

Decolonising Education in the Pacific: Balancing National Identity and Global Competencies in Fiji's Education System

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the enduring tension between national and international orientations in education systems within the Pacific, with a particular focus on Fiji. Situated within ongoing debates on globalization, decolonization, and the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the study interrogates how historically embedded colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary education policy, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices. Drawing on decolonial theory, particularly the works of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, alongside the concept of epistemic injustice advanced by Miranda Fricker, the paper argues that Western-dominated education systems systematically marginalize Indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural identities.

Using a qualitative, policy-informed analytical approach, the study synthesizes regional literature, national policy frameworks, and global education discourses to explore how Fiji's education system negotiates the competing imperatives of preserving national identity and achieving global competitiveness. The findings reveal that while international standards and global competencies, such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and innovation, are increasingly prioritized, they often reinforce Eurocentric epistemologies and contribute to the erosion of Indigenous knowledge systems and linguistic heritage. At the same time, national efforts to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy and Indigenous perspectives remain fragmented and insufficiently institutionalized.

The paper advances a conceptual framework for a hybrid, context-responsive education model that reconciles these tensions by integrating Indigenous epistemologies with globally relevant skills. It emphasizes the importance of curriculum reform, bilingual and multilingual education policies, teacher professional development, and inclusive governance structures that actively engage local communities. In doing so, the study positions decolonising education not merely as a cultural project, but as a critical pathway toward epistemic justice, social equity, and sustainable development in Fiji and the broader Pacific region.

Ultimately, the paper contributes to global discussions on education reform by challenging binary distinctions between national and international education models. It argues for a transformative approach that recognizes the value of plural knowledge systems and reimagines education as a site for both cultural preservation and global engagement in the 21st century.

Keywords: Decolonising education; Fiji; Pacific education; epistemic injustice; Indigenous knowledge systems; global competencies; curriculum reform; culturally responsive pedagogy; education policy; Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR); language and identity; educational transformation; decolonial theory; sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Education systems across the Pacific have historically evolved at the intersection of colonial legacies, national aspirations, and global pressures. In countries such as Fiji, contemporary education policy and practice reflect a complex negotiation between preserving Indigenous identity and meeting international standards of knowledge and skills. This tension has intensified in the context of globalization and the Fifth Industrial Revolution (5IR), where education systems are

increasingly expected to produce globally competitive graduates equipped with digital literacy, critical thinking, and innovation capabilities (UNESCO, 2021). However, these global imperatives often coexist uneasily with the need to sustain Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultural values that are foundational to Pacific societies.

The origins of this tension can be traced to colonial education systems that were designed to serve administrative, religious, and economic interests of

imperial powers rather than the holistic development of Indigenous communities. Colonial schooling introduced Eurocentric curricula, languages of instruction, and pedagogical approaches that marginalized local epistemologies and disrupted traditional knowledge transmission systems (Thaman, 2003). In Fiji, missionary and colonial education institutions privileged English language proficiency and Western knowledge frameworks, contributing to the gradual erosion of Indigenous languages and cultural practices (Nabobo-Baba, 2006). These historical dynamics continue to shape contemporary education systems, where Western epistemological dominance remains embedded in curriculum design, assessment regimes, and policy orientations.

The persistence of these structures can be understood through the lens of epistemic injustice, as conceptualized by Miranda Fricker (2007), which refers to the ways in which individuals and communities are wronged in their capacity as knowers. In the context of Pacific education, epistemic injustice manifests in the systematic devaluation of Indigenous knowledge systems and the privileging of Western forms of knowledge as universally valid. This imbalance not only undermines cultural identity but also limits the relevance and inclusivity of education for Indigenous learners. As Pierre Bourdieu (1986) argues, education systems reproduce dominant cultural capital, thereby reinforcing existing power structures and inequalities.

In response to these challenges, there has been a growing call for the decolonization of education systems, particularly within Indigenous and postcolonial contexts. Decolonising education involves critically interrogating and transforming the structures, content, and practices of education to recognize and legitimize diverse knowledge systems. Scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) emphasize the need to center Indigenous perspectives and methodologies in both research and education, while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) underscores the centrality of language in shaping cultural identity and intellectual autonomy. In the Pacific context, this includes integrating Indigenous epistemologies, values, and languages into formal education systems in ways that are meaningful and sustainable (Thaman, 2009).

At the same time, the realities of globalization and the 4IR necessitate engagement with international knowledge systems and competencies. Education systems in Fiji and the wider Pacific cannot afford to remain isolated from global developments in science, technology, and innovation. The challenge, therefore, is not to reject international standards, but to critically adapt and integrate them within local contexts. This requires a shift from binary thinking—where education is seen as either national or international—toward a more nuanced, hybrid approach that values both local relevance and global competitiveness (Tikly, 2004).

This paper argues that achieving such a balance requires a

fundamental rethinking of education systems in Fiji and the Pacific. It posits that decolonising education is not merely a cultural or symbolic endeavour, but a structural and epistemological transformation that addresses historical injustices while preparing learners for contemporary global realities. By examining the interplay between national identity and global competencies, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on education reform in postcolonial and developing contexts.

Specifically, the paper explores the following key questions: How can education systems in Fiji effectively integrate Indigenous knowledge and cultural values while meeting international standards? What are the implications of current policy and practice for epistemic justice and educational equity? And what models or frameworks can support a balanced, context-responsive approach to education in the Pacific? Through a critical analysis of these issues, the study aims to propose pathways toward an education system that is both locally grounded and globally relevant.

Ultimately, this paper positions education as a critical site for negotiating identity, power, and knowledge in the 21st century. In doing so, it highlights the importance of developing education systems that not only equip learners with the skills needed for global participation but also affirm and sustain the cultural and epistemological foundations of Pacific societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature

The literature on education reform in postcolonial contexts reveals a persistent tension between the imperatives of globalization and the need to preserve Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural identities. In the Pacific region, and particularly in Fiji, this tension is deeply rooted in colonial histories that have shaped the structure, content, and purpose of formal education systems. Contemporary scholarship engages with this complexity through multiple lenses, including decolonial theory, epistemic justice, globalization, and human capital development.

Colonial Legacy and the Foundations of Pacific Education Systems

A substantial body of literature highlights how colonial education systems were designed to serve administrative and economic purposes, often at the expense of Indigenous knowledge systems. Missionary and colonial schooling introduced Western curricula, languages, and pedagogies that marginalized local epistemologies

(Thaman, 2003). In Fiji, these systems privileged English as the language of instruction, contributing to linguistic hierarchies and the gradual erosion of Indigenous languages (Nabobo-Baba, 2006).

Postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said (1978) argue that colonial knowledge production was inherently tied to power, shaping how Indigenous societies were represented and understood. This perspective is further extended by Walter

Mignolo (2011), who conceptualizes the “coloniality of knowledge” as a continuing structure that privileges Western epistemologies long after formal colonial rule has ended. These insights are critical for understanding why education systems in the Pacific continue to reflect Western dominance despite political independence.

Table 1: Colonial Legacy and Its Contribution to Epistemic Injustice in Education

Historical Phase	Education Features	Impact on Indigenous Knowledge	Long-Term Outcome
Missionary Era	Religious schooling, English instruction	Suppression of Indigenous languages	Loss of oral knowledge systems
Colonial Administration	Eurocentric curriculum, exam-based system	Marginalization of Indigenous epistemologies	Cultural hierarchy in education
Post-Independence	Imported education models retained	Partial inclusion of local content	Continued epistemic imbalance
Globalization Era	Standardized global competencies	Western dominance in assessment systems	Persistent epistemic injustice

Source: Adapted from Edward Said (1978); Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012); Konai Helu Thaman (2003).

Epistemic Injustice and Educational Inequality

The concept of epistemic injustice, developed by Miranda Fricker (2007), provides a powerful framework for analysing the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge in education. Fricker distinguishes between testimonial injustice, where speakers are discredited due to prejudice, and hermeneutical injustice, where gaps in collective understanding prevent certain experiences from being adequately interpreted.

In the context of Pacific education, these forms of injustice manifest in curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and assessment systems that privilege Western knowledge while rendering Indigenous perspectives invisible or inferior. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) further explains how education systems reproduce dominant cultural capital, reinforcing social inequalities by valuing certain forms of knowledge over others. Indigenous students, therefore, often navigate an education system that does not fully recognize or validate their cultural and epistemological backgrounds.

Decolonising Education and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Decolonising education has emerged as a critical response to these challenges. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues that decolonization involves reclaiming Indigenous knowledge systems and challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies in both research and education. Similarly,

Ngūgī wa Thiong’o (1986) emphasizes the importance of language in cultural identity and intellectual autonomy, advocating for the use of Indigenous languages in education.

In the Pacific, scholars such as Konai Helu Thaman (2003, 2009) have been instrumental in promoting culturally inclusive education frameworks that integrate Indigenous values, knowledge, and pedagogies. These approaches emphasize relationality, community engagement, and holistic learning, which contrast with the individualistic and standardized models often associated with Western education systems.

Globalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and Education

The rapid advancement of technology and globalization has introduced new demands on education systems worldwide. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has intensified the emphasis on skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and innovation (UNESCO, 2021). These competencies are often framed as essential for participation in the global economy, reinforcing the importance of international standards in education.

However, scholars argue that the global education agenda can inadvertently perpetuate epistemic dominance by prioritizing standardized, Western-centric knowledge frameworks (Tikly, 2004). In developing contexts,

including Fiji, the adoption of global education models may lead to the marginalization of local knowledge systems and exacerbate existing inequalities. This raises critical questions about the extent to which global competencies can be integrated without compromising cultural relevance and identity.

Balancing National Identity and Global Competencies

The literature increasingly recognizes the need for a balanced approach that integrates national and international dimensions of education. R. Edward Freeman (1984) provides a useful lens for understanding education systems as serving multiple stakeholders, including local communities and global economies. Similarly, Amartya Sen (1999) emphasizes the importance of expanding individuals' capabilities, which includes both cultural and economic dimensions of development.

In the Pacific context, this balance is often conceptualized as a hybrid or context-responsive model of education that incorporates Indigenous knowledge while equipping learners with global competencies. Policy frameworks in Fiji, such as national education development plans, reflect an increasing awareness of this need, although implementation challenges remain significant.

Fiji-Specific Perspectives on Education Reform

Research on Fiji's education system highlights ongoing efforts to integrate Indigenous knowledge and promote culturally responsive pedagogy. Nabobo-Baba (2006, 2008) advocates for the incorporation of the *vanua* framework, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of people, land, and culture. However, empirical studies indicate that such approaches are not consistently implemented across schools, and Western curricula continue to dominate (Fiji Ministry of Education, 2019).

Additionally, issues such as the digital divide, teacher preparedness, and policy-practice gaps pose significant challenges to achieving a balanced education system. While global competencies are increasingly emphasized, there is a risk that these priorities may overshadow local needs and contexts if not carefully managed.

LITERATURE GAPS

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, several critical gaps remain:

Limited Integration of Decolonial Theory with Education Policy

While decolonial perspectives are well-developed theoretically, there is a lack of empirical research examining

how these frameworks can be operationalized within national education policies in Fiji and the Pacific.

Insufficient Fiji-Specific Empirical Studies

Much of the literature on Pacific education is regional or theoretical. There is a need for more context-specific, empirical research that examines how epistemic injustice manifests in Fiji's classrooms, curricula, and policy implementation.

Lack of Research on Hybrid Education Models

Although scholars advocate for balancing national and global education priorities, there is limited research on practical models that successfully integrate Indigenous knowledge with global competencies.

Underexplored Role of Language in Education Reform

While language is recognized as central to decolonization, there is insufficient research on effective bilingual or multilingual education policies in Fiji and their impact on learning outcomes and cultural preservation.

Limited Focus on the Fourth Industrial Revolution in Pacific Contexts

Existing literature often treats globalization and 4IR as universal phenomena, with limited attention to how these processes interact with Indigenous knowledge systems in small island developing states.

Policy-Practice Gap

There is a significant gap between policy intentions and actual implementation in schools. More research is needed to understand the barriers to implementing culturally responsive and inclusive education practices.

Lack of Interdisciplinary Approaches

Most studies focus on education alone, with limited integration of insights from sociology, anthropology, and development studies that could enrich understanding of education reform in the Pacific.

This study seeks to address these gaps by critically examining how education systems in Fiji can be reimagined through a decolonial lens that balances national identity and global competencies. By integrating theoretical insights with contextual analysis, the paper contributes to the development of a hybrid, context-responsive model of education that is both culturally grounded and globally relevant.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in a decolonial–socio-educational framework that integrates four complementary lenses to examine how education systems in Fiji can balance national identity with global competencies: (1) Epistemic Injustice, (2) Decolonial Theory, (3) Cultural Capital Theory, and (4) the Capability Approach.

Brief Explanations of the Four Theoretical Lenses

1. Epistemic Injustice

Developed by Miranda Fricker (2007), this concept explains how individuals or groups are wronged in their capacity as knowers.

- **Testimonial injustice:** Indigenous voices are undervalued or dismissed
- **Hermeneutical injustice:** Indigenous experiences are not adequately understood within dominant (Western) frameworks
In education, this leads to the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge, language, and perspectives.

2. Decolonial Theory

Advanced by scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, this theory critiques the ongoing dominance of colonial power structures in knowledge systems.

It calls for:

- Reclaiming Indigenous knowledge
- Revitalizing local languages
- Transforming education systems to reflect local cultures and identities

3. Cultural Capital Theory

Proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), this theory argues that education systems privilege the dominant culture’s knowledge, language, and norms.

Result:

- Students with Western-oriented knowledge succeed more easily
- Indigenous learners may be disadvantaged
Education reproduces inequality unless reforms are made.

4. Capability Approach

Developed by Amartya Sen (1999), this framework views education as a means of expanding people’s freedoms and opportunities.

Focus:

- Skills (e.g., digital literacy, critical thinking)

- Identity and agency
- Participation in society
Education should enable both global competence and cultural identity.

First, the concept of epistemic injustice, developed by Miranda Fricker (2007), provides the central analytical lens. It explains how Indigenous learners and communities may be disadvantaged in their role as knowers through testimonial injustice (their knowledge is undervalued) and hermeneutical injustice (their ways of knowing are excluded from dominant interpretive frameworks). In the Fijian context, this is evident where Western curricula and assessment systems marginalize Indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural practices.

Second, decolonial theory, as advanced by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), frames education as a site of power and contestation. It emphasizes the need to reclaim Indigenous epistemologies, languages, and cultural identities within formal education. This perspective underpins the study’s argument that education reform in the Pacific must move beyond superficial inclusion toward structural transformation of knowledge hierarchies.

Third, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) provides a sociological explanation of how education systems reproduce inequality by privileging dominant forms of cultural capital—typically Western knowledge, language, and norms. In Fiji, this helps explain why students from Indigenous or rural backgrounds may be systematically disadvantaged within standardized, exam-oriented systems.

Finally, the Capability Approach, associated with Amartya Sen (1999), broadens the framework by emphasizing education as a means of expanding individuals’ freedoms and opportunities. This includes not only economic capabilities (e.g., employability, digital skills) but also cultural and social capabilities, such as identity, agency, and participation in community life.

Together, these perspectives inform a hybrid, context-responsive model of education that seeks to reconcile global competencies with local relevance. The framework positions decolonising education as both an ethical and practical imperative—one that addresses historical injustices while enabling learners in Fiji to engage meaningfully in a globalized world.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study proposes a hybrid, context-responsive conceptual framework for education reform in Fiji, aimed at balancing national identity with global competencies. The framework conceptualizes education as a dynamic

system shaped by historical, structural, and contemporary forces, and identifies pathways for transformation toward epistemic justice and inclusive development.

At the foundational level, the framework recognizes the enduring influence of colonial legacies and globalization pressures, including the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). These forces have contributed to the dominance of Western knowledge systems within formal education, often resulting in the marginalization of Indigenous epistemologies, languages, and cultural practices. This condition is understood through the lens of epistemic injustice, as articulated by Miranda Fricker (2007), where certain knowledge systems are systematically undervalued or excluded.

The framework identifies key mediating structures within education systems, including curriculum design, language of instruction, assessment practices, and policy orientations. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu (1986), these structures are seen as mechanisms that reproduce dominant cultural capital, often privileging Western epistemologies over Indigenous knowledge systems.

To address these challenges, the framework introduces decolonising interventions, informed by the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986). These interventions include the integration of Indigenous knowledge into curricula, revitalization of Indigenous languages, adoption of culturally responsive pedagogies, and increased community engagement in education processes.

The outcome of these interventions is conceptualized through the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen (1999), which emphasizes the expansion of learners’ capabilities—not only in terms of economic and technical skills but also cultural identity, agency, and social participation. This leads to the development of a balanced education system that is both

locally grounded and globally relevant.

Ultimately, the framework positions education as a transformative space where epistemic justice, cultural sustainability, and global engagement can be achieved simultaneously, moving beyond the binary of national versus international education toward an integrated and inclusive model.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Reframing the National–Global Tension

The findings from the literature and conceptual analysis demonstrate that the perceived dichotomy between national and international education systems in Fiji is both historically constructed and analytically limiting. Rather than representing mutually exclusive pathways, national identity and global competencies are better understood as interdependent dimensions of a contemporary education system. However, the current configuration of education in Fiji reflects an imbalance, where global standards, often derived from Western epistemological frameworks, are prioritized at the expense of local knowledge systems and cultural relevance.

This imbalance can be traced to the enduring influence of colonial education structures, which established Western knowledge as the benchmark for legitimacy and success (Thaman, 2003). Despite post-independence reforms, these structures continue to shape curriculum design, language policies, and assessment practices. As a result, education systems in Fiji often reproduce what Miranda Fricker (2007) identifies as epistemic injustice, wherein Indigenous knowledge systems are marginalized or rendered invisible within formal education.

Table 2: Tension Between National Identity and Global Competencies in Education

Dimension	National Education Focus	Global Education Focus	Key Tension
Curriculum	Indigenous knowledge, culture	STEM, global standards	Relevance vs competitiveness
Language	Vernacular languages	English dominance	Identity vs global mobility
Skills	Cultural values, community knowledge	Digital literacy, innovation	Tradition vs modernity
Assessment	Holistic learning	Standardized testing	Local meaning vs global ranking

Source: Developed by the author, informed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986); Amartya Sen (1999); UNESCO (2021).

Epistemic Injustice and the Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge

The concept of epistemic injustice provides a critical lens for understanding how Indigenous learners in Fiji are positioned within the education system. Testimonial

injustice occurs when Indigenous knowledge is undervalued in classroom settings, while hermeneutical injustice arises when curricula fail to incorporate Indigenous frameworks of understanding. This results in a disconnect between students' lived experiences and the knowledge validated in formal education.

From a sociological perspective, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) explains this phenomenon as the reproduction of dominant cultural capital. In Fiji, proficiency in English and familiarity with Western knowledge systems are often rewarded, while Indigenous languages and epistemologies are sidelined. This not only disadvantages Indigenous students academically but also contributes to the erosion of cultural identity and self-worth.

Empirical observations further suggest that this marginalization is not merely symbolic but has tangible implications for educational outcomes. Students who do not see their cultural identities reflected in the curriculum may experience lower engagement, reduced motivation, and diminished academic performance. Thus, epistemic injustice operates as both a cultural and structural barrier to equitable education.

Globalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and Policy Pressures

The increasing emphasis on global competencies, particularly in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), has intensified the pressure on education systems to align with international standards. Skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and innovation are widely promoted as essential for participation in the global economy (UNESCO, 2021). In Fiji, national education policies have increasingly incorporated these priorities, reflecting a broader trend toward globalization in education.

While these developments are necessary, they also risk reinforcing epistemic hierarchies if implemented without contextual adaptation. As Tikly (2004) argues, global education agendas often carry implicit assumptions about knowledge and development that may not align with local realities. In the Pacific context, this can lead to the adoption of standardized curricula and assessment frameworks that marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems.

Moreover, the digital divide within Fiji exacerbates these challenges. Rural and maritime communities often face limited access to technology and infrastructure, creating disparities in the acquisition of global competencies. This highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that integrates global skills within locally relevant and accessible educational frameworks.

Decolonising Education: From Theory to Practice

Decolonising education offers a transformative pathway for addressing these challenges. Drawing on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), decolonization involves not only the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge but also the restructuring of power relations within education systems. Similarly, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasizes the centrality of language in reclaiming cultural identity and intellectual autonomy.

In Fiji, this requires a multi-dimensional approach:

- **Curriculum Reform:** Integrating Indigenous epistemologies, such as the *vanua* concept, into formal curricula
- **Language Policy:** Promoting bilingual or multilingual education to preserve Indigenous languages
- **Pedagogical Innovation:** Adopting culturally responsive teaching methods that reflect local values and practices
- **Community Engagement:** Involving local communities in the design and delivery of education

However, the analysis indicates that while these strategies are recognized in policy discourse, their implementation remains uneven. This gap between policy and practice underscores the need for stronger institutional commitment and capacity-building initiatives.

Toward a Hybrid, Context-Responsive Education Model

The discussion supports the argument that a hybrid education model, one that integrates national identity with global competencies, is both necessary and feasible. Such a model moves beyond binary thinking and recognizes the value of multiple knowledge systems. It aligns with the Capability Approach proposed by Amartya Sen (1999), which emphasizes the expansion of individuals' freedoms and opportunities.

In this framework, education is not solely about economic productivity but also about enabling individuals to:

- Maintain cultural identity
- Participate meaningfully in society
- Engage with global knowledge systems

A hybrid model would therefore:

- Embed Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum
- Contextualize global competencies to local realities
- Promote inclusive and equitable access to education
- Foster critical thinking that bridges local and global perspectives

Policy and Practice Implications

The analysis highlights several key implications for education policy and practice in Fiji:

1. **Reconceptualizing Curriculum**
The Curriculum frameworks must move beyond tokenistic inclusion of Indigenous content to fully integrate Indigenous epistemologies as foundational knowledge systems.
2. **Strengthening Teacher Capacity**
Teachers require professional development to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and effectively integrate Indigenous and global knowledge.
3. **Addressing the Digital Divide**
Investments in infrastructure and equitable access to technology are essential for ensuring that all students can benefit from global competencies.
4. **Enhancing Policy Coherence**
Greater alignment between national policies and school-level practices is needed to ensure effective implementation of education reforms.
5. **Promoting Participatory Governance**
Engaging communities, including Indigenous leaders and stakeholders, in education decision-making processes can enhance relevance and sustainability.

Synthesis and Contribution

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the challenge of balancing national and international education in Fiji is not simply a technical issue but a deeply political and epistemological one. It requires confronting historical injustices, rethinking knowledge hierarchies, and embracing a pluralistic approach to education.

By integrating insights from epistemic injustice, decolonial theory, cultural capital theory, and the capability approach, this study contributes a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding and addressing these challenges. It advances the argument that decolonising education is essential not only for cultural preservation but also for achieving equitable and sustainable development in the Pacific.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to critically examine the tension between national identity and global competencies within education systems in Fiji and the broader Pacific region, with a specific focus on the need to decolonise education in response to persistent epistemic inequalities. The analysis demonstrates that this tension is not a recent development but is deeply rooted in colonial histories that have shaped contemporary education structures, curricula, and knowledge hierarchies. These historical foundations continue to influence how knowledge is selected, validated, and transmitted within

formal education systems, often privileging Western epistemologies over Indigenous knowledge systems.

A key argument emerging from this study is that education systems in Fiji remain shaped by what Miranda Fricker (2007) conceptualizes as epistemic injustice. Indigenous learners and communities frequently experience both testimonial injustices, where their knowledge is undervalued or dismissed, and hermeneutical injustice, where their lived experiences are not adequately represented within dominant educational frameworks. This results in a systemic marginalization of Indigenous epistemologies, languages, and cultural practices within formal education.

Furthermore, the analysis confirms that this epistemic imbalance is structurally reinforced through what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) describes as the reproduction of dominant cultural capital. Education systems tend to reward familiarity with Western knowledge, language, and norms, thereby disadvantaging students whose cultural backgrounds do not align with these dominant standards. In the Pacific context, this dynamic contributes to educational inequities and the gradual erosion of Indigenous identity within schooling systems.

At the same time, the study acknowledges that the increasing influence of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has intensified demands on education systems to produce globally competitive graduates. Skills such as digital literacy, innovation, and critical thinking are now central to education policy agendas (UNESCO, 2021). However, as the analysis shows, these global competencies are often framed within Western epistemological paradigms, raising concerns about the continued marginalization of Indigenous knowledge systems if not carefully contextualized.

In response to these challenges, the paper argues for a decolonial transformation of education systems, drawing on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986). Decolonising education is understood not as a rejection of global knowledge, but as a process of rebalancing epistemic relations by legitimizing Indigenous knowledge systems, revitalizing local languages, and embedding culturally responsive pedagogies within formal education structures.

The study further highlights the relevance of the Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen (1999), which positions education as a means of expanding human freedoms and capabilities. Within this framework, education in Fiji should not only aim to develop economic and technical skills but also strengthen cultural identity, agency, and social participation. This dual emphasis provides a conceptual basis for reconciling national identity with global competencies.

Importantly, the paper proposes that the future of

education in Fiji and the Pacific lies in the development of a hybrid, context-responsive education model. Such a model integrates Indigenous knowledge systems with global competencies, ensuring that learners are both culturally grounded and globally prepared. This requires systemic reforms in curriculum design, language policy, teacher education, and governance structures, alongside meaningful engagement with local communities.

In conclusion, this study argues that the question is not whether education systems in Fiji should be national or international, but rather how they can be simultaneously locally meaningful and globally relevant. Achieving this balance requires moving beyond binary thinking and embracing epistemic plurality within education systems. Without such transformation, education risks perpetuating historical injustices and failing to serve the diverse needs of Pacific learners in a rapidly changing global context.

Ultimately, decolonising education is both an ethical imperative and a practical necessity. It is essential for addressing historical inequalities, strengthening cultural sustainability, and ensuring that education systems in Fiji and the Pacific contribute meaningfully to both local development and global engagement. As such, the transformation of education must be understood as a long-term, systemic process aimed at achieving epistemic justice, cultural resilience, and inclusive development.

WAY FORWARD / RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the preceding analysis, this section outlines strategic pathways for transforming education systems in Fiji and the wider Pacific region. The recommendations are grounded in decolonial theory, epistemic justice, and capability-based education, and are intended to support the development of a balanced, context-responsive, and future-oriented education system.

Curriculum Reform for Epistemic Balance

A fundamental step forward is the restructuring of national curricula to ensure equitable representation of Indigenous and global knowledge systems. Current curriculum frameworks should move beyond tokenistic inclusion of Indigenous content toward systematic integration of Indigenous epistemologies, histories, and worldviews.

- Indigenous knowledge systems, such as the *vanua* framework, should be embedded across subjects rather than treated as standalone topics.
- Curriculum design should reflect both local realities and global competencies, ensuring relevance for Pacific learners.

- Assessment systems should be reformed to value diverse ways of knowing, including oral traditions and experiential learning.

This aligns with the decolonial imperative advanced by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), who emphasizes the need to reposition Indigenous knowledge as foundational rather than supplementary.

Language Policy and Revitalisation

Language is central to identity, cognition, and cultural continuity. In line with the work of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), education systems must prioritise the revitalisation and institutional support of Indigenous languages.

- Strengthen bilingual and multilingual education policies, particularly in early childhood and primary education.
- Develop culturally relevant teaching materials in Indigenous languages.
- Encourage the use of Indigenous languages as legitimate mediums of instruction, not only as subjects of study.

Such measures are essential for addressing linguistic hierarchies and reducing epistemic injustice in education.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

Teachers are key agents in implementing educational transformation. Therefore, sustained investment in teacher education and professional development is critical.

- Pre-service and in-service training should include culturally responsive pedagogy and Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Teachers should be equipped to integrate global competencies (e.g., digital literacy, critical thinking) within culturally grounded teaching practices.
- Partnerships with Indigenous communities should be encouraged to support experiential and place-based learning.

This ensures that educators are not only transmitters of knowledge but also facilitators of epistemic inclusivity and cultural affirmation.

Policy Coherence and Institutional Alignment

A recurring challenge identified in the analysis is the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. To address this, stronger policy coherence and institutional alignment is required.

- National education policies should clearly articulate the balance between global competencies and Indigenous knowledge integration.
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks must assess not only academic outcomes but also cultural and identity-related outcomes.
- Education governance structures should ensure coordination between ministries, schools, and community stakeholders.

This approach reflects the need to move from policy rhetoric to effective implementation and accountability.

Community Engagement and Indigenous Participation

Sustainable educational transformation requires the active involvement of Indigenous communities in decision-making processes.

- Establish formal mechanisms for community consultation in curriculum development and education planning.
- Recognize Indigenous elders and knowledge holders as legitimate contributors to education systems.
- Strengthen school-community partnerships to support culturally grounded learning environments.

Such engagement ensures that education systems remain locally legitimate and socially accountable.

Equitable Access to Digital and Global Competencies

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, ensuring

equitable access to digital learning is essential. However, this must be done without reinforcing existing inequalities.

- Expand ICT infrastructure in rural and maritime areas to reduce the digital divide.
- Integrate digital literacy programs that are contextualised to local needs and cultures.
- Ensure that global competencies are taught in ways that complement, rather than replace, Indigenous knowledge systems.

This aligns with UNESCO’s (2021) emphasis on inclusive and future-oriented education systems.

Advancing a Hybrid Education Model

Ultimately, the findings support the development of a hybrid education model that integrates national identity with global competencies. Such a model rejects binary thinking and instead promotes epistemic pluralism.

This approach, informed by the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen (1999), ensures that education expands learners’:

- Cultural identity and belonging
- Critical and analytical skills
- Digital and global competencies
- Social and civic participation

A hybrid model positions education as both a tool for global engagement and a mechanism for cultural preservation.

Table 3: Strategic Approaches to Decolonising Education in Fiji

Area	Challenge	Strategy	Expected Outcome
Curriculum	Eurocentric bias	Integrate Indigenous knowledge systems	Balanced epistemic representation
Language	English dominance	Bilingual/multilingual education	Cultural and linguistic preservation
Pedagogy	Teacher-centred methods	Culturally responsive teaching	Inclusive learning environments
Policy	Weak implementation	Strengthen monitoring & accountability	Policy-practice alignment
Community	Limited involvement	Indigenous stakeholder participation	Contextually relevant education

Source: Adapted from Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012); Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986); Miranda Fricker (2007); UNESCO (2021).

Final Recommendation: Toward Epistemic Justice in Education

The overarching recommendation is that education reform in Fiji and the Pacific must explicitly aim for epistemic justice.

This requires dismantling structural inequalities in knowledge systems and ensuring that Indigenous ways of knowing are treated as equally valid and essential.

As argued by Miranda Fricker (2007), justice in knowledge systems is not only a moral imperative but also a

prerequisite for genuine educational equity. Without addressing epistemic injustice, efforts toward curriculum reform, digital inclusion, and skills development will remain incomplete.

In summary, the way forward requires a systemic, integrated, and culturally grounded transformation of education systems. By embracing decolonial principles, strengthening Indigenous knowledge systems, and aligning global competencies with local realities, Fiji and the Pacific can develop education systems that are both globally competitive and locally meaningful.

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