

Whippy, K. (2026, April 22-24). *Culture Inclusive Curriculum in Fiji - an ECE Perspective*. Fiji Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage & Arts Curriculum & Resource Consultations [Paper & Remote presentation]: Suva, Fiji

Abstract

This paper argues for the urgent need to place culture at the centre of curriculum design in Fiji, rather than treating it as an add-on. A culturally grounded curriculum is presented as essential for strengthening identity, improving learning outcomes, and supporting the wellbeing of young people. Drawing on over three decades of experience, it highlights that learners engage more deeply when education is connected to vanua, language, family, and lived experience. The paper critiques schooling systems that marginalise Indigenous and local knowledge, despite constitutional recognition of education as a right. It emphasises that education is never neutral and can either sustain or erode cultural identity. Using Fiji as the focal context, it explores Indigenous Fijian epistemologies grounded in vuvale, vanua, and lotu, alongside concepts such as *Vakatatalo*¹ and *Vuli Ni Lalai*.² It aligns these with ecological and sociocultural theories to show learning as relational and contextual. The paper calls for integrating Indigenous knowledge, language, and heritage across all curriculum areas. It concludes that systemic reform in curriculum, teacher education, and policy is required to ensure culture becomes the foundation of education and supports national resilience and identity. Ultimately, the paper calls for systemic reform across curriculum, teacher education, and policy to ensure that culture moves from the margins to the centre of educational practice. It argues that such transformation is essential for national resilience, identity preservation, and meaningful learning across Fiji and other Pacific contexts.

¹ Sale-Whippy, K. L. (2018). Na Vakatalo: An exploration of the iTaukei perceptions and expressions of Play and its implications for Early Learning and Development. A Doctoral thesis. The University of the South Pacific. Fiji, Suva.

² Tiko, L. (2016). The Indigenous Fijian Notions of Child Development and Understanding children's ways of learning, knowing and doing and implications for policy and practice in the early years of school. A Doctoral thesis. University of New England. NSW, Australia.