the primary level that lays the foundation on which all subsequent formal learning will be built; thus, the primary level deserves greater attention and special recognition (Delors, 1996). It forms the basis for further education, future employment and general quality of life. Having unqualified and under-qualified people to teach at the primary level can have serious repercussions on children’s education and personal development, and the nation as a whole (Hawes & Stephens, 1990; World Bank, 2000). Thus, qualified and well experienced teachers are needed at this level of education to lay a sound foundation. However, it appears that this is not so in the case of Fiji, despite the establishment of a Teacher Registration Board whose remit includes matters of teacher quality. Instead of the abrupt lowering of retirement age, the relevant authorities could better have carried out a proper assessment of teacher supply and demand. It appears the very registration board ostensibly committed to ensuring the high quality of teachers in the school system has compromised itself
by relaxing or ignoring the qualification requirements. This will inevitably lower the quality of education provided to the nation’s children.

POOL OF RESERVE TEACHERS

The Ministry of Education needs to work in partnership with other stakeholders in creating a pool of reserve or relief teachers. For example, in a game of soccer there are always some reserve players in case of an emergency and to relieve pressure on existing players. Similarly, in the teaching profession there is a need for a pool of reserve teachers to fill short-term teaching vacancies arising due to such factors as maternity, sickness or study leave. A pool of supply teachers from those retired could be drawn on to fill in positions on a short-term basis in case of unplanned circumstances. A recent study on the perceptions of ageing held by a sample of retired teachers has illustrated that they were still healthy and actively involved in retirement activities, for personal and financial reasons (Lingam & Boulton-Lewis, 2012). This could be a suitable opportunity for them to be in the pool of reserve teachers, thus ensuring that children are not left unattended and that good quality teaching continues. The education planners’ goal should not be just a balance between supply and demand; they should also plan to have extra teachers in reserve to meet exigencies that may arise.

IMPLICATIONS

It is vital for the employing authority and other stakeholders such as teacher unions and the Teacher Registration Board to work collaboratively on the issue of teacher supply and demand. A well-directed planning approach is needed to revitalise the teaching workforce at various stages of their career. Morale building of the teachers is important at this stage as it will encourage them to stay in the profession and at the same time help enhance productivity. Teachers, like other workers, will inevitably retire at one point or the other and this needs to be planned for well in advance. Otherwise, Band-Aid strategies will inevitably make our schools and students suffer. The quality ‘to plan carefully’ can help improve the current levels of qualitative and quantitative aspects of staffing in schools and sustain educational provision.
CONCLUSION

High rates of teacher attrition in a small developing nation like Fiji, if not dealt with properly, can lead to a downward spiral in the quality of educational provision, which could then take many years to reverse. To improve the quality of education, schools need to be resourced with well trained and experienced teachers. The relevant authorities should put in place appropriate mechanisms to retain well-trained and experienced teachers as their services will yield better results for the nation. In this regard educational planners and policy-makers need to plan teacher workforce recruitment and retirement carefully, in order to reach informed decisions on staffing schools. A planned provision of teacher supply is necessary to meet the present and future demands for qualified teachers. Instead of replacing experienced teachers at frequent intervals with newly trained and insufficiently experienced teachers to handle some of the complexities of work in the school, ways are to be found to retain the services of experienced and distinguished teachers. These teachers would mentor and professionally build new teachers through transmission of wisdom, rather than being just retained ‘old’ teachers who are serving out their time, as the saying ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’, goes.
REFERENCES


