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***Talanoa* Research:  
Culturally Appropriate Research Design in Fiji**

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## ***Talanoa* Research: Culturally Appropriate Research Design in Fiji**

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### ***Abstract***

*Talanoa* Research is the most culturally appropriate research design in the ethnic Fijian community in Fiji. *Talanoa* asks researchers to establish a good interpersonal relationship and rapport with ethnic Fijian participants. *Talanoa* research expects researchers and participants to share not only their time and interests but also emotions. Researchers need to use culturally appropriate procedures in conducting *talanoa* research effectively. For this purpose, researchers should be aware of ethnic Fijian cultural values and beliefs in sharing, giving and typical ethnic Fijian transactions of discussion including their non-verbal communication cues. If protocols are ignored, research results are most unlikely to be reliable, since many ethnic Fijian participants may end the *talanoa*. They might even deliberately elicit a wrong response to teach researchers a lesson.

### **Introduction**

Cross-cultural research must interpret the human condition in its social, cultural and historical context in order to understand it (see Krause & O'Brien, 2001). It is essential to conduct culturally appropriate research with indigenous people such as Pacific Islanders. This produces more accurate and valid data to address local issues. A culturally appropriate methodology makes fieldwork more reliable and valued. In the Fiji context, particularly in the ethnic Fijian community, the establishment of a good interpersonal relationship and rapport with ethnic Fijian participants is of vital importance. This helps to bridge the gap between researchers and participants, so that they feel at ease to communicate with each other openly and freely. For this purpose, *talanoa* research (see Vaioleti, 2003) is a very effective approach, since *talanoa* expects to share emotions of both parties (i.e., researchers and respondents). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct *talanoa* research with ethnic Fijians. The purpose of the present paper is to discuss what *talanoa* research is, how to conduct it in Fiji and its limitations of *talanoa* research.

It should be noted, for Indo-Fijians, the second largest group in Fiji, the establishment of rapport is of course also important in conducting research. However, Indo-Fijians are generally not as communal as ethnic Fijians. Rather, they are strongly individualistic. Researchers do not need to consider the importance of establishing a good personal relationship with them as much as with ethnic Fijians. As Indo-Fijians value individuality more highly than ethnic Fijians, they appreciate the importance of time more greatly than ethnic Fijians. For example, an ethnic Fijian vice-Principal, from the rural secondary school where I visited without forewarning, turned her attention to me, instead of to the class that she was supposed to be with at that particular time. She asked her colleague to look after her class and spent her time talking with me about my fieldwork (Otsuka, 2005). That is, my spontaneous visit to that school was welcome, and made my fieldwork there possible straight away. If I took the same procedure with an Indo-Fijian teacher, s/he might take her/his class first. Generally speaking, Indo-Fijians consider one's business more than ethnic Fijians.

### ***Talanoa* in the ethnic Fijian context**

*Tala* literally means to inform, tell, relate, command, ask and apply. *Noa* literally means any kind, ordinary, nothing-in-particular, purely imaginary (Vaioleti, 2003). Hence, *talanoa* literally means a face-to-face conversation whether it is formal or informal. It is commonly practised by Pacific Islanders, such as ethnic Fijians, as it stems from their culture in which oratory and verbal negotiation have deep traditional roots (Schmidt, 1988; Tavola, 1991; Vaioleti, 2003). It culturally connotes talking about “nothing in particular”, and interacting without a rigid framework. Capell (1991, p. 214) describes *talanoa* as “to chat; to tell stories; to relate something; to chat to someone; to chat together; to chat together about; a story, and account legend.” While *talanoa* is about chatting, it involves a deep, interpersonal relationship, the kind of relationship on the basis of which most Pacific activities are carried out (Morrison, Vaioleti & Vermeulen, 2002). The custom of *talanoa* encourages ethnic Fijians often to hold *yaqona* sessions, social gatherings and *talanoa*, and it enhances people's sense of “sharing” and “caring” within their communities. As a note, *yaqona* is piper methysticum—a plant the roots of

which are prepared and used by ethnic Fijians as either a formal or a casual social and ceremonial drink. *Yaqona* is a sacred drink in ethnic Fijian culture (see Ravuvu, 1983). It is also known as *kava*.

The ethnic Fijian communal way of living encourages people to have a strong sense of “sharing”, “giving”, “being generous with others” and “being helpful to visitors and even strangers”. Ravuvu (1988) has explained that the ethnic Fijian ideals of sharing and caring are embodied in such terms as *veivukei* (giving a helping hand), *veinanumi* (consideration of others), *veilomani* (being loving and friendly to one another) and *yalo vata* (of being the same spirit). Thus, “apart from those who are directly involved or formally informed of any happening, many others who casually know about the occasion or accidentally come across it often feel obligated also to participate” (Ravuvu, 1987, p. 330). Ethnic Fijian attitudes towards loving and caring about each other develop their sense of generosity, co-operation, solidarity and harmonious social relations. “It’s natural for ethnic Fijians to care for people. They welcome tourists and visitors, because their heart is there” (Otsuka, 2005, p. 118). Ethnic Fijian valuing of sharing also reflects their attitude towards colleagues at work. According to an ethnic Fijian female teacher from a racially mixed rural secondary school in the Nadroga/Navosa Province in Fiji, “For ethnic Fijians, if they have ideas, they think that they should share them, because those ideas might help other colleagues” (Otsuka, 2005, p. 118). It is, therefore, an important cultural norm for ethnic Fijians to share things with each other.

In *talanoa* research, researchers and participants share not only each other’s time, interest, and information, but also emotions of both parties. In fact, “*tala* holistically intermingles researchers’ and participants’ emotions, knowledge, experiences, and spirits” (Vaioleti, 2003, p. 3). Hence, *talanoa* research is collaborative, and removes the distance between researchers and participants, and provides respondents with a human face they can relate to (Vaioleti, 2003), since *talanoa* research is all about “sharing”, based on face-to-face verbal interactions between researchers and participants. The value of *talanoa* supports the concept of rapport in Western social research. “A face-to-face

interaction assists in the establishment of rapport and higher level of motivation among respondents” (Burns, 1990, p. 302).

In order to establish a good interpersonal relationship and rapport with ethnic Fijian participants, researchers should be aware not only of their cultural values and beliefs in sharing and giving, but ideally also have in-depth knowledge of other norms, practices, customs of ethnic Fijian culture, in order to conduct culturally-appropriate fieldwork in the ethnic Fijian community. It should be noted that because human interaction is nearly always symbolic, there is a tendency to assume that it is the symbols themselves, which contain the emotion. Symbols cannot draw out emotion unless the individual is capable of emotion (Brittan, 1973). Sentiment factors in human interaction are likely to strongly influence what people say, how they say it, and what they think about the topic. The interviewees’ perceptions towards the topic, which may be influenced by their emotional feelings, affect the way in which they answer questions. The interview questions also affect the interviewees’ way of thinking and talking about the topic. If the question contains something to affect the interviewees emotionally, it is not easy for them to think about the question objectively and logically.

### **Considerations of conducting in *talanoa* research**

In addition to being aware of the typical ethnic Fijian valuing of sharing and giving, a researcher’s knowledge of their communicative styles, especially their non-verbal communication cues, is of great importance for valid *talanoa* research. The way ethnic Fijians use their time and talk is culturally inter-dependent.

#### **(i) Use of Time**

In particular, the typical ethnic Fijian attitude towards the use of time (commonly called “Fiji Time”) often causes matters to be attended to at a leisurely pace. For example, it is not uncommon for the village meeting, that is supposed to begin “after lunch”, actually starting at 4:00p.m. or even later (Nabobo, 2001). Another example is that it took an ethnic Fijian secondary school in the Nadroga/Navosa Province a whole day to conduct

the class photograph session (see Otsuka, 2005). Thus, researchers need to understand the way typical ethnic Fijians use time when having *talanoa* with them and conducting fieldwork in their community.

(ii) Talk

For effective communication with ethnic Fijians, knowing that what one expects to get from conversations which are culturally different from typical Western transactions of discussion is of great importance (Bride, 1985). It is very common at the first meeting with ethnic Fijians to share each other's personal background by asking a lot about questions like: "Are you married?" "Do you have a wife/husband?" "Where do you live/stay at the moment?" "What is your religion?" "How old are you?" and so on. While these personal questions might make some researchers uncomfortable, it is necessary for the researcher to be tolerant and patient about answering these questions. As the field researcher, I was often asked such questions (Otsuka, 2005).

In addition, the way typical ethnic Fijians speak English is different from the way of native speakers of English. (It is of course common to conduct fieldwork with indigenous people in English, as researchers often cannot speak the indigenous language.) In the course of conversations and interviews, many ethnic Fijians (and also Indo-Fijians) do not verbalise simple indications like "yes" or "no" clearly (Otsuka, 1999). They do not specify whether they mean "yes" or "no", whether they "agree" or "disagree". Hence, they generally do not expect to give clear statements of their position immediately when they discuss topics, and this often tends to give their discussion a rather indirect quality, by comparison with the "simple-straightforwardness" of general discussion more typical among native English speakers. The way ethnic Fijians speak English, tends to be lengthy and even ambiguous, which can sometimes confuse researchers. Researchers need to be aware of the general possibilities in the course of discussions with ethnic Fijians. This helps researchers to have close co-operation with ethnic Fijian participants and to establish good rapport with them, in order to conduct culturally appropriate *talanoa* research.

## **Procedures of *Talanoa* Research**

*Talanoa* research required researchers to take culturally-appropriate procedures, when conducting fieldwork in an ethnic Fijian village, if they wish to collect reliable and valid data. In the first instance, researchers are commonly expected to meet face-to-face a chief or a person called a headman, or an assistant-headman. At a village meeting, the researcher will ask for her/his permission to conduct the fieldwork. At such a meeting, s/he is advised to present 1/2kg or 1kg of *yaqona*, which is prepared and used by ethnic Fijians as either a formal or a casual social and ceremonial drink. This act of giving not only indicates respect for the ethnic Fijian community, but also gives ethnic Fijians an opportunity to share social gatherings with the researcher. S/he will be asked to join the *yaqona*-drinking session in the village, where s/he will be expected to follow the customary procedures carried out in that session. An ethnic Fijian male teacher from a rural secondary school explained:

Once ethnic Fijians sit around the *yaqona* bowl, they have to share it in the respectful way. When they give the bowl, they have to clap their hands. After they drink it, they clap their hands three times. That's their respect and appreciation for drinks" (Otsuka, 2005, p. 118).

It is not polite to refuse to drink *yaqona* at these occasions. Indeed, in the communal ethnic Fijian society, it is generally not acceptable to refuse to be part of what is going on in the village. It can be even rude to say "no" to anyone who asks for help or company. Researchers should join in *yaqona* drinking to share emotions and experiences with villagers. It should be also noted that no one is allowed to wear a hat or a cap in the village, including visitors, as ethnic Fijians generally believe that one's head is spiritual so that it should be shown all the time. This rule is also about respect for village hierarchy.

To inform ethnic Fijian participants of the purpose of the research, researchers make an oral presentation. It is not culturally appropriate just to provide written information, such as a subject information sheet (i.e., "Participant Information Sheet"), because Pacific

Islanders, including ethnic Fijians, highly value the importance of oral traditions. However for ethical reasons, researchers must also ask participants to sign the consent form (i.e., “Participant Consent Form”), and store it in a secure place. The purpose of the consent form needs to be explained to all participants. This is a very important step in preparation for any problems that might arise during and after the research.

Finally when researchers write up a fieldwork report, they send it to the Chief from the ethnic Fijian community where the research took place. This not only shows the researchers’ appreciation to the community, but also shares research findings with the community. This is important, especially because sharing is at the heart of ethnic Fijian culture; ethnic Fijians generally understand that “they have to share and help each other” (Otsuka, 2005, p. 118).

### **Conduct of *Talanoa* Research**

In face-to-face interviews with ethnic Fijians, it is expected that researchers and respondents first chat about some irrelevant subjects, rather than focusing on the subject straight away. Mo’ungatonga (2003) explains as follows:

At the beginning of my interviews, I would ask the mothers how their days had been while helping them with their chores, things that were totally irrelevant to my topic. They would ask several things, about my work and myself (sic), until they felt at ease. Once they accepted and trusted me as a person, out came their stories, including the information I was wanting to know about. The stories around the information I was looking for were what made me know that the information was authentic. I rarely needed to ask specific questions (cited in Vaoleti, 2003, pp. 3 & 4).

Not only prior to interviews, but also in the course of interviews with ethnic Fijians, *talanoa* is a very useful approach. An incident occurred during Otsuka’s (2005) face-to-face interview with an ethnic Fijian mother of a Form 6 (Australian equivalent; Year 12) secondary-school male student, which was conducted outside her house in a rural village.

In the course of the interview, there was suddenly an unexpected noise in the village. A village pig, which was running after a chicken for food, was chased by a woman who was yelling: “Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!” The researcher interrupted the interview and asked his interviewee what was happening:

Interviewer: “Are they a pig and a chicken? What’s happening?”

Respondent: “Wants to eat that chicken.”

Interviewer: “That pig?”

Respondent: “Yeah.”

Interviewer: “Really!”

Respondent: “Um...”

Interviewer: “Wah...” [Laughing in a surprised way for a short period] “OK. Shall we continue?” [With a smile]

Respondent: “Yeah!” [With a positive smile]

(Otsuka, 2005, p. 169)

This short *talanoa*, irrelevant to the interview topic, gave not only a welcome short break to the interview, but also an opportunity for the respondent to share with the researcher what she knew; i.e., a pig chasing the chicken in the village. After the researcher and the participant laughed together, they went back to the subject even more positively and continued the interview with enthusiasm. The episode illustrates how *talanoa* shares emotions of both parties during the interview and encourages them to carry it on. The incident helped to strengthen the rapport.

### **Limitations of *Talanoa* Research**

Otsuka’s (2005) face-to-face interviews taught him that if the research with ethnic Fijians was conducted in a culturally inappropriate and insensitive manner (e.g., protocols being ignored), the research findings would be neither reliable nor valid. Some informants’ answers gave the researcher some doubts as to whether respondents answered questions truthfully but rather in a socially desirable way. For example, in the course of his face-to-face interviews with an ethnic Fijian mother conducted in rural *koro* (villages) in the Nadroga/Navosa Province, the mother used the so-called “white-lie” with the researcher.

After the researcher mentioned to her that a sensitive question would be asked, she provided inaccurate information. According to her, she sometimes pays her son's school fees two weeks after the due date. But the boy himself admitted that his parents had not paid the fees at all since the beginning of academic year 2004, and his school record confirmed this. This was a useful reminder of the importance of data triangulation, and so the present research also used school archives, students' examination results (both external and internal results), students' attendance records, teachers' reports, and parents' payment records of school fees. Another example is that a male ethnic Fijian student who always spent long hours on daily homework and received regular assistance from his parents and relatives when he was studying at home. He also attended Evening Classes and Saturday Classes regularly. He said that he did not have any problems in studies. However, his school record clearly indicated that he often was placed 34th out of 35 students in his class. He repeated his form twice.

Therefore, the researcher paid particular attention to the "white lie" in research with Pacific Islanders such as ethnic Fijians. Apparently, many ethnic Fijian respondents in the present study attempted to "please" visitors, such as the present researcher, by "showing off" their performance based on the "white-lie". Despite a number of critiques (see e.g., Young & Juan, 1985), Freeman's (1983) controversial study claims that Margaret Mead's (1928) Samoan research contained inaccurate data that supported a false picture of a culture where the typical "storm and stress" of adolescence in Western societies did not exist. Freeman (1983) claimed that Mead's young female informants misinformed her as *totongi* (a reciprocal gesture) for her culturally insensitive questions and intrusion into their social lives. Pacific Island informants disclose information only when they feel and sense the time is right, trust has been established, and context is appropriate. If such protocol is ignored, they may invoke *totongi* to teach the researcher a lesson, to remind them of their obligations in this symbiotic relationship. However, it might not be easy for a non-ethnic Fijian researcher to know when or whether informants tell "white-lies" or not, while the research is being carried out. Therefore, the researcher should take time to establish a culturally-appropriate interpersonal relationship and rapport with ethnic Fijian participants, prior to conducting the *talanoa* research in their community.

## **Culturally Inappropriate Research in the Ethnic Fijian Community**

According to the ethnic Fijian cultural value system, the written survey or questionnaire, which does not involve interpersonal relationships, is not a culturally appropriate research tool. Indeed, Pacific Islanders in general are usually reluctant to be surveyed (Vaiotei, 2003). Many ethnic Fijians find surveys “dry” and “boring”. Furthermore, some might not understand fully what the questions mean, whether the questionnaire was written in English or in their own language. Ethnic Fijians (and Indo-Fijians) have a greater opportunity to read public information written in English, such as newspapers and school textbooks (although there are ethnic Fijian and Hindi weekly newspapers). At school, it is optional for students to study their own language, i.e., the ethnic Fijian language or Hindi (the Indo-Fijian language). Thus, some ethnic Fijian pupils often find it difficult to recognise their own written language.

In addition, some ethnic Fijians have difficulties in understanding written English. Otsuka’s (2005) fieldwork conducted in the Nadroga/Navosa Province suggested that many ethnic Fijian students misinterpreted the survey, which was administered at racially integrated secondary schools in that province. Some people even misunderstood simple English questions like; “what do you think about *kere kere*?” As a brief note, *kere kere* is the traditional ethnic Fijian custom and socio-economic system, which literally means the practice of borrowing amongst kin, at the will/request of the borrower. Individuals are expected to be ready, at any time, to lend their in-group people (often including those from other villages who are not related to them) not only their money but also their “belongings”. This is largely due to their moral and social obligations within their community. It is very common that once their “belongings” are borrowed, they are almost never returned. Due to this traditional ethnic Fijian custom, people often incur extra expenses.

In Otsuka’s (2005) field survey, more than 33.3% of Form 4 (Year 10) secondary school students gave a brief description of *kere kere*, rather than their opinions and ideas about it. Surprisingly, even upper secondary school students also misinterpreted that question:

over 13.3% of Form 6 ethnic Fijian students gave the same response as their Form 4 counterparts. Hence, prior to the survey being administered at three other racially integrated secondary schools in the province, the researcher decided to explain more carefully the meaning of that question. But, even then, 41.7% of Form 4 ethnic Fijian students and 21.5% of Form 6 still answered by explaining what *kere kere* means, rather than giving their views about the custom. This could suggest how typical ethnic Fijians interpret English, which is different from their mother tongue (see Winn & Lucas, 1993).

Communication patterns among ethnic Fijians are important here. Ethnic Fijian students typically do not often ask teachers questions in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2000). Many ethnic Fijians often do not even verbalise simple answers clearly like “yes” or “no”. The ambiguous way of expressing opinions and interests begins with child-rearing practices. According to Nabobo (2001), when an ethnic Fijian child tried to participate in conversations at home, s/he would be told by her/his parents; “Don’t interrupt (*kua ni silima na gau ni dali*)!” S/he would even be shut up (*tikolo*) by her/his parents. Children are often silenced by their parents and elders at home, and by teachers, who are traditionally highly respected as occupying positions of authority. Hence, ethnic Fijian students are already conditioned to be quiet in the classroom and even wary of asking questions because of the respect they have for their teachers. In fact, a good listener, i.e., *dauvakarorogo*, or “being often quiet”, i.e., *dau galu tu ga*, is highly regarded in the ethnic Fijian community (see Nabobo, 2001). Silence is considered polite in ethnic Fijian communal culture, and this encourages children to avoid open confrontations in order to keep harmony. Harmony has culturally different connotations in the ethnic Fijian value system, than in Western culture. Ethnic Fijians tend to maintain harmony at the expense of allowing individuals to express themselves.

Therefore, although ethnic Fijian students might well have had some questions about the meaning of certain survey items, they would be unlikely to ask researchers and teachers about them. As a result, their interpretations of survey questions might be not be those the researcher expected. This raises important issues of validity.

Accordingly, if the research with ethnic Fijians was conducted in a culturally inappropriate and insensitive manner, i.e., protocols being ignored and use of surveys, the

research findings would be neither reliable nor valid. Most survey results, which were administered with both ethnic Fijian students and Indo-Fijian students in the Nadroga/Navosa Province, gave the researcher some doubts as to whether respondents, especially ethnic Fijian respondents, answered questions truthfully or rather in a socially desirable way (Otsuka, 2005). For example, the survey administered at a racially integrated rural secondary school suggests that more ethnic Fijian Form 6 students spend a longer time on daily homework than their Indo-Fijian counterparts (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Average Hours of Doing Homework per day by Ethnicity & Gender

	Ethnic Fijian Students		Indo-Fijian Students	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average Hours of Doing Homework per day	3.2 Hours	2.1 Hours	3.0 Hours	1.6 Hours

Source: Otsuka, S. (2005). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Sydney, Sydney.

More ethnic Fijian students received assistance to complete their homework (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Assistance Received in Doing Homework by Ethnicity & Gender

	Ethnic Fijian Students		Indo-Fijian Students	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	14 (66%)	5 (23%)	4 (21%)	11 (58%)
No	0	2 (10%)	0	4 (21%)

Source: Otsuka, S. (2005). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Sydney, Sydney.

It may be that Indo-Fijian students are more efficient in their homework. As discussed earlier, typical ethnic Fijians grow up in an oral culture, so are likely to discuss their homework with their peers before beginning to write it. However, there are contradictions here: over 58% of respondents from the face-to-face interviews conducted by Otsuka (2005) said that one of the major factors influencing ethnic Fijian under-achievement stems from their home environment (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Major Factors Influencing Ethnic Differences of Academic Achievement

Major Factors cited	Respose	% Affirmative Responses
Home Environment	28 of 48 Respondents from both Ethnic Groups Say "Yes"	58% N=48
Land Issues	14 of 48 Respondents from both Ethnic Groups Say "Yes"	29% N=48
Considerable Pressure (e.g., It is hard to say "no" when asked for help or company)	22 of 23 Ethnic Fijian Respondents Say "Yes"	96% N=23
Regular Church Goers	23 of 23 Ethnic Fijian Respondents Say "Yes"	100% N=23

Source: Otsuka, S. (2005). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Sydney, Sydney.

Otsuka's (2005) fieldwork, based on face-to-face interviews in the ethnic Fijian community, found that many ethnic Fijian parents are so committed to village gatherings, such as ceremonies and church activities, that they are often absent when their children come home after school. Children are often left home alone, rarely receiving any supervision on their homework. In addition, their peers often pop in to see them and they go out together playing sports or socialising with other friends from the village until late in the evening. It is very hard for many ethnic Fijian children to say "no" when their peers from the village ask for company or help. Thus, children often feel very heavy peer or parental pressure in the village. In particular, during the village functions and gatherings, children are often involved in those activities, and many then find it difficult to study at home to catch up with their school work. Yet, according to the present survey results (Otsuka, 2005), more than 21% of ethnic Fijian students receive their father's supervision on their homework regularly, and over 26% of ethnic Fijian students receive their mother's supervision.

The survey results also suggested that more Indo-Fijian female students find it difficult to complete their homework than their ethnic Fijian peers, largely due to their parents' expectations of children's domestic duties like washing dishes and clothes, cleaning rooms and preparing dinner and so on. These domestic duties often disturb their

homework. But, only 14% of ethnic Fijian female students reported difficulties in doing homework due to disturbances from home (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Difficulties in Doing Homework by Ethnicity & Gender

	Ethnic Fijian Students		Indo-Fijian Students	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	8 (38%)	3 (14%)	0	15 (79%)
No	6 (29%)	4 (19%)	4 (21%)	0

Source: Otsuka, S. (2005). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Sydney, Sydney.

However, overall, the academic performance among Indo-Fijian Form 6 students from a racially integrated secondary school in the Nadroga/Navosa Province (School A) was significantly better than that of their ethnic Fijian counterparts (see Tables 5 & 6 below).

Table 5: Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School A by Ethnicity and Gender, 2004

Subject	Ethnic Fijians (Male)			Indo-Fijians (Male)		
	No. Sat.	% Pass	Mean	No. Sat.	% Pass	Mean
English	5	20.0	41.2	11	45.4	50.6
Mathematics	5	40.0	46.2	11	90.9	62.1
Biology	1	0.0	35.0	6	50.0	56.8
Chemistry	1	0.0	41.0	6	100.0	62.8
Accounting	4	0.0	35.0	5	60.0	53.8
Geography	4	0.0	40.7	N/A		
Economics	2	50.0	51.0	2	100.0	58.5
Physics	N/A			6	100.0	64.3
Computer Studies	N/A			5	100.0	54.8
Wood Work/ Technical Drawing	3	0.0	34.6	3	33.3	48.3

Source: Otsuka, S. (2005). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Sydney, Sydney.

Table 6: Results of the Fiji School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) Examinations at School A by Ethnicity and Gender, 2004

Subject	Ethnic Fijians (Female)			Indo-Fijians (Female)		
	No. Sat.	% Pass	Mean	No. Sat.	% Pass	Mean
English	13	15.3	40.6	11	18.1	44.0
Mathematics	13	46.1	47.4	11	81.8	57.0
Biology	9	11.1	39.4	3	33.3	49.3
Chemistry	9	44.4	49.2	3	33.3	51.3
Accounting	4	0.0	24.7	8	25.0	42.8
Geography	4	50.0	48.7	5	40.0	47.0
Economics		N/A		8	75.0	53.6
Physics	4	50.0	53.7		N/A	
Computer Studies		N/A		3	33.3	46.0
Food & Nutrition	8	12.5	40.7	3	66.6	52.3

Source: Otsuka, S. (2005). *Cultural Influences on Academic Performance in Fiji: A Case Study in the Nadroga/Navosa Province*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Sydney, Sydney.

Clearly, ethnic Fijian academic performance is inconsistent with the survey results, such as their responses on the number of hours spent on the homework and the assistance received. These contradictions were seen not only in Form 6 of this particular school, but also among Form 7 and Form 4 students from three other racially integrated secondary schools in the province (Otsuka, 2005). The researcher became concerned as to why the same trend was seen across genders, forms and schools. Consequently, the researcher concluded that he should not rely heavily on the survey results, as they seemed to be inconsistent with relative performances in school examinations. If a culturally inappropriate research method, i.e., culturally insensitive questions or survey, was conducted in the ethnic Fijian community, the results would be often unreliable.

## Conclusion

It is essentially important to employ culturally appropriate research methodology with indigenous people, such as ethnic Fijians, if the researcher is to obtain reliable and valid data. *Talanoa* research is a very appropriate approach for this purpose, while *talanoa* research often consumes much of the interviewer's and interviewee's time, in the interest of establishing good rapport. *Talanoa* shares the emotions of both participants and

researchers, and helps to establish a good interpersonal relationship and rapport between the two parties. For valid *talanoa* research, researchers should pay particular attention to using culturally appropriate protocols prior to the research, asking questions in a culturally sensitive fashion, and conducting a culturally proper form of research such as face-to-face interviews in the ethnic Fijian community. Researchers should also be aware of ethnic Fijian cultural values and beliefs in sharing and giving, which is at the heart of *talanoa*, in addition to typical ethnic Fijian communicative styles, including their non-verbal communication cues such as the way they use time and silence. In this way, their research findings and interpretations are afforded greater credibility and validity.

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### **Note about Author**

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