Teaching and Learning about Food and Textiles in Samoa: Multiple Perspectives on a new Curriculum

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Introduction

The aim of this research was to examine perspectives regarding teaching and learning about food and textiles technology (FTT) in secondary schools in Samoa. The study aimed to identify the major factors that impede successful FTT teaching and learning in the classroom.

This paper draws on a range of theories of inquiry to consider the most effective practices in teaching and learning FTT in schools. The study focused on FTT learners and the researcher collected information through interactions with principals, teachers and students in classroom settings.

In considering the specific needs of FTT students, I outlined what was important for teachers: responsive teaching, understanding of terminology, specific strategies and approaches concerning students’ learning FTT, teacher problem solving, and decision making about their daily lives in the classroom (Peacock, 2000).

In this study, it was important to find out how teachers and students learn to become active change agents in their schools and society. There was also a need to identify effective teacher professional development techniques that enable teachers to shape
their teaching skills and strategies for FTT learners. Very importantly, it was also necessary to identify how schools interact with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) and school committees as partners, as these agencies work collaboratively to ensure that appropriate support is provided for the management of the school. Last but not least, it was necessary to examine the wealth of knowledge and experiences of the research participants.

The research centred on six key themes. These are as follows:

- Professional development of teachers
- Teaching strategies
- Research schools
- Perspectives of the participants
- MESC issues
- School committees

**Background**

**Education goals**

The overall aim of education worldwide is threefold: intellectual development, citizenship training and life skills development (Levi, 1995; Thaman, 2002). Traditional teaching and learning in Samoa was mainly pragmatic and practical. Western intervention and the introduction of formal education changed Samoa’s traditional system of education. Today’s education system reflects the powerful influence of European and American colonialism as the education system reflects European and American education culture.

Tavana argues, “Samoan education still reflects the powerful influence of European and American colonization, with its primary focus on individual students and individual
performance” (1994, p.139). Today, education is wider in scope.–It is argued, however, that schooling should be concentrated on moral education, vocational skills, the development of a “whole” person, and the sustainability of the society (Afamasaga, 1999; Thaman, 1993; Nabobo, 1998; Sharma, 2000).

The Samoan education context

Church schools were established in the villages when the missionaries arrived in Samoa in the 1700s. Later, secondary education in Samoa was based on New Zealand’s education system. Education was facilitated by imported curricula and teachers and this model prepared students to sit the New Zealand School Certificate and the University Entrance examinations. Today, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture has the overall responsibility for schooling, but Samoa also still has church schools, which operate in partnership with the ministry. The family, traditional village institutions, churches and other community groups all have a role to play in this system.

Key cultural values

To understand any development in Samoa, including in its education system, it is important to understand Samoa’s culture. In Samoan culture, social structure and indigenous leadership play an important role in education, especially when a school principal is a matai (chief), who traditionally has a strong leadership role and promotes certain values and beliefs that are taught in schools). The values, beliefs, understandings and practices central to fa’aSamoa (the Samoan way of life) impact on education and relate to good teaching practice.

A teacher’s instruction rests upon the teacher as a source of authority, with knowledge and control and this arises from the teacher’s experiences and background (Bernstein’s,
1975). The local education values, beliefs and understanding influence how teachers and students approach teaching and learning. Bernstein (1975, 1996) pointed out that the way teachers go about their work directly reflects their ideas as to how students learn, how knowledge is best acquired, effective teaching methods to use, and how to understand the nature of students.

An important consideration within the school culture is to reflect on the learning processes occurring in the group setting. In Samoa, the cultural imperatives add extra weight to the notion that education is to create learning in communities in which power is shared to enhance the common good of the school. Furthermore, communal orientations impact on students’ schooling in significant ways (Bernstein, 1975). For example, in Samoa when a student behaves inappropriately this is a disgrace to both the student and the family. Because of the culture’s group orientation, in Samoan classrooms only some students are comfortable asking questions and generally students believe that they are trying to learn knowledge and skills from the teacher in the classroom.

Furthermore, in Samoa teachers are treated as equally important as family members, the classroom as home and the school as family (Davis, 2006). This adds weight to the importance of the influence of the classroom in the lives of Samoan students. Positive respect from teachers, principals, students and the school environment (Gibbs, 2005 as cited by Faaulufalega, 2008), influence schools, students and culture. If a principal does not display respect, the school will be considered unsafe (Faaulufalega 2008). In a school context, respect is usually engaged with the Samoan culture of collaboration, consensus and sharing values and beliefs of other people. Woods (2005) notes that respect refers to an appreciation for others. This is also described in Samoan as faaalaloalo, which means having a good relationship with other people.
Another cultural aspect to consider in the learning processes is the position of students themselves to achieve learning and education when they go to school. It is expected that students who follow instructions, obey and retain knowledge will develop cognitively and succeed academically. The students’ responsibilities do not end here though, because when they finish school for the day they have to do chores at home, such as clearing the family land of fallen leaves and litter, carrying water, collecting firewood and serving food to older people in the family (Gardner, 1965).

It is clear from literature that Samoan society can be said to be a male-dominated one, due to the gender roles. For example, men are mainly assigned tasks and roles relating to matters outside the home, such as leaders of families which requires interacting with other families. Women on the other hand are assigned roles within the family's household, which include housework and child care. These roles can change however, for example in cases where a woman takes full responsibility for the household (i.e. in the absence of a man). In such cases the woman may take control of family matters and undertake such tasks as working in the plantation. As suggested by the literature, learning about these demands and roles are additional to the formal learning obtained at school. These daily activities at home enable children to learn via observational, transmission means and personal experience. Although some may see this as an additional burden on children, in many respects it can support and nurture such learning. From my experience, “A child who is good at performing family chores is also an active learner in the classroom” (Moli 1993).

Another aspect to consider in relation to culture is the organizational culture (MESC) of the Samoan educational system. A number of specific key concepts are described and
the outcomes of these for daily living are considered. It is important to also consider the enriching cultural factors that define this society. The extensive research of Hofstede (2001, 2004) is useful for such an analysis. This analysis of values functions on each dimension, such as power distance, collectivism and individualism, long term and short term orientations, and masculinity and femininity are listed below with a commentary about their significance for Samoan life. This supports the idea that if principals, teachers, stakeholders, and students have consistent value structures then these values lead to success, and a process of cognitive change is more likely to occur. The difficulty is that the Western approaches to education are not necessarily aligned to local cultural values in Samoa. For example, modern learning theory encourages close interactive links between teachers and students, which is not consistent with Samoan values.

Dimmock and Walker (2005) stated that students, teachers and principals are more motivated when a school has a strong cultural basis and is along the same lines as their own. Moli (1993) similarly noted that Samoan cultural values are important for understanding teaching and learning. She identified that transmission learning, observational learning and learning by doing are linked to indigenous Samoan values; the implication being that these approaches need to be incorporated more fully into contemporary educational theory and practice in Samoa.

FTT is a part of the fa’aSamoa and yet there are contradictions in accepting its importance. There is a clash between educational systems priority demands and the cultural imperativeness. And this overrides the importance of FTT as a subject of study in the school context. But in a local sense it is recognised as important. For example, in the Samoan school context, every school recognises FTT education as part of the school. For example, most schools usually practice cooking, sewing, fabric printing,
feasting, floral arrangement in order to prepare young ones for their multiple roles in the future. Parents see the value of teaching and learning FTT courses which lead their sons and daughters learning more about home and family life. A good FTT education would also enable their children to be able to pursue an active and rewarding career in FTT. Providing for the family and well-being are skills, learned from FTT and support economic development for the family. Here we can see the family, village and values of the matai creating an educational system that supports and encourages students to learn the skills taught by FTT.

This approach is somewhat in conflict with the academic demands placed upon students and the priority given to core subjects, however. Therefore, the core and vocational subjects should both be properly implemented in the schools. Support for teaching and learning essential skills from any curriculum domain offer students opportunities to develop new skills and replenish their own creativity. National festivals and education can showcase students’ achievements in the skills of traditional visual arts, design technology, food and textiles, music, drama and dance (MESC Report, 2003).

The purpose of professional development, when a school seeks improvements and changes to teaching and learning practices (Fullan 1997; West, 1994), is to enhance student learning. In many settings in Samoa the management of the school (e.g., principal, HODs) determine what the training needs are so that skills and confidence to teach the subject are improved. For in-service training (IST) in assessment areas or curriculum matters, a special request is presented to the MESC to send experts from the Assessment or Curriculum Division to conduct in-service training for all the school teachers.
Very importantly, the idea is that an investment in teaching and learning FTT and other vocational subjects will help reduce unemployment and ensure a skilled labour force in primary, secondary and tertiary industries. This initiative encourages people of all ages to upgrade their skills, especially in the present competitive “world of work” context in Samoa industries.

Since 1990, the development of the Samoan secondary school curriculum has been strengthened with assistance from outside aid funding agencies. Both core and vocational subjects were developed (Petana–Ioka, 1995). A successful education in vocational subjects like FTT is an important part of the educational system (Maia‘i 1957; MESC 2002; and Nabobo 2001). Through FTT, students can gain skills to increase employment opportunities, particularly for school leavers who can then take part in the social and economic development of the country (Sharma, 2000). Creating a strong FTT curriculum will assist with the challenge facing parents and teachers to ensure that students emerge from school with a strong commitment to the community and to living a productive life (MESC 2002; Atwell, 1992). It is within this context that this research study was designed.

**An overview of FTT in Samoa**

In Samoa, FTT teaching and learning has been a non-compulsory subject in secondary schools. In my experience, and from accounts of older teachers, it seems that some students and parents believe that everyday tasks (jobs) like cooking, sewing, house-building fishing and hunting are activities to be learned at home but not at school. Furthermore, from anecdotal evidence, it appears that principals prioritise the teaching of the core subjects such as English, science, social studies, Samoan and mathematics,
rather than FTT subjects. Consequently, FTT is implemented by only a few secondary schools choosing to teach this subject area.

It is the thesis of this paper that the teaching of FTT does not provide “education for all” in the schools in Samoa. If this is the only opportunity for students in the skills of life and living, the MESC needs to upgrade teachers’ skills and support schools in terms of providing all the resources needed for practical teaching and learning. FTT needs to be recognized as being equally important as other subject domains because not only does it have the capacity to develop higher-level thinking skills but also provides an education that is needed by all students. It is important that the students learn more food and textile skills to contribute to their society.

Objectives of the research
Little research has been undertaken in the area of FTT and, accordingly, research is necessary to identify the processes that are involved in the nature of teaching and learning about FTT in secondary schools. Such information would help determine approaches useful to MESC for in-depth implementation of FTT. This study therefore aimed to identify the strengths and limitations of FTT teaching and learning in the light of the educational change literature and in the context of secondary schools policies and practices. It was anticipated that examining the major factors that impede the successful teaching and learning of FTT would provide insights and contribute significantly to more positive perspectives and attitudes towards teaching and learning of FTT in secondary schools.
Method

The research was a qualitative case study. The intention was to identify participants’ perspectives and insights regarding the teaching and learning of FTT. The participants comprised four students selected from two Year 12 classes in two secondary schools, as well as four parents, two MESC officers and four teachers.

The study utilised semi-structured questions, in-depth interviewing of focus groups, participant observation and document analysis. This form of data collection is consistent with the purpose of this research, namely to explore the perspectives and experiences of teachers, students and parents towards teaching and learning FTT in secondary schools. A focus group interview was an efficient way to collect a large amount of data in the limited amount of time that was available to undertake this research. Data was also gathered from conversations that occurred spontaneously.

During a discussion session the researcher is brought into the world of the research participants. The setting allows the researcher the flexibility to explore unexpected issues as they arise in the discussions. Usually this discussion approach is a good way of getting insights into the topics to be pursued in individual and focus group interviews and observations. Overall in this study, such sessions covered a lot of important information on FTT and about the people involved in this field. These interviews form the core of the research as I was interested in the participants’ perceptions and ideas that were expressed in oral communication.

Most conversations were in the Samoan language, and were later translated into English. The data reflects my role as a researcher and the lived experiences of the research participants.
I observed teaching sessions, watching both students and teachers. It was important to observe students for their performances in their practical tasks for instance, in practical cooking students were observed to see whether they could measure the ingredients accurately, how they applies the various techniques and processes in cooking, and how they presented their final products. In addition, teachers were directly observed to see how they assessed students practical sessions. It was found that the more experienced teachers were in doing practical activities, the more they were able to actively engage and motivate their students. As a result of this motivation, students were confident using their "hands on skills" to produce products.

I also undertook observations during the teachers’ in-service training. Listening to the teachers’ discussions on teaching strategies and other issues, including those relating to FTT, MESC and school committees were all important data for this study.

Document analysis was used to gather data from teachers’ work plans, curriculum materials, teachers’ timetables, teaching strategies and assessment activities. This information was then analysed.

This approach provided the necessary key data that was considered important for the investigation. It provided an opportunity to examine the issues discussed in depth and provide some consistency to the findings in terms of themes that could be deduced from the data.

**Findings**

The schools studied were referred to as Case-Study 1 (CS1) and Case Study 2 (CS2). CS1 was a government-managed school and with a roll of 400 predominantly Samoan
students while CS2 was a church-based school and with mainly Samoan Catholic students.

Case study (CS1)
This school began as a Form 3 to Form 5 junior secondary school, in 1997, and later established a Form 6 so that students could study for the Samoa School Certificate. In 2004, MESC selected this secondary school to become a college (senior secondary school). The majority of the students in this school come from the eight surrounding villages. Most of the students had passed the 8th Year External and Samoa Year Eight Certificate examinations. The successful achievers of the Year Eight Certificate examination with grade 2 and 3 become the feeders for this college.

The topics covered in FTT at this school include kitchen hygiene, food preparation, recipe trials, meal planning, nutrition, diseases, food budgeting, sewing and tailoring. According to one of the teachers, there were insufficient resources to cater for all classes in Years 9 to Year 13, because all the classes used the same equipment and resources. The equipment used for cooking included two kerosene stoves, two gas stoves and one electric (unused) stove, as well as some pots and a small number of cooking tools. The school has three electric sewing machines and one hand sewing machine to cater for the needs of many FTT students. Given that equipment was limited, most of the sewing is done by hand. It became clear in the study that the participants found that a lack of resources and equipment was problematic for student learning.

A problem noted with the FTT timetable was that insufficient time was allocated to implement the FTT curriculum. To compound matters, most of the FTT classes were taken in the afternoon when students were getting tired and were unable to fully
concentrate on the lessons. Morning classes were rare because the priority was given to academic subjects. Classes about the theory component part of the course involved the teacher writing notes on the board, and students found the theory sessions boring. The slow learners were encouraged to take FTT, while more academically oriented students were expected to study the academic subjects.

Consistent with the general school practice, the teacher prepared a weekly workbook in advance, which was signed by the principal or vice principal to approve that the teacher had made a week plan to follow. Along the same lines, this weekly plan prepared by the teacher is endorsed by the visiting school review officer during the week.

It was observed that the school operated with a largely academic curriculum, with a fixed timetable and teacher-directed lessons. In the school context, teachers valued the Christian beliefs as a guide for the school activities for maintaining peace in the school community. It was noted that there was collaboration and teamwork between the school committee, the principal and teachers in managing the school (CS1).

As noted earlier, in this study one way to identify teaching and learning FTT context was to observe what the teachers were teaching. Observing the teachers in their daily teaching routine provided an opportunity to understand how each teacher had transferred knowledge and skills to the FTT learners. One of the teachers observed had only been teaching FTT for four years and she was a new teacher to the school. The same teacher rarely attended any IST workshops for FTT teachers in teaching and practising skills. It was found that the delivery of the knowledge and practical tasks was teacher-directed and the students received these skills and knowledge via transmission rather than through practice. It was noted that the teacher who had more than 10 years
teaching experience in FTT was an experienced teacher in both areas such as teaching
the content knowledge and skills of the FTT curriculum.

There was considerable evidence from the school principal that FTT was valued, as he
confirmed that most of his teachers were sent to attend FTT professional development
courses. These encouraged the teachers to become familiar with the subject knowledge,
research and practical skills and teaching strategies of the new curriculum. It is clear that
the new curriculum was concerned with the means of achieving desired educational
outcomes (Fullan, 1991) and therefore was primarily concerned with the unity of theory
and practice (Lovat, 1991).

I would argue, as has Hattie (2003), that in terms of learning, teachers make the
difference and we must value the teacher and teaching as major change agents. Fullan
(1991:117) likewise suggests that “educational change” depends on what teachers “do
and think”. It is therefore very important in the teaching and learning FTT curriculum that
research skills, knowledge and based practical skills context should be properly taught
and passed on to the learners to achieve interest in learning.

**Case School 2 (CS2)**

This school was established in 1956 as a secondary school or college and catered for
secondary education for female students of the Catholic faith. Most of the school’s
students had completed the Samoa Year Eight Certificate Examinations.

In keeping with Catholic Church policy, the management of this school was under the
Catholic Board of Education; led by the director and officers. CS2 was managed on
conventional lines. The school organisation was similar to the government schools: from
the principal through an assistant principal and the heads of departments, to assistant teachers and students. In the overall administration, the school PTA and the Old Girls’ Association (SMOGA) play an important role in the school.

The staff meet monthly on matters concerning students, teachers general up-keeping of the school matters and teaching programmes. Some extra-curricular activities, such an English School Day are also held. The school’s English School Day committee plans activities such as English speech competitions, which are then approved by the staff. All matters concerning students and general operations are brought to the monthly staff meeting. Certain matters that are deemed to be confidential by the principal are dealt with by the administration committee.

Observation and document analysis revealed that this school operates with a largely academic curriculum, a fixed timetable and teacher-directed lessons. The researcher noted that the new and revised FTT curriculum was deemed to be adequately taught by the two teachers. According to the principal, the FTT teachers in her school were quite experienced and she supported them so that they could teach the FTT content and skills effectively. In general, she advised the inexperienced teachers to do more work and to work hand-in-hand with the experienced staff to promote better teaching and feelings of commitment and job satisfaction.

In summary, the principal and teachers prioritize the learners’ needs in terms of teaching and learning both the FTT content and skills. Furthermore, the researcher observed that the students were encouraged by the teachers to take FTT and other vocational subjects as high status subjects.
The two schools were similar in many aspects of administration and both the school buildings were well kept. One conclusion was that continuous professional training of teachers was a vital aspect of educational opportunity for teachers in both case study schools to upgrade their content knowledge and skills.

**Perspectives of the participants**

The teachers in this study were asked for their perspectives of FTT. Each emphasised the practical skills component of the course but they were also concerned about the other factors. It was noted that the MESC should be able to work collaboratively with teachers, principals and school committees out in the schools, and therefore the MESC, principals, and school committee needed to hear the teachers’ voices.

Teacher 1 stated that teaching and learning the FTT curriculum is very important, both theory and practice, but, unfortunately, very few resources provided by the MESC is a problem.

“Food and nutrition is an important curriculum implemented in schools today, unfortunately, we did not have enough resources to implement the practical side of the course. As a result I forked money out of my pocket to pay for ingredients for students’ practical tasks. This is not fair because my salary is low”.

The same teacher added:

“It is clear that FTT is now examined in the Year 12 and Year 13. Some of these students who would pass this important examination should be able to continue and to pursue education at the NUS or other universities in the South Pacific countries”.
T2 agreed that teaching the concepts of consumer education is an important aspect of FTT.

“It is an important subject in which students learn about the skills and knowledge of consumer education, such as expiry dates on food products, food labelling use of new technological appliances at home. The issue of food labelling, if not properly taught, could cause sickness in family members when they use expired food products”.

Teacher 3 said MESC should consider school needs in order to share resources equally between both government and mission schools.

MESC should not be biased in its decision-making. The resource implications for implementing FTT should also be included and be distributed to the mission schools, including our school. As it was clear that MESC was only giving the consumables, equipment, tools and utensils to the government schools.

Another teacher argued that professional development of teachers should be ongoing.

I believe that there should be a continuous training and workshops every month for teachers to empower them with knowledge and skills of FTT and other vocational subjects. Likewise, it is sometimes very difficult to work out the units of work in the new curriculum. I definitely needed help from the curriculum person to help out with these curriculum gaps.

Teacher 1 further noted that the skills learned through FTT allow graduates to develop small businesses at home, which is a good enterprise.

This subject was important to learn the life skills. I taught one student at this school and when he left school he started to run a small business at home, baking home
made scones, coconut cream buns, doughnuts and sells them to the village people. He earns a lot of money for the family and his children.

The principal (CS1) was not very happy with the way the school funds are handled by the school committee.

*Sometimes it was difficult to work with the school committee in terms of handling the schools funds. I requested for funds to fix the electric oven, unfortunately this was not done for ages.*

He further commented that MESC policies concerning the use of school funds was not consistently followed by the school committee.

The other principal had more praise for the school committee. She said:

*It is very important to work in partnership with the school committee and PTA to strengthen the school programmes and developments in school. I rely on them for their support and school improvements. I learned a lot from them in terms of sharing knowledge and experiences.*

The principal CS1 further commented that:

*MESC needs ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the school curriculum by the curriculum officers. This is important to ascertain if the teachers are following the curriculum correctly and to help teachers close gaps regarding teaching of the curriculum and teaching practices in the classroom.*

Teacher 1 also pointed out that there were issues and gaps that needed to be addressed in the school:
One of the principals has a biased attitude towards teaching subjects in school. His first priority is to appoint teachers to teach English or maths and science and not FTT. Secondly, FTT teachers have to struggle to get resources to teach the subject rather than the school providing the resources for teaching the content and practical tasks of this subject area. And, most importantly, this was the main reason why the school is short of FTT teachers; because the teachers who were pushed to take English, maths and science were originally trained as FTT teachers at the Faculty of Education of the National University of Samoa.

Both students and parents were also asked about their perspectives of FTT.

One parent, when interviewed, spoke about the value of FTT:

FTT is a “second class” option for early school dropouts. So the schools need to teach the FTT curriculum effectively, until the students leave school. This opportunity of “learning something” will enable the students to reach out to contribute to their families and society.

Another parent noted the demands of the FTT learning in the family:

I am required to pay the school fees and provided other resources needed for my children in learning FTT such as cooking ingredients, sewing materials and sometimes providing used cooking utensils from home for my daughter’s practical tasks in school.

Parent 4 explained further that she was willing to be a service provider for all the requirements needed by her children in learning FTT in order to get a blue collar job rather than remaining unemployed. As P4 expressed:
My daughter is the one doing all the household activities at home and planning good meals for the family. The reason is that she is learning FTT skills in cooking and food budgeting classes in school.

In summary, parents were psychologically prepared for FTT and other vocational subjects and they didn’t really mind spending a little more money on these subjects for their children although it was an extra burden on families.

Most students said that they liked all the strands taught in FTT because they enabled them to learn practical skills. All the skills indicated were important to their daily living activities. Unfortunately, however, they didn’t begin their learning of these skills at the primary schools; they began to learn this programme when they were enrolled in the secondary schools. It was noted that these students were unaware of the pathway to take in advance.

Student 1 commented as she supported the teaching and learning of this subject.

GETTING INTO FTT CLASS IS FOR MY SOCIAL LIFE AND A PERSONAL INTEREST, AND AS MY CONFIDENCE INCREASES I CAN EXTEND MY KNOWLEDGE IN THE PRACTICAL SKILLS, LEARNING HOW TO COOK AND SEW AND MANY OTHER OCCUPATIONAL ACTIVITIES.

Student 3 pointed out that she wanted to learn about textiles so she could become a designer and a dressmaker.

LEARNING FTT SKILLS IN SEWING IS USEFUL FOR ME TO CREATE MY OWN FASHION STYLES AND SEW MY OWN DRESSES TO WEAR WHEN I GO OUT WITH MY FRIENDS. I WOULD ALSO LOVE TO SEW AN OUTFIT TO WEAR FOR A SCHOOL PARTY. I AM PROUD TO WEAR A PULETAI (TRADITIONAL WEAR) THAT I CREATE USING MY OWN SKILLS. FURTHER, I CAN LEARN TO BECOME
a designer in dress making, because the designers earn a lot of money these days. … I can design evening wear for a Miss Samoa Pageant.

She further commented that she would develop a business of dress making of her own when she left school.

Student 4 noted she liked to grow flowers to sell for floral arrangements for church decorations and for making wreaths for funerals.

“I want to become a florist so that I can build a shop to sell fresh flowers and wreaths to the people of Samoa. Most Samoans like to have fresh flowers for church decorations and making wreaths when people pass away.

In summary, it is clear from the participants responses that all knowledge and skills learned from FTT teaching and learning are valuable, and the learning and skills development can influence the lives of students and can make a contribution to the economic development of communities in Samoa.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the major factors that impede the successful teaching and learning of FTT in secondary schools in Samoa. The key participants selected for this study have ongoing involvement with the teaching and learning of FTT. Significantly, the participants’ varying knowledge and experiences related to FTT within the schools enabled the researcher to understand the big picture what was happening in the field. The use of the qualitative case study method provided the opportunity to perceive the situation about FTT from a different perspective. In examining the findings,
three main themes emerged. These were: professional development, MESC polices, and school governance.

**Professional development**

This study confirmed that professional development has an important role to play in the effectiveness of teaching of FTT. According to MESC (2006) professional development should be school-focused, and embedded in the job of teaching.

To create the conditions necessary to support teacher learning and development, the teachers must hold discussions within their school context and discussions must take place over sustained period of time. On the same lines, the literature suggests effective professional development frequently requires groups of teachers to work actively and collaboratively together (Stoll 2000). Bell and Evans (2003) found that continuing teacher professional development does lead to improvements in teaching and learning in classroom practices. Furthermore effective learning is not just about building teacher knowledge, but also refers to transferring teacher learning into classroom practice (Hill, Hawk and Taylor, 2002).

It was clear from the study findings that a range of learning activities from the teacher training workshops are effective elements for changing teachers’ behaviour. Transferring what they have learned needs should be considered more carefully, however. Important approaches include the teaching of specific strategies, observation of teaching and providing feedback to teachers.

It is also important to point out that teaching and learning about FTT will only succeed if the administrators and teachers are adequately prepared with the skills, knowledge and
positive attitudes towards FTT in order to carry it out effectively. Therefore, I believe that there should be continuous training and workshops for FTT teachers and principals to encourage them to keep learning.

Teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about teaching are reflected in many aspects of their work. It is necessary for teachers to understand the impact of their teaching and gain the required practical skills to support students’ capacity to learn.

The study found that in the surveyed schools the delivery of the knowledge and practical tasks was teacher-directed and the students received these skills and knowledge in a fairly passive manner. Most teachers directed the lessons, giving out instructions for getting things ready to do their practical tasks. One of teachers did not use any practical activities in her teaching. She mostly delivered the lessons by explaining the theory,— an approach which was not in accordance with the curriculum as provided in the textbooks. As a result, her students did not appear to be actively engaged in learning. A more student-focused approach to learning is believed by many experts to be more effective, although this is somewhat contrary to the traditional Samoan cultural approach to teaching.

There was a general feeling among the study participants that practical FTT skills are important for village life and for the workforce. It was agreed by many that teaching and learning FTT can also help with the economic development of Samoa by training the country’s youth for many job opportunities, including in the tourism industry and the food industry.
The bias in CS1 towards teaching academic subjects rather than vocational ones was an important issue that should be addressed. In CS1 the slow learners were pushed to take FTT while more academically oriented students were encouraged to study the academic subjects. This was not the case at CS2. The teachers and principals at CS2 supported teaching and learning about FTT and other vocational subjects in their schools. Significantly, FTT is a compulsory subject at CS2.

The general impression was that the principals of the two schools have different perceptions regarding the importance of teaching and learning of FTT. A fundamental change is needed in thinking about the value of FTT and who should enrol in it as a subject, including whether all students should have this option. After all, the key processes of learning (analysis, judgement, critical thinking, etc) could be taught via this subject. The CS2 students were all in favour of learning vocational subjects such as FTT. It was found that the students from this school who went on to study at university in Samoa performed well in FTT at the Foundation level, and it was believed that these girls had been trained well at senior secondary level.

Regarding professional development, the findings indicated that in general terms there was a positive focus on ongoing learning for the teachers and principals, but more direction was needed in the area of FTT.

**MESC policies**

A clear message from many participants in the study was that the MESC needs to thoroughly monitor the school curriculum and to conduct ongoing training for teachers in all subject areas. Vocational subjects such as FTT should be considered as being on the same level as all other subjects. It was clearly stated by the teachers that FTT was a
useful culturally-embedded subject, which enabled students to learn how to cook, sew, weave local crafts, arrange flowers, make wreaths, paint fabric and do screen printing. Such skills give young people the opportunity to gain employment so as to earn money to raise their families. Furthermore these skills provide young people with the opportunity for self-employment.

Most students said that they wanted to continue education in FTT because the subject would give them practical skills. Teachers also supported teaching and learning FTT in Samoa and wanted FTT to become a mainstream subject of the curriculum so as to influence the lives of students in their learning capacity and to enable them to contribute positively to the economic development of Samoa. The findings therefore indicate that the MESC should implement policies to strengthen the teaching and learning of vocational subjects and make them as equally important as academic subjects.

One important issue is the shortage of FTT teachers in the school system. The MESC needs to resolve this issue by upgrading teachers’ salaries and providing more opportunities for them to extend their learning academically.

Another problem of the MESC policies is also inconsistent in practice – the allocation of funds to the school committee causes difficulties. As indicated by the results of this study MESC, principals, teachers and the community need to work collaboratively to ensure that a school becomes an effective learning community for FTT and so therefore needs to be more engagement between the agents.

Overall, it was clear that there is a need for MESC to further support teaching and learning FTT in all aspects including in the provision of resources, and in providing
ongoing monitoring to check the equipment, tools, utensils and consumables supplied to schools for implementing vocational subjects effectively.

Perhaps most importantly, teacher professional development must be improved. One of the key findings of this study is that teacher professional development needs to be developed by the authorities to improve teachers’ teaching strategies so that students learn effectively. If the teachers and principals are professionally trained, the school would have better student learning outcomes and achievements.

**School governance**

The two principals that participated in the study believed that the school committees and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) in Samoa play important roles in school culture in both rural and urban areas. The function of the school committee is to ensure that support is provided for suitable tuition in subjects required by the government for the safety of teachers and students, to address property issues concerning where the school is located and to oversee the disbursement of school fees and other funds raised in accordance with the annual school budget and MESC policies (MESC Policies 2002, 2003). The teamwork between the school committees and PTAs and teachers within the school aims to enhance the development of the school system and thereby provide better education for children of Samoa. This seemed to work well in one of the schools but there were difficulties at the other school.

Furthermore, school principals need to prioritise teaching FTT rather than allocating FTT teachers to teach core subjects and only encouraging the slow learners to study FTT.
Conclusions

The findings of this study clearly indicate the importance and positive value of FTT and yet there are many barriers to its effective implementation. This study found that the three major factors that impede the successful teaching and learning of FTT in secondary schools in Samoa are as follows: inadequate professional development of FTT teachers, resulting in ineffective teaching strategies; a lack of MESC policies that support FTT; and a lack of emphasis on FTT by the school principal. It is believed that well-trained teachers who receive ongoing training, well-equipped schools, and a supportive context for teaching and learning of FTT (including an equal emphasis on vocational and academic subjects) will improve FTT teaching and learning outcomes and achievements.

As highlighted in this report, FTT is an important part of the Samoan culture and therefore should be cherished ... currently that appears not to be the case.
References


