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Child-Centred Climate Education in Fiji: Stakeholder Perspectives and a Community-Governed Partnership Framework

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ABSTRACT

Climate-related hazards affect children's learning, safety and wellbeing, making early childhood education a relevant setting for age-appropriate environmental learning and preparedness. This article examines how child-facing and adult stakeholder questionnaire materials frame climate and environmental learning in Fiji and develops a provisional framework for university–community collaboration. An exploratory qualitative documentary analysis was conducted on 27 completed, text-readable questionnaire files across six categories: children aged 6–8 years (2), pre-service teachers (7), in-service early childhood/primary teachers (7), caregivers (5), faith-based representatives (4), and university academics (2). These are document counts, not confirmed counts of unique individuals. Additional scanned PDF responses were not included in the text-based synthesis, and no completed community/civil-society leader questionnaire was available in the analysed text-readable corpus. Iterative semantic coding and cross-group comparison generated six overlapping themes: everyday environmental stewardship; home–school learning relationships; preparedness as both practical routine and emotional reassurance; teacher development and resource needs; culturally governed place-based knowledge; and universities as potential convenors of reciprocal partnerships. The materials describe perspectives, reported practices and recommendations; they do not establish representative prevalence, the operation of a coordinated programme, or measured changes in child resilience. The article proposes the CARE framework—Child-centred climate pedagogy, Adult learning and alignment, Respectful knowledge governance, and Enabling institutional support—as a heuristic for future co-design and evaluation. The findings suggest that responsible climate education should connect practical learning with adult safeguarding, culturally authorised knowledge-sharing, teacher support and institutional responsibility, without transferring responsibility for structural climate risks to children.

Keywords: Fiji; Early Childhood Education; Climate Education; Qualitative Documentary Analysis; Child Agency; Community Partnership; Teacher Development; Indigenous Knowledge Governance; Disaster Preparedness; Care Framework

Key messages

- The analysis includes 27 text-readable completed questionnaire files; these are not confirmed unique-person counts.
- Stakeholder materials converge around practical environmental learning, adult support, teacher resources and locally governed knowledge.
- The proposed CARE framework is conceptual and requires co-design, implementation and evaluation before effectiveness can be claimed.

Introduction

Climate-related hazards have implications for children's educational continuity, physical environments, family routines and emotional wellbeing. In Pacific Island settings, climate risks intersect with geography, uneven infrastructure and the resources available to households and services. Child-focused adaptation strategies therefore need to address both the content of learning and the systems that keep children safe. Climate-related stressors can affect educational outcomes through direct and indirect pathways, with existing vulnerability shaping the effects Prentice, et al. [1]. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 emphasises disaster-risk understanding, preparedness and shared responsibility, while UNICEF Pacific has argued for adaptation and resilience-building that place children's needs at the centre of decisions (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction UNDRR, [2]; UNICEF Pacific, [3]. Early childhood education can offer concrete and developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to notice their surroundings, care for plants and water, ask questions about weather, learn from local stories and participate in calm safety routines. A systematic review of 66 early-childhood environmental education studies found that nature-rich, play-based and socially interactive approaches were commonly associated with environmental, cognitive and social-emotional learning outcomes Ardoin & Bowers, et al. [4]. Such findings support the plausibility of experiential learning, but they do not demonstrate that any particular programme in Fiji improves climate adaptation or resilience. This article draws on a set of child-facing and adult stakeholder questionnaire documents concerning early childhood climate and environmental education in Fiji. It brings together the empirical focus of a multi-stakeholder thematic synthesis with the developmental, safeguarding and curriculum-development principles set out in the companion conceptual draft. The aim is not to report a curriculum audit or intervention evaluation that has not been completed. Rather, the paper analyses the perspectives contained in the available documents and proposes a community-governed framework to guide subsequent research and practice. The paper makes three bounded contributions. First, it offers a cross-stakeholder interpretive synthesis of the supplied questionnaire corpus. Second, it identifies practical and ethical conditions that should shape collaboration among teacher educators, early childhood settings, caregivers, community knowledge holders and civil-society organisations. Third, it develops the provisional CARE framework and a staged research pathway that can be tested through future, appropriately authorised work. Throughout, the paper distinguishes participant perspectives and recommendations from independently observed practices and measured outcomes.

Context and Conceptual Framing

Early Childhood Climate and Environmental Learning

Environmental education in early childhood often begins with direct experiences: observing plants and animals, exploring local places, participating in routines of care and asking questions about the environment. Climate education adds the challenge of connecting observable experiences with scientifically accurate explanations of climate processes and risk. Educators must avoid conflating litter reduction or gardening with climate mitigation, and should distinguish daily weather from longer-term climate patterns in ways appropriate to children's developmental stages. UNESCO's [5] Greening Curriculum Guidance similarly advocates age-responsive, action-oriented climate learning. Play, stories, observation, movement and guided inquiry can provide entry points without requiring young children to grasp abstract systems prematurely Ardoin & Bowers, [4].

Child Agency, Safeguarding and Resilience

Children's agency is best understood as the opportunity to express views, ask questions, contribute ideas and participate in safe, meaningful activities with trusted adults. It should not be interpreted as a transfer of responsibility for preventing climate change or managing disaster risk. A child is not responsible for the consequences of a cyclone, flood or infrastructure failure. Resilience should likewise be understood relationally: children's wellbeing depends on caregivers, safe schools, accessible information, inclusive shelters, adequate services and public investment, not solely on individual attitudes or knowledge UNICEF Pacific, [3].

Place-Based Learning and knowledge Governance

Local knowledge concerning seasons, food growing, fishing, plants, waterways, coastal environments and preparedness can enrich teaching when communities choose what may be shared and how it should be interpreted. "Indigenous knowledge" must not be treated as a single, uniform or freely extractable resource. Knowledge may be specific to place, language, lineage or community protocol; some may be restricted. Ethical co-design therefore requires prior permission, appropriate attribution, community review, clarity about benefits and the right to decline, limit or withdraw contributions.

Universities and Reciprocal Partnerships

Universities can contribute through initial teacher education, continuing professional development, mentoring, resource development, practicum arrangements and research. Schools, families, NGOs, faith-based organisations and community leaders may contribute trusted relationships, local experience, venues and practical support. However, the presence of multiple stakeholders does not itself constitute an effective partnership. Collaboration should be assessed through shared decision-making, clear responsibilities, safeguarding, resource commitments, continuity and accountability to participating communities.

Research Questions

The analysis was guided by four questions:

RQ1. How do the available child-facing and adult stakeholder materials describe environmental learning, climate-related concerns and practical preparedness?

RQ2. What areas of convergence, difference and tension appear across children, pre-service and in-service teachers, caregivers, faith-based representatives and university academics?

RQ3. What do the materials suggest about teacher preparation, home–school relationships, local knowledge and university outreach?

RQ4. What provisional partnership framework and future research priorities can be developed without overstating the evidence?

Methods

Design

This study used an exploratory qualitative documentary analysis of completed child conversational forms and open-ended stakeholder questionnaires supplied to the research team. The instruments addressed environmental understanding, experiences of hazards, sources of learning, safety, teacher readiness, family practices, community knowledge and potential university outreach. The responses were treated as documentary accounts; the analysis does not assume that respondents belonged to matched schools, households or communities.

Corpus and Inclusion

The preliminary corpus comprised 27 completed text-readable files across six respondent categories. The count refers to files included in the text-based analysis, not a verified number of unique people. Some additional responses were present as scanned PDFs but were not independently transcribed and coded for this revision. Blank instrument templates, duplicate direct uploads and unreadable or unverified material were excluded from the text-readable count. No completed community/civil-society leader questionnaire was available in the analysed text-readable corpus. The team should reconcile unique respondent identifiers, duplicate versions and all scanned files against the original source register before final submission (Table 1 & Figure 1)

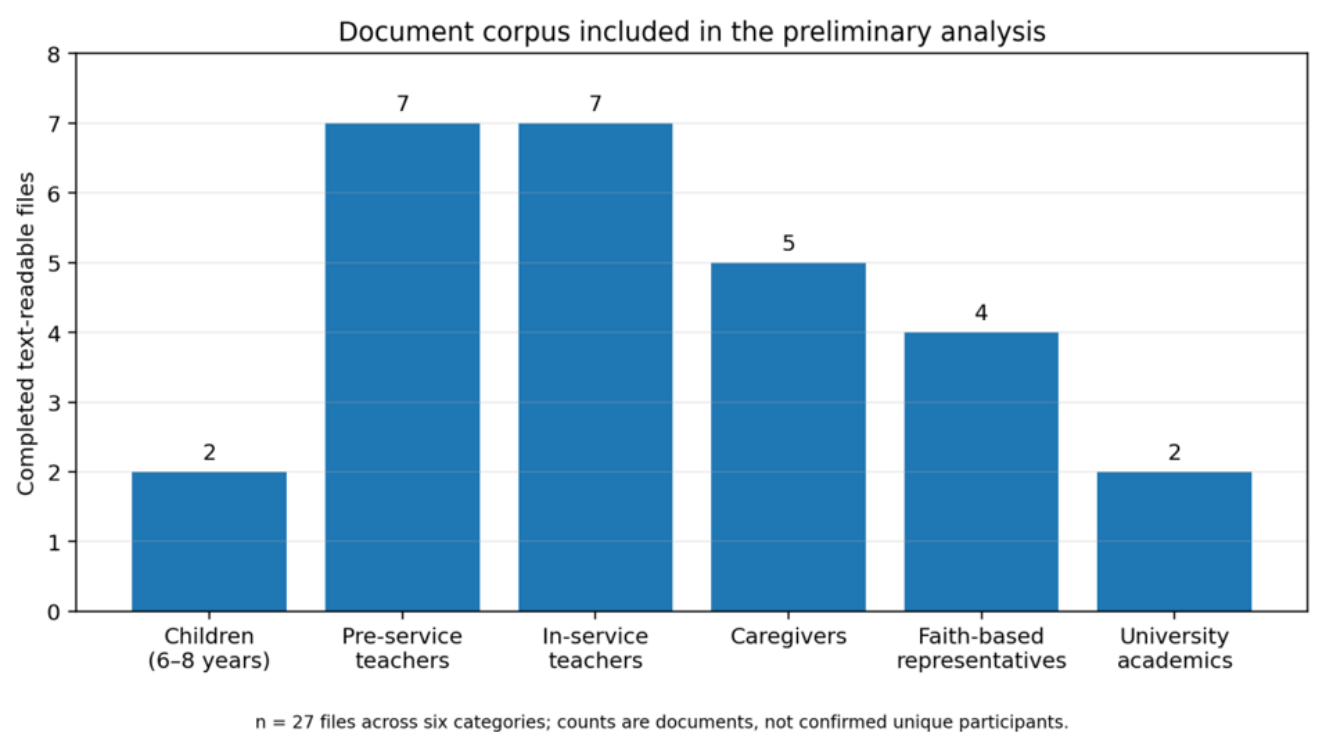


Figure 1: Distribution of completed text-readable questionnaire files included in the preliminary analysis. Note. Counts represent files, not confirmed unique participants; scanned PDFs and blank templates were excluded from the text-readable count.

Table 1: Composition of the preliminary text-readable document corpus.

Stakeholder Category	Files Included	Important Qualification
Children (ages 6–8)	2	One additional scanned child form was not included in text-based coding.
Pre-service teachers	7	Two additional PDF files were not included in the text-readable count.
In-service ECE/primary teachers	7	Three additional PDF files were not included in the text-readable count.
Parents/caregivers	5	A blank questionnaire template was excluded.
Faith-based representatives	4	One additional PDF file was not included in the text-readable count.
University academics	2	USP and FNU academic documents; duplicate direct uploads excluded.
Community/civil-society representatives	0	Only a blank questionnaire template was available in the analysed text-readable corpus.
Total	27	Document count only; unique-person count not confirmed.

Analysis

The synthesis followed an iterative, pragmatic process:

1) extract text and retain a provenance trail;
2) read responses within their stakeholder group;
3) code explicit passages concerning learning, risk, resources, relationships and local knowledge;
4) compare patterns across groups;
5) develop candidate interpretive themes; and
6) test each theme against the available examples, including tensions and negative cases. The analysis is descriptive and interpretive, not a quantitative content analysis. No percentages were calculated from checkbox items because marking and document formatting were not sufficiently reliable to establish comparable selections. Suggestions for future activities were not coded as evidence that those activities had occurred.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

The manuscript retains the distinction between what respondents describe, what they recommend and what the research team infers. Cross-group convergence is treated as a map of shared concerns rather than independent confirmation of an intervention's effectiveness. The available instruments vary in depth, and the researchers' professional roles and networks may have influenced response patterns. Before submission, the author group should complete a collaborative coding audit, document any changes to the codebook, verify all data provenance and report how reflexivity and social-desirability bias were addressed.

Ethics and Child Safeguarding

The source draft states that ethics approval, parental/guardian permissions and child assent were obtained. The formal approving institution, approval identifier and date, relevant site permissions and the approved consent procedures were not included in the manuscript materials reviewed. These details must be inserted from the original records before submission. No identifying details of children, schools or communities should be published without explicit, appropriate authorisation. The manuscript does not reproduce direct child quotations because the available material and consent documentation provided for this revision do not establish a verified quotation-release process.

Findings

Environmental Stewardship is Framed Through Visible Everyday Practices

The child-facing and caregiver materials foregrounded familiar practices such as putting waste in bins, cleaning shared spaces, conserving water and electricity, planting trees, tending gardens and reusing materials. Pre-service and in-service teacher responses also proposed gardening, observation and recycling as accessible classroom activities, while university responses extended the range to outdoor learning and conservation projects. Across these documents, environmental learning was often expressed through practical routines rather than explicit accounts of climate science. This convergence suggests a possible pedagogical sequence: begin with locally observable practices and gradually connect them to accurate explanations of environmental change, climate processes and collective responsibility. An important distinction remains, however. Cleanliness, recycling and planting are not automatically evidence of climate literacy or climate adaptation. Future curriculum materials should make the relationship between an activity and its intended learning outcome explicit.

Learning is Relational and Crosses Home–School Boundaries

Children identified parents and teachers as sources of learning. Caregiver responses emphasised modelling everyday habits and involving children in household routines, while teacher responses proposed practical classroom activities and communication with families. The materials therefore position learning as distributed across relationships rather than located solely in a school or university. The

documents do not establish how frequently home–school activities currently occur, which institutions coordinate them or which families may be excluded. Proposed activities should not assume that households have spare income, reliable internet, transport, private gardens or additional time. Inclusive partnership design should offer free or low-cost options and recognise the different circumstances of urban, rural and maritime communities.

Preparedness Combines Practical Routines with Emotional Reassurance

The child-response synthesis included accounts of hazards and practical preparation, such as keeping essential supplies, staying in safer places and following adult instructions. The adult questionnaires proposed preparedness lessons, practice routines and age-appropriate explanations. Children's sense of safety was also linked to trusted and reassuring adults. Together, these materials suggest that preparedness education should address both practical routines and emotional security. The evidence does not establish measured reductions in anxiety, improved physical safety or increased disaster readiness. Preparedness activities should therefore be calm, predictable and led by responsible adults. Educators should monitor possible distress, offer children opportunities to ask questions or decline participation, and adapt activities for children with disabilities or previous exposure to traumatic events.

Teachers Need Practical Resources and Sustained Professional Learning

Pre-service teacher materials emphasised age-appropriate, hands-on learning and locally relevant examples. In-service responses identified the need for training, curriculum guidance and usable resources, sometimes alongside self-reported confidence. One reported pattern was that confidence could coexist with limited professional development and multiple perceived barriers. This illustrates why self-reported confidence should not be treated as equivalent to demonstrated pedagogical competence. The materials support consideration of practical professional development: locally relevant lesson prompts, child-friendly explanations, observation activities, learning rubrics, mentoring and follow-up support. They do not establish the scale of workforce need or the effectiveness of any particular training model. Those questions require a separate needs assessment and evaluation.

Community and Faith-Based Relationships May Extend Learning, Subject to Safeguards

Faith-based respondents and university academics identified community organisations, NGOs, leaders and faith networks as possible collaborators. Such organisations may provide trusted relationships, venues and routes for communication. These responses indicate potential channels for engagement, not proof that a coordinated programme currently operates or that all communities share the same priorities. Partnerships involving faith-based organisations must remain inclusive of children regardless of religion or affiliation. Participation should not depend on religious observance. Written agreements should specify safeguarding, supervision, consent, privacy, accessibility, responsibilities and referral processes whenever non-school organisations engage with children.

Place-Based and Indigenous knowledge is Valued But Requires Community Authority

Caregiver and university responses referred to food growing, local environments, seasonal knowledge, respect for land and sea, storytelling and learning from elders. These materials suggest interest in culturally situated education rather than generic imported resources. They do not demonstrate that particular communities have authorised specific knowledge for inclusion in a curriculum. Community consultation must therefore involve substantive decision rights. Knowledge holders should be able to approve, amend, restrict or withdraw local content, determine appropriate attribution and discuss how benefits will be shared. University expertise in research or pedagogy does not confer ownership of community knowledge.

Universities are Viewed as Potential Convenors, Not Proven Programme Leaders

University-based respondents proposed roles in teacher training, mentoring, development of stories and practical resources, practicum placements and partnership coordination. These proposals align with teachers' requests for locally usable materials and sustained support. However, the documents do not establish a programme budget, reach, implementation history or observable change in teaching quality. The most defensible institutional role is therefore one of facilitation and capacity-building within a co-governed partnership. Universities can support research, professional learning and evaluation while schools and communities shape priorities and retain authority over local knowledge. Partnership performance should be judged by decision rights, continuity, resource commitments and accountability, not by the number of organisations listed.

Cross-Stakeholder Synthesis

Six overlapping themes emerged from the documentary synthesis:

1) everyday environmental stewardship;
2) home–school relational learning;
3) preparedness as both practical routine and emotional reassurance;
4) teacher development and resource needs;
5) culturally governed place-based knowledge; and
6) universities as potential convenors of reciprocal partnerships. These themes are interpretive categories rather than ranked or measured outcomes. They do not imply unanimity across respondents Table 2

Table 2: Cross-stakeholder themes and defensible interpretation.

Theme	Materials foregrounded	Interpretation and boundary
Everyday environmental stewardship	Waste, water and energy routines, planting, gardening, reuse and local observation.	A practical entry point for environmental learning; not itself proof of climate literacy or adaptation.
Home–school relational learning	Children learn from parents and teachers; adults propose shared routines and communication.	Supports a partnership rationale; does not show how often coordination currently occurs.
Practical and emotional preparedness	Emergency routines, following adult guidance and feeling safe with trusted adults.	Preparedness should include reassurance; no measured anxiety or safety outcomes were available.
Teacher development and resources	Requests for age-appropriate materials, training, curriculum guidance and mentoring.	Indicates perceived needs; workforce prevalence and training effectiveness remain unmeasured.
Place-based knowledge governance	Local stories, land and sea stewardship, food growing, seasonal knowledge and elders' teaching.	Community interest is evident; formal permission to publish or standardise knowledge was not documented.
Universities as potential convenors	Proposals for teacher education, resources, placements, mentoring and partnership coordination.	A future institutional role, not evidence of an implemented or evaluated programme.

Discussion

From Thematic Convergence to Explanatory Modesty

The recurrence of similar recommendations across stakeholder groups provides a useful map of priorities and potential entry points. It does not independently validate a programme or show that collaboration has produced resilience gains. The questionnaires offer limited opportunity to probe contradictions or observe practice directly. The appropriate inference is that respondents identify plausible needs and desirable actions; the effectiveness and feasibility of those actions remain to be tested. This distinction is consistent with the wider literature. Ardoin & Bowers, et al. [4] document promising early-childhood environmental education approaches, while Takinana & Baars [6] caution that climate education and resilience must be considered in relation to power and whose interests are served. Satchwell, et al. [7] show how child-centred exchanges between Fiji and the United Kingdom can create opportunities for children to explore climate change through everyday experience and empathy. These studies inform the rationale for participatory, context-sensitive approaches, but they do not substitute for evaluation of the proposed Fiji partnership model.

CARE: a Provisional Community-Governed Partnership Framework

The findings inform the CARE framework: Child-centred climate pedagogy; Adult learning and alignment; Respectful knowledge governance; and Enabling institutional support. CARE is a conceptual implementation heuristic, not a validated measurement scale or a tested intervention. It organises the practical conditions identified in the documentary synthesis and provides a structure for future co-design and evaluation.

Child Participation Must Not Displace Adult Responsibility

The conference theme of children as agents of change can be interpreted productively when children are invited to ask questions, express views and contribute to safe activities. It becomes ethically problematic when children are portrayed as responsible for preventing structural climate risks. Young children's participation should be differentiated from the civic and political activism that may be available to older students and adults. Adults and institutions remain responsible for safe infrastructure, disaster planning, resources and protection Figure 2.

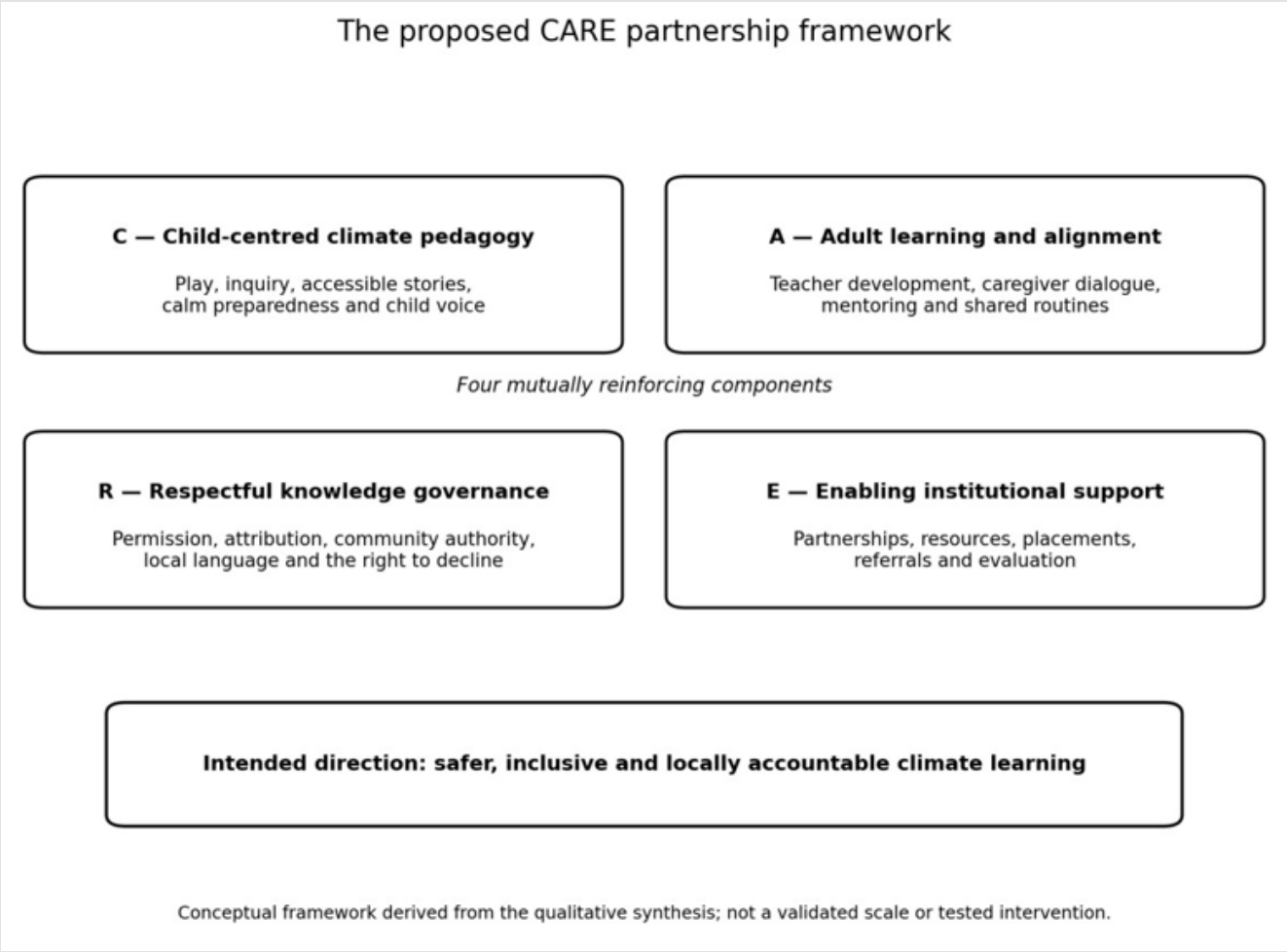


Figure 2: The proposed CARE partnership framework. Note. CARE is a conceptual heuristic derived from the qualitative synthesis; it is not a validated scale or evaluated intervention.

Resilience Requires Systems, Not Just Individual Learning

An educational programme cannot substitute for safe schools, reliable warning systems, accessible shelters, household support or adaptation investment. Climate-responsive education should complement broader climate and disaster policy, child protection and community development. Evaluation should examine learning and engagement while also documenting the institutional conditions that enable or constrain them.

Proposed Framework and Practical Implications

CARE Components

C — Child-centred climate pedagogy: use play, local observation, accessible storytelling, child questions and calm adult-led preparedness routines. Learning should be differentiated by age, language and access needs.

A — Adult learning and alignment: provide practical teacher development, mentoring, caregiver dialogue and coherent messages between home and school. Training should include follow-up and opportunities to reflect on implementation.

R — Respectful knowledge governance: establish community authority over the selection, interpretation, attribution and use of local and Indigenous knowledge. Consent and cultural protocols should be documented, and refusal to share knowledge respected.

E — Enabling institutional support: clarify the roles of universities, schools, government agencies and civil-society partners; provide resources and supervised placements; agree on safeguarding and referral routes; and evaluate feasibility and equity Table 3.

Table 3: CARE framework: components, actions and proposed indicators.

Component	Illustrative Actions	Potential Indicators for Future Evaluation
C — Child-centred climate pedagogy	Play, local observation, accessible stories, child voice and calm adult-led safety routines.	Observed engagement; age-appropriate explanations; inclusion and emotional safety.
A — Adult learning and alignment	Teacher mentoring, practical professional learning, caregiver dialogue and shared routines.	Teacher-reported confidence plus observed practice; caregiver feedback; follow-up participation.
R — Respectful knowledge governance	Prior permission, attribution, community review, right to decline or withdraw, benefit-sharing discussion.	Documented permissions; community satisfaction; records of revisions and restrictions.
E — Enabling institutional support	Defined roles, resources, placements, safeguarding, referral pathways and evaluation.	Resource commitments; continuity; accessible participation; agreed responsibilities and referral compliance.

Developmentally Differentiated Curriculum Possibilities

The following age bands are proposed for curriculum design and require comparison with Fiji's authorised curriculum documents. They are not findings of a completed curriculum audit Table 4.

Table 4: Illustrative developmental progression for future curriculum co-design.

Age Band	Illustrative Learning Possibilities	Safeguards and Boundaries
Birth–2 years	Caregiver-led sensory exploration of plants, water and familiar surroundings.	Safe, familiar routines; no abstract hazard messages; caregiver-mediated participation.
3–5 years	Nature play, storytelling, sorting, gardening and observation.	Adult-guided stewardship, accessible participation and simple safety routines.
6–8 years	Weather journals, local inquiry, group problem-solving and supported child consultation.	Distinguish weather from climate; keep preparedness adult-led and emotionally safe.

Recommended Implementation Pathway

A staged pathway is recommended:

1) verify the corpus, ethics and consent records;

2) audit the authorised curriculum and relevant policy;

3) co-design learning experiences with teachers, caregivers and community knowledge holders;

4) pilot and evaluate activities under appropriate approvals; and

5) revise, validate and seek formal curriculum-authority approval. No phase should be represented as completed unless the research team has documentary evidence Figure 3.

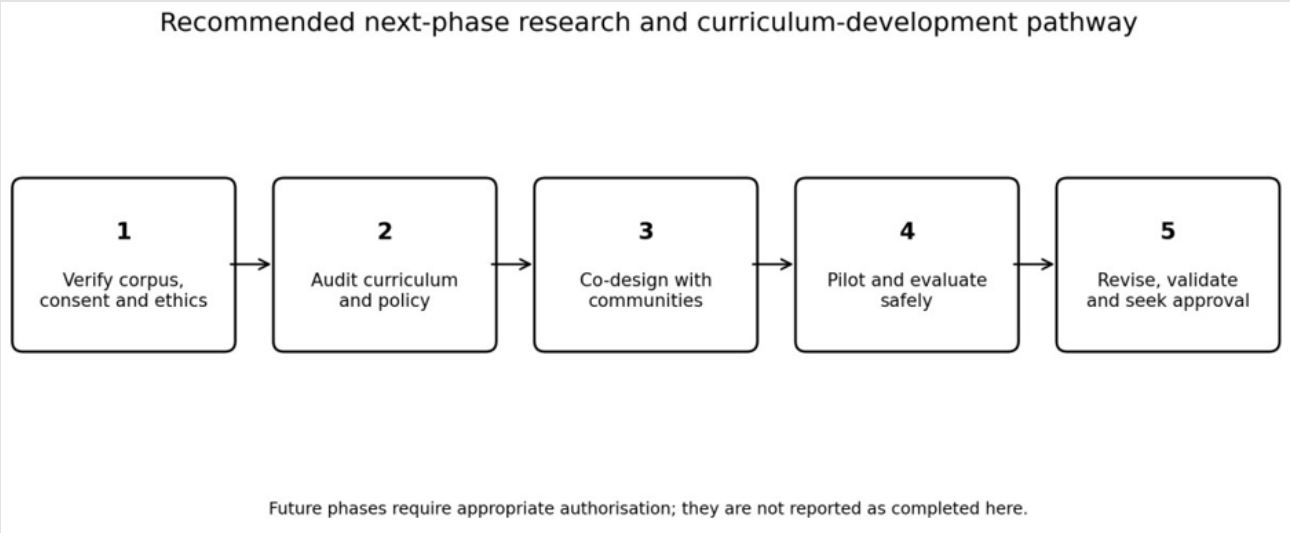


Figure 3: Recommended next-phase research and curriculum-development pathway. Note. Future phases remain prospective unless the authors can document completion and appropriate approvals.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is exploratory and based on a limited documentary corpus. The 27 files included in the text-readable analysis cannot be assumed to represent 27 unique people, and the full roster, duplicate status and scanned PDF responses require reconciliation. The sample was not designed for statistical representativeness, recruitment dates and selection criteria were not fully documented in the materials reviewed, and the instruments differed in depth. No completed community/civil-society leader questionnaire was available in the analysed text-readable corpus. The analysis did not include direct observations of classroom practice or functioning partnerships. It provides no longitudinal outcomes, intervention effects or verified changes in child resilience. The preliminary themes should not be interpreted as prevalence estimates. The age range also requires care: the conceptual proposal covers ages 0–8, while the child-facing questionnaire described in the source material was designed for children aged 6–8. Claims about infants and toddlers should therefore be treated as curriculum-development proposals rather than findings from child responses. The next research phase should reconcile and manually verify the source corpus; document ethics approval, consent and site permissions; complete a curriculum and policy audit; and consult a broader range of community representatives. Participatory co-design should be followed by a small feasibility pilot across varied settings, with child-sensitive measures of engagement, teacher practice, caregiver feedback, accessibility, emotional safety and partnership governance. Any claim about longer-term resilience or climate adaptation would require an appropriate design and follow-up evidence.

Conclusion

The available Fiji stakeholder materials position climate learning within the everyday relationships among children, caregivers, teachers, community organisations and universities. They foreground practical environmental stewardship, home–school connections, calm preparedness, teacher resources, locally grounded knowledge and collaboration. These converging perspectives provide a useful foundation for further work, but they should not be mistaken for evidence that a coordinated partnership has already operated or improved children's resilience. The article's contribution is a bounded qualitative synthesis and the development of the provisional CARE framework. CARE connects child-centred pedagogy with adult learning, community authority over knowledge and institutional support. Its value lies in making the conditions for responsible collaboration explicit and testable. Future work should move from shared aspirations to transparent curriculum mapping, co-design, piloting and evaluation, with children's rights and wellbeing protected throughout. Climate education for young children is most defensible when it supports curiosity and participation while keeping responsibility for climate risks with adults, institutions and governments. A community-governed approach can help connect learning with local knowledge and teacher capacity, provided that it is evaluated carefully and does not substitute educational activity for the wider investments required to protect children and communities.

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