

# The Impact of a Book Flood in Fiji Primary Schools

Warwick B. Elley

&

Francis Mangubhai

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### The Authors

*Francis Mangubhai*, MA in Applied Linguistics (Essex), of University of the South Pacific. Until recently, Senior Adviser in English, Fiji Ministry of Education. Areas of study include English curriculum development, teacher training and textbook writing. Publications include English textbooks for Fiji and Pacific secondary schools, editor of local literary journal, *Sinner*, editor of *English Journal for Fiji Teachers*, and editor of short story collections.

*Warwick B. Elley*, PhD in Educational Psychology (Alberta); Fellow of the Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific; formerly Assistant Director, NZCER. Areas of study include measurement, research in reading, curriculum evaluation. Publications include *External Examinations and Internal Assessments* (NZCER), *The Role of Grammar in a Secondary School Curriculum* (NZCER), *Evaluation of the Quality of Education in Indonesia* (Indonesian Ministry of Education), and numerous series of standardized achievement tests.

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## Introduction

Fiji primary school children are introduced to English as a second language in the first year of school. However, in most cases the medium of instruction is Fijian or Hindi vernacular until Class 4 when English becomes the language of the classroom. Understandably, the transition to English is frequently difficult, particularly in rural areas, where English is rarely used outside the classroom. Some of these difficulties have been identified in surveys of achievement conducted in primary schools in recent years.

Thus, a national reading survey, conducted by the Suva Institute for Educational Research (Elley and Mangubhai, 1979), found that approximately one-quarter of Class 6 children were unable to read simple English prose with enough understanding to cope with daily classroom tasks. A similar figure was found in another survey conducted for the Ministry of Education (Elley and Achal, 1980), and several small-scale surveys using cloze tests have shown that large numbers of children are unable to read independently the textbooks and other materials designed for them (Stamp, 1979; Elley, 1980). The evidence cited below shows that weaknesses in listening, speaking and writing skills in English are equally serious. How can this state of affairs be improved?

In the project of the Suva Institute for Educational Research, referred to above, one promising avenue for exploration was identified. It was found that those children with high achievement levels invariably came from schools with large libraries, and/or homes with many books. Access to books seemed to be important for language learning. While we cannot state with assurance, from such a survey, that an increase in the supply of books would automatically bring about a dramatic improvement, it is clearly a plausible — and practicable way — of approaching the problem.

Unfortunately, most Fiji primary schools have very few books (see Ragni, 1979). Reading for pleasure is not a widely accepted custom, yet recent writers on the subject believe that much of our language learning takes place through reading (e.g., Smith, 1978; Lado, 1977). Also, few Fiji teachers or parents read aloud to their children. Yet exposure to a rich range of stories has much support from research as an effective way of improving children's language development (e.g., Chomsky, 1979; Lado, 1977).

Much of this research has taken place with first language learners of English. How relevant is it in the South Pacific? There is already some evidence from Niue that reading has an important role to play in improving children's mastery of English as a second language. In 1978, the Director of Education in Niue, Mr Peter De'Ath introduced a new reading programme at Class 3-4 level, based on the extensive use of what he called the *Fiafia Readers*. These booklets were written to have a local flavour and a lively story, and teachers were trained to use them in a 'Shared Book Experience' approach, with their children. In this method, teachers share the books with the pupils in a typical bed-time story situation, with much discussion, chorus reading, role playing and follow-up language activities, all conducted in a non-threatening atmosphere. New language is taught through the print, with assistance from context cues, pictures and teachers' explanations.

An evaluation of this project in Niue primary schools showed that Class 3 and 4 pupils who made use of the *Fiafia Readers* through the Shared Book Method improved their English language growth dramatically (Elley, 1980; De'Ath, 1980) and raised the possibility of a general improvement in English learning in the region.

Other anecdotal evidence about the potential of books in South Pacific schools has been provided by Douglas McKeating, a former English language adviser in the Fiji Ministry of Education. McKeating used a book-based programme in a Solomon Islands Secondary School in the late 1960s. The pupils were given an extensive diet of Longmans Simplified readers, Biggles books, 'Famous Five' stories of Enid Blyton, etc., and the teacher read aloud to the pupils for at least three half-hours per week, while the pupils followed the print in their text. Opinion surveys showed that the pupils were enthusiastic about the programme, and examination results in the Cambridge Overseas Examinations showed a remarkable improvement, from a pass rate of less than 30 percent to a new rate of nearly 80 percent, according to McKeating.

He repeated the experiment in a rural Junior Secondary School in Fiji, in 1971, in association with a Peace Corps teacher, Tom Rekob. Once again the pupils became 'hooked on books', and examination results improved considerably. These two examples, although set in a secondary school context, suggest that the Niue primary school experience may not be unique. What was required was a carefully controlled experiment, across many schools, in which some pupils were given a rich diet of books, and their progress compared with those of comparable ability and circumstances, but who had little or no access to books. This, in essence, was the aim of the 'Book Flood' project.

## Outline of the Project

The idea of an experimental Book Flood in primary schools was by no means a new one. In 1973-4 the New Zealand Book Council, in collaboration with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, had undertaken a small-scale Book Flood in two Auckland primary schools which had large numbers of Polynesian immigrant children. While the children obviously made substantial improvements as a result of their exposure to a comprehensive range of good books, the teachers' strategies in getting the children involved were not carefully controlled. Nevertheless, the results were promising (see Elley, Watson & Cowie, 1975) and provided some suggestions for the present project. In order to minimize the effects of differences in the teachers' skills, it was resolved to use a large number of schools, and to confine the study to two levels in the middle primary school. Rural schools were preferred, as most had very few books and the amount of English language used outside the school was sufficiently slight to assess more clearly the effects of the school programme on the children's language development.

A sub-committee of the Suva Institute for Educational Research drew up plans, late in 1979, for a Book Flood in 20 schools at Class 5 and 6 levels, and applied to the IYC Telethon Trust, New Zealand, for aid in purchasing suitable story books. The Trust provided (NZ)\$5,000 and, with an additional grant of \$1,000 from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, the committee had enough aid to proceed. But it had only enough resources to provide 16 classrooms with 250 books each. Therefore, eight schools were selected to receive the books at two class levels — Classes 4 and 5. Class 6 was rejected as many schools are concerned about the Fiji Intermediate Examination at that level, and are less interested in experimenting with new programmes. Class 3 would have been unsuitable too, as the pupils have had so little exposure to English reading that the selection of suitable books would have been difficult. Indeed, it was no easy task to find suitable stories for Class 4 pupils, as virtually none has been written for young South Pacific children.

The schools chosen to participate were predominantly in the rural area beyond Nausori town. To be considered suitable, they had to have at least 15 pupils and no more than 40 in each class level. They should also have few children's books in the school. In these respects, they were typical of most primary schools in Fiji. Fifteen schools were pre-tested initially, in order to identify eight for the book programmes, and four others, a control group, which had pupils of sim-

lar English reading ability, and ethnic distribution. These schools would receive no additional books, but were to serve as a control group, to show how much progress is normally made by Fiji children during the school year.

The eight schools finally selected for the Book Flood were divided into two similar groups of four, so that an additional comparison could be made between two methods of using the books with the pupils. Thus, three groups of four schools were selected, known respectively as the *Shared Book Group*, the *Silent Reading Group* and the *Control Group*. Each had a cross-section of teachers, of both sexes and various levels of experience. Each had approximately 100 pupils at each of the two class levels. And each had very few books over and above their normal classroom readers. Every classroom was working on the same English programme, and the timetables were remarkably similar from school to school. Fortunately all headmasters agreed to cooperate in the experiment, and all were pleased to receive the 500 children's books for their school as a donation from the IYC Telethon Trust and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

In order to clarify the effects of the Shared Book Experience method, which had proved so successful in Niue, it was decided to train the eight teachers in four of the schools to use this method of involving the pupils in the new books. To achieve this end, a Maori and Islands School Adviser from the Department of Education in Auckland, New Zealand, was brought to Fiji to conduct a three-day workshop on the Shared Book method in March 1980, just before the first books arrived from New Zealand. The eight teachers in the four Shared Book schools attended this workshop, held at Nasinu Teachers College, and also received a short visit and demonstration by the adviser in their classrooms.

The second group of schools, the Silent Reading group, was given no workshop. The teachers were merely advised to encourage the children to read the books, chiefly by setting aside up to 30 minutes each day for silent reading of the books which they chose from the school's allotment. The teachers in the control group of schools received no books, but they did have a one-day workshop in April, on the techniques of teaching English. This was conducted by two Ministry of Education advisers who were fully aware of the nature of the project. All teachers retained their usual English timetable. The two Book Flood groups merely replaced some of their normal graded reading book periods with activities designed to encourage extensive reading with the books provided. In this way it was ensured that the eight Book Flood schools spent no more time on English than the four control schools.

The first books were given to the schools late in March 1980, and

additional sets were provided as they came to hand, until by October each class had approximately 250. They were displayed variously on bookshelves, on tables, or on makeshift wire hangers. Each class had only one or two copies of each book, and all schools received the same books, with a few exceptions. More difficult books were provided for Class 5 pupils, and simpler ones for Class 4, but over half were provided for both class levels. In retrospect, it is clear that some of the books were unsuitable, but enough good ones were purchased to capture most children's interest.

In the first two weeks in November, slightly less than eight months after the project began, all 24 classes — 16 Book Flood and eight Control — were given a series of English tests and interviews, designed to assess the effects of the books on the children's reading and other English language skills. These tests are described in more detail later in this report.

Thus, the overall plan of the project can be seen in the following diagram.

Group	February	March	April-October	November
<i>Shared Book</i>	Pre-tests	3-day Workshop	250 books supplied to Classes 4&5	Post-tests
<i>Silent Reading</i>	Pre-tests	No Workshop	250 books supplied to Classes 4&5	Post-tests
<i>Control</i>	Pre-tests	1-day Workshop	Usual programme No extra books	Post-tests

## Teaching Procedures

Access to books is of little value unless the pupils are led to do something constructive with them. In this project, the Shared Book Experience method was deliberately chosen as it is relatively easy to learn the basic elements, and it had already shown promise in earlier studies.

### (i) *Shared Book Experience Method*

This method was developed by Don Holdaway in New Zealand primary schools, and the rationale behind it is set out in a variety of publications (e.g., Holdaway, 1979, NZ Department of Education, 1978). The teacher chooses an interesting story, and introduces it to the class in a sharing experience, similar to a bed-time story situation. Discussion takes place about the pictures, the likely contents, some new words, and the teacher then reads all — or some of it — to the group. To ensure that all the children can see the print and pictures, the book is often 'blown-up', or enlarged, beyond the normal size. On the second and third readings, the children are encouraged to join in, until they are reading with the teacher. She asks questions and encourages discussion about the book as they progress. Prediction and confirmation of events and new words or phrases are emphasized, so that the children are constantly striving after meaning. If they enjoy the book they will be motivated to read it often, in the group, in pairs, or as individuals, and thus will master the language without threat or pressure. Follow-up activities include art work, role playing, word study and writing. The essence of the method is that new learning takes place at the point of interest, rather than according to a graded system.

These principles and techniques were discussed and illustrated with the eight teachers from the Shared Book schools at the three-day workshop in March. Most of the teachers saw merit in the method, and began to develop large books to use in group reading situations. The teachers copied stories from books on to large sheets of paper and illustrated them, so that the print and illustrations could be seen from a distance. During the year, the typical pattern was for teachers to study one new book per week, but to return to favourites many times at later dates. A few teachers kept these blown-up books on display, while others were less energetic and used the method only occasionally. No compulsion could be exercised, and it should be stressed that the participating teachers were a typical cross-section, with a variety of views about reading instruction and the importance of reading in an English language programme. In fact, one Class 5 teacher used the method only occasionally, and confessed he thought it unsuitable for him or his class.

### (ii) *Silent Reading Group*

The eight teachers in this group were advised by the authors, during school visits, to display the books attractively, to draw children's attention to them, to read them aloud, and to encourage regular silent

reading, up to half an hour per day. No special training was given. The principles on which the regular reading is based are those derived from the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) Programme, popularized in USA by McCracken (1971). The key notion of SSR is that to progress in reading a child must read — regularly and often. A definite period should be set aside every day for sustained reading, and the teacher should set a good example by reading also. The pupils choose their own books; no reports are required and no questions are asked about what is read. The teacher trusts the pupils and the research evidence from USA seems to suggest that the method works — at least as well as conventional instruction.

### (iii) *Control Group*

The teachers in the Control Group were aware of the experiment. All eight classes were pre-tested in February, and all were advised that their children would be re-tested in November. They were requested not to alter their usual English programme, and a one-day workshop on English language teaching was arranged for them in April. As in the other two groups, the teachers represented a typical cross-section, who taught by orthodox methods, although it was later discovered that one Class 4 teacher was using a procedure common in Book Flood schools. She spent approximately half an hour each day reading stories to her children, a very unusual practice in Fiji primary schools.

Apart from this aberration, and the single Class 5 teacher who preferred phonic drills to the Shared Book Experience, there were a number of other departures from the ideal experiment. In the Shared Book group one teacher was given an additional class to mind for one term, and another was transferred to a different school in August, and his replacement could not be properly trained. In the Silent Reading Group, two female teachers were absent for 10 weeks on maternity leave, but were replaced by older men who continued the programme. One teacher was given an additional class for a term, while another was replaced while she spent a term on secondment at Teachers College. Two control teachers were replaced while on maternity leave, while another had a change of teacher at mid-year. Such disturbances are common in Fiji primary schools, and while they make the project more life-like, they make it more difficult to demonstrate the real effects of the different programmes.

## Assessment Techniques

To assess the effects of the Book Flood, all pupils in Classes 4 and 5 in the three groups were given a general test of English reading comprehension in February, and were subsequently given an extensive range of tests of reading and other English language skills in November. The complete list of tests given is as follows:

### Class 5

1. *Pre-test: Reading Comprehension.* Sentence-completion test of 35 multiple-choice items, developed by the senior author in the Cook Islands and used subsequently in the Niue evaluation (Elley, 1980). The reliability of the test is high ( $r_{11} = 0.90$ ) and correlations with other reading tests range from 0.78 to 0.83.
2. *Post-test: STAF Reading Comprehension (Form Y)*  
Reading test of six passages and 32 multiple-choice items was given in November. It was developed for the Fiji Ministry of Education for administration to Class 6 pupils. Reliability is reported as 0.92, and correlations with other reading tests and Fiji Intermediate external examinations are also high. (Elley and Achal, 1980)
3. *STAF Listening Comprehension (Form Y)*  
This test is one of the same Ministry of Education series of standardized tests designed for Fiji Class 6 pupils, and was also given in November. There are 36 multiple-choice items based on seven short passages read aloud by the administrator. The pupils do not see the options to the questions, or the passages. Reliability is estimated at 0.88, and correlations with other English tests in the series range from 0.59 to 0.72. (Elley and Achal, 1980)
4. *English Structures Test.* This test of 20 open-ended questions was prepared for the project, and trial-tested on a sample of children in a Suva suburban school. It requires pupils to complete short sentences in their own words, using structures that they have learned in Class 5 from Books 10–12 of the Tate Oral Syllabus. The focus of the assessment was on the right structure, rather than on spelling or punctuation. The marking was done 'blind' (i.e., without knowledge of which group the pupils belonged to) by one of the authors, and half the papers

were check-marked by two other markers from the Ministry of Education.<sup>1</sup>

5. *Composition Test.* Pupils were required to complete, with at least 5 sentences, a short story about an old lady who lived alone with her cat and her hen. Equal weight was given for content, sentence sense and mechanics. As for the English structures test, the marking was done 'blind', and then check-marked.<sup>2</sup>

### Class 4

1. *Pre-test.* Reading Comprehension. As for Class 5.
2. *Post-test.* Reading Comprehension. Same as the Pre-test.
3. *English Structures Test.* Specially prepared for the project, this test consisted of 35 multiple-choice items assessing pupils' ability to select the correct structure to use in each sentence. All structures were included in Books 9–11 of the Tate Oral Syllabus. It was trial tested and revised in a Suva primary school before use.
4. *Word Recognition Test.* Every Class 4 pupil was interviewed separately, and questioned about his or her background and attitude to English. Then, every second pupil was given a Word Recognition Test consisting of 50 graded words. Pupils merely had to recognize and pronounce each word correctly. If they missed four consecutive words they were stopped. The score was the number of words correctly pronounced. The test was the same as that used in the Niue evaluation, in which it proved both reliable and sensitive to changes in reading levels.
5. *Oral Sentence Repetition.* This is a test of oral language adapted from Clay's (1976) Test. Pupils are required to repeat orally after the examiner a series of 28 English sentences graded according to complexity of structure. Those who are unfamiliar with a particular structure have more difficulty doing this correctly, so the test is more a test of language mastery than memory. This test was also used successfully in the Niue evaluation. It was taken by every second child in this study.

1. For the three schools check-marked by the second marker, the correlations between scores of first and second markers for the English structures test were all 0.98 or above;

2. For the composition tests the correlations were all above 0.90.

## Results

### (i) *Pre-tests*

The general reading comprehension pre-test was given to all Class 4 and 5 pupils in 15 schools, and 12 of these were selected and classified, on ethnic and ability criteria, into three similar groups of four schools. The results of the pre-tests for the three groups were as follows. The possible score was 35 in each case.

Table 1 *Pre-Test Results for Class 5*

Group	N	Mean	%	SD	% Fijian
Shared Book	105	17.99	51.4	5.90	47
Silent Reading	96	17.70	50.6	5.59	52
Control	113	17.50	50.0	5.36	43
Total	314	17.73	50.7	5.88	48

Table 2 *Pre-Test Results for Class 4*

Group	N	Mean	%	SD	% Fijian
Shared Book	81	15.07	43.1	5.72	51
Silent Reading	98	14.67	41.9	4.78	49
Control	121	12.14	34.7	4.12	40
Total	300	13.76	39.3	5.21	46

For Class 5 pupils, the three groups were very closely matched. The Class 4 results, however, showed that the Control Group had fewer Fijians and a lower mean than the other two, but it was impracticable to rearrange them. If Class 5 in one school was given a rich supply of books and Class 4 was not, there could be no guarantee that the Class 4 pupils might not obtain access to the books. Therefore, it was decided to retain the original groupings and make corrections for pre-test differences later.

In general the pre-test results showed that reading standards were very low in most schools. The average Class 5 pupil had a score of only 17.73 or 50.66 percent on a very simple multiple-choice comprehension test. The Class 4 pupils had only 13.76 or 39.31 percent. The

growth from Class 4 to Class 5 was 3.97 points. All schools showed a wide range of ability, but few pupils had high enough scores to be regarded as good readers. Three pupils in Class 5 obtained over 30 (83 percent) and one in Class 4. On the other hand there was a familiar bunching effect around the 'chance' mark at the lower end. Nearly one-quarter of Class 4 pupils could not read a simple English sentence with comprehension, and these pupils were found in all schools. Typical sentences to be read were: 'We grow food in our garden.' 'The boy who fell down was hurt.'

### (ii) *Post-Tests*

To assess the growth shown by the pupils on each test, two approaches were taken. In the first, the pre-test scores for the three groups were made equal by omitting pupils from the groups that were not matched. Then the growth of the pupils was measured by comparing the post-test raw scores of the three groups. In the case of Class 5, there were only 2 or 3 omissions required, as the differences in pre-test means were negligible, even after absentees were considered. For Class 4, however, about 40 lowest-scoring pupils had to be dropped from the Control Group to equate the three groups. Therefore, in case this process introduced a bias into the comparisons, a second method of assessment was also used, which examined the amount of gain made by each pupil. Each child's post-test score was predicted from his pre-test score, and the difference between his predicted and obtained score was calculated. This discrepancy showed the gain he had made over and above what was predicted from his pre-test ability level.<sup>3</sup>

#### (a) *Raw Score Results*

The first method, which compares post-test raw scores, is reported first in Tables 3 and 4. All groups had equal pre-test means.

Table 3 shows that the two Book Flood groups performed considerably better than the control groups in all four of the post-tests. Thus,

3. It was assumed that the correlations between the sentence completion reading test, used as a pre-test measure, and all post-tests were positive, and moderate to high. In fact, the correlations obtained between the Sentence Completion Test and all post-tests given in November ranged from 0.72 to 0.86 for Class 5, and 0.48 to 0.77 for Class 4. Only the Oral Sentences Test (0.48) and the Word Recognition (0.69) fell below a correlation coefficient of 0.75. Thus, the pre-test was considered an adequate measure of the English language ability levels of the pupils.

Table 3 *Post-Test Raw Scores for Class 4*

Test	Possible Score	Shared Book			Silent Reading			Control		
		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Reading										
Comprehension	35	71	19.82	6.28	84	20.39	5.40	65	17.17	5.55
English Structures	35	71	14.92	6.20	84	14.73	5.33	65	12.05	3.81
Word Recognition	50	33	36.45	12.58	42	34.17	13.60	29	31.55	14.60
Oral Sentences	28	32	12.09	6.82	37	10.03	5.52	32	9.78	4.33

Table 4 *Post-Test Raw Scores for Class 5*

Test	Possible Score	Shared Book			Silent Reading			Control		
		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
STAF Reading										
Comprehension	32	89	17.29	6.39	86	15.50	6.09	87	13.47	5.83
STAF Listening										
Comprehension	35	89	16.40	4.90	85	14.88	5.95	87	12.15	4.71
English										
Structures	20	89	6.62	4.02	85	6.66	4.22	87	6.02	4.21
Composition	6	89	1.97	1.98	85	1.98	1.92	87	1.71	1.81

in Reading Comprehension the two Book Flood groups had a combined mean of 20.13 which is significantly better than the control group mean of 17.17 ( $t = 4.16, p < .001$ ). The Silent Reading Group did slightly better than the Shared Book Group, but the difference is too small to be important. The book groups gained approximately 4.9 points on this test, in the 8 months between March and November. As the normal growth in reading for Class 5 pupils in 12 months is 3.9 points (estimated from the pre-tests given to both Class 4 and 5 in February), we can conclude that both book groups made approximately 15 months growth in 8 months. The Control Group made 2.1 points growth, which is equivalent to 6½ months. In other words, the two book groups were progressing in reading comprehension at more than twice the rate of the Control Group during the 8 months of the project.

In the English structures test, the two Book Flood groups had a combined mean of 14.81, which is also significantly higher than the control group mean of 12.05 ( $t = 4.00, p < .001$ ).

The difference is nearly as great, statistically, as in reading, which suggests that the effect of the extra reading spreads into other aspects of language, even those which are normally taught by structured drills. Again, the difference between the two book groups was not significant.

The other two tests were given orally, to much smaller numbers of pupils. Both showed better performance in the Shared Book Group, followed by the Silent Reading and Control Groups in that order, but the differences were not quite large enough to be significant. It is worth noting that if the whole sample had been tested the differences would have been significant. And if the control group teacher who had the unusual practice of reading stories to her children had been dropped, all these differences in favour of the book groups would have been considerably increased.

Class 5 raw scores in the post-tests are set out in Table 4.

As in Class 4, the two Book Flood groups have clearly made much better progress in English than the Control Group, especially in Reading Comprehension and Listening Comprehension. The additional reading done by the Book Flood pupils produced a significantly higher mean in Reading Comprehension than in the control groups ( $t = 3.77, p < .001$ ), with an even larger difference in Listening Comprehension ( $t = 5.40, p < .001$ ). In both cases the Shared Book pupils performed significantly better than the Silent Reading groups, which were in turn significantly better than the control groups.

The two open-ended tests showed smaller differences in favour of the book schools, but were not large enough to be significant. Once again, all these differences would have been considerably increased if



the pupils of the Class 5 teacher who did not believe in the Shared Book method had been omitted. This effect will be elaborated on in the next section.

The actual amount of growth shown by the Shared Book and Silent Reading groups in Class 5 was clarified further by giving the Sentence Completion test (used as a pre-test) to a sample of 77 pupils in three schools, during the week after the post-tests. As it correlated highly (0.83) with the STAF Reading Comprehension Test given to all Class 5 pupils, the amount of gain shown on this test could be expressed in terms of months progress on the Sentence Completion Test. For the Shared Book pupils the gain was 4.86 points, or 15 months growth in only 8 months. The Silent Reading pupils gained 9 months, while the control groups gained only 2½ months. This pattern is similar to that of Class 4, although the Shared Book pupils performed relatively better in Class 5.

(b) *Gain Scores<sup>4</sup>*

When each pupil's gain was determined by comparing his predicted score (based on the pre-test) with his actual post-test scores, the results obtained were very similar to those reported above. Tables 5 and 6 show the gain score means.

As before, the Book Flood groups did significantly better than the Control Group in Reading Comprehension ( $t = 4.38, p < .001$ ) and English Structures ( $t = 3.48, p < .001$ ). The differences in Word Recognition and Oral Sentences also favoured the book groups, as expected, but only in the latter case were they statistically significant ( $t = 2.59, p < .05$ ). The fact that this effect was larger than in Table 3 is probably due to the larger number of pupils included in the analysis.

As in Table 4, the Book Flood groups produced significantly better results in Reading and Listening, and marginally better in English Structures and Composition.

To clarify these results further, the gain scores for each school are recorded in Figures 1 to 6. In Figures 1 and 2, the bar graphs for the 4 Shared Book Class 4 groups (on the left) and the four Silent Reading Class 4 groups (centre) show that most schools had above the average expected gain score of 10 in Reading and English Structures, while only one control group school (No. 10) gained an above average score in either test. The teacher in this case, unlike the others, believed in daily story reading to children, which made her much more like the

4. Technically, these are actually 'residual gain' scores, or the difference between predicted and obtained scores for each pupil. These scores have been increased in each case by 10 points in order to eliminate negative scores during the calculations.

Table 5 *Gain Scores for Class 4*

Test	Shared Book			Silent Reading			Control		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Reading Comprehension	75	10.59	4.06	84	11.21	4.78	106	8.60	4.17
English Structures	71	10.99	4.68	84	10.63	4.71	106	9.05	3.48
Word Recognition	37	12.08	9.83	43	9.65	12.73	54	8.67	11.63
Oral Sentences	34	11.56	5.74	38	9.32	5.16	49	9.29	4.36

Table 6 *Gain Scores for Class 5*

Test	Shared Book			Silent Reading			Control		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
STAF Reading Comp.	91	12.08	5.23	88	9.86	4.05	91	8.18	5.11
STAF Listening Comp.	91	12.18	4.31	87	10.63	5.30	91	7.87	4.25
English Structures	91	10.12	3.14	87	10.24	3.11	91	9.67	3.17
Composition	91	10.05	1.51	87	10.16	1.40	91	9.93	1.28

teachers in the two Book Flood groups. If her pupils had been dropped, it can be seen that the superiority of the book programmes would be considerably greater.

The Shared Book school which had low scores in both tests (No. 4) was taught by a first-year teacher, in a composite class, who later reported allowing only 15 minutes per day for the programme. The Silent Reading School which showed minimal progress (No. 8) had a relieving teacher for the middle term, while the regular teacher was absent. The other schools in the Book Flood clearly made rapid growth; the control schools made comparatively little. The two individual tests given at Class 4 level are not graphed by schools, as only small numbers of pupils were tested in each school.

Figure 1 Class 4, Reading Comprehension

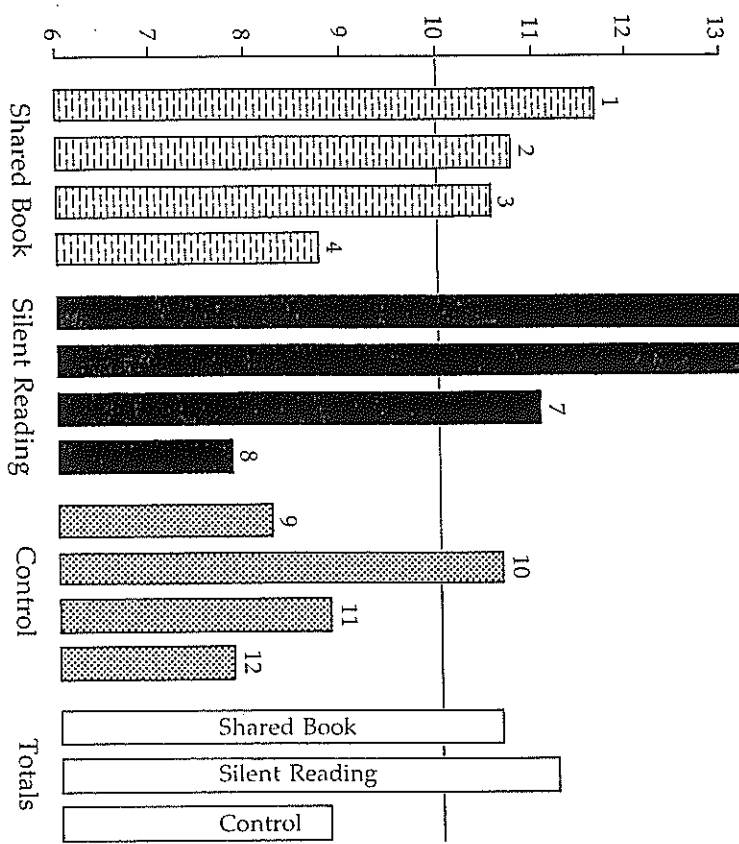
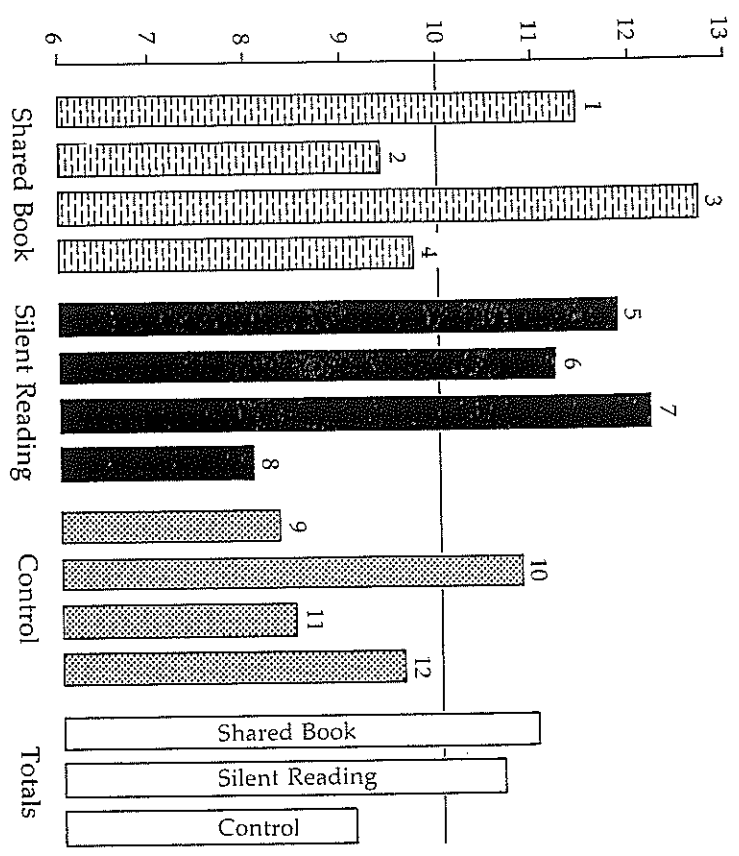


Figure 2 Class 4, English Structures



Figures 3 and 4 show the mean gain scores for Class 5 pupils in Reading Comprehension and Listening Comprehension. Once again, the schools with the highest gains all came from the Book Flood groups. The exception in the Shared Book schools, School No. 4, was taught by a teacher who did not believe in the approach, and actually expressed the view that a programme with heavy phonic emphasis was superior. If his class had been dropped, the mean score for the Shared Book pupils would amount to 1.5 year's growth in only 8 months. One Silent Reading group also did not show the pattern of marked gains in the other three schools, but the reason for this is not clear at this stage.

Clearly, the solution to faster growth requires more than the mere presence of books in the classroom. The teacher must take an active part in getting the pupils to read them. But it is also clear that in these 12 schools, rapid progress did not occur without a greater emphasis on reading.

Figures 5 and 6 show the results, by schools, for the English Structures and Composition tests given in Class 5. The patterns are very similar to those of Figures 3 and 4, but the differences between groups are less marked.

Figure 3 Class 5, Reading Comprehension

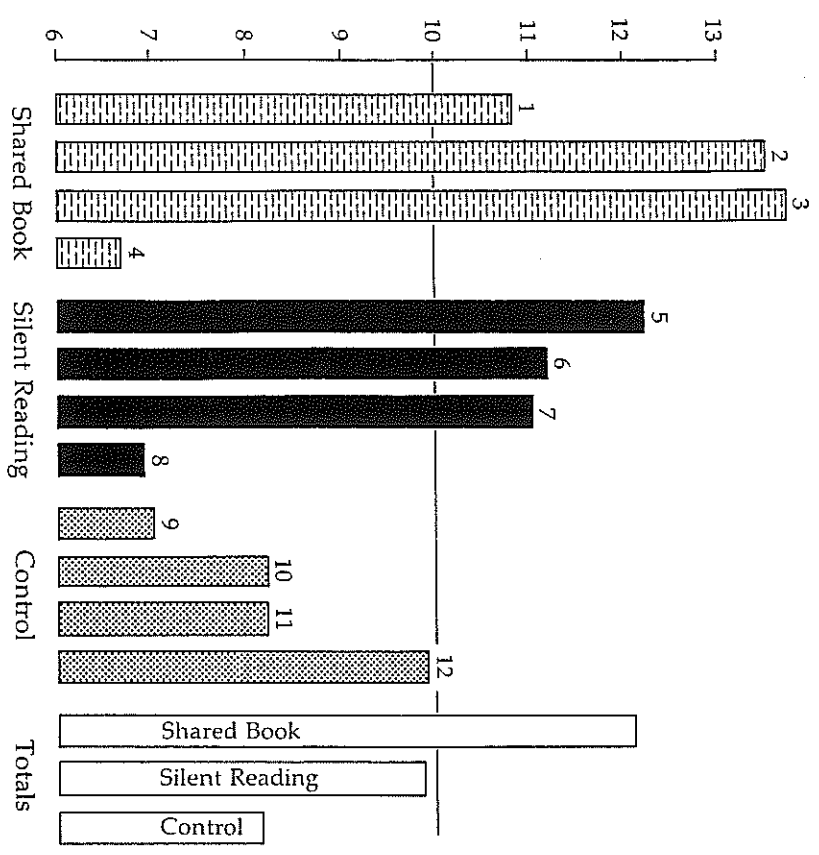


Figure 4 Class 5, Listening Comprehension

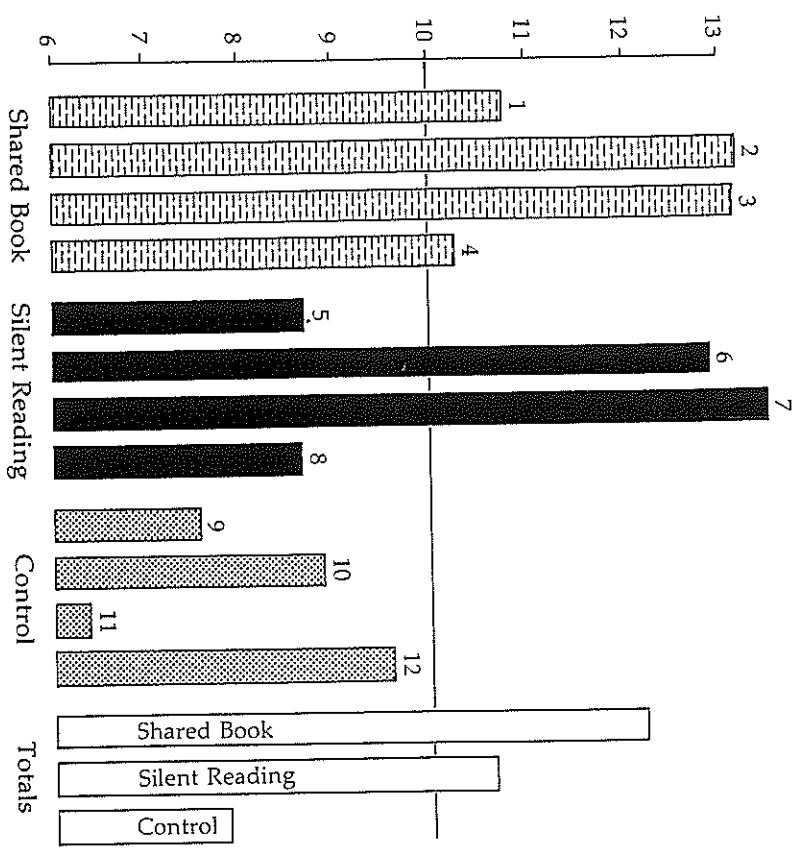


Figure 5 Class 5, English Structures

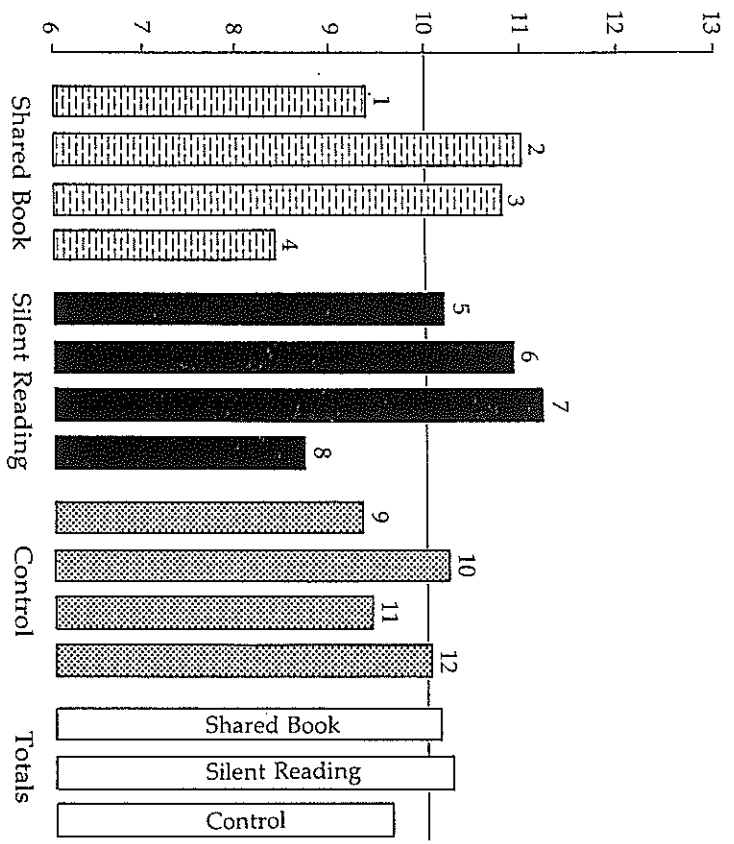
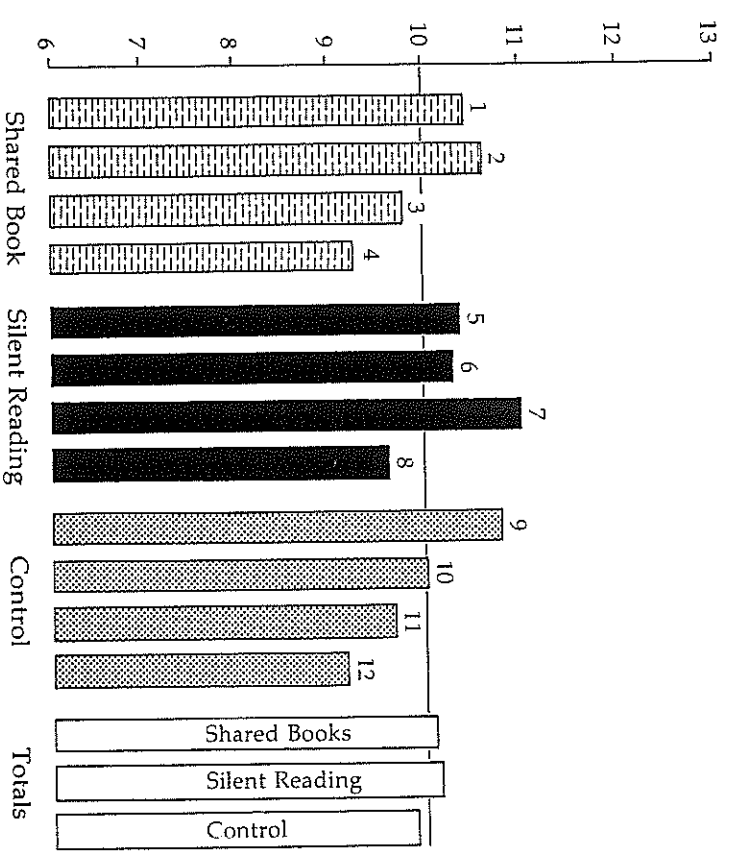


Figure 6 Class 5, Composition



## Conclusions

The major aim of this project was to clarify the role of the reading of children's story books in raising the English language levels of rural primary school children in Fiji. Approximately 250 children's books were donated to each Class 4 and Class 5 group in 8 schools, and the pupils' progress in English was compared with that of children in 4 control group schools, of similar ability and ethnic composition.

Half of the teachers in the Book Flood schools had a three-day workshop on how to use the stories to improve children's language skills using the Shared Book Method. The other half had no special training, but were advised to encourage the children to read the books silently for up to half an hour per day. The eight teachers in the four control schools had a one-day review workshop on the principles of the SPCTate English Programme, but no additional books.

After 8 months, the pupils in all 12 schools were carefully tested and interviewed to assess their progress in various aspects of English language. The results showed that at both class levels, the Book Flood schools made twice the expected rate of progress in reading comprehension. They also did significantly better in tests of Listening Comprehension (Class 5), English Structures (Class 4) and Oral Sentence Repetition (Class 4), and marginally better in tests of Written Composition and Sentence Structures (Class 5) and Word Recognition (Class 4).

In the two Book Flood groups, the eight teachers who followed the Shared Book programme produced significantly better results than the Silent Reading groups in Reading and Listening Comprehension (Class 5), but in other respects they were very similar. It is clear, too, that the Shared Book Method would have fared even better if one of the Class 5 teachers had not had a sceptical attitude towards it. This teacher's pupils performed badly in all tests, and lowered the Shared Book averages correspondingly. Likewise, the single control group teacher who believed in regular story-reading to pupils raised the control group averages consistently. An experiment of this kind cannot control all teachers' behaviour, but it can clarify the effects of departures from the teachers' prescribed programme. In this case, both of the obvious exceptions referred to above do support the importance of regular reading.

The impact of the books is clearly positive, and, as one would expect, most marked in those English skills which the pupils had been practising — general reading and listening comprehension. However, the effect did spread to related skills, as shown by the greater progress made in learning written English structures, and the

ability to recite complex English sentences correctly. It is true the influence of the reading on written composition was not apparent in Class 5, but it is plausible to assume that this effect takes longer to appear than in the period of eight months of this project. In fact, it was noticeable that many pupils at this stage in their development are unable to write a continuous, coherent story at all. Fully 118 out of 260 pupils obtained a 0 mark on the composition, so we cannot conclude that the assessment of this skill was very reliably done. It would be interesting to re-assess this skill after another year.

Another disconcerting feature of the children's competence was the poor performance in the Class 5 open-ended test of English Structures. Although all these structures had been taught in Class 4 and Class 5, the average score was only 6.36 (or 31.8 percent). Clearly, under the present system of teaching these structures, we cannot assume that what is specifically taught (and revised) in the classroom is subsequently mastered by the pupils. Very few Class 5 pupils could use their verb tenses or comparatives correctly; many said, My father let me to go fishing, or Ram's age is the same as me, or Jone said that he had *not to school*, etc. While the extensive reading groups did not avoid such errors, they produced them less often than the control groups.

There may be some who would attribute the marked growth in the book groups to a 'Hawthorne Effect', brought on by the novelty of the supply of many attractive books. In fact, the effect of any novel programme wears off in a matter of weeks in most schools, and there was no exception in this project. If there was any greater motivation to learn English, it was generated by the appeal of the books themselves. This is an effect which could be produced by all teachers who set out to provide interesting reading materials for their pupils. Certainly the pupils in this project appeared to enjoy the Shared Book Experience Method, and teachers had little difficulty in getting the pupils to read on their own. The exceptions were the non-readers, of course, and there were many of these in the Silent Reading group who had not reached the threshold at which they could begin independent reading. For such children, the Shared Book method seems to have more to offer.

It might also be argued that the workshop for teachers in March helped the Shared Book group unduly. A workshop, of course, was necessary, because it was a new programme. However, it is clear that the Silent Reading group, which had no workshop, performed just as well on most criteria, and better than the Control Group, who did have a workshop for their teachers. Once again, any enthusiasm generated by a short workshop in March is unlikely to be felt by teachers — or their pupils — in November.

In considering the implications of the study for other schools, it should be pointed out that not all the books were found equally suitable. Teachers who wished to duplicate these effects in their classes would not need to purchase the same 250 books. Indeed a questionnaire to all Book Flood teachers revealed that most pupils preferred, and spent much time with the traditional favourite stories of western children — *The Three Pigs, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk*, etc., especially as presented in the 'Ladybird' series. Other favourites included the 'Gay Way Series', the 'Star Family Readers', and many of the 'Picture Puffin Series'. Most were well-illustrated, and used only common-sense controls over the presentation of vocabulary and structures. The Nive experiment had shown the popularity of simple readers with local flavour but, in the absence of such materials, imported books are still effective in hooking children to books.

It is worth noting, too, that the typical book provided cost only \$1.50, and the cheaper paperbackbacks were often more popular than the more expensive hardbacks. Apparently, many children were nervous about losing or damaging them.

A few teachers allowed their children to take books home, but most had school rules which prevented this. The bulk of the reading was done in the set English reading periods, instead of the formal instructional reading exercises prescribed by the Ministry of Education.

No noticeable difference was found between the two ethnic groups in the appeal of the books, or of particular favourites, and both groups progressed at similar rates, despite the fact that the Indian pupils started off from a lower reading level. Further analysis of the results will be undertaken to clarify these and other differences in the various tests.

In conclusion, the following findings can be stated with some confidence:

1. The impact of a Book Flood of 250 children's story books in the classrooms of rural primary schools in Fiji is clearly beneficial. The average pupil made one-and-a-quarter year's progress in 8 months in Reading Comprehension, and improved almost as much in Listening Skills and English Structures. Growth in Oral Sentence Repetition, Word Recognition and Written Composition was marginally better than that of the Control Group
2. In the comparisons of the two Book Flood groups, the Shared Book Method proved slightly better than a Silent Reading Programme, but both approaches accelerated children's language development in a significant way.

3. The effects of the books were equally helpful in Fijian and in Indian schools.

4. The favourite stories popular in western traditions proved popular also in these schools, although there is clearly scope for the production of reading materials with a local flavour.

The state of English teaching is not healthy in the South Pacific. However, this project assessed the effects of one promising — and eminently practical policy — and found that it does exert a definite improvement on children's language development in English. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that books more consistently provide pupils with a better model of English and could, therefore, counteract any examples of poorer models provided by a teacher whose own mastery over the English language may not be too secure. Follow-up studies are planned in the future to explore these matters further.

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