

## School Administration, Planning and Reporting: Opportunities, Challenges, and Policy Directions in the Fijian Context

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Doi <https://doi.org/10.55640/ijssll-06-02-09>

### ABSTRACT

School administration, planning, and reporting are central to school governance, yet they are frequently enacted as discrete and compliance-oriented functions rather than as interconnected processes supporting educational improvement. This paper critically examines the interrelationships between administration, strategic planning, and reporting within the context of Fiji's education system, situating the analysis within broader international debates on educational leadership, accountability, and reform. Drawing on contemporary leadership theory and Pacific education scholarship, the study synthesises literature to explore how centralised governance structures, leadership capacity, and cultural values shape school-level practices.

The analysis reveals a persistent tension between accountability-driven administrative requirements and the need for adaptive, learning-centred leadership. While national frameworks have strengthened coherence and transparency, planning and reporting practices are often constrained by standardisation, limited contextual flexibility, and uneven data-use capacity. At the same time, Fiji's strong communal values, relational leadership traditions, and emerging digital systems present significant opportunities for participatory planning and culturally responsive governance.

The paper argues that effective school improvement in Fiji depends on repositioning administration as strategic educational leadership and integrating planning and reporting within a coherent governance framework. It concludes by proposing policy-relevant directions that emphasise leadership development, flexible planning structures, streamlined and learning-oriented reporting, and broader conceptions of accountability that reflect Pacific educational values. These insights contribute to international scholarship on school governance while offering practical implications for small-state and developing education systems.

**Keywords:** School administration; Strategic planning; Accountability and reporting; Educational leadership; School governance; Fiji education; Pacific education systems.

### INTRODUCTION

School administration, planning, and reporting are central to the effective functioning of education systems, shaping how schools translate policy intentions into everyday practice. These processes influence leadership decision-making, resource allocation, curriculum implementation, and accountability mechanisms that collectively determine the quality of educational outcomes (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2018). While often perceived as technical or bureaucratic functions, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises school administration as a strategic and relational practice that mediates between governance structures, pedagogical priorities, and community expectations (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020).

Globally, education systems have experienced intensified

accountability pressures driven by performance measurement, standardisation, and evidence-based policymaking (OECD, 2020). As Lingard (2011) argues, schools now operate within complex policy environments characterised by datafication, audit cultures, and heightened reporting requirements. In this context, planning and reporting have become key instruments through which governments monitor school effectiveness, justify public expenditure, and steer institutional behaviour. However, the increasing emphasis on compliance-oriented reporting has raised concerns about the narrowing of educational priorities and the marginalisation of professional judgement and local contextual knowledge (Ball, 2016).

The literature on educational leadership underscores that effective school administration extends beyond procedural efficiency to include strategic vision,

collaborative leadership, and adaptive organisational learning (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Planning, when authentically enacted, provides a mechanism for aligning school goals with student learning needs, teacher development, and community aspirations (Fullan, 2014). Conversely, when planning is reduced to a formalistic exercise driven by external accountability demands, it risks becoming disconnected from classroom realities and school improvement processes (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). This tension between strategic planning and performative compliance remains a persistent challenge across diverse education systems.

Reporting practices similarly occupy an ambivalent position within school governance. On one hand, transparent reporting can enhance accountability, inform stakeholders, and support data-driven improvement (Earl & Katz, 2006). On the other hand, excessive or poorly designed reporting systems may burden school leaders and teachers, diverting time and energy away from instructional leadership and student engagement (Keddie, 2015). As Schildkamp (2019) notes, the effectiveness of reporting depends not on the volume of data produced, but on the capacity of school leaders to interpret, contextualise, and use information meaningfully to inform decision-making. These global dynamics are particularly pronounced in developing and small-state contexts, including Fiji and the wider Pacific region. Education systems in these settings often operate under resource constraints, limited administrative capacity, and inherited governance structures shaped by colonial legacies (Nabobo-Baba, 2013; Thaman, 2009). School leaders are frequently required to navigate competing expectations from central authorities, local communities, and international development partners, while managing administrative workloads that exceed their formal training and support structures (Lingam, 2014). In such contexts, planning and reporting can become compliance-driven processes rather than tools for locally responsive school improvement.

Pacific scholars emphasise the importance of culturally grounded leadership and relational accountability in education administration (Sanga & Chu, 2009; Thaman, 2014). These perspectives challenge technocratic models of administration that prioritise standardisation over relational trust, collective responsibility, and community engagement. Integrating Indigenous and local knowledge systems into planning and reporting processes offers potential pathways for more inclusive and contextually meaningful school governance, yet such approaches remain underexplored in mainstream educational administration literature (Nabobo-Baba & Teasdale, 2015).

Despite a growing body of research on educational leadership and school effectiveness, there remains limited integrative analysis of how administration, planning, and reporting function as interconnected processes within schools, particularly in non-Western and small-island contexts. Much

of the existing literature treats these domains separately, focusing either on leadership styles, planning frameworks, or accountability systems, without adequately examining how their interaction shapes institutional coherence and educational outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). This fragmentation constrains the development of holistic models of school governance that are responsive to contextual realities.

Against this backdrop, this paper critically examines school administration, planning, and reporting as mutually reinforcing dimensions of school governance. Drawing on international scholarship and regional policy discourse, the paper seeks to reposition these functions as strategic, learning-centred practices rather than purely administrative tasks. By synthesising theoretical insights and contextual evidence, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on educational leadership, accountability, and reform, while offering policy-relevant insights for school leaders, teacher educators, and policymakers working in Fiji, the Pacific, and comparable education systems.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *School Administration as Strategic Educational Leadership*

Contemporary literature positions school administration not merely as a technical or managerial function, but as a form of strategic educational leadership that shapes organisational culture, instructional priorities, and stakeholder relationships. Bush (2020) argues that effective school administration requires alignment between leadership values, institutional vision, and operational practices. This view is reinforced by Hallinger (2018), who emphasises that administration mediates the translation of policy into practice, particularly through decision-making related to staffing, resource management, and curriculum oversight.

Leithwood et al. (2020) further contend that administrative leadership influences school effectiveness indirectly by creating enabling conditions for teaching and learning. From this perspective, administration is inseparable from leadership, as it structures how power, responsibility, and accountability are distributed within schools. However, several studies note that administrative roles are increasingly constrained by external accountability demands, limiting leaders' capacity to engage in pedagogical leadership (Ball, 2016; Keddie, 2015).

In developing and small-state contexts, administrative leadership is often complicated by limited institutional capacity and overlapping roles (Lingam, 2014). School

leaders may simultaneously act as instructional leaders, financial managers, compliance officers, and community representatives, intensifying administrative workload and role strain. As a result, administration risks becoming reactive and compliance-driven rather than strategic and developmental.

### ***Strategic Planning and School Improvement***

Strategic planning is widely recognised as a critical mechanism for school improvement, providing a structured process for setting goals, allocating resources, and monitoring progress (Fullan, 2014). Effective planning aligns school vision with student learning needs, teacher professional development, and community expectations (Day et al., 2016). When planning processes are participatory and data-informed, they can foster collective ownership and organisational learning (Earl & Katz, 2006).

Despite its potential, the literature highlights persistent challenges in the implementation of school planning. Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) observe that planning is frequently reduced to a symbolic exercise undertaken to satisfy external accountability requirements rather than to guide meaningful change. Lingard (2011) similarly notes that performative planning cultures prioritise measurable outputs over deeper educational values, contributing to superficial compliance rather than sustained improvement.

In Pacific and postcolonial contexts, planning frameworks are often imported from Western policy models, with limited adaptation to local cultural, social, and institutional realities (Thaman, 2009; Nabobo-Baba, 2013). This misalignment can undermine the relevance and effectiveness of school plans, particularly where community engagement and Indigenous knowledge systems are marginalised.

### ***Reporting, Accountability, and Data Use in Schools***

School reporting systems are central to accountability governance, providing mechanisms through which schools demonstrate performance to governments, communities, and funding agencies (OECD, 2020). Earl and Katz (2006) argue that reporting can support improvement when data are used diagnostically to inform teaching and leadership decisions. However, the growing emphasis on standardised reporting has intensified concerns about data overload and managerial control (Ball, 2016).

Schildkamp (2019) emphasises that the value of reporting lies not in data production but in data use capacity. Without adequate training and interpretive support, school leaders may struggle to transform reports into actionable insights. In such cases, explicit accountability may increase, while professional accountability and trust decline (Keddie, 2015). In many developing systems, reporting requirements are

fragmented and centrally driven, resulting in duplication and administrative burden (Lingam, 2014). Pacific scholars highlight that reporting practices often privilege quantitative indicators over relational and cultural dimensions of educational success, limiting their relevance for local communities (Sanga & Chu, 2009; Thaman, 2014).

### ***Interconnections Between Administration, Planning, and Reporting***

While administration, planning, and reporting are frequently examined as discrete domains, emerging scholarship suggests that they function as interdependent processes within school governance systems (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Administration provides the structural and leadership foundation through which planning is enacted and reporting is managed. Planning sets the strategic direction that informs administrative priorities and determines what is reported and evaluated. Reporting, in turn, generates feedback that shapes future planning and administrative decision-making (OECD, 2020).

Despite this conceptual interdependence, empirical research rarely examines these processes holistically, particularly in non-Western contexts. As a result, the dynamic relationships between leadership practice, strategic intent, and accountability outcomes remain insufficiently theorised.

### ***Explicit Literature Gaps***

For reviewer clarity, the following gaps are evident in the literature:

#### **1. Fragmented Analysis**

Existing studies tend to examine school administration, planning, and reporting in isolation, with limited integrative frameworks that conceptualise their interaction as a coherent governance system (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

#### **2. Contextual Underrepresentation**

There is a scarcity of research focusing on small-island and Pacific education systems, where administrative capacity, cultural context, and governance structures differ significantly from Western settings (Nabobo-Baba, 2013; Lingam, 2014).

#### **3. Compliance vs Learning Tension**

Limited empirical work critically interrogates how compliance-driven planning and reporting practices affect school leaders' ability to engage in instructional and transformational leadership.

#### **4. Cultural and Relational Dimensions**

Indigenous and relational accountability perspectives remain under-theorised in mainstream school

administration and reporting literature, despite their relevance for community-based education systems (Sanga & Chu, 2009).

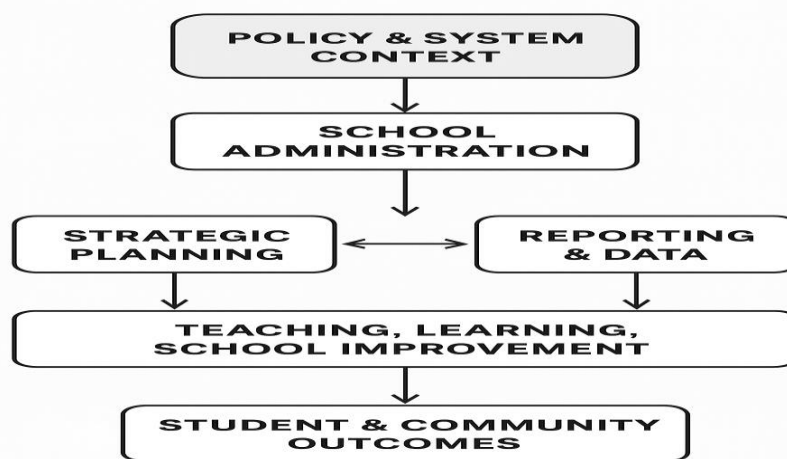
5. **Leadership Capacity for Data Use**

While data-driven decision-making is widely promoted, insufficient attention is given to leadership capacity-building for meaningful interpretation and use of reporting data, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Schildkamp, 2019).

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: LINKING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, PLANNING, AND REPORTING**

**Conceptual Explanation**

The proposed conceptual framework positions School Administration as the central leadership and governance function that enables and coordinates Strategic Planning and Accountability Reporting. Planning provides direction and purpose, reporting provides feedback and accountability, and administration integrates these processes to support continuous school improvement. Contextual factors, such as policy environment, leadership capacity, and cultural values—mediate how these processes operate in practice.



**INTEGRATED DISCUSSION: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, PLANNING, AND REPORTING IN THE FIJIAN CONTEXT**

The interrelationship between school administration, planning, and reporting in Fiji reflects broader tensions between centralised governance, local leadership capacity, and culturally grounded educational aspirations. While national policy frameworks emphasise accountability, efficiency, and system coherence, the enactment of these priorities at the school level reveals uneven capacity and limited scope for contextual adaptation (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts [MEHA], 2021).

School administration in Fiji continues to be shaped by strong ministerial oversight, positioning school leaders primarily as policy implementers rather than strategic decision-makers (Lingam, 2014). This administrative orientation reinforces compliance-driven practices, particularly in planning and reporting, where leaders prioritise meeting prescribed requirements over engaging in reflective, improvement-oriented processes. As Bush (2020) argues, when administration is narrowly defined as managerial compliance, leadership agency and innovation are constrained.

Nevertheless, the Fijian context also presents significant opportunities. Deeply embedded communal values and strong

school–community relationships offer a culturally congruent foundation for participatory leadership and relational accountability (Sanga & Chu, 2009). These strengths align closely with contemporary leadership theories that emphasise collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility for school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020). When leveraged effectively, such relational capital can enhance planning processes by grounding school goals in local aspirations and collective ownership.

Strategic planning in Fiji illustrates the dual nature of opportunity and constraint. While national planning frameworks provide coherence and alignment with system priorities, their standardised design often limits school-level flexibility (Lingard, 2011). Consequently, planning risks becoming a procedural exercise rather than a strategic tool for pedagogical improvement. This challenge is exacerbated by leadership capacity gaps, particularly in smaller and rural schools where principals juggle teaching, administration, and community roles (Lingam & Lingam, 2016).

Reporting practices further intensify these dynamics. On one hand, reporting mechanisms promote transparency and accountability, reinforcing public trust in the education system (OECD, 2020). On the other hand, fragmented reporting requirements and an emphasis on

quantitative indicators contribute to administrative overload and narrow definitions of success. As Thaman (2014) notes, such approaches marginalise holistic outcomes valued in Pacific education, including wellbeing, cultural identity, and social responsibility.

Importantly, the conceptual framework presented in this paper highlights that administration, planning, and reporting are not discrete functions but mutually reinforcing

governance processes. In Fiji, misalignment between these processes often undermines coherence, with reporting serving upward accountability rather than feeding back into planning and administrative decision-making. Strengthening these linkages requires not only technical reform but also a shift towards learning-centred, culturally responsive leadership practices.

**Table 1: Comparative Table: Opportunities and Challenges in Fiji**

Domain	Opportunities	Challenges
School Administration	Strong communal values supporting relational leadership (Sanga & Chu, 2009); growing recognition of leadership beyond management (MEHA, 2021)	Compliance-oriented roles; limited leadership autonomy; high administrative workload (Lingam, 2014)
Strategic Planning	National coherence and alignment with system priorities; potential for participatory, community-informed planning	Standardised templates limit contextual responsiveness; limited planning capacity in schools (Lingam & Lingam, 2016)
Reporting & Accountability	Transparency and system-level monitoring; emerging digital reporting systems	Fragmented reporting demands; emphasis on quantitative indicators; limited data-use capacity (Schildkamp, 2019)
Cultural Responsiveness	Strong Indigenous and community knowledge systems; relational accountability traditions	Western managerial models dominate planning and reporting; Indigenous values under-represented (Thaman, 2009)
System Context	Small system size enables dialogue and policy coherence	Centralisation constrains innovation; uneven resourcing across schools

**PREPARING TEACHERS FOR ADMINISTRATION, PLANNING, AND REPORTING IN THE FIJIAN CONTEXT**

Preparing teachers for roles in school administration, planning, and reporting is critical for strengthening school governance and leadership capacity in Fiji. While administrative responsibilities have traditionally been concentrated at senior leadership levels, contemporary education reforms increasingly require classroom teachers to engage with planning processes, data reporting, and accountability mechanisms. In the Fijian context, effective preparation must therefore extend beyond technical skills to include leadership development, cultural responsiveness, and system literacy.

*Building Foundational Administrative Literacy in Teacher Education*

Teacher preparation programmes in Fiji should explicitly incorporate administrative literacy as a core component of pre-service and in-service training. This includes understanding school governance structures, ministry policies, and the administrative responsibilities associated with teaching roles. Lingam (2014) emphasises that many teachers enter leadership and administrative positions with limited formal preparation, learning administrative tasks through trial and error once appointed.

Pre-service programmes at teacher training institutions should introduce foundational knowledge of:

- School governance and administrative hierarchies

- Roles of principals, heads of department, and school management committees
  - Basic financial and resource management concepts
  - Ethical and professional responsibilities in administration
- Embedding these competencies early normalises administration as part of professional teaching practice rather than an additional burden.

### ***Developing Strategic Planning Skills through Practice-Based Learning***

Effective planning skills are best developed through experiential and reflective learning rather than abstract instruction. Teachers in Fiji should be exposed to planning processes that connect classroom practice with school-wide goals. Fullan (2014) argues that meaningful planning occurs when educators see clear links between strategic objectives and student learning outcomes.

Teacher preparation should therefore include:

- Participation in school development planning exercises
- Collaborative lesson-to-school planning simulations
- Analysis of real school plans and improvement documents
- Reflection on alignment between curriculum, assessment, and planning

In the Fijian context, planning preparation must also emphasise community consultation and cultural responsiveness, ensuring that school plans reflect local values, Indigenous knowledge, and parental expectations (Thaman, 2009; Nabobo-Baba, 2013).

### ***Strengthening Reporting and Data Literacy Capacities***

Reporting is one of the most challenging administrative domains for teachers and school leaders in Fiji, particularly due to increasing data requirements and limited training in data interpretation. Schildkamp (2019) highlights that data use for improvement requires specific skills in analysis, reflection, and decision-making.

Teacher preparation programmes should therefore prioritise:

- Understanding different types of school data (attendance, assessment, wellbeing)
- Interpreting reports for instructional improvement
- Writing clear, ethical, and accurate reports
- Using data to inform planning rather than merely meeting compliance requirements

Importantly, reporting preparation should move beyond technical skills to include critical engagement with data, helping teachers question what is measured, whose knowledge counts, and what outcomes matter in the Fijian context (Lingard, 2011).

### ***Cultivating Leadership Identity and Role Readiness***

A key challenge in Fiji is the rapid transition of teachers into administrative and leadership roles, often without structured mentoring or leadership preparation (Lingam & Lingam, 2016). Preparing teachers for administration therefore requires early cultivation of leadership identity and confidence.

This can be achieved through:

- Leadership shadowing and mentoring programmes
- Rotational administrative responsibilities within schools
- Reflective leadership journals and peer discussions
- Exposure to Pacific leadership models grounded in service, humility, and collective responsibility (Sanga & Chu, 2009)

Such approaches align with Pacific values and help teachers view administration as a form of service rather than authority.

### ***Embedding Cultural and Relational Accountability***

In Fiji, accountability extends beyond formal reporting to include relational obligations to students, families, communities, and faith-based organisations. Thaman (2014) argues that Pacific education systems must recognise relational accountability as central to educational leadership.

Teacher preparation should therefore:

- Emphasise culturally grounded leadership and ethical decision-making
- Include training on engaging school management committees and communities
- Value qualitative indicators such as wellbeing, inclusion, and cultural identity
- Encourage reflective practice grounded in Indigenous epistemologies

This approach ensures that administrative, planning, and reporting practices are culturally legitimate and socially meaningful.

### ***Supporting Continuous Professional Learning and System Alignment***

Preparation for administration should not end at initial teacher education. Ongoing professional development is essential to respond to evolving policy demands and digital reporting systems. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA, 2021) recognises the importance of leadership development pathways but requires stronger alignment between teacher training institutions, schools, and ministry expectations.

Key system-level strategies include:

- Structured induction for new administrators

- Leadership micro-credentials in planning and reporting
- School-based professional learning communities
- Clear progression pathways from classroom teaching to leadership

Such coherence reduces role strain and strengthens administrative effectiveness across the system.

### Synthesis

Preparing teachers for administration, planning, and reporting in Fiji requires a holistic, culturally responsive, and practice-oriented approach. Rather than treating administration as an add-on skill, teacher preparation must recognise it as an integral dimension of professional practice and educational leadership. By strengthening administrative literacy, planning competence, reporting capacity, and leadership identity, while grounding preparation in Pacific values, Fiji can develop a more confident, capable, and contextually responsive teaching workforce.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that school administration, planning, and reporting in Fiji must be understood as interdependent governance processes rather than isolated technical functions. While current practices have strengthened accountability and system coherence, they have also reinforced compliance-driven cultures that limit leadership agency, contextual responsiveness, and pedagogical focus.

The analysis highlights that Fiji's education system possesses substantial strengths, particularly in its relational leadership traditions, community engagement, and growing policy recognition of leadership effectiveness. However, realising these strengths requires a deliberate shift from procedural administration towards adaptive, learning-centred governance models.

### WAY FORWARD

Several forward-looking directions emerge from this study.

First, leadership development must be prioritised. Targeted professional learning in strategic planning, data literacy, and instructional leadership is essential to enable school leaders to move beyond compliance and engage meaningfully with improvement processes.

Second, planning frameworks should be redesigned to allow contextual flexibility. While maintaining alignment with national priorities, policies should encourage schools to integrate Indigenous knowledge, community values, and locally defined success indicators.

Third, reporting systems should be streamlined and reoriented towards learning. Reducing duplication, aligning reports with school plans, and strengthening feedback loops

can transform reporting from a burden into a tool for reflection and improvement.

Finally, accountability should be broadened to include relational and cultural dimensions. Recognising wellbeing, identity, and community engagement as legitimate educational outcomes would better align policy with Pacific educational philosophies and aspirations.

In moving forward, Fiji has the opportunity to model a contextually grounded approach to school governance, one that balances accountability with trust, coherence with flexibility, and global reform agendas with local wisdom. Such an approach holds promise not only for Fiji but also for other small and developing education systems navigating similar challenges.

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