KĀTAKI Ē MAMÁ MOE HOPOHOPOKIA

Perceptions and Experiences of Tongan Male Learners in Higher Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

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I hereby affirm that this thesis represents my own research and writing, and it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been illustrated and the source information acknowledged.

'Olikoni Tanaki Ta'ai

December, 2015.

ABSTRACT

Tongans are known as one of the greatest seafaring people, constantly and fearlessly venturing beyond the sunrise in search of new lands and new grounds to conquer and seeking better opportunities away from home. However, settlement and the adjustment and transition into a new life in the new destinations invariably come with sets of unfamiliar challenges and obstacles that demand often rather painful and difficult socio-economic acculturation.

Such is the story of the Tongan Aotearoa diaspora. Tongan migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand (A/NZ) have faced quite stringent challenges resulting in their having been largely distracted and diverted from their "New Zealand-the promised-land" dream. The Tongan experience in, and encounters with, the New Zealand education system is a standout example of the most serious of these challenges as evidenced predominantly by the lack of numeracy and literacy skills. As direct result of this gap Tongans along with, and similar to, their fellow Pasifika students are quite conspicuous amongst those seen as failures in the education system in A/NZ.

Literature shows a widening gap between policies and practises and the need to address the issue urgently. Responding to concerns about these increasing barriers, this study specifically provides ethnic gender specificity by exploring the experiences of Tongan males at higher education in A/NZ.

In my research, and as presented in this thesis, I use the Tongan methodologies of *talanoa, tālanga, and tālave* with the Kakala framework to provide comfortable space and time where the experiences, perceptions, and voices of Tongan male learners at higher education were unravelled. *Makatūkia* and *makatuʻu* were identified and discussed, and various overarching institutions such as *kāinga*, lotu, self and cosmos were identified to play dual roles in the failures and successes of Tongan male learners.

This research also develops and presents a new conceptual framework; *Kalia-Langimālie* which is grounded on the theoretical orientations of *tā-vā kāinga*, fashioned by the understanding that *vā* is mutual, interpersonal, and reciprocal with *tā* to represent movements, beat, and rhythms. The result of this undertaking empirically concurs that when policies and practises are grounded within, and built on, meaningful values that understand Tongans' *tā-vā* through their worlds of self, *kāinga, lotu* and cosmos, success is attainable.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, this thesis is dedicated to my parents, the late **Soane Patita Finau Tanaki Ta'ai (R.I.P)** and **'Amelia Paloti Lutui Ta'ai** who had taught me so much about life and the passion to learn and persistently struggle to succeed. *Ko ho'omo helá'eni, kuó u lava ke lava'i'eku feingá*. I am forever indebted to you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APSTE – Association for Pasifika Staff in Tertiary Education

ATLAANZ – Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa NZ

A/NZ – Aotearoa New Zealand

AUT – Auckland University of Technology

CLANZ – Community Learning Aotearoa New Zealand

EFTS – Equivalent Full Time Students

IELTS – International English Language Testing System

LDS – Latter Day Saints

LMS – London Missionary Society

MIT – Manukau Institute of Technology

MOE – Ministry of Education

MPIA – Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs

MSD – Ministry of Social Development

NZAID – New Zealand Aid and Development

NCEA – National Certificate in Education Achievement

NZTTSA – New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Student Association

OECD – Organisation for Economic Development

PAG – Pasifika Advisory Group

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy

PSSC – Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate

SUTT – Siasi Uēsiliana Tauʻatāina ʻo Tonga

TEC – Tertiary Education Commission

TEI – Tertiary Education Institution

TLDU – Teaching and Learning Development Unit

UNESCO – United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF – United Nations International Children Emergency Fund

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW: KOE TALATEU

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the stepping stones *makatuʻu* and stumbling blocks *makatūkia* encountered by Tongan male learners in higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand (A/NZ). My years as a high school student in Tonga, and at higher education in A/NZ and later working as a teacher, administrator, and a full-time student, have challenged and provoked me to explore why most Tongan male learners have failed to pursue and succeed at higher education. I was curious about what causes many to fail, while a few are more determined and succeed. I felt a deep conviction and was inspired to pursue this study, in order to provide a better practical scenario for more Tongan male learners to pursue and succeed at higher education.

My own desire to pursue higher education began when I was still at high school in Tonga. Life was hard, and I literally had to help my parents to support our family. Being the youngest, I knew that without a decent education I would not be able to have a bright future. It was quite a challenge but because I saw no other way through this hardship and extreme poverty, I committed early on to persevere and persist to the end. I was fortunate enough to be awarded a NZAID scholarship, and I found my new, multifarious adventures in A/NZ quite challenging. Things were different and soon I

found myself having to tangle and untangle socio-cultural tensions and make tough decisions about life. The rewards of my educational endeavor were always on my mind.

I saw my own people struggling while trying to admonish their children about the value of gaining a good education. Sadly, I also witnessed many forego their opportunities because of peer pressure, employment, and other latent commitments. The benefits of higher education are correlated with better job opportunities, a higher income and job satisfaction, along with increased personal comfort and social fulfillment compared to those with no qualifications at all. Lawes (2009) reported that people with higher education skills have more potential to secure better job opportunities, higher personal income and job satisfaction than those with no qualification at all. Additionally, in A/NZ, average earnings are 24% higher for those with a tertiary education compared to those with only upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). This implies that those with higher education qualifications are rewarded and compensated with better opportunities and financial remuneration.

Transitioning to life in Aotearoa requires certain literacy and numeracy skills, which can be learned at higher education. The age of information has created a ripple effect on skills and employment opportunities, especially the need to continually update knowledge and skills that are in high demand. My experiences, both as a learner and as a practitioner at secondary and higher education here in A/NZ and Tonga, have allowed me to associate and gain a holistic understanding of the barriers and obstacles

faced by Tongan male learners in higher education. Tongans need to realise that to break the cycle of living below the poverty line, and to conquer the health and well-being problems this creates, every educational opportunity must be exploited and pursued. A changed mindset is needed to provide and create better opportunities for Tongans in A/NZ.

1.2 Research Question and Approach

This research is rooted in the life and learning experiences of Tongan male learners at higher education in A/NZ. It was expedient that a focus question was developed to envelop the holistic nature of the scholarship. This research asks the question: ***"What are the perceptions and experiences of Tongan male learners at higher education in A/NZ?"*** Asking this question allows the researcher to objectively formulate meaningful research methodologies for data collection. This focus question forms the basis for other sub-questions to be asked and deviated from, and allows rich information to be collected and collated. Developing this focus question allowed an exploration of the socio-cultural constructs of education amongst male Tongan learners living in A/NZ, and discovery of the relevant stumbling blocks and stepping stones. The focus question was designed to illicit an understanding of the issues that are relevant for building the capacity and capability of Tongan male learners, a field that has lacked published scholarship. It set the stage for what I hoped to achieve in this thesis through developing research aims.

1.3   The aims of this research

The research title and focus question provided the direction I was going to take to make this thesis more focused and meaningful. I also developed corresponding aims, which helped to coherently guide this research and define its scope and parameters. Under the guidance of my supervisor I was able to focus my research on an aspect wherein I would be able to contribute significantly to the welfare of Tongans in A/NZ.

To explore the experiences of male Tongan learners at higher education there was one principal aim followed by a sub-aim for this thesis:

Principal aim

    i.   To provide insights into and understanding of the possible stumbling blocks and potential stepping stones of Tongan males in higher education;

Sub-aim

    ii.   To develop a possible research framework for understanding Tongan male learners and possibly other Pasifika male learners at higher education

These aims propelled me to empirically explore the experiences of male Tongan learners, using Tongan research methodologies and a body of knowledge that could be drawn upon, to improve their access, participation, retention, and completion of higher education in A/NZ. Having established the aims of this research, it was also expedient

that a set of assumptions were identified to guide research questions and validate the gap in literature about the significance of this research.

1.4   Assumptions

When undertaking this research several things clouded my mind about the variables that affect the experiences and perceptions of Tongan male learners. As a learner and a researcher I needed to objectively judge my assumptions, which are as follows:

- Stepping stones and stumbling blocks for male Tongan learners are influenced by cultural, religious, and organisational values.

- Lack of employability and harsh economic realities force male learners to consider further learning.

- Tongan male learners are struggling to persist and engage successfully because of the pedagogical nature and institutional structure of the A/NZ education system.

- Successful Tongan male learners are those who are able to persist and interface effectively and efficiently with the learning environment and surroundings.

1.5   Delimitations

Delimitations were developed to provide a quality benchmark and scope in order for my research to be specific, reliable, manageable, and achievable. The following enabled this research to be focused in achieving its aims and objectives.

- This study will be limited to Tongan male learners in A/NZ engaging in higher education.

- This study will be restricted to a selected sample of New Zealand universities and polytechnics with reference to Tongans.

- This study will be limited to issues of higher education identified by historical and contemporary documents, and the barriers that are confronting Tongan male learners.

- The study will be limited to the period covering the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

To address the focus question, aims, and delimitations, three Tongan conceptual frameworks were used: the *Kalia-Langimālie framework* (Chapter 8) conceptualised and developed in this research; using of *talanoa methodology* and a refinement of Thaman (1988) *Kakala research methodology* (Chapter 4). Exploring the intricate and delicate weaving of indigenous Tongan epistemologies and Western philosophies offer possible outcome to improving the success of Tongan male learners in Aotearoa.

1.6   Background and Interest

My interest in this study began several years ago during my work with adults in continuing education at the University of the South Pacific (USP) – Tonga Campus, where a large number of mature students, with no history of completed formal schooling, came back to school after many years. After working with some male, mature learners, I realised that there were *makatūkia* and *makatuʻu* that were affecting their studies. Some managed to get through, but many failed and became discouraged and did not continue. Despite having quite a significant number of students failing, the university did not attempt to find solutions for the problem. Nevertheless, I was impressed with the students who had, against all odds, persisted and made it to graduation. In fact, my educational journey here in A/NZ also provided me with relevant experiences and the impression that Tongans are not proactive enough to take advantage of available educational opportunities.

Educational accomplishment for Tongans in New Zealand is a Government priority, according to Tongataiʻo (2010) and Pacific Plan 2009-2012 (Ministry of Education, 2009). Despite being well recognised in papers and policies for decades, a wide disparity has existed in tertiary participation rates and subsequently in the socio-economic status of Tongans compared to Pakeha and Asian populations (Airini et al., 2009, 2011; Chu et al., 2013).The title of this research symbolically explicates and embodies the notion of struggle, persistence, and the challenges that Tongan male learners face in their pursuit of learning and excellence. The well-known Tongan proverb**,** "*Kātaki ē mamá moe*

hopohopokia" means enduring, bailing out water from leaks and rough seas. It denotes endurance, persistence, and perseverance to the end ('Ofisi Ako 'o e Siasi Uēsiliana Tau'atāina 'o Tongá, 1997). Likewise, an educational journey is always clouded with uncertainty, tension, and chaos, but to reach the destination one must press forward and remain true and steadfast. This research title also symbolises the ancient wisdom and knowledge of the *Moana* (Oceania) people as seafarers, having to navigate, sail to and settle Oceania against crosswinds and crosscurrents and the need to appreciate and use Moana epistemologies to understand how they see their world.

Tongan epistemologies help to explain the tension and complexities of *tā* (time) and *vā* (space), past, present, and future and the struggle that male Tongans face while growing up in A/NZ with their *kāinga,* extended family and cosmos. It depicts the struggle of Tongans to find and cultivate appropriate time and meaningful space to adjust and adapt to life in A/NZ. In reality, life is like sailing; it is not the best vessel that reaches safety, but the one that knows how to exploit, adjust and adapt to the obstacles and challenges encountered within the vast ocean.

Kumifonua, migration and searching for new land, is not a recent phenomenon to the Tongans. Connell and Brown (2004, p.2) argued that migration is a reaction to "real and perceived inequalities in socio-economic opportunities" between developed and developing countries. One rationale for Tongan migration is for Tongan children to gain the benefits of the good education that A/NZ has to offer. Coxon and Mara (2000) stated that the quality and well-organised nature of formal education in A/NZ

persuaded people to migrate from the Pacific Islands, including the Island Kingdom of Tonga.

1.7   Relevance of the study

There is growing concern that, despite the quality of education in A/NZ, the gap in participation and achievement between the Tongans and Pakeha is quite significant. Research has also indicated that the majority of Pasifika and Tongan families tend to be clustered in the lower socio-economic levels, engaging in low-paid jobs that require little skill (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003). Interestingly, researchers such as Dale, O'Brien, and St John (2011) have validated that the most under-served group in education is the poor. This is in line with the recent Auckland University: *He Ara Hou*: The Pathway Forward (2011), and Tanielu and Johnson (2013, & 2014), which confirm that there is a strong correlation between poverty and access to basic social, political, and economic services. Therefore, the growing divide between the poor and the rich is affecting the access, participation, retention, and completion in higher education.

 At present, the gap between female and male learners in terms of participation, retention, and completion is quite phenomenal, according to current statistics in A/NZ. Statistics New Zealand (2014) reported that more than two thirds of bachelor degree graduates were female. While the number of males completing their studies dropped over the last 10 years, there was a consistent increase in females completing their study. There have also been an increasing number of male students not completing National Certificate in Educational Assessment (NCEA). In general, the trend of male learners is

alarming; the need to bridge that gap is critical, according to various literatures and findings (Chu et al., 2013).

McLaughlin (2003, p.14) affirmed that "very little is known about the participation patterns of Pasifika learners and the impact of their life contexts on their learning journeys'', hence the urgency to explore this subject. Pasifika and Tongan male learners' participation and completion across the board, from high school to tertiary education, are alarmingly disproportionate. The literature over the past two decades indicates that Tongan male students in A/NZ are increasingly struggling to be academically successful and research is needed to uncover the reasons for their struggles and to identify the problems of underachievement in formal and higher education (Fusitu'a, 1992; Fusitu'a & Coxon, 1998; Kalāvite, 2010; Koloto, 2003; Manu'atu, 2000; 'Otunuku, 2011; Vaioleti; 2011). However, almost no particular study has taken the initiative to address why male learners are predominantly underperforming and dropping out. As a consequence there is a critical need to find solutions and alternative pathways to empower Tongan male learners to succeed.

This study assumes that because there is a high rate of failure in secondary and tertiary studies for Pasifika and male Tongan learners, there will be complex, overarching challenges that need to be discussed and deliberated (Airini et al., 2008; Anae et al., 2002). This study also seeks to uncover the underlying factors that have contributed to the socio-economic marginalisation of male Tongans, thus creating a benchmark for policy dialogue, formulation, and implementation. This undertaking is critically

expedient for providing a theoretical and practical framework for empowering Tongan male learners with the knowledge that it is never too late to pursue further education.

The need for this research is timely and relevant as "in A/NZ, the ethnic-specific information about Tongan people is scarce" (Koloto, 2003, p. 37).Lack of scholarship on issues of ethnic-specificity have created widening gap on participation and achievement. To date, research on the issues of Tongan students' academic achievement in A/NZ has tended to focus on primary and secondary learning. Only a few researchers such as Kalāvite (2010, 2012) and Havea (2011) have taken the step to explore the aspects of Tongans in higher education in A/NZ. This research is one of the first to address the issue through an ethnic and gender-based undertaking, looking specifically at male Tongan learners and their engagement in higher education. This undertaking will be useful to various stakeholders for different reasons, such as:

- Informing new policy guidelines pertaining to Pasifika and Tongan education.

- Creating new literature on education pertaining to engaging Pasifika and, in particular, Tongan males in tertiary education.

- Identifying strategies for intervention and counselling and identifying alternative pathways on how Tongan males can best be inspired, supported, and motivated to pursue and re-engage successfully in tertiary education.

- Identifying stumbling blocks and stepping stones within a specific Tongan conceptual framework for interested stakeholders.

- Informing learning institutions and government officials about initiatives and incentives to support male learners.

- Providing guidance for potential and future Tongan male learners who seek to take the pathway of further education.

1.8   Structure of the Thesis

This chapter provides the rationale and purpose for this thesis. I have also outlined the key research questions and delimitations; the conceptual framework used, and explained why this research is significant and relevant.

Chapter Two provides a contextual setting of contemporary Tongans in A/NZ with reference to the Tongan culture, *anga faka tonga*, Tongan culture, *nofo 'a kaingā*, Tongan extended families operated *tauhi vā*, keeping good and harmonious relationships, and *lotu*, religion.

Chapter Three reviews the literature around Pasifika and Tongan male perceptions and experiences in higher education in A/NZ, with relevant theories and theoretical frameworks that are used throughout the research.

Chapter Four discusses the research design and the methodology employed in the research. The conceptual/cultural framework of *talanoa* is introduced and described. Analysis of the data using a thematic approach is discussed in this chapter, the participants are introduced, and how they were included during the data collection phase is explained. Ethical considerations and requirements are also addressed.

Chapter Five presents and discusses findings specifically related to *makatūkia,* stumbling blocks. The chapter uses *talanoa,* to talk, *tālanga, to* talk constructively *and tālave,* to informally talk, to connect, scenarios through vignettes to accurately elaborate on the experiences of Tongan male learners. The chapter builds on thematic issues that were identified and are prevalent in the research findings.

Chapter Six follows the same scenario as that of Chapter Five, but specifically focuses on stepping stones, *makatu'u.* This chapter reiterates findings through constructive thematic issues that portray the experiences of Tongan male learners in higher education.

Chapter Seven elaborates holistically on the major themes that arise from the two previous chapters and links it with the current literature. This chapter also summarises the findings from the study, considers them in relation to the literature reviewed, and discusses their implications. The findings have a strong Tongan voice and Tongan ways of practice are explored and discussed.

Chapter Eight develops a conceptual framework known as *Kalia-Langimālie* to explain and understand how successful Tongan male learners adjust and adapt in order to succeed in A/NZ. The chapter also acknowledges research limitations and presents concluding remarks.

CHAPTER TWO

TONGANS IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a contextual setting relating to contemporary Tongans in A/NZ, illustrating the issues that are shaping and affecting their socio-economic livelihood. A historical overview is also given, to trace the motives behind their migration, their struggles, and the challenges that contribute to their *kumifonua* and *langafonua* in A/NZ. This is then followed by a discussion of their *anga-fakatonga, nofo 'a kāinga, tauhi vā,* and *lotu*, which are very influential in shaping the livelihood of Tongans in A/NZ.

2.2 *Kumifonua*: searching for a new home

Kumifonua, searching for new land, and *langafonua,* building and nurturing the land, represent the nomadic skills of the Tongans in searching for a new place to settle. Trans-migration of the Tongan people is not a modern day phenomenon. Tongans were part of the Moana people who traversed and settled Oceania thousands of years before the arrival of the white men (Campbell, 2001; Connell, 2002; Hau'ofa, 2008; Latukefu, 1975). Modern day migration started at the end of World War II, and was mainly to the United States, Australia, and A/NZ. According to Fa'anunu (2007), most of these migrants were young, single adults who were desperately excited about expected opportunities, with no expectation to return home.

Large scale migration to A/NZ began in the 1970s and was, again, caused by many factors in Tonga, such as limited opportunities for paid employment, diminishing agricultural work, and the land tenure system becoming problematic due to the growing population. Access to media and stories influenced the country's migration patterns, and many Tongans were motivated to migrate overseas. Tongan political autonomy and independence was historically stable, but the living standards held little prospect for many young Tongans. Although Tongans have long shown a profound appreciation for education, employment chances have remained frustratingly limited, hence the impulse to migrate. Many perceived migration as the only solution to their socio-economic problems (Campbell, 2001; Lee-Morton, 2004; Taumoefolau, 2006a).

The stories about, and fascination with, living and working in A/NZ were irresistible to many young Tongan migrants, and they decided to stay. Many of these labour migrants were given temporary working visas and instead of returning to Tonga after their permits expired, stayed in A/NZ unlawfully (Taumoefolau, 2006a, and 2006b). In the mid-1970s, the A/NZ economy was in a recession and unemployment was dramatically affecting the economy. The Government immediately turned to the issue of "overstayers" – immigrants whose temporary visas had expired. Many were immediately singled out for abusing the welfare system and committing petty crimes; some were chased up and deported instantly. In 1974, police started making "dawn raids" on the homes of alleged overstayers and these intensified in October 1976. Households were stormed at night or in the early hours of the morning, a strategy

that caused outrage and brought accusations of racism. Both Samoan and Tongan overstayers were singled out; some people of these ethnicities were stopped in the street and asked for proof of residency. It created a sense of racial fragmentation and discord. While this part of history is not often brought up by mass media or referred to as historically significant, Tongans are not reluctant to share it as part of their heritage in A/NZ (Fa'anunu, 2007; Tu'itahi, 2009).

However, in the late 1980s, there was a change in the immigration policy. The Government, triggered by a booming economy, initiated a "visa free entry" in 1987, which saw the highest number of Tongans migrating to A/NZ, where most remained and gained permanent residency. In 1981, there was an estimated 5,232 Tongans in A/NZ, but the number tripled by 1991 to reach 23,172, which is quite dramatic growth (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). This later ceased when A/NZ, again, experienced economic problems. Strict criteria were implemented to curb overstayers and the inflow of visitors from the islands. The initiation of the Pacific Access category in 2004 contributed to an increase in numbers of skilled Tongans seeking better opportunities in A/NZ. Through the Pacific Access, every year names are put into a lottery and 250 names are drawn and given an opportunity to file for permanent residency, provided they meet certain criteria. This has attracted quite a significant number of Tongans to A/NZ every year (Taumoefolau, 2006; Tu'itahi, 2009).

Stories of hardship associated with searching for a better life – such as the dawn raids, and experiences of working in cold weather and long hours – are being reiterated by

many Tongans to remind their children of their heritage. This is significant because it reminds their children of who they are, and the sacrifices that were made in the past. There are increasing numbers of young Tongans who are becoming deviants and causing serious problems. Statistics New Zealand (2012) reported an increase in the number of Tongan and Pasifika (12%) inmates in prison, disproportionate to their population. Pasifika and Tongan generations must step up their responsibilities to their people, especially with the vast array of opportunities that are there for them. Consequently, it seems that the younger generations of today have lost touch with their heritage and how fortunate they are, especially with the opportunities that are available for them in A/NZ.

Contemporary scholars of Tongan heritage in A/NZ have also articulated that when these historical events are positively exploited, taught, and embedded , it helps create a sense of purpose, character, perseverance, and persistence amongst Tongan students (Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2011; Tu'itahi, 2009, 2012). When stories of the *kumifonua* are meaningfully explained and understood it can dramatically change lives and characters (Tu'itahi, 2009).

2.3 *Langafonua*: growing up in a new land

When Tongans arrive in A/NZ they must learn to cope with their surroundings. The last official census, in 2013, showed that there are slightly more than 60,000 Tongans living in A/NZ. Officially, Tongans are the third largest ethnic group, behind Samoans

and Cook Islanders, with a vigorous growth rate since 2006. Tongans have increasingly made their presence felt in A/NZ, in areas such as sport and education.

Tongans in New Zealand from 1961-2013

Year	born in Tonga	total population
1961	777	
1971	1273	
1981	5232	
1991	13068	23172
2001	18051	40719
2013	22413	60333
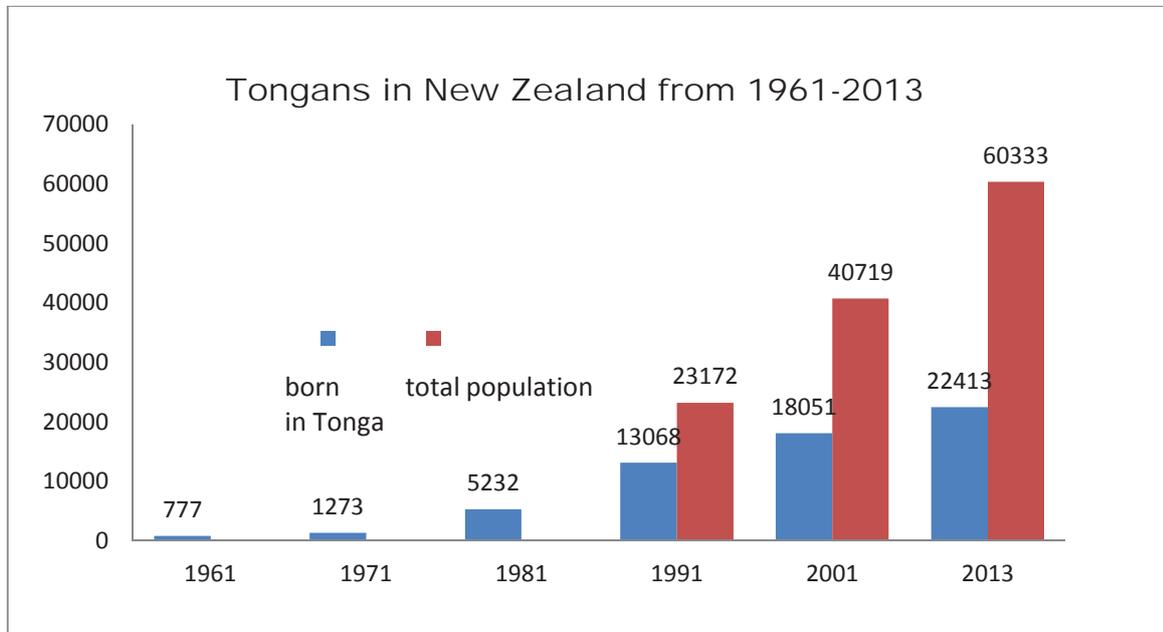
Fig.1 shows the Tongan population in A/NZ with total Tongans born in Tonga (Statistics New Zealand, 2014)

2.3.1   Population and settlement

The Tongan population has experienced dramatic growth since the 1980s to become one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in A/NZ. In the early 1980s, most Tongans settled in places where employment was available. Successive flows of migrants from Tonga also found themselves living with their *kāinga*, who had previously migrated because of employment and support. They also settled in places that were close to employment, with cheap accommodation, such as state houses, and *lotu*, religion.

With a total population of 60,333 Tongans living in A/NZ, there is an almost evenly balanced gender distribution, with 49% males and 51% females; boasting a very youthful population. More than 60% of those identifying as Tongans were A/NZ born, therefore it is a challenge for Tongans to keep their language alive. Significantly, the number of those who speak Tongan is slowly declining – from 63% in 1996 to 53% in 2013. Tongans have mostly settled in urban areas, with 90% living in the Auckland region, mostly in South Auckland. Wellington was the second most important area of settlement, with 4% of the A/NZ Tongan population living there (Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

2.3.2   Health and well-being

Being Tongan is one of the worst health and social indicators in A/NZ, and demands better approaches and health precaution strategies. This has been influenced by socio-economic factors, which have caused an aggravated, negative impact on health and well-being. It seems that the factors that most negatively affect Tongans' health are low educational achievement and health literacy, high unemployment rates, crowded, cold, and damp houses, and inequities in access to, and quality of, provided health care. While socio-economic factors are the main underlying factors that contribute to poor health in Pasifika people, not all of the ethnic disparities in health are attributable to socio-economic factors (Basset & Holt, 2002; 'Ofanoa & Raeburn, 2014; Vaka, 2014).

Studies of Tongan populations have recorded some of the highest levels of obesity in the world. There has been an increasing prevalence in obesity over the past few

decades, indicating a major public health threat to people's lives and placing them at greater risk of short-term and long-term health consequences. A New Zealand Health Survey (2012) was conducted on the burden of obesity, and 23.3% of Pasifika children (aged 2–14 years), and 63.7% of Pasifika adults were found to be obese. When compared with other ethnic groups in A/NZ, these results indicate that obesity is more prevalent among Pasifika children and adults than any other ethnic group in A/NZ. Moreover, obese children are likely to become more obese in adulthood and experience health conditions such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and psychosocial problems (Vaka, 2014).

However, various strategies and practises have been implemented to help provide better health and well-being for Tongans in A/NZ. For example, *Langimālie* Integrated Health Care and other Pasifika health providers provide health counselling and promote healthy living for Tongans. However, despite this and other Government initiatives, Tongans remain ill-affected by health-related problems, which are linked to socio-economic factors.

2.3.3 *Ako*

Ako is used in this research context to refer to worthwhile, meaningful education and training that causes lifelong positive influence. *Ako* is also referred to as the formal learning that the missionaries brought to the islands, which was used, at that time, as a tool for conversion to Christianity. Most writers on Tongan migrations, such as Lee-Morton (2004), and Faʻanunu (2007), claimed that *ako* was one of the strongest

impetuses for Tongans to migrate overseas. Searching for better educational opportunities caused many Tongans and their families to leave their small island country. The first wave of Tongan migrants in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to A/NZ were mainly unskilled and faced multifarious obstacles. They badly wanted to give their children an opportunity to make a difference. However, as time has passed, it appears that second and third generation Tongans are now forgetting the real motives that persuaded their parents to leave the islands. More and more opportunities for further education are being neglected over paid employment.

Despite numerous challenges faced by Tongans, many are engaged in getting a decent education. About 68.7% of Tongan adults aged 15 and above have attained a formal educational qualification, with a higher proportion of Tongan women (72%) than men (65%) with a formal qualification. Furthermore, the proportion of Tongan-born New Zealanders who have a formal qualification (77%) is much higher than New Zealand-born Tongans (62%). Currently, there are 56% females, and only 44% males, aged 15 and above, doing some form of learning. However, attaining a formal qualification does not necessarily translate into employable skills, with more Tongans failing to take up further studies at higher education, causing high unemployment rates. Again, statistics show that Tongan women are continually doing better than men, and are successfully pursuing higher education qualifications (Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

2.3.4 Income and employment

There is a strong correlation between higher education and gaining employable skills with higher income and better employment opportunities (Kalāvite, 2010; Faleolo, 2012). However, Tongans are affected because of their lack of employable skills and their failure to gain further education. Additionally, the median annual income in 2013 for the Tongan adult population was $15,300. In comparison, the median annual incomes for the total Pasifika population and New Zealand populations in 2013 were $24,400 and $28,500 respectively. This is quite a big gap, of close to $10,000 in annual income, which again affects a lot of Tongans in A/NZ. Close to 60% of the population earned an average of $20,000 or less, with only 3.7% earning above $70,000. This low income is a result of Tongans being employed in unskilled jobs with minimum pay rate, causing severe socio-economic hardship.

One of the main reasons for Tongans' lower income level is their young population, and lack of employable skills, with only 59% being of working age, and mostly employed in the manufacturing industry where jobs are unsecure and poorly paid. High unemployment rates have continued to affect Tongans in A/NZ, especially living standards, health and access, participation and completion in higher education. Evidence shows that income and earning potential increases with skills, better education, and age (Tanielu & Johnson 2013, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

2.4 Contemporary Tongans in Aotearoa New Zealand

The experiences and perceptions of Tongans living in A/NZ are informed by a combination of various factors, such as *nofo ʻa kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos, through the overarching dynamics of *tā* (time) and *vā* (space). The gradual transformation and influence of these factors on Tongan New Zealanders have increasingly changed over time. These factors, with the dynamics of *tā* and *vā*, have created inter-generational differences, perceptions, boundaries, and meanings, to the extent of causing tension, conflict, and harmony (Kaʻili, 2008 Kalāvite, 2010; Mahina, 2004b; Vaka, 2014).

2.4.1   The role of culture

Tongans are a well-established ethnic group in A/NZ. They possess a very colourful culture, which is inherently reflected in how they celebrate their identity through their roles and responsibilities to *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos. Understanding culture is a prerequisite to understanding how people operate and do things, and their meanings and expectations of life, such as norms, values and beliefs. According to prominent Pasifika and Tongan scholar, Konai Helu Thaman (Thaman, 1999, p. 2) culture is defined as "the way of life of a discrete group, which includes a language, a body of accumulated knowledge, skills, beliefs and values." Thaman elaborates that a "culture is central to the understanding of human relationships and acknowledges the fact that members of different cultural groups have unique systems of perceiving and organising the world around them. The ways in which we have been socialised largely influence our behaviour and way of thinking as our world view" (ibid, p.2).

Thaman (1988, 1999, 2001, 2009) has tirelessly argued that an understanding of a people's culture is essential to the understanding of individual human beings, their perceptions, and the meanings they bring to life. Thaman stresses the fact that each cultural group has a unique system of perceiving, understanding, and organising the world around them.

Additionally, Swartz and Jordan (1980) and Thaman (1999) allude to culture as a shared heritage because it provides explicit guidance for expected behaviours, values, and worldviews of a particular group of people at a given period of time. According to these commentators, culture is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves over time to respond to emerging needs and circumstances. Daniellson (1979) further noted the dynamic nature of culture and pointed out the unrealistic nature of wholesale repetition of indigenous culture. He argued that culture "is never a set of fixed and uniform behaviour, and any attempt on a large scale to turn back the clock is bound to end in dismal failure. The eternal question that Pacific Islanders will have to face also in the future is therefore, what to retain of the traditional culture and what to adopt in the form of new ideas and things"(p. 16).

Other Pasifika scholars, such as Tausie (1980, p. 6) have pointed out that "culture gives one confidence and identity. A person without a culture is a person without a soul". The importance of understanding the culture of Tongans in A/NZ is significant, because the outcome of this research argues that the elements of socio-culture such as

kāinga, *lotu*, and *tauhi vā* play a critical role in shaping the experiences of Tongan male learners in higher education.

2.4.2 *Anga fakatonga*

One of the most notable writers in Tongan education and culture, Dr. ʻAna Maui Taufeʻulungaki, then the honorable Minister of Education, stated:

"The key values of western societies are often said to relate to individual rights and freedoms; justice in terms of equity and access; protection of privacy; promotion of competition and consumerism; and, scientific rational thinking. Tongan values, on the other hand, which are similar to the values of other Pacific communities, emphasize the holistic nature of life and the centrality of good relationships; the connectivity of the past, present and future; of people, land, sea and sky, and the spirituality that binds them together"(2011, p. 1).

This inquiry holistically delineates the meaning of *anga fakatonga* (in the Tongan way) as circular, non-linear, and communalistic, as opposed to the Western lifestyle that is individualistic and linear. *Anga fakatonga* literally means the culture or tradition of the Tongans, with attributes that entail *fakaʻapaʻapa* (respect), *ʻofa* (love), *fatongia* (obligation), *talangofua* (obedience), and *mateakiʻi meʻa* (loyalty) (Taufeʻulungaki, 2011; Vaioleti, 2011; Vaka, 2014).

There are numerous writings that have articulated on *anga fakatonga* in A/NZ; for example, the works of Afeaki (2004), Kalāvite (2010), Manuʻatu (2000), ʻOtunuku (2011),

Tu'itahi (2005), and Vaioleti (2011). These authors acknowledged that *anga fakatonga* does exist in A/NZ. Like culture, *anga fakatonga* must adapt and change, and Tongans have continued to identify with it as a matter of pride and identity. The last Rugby World Cup, in 2011, for example, really was a showcase of Tongan pride and identity in A/NZ. Tongans were proud to share their culture with the rest of the world. The annual ASB Polyfest also showcased unique Tongan dances, which were performed by Tongan students as a form of showcasing their culture and *anga fakatonga*.

Secondly, there is an emerging degree of tension and fluidity in the views of the Tongan people about *anga fakatonga*. According to Kalāvite (2010) and Faleolo (2012) those that have become more educated and are increasingly attached to the ways of the Pakeha are not too fond of *anga fakatonga*. Some believe that it has become a barrier to becoming successful in A/NZ. Others have decided to let go of some of the rigidity and rituals of being Tongan, such as *fatongia* (mutual obligations) to *kāinga* at funerals and weddings, which they believe has degraded their family wellbeing. Evidently, there are Tongans who are strongly clinging to *fatongia* as a showcase of material wealth and *anga fakatonga*.

Lastly, there is a continuum of views and perceptions held by older Tongan-born New Zealanders in comparison to the young New Zealand-born Tongans. There are inter-generational dynamics that cause different views and perceptions of the *anga fakatonga*. Tongans in A/NZ have modified and integrated a combination of different sets of values of the Pakeha with the *anga fakatonga* to allow them some degree of flexibility,

adaptation, and survival. However, "old school Tongans" seems to stick with the conservative, orthodox, and more traditional *anga fakatonga*, while the "new school" are more modernised, are exposed to greater material wealth, and are more relaxed about adapting and adjusting to change. The older generation seems to believe that Tongan values are significant to retaining identity and success. They teach humility, love, respect, and obedience, which all contribute to becoming *tangata kakato,* a holistic and completed being. Tongans see *tangata kakato* as the supreme purpose of life, the ability to take responsibilities for the self, *lotu*, cosmos and *kāinga*, in a spiritual and temporal way.

On the other hand, contemporary Tongans believe that there needs to be some changes to performing *fatongia, faka'apa'apa, mamahi'i me'a, talangofua,* and *'ofa* which are the core elements of *anga fakatonga*. Interestingly, these core elements of the *anga fakatonga*, through *tā* and *vā*, are significant to the outcome and understanding of this research context. Tongan concepts such as *nofo 'a kāinga* (extended family), and *kavei koula* (core values), are discussed in the findings and discussion chapters. These overarching elements form the principal dispositions of *anga fakatonga* and being Tongan, including perceptions and experiences of higher education.

2.4.3   *Nofo 'a kāinga*

The core element of the Tongan culture is the *kāinga*, which is enacted and replicated through *nofo 'a kāinga*. *Kāinga* is synonymous with family, tribes, and clans. *Kāinga* is the extended family, bonded by kinship through blood and marriage. This is the world

where Tongans learn of the core values that are enacted through *anga fakatonga* and *nofo 'a kāinga*. *Nofo 'a kāinga* is literally defined as how *kāinga* and households live and relate to each other harmoniously, through performing and cultivating responsibilities and obligations. Tongans are taught their expected roles and responsibilities through socialization, by various institutions of their society, but most importantly through *nofo 'a kāinga'*.

Within the context of the *nofo 'a kāingá, 'ulumotu'a* is the male head of the household. The *'ulumotu'a* is usually the paternal male elder of the *kāinga*. This title is passed on from father to son. Through his wisdom and character, he is revered and respected and is seen as a person of age, who gives wise counsel and judgement with a loving heart. Everyone learns their responsibilities, and how best to keep and nourish them harmoniously. Each learns how to render an act of service, through responsibilities and obligation, by seeing and rendering it.

The Tongan saying, *fōfola ē falá ka e talanoa e kāinga*, which literally means roll out the mat for the *kāinga* to dialogue, describes a platform where deliberations and discussions are held for the welfare of the *kāinga*. Everyone's responsibilities and contributions are acknowledged. Decisions are made consensually, and everyone acknowledges the wise counsel of the *'ulumotu'a*. The benefit of the collective group is always important and is taken as first priority. Tu'itahi (2006, 2012) elaborated on the contributions of *nofo 'a kāinga* in building a healthy and successful transition for Tongan families. He describes how the first Tongans that arrived in A/NZ formed a network of *kāinga*, where they

could provide accommodation, jobs and so forth for others, which was important for those who followed. Other Tongan scholars, such as Ketu'u (2014), have also articulated that *nofo 'a kāinga* was inevitable for the success of many Tongans, who find life in A/NZ hard, especially with learning a new language, lifestyle, and choices.

However, contemporary *nofo 'a kāinga* in A/NZ are affected by demography and capitalism. Tongan households are always big in numbers, because of the number of visitors that come from the islands, as well as those that are struggling to meet the financial obligations of paying rent. Those who own houses also house other *kāinga* with them, to help them financially. Interactions between *kāinga* are occurring less, because of space and time and the financial obligations that come with trying to survive in A/NZ.

2.4.4 *Tauhi vā*

Tauhi vā simply means reciprocally cultivating a harmonious and conducive space, and is important for contemporary Tongans in A/NZ. According to Fa'anunu (2007) and Tu'itahi (2009) the first wave of migrants were cautious about the importance of cultivating *tauhi vā* as a means of trying to adapt and adjust to the new land. It was important that they created close relations with Maoris and other ethnicities. Many of them were married to Maori, especially Tongan men, as a way of creating space for their *kāinga*. Tongan men, with their physicality and masculinity were highly attractive to Maori women (Mafile'o, 2005).

Desiring to get their relatives and *kāinga* to A/NZ was also part of keeping their *vā*, relational space to their motherland. According to Kalāvite (2010, 2012) those that came and saw the opportunities wanted to bring their families from the island. Making the transition from island life to a metropolitan lifestyle was quite chaotic and complex. It came with challenges and obstacles. Fa'anunu (2007) highlighted that most Tongans in the 1970-80s, preferred to stay with their *kāinga*, close to the cities, in areas such as Grey Lynn, Mt Roskill, and Ponsonby. This happened because those who first arrived felt that it was their responsibility to provide for those that would follow.

Kāinga support was critical for finding new jobs, and learning to survive. Those that had previously landed were continuing to provide accommodation and material needs, which were critical for the new arrivals. As the *kāinga* grew in numbers so did the circles and networks of *tauhi vā* and support. Lee (2003), Fa'anunu (2007), Pulu (2007), and Tu'itahi (2009) have also concurred that *tauhi vā* provided a platform for overseas Tongans to acculturate to their new home. Tongans believed that growing up in A/NZ, their families needed to create and cultivate *tauhi vā*. This is seen in A/NZ in many forms such as *kāinga* reunion, village fundraising, graduations, weddings and birthdays, sports tournament, festivals and so forth. Tongans are warm-hearted people who always give much, even when there is little left.

Discouraged by globalisation, Tongans are affected because of the space and time that is needed to perform *tauhi vā*. Incentives, through sports competition, school reunions, and kava drinking circles, are increasingly conducive to providing a platform for *tauhi*

vā. Tongans seek to cultivate harmonious spaces with their fellow villagers and *kāinga* through various occasions such as weddings, funerals, and birthdays. Many have initiated *kāinga* reunions to reignite family ties by cultivating a harmonious space and looking for meaningful ways of helping their *kāinga*. Tongans believe that *tauhi vā* creates a sense of belonging and ownership. Reigniting and reconnecting their space is important with *nofo 'a kāinga* and how they cope and adjust to life in A/NZ.

Tauhi vā demands constant and reciprocal acts of *fatongia* and *'ofa.* Tongans believe that maintaining a good, harmonious space begins with having *'ofa* (love), and performing *fatongia* (obligation), and *makafetoli'aki* (reciprocity) to the fullest. When *fatongia* is fulfilled and harmoniously performed, it is said to cause excellence, *laulōtaha and napangapangamālie*, a well-balanced *fala* (mat), a space where everyone is cautiously mindful of the welfare of the *kāinga*. Ka'ili (2005, 2008) and Mahina (2001; 2004; 2007a; 2007b) wrote extensively on *tauhi vā,* and the importance of maintaining and cultivating a harmonious and *napangapangamālie* space for the *kāinga*. In A/NZ, *tauhi vā* is important, because one has to find a balance between *kāinga*, *lotu*, self, and the cosmos in order to adapt and adjust to the surroundings. At the same time, there is disharmony, discord, and conflict when *tauhi vā* is not harmoniously cultivated and maintained, causing family feuds, quarrels, and disagreement, which disrupts *nofo 'a kāinga*. When one is neglectful of his/her *fatongia*, there are always repercussions, which bring destruction and disharmony to the *kāinga* and the individual.

2.4.5 *Lotu*

Lotu is a broad concept that encapsulates faith, religion, church, and spirituality and is used interchangeably with these in this thesis. Tongans are categorically Christian by faith and are proud of their Christian heritage. Contemporary Tongans in A/NZ continue to practice *lotu* as an essential feature of their life. Like early pioneers of Christianity to the islands, Tongans took their *lotu* with them to remind and ground them with spiritual strength in their journey. Tongans are well known for their missionary work across Pasifika, from Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to Samoa and Fiji. The legacies of Tongan missionaries are founded on these islands (Latukefu, 1974; Niumeitolu, 2007).

Historically, Tongans practiced their own form of *lotu*, which was recorded by early explorers such as Captain Cook in 1773, 1774, and 1777. *Lotu mu'a*, ancient religion or heathenism as it was called by the missionaries, was an important element of power and authority. Chiefs were the main dictators of the *lotu mu'a*, including life and property. When the missionaries arrived in Tonga, much of their effort went to trying to discredit the power of *lotu mu'a* and replacing it with Christianity. Through the conversion of Tupou I, the power of Christianity gained prominence and influence (Latu, 2011; Latukefu, 1974; Niumeitolu, 2007).

Lotu played an integral part in shaping modern Tonga. Latukefu (1974), a notable Tongan historian, called it a "marriage of convenience", when explaining the role of *lotu* in shaping modern Tonga. It was the political interest of Tupou 1 that allowed the

missionaries to establish their influence in Tonga. Though it was introduced by the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the 18th century, the influence of *lotu* is evidenced in the lives of Tongan people everywhere. The first missionaries arrived in Tonga in early 1822, spreading the teachings of Christianity and Western Christian values and practices. It was difficult because the power of the chiefs over the people was still prominent and powerful. After a period of civil unrest, with the help of the missionaries, Tonga was finally unified by Tupou I in 1845, with an Emancipation Edict in 1862, which gave the people freedom to worship and to their property (Latukefu, 1974, 1996; Latu, 2011; Niumeitolu, 2007).

Significantly, the 1875 Constitution was the hallmark of Tupou's achievement and the influence of the missionaries. It displayed a Tongan motto, *Ko e 'Otua mo Tongá ko hoku tofi'a* (God and Tonga are my inheritance), which symbolises the significance of *lotu* to the Tongan people. Tongans are God-fearing people and are very conscious of the consequences of their *tauhi vā* to people and *lotu*. Above all the material inheritance that Tongans seek, *lotu* is regarded as the utmost prize, because it permeates peace, joy, and eternal happiness. The definition *of tangata kakato* (holistic and balanced being), is influenced by the fact that *lotu* plays an important role in it. The characteristics of being spiritually, mentally, and physically balanced, with the ability to provide and help others are important to being Tongan. Tongans are not rich by material terms, but they give wholeheartedly to any cause that they believe is important, which is rooted in their belief (Havea, 2011; Latu, 2009).

Tongans love travelling, and any opportunity to migrate overseas is always taken with vigour. According to Havea (2011) many knew that their journey would be unpredictable with challenges and obstacles, and that practicing their faith was a form of finding harmony and peace amidst problems. The 2013 New Zealand census data clearly showed that 86% of Tongans associate themselves with a religion and that 98% of that proportion identified themselves with a Christian denomination (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Interestingly, New Zealand born-Tongans are less likely to affiliate themselves with a *lotu* when compared to Tongan-born New Zealanders. Still, the influence of *lotu* is evidenced in the growth of many Tongans' *lotu*, especially in South Auckland. However, some Tongans are increasingly dissatisfied with *lotu*, and are not interested in it. They see it as an extra burden causing socio-economic hardship for their families (Havea, 2011).

In A/NZ *lotu* took on a unique role for Tongan communities, as previously mentioned. *Lotu* became a proxy for *nofo 'a kāinga* in Tonga, which significantly provides the necessary life support that new migrants need. As such, the church became, and possibly still is, a prominent sanctuary for Tongan pride and identity, particularly in the A/NZ context. In this sense, *lotu* became a prescriptive element of Tongan identity during the first migration wave in A/NZ. Here in South Auckland, the physical evidence of religious chapels that belong to Pasifika and Tongan churches are numerous, and on Sundays people flock to attend *lotu* and other activities. *Lotu* has become the mainstay of their communities.

There are quite a few different congregations that Tongans are affiliated to, and most are still attached to their *lotu* from the islands. Statistics New Zealand (2013) recorded that most Tongans belong to the Methodist Church, the Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS), and the Catholic Church. The LDS seemed to have the fastest growth amongst the three, with very convincing methods of proselyting and retention of members based on family-oriented principles. Many of these churches are recognizing the need to maintain close contact with their youth, who are increasingly straying from the folds. There are youth conferences, expos, firesides, and power up study programmes, all intended to encourage the youth to become more productive in the church and their future.

This research reiterates that *lotu* plays a significant role in providing a stepping stone for Tongan learners; however, on the other hand it may also be a stumbling block to their success. There is currently lack of research on how lotu affect members, financial commitments, outreach and support programmes, and counseling and youth activities and their education here in A/NZ.

2.5   Summary

This chapter has provided demographic and contextual information about contemporary Tongans in A/NZ. As migrants, Tongan communities have solidly established themselves in A/NZ through the process of chain migration during the 1960s. Since then, migration through skilled and Pacific Access program has continued to contribute to the increase in the Tongan population in A/NZ.

At present, the Tongan community is a youthful community with the majority of Tongans being New Zealand-born. There is also an increasing number of Tongans with multiple ethnicities. The demographic characteristics of contemporary Tongans in A/NZ are influenced by various overarching socio-cultural contexts. These have continued to shape the fate of many Tongans. Contemporary Tongans in A/NZ are still underperforming in areas such as health and wellbeing, *ako*, income, and employment opportunities. This chapter ended with a description of the key factors of *anga fakatonga* – that is, *nofo 'a kaingā*, *tauhi vā,* and *lotu* – and how they are important to contemporary Tongans in A/NZ.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   Introduction

The literature review is divided into three main parts. The first part is an overview of male learners' experiences and participation in higher education. Secondly, a presentation of literatures for Pasifika and Tongan males in Aotearoa is given. Lastly, a review of relevant theories that are expedient to this research is provided to clarify gaps in literature. Undertaking an ethnic and gender specific research has exposed the paucity of scholarship on the issue. Literature and research on these issues – or more, accurately, the lack of it – have highlighted the need to encourage and provide opportunities for further vigorous research on these issues. This review therefore is exploratory in nature to identify the degree to which relevant works come close to the premise of this research.

3.1.1   Definition of Higher Education

The (OECD) Organization for Economic Development (2008, p. 15) New Zealand Review concurred that Higher Education (HE) is synonymous with tertiary education covering post-secondary training such as "adult literacy and second chance education for those without previous formal or low schooling, through to certificates, diplomas, bachelors, masters and PhDs. It also covers industry training, apprenticeships and adult and community education." HE in Aotearoa is provided by Tertiary Education

Organizations (TEOs) through different organisational modes and mediums of learning such as Public tertiary education institutions (TEIs), Private training establishments(PTEs), Other tertiary education providers (OTEPs), industry training organisations (ITOs), and adult and community education (ACE) providers.

A working concept of HE clearly has varying degrees and meanings. For the purpose of this research, I stipulated that Higher Education refers to all worthwhile and organized learning that is undertaken after secondary schooling for the purpose of intellectual proficiency and practical skills improvement. This study will specifically look at PTEs (namely universities), OTEPs such as polytechnics and ITOs.

3.2   Higher Education in A/NZ

The priorities for HE in A/NZ are comprehensively presented in the Ministry of Education Tertiary Education Strategy document 2007-2012 (MOE, 2008c). The intent of the Tertiary Education Strategy is to contribute to the national goals by facilitating attainment of success by all New Zealanders through provision of "lifelong learning; creating and applying knowledge to drive innovation; and strong connections between tertiary education organizations and the communities they serve" (ibid, p. 18). The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) Strategy 2010-2015 (MOE, 2009) clearly outlines strategic emphasis of tertiary education for the next decade. Significantly, it calls for an overarching vision of providing a world-leading education system that equips all learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to be successful citizens in the

21st century. Importantly, the strategy also recognises Maori as tangata whenua and explicitly acknowledges the need to improve their welfare.

HE in A/NZ is governed by the Education Act of 1988, which stipulates TEC as the governing authority in managing government HE funds, thus ensuring that HE providers and institutions are cost effective to produce efficient result. HE institutions are obliged to be proactive in strategies and methods, and are research-oriented pertaining to retention, access, and students successfully completing courses. Substantial resources have been allocated to improve access, retention and students' successful completion of HE, including special targeting of Maori and Pasifika (MOE, 2013; OECD, 2008). TEC has recently scrutinised its funding criteria in order to ensure accountability. The Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017, focusing on retention and qualification achievement for Pasifika learners, reflects approaches by the Government to address the underachievement of the Pasifika population. The TEC has responded to this ongoing underachievement through outcomes- based funding incentives to support institutions' effort to help underachieving learners. However, although an estimated $4 billion is spent on HE annually, achievement is not improving for Pasifika and Maori (MOE, 2013).

3.3 Male Engagement in Higher Education: International perspective

One of the persistent challenges for HE during the 20th century and the beginning of this century has been the facilitating of the increasing participation and questioning access from ethnic minority groups who have not previously featured in HE.

Interestingly, it has only been in the last 40 years that substantial scholarly deliberations within academia over gender disparities of achievement in HE have emerged. However, attempts to address issues of access, participation, retention, and completion by male learners' have been even more recent. Debates have focused on the controversial portrayal of male learners as the "new disadvantaged" (Epstein et al., 1998). Boys have fallen behind girls in academic achievement in a number of industrialised countries (New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States) and in less developed countries; the picture is a lot more obscure. Such international trends reflect that the problem is accelerating and homogenous, underpinned by issues of politics, gender, culture, and wealth (Callister & Newell, 2006; Jha & Kelleher, 2006).

Media and commentators alike have amplified both "ethnic gap" and "gender gap" and the need to address and find alternative strategies. Although male underachievement is a relatively new focus of research, females have consistently outperformed their male counterparts for decades. Such gender disparities in attainment have been replicated in successive statistical data especially transitioning from secondary to higher education. Whilst the number of females entering HE over the last ten years has increased annually, male participation has stagnated, and the gap shows no real sign of narrowing (Callister et al., 2006; Dobson, 2006; Jha and Kelleher, 2006).

After World War II, access and participation in HE was male dominated. Therefore the issue of gender and ethnicity remained very much a floating epistemology. The rise of liberal feminism and Marxist-socialism coupled with international conventions on human rights prompted urgent action in various countries to address issues of disparity and inequality. For example, Britain introduced the Sex and Discrimination Act in 1975, which saw inaugural practices of allowing more participation for females in HE and areas that were male reserved and dominated (Beyer, et al., 2005)

Fascinatingly, international education figures published by the OECD (2008) are a complete reversal of what would have been expected a generation ago. Women have overtaken men at every level of education in developed countries around the world. Females are more confident of getting better paid professional jobs than their "flagging" male counterparts. For example, female students now outnumber male students (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006; Baker & Velez, 1996), female students outperform male students academically, and female students choose fields of study in which they were previously under-represented, while male students continue to make traditional choices (ABS, 2006; Ayalon, 2003; Beyer, et al., 2004). While it appears that women are increasingly more determined, focused, and proactive to take HE more seriously than men, the labour market in general, is still dominated by the established stratified patterns favouring men. Despite equal qualifications, women are paid considerably less than men, within the individual professions as well as when

comparing male-dominated and female dominated occupations (Aisenbrey, Silke, & Bruckner, 2008).

3.4   Ethnic Males in Higher Education

UNESCO (1997) for the past decade has been proactive   and vocal for an "education for all" (EFA) which rests on the paradigm that education is "learning to know, to be, to do, and live together". Gender inclusive culture through equity and equality has been at the forefront of the UNESCO agenda especially for Third World countries. It has been realised that education is an important vehicle if poverty is to be eradicated and equity and equality realized. UNESCO (2012) reported that boys in Latin America and the Caribbean usually have higher repetition rates and lower achievement rates than girls. The reasons for boys' underachievement are becoming clearer through a growing number of studies. One study observed that the boys' underachievement is inextricably linked to the notions of gender and power (UNICEF 1993). Boys' weak performance in school may be related to their traditional socialisation—for example, achievement in language and literature is considered to be more "feminine" than "masculine". A study in Jamaica found that boys were continually told they were lazy and inattentive. This resulted in low self-esteem and poor academic achievement and test results (UNESCO, 2012).

Findings from the Commonwealth Educational Report (2012) and the EFA report (2012) show that ethnic minority male learners are not keeping up with other groups and that the gap is unrelenting. The problems are particularly evident in poorer countries, and

problems are very much rooted in and underpinned by socio-political institutions. Scholars and commentators alike have articulated the need to address the problem, which has aggregated to cause other social malfunctions. Most of these minority ethnic males are descendants of migrants in search of better opportunities, but who are often marginalised and disenchanted because of their socio-political background.

A Secretariat of Commonwealth-sponsored study led by Jha and Kelleher (2006) titled "Boys Underachievement in Education" conducted a comparative analysis of selected African, Pacific and Caribbean countries which highlighted significance gaps on minority ethnic male learners. The findings supported the need to better understand the underachievement of boys from multiple dimensions, such as culture and the interplay of various societal institutions, but also maintained that each country has a different set of variables that must be individually understood. Poverty, however, forced many young males to leave education prematurely, looking for jobs to help out their large families. The study recommend that changes must be implemented from the top with an inclusive framework approach; forming a wider community platform for relevant changes.

3.4.1   United Kingdom

Dyhouse (2006), Archer (2010) and Stevenson (2012) provide a contemporary analysis of gendered and minority participation rates in HE in the United Kingdom. On the whole, HE in the twentieth century had been very much a male domain and white dominated. Taking a cross-cultural comparative argument, Gilborn (2005) and others argue that

British educational policy was very much influenced by "white supremacy", which exploited the rights of ethnic minorities. British imperialism and colonialism embedded white supremacy through cultural assimilation and educational practices which are very much evident in its commonwealth. However, an ideological and paradigm shift in the mid-1990s, especially with liberal feminism and democracy over equality and equity, provided a surge in females eagerly pursuing HE, overtaking males in humanity subjects.

Recent figures (2011-2012) from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in Britain concur with Dyhouse (2006), Archer (2010), Singh (2011), and Stevenson (2012) that female student numbers have increased steadily over the last decade, whilst the numbers of ethnic and minority males have lessened. Singh (2011) and Stevenson's (2012) compiled reports on BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) students highlighted issues which affect them pertaining to participation, retention and completion and also provide strategies to address the issues. Additionally, Singh (2011) and Stevenson (2012) both mentioned the persistence factors for BME, highlighting the need for institutional changes to provide such students with help to thrive and succeed in HE.

Connor, Tyers, Modood, & Hillage's (2004) research further identified key factors influencing entry and choice of HE; these included influence of parents and families, expectations of economic gain and careers, and concerns about student finance. An important conclusion from the research is that the influence of ethnicity on decisions about HE entry is powerful, but not equally so for all minority ethnic groups. Being a

member of a particular ethnic group is one of a variety of factors affecting decision-making about engaging in HE. In particular, it is likely that strong positive parental support and commitment to education eases some negative effects, such as being in a lower socio-economic class. This would explain why minority ethnic groups disproportionately enter full-time degree courses, despite having lower than average class achievement. So their ethnicity affects their class and their class affects their ability to achieve in education. Significantly, Conor at al., (2004) added that the lower a child's class position, the lower their income. Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Black pupils are more likely to be raised in low income families. This can affect how well they do in school because lack of funds means lack of school equipment, and less favourable working conditions such as a cold house, no desk and resources.

These United Kingdom studies highlight the impacts of its history as a colonialist on its ethnic minority population's poor participation and performance in HE. It is significant that these studies also provide interesting overarching factors, such as poverty and family that contribute to lack of actions and strategies being implemented for minority learners. Examples raised in these cited studies provided discussion benchmarks across various countries and their response to minority male learners.

3.4.2 United Sates of America and Canada

Historically, the United States has been "less supportive of African Americans in social and education institutions, particularly with regards to educational attainment" (Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010, p. 107), similar to the indifferent attitude of the

United Kingdom regarding ethnic populations in education. DiPrete & Buchmann (2013) attributed the continuous growth of female success in HE to the collective institutional effort which supported and facilitated females' opportunity to pursue HE under a "return on an investment approach". The cost/benefit approach was deemed more suited to young professional women than their counterparts. The impact is a further widening of the gender gap. Despite educational reform over the few past decades, the gap in educational achievement is still substantial, especially for African-American males. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a considerable increase in African-American males attending HE institutions, but African-American males continue to fall behind white and female counterparts in relation to college participation, retention, persistence, and degree completion (Hodges, 2011; Noguera, 2003).

Hodges (2011) conducted a study which affirms that the retention rates of African-American men in college are among the lowest of both sexes and all ethnic groups. Nationally, two-thirds of all Black men who start college do not graduate within six years of initial enrolment. The study also points out that African-American males take fewer notes in class, spend less time studying and writing papers, participate less in campus activities, hold fewer leadership positions, and report lower grades than their same-race female counterparts. The study also highlights that African-American males attribute their success to factors such as Institutional Outreach programs for minorities, Peer Group Consultations and mentoring, and favorable home support. However,

African-American male underperformance continues despite these efforts to address the issues.

Sáenz and Ponjuan's (2011) study on the male American Latino affirmed that more than three in five degrees earned were by females and confirmed similar outcomes faced by African-American male, but noted the importance of familial and community support as well as extended social and family networks to persist in HE. Latino student retention is further influenced by how well students are provided with on-going cultural validation and positive mentoring experiences. Both of these American studies offer insights to the minority ethnic and gender questions regarding participation and success in HE, which could shed some light on this research. They both support that institutional and social factors are influential in shaping persistence, experience, and success of ethnic minority male learners. However, the influence of the specific context and cultural background may be quite unique, which this study intends to unearth.

Furthermore, a Canadian study on Access, Persistence, and Barriers (Educational Policy Institute, 2008, p. 4) confirmed that young women are more likely to go on to postsecondary study than young men. The latters' experiences in high school where they "…fail more often, have lower high school grades, enjoy school less and find it less interesting, and get along with teachers less" have accounted for the gender disparity. Although the Canadian researchers agree that parental education has a tremendous impact on access to HE, some argue that it is because of education's link to family income (Butlin, 1999; Finnie, Laporte, & Lascelles, 2004) while others argue that social

and cultural variables are significant. The Canadian study on Access, Persistence and Barriers (2008) also argues the point of view that the father's level of education can impact greatly on young boys' aspirations to HE and the successful completion of chosen courses. Cited studies from both America and Canada concur that institutional and familial influences contribute to ethnic and minority male learners' access, participation, and completion. It is also important to note the significant impact made when policies and practices are matched and are meaningfully implemented for improvements of ethnic male learners.

3.4.3   Australia

West (1999) and Nyland (2001) contended that the prevalence of underachievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys had been caused by a mismatch between their communal world and the white fella system. Both Nyland (2001) and West (1999) believed that Aborigines see things in symbolism and take learning from an inclusive and collective perspective. This is supported by Beresford and Grey (2006) and Gorringe, Ross, and Fforde (2011) who emphasised that Aboriginal people have inner strengths and wisdom (engoori) which is not recognised by the current curriculum and teaching practices. Furthermore, the situation is aggravated by the lack of an indigenous framework and paradigm to guide educational policy and practice, and facilitate the strengths of the indigenous peoples. The National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, Commonwealth of Australia (AUTHOR, 2001) identified reasons for indigenous students having lower than average attendance, retention, and

completion – these include relationships between teachers, students, parents and the community; and relevant teacher expertise in cultural awareness. Some indigenous students find engagement with school difficult because of non-school factors, such as poverty, poor health, imprisonment, high family mobility, and indigenous inter-group tensions. Students from remote communities face additional barriers to school engagement due to limited access to facilities and difficulties associated with living away from home.

Indigenous parents increasingly recognised the need for their children to succeed at school. The data from a national survey of 20,000 students, of whom 451 were indigenous (Polesel & Helme, 2003) support this view, with more than nine in ten indigenous students surveyed reporting that their parents wanted them to do well at school. This reflects increasing recognition by indigenous communities of the value of education. However, while parents recognized the need to find means to help their children to succeed, there are continuing gaps in policy and practice.

Kearney and Donaghy's (2010) findings on Pasifika learners in Australia revealed that family support for education, equity outreach initiatives in schools, and transition programmes raised aspirations and encouraged access and completion in HE. Personal attributes such as agency and persistence allow students to persevere through HE. The study also confirms barriers such as negative peer pressure and lack of family and institutional support affect Pasifika learners' participation and completion. As one of the very few research projects focusing on ethnic minorities in Australia, the study

highlights the desperate lack of literature on Pasifika learners. Interestingly, several Australian studies highlight the mis-match between policies and practices in relation to minorities' education in Australia.

3.5   Higher Education in A/NZ

New Zealand is regarded as world elite in HE. It attracts a phenomenal number of international students annually, reflecting its international status and ranking. However, HE in A/NZ is not a level playing ground. Though billions of dollars of public funds are continually invested, they have not produced a fair return especially to marginalised and poor sectors of the society. Successive governments have implemented policies and practices based on an economic-oriented mode, demanding greater efficiency and proficiency (Eppel, 2009; McLaughlin, 2003).

Such policy and methodologies with constant educational strategy reviews have enforced a market-led framework on tertiary education; created a single "tertiary education sector"; and have heightened the Government's "strategic steering" of the sector. The result is that the primary focus of the tertiary education sector has moved from that of broad-based social, human, scientific, and economic progress, to the much narrower goal of economic advancement (Eppel, 2009; McLaughlin, 2003). It is also interesting to note that the result of all these reviews have been major legislative changes; the closing of some government agencies and the creation of new ones; the modification of funding environments; redefinition of roles of institutions and those

within them; changes to the way institutions are governed; and the creation of new accountability and auditing models.

In A/NZ there is growing evidence that a gendered "education transition" has taken place (Callister, Leather and Holt, 2008; Irwin, 2011; 2013). This transition, starting within the school system, is strongly evidenced in tertiary education by higher rates of participation and achievement of women relative to men, suggesting that men are out of touch with HE, and that women are no longer the marginal group. An investigation of statistics from a longitudinal Christchurch Health and Development Study (Fergusson and Horwood, 1997, p. 94) suggested: "it is clear that by the mid-1990s, any female educational disadvantage (up to the point of school leaving) has largely disappeared and has been replaced by an emerging male educational disadvantage". The report highlighted that the significant female improvement was not an overnight transition, but a combination of various socio-political factors that had made it possible. The report of the Literacy Taskforce (Ministry of Education, 1999) declared there was sufficient evidence to show that boys were not doing as well as girls at school. Boys were beginning at an earlier age to lack necessary literacy skills to help them succeed in schools. Those from low income families were suspected to be affected the most, and showed other problems such as truancy and resistance in schools.

Rutledge (1997) who investigated gender differences in educational performance, stated: At every level of New Zealand schooling, evidence showed boys to be providing the majority of educational and behavioral problems, tending to be exposed from an

earlier age to routine activities requiring predominantly large motor actions, spatial games, construction, and outdoor pursuits. The research also noted that on transition to Primary and High school girls' outperformed boys on literacy and comprehension. About 70% of boys in Primary school were associated with speech problem while 90% enrolled with reading recovery assisted by special teachers. By the time they reached high school, and were making the transition to higher education, the gap had widened.

Recently, both internationally and within A/NZ, the focus on boys began to receive widespread support. Media kept boys' underachievement in the public eye with editorial comments such as: Feminized education holding boys back (New Zealand Herald, Sept, 14, 2009); and books like "He'll Be Ok: Growing Gorgeous Boys into Good Men", by Celia Lashlie and "Educating Boys: Helping kiwi boys succeed at school" (2009) by Michael Irwin, are some of the few in-depth works identifying issues and exploring solutions for male underachievers. It is interesting to note that it took some time for the New Zealand Ministry of Education to realize that male underachievers were increasingly become a burden to the educational system. However, the issue of ethnic minorities such as Maori and Pasifika lacking representation in HE is increasingly deliberated. Policies and practices have been equally slow to address the issues.

The report "The Achievement of Boys" (Education Review Office, 1999) suggested ways for schools to address achievement gaps for male underachievers. It acknowledged that the issue of boys' education was a problem needing urgent policy and practical action.

For example, the report (p. 9) suggests that girls and boys position themselves differently in the English classroom. Boys favour more traditional approaches to learning, which emphasise memorising facts and rules, and "are willing to sacrifice deep understanding, which requires sustained effort, for correct answers at speed". This difference in learning behaviour shows itself in writing, with girls seeming more able to produce what the teacher had in mind, and boys tending to need more help with structuring and organizing ideas. The report stresses the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about research on boys and preferred learning styles and behaviour, and incorporate this into classroom practice. However, the document did not provide approaches to problems faced by minority and Pasifika male learners.

A second report "Promoting Boys' Achievement" (Education Review Office, 2000) said that whilst 80% of schools showed an awareness of a gender gap, only 11% were responding to the issue. An MOE report "Explaining and addressing gender differences" in the A/NZ compulsory school sector (Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000) pointed to areas that needed attention, recommending a constructive forum for stakeholders to build a more informed dialogue; understanding the inter-relationships between the various institutions of the society; meaningful gender policy; targeting low decile schools; and increasing male representation in the teaching profession. Though attempts were made to strike some sense of equity and equality, ethnic and gender specificity was still under-addressed despite the fact that a large percentage of the low decile schools' roles were of Pasifika descent.

Ferguson and Horwood's (1997) Christchurch-based research on gender and education concluded that the traditional educational disadvantage shown by females had largely disappeared. The research pointed out that males were more prone to disruptive and inattentive classroom behaviours which impeded male learning and lead to an emerging male educational disadvantage. The Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey by the Ministry of Education (2007) found males showed strength in numeracy but lacked language skills, Pasifika and Maori were increasingly overrepresented at the lower end of the underachievers, and Pasifika were reluctant to take up-skilling opportunities compared to other ethnic groups. The attention from the popular press, academics, politicians, and the Ministry of Education towards gender in schools has urged significant scholarship on the subject.

Irwin's (2007; 2011; 2013) research on male learners provide insights into the reasons for male underachieving. His findings concur with international literature that male learners are struggling in HE for reasons such as male "students feel alone and lost when first transitioning to university, young males perceived a greater difficulty in establishing learning relationships and social contacts than their female counterparts. The lecturing style adopted by academic staff and student established support networks are two significant factors that influence student academic engagement" (2011, p. 2). The study recommends several institutional, individual, and social-oriented strategies to help elevate male participation: having an induction program that is proactive and filled with learning interactions and challenges, teaching strategies to be refined and

redefined to fit gender and ethnic context and learning situations, and use of male peer networks for support and intervention.

Callister, Leather, and Holt (2008) concur that there are ethnic and gender gaps in HE. This research postulates that male participation in HE is affected as early as pre-school and primary school. Females tend to develop better reading skills from an early age and throughout their learning journey which better equip them to pursue HE. Issues such as literacy and disrupting learning behaviours are embedded early and affect males throughout their learning journey. The research also identified that Pasifika learners, especially males, are the worst affected and the most reluctant to pursue higher education.

Madjar et al's., (2010a, 2010b) research work provides insights into the transitioning of learners like Pasifika students from low-mid decile schools to university. Shaped by social and institutional variables which either act as stepping stones or stumbling blocks these factors can be characterised as pre-transition, post-transition and enduring characteristics. The study provides important policy implications for finding solutions for disadvantaged learners such as Pasifika students to be proactive in their learning journey with parents providing encouraging environment and support. Institutions are expected to be more facilitative and supportive. This study highlights the continuing trend and gap in Pasifika participation, retention, and completion, and the need to address these issues of transition effectively.

Madjar et al., (2010a, 2010b) has made a significant contribution to understanding of Pasifika learners. The findings posited that Pasifika and Māori students were overrepresented among students who did not persist beyond their first year, but that they were also more likely than other students to report familial challenges or other problems that made ongoing study difficult or impossible. However, the higher rate of educational under-achievement in males was explained by gender-related differences in classroom behaviours with males being more prone to disruptive and inattentive behaviours that appeared to impede male learning. The research noted that successful students attributed their persistence and success to a conducive learning environment, good time management, positive feedback on their academic work, the quality of academic and social engagement with academic staff in smaller classes, a growing sense of confidence and independence, peer support, and learning from experience.

It is noted that despite the establishment of initiatives to help Pasifika students, especially underachievers, ethnic and gender specificity remains an issue to be addressed in scholarship and research.

3.6   Migrant dreamers: Pasifika and Tongan Male learners

"Migrant dreamers" is a phrase adopted from Karlo Mila–Schaaf's (2005) poem, "Dream Fish Floating", which speaks of the Pasifika migration and search to survive in Aotearoa. Migrant dreamers came with the passion to discover a new land, the desire to search for something better. Their navigational knowledge and prowess had helped them to journey and settle the vastness of Moana nui (Oceania) thousands of years

before, though it had been questioned by academia for over a century. Hau'ofa (1994, 2008) re-asserted that the Moana people once traversed Moana nui, with skills that modern day scholars still marvel at and even question. Searching for something better was always in their veins, even if it meant taking up the challenges of navigating Moana nui.

Modern day migrant dreamers' replicate what their ancestors did thousands of years ago but also envelop the hopes and aspirations of their forefathers who have made a lot of sacrifices to move here to Aotearoa, seeking a better life for their children (Fa'anunu, 2007; Kalāvite 2010; 2013; Tu'itahi, 2009). Fa'anunu and Tu'itahi provide a rich ethnography of the struggles and life of Tongan migrant dreamers here in Aotearoa and the life of transitional migrants. However, the lives of the migrant dreamers have not been that fulfilling, encountering numerous challenges and obstacles, belittlement by mainstream media, disillusioned by hardship and lack of relevant government initiatives and practices. Despite that, some have weathered the storms and successfully nourished and nurtured generations who have made a life changing beat (Mila-Schaaf, & Robinson, 2010; Tu'itahi, 2009). HE was always what Pasifika parents desired their children to achieve, even if it meant working long hours and doing menial labouring jobs. However, many that make it find it hard to stay on track and complete.

Perhaps it is the lack of relevant supportive policy initiatives for Pasifika learners which have prompted robust resentment from some scholars. Nakhid (2003, p. 314) strongly contends that:

"Pasifika students' presence in education appears as little more than intrusions into a system which holds very little benefit for them rather than as participants in an educational process. It is as important to Pasifika students, as it is to any of us, to be able to look and to find ourselves in the places where we are located. If the capacity to do this is missing, or the opportunity to create that feeling of belonging is absent, then it is a signal that our presence is not wanted or valued".

The above statement captures the feeling of Pasifika participants on HE in Aotearoa, emphasising the need to address Pasifika attrition, retention, and completion from within. Ministry of Education statistics (MOE, 2012) show that a total of 33,800 Pasifika students were enrolled in HE, with 13,852 of them registered as male learners. TEC (2012) reported that Massey University had a Pasifika enrolment of 4%, below the national average of 6%, and qualification completion rate of 56%, one of the lowest in Aotearoa. Having three campuses and offering the most extramural programmes in A/NZ is not enough; an organizational change is needed to find ways to improve Pasifika achievement. Several institutions have initiated strategies such as *Pasifika@ Massey*, Pasifika @Victoria, Pasifika Leadership @MIT, and Centre for Pacific Studies at Auckland University, academic positions, courses such as Pacific Studies and ethnic languages, and research projects such as the Tuakana program at Auckland University, to indicate they are doing something to improve Pasifika access, retention, and completion.

Since 2002, Pasifika students in HE have increased with more than 10,000 with the bulk of them at public providers and polytechnics. However, this is more of a reflection of population growth which was quite a substantial increase from the last census in 2006. In 2011, there were only 2,501 Tongan male learners in HE, with 32% qualification completion rate. The statistics, therefore, have remained low and subsequently continued in a downward trend (MOE, 2012). As McMahon (2002, p. 1) has observed, "The expectation that schools will actively and deliberately seek to improve Maori and Pacific education outcomes is not a liberal nicety but an urgent necessity".

In recent times, Pacific scholars like Thaman(1998, 2002), Taufe'ulungaki(2002,2003a), Nabobo(2004,2006) and Hau'ofa(1994,2008) have reinvented and reintroduced Pasifika epistemologies and knowledge which are relevant to how Pasifika learn and do things from their perspective. This rethinking approach is not intended to discredit Western knowledge, but to provide alternative ways and methods of looking at the problem.

MOE initiatives such as the Pasifika Education Plan (2013-2017) and the TEC Framework (2013-2017) represent the continuation of previous review and policy framework formulation, aimed to bridge achievement gaps across the board in education for Pasifika. The Pasifika Plan (MOE, 2013) takes a holistic approach that recognizes that leaning is a communal journey, where ethnic cultural values, knowledge and pedagogies must be understood and practiced. TEC Pasifika Framework (2013-2017) (MOE, 2012c) is a comprehensive policy approach which identifies instruments needed to improve Pasifika learning; these include successful

transition and academic support, intra-agency and support, and research-led evidence. The TEC framework is significant because it recognises that something has to be done to bridge the achievement gap in HE. Nevertheless, both the TEC (2013-2017) Framework and the Pasifika Plan lack specificity about the increasingly critical male underachievement and how to deal with it.

In endeavoring to address stumbling blocks and stepping stones in HE, various scholars and research findings have strongly advocated a change in teaching and pedagogical frameworks, Vaioleti(2011) and Manu'atu(2000) while others have called for schools to recognise the socio-cultural background of the learners, the institutional approach to intervention and transitional experiences, academic monitoring and counseling, motivation and relationships, masculinity and peers, finance and lotu (Havea,2011; Kalavite,2010,2012;Havea,2011).Several commentators (Koloto, 2006; Kalāvite, 2010, Salitiban, 2012; Havea, 2011) have articulated broadly that Pasifika and Tongan students live in and are affected by four different worlds; cultural, economic, bureaucratic, and academic. Others such as Hill and Hawke (2002) claim there are six worlds affecting Pasifika students; family, church, peers, work, institutions, and culture. Siope (2010, 2011) observed that our students tend to fabricate siloed worlds which they keep as distant as possible. This indicates that Pasifika students often try to live and transit between their world and the world of their parents. Significantly, Siope (2010, 2011) added that the trouble is, often help is rarely understood nor taken, until almost too late

to have the courage to admit that there is a problem. This, then, is an unanticipated consequence of the migrant dreaming.

In the early 1990s, scholarly writings on Pasifika education were minimal. While a diverse field has emerged since then, the major emphasis is on secondary education, with little on gender specificity. This research has chosen to address the lack of ethnic-gender specificity in the literature.

3.7   Contributing Factors: *makatūkia moe makatu'u*

While many studies have examined the factors that lead to various forms of student departure and related institutional efforts to encourage student persistence (Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 2006), relatively few focus on ethnic and gender specificity. Much of the research on the factors behind persistence is based on the theory of student departure developed by Tinto (1997, 2005, 2006).

Tinto (2006) recognised three factors influence a student's decision to remain or leave: (a) individual characteristics (e.g., family background, personality, past educational experiences, goal commitment); (b) institutional characteristics(e.g., size, type, quality); and (c) the student's interaction within the college environment (e.g., social interactions, academic integration).Within this model, students' individual characteristics and their interactions with the academic and social systems shape their commitments both to personal goals and to the institution. Tinto's contributions are relevant and significant,

as they provide a possible platform for interrogation and addressing the issues of minority and male engagement in HE.

Tinto (2006, 2012a) argued that the emphasis is on the conditions in which institutions place students rather than on the attributes of students themselves. He believed that student attributes are outside institutional control, however conducive and positive institutional approaches can improve and encourage student completion and retention rates.Tinto's scholarly findings point to six institutional factors that can be supportive of student success: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning.

3.8   Time and Space relationships

Because of its connected and diverse life networks that gives meaning to being a Tongan, the socio-spatial sphere and level where a Tongan operates is very different to that of a Pakeha (Kalāvite, 2010, 2012 Ka'ili, 2005; Morton, 1996). Tongans are very much influenced by the repertoire of their social network and their relationship with others. Literatures (Kalāvite, 2010, Salitiban, 2012; Havea, 2011) support the many benefits of positive home-school relationships which include all stakeholders – parents, children, school, teachers, and community. Such relationships are shaped by a number of factors, including communication, responsibility, and roles. Tongan's relationships and view of reality is very much influenced by *tā* and *vā*, the principles by how and why they do things especially their socio-spatial relationships (Kalāvite, 2010, 2012;

Ka'ili, 2005 Morton, 1996). *Tā* (time) envelops the idea that reality is continually evolving as life itself.

Vā – in the educational environment is the space and relationship between learner and teacher – is critical in enabling learning (Coxon et. al, 2002; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Salitiban, 2012). Equally critical to the learning process is the relationship between the learners and their socio-cultural surroundings (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). The AIMHI project (1996, p. 23) noted, "Pacific parents, many of whom were born in the islands, have minimal understanding of the New Zealand education system, do not understand the recent changes to the curriculum and qualifications structures, or the ways that the schools organize themselves". Most of the Tongan male students at university now are New Zealand-born but their parents were born in Tonga. The latters' limited understanding about their children's education may prevent them from getting involved. 'Otunuku (2011) and Tu'itahi (2009) also maintained that Tongan parents' involvement are quite critical, especially their relationships with their children and the learning organizations. Foliaki's (1993) research, however, found that the language barrier was one of the more critical factors for parents choosing not to be involved with their children's education.

Kepa and Manu'atu (2006a) conducted a *pō ako* (night study) project for disadvantaged students in the Mt Roskill area. The project's success was attributed to its inclusive approach where parents and teachers were closely involved with the learning of their students. These findings (Foliaki, 1993;'Otunuku; Kepa&Manu'atu, 2006a) highlight the

importance of creating relevant networks of good relationships between all stakeholders when dealing with Pasifika learners. Using a cultural metaphor of *fetuiaki mālie* (relevantly inter-twined), Kepa and Manu'atu (2006a) showed that creating effective social networks and partnerships rested on cultural understanding and making relevant connections. When stakeholders feel ownership, help will be extended and learning will improve. Manu'atu (2000b, 2004) believes that these socio-cultural networks work best when there is a sense of participation and ownership. Stakeholders, especially parents and *kāinga,* must take ownership in the learning process of their children to make it meaningful and successful.

Social networking is also a crucial factor in retention and transition in HE. The literature concurs that those who are failing in HE lack social networking skills, and most of them are male (Irwin, 2012). New Zealand researchers have found that relationships building are a key factor in determining success or failure; retention or early withdrawal of students. Positive professional relationships between students, their peers, institutional support staff, and teachers do have major effects (Zepke, 2009). These findings highlight the need to explore how these social life skills are to be taught and utilised effectively for the benefit of ethnic male learners in HE.

Nakhid et al., (2007) detailed specific cultural mentoring approaches and strategies that were successful with Pasifika students. Nakhid's research team developed, in partnership with students, a Pasifika research methodology using the concept of *te vaka*. In this approach students' voices were heard and they were supported to engage in

their own "insider" research. *Te vaka* optimized the nature of Pasifika people, and validated earlier assumptions that effective learning can be a communal effort, and the need for Pasifika learners to be unified and collaborative in their journey in HE with moral and academic support along the way. Additionally, Davidson-Toumu'a & Dunbar (2009) articulated that successful learning advice and support for Pasifika learners is that which creates cultural connections and meanings. When cultural connections are meaningfully created and sustained, Pasifika learners are able to cultivate a worthwhile and successful learning experience.

Ross (2008) who researched the relevance of cultural peer support for Maori and Pasifika students asserted that the students find it encouraging and motivational, enables them to deal more effectively with the demands of study and to feel part of a learning community. Cultural peer support offers a more relevant approach to helping and identifying problems early, and having the necessary cultural knowledge to facilitate immediate response to remedy the situation. The study believes that providing cultural peer support is at the heart of retaining the students before they decided to drop out. Several higher education institutions have continued initiatives such as Massey University's Pasifika@Massey – which not only provide cultural peer support and social networking but also find ways to improve achievement. With a qualification completion rate of 72%, the Tuakana program at Auckland University seems to create the right academic and cultural peer support for Pasifika learners. In essence, the

success of any educational pursuit for Pasifika learners at any level will depend on the cultivation and maintenance of effective relationships through *tā* and *vā.*

3.9   *Lotu moe Siasi*

The London Missionaries Society (LMS) and the Catholic Mission were the first to bring Western religion to Oceania. Education was clearly an integral companion to the spread of Western religion and later colonialism. The influence of *lotu* (religion) is often underestimated; however, its impact and influence are very much imbedded in the lives of Pasifika peoples. When they move from one place to another, they see their *lotu* as something to hold on to and practice. They have regrouped in Aotearoa under various denominations reestablishing the familiar worshipping environment at home. *Lotu* is sacred to the Tongans, and they take great pride in their belief.

However, there is relatively little scholarship on the issue of *lotu* and its intersecting value on Pasifika education in Aotearoa. Several Tongan commentators (Havea, 2012; Latu, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010; Vaioleti, 2012) have concurred that *lotu* does have an intriguing influence on how Tongan perceive their education. Few have undertaken a deeper analysis how it has affected Tongans in HE.

 Havea's (2012) research on *lotu* and Pasifika students in HE identified that Pasifika students practiced *lotu* as a means of helping them adapt and adjust to the challenges of HE. She adds that *lotu* is used as a form of socio-cultural identity. She concludes that students who have taken *lotu* to a personal level – having a personal relationship with

God –and attributed their success, reduced stress, commitment, and organisation skills to their quality *vā* with God.

Coxon et al. (2003) found that Tongan mothers see grounding their children in religion and cultural values as part of their role, not often understood and obvious to teachers. Similarly, Faʻanunuʻs (2007) research found that Tongan mothers in Aotearoa claimed that *lotu* helped them to persevere, and that they taught this to their children. Mason Durie's (1994) concepts of the Maori *hauora* and *whare tapawha*, (four corners of wellbeing) strike similarity with Tongan *lotu* but he makes the distinction of spirituality in finding inner balance which is necessary for strength and perseverance in HE and life.

Significantly, none of the aforementioned works raised or discussed any elements of *lotu* that adversely affect Tongan students' performance in HE. However, Tuʻitahi's (2009) findings, cautioned that some elements of *lotu* were not conducive to life in Aotearoa. It is disputable that the priority given to tithing and donations, church responsibilities and obligations have contributed to the failure and lack of completion of Pasifika and Tongans in HE.

Kalāvite (2011) notes the significance of the pride that Tongan learners in HE have in their faith and religion, while also resenting the extravagance of meeting church obligations at the expense of family welfare. She maintains that eighteen of the participants mentioned how church obligations such as *misinale* (Protestant, especially Methodist, church annual donation), *katoangaʻofa* (Roman Catholic Church annual

donation) and other commitments contribute to financial strife for some Tongan students. Eleven participants said that some parents had prioritised their *kavenga fakalotu* (church obligations) and, as a result, neglected providing for their children's educational needs, such as stationery, lunches, uniforms, and school and fieldtrip fees.

Increasing Pasifika youth suicide and delinquency, especially among Tongans, have put pressure on ethnic communities to consider what *lotu* is actually achieving and the amount of resources being spent on it.

3.10   Paradigm and methodologies

A/NZ is a country which encompasses many cultures and ethnicities. Its educational system reflects the dominance of the Anglo-European culture shaped by socio-political historical events. Related to this is the egalitarian notion that education is a level playing field serving the interests of multiple and diverse cultures. As Harker and McConnochie (1985) noted, the curriculum and teaching methods are not drawn from the "general culture" but from the dominant culture. However, after 30 years later, Vaioleti (2011) further articulated that the educational system in A/NZ is still the same. Such pedagogical strategies offer limited equity and equality of access or opportunity meaning that only those from the dominant culture will have the "cultural capital" necessary to benefit from the system. Hence, there are inherent inconsistencies and potentially crippling weaknesses in the system.

Current educational literature in Oceania has called for a pedagogical and epistemological shift, "decolonization methodologies", to allow alignment and recognition of Pasifika values and knowledge (Smith, 1999; Kalāvite, 2010; Vaioleti, 2011). There is a growing call to escape the "imperial habits of mind" (Willinsky, 1997, cited in Airini, 1997, p. 11) where alternative discourse can be "exoticised at best, marginalized, or even ghettoized at worst". Moving forward allows space for accepting diversity and differences. Clearly, an alternative paradigm is needed, with some going further, suggesting that Pasifika and Tongan epistemologies need to be decolonized and unpacked.

Indeed, current writings and research lack substantive writing on Pasifika pedagogies and learning approaches including Tongan educational concepts. Baba (2002) noted that the notion of the Pacific pedagogy is being promoted by some Pacific educators as a means of dealing with the unique learning needs of Pacific students. However, literature pertaining to the subject is practically non-existent. Likewise, when questions are raised about what Pacific pedagogies are, there are no clear explanations. Baba (2002) failed, like many before, to acknowledge that Pasifika is a construct of diverse groups bound by common colonial histories and precolonial cultural ties. The wealth of knowledge forms the latter that is now being explored as research methodologies and frameworks.

Pasifika and Tongan pedagogical approaches have resurfaced in the research and writings by Manu'atu (2000), Vaioleti (2011) Taufe'ulungaki (2003a, 2002) and Thaman

(1988, 1999, 2002, 2003). Pasifika pedagogy is defined as "An integration of teaching and learning methods that are informed and validated by Pacific values, world views, knowledge and experience" (Koloto et al., 2006, p. 4). Taufe'ulungaki (2003a) and Thaman (1988, 2002) observed that Pasifika use an inclusive style of learning that promotes the formation of integrated groups, and feelings of cohesion and cooperation.

Nakhid (2003) suggested that the achievement gaps in numeracy and literacy between Pasifika and other students are well entrenched from early childhood years through primary and secondary to post tertiary institutions. Over the years, there have been persistent calls for changes to teaching, learning, and curriculum to reverse educational inequalities linked to social and ethnic factors (Koloto, 2006; Kalāvite & Hoogland, 2005).

Others have called for schools to recognize the cultural backgrounds of learners. Researchers (Vaioleti,2011; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Manu'atu,2000) have almost dared to suggest that students must learn to operate within the dominant pedagogical paradigm and, further, must also able to unpack and decolonize its assumptions , paradigms, and hegemonic characteristics including developing an awareness of power relationships and the hidden curriculum.

Manu'atu's (2000a) pedagogical approaches focused on finding alternatives to achievement for the Tongan learners, suggest that curriculum and pedagogy must impose the notion of *mālie* and *māfana*, relevancy and ownership to the curriculum framework. The study stresses the need to ensure cultural inclusiveness in curriculum

causing effective teaching for the ethnic minorities at A/NZ. Using two community-initiated relationship-building contacts, *Kātoanga Faiva* (the ASB Bank Maori and Pacific Island Secondary Schools Cultural Festival) and *Pō ako* (Home-work Centre project), the author argued that Tongan parents enthusiastically engaged with the school, which led to successes in achievement of academic and extra-curricular goals. Learning is a collective journey that include the contribution of the all the stakeholders.

Vaioleti (2011) offers "*manulua*: a pedagogical approach" to understanding of Tongans across their educational journey here in Aotearoa. His research argues from the perspective that the cause of the widening gaps in educational achievement across the board has been the absence and negligence of Tongan epistemologies. Tongan students operate on a different platform and sphere of knowledge to that of their peers. Vaioleti's thesis advocates for the inclusion of Tongan educational concepts and values in teaching and learning in A/NZ. The central proposition of this thesis is that Tongan students will achieve better and more meaningful educational outcomes in the country's primary, secondary and tertiary institutions through improved self-esteem, stemming from an acknowledgement of their Tongan identity and the knowledge that their unique ways of learning are respected in A/NZ's education system. Vaioleti's position is similar to other Pasifika and Tongan scholars who are pushing for pedagogical relevancy and ownership here in Aotearoa.

3.11 Socio-cultural challenges

There is growing evidence in A/NZ of the significance of culture, identity, and ethnicity in educational responsiveness that can lead to successful learning (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Vaioleti, 2012). Learning is culturally bound, and research shows that improving the literacy level of disadvantaged groups has positive implications for their children's learning. Kalāvite and Hoogland (2005) highlighted four major factors that could shape persistence and experiences of Pasifika learners as cultural, economic, academic, and bureaucratic constraints. The findings further highlighted that the institutions' socio-cultural characteristics are critical for an effective and successful learning journey. Pasikale (1996) noted the direct link between cultural experiences and learning achievements: Pacific Island students respond positively to teachers who care about them, recognize their culture, and create a sense of belonging as key factors in their learning process. In addition, Pasikale (1996) also pointed out that the failure of Pasifika learners to reach educational goals has more to do with learners' socio-cultural world being mis-matched with the institutional goals.

Hill and Hawke (1998) argued that Pasifika students live in multiple worlds: their family, their culture, their church, the school, part-time employment, and the world of their peers. The conflicting and contentious relations of these worlds extensively affect their studies, which raise issues of relevance, cultural contexts and learner interests. The most difficult to merge with their studies is their cultural world. Siope's (2010) noted that in Pasifika students fabricated siloed worlds they adopt the language and behavior

of the Pakeha at school and then come home to a different world altogether. At times Pasifika learners tend to demonstrate different sets of behaviours to suit their setting and audience. Making such transitions can be chaotic and hectic at best. It can also generate conflict between the learners and their families or hold them back from engaging with a learning group or a setting.

Millard et al.'s (2012) study focused on retention and completion of under-represented groups at university in A/NZ and found that there are combinations of risk factors "such as being poor, of having prior low achievement, of being male, of being Maori or Pacific Island origin and of having significant family or work commitments could be identified as increasing the risk of failing to complete a higher education qualification" (p.173). The research argues that students experiencing these risk factors would be unlikely to complete their qualifications. It is significant that the underachievers were predominantly Pasifika male and socially deprived. Madjar at al. (2010) and Irwin (2012) pointed out that HE is also a social engagement task because those who manage to complete their studies attribute their success to having good friends who helped them. Irwin (2012) pointed out specifically that male learners lacked social-cultural network skills to adapt and adjust hence making poor choices, which contributed to their failures.

Kalāvite (2012) article expresses valuable insights into the nature of Tongan social institutions pertaining to HE. The article argues that Tongan students' academic achievement results are affected by the inter-play of *tā* and *vā,* and the differential

contexts of kāinga. This socio-political interface can be either a stumbling block or a stepping stone for students operating across the socio-cultural boundaries. Its many functions and obligations are demand-driven causing confusion especially for those born in New Zealand.

Tiatia (1998, p. 1) observes that "as New Zealand born Pacific Islanders we are 'in between' alternating between the culture of the European and our particular culture of origin, and thus grappling to establish an identity of our own". Similarly Afeaki (2004) and Hanifan (2010) have argued that there is a 'generational gap' between two conflicting worlds: the Tongan and the Pakeha, the New Zealand-born and their Tongan-born parents. Consequently, the transition from one time and space boundary to another causes cultural confusion and deviation. Morton-Lee (2003) also stressed that overseas-born Tongans are more westernised and have the tendency to prioritise their obligations and responsibilities differently.

It is also important to note that *kāinga,* at both micro-macro levels, is significant for Tongan students' academic attainment since their lives are intertwined within their spiritual, social, and physical environment. Many Tongan students were motivated to study hard because they were encouraged by family members and had a desire to succeed for their families (Hau'ofa, 2008). These findings indicate that low economic status can be used as a means to motivate better outcomes for some. Sullivan (1998), in his study of Tongan culture, indicated that many cultural traditions were part of education and that reflected in the positive attitude and successful achievement of

many Tongan students. Fusitu'a (1992) emphasised that education had become a valuable part of the culture of Tongan students, especially their desire to travel to places like Aotearoa in search of a better life, believing that increased opportunities would help them flourish and decide their destiny. Students' ambitions lay beyond education in escaping menial work family tax allotments in Tonga or dirty factories in New Zealand, even if the long-term hopes were modest in nature – *ngaue ma'a* or *ngaue 'ofisi* (blue collar jobs) and to "help our people":

> "We don't want them to follow in our footsteps. We want them to see the sufferings of getting up at 5 or 6 in the morning, in the cold, and limping to work. That's because of no education. We want them to hate that way of living. Schooling back in the Islands was hard, walked for miles to go to school with only one meal a day. With the opportunities that these children have today there is no excuse for them to go through the hardships that we're going through". (p. 95)

Kalāvite (2010) pointed to the interplay of various socio-political institutions in shaping the journey of Tongan learners in HE in Aotearoa, arguing that achievement gaps are directly affected by socio-cultural disparities and, if understood and taken into pedagogical considerations, positive results will occur. Faleolo (2013) similarly stressed that Tongans' pursuit of HE is affected by the interplay of various socio-cultural variables, such as family and *lotu*. Though her research was specifically on Tongan

women, it provides evidence that the interplay of socio-cultural aspects affects the journey of the learners.

Tatafu (1997) identified socio-cultural factors as the main cause that contributed to Tongan learners being pushed or dropping out of school. However, though this study was conducted in Tonga, it is significant because it provides indications of why Tongans are not performing well in HE. The study also noted that females outperformed males, and pursued HE more opportunistically. On the other hand, men, as traditional breadwinners for their families including their extended *kāinga*, often feel obligated; choosing to drop out of school to find employment is part of that. Vaioleti (2011) also pointed strongly to previous work of Thaman (1988) and Manu'atu (2000) that Tongan and Pasifika values and knowledge must be taken into consideration if achievement gaps are to be addressed. This is rooted in the belief that Tongans, like other Pasifika peoples, operate in communalistic values system. Understanding Tongans' socio-cultural underpinnings will help in the construction of effective strategies to address Tongan underachievement in HE.

3.12   Institutional and bureaucratic challenges

Higher Education and Training providers affect and shape the experiences and persistence of Pasifika-Tongan male learners. Literature, including (Irwin 2012), on transition of Pasifika learners and low-decile schools show that institutions with pastoral care initiatives are more successful in retaining their students and the likelihood of successful retention and completion. Irwin (2012) argues that HE

institutions play a critical role in providing meaningful and successful social and mental learning engagement. Given the findings (above), compared to their female counterparts, Pacific male learners lack skills to adapt and adjust to their new learning ground. Institutions should provide academic space and support for Tongan and Pasifika learners to engage and interact successfully.

TEC (2013) has pressured most HE institutions in A/NZ to develop strategies and approaches to improve access, retention, and completion. As explained above, there have been positive initiatives by certain institutions to address the issues. The Maori Massey Strategies and later Pasifika@Massey Strategies, which are designed to lift the game for both groups by weaving support networks around learners. Further, strategic tasking of Pasifika staff in colleges support and monitor the retention and completion rates of Pasifika learners. Middleton (2011) argues that HE institutions in A/NZ are taking a more business-oriented approach which neglects their fundamental duty to reach out to underachievers. He also argues that providing alternative programmes such as vocational and technical education fits well with Pasifika learners' interests and academic gifts. Current programmes at Manukau Institute of Technology which target Pasifika underachievers show great success in retention and completion.

Tinto (2006) points to six conditions where institutions can be supportive of student success: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning. For example, commitment is putting policy to practice, and targeting resources to student's welfare; Pasifika students need high expectations to rise from mediocrity and self-

doubt. Kalāvite (2010), Havea (2011), Faleolo (2012), and Vaioleti (2011) have also voiced the need for institutions to foster the learning with necessary support and feedback, through stakeholders' involvement. Murray and Morgan (2009) research into ways to increase the proportion of Pasifika students at the School of Engineering at Auckland University supported the need to have specialized and focused support especially for Pasfika. Similarly, Nakhid (2006) pointed out the need to have focused tutorial support for Pasifika learners.

Madjar et al., (2010a, 2010b) argue that transition and retention of Pasifika learners from low-decile schools are not improving. They identified areas for learning institutions to improve including counseling, induction, student pastoral care, and also identifying failures and underachievers early and finding means to support them. Williams (2009) proposed initiating mentoring programmes which are inclusive of Pasifika values and knowledge. The MenTOA framework was created by blending the Western word mentor (wise counselor/teacher*)* and the pan-Polynesian word *Toa* (in this context meaning warrior). The blending of these words acknowledges and recognizes that the Pasifika mentor/student worldview in A/NZ is informed by two, dichotomous perspectives – that of the Pakeha world and that of the home cultures.

Finance is one of the major influences on Tongan male learners not engaging in HE. Several studies have argued that there is a high correlation between the direct cost of education and access and completion especially those from low economic backgrounds (Coxon et al., 2002; McLaughlin, 2003). The introduction of student loans in 1992 and

student allowances have helped to increase the participation of Pasifika in HE. However, a recent study shows that Pasifika students are struggling to repay loans after graduation, but especially those who have dropped out with no qualification at all. Clancy (2007, p. 139) further enforces that "because access to higher education is, to varying degrees, competitive, it will always privilege those with superior economic, social and cultural resources". Most Tongan families are below the national average for income earners, and characteristically have large households, with extended families living with them. Pushed by financial hardships, a high percentage of Tongan males take up paid employment at an early age, taking minimum wage.

Chu., Glasgow., Rimoni., Hodis. , & Meyer. (2013) conducted an updated critical review and analysis of relevant literature on educational practices that would benefit Pasifika learners in education. The review significantly builds on what Coxon et al. (2002) had suggested, but also makes updated judgment of the current gaps in Pasifika education. The study argues that there is a significant information gap which affects decision-making for stakeholders. The study also reiterates the need for institutional commitment to be more than fancy policies and well said strategies.

3.13   Aspirations, expectations, and persistence

Kearney and Donaghy (2012) writing about Pasifika students and their experiences of HE in Australia, agreed that self-persistence had helped them to endure their studies. This study reflected other recent literature on Pasifika, including literature by Tongans, that students attributed their success to parents' aspirations and self-persistence

(Kalāvite, 2010; Vaioleti, 2012; 'Otunuku, 2011). Dizzio (2006, p. 2) suggested that Pasifika students' early success in university studies included resourcefulness and high self-expectations, attributes that he describes as "proactively managing the challenges of the university experience". This type of self-regulatory behavior has been identified as a strong predictor of early success at university (Krause, 2005). In addition, Kearney and Donaghy (2012) suggest that unless Pasifika students perceive that teachers hold high expectations for them, many are unlikely to develop aspirations for higher education. The study also suggests that limited aspirations on the part of students, even by their parents and peers, and a lack of high expectations on the part of teachers resulting from limited intercultural understanding on the part of both students and teachers, could also undermine Pasifika learners at higher education.

Cultural distance and gaps between students and their teachers influence the type of school climate, pedagogies, and retention of at risk Pasifika students. Therefore, ways to enhance intercultural understanding within school settings provide a worthwhile focus for future research. It is also important for universities to look beyond generic strategies that support students' first year experience at university to identify specific strategies that bridge successful transition and completion (Madjar et al ., 2010b)

Tinto (1987, 2005, 2006, 2012a, 2012b), one of the most vocal scholars in the field of persistence at HE, argued that institutions must play an unequivocal role in initiating ways to help students succeed and explains that, for decades, the issue of student attrition was typically viewed through the lenses of psychology. It was viewed as

individual attributes of motivation, skills, and self -esteem. Students who failed were regarded to be less able, less motivated, and less willing to persevere. The general idea at the time was that students failed, not institutions. However, Tinto's (1987) thought-provoking article and later his book, "Leaving College", provided one of the earliest models explaining the interplay of the environment and the social systems in affecting students. Tinto (2005) further articulated that under-privileged students who remained connected to their communities, church, and family demonstrated strength to persist through higher education. Though understanding of student retention has gone through major transitions, it is clear that one model has limitations. However, Tinto's scholarly contributions have given firm conviction that communal engagement of institutions through educational innovations influences student retention and success.

Madjar et al., (2010a) conducted a study on persistence of first year students at university in A/NZ and provided a platform for immediate deliberations and actions. The   project asked what has helped students' to persevere and sustained them through good and bad times at university. The study stressed that students who failed to internalise their family aspirations find transition to university quite challenging. Similarly expectations of family obligation and communal activities also created problems for students. Even so, a number of students identified their families' hopes and aspirations as the stronger motivator, particularly during difficult times. Left to themselves they would have given up, but knowing how much hope and pride their parents and families had invested in their success, they persisted. The study reported

that students from low decile schools in New Zealand, who are predominantly Pasifika, believed that aspirations of their parents had helped them to stay focused and complete their programmes. This is in line with many Tongan scholars such as Thaman, Taufe'ulungaki, Vaioleti, and Kalāvite, who have argued that Tongan learners who have synthesized and internalised Tongan values have the ability to persevere and endure their higher education journey.

 Chu et al., (2013) introduced "appreciative pedagogy; such as family commitment, individual aspirations, and learning village", and argued that understanding and embracing it will provide a holistic understanding to address the growing Pasifika problems in HE. The argument builds on the notion that Pasifika are communalistic and view the educational journey as a communal task, which cannot be isolated. The study (Chu et al., 2013) demonstrates that family and personal aspirations and the determination for better life are also pushing Pasifika learners the extra mile to succeed:

> " Coming from a broken home, seeing that this is not what we want to be, taking the initiative, getting support from our cousins who had come through university to be like them, and doing something for our parents. We do not want to be cleaners; we don't want to be working odd jobs. These are the drivers for me. It is clear to me that education is a key – for me and my family. Education will provide me a good life and better wages.

I don't want to be on any benefit or welfare system. The news tells people that we Pacific people are on the benefit. But that's not true. Not all of us alike that and I am not going to be like that".

The students would also like to use tertiary education as an enabling tool to break down stereotypes about Pacific learners being underachievers:

"The white people will get high education and will have more money, while the brown people will work in low-income jobs and [live in] low-cost housing. I am so over it! I am over the negative images and stories of Pasifika people in the media. That is so not us! We are more than that. Look at me, I am doing very well "(p.6).

3.14   Theoretical framework

The notion of ethnic males in higher education would be easy to explain if there was a single theory that differentiated and distinguished "mainstream" from "ethnic minority"; a theory that includes all types of learning and clear interpretations. Such a theory is difficult to find. This literature review examines several applicable theories as it is assumed that, in principle, these theories will contribute to a clearer understanding of ethnic male learners in HE and provide a benchmark for formulation of practical application.

Theories pertaining to the issues affecting ethnic learners in HE, from international discourses to national and specifically Pasifika, have identified similarities and

differences. New frameworks and approaches for ethnic minority learners' in HE have emerged as a response to globalisation and the search for sustainability, equality, access, and participation. Merriam (2007a, 2007 b) challenged the hegemony of western ways of knowing that emphasise individualism, autonomy, and independence. Equally significance are the decolonization methodologies called for by Smith (1999), which has propagated a call to reassess and redefine methods and frameworks used in research and working policies, particularly in Oceania. Others such as Thaman (1998, 2004, 2007) Hau'ofa (1998) and Taufe'ulungaki (1997) have advocated strongly for Pasifika and Tongan theoretical and conceptual approaches to the problem.

The search for suitable lenses to articulate issues affecting ethnic Pasifika and Tongan male learners in HE leads to identification of certain theories that provide clear and relevant explanations. Socio-cultural theory, postcolonial theory, deficit theory, capital deficiency theory, *tā* (time) and *vā* (space) theory, are used to provide lenses for critical interpretations of results and benchmark for formulation of relevant approaches and frameworks.

3.14.1 Socio-cultural Theory

Vygotsky, a pioneer of socio-cultural learning theory, based his work on the assumption that all human activities take place in a cultural context with many levels of interactions, beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, structured relationships, and symbol systems. Vygotsky argued that, because of the differences in culture and social groups, the nature and content of learning is not general but will inevitably vary from one social

and/or cultural group to another because of the differences in specific forms of semiotic mediation such as language (Vygotsky, 1978, 1994).

One crucial theme that is consistent throughout Vygotsky's theories is the importance of the relationship between learning and the child's social and cultural worlds (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006). Vygotsky (1978, p. 88) stated that: "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them". This theme is strongest in Vygotsky's social constructivism theory of education. The social and cultural context that children grow up in, informs the growths in which their thinking is developed. Thus, the home, social, and cultural environments and the social interactions in which children are engaged in provide the foundations and tools for children's thinking and learning.

The overall goal of education, according to Vygotsky (1978), is to generate social learning through internalisation of culture and social relationships. He stressed the importance of prior knowledge in making sense of future situations and present experiences. Therefore, all new knowledge and newly introduced skills are greatly influenced by each student's socio-cultural environment. Such socio-cultural aspects affect and determine relationships and give meanings to learning. For this thesis, it is important to understand and acknowledge the historical processes that shape Tongan communities in A/NZ in relation to HE. This is previously discussed in Chapter I and 2 in this thesis.

The differences in socialization and cultural contexts of children in multicultural societies like A/NZ are important pedagogical issues that educators and educational institutions need to be aware of. This is of particular concern given that minoritised children in multicultural societies are educated with practices embedded in Western ideology. This is Vygotsky's point , as well as the concern of indigenous contemporaries like Vaioleti (2011) and Bishop (2003) who advocate for change in education to promote equality and relevancy through alternative models that empower children rather than through "deficit" mode. Vaioleti (2011) makes references to the work of Bishop (2008) on the Te Kotahitanga project and argues that such a perspective and framework is applicable if initiated for Pasifika and Tongan in A/NZ. The use of Maori epistemology, values and wisdom were most necessary and meaningful when approaching the issue of underachievement of indigenous and Pasifika students. Similar to Vaioleti (2011) research findings, Tongan wisdom and knowledge could be very helpful in providing meaningful   teaching pedagogies for Tongans in A/NZ.

In providing equitable learning particularly in multicultural societies such as A/NZ, teaching must also acknowledge and reflect the diversity of the student body and their cultural background. For example, in tertiary education in A/NZ, small tutorials and group work have been identified as effective teaching practices for Tongan and Pacific learners (Benseman et al., 2006; Vaioleti, 2011). Similarly, A/NZ universities have been criticised for failing to meet the learning needs of Asian students with current teaching practices based on the assumptions that all tertiary learners are equal (Pang, 2008), have

the same understanding and command of the English language, and share the same academic traditions. Clearly, this is not the case.

Vaioleti (2011), with close reference to Vygotsky (1978), argues that to ensure meaningful and worthwhile learning, learning and teaching practices must cater for ethnic minorities' pedagogies and knowledge. However, Vaioleti (2011) articulates strongly that using a diverse pedagogical approach rooted in Vygotsky's social construct theory, cultural and language differences need to be acknowledged in New Zealand's tertiary education system to inform learning processes that empower minority Pasifika learners. Vygotsky (1978, p. 88) stated "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which to grow into the intellectual life of those around them."

Most Pasifika educationalists applaud Vygotsky's theory, as illustrated by its dominance in Pasifika and Tongan pedagogical and educational research (Thaman, 1993; Kalāvite 2010; Vaioleti, 2011).

3.14.2 Post colonialism

Within the context of a multicultural society, post colonialism offers a relevant perspective to unpack the influence of Western epistemology on the learning of ethnic minoritised learners in HE (Burman and Chantler, 2004). Having an understanding of alternative worldviews other than the mainstream is important given the cosmopolitan and diverse nature of A/NZ. Proponents of postcolonial ideology challenge and

reconstruct the extensive conceptual legacy of imperialism in Oceania and Third World countries. Since its inception there have been a number of debates and postulations over post colonialism's many meanings and deviations. However, two people associated with this movement are widely acknowledged to have contributed a wealth of knowledge to its meanings and interpretations; Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak (Sidaway, 2000).

For the past two decades, both the term and the field of post colonialism have been subjected to thorough and extensive criticism from the perspectives of literary, political, and religious studies. Gregory's (2000, p. 612) offers a comprehensive definition of postcolonial theory: "centrally concerned with the impact of colonialism and its contestation of the cultures of both colonising and colonised peoples in the past, and the reproduction and transformations of colonial relations, representations and practices in the present". Within Oceania, though many islands have achieved independence typically from European masters, the colonial legacy remains inherent and embedded within socio-political institutions. According to Hau'ofa (1998, 2008) and Helu (1999) the ultimate goal of post colonialism is to combat the residual effects of colonialism on cultures. It is not simply concerned with rescuing past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect and understanding.

Postcolonial thinkers recognise that many of the assumptions which underlie the "logic" and "ethic" of colonialism are still active forces today. Exposing and deconstructing the

racist, imperialist nature of these assumptions will remove their power of persuasion and coercion. A key goal of postcolonial theorists is clearing space for multiple "subaltern" voices that have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies. It is widely recognised within the discourse that this space must first be cleared within academia. Said's path-breaking book "Orientalism" (1978) established a trend that was, for some years, loosely described as "colonial discourse studies" rather than "postcolonial theory." Although Said supposedly wrote about the Middle East being constructed as the "Orient" by French intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was the Spanish and British empires that formed the main fields of colonial discourse studies. Orientalism describes how and why the Orient becomes subjugated through the privileging of Western culture. Said suggests that the Orient also includes all of the cultures of northern Africa, East to Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific. The representation of people in these regions are dominated by Western imaginative demographics and perpetuated through dominant discourses and institutions such as schools and universities (Sharp, 2009). Said characterised the discourse of Orientalism by using a series of binary oppositions between the positivities of the West and the corresponding absences representing the East. Such interpretation and distinction was the hallmark of Said's philosophical argument (Gregory, 2000; Said, 1978).

Another influential writer who took postcolonial theory to a different level is Spivak (1988) who made reference to Marx's conflict theory, referring to oppressed colonized non-elite as the subaltern. Growing up in India before her academic training in the

United States, her academic journey gave her experiences to apply categorisations not only to the caste system, but also the British imperial administration. Spivak's theoretical dimension clearly is an expansion of her collided worlds; the world of being a Western academic and that of a female Indian. According to Spivak, the subaltern were suppressed because of their being minority or low social status.The category of the subaltern was intended to shed light on the practices of dominance and resistance outside the framework of class struggle, but without ignoring class itself. Spivak uses subaltern theory to explain the dynamics of representation and voice of those who were unheard and oppressed, perpetuated by poverty and illiteracy, inflicted by power and politics. Often the subalterns are regarded as ignorant, illiterate, and a burden to society. Like Orientalism, subalternism is about recognising that there are multiple voices and multiple truths to reality.

3.14.3 Cultural deficit theory

In trying to explain the prevalent underachievement among ethnic minority students and students from lower socioeconomic strata in higher educational institutions, educational commentators and others locate the problem within the students, their families and communities. Historically, deficit theory has been one of the main rationalisations given for the success or failure of students from ethnic minority groups.

Significantly, cultural deficit model attributes students' lack of educational success to characteristics often rooted in their cultures and communities. This perspective overlooks the root causes of oppression by locating the issue within individuals and/or

their communities. Because this model frames the problem as one of students and families, the "remedies" informed by deficit perspectives often fail to ameliorate problems within schools or society. Under the cultural deficit model, schools are, at least in part, absolved from their responsibilities to educate all students appropriately, and this charge is shifted almost entirely to students and their families (Hess & Shipman, 1965).

Engelmann and Bereiter (1966) emphasized how cultural deprivation theories supported the idea that social and emotional deficiencies affected student performance within the academic system. Until dealt with, these deficiencies would make it "impossible for" culturally deprived students "to progress in academic areas"

According to Utumapu (1992), Pasikale (1996), and Osborne (2001) the deficit approach represents students who failed to adapt and inherit the ability to handle schooling adequately. It asserts that students of colour and/or low-income often fail to do well in school because of perceived "cultural deprivation" or lack of exposure to cultural models more obviously congruent with school success. Consequently, according to this perspective, these students often enter school with a lack of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 2004), cultural assets that are affirmed by schools and often shared by school agents and therefore considered valuable. In addition, there is a popular assumption that the families of students of colour and socioeconomically disadvantaged students do not value education in the same ways that their middle and upper class white counterparts do. Conversely, upper and middle class students are more likely to do

well in school because they possess more cultural capital. According to Tamihere (2014) lack of involvement among families living in poverty is in part responsible for the educational outcomes such as the Tongan community.

By locating the causes for underachievement within students and communities, the cultural deficit model fails to examine institutional barriers (examples, school funding, school decile funding, racial and ethnic segregation) that can also potentially influence student achievement. It also fails to acknowledge the relationships between school practices, the sociopolitical factors that shape these efforts, and student outcomes. "According to Utumapu (1992) much of the deficit-centered literature fails to explain or account for students who come from families and communities with the same alleged limitations yet succeed in school. Additionally, Pasikale (1995) and Utumapu (1992) the problem with the deficit model is that even though it argues for the provision of extra help, it implies that students are deficient or lacking. This worldview does not recognize human potential and the ways in which it can be developed. Importantly, Pasikale (1995, p. 5) captures the use of the deficit model against Pasifika people and its damaging effects:

> "[T]he images, information and stereotypes about Pacific Island people are rooted in assumptions based on the images of 'recent island migrants' … [consequently] … the displacement of the majority Pacific learners, especially in the formal educational establishments. By this I mean the assumptions (mostly bad) educators make about New Zealand-born Pacific Island learners, who either

fail to meet expectations or worse still, float by without any expectations or demands on them because of some misguided liberal attitude (otherwise known as the 'soft option'). Either way, human potential is not recognized or developed".

Writers such as Thaman(1988,1999a), Taufeʻulungaki (2011,2002) and Mahina(2004c, 2007a) believed that Pasifika people must move beyond and above these institutional restrictions often perpetuated by sociocultural institutions in order to function successfully in a multi-cultural setting. Hauʻofa (1993, p. 16), a well-known Tongan and Pasifika writer argued fervently against deficit theory:

"Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and a region of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom".

Such powerful assertions and rhetoric have helped Pasifika to create new waves and to reassert a sense of pride and strength, by reasserting Pasifika epistemologies and knowledge system to the academic scholarship.

3.14.4 *Tā-Vā*

Ancient Pasfika and Tongan people were fearless seafarers who chartered and settled Oceania before the white men. Their successful journey was very much attributed to learning how to master the art of navigating *tā* (time) and *vā* (space). Navigating the vast space of Oceania 3000 years ago was not accidental; rather, it was a combination of skillful knowledge based on *tā* – knowing when to travel, including weather and seasonal patterns, ocean, land, and physical nature – and *vā*, connecting the missing dots and space within Moana nui. Moana nui was not just an empty ocean; it was space where land and sea existed. Knowing the existence of time and space in relation to Moana nui was critical then, and is still relevant today as it represents modern day migrant dreamers in A/NZ. Hau'ofa (1994, p. 161) asserted poetically:

> "There are no more suitable people on earth to be the custodians of the oceans than those for whom the sea is home...we seem to have forgotten that we are such a people...our roots...our origins are embedded in the sea...our ancestors were brought here by the sea...the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else, the sea is our endless saga, the sea is our most powerful metaphor...the Ocean is in Us".

The building of the Ha'amonga 'a Maui (Maui's burden) trilithon about 1200AD signified why *tā* and *vā* were monumentally important for the ancient Tongan civilization which, at the time, had a vast Polynesian maritime empire that stretched outward to the Melanesian outliers and part of Polynesia. The stone creation*(Ha'amonga*

'a Maui) was symbolically a (*tā*) clock, but also represented the space between the dead and living and the gateway to *Pulotu* (the underworld) –where the spirits of the dead went to – and also the space between commoners , *tu'a* and the chiefs, *'eiki*. Such is the heartbeat that fabricates and defines *anga fakatonga*, where people know and learn their space and time; to offer their duties and obligation with respect, love, loyalty, reciprocity, and obedience.

Tā (time) suggests actions through time in a progressive sense, like *tā lali* (beat the *lali*: a form of Tongan wood drum) is a process of marking time through lali beats. Ka'ili (2008) elaborates that *tā* is a marker of time indicated through beats, such as *tā hiva* (musical beat), or social acts like *tā lave* (to equally empower). The concept of *tā*, like heartbeat, represents our very wellbeing, what we are, and the way we do things. Mahina (2004b) contends that *tā* acts as a form of time and signifies time through the beating of space. *Tā* also calls for plurality of action through time and space, usually before a verb, as in *Tā-langa* (to construct), *Tā-lele* (to run), *Tā- nofo* (to stay).

Tongan music and dance reflects "symmetrical beating of language, sound and body, all with common purpose of producing harmony and beauty" (ibid, p. 92). The performer acts accordingly to the symmetrical beating of time with an eloquent expression of the lyrics through body actions. *Tā*, in a simple sense, encompasses actions and responses as a result of our interactions within the institutions of our society. *Tā* further explains how actions, even values and norms, change over time; even how generational interface influences how people value and see things in perspective.

For example, New Zealand-born Tongans progressively see the ability to speak Tongan as irrelevant; Tongans have changed the way they dress to lotu and funeral. Such cultural changes to the values and norms of anga fakatonga have been made to fit the needs of modern society.

Understanding Tongan culture and their notion of *tā* is imperative for educators. A Tongan saying "*Koe taimi faka-Tonga*" (It's Tongan Time) literally means that Tongans are not so passionate about timeliness and punctuality, in that they have their own perceptions of making the time. Tongans have their own way of doing things, and often see their world from a vantage point that is different from that of the mainstream. Mahina (2007, p. 226) elaborates that Pacific peoples "locate the past as time in front, the present as time in the middle and the future as the time that comes after or behind". *Ko ho 'amui*, literally meaning your future, adds to the notion that Tongan see the future as in the back of their mind, as if they "walk forward into the past and backwards to the future". They see the past as events that have happened and are in front of them, and the future lies "behind the past", yet to happen and remains unreal (ibid, p. 226).

Vā is a concept with recognized similarity in meanings in a variety of Pasifika contexts. Important to the Tongan view of reality is the concept of *Vā*, or *Wa* in Maori. Samoan scholar, Albert Wendt (1994, p. 403) explains:

> "*Vā* is the space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The

meanings change as the relationships/contexts change. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, more than individualism: who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of *vā*, relationships".

Vā also relates to the nature of the space that is created in a social-cultural context where relationships are created and fostered through blood ties, marriage, profession, and friendships. Consequently, *vā* signifies:

> "the nature of the relationship that is *vāmamaʻo*, a distant space between things and *vāofi* close space between things. In social contexts then *vā* is a space that is formed through the mutual relations between persons or groups and it is also an indicator of the quality of the relationship, like *vālelei* refers to harmonious and beautiful social space between people and *vātamaki* signifies a disharmonious social space between people" (Kaʻili, 2008, p. 16).

According to Mahina and Kaʻili (2006) harmonious social spaces are created when reciprocal actions are based on mutual understanding causing pleasant and meaningful vā; however, neglect of one's reciprocal role causes unpleasant social feelings and disharmonious social space. *Tā* and *Vā* are socially constructed concepts and mechanisms for understanding reality. Conflict and order define and shape the nature of relationships within *ta* and *vā*, but with varying degree across different cultures. Mahina (2007, p. 225) explains:

"ontologically *tā* and *vā*, time and space, are the common medium in which all things are, in a single level of reality; that epistemologically *tā* and *vā*, time and space are social constructs, concerning their varying social arrangements across cultures is conflicting in nature; that all things, in nature, mind and society, stand in eternal relations of exchange to one another, giving rise to conflict or order; that conflict and order are permanent features of all things within and across nature, mind and society".

Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009) claims that the concept of *vā* is a way of thinking about space, specifically in terms of social space. As she explains, *vā* in Samoan epistemology "is a highly complex phenomenon influencing interactions in everyday life [that sanctions and guides] individuals and family behavior" (cited in Ka'ili, 2008, p. 8). Ka'ili (2008) strongly attested that *tā* and *vā* framework underpins the very core of being Tongan; hence this framework will provide a conceptual platform for understanding the social-cultural journey and how Tongans perceive their educational journey in Aotearoa.

Langimālie (balance of nature, a state of wellness) is a concept that I fused in to be included in *tā* and *vā* because of its relevancy to the subject. It is the state of acting and of knowing – when, what, why, and how – and is very much intertwined and embedded with learning one's space and time. *Langimālie* is consciously knowing and learning to keep up with changes, taking account of your surroundings, and learning your place and value. Everyone has the ability to create his/her own wind, and the courage to persist even when things are at odds. Being a Tongan male is an ascribed

obligation because it comes with responsibility and expectation. In essence, langimālie not only connects ta and *vā*, but also exemplifies the need to find balance and wellbeing within the family and society. Performing of duties and responsibilities reflect ones *tā* and *vā*, which usually comes before individual gain. *Langitāmaki*, the opposite of *langimālie*, speaks of the imbalance and discrepancy of not fulfilling responsibilities and obligation within the *tā* and *vā*, and its ill causes. Tu'itahi (2009) describes how a successful Tongan family and student are able to navigate successfully in Aotearoa by finding langimālie within their *tā* and *vā*. His thesis, "*Langa Fonua*", having the desire and aspiration to succeed, explains that while much research has spoken out about the deficit analysis of negativity, there is a need to reflect on the successful side of it. The findings indicate that *langimālie* (balance) – even *langafonua*, which can be similar – is at the roots of many successful Tongan families here in A/NZ, and make suggestions about how it can be replicated. According to Salitiban (2011) and Tu'itahi (2009) finding the *langimālie* between Tongan and Western upbringing helps to nourish positive encouragement and persistence for Tongan children to succeed at school.

Another thesis on Tongan students, by Kalāvite (2010), also emphasises the importance of *tā-vā kāinga* and its relationship with the various institutions of the society. The finding stipulates that when Tongan students competently cultivate a consistent and balanced *tā-vā kāinga*, there is possibility of success at HE. Kalāvite (2010, 2012) further highlights the importance of *fakapotopoto and makafetoli'aki* as integral to the success of Tongans. *Fakapotopoto* means prudent and provident living, and staying within the

time-space boundaries. Making wise and thoughtful decisions and acting on them is also important especially when there are varied choices. *Fetokoni'aki* means mutuality, reciprocity, or "to help one another, to co-operate" (Churchward 1959, p. 178). This is at the very core of *anga faka-tonga*, which is fundamental to the success of Tongan learners. Findings of Kalāvite (2010) research also pointed to a conceptual framework, *toungāue,* which explains the importance to the success of Tongan students of uniting and working together. When all the stakeholders have the same vision and purpose success is likely to be achieved.

3.15   Summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of international, regional and ethnic minority literatures pertaining to males in higher education. Literatures strongly show gaps in policies and practices. Identifying international literatures help to set the scene from a bigger picture especially the current trend and practices that dealt with males at higher education. Highlight from various, international and regional discourses further concurred that males' participation, retention and completion at higher education are similar across the board and are affected by multifarious factors such as culture, economic, political and institutional issues. Consequently, showing similar trend Pasifika and Tongan male learners lacked representation at higher education in A/NZ.

The chapter closes with several relevant theories to provide better lenses for understanding of Tongan ethnic male learners in HE. The using of both western and Pasifika conceptual framework help to provide a valid and reliable benchmark for

formulation of practical application, meaningful interpretations and triangulation. Using varieties of western and Pasifika lenses and angles to understand issues and voices of Tongan males in higher education are practical and relevant. The investigation uses post-colonialism and socio-cultural theories to provide holistic explanations to the enquiry and the lived experiences of Tongan male learners in A/NZ. Similarly, the uses of *tā-vā* further illuminate the need to add indigenous lenses research process especially when investigating problems and issues that are affecting Pasifika people in A/NZ.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOUNGA FEKUMI AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Searching and inquiring for truth and reality is an educational endeavor that causes the researcher to make critical analysis and judgment of research surroundings; its natural and human phenomena. Research design *(founga fēkumi)* in a simple sense is "a plan or strategy [that is] aimed at enabling answers to be obtained for the research questions" (Burns, 2000, p. 145). It also refers to the appropriateness of the techniques used to gather data. The diagram below (fig.2) explains the *founga fēkumi* and how this research evolves and develops.

Fig.2   Founga fēkumi: research design

METHODOLOGY : SET THE DIRECTION

METHOD: TOOLS **QUALITATIVE**

PHENOMENOLOCIAL/ INDUCTIVE APPROACH

TONGAN RESEARSCH DESIGN(PROCESS) : **KAKALA**

DATA COLLECTION **TALANOA, TĀLANGA,TĀLAVE**

DATA ANALYSIS : **KAKALA/THEMATIC CODING**
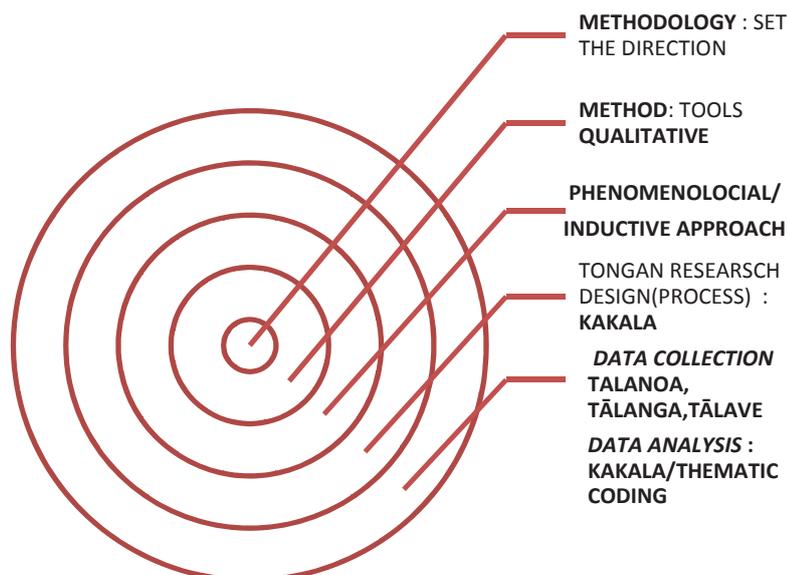
With the study focusing on Tongan males pursuing HE in A/NZ, a Pasifika-Tongan research design (fig.2) is appropriately designed to make sense of their experiences and perceptions; more importantly, their life journeys and lived experiences. In the case of this research, a Tongan qualitative methodology is employed with Western lenses to recognize the important of both cultures on Tongan males' academic achievement. Kaplan (1973) explains that the choice of methodology will determine how the research is undertaken and what resources, processes, and tools are used.

In choosing what approach to use, the researcher often has to make a judgment pertaining to the methodology and the methods chosen for the research. The means by which a researcher sets out to achieve this may be organised into three broad categories: experience, reasoning, and research (Mouly, 1978). Though classified into three distinct categories, each category is far from being autonomous and reciprocally exclusive. They must be seen as having both corresponding and overlapping features that can provide solutions to multifaceted issues under study such as those stumbling blocks and stepping stones faced by Pasifika and Tongan learners' in Aotearoa. In this thesis, all three means of inquiry have a role to play.

Every day we have choices to make, some are casual others are impulsive while the rest need careful consideration and wisdom. At some point we depend and rely on our experiences. Experience helps us explain and understand what is going on around us, hence the relevancy and value of experience in any search for truth should not be misjudged. However, while experience helps explain what is going on, in itself it is

often not enough, and so reasoning, inductive, deductive or both, comes into play. Where experience and reasoning are not enough, research becomes critical. Research has become the focal point of intellectual scholarship and knowledge. Institutions are increasingly research focused and driven, with funding allocated according to research output.

4.2 Methodology

Research methodology "refers to the overall epistemological paradigm adopted within a particular discipline or tradition, or within a specific research project, which may be interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or trans-disciplinary" (Mikula, 2008, p. 127-128). Drawing a distinction between methodology and methods, Sandra Harding (1987, p. 2) posits that methodology serves as a "theory and analysis of how research should proceed", and methods are described as the "techniques for (or a way of) gathering evidence". In his assessment of methodology, Joey Sprague (2005, p. 5) elucidates that methodology is concerned with "how we do what we do . . . to gather and interpret data consistent with what we believe knowledge is and should be created," giving us a lens through which to interrogate "standards for evaluating claims about how things are or really happened". Shawn Wilson (2008, p. 34) suggests that "Methodology is thus asking 'How do I find out more about this reality?'" Finding out more about a particular reality is inclusive of methodological approaches that help us to "make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 323). This research has taken a methodological viewpoint of the social reality of

Tongan male students and their experiences and voices in formal learning institutions. The research design that I have implemented provides a space to look through their eyes, and learn from their voices and experiences. Despite the routine disregard for Pacific and Tongan epistemologies in traditional Western research, I consciously integrate methodologies that are grounded in Pasifika and Tongan epistemologies.

4.3   Qualitative Approach

The purpose of this study is to identify, describe, and analyse the perceptions, aspirations, and experiences of Tongan adult male learners' in Aotearoa. The purpose of the study determined that a descriptive and ethnographic research approach be adopted. With a descriptive and ethnographic approach, a qualitative and phenomenological research design is adopted. Qualitative study is defined as an "'inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994, p. 2) . Qualitative approaches seek to portray a world in which reality is socially constructed; complex and ever changing. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 3) suggest that qualitative research can be variously defined depending upon which historical "moment" it occurs in. They provide a generic definition as follows:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study thing their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the

meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand.

Qualitative methodological approaches use a range of methods to explore and interpret phenomena, but are not usually intent on generating or testing hypotheses. The research strategies are inductive, attempting to make sense of the experience/situation through exploration and understanding (Creswell, 1994, 2008) rather than imposing pre-existing expectations on the situation. Furthermore, qualitative approaches allow participants to give detailed descriptions of their perceptions of the problem. Qualitative researchers believe that social reality is associated with human beings and recognise that conversation is a basic mode of human interaction (Creswell, 1994, 2008). Therefore, human knowledge is deeply rooted in human actions rather than being generated through statistical manipulation and quantifiable research approaches which objective science relies on (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000)

4.4   Phenomenological approach

Phenomenology is defined as the "interpretive study of human experience in which phenomena are examined and clarified through the human situations, events and experiences as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (von Eckartsberg,

1998, p. 3). It investigates the very nature of a phenomenon; not attempting to make an explanation of it, but generating a description of it as it appears in reality. It recognises that truth is grounded on human experience, and gathering everyday descriptions of experience can provide real insights and meaning. A phenomenological study is a "research method that attempts to understand participants' perspectives and views of social realities" (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, p. 86).For this study, a phenomenological research design is adopted as it allows the study to draw attention to and describe the personal experiences and perceptions of participants. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design best fits the purpose of this study to describe and capture the journey of Tongan males in higher education.

4.5   Research Paradigm

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008) a research paradigm is a perspective held by a community of researchers based upon shared assumptions, concepts, values, and practices. Interestingly to capture richness in data collection, a qualitative approach underpinned by pragmatism as its philosophy positions the researcher as central to the process. This approach relies upon the researcher as the instrument of data collection (ipid, 2008). In the case of this research, as the researcher, I asked the questions, collected the data, recorded interviews, and through this work made the interpretations from the results. The methods used and the interpretive techniques employed have to be rigorous to ensure the validity and integrity of the study. Both phenomenology and pragmatism are used to provide a broader and balanced framework to data collection,

and with a Pasifika –Tongan paradigm being fused in, it adds to the validity and reliability of the study.

Growing Pasifika literature and scholarship have challenged the need to take into consideration the Pasifika research paradigm (Chu et al., 2013).According to this position, research conducted on Pasifika issues should be informed by, and filled with, the continuum of Pacific worldviews, knowledge, practices, and values. Within the context of the Pacific research paradigm, research processes and practices should be conducted in accordance with the ethical standards – including responsiveness and reciprocity – of Pacific peoples, and the research should be conceptualised in a way that is consistent with their needs, expectations, and aspirations. This research project was designed with the needs and aspirations of Tongan male learners in mind.

There is also a broader perspective from which this research can be seen to be located within the Pasifika research paradigm. Its methodology is designed in such a way as to recognise and validate relationships between the researcher and the researched; to reduce the space between them by involving Pasifika people directly in the research and providing a forum in which their voices can be heard. This is an important aspect of the responsiveness and reciprocity that characterise research conducted within the Pasifika research paradigm. It is expected, therefore, that the research will contribute not only to the Pasifika knowledge base in the area of Pasifika and Tongan male learners, but also add to the understanding of Tongan cultures, experiences, and world views.

This research is using Thaman's (1988) *Kakala* research framework with a phenomenological design that requires a qualitative approach using Tongan methodology of *talanoa, tālave*, and *tālanga*. While this research is driven by Tongan methodologies, it is important to note that it has included Western approaches of phenomenology and pragmatism to make the research holistic. Taufe'ulungaki (2003a) emphasises the need to take holistic and inclusive approaches in Pasifika research, when knowing that participants are operating within continuum of both indigenous and Western worlds. Logically, indigenous truth and knowledge are underpinned by core values and set beliefs, living and non –living, which are integral to their human and physical world.

One of the most notable authorities in Pasifika and Tongan education is Thaman (1987, 1993) whose poem "Our way" illuminates how our(Tongan) culture and traditions are often compromised and questioned, because of our tendency to see and do things in a Western way. The poem suggests the need to take a decolonised approach when trying to understand problems and find solutions pertaining to Pasifika and Tongan people. This does not imply that the Western body of knowledge is neglected; rather Western knowledge has been used for many decades since the arrival of the missionaries and the colonialists, but scholars such as Thaman and Taufe'ulungaki advocate for a much-needed new fresh approach. The thoughts and words of this poem, "Our Way", exemplify how we have become caught between the two cultures.

OUR WAY

your way

objective

analytic

always doubting

the truth

until proof comes

slowly

quietly

and it hurts

my way

subjective

gut-feeling like

always sure

of the truth

the proof

is there

waiting

and it hurts

      (Thaman, 1987, p. 40)

The poem illustrates the contrasting and conflicting elements of epistemologies of Western and the indigenous views, and how we are often caught entangled and confused because of how reality and truth are treated and contradicted. Scholars such as Edward Said (1978) had strongly protested the intellectual colonization by the West. Sykes (1989) has critically exposed the demise of the aboriginal people in Australia, and the negligence and loss of their languages and wisdom. Similarly, the work of Linda

Smith (1999) articulates the need to decolonise methodologies in indigenous research and to re-invent and interrogate culturally appropriate practises for research. Interestingly, Denzing and Lincoln (1998, p.81) concept of "historical moments" in research methodology affirms the rise of Pasifika research methodologies and paradigm to provide alternative research framework for addressing Pasifika issues in A/NZ. All of these writers have argued from the perspective of "our way", the need for an alternative, a paradigm shift in our scholarship and the research of indigenous people.

4.6   Pasifika research methodologies

Aotearoa is quite fortunate to be the breeding ground of most notable Pasifika scholars who have recently developed clear guidelines and frameworks pertaining to research conducted on Pasifika people. The emergence of these Pasifika scholars and commentators has promoted the use of Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) as an alternative paradigm for conducting research that involves indigenous people and issues. Pasifika research and methodologies based on Pasifika values and belief systems are now being acknowledged and interwoven with Western research approaches. These indigenous research approaches identify Pasifika values and worldviews that are relevant to Pasifika societies (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001). Anae et al., (2001, p. 9) have suggested that "if research is to make meaningful contributions to Pasifika societies, then its primary purpose is to reclaim Pacific knowledge and values for Pacific peoples". Most prominent in this endorsement are the works of Smith (1999), Bishop (1998), Thaman (1988, 1992, 1996a, 2003) and Taufe'ulungaki (2004, 2003a).

Collectively, they propose a research framework underpinned by the cultural systems of the indigenous people.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies: Indigenous Research (1999, p. 69) explains that "reclaiming a voice in this context has also been about reclaiming, reconnecting and reordering those ways of knowing which were submerged, hidden or driven underground". Smith's seminal work has become a beacon of light that has prompted many Pasifika scholars to emerge with valuable contributions to the research field. It also encourages and empowers indigenous researchers to bring their cultural knowledge to their academic fields and to apply these to help design frameworks, models, and practices that are relevant for their people. The approach also liberates indigenous scholars from Western epistemological practice, by giving them ownership over their indigenous values and knowledge. Smith (1999, p. 143) emphasised that: "methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes analysis". Within an indigenous framework, methodological considerations are ones concerned with the broader rules and guidelines of indigenous research. It is at this level that researchers have to clarify and justify their intentions.

Pasifika research must raise the level of understanding and awareness of the problems faced by Pasifika and offer opportunities for them to develop holistic resolutions to those issues. However, Pasifika values, beliefs, and aspirations need also to be at the forefront and core of indigenous research so that approaches of Western knowledge can

be transformed from the academic single-minded to circular and inclusive approaches (Smith, 1999). Apart from being academically robust and sound, Pasifika research also requires a strong element of appropriateness and circularity to be valued and appreciated in a Pasifika academic environment. The participants and their communities being researched must be made to feel empowered and enriched through *talanoa, tālanga, and tālave* process with the research itself responding to evolving and dynamic Pasifika issues (Taufe'ulungaki, 2000).

Notably, Kalāvite (2010) referred to several Pasifika scholars in a variety of contexts and locations, have developed frameworks that represent a change in how research could be conducted for Pasifika people: Kupa's (2009) "*Te Vaka Atafanga* Model" from Tokelau; Nabobo-Baba's (2006) "*Vanua* Model" from Fiji; Mitaera's (1997) concept of "The researcher as the first paradigm", and Ma-Ua Hodges' (2000) "*Tivaevae* Framework from Cook Islands; Tamasese, Peteru, and Waldegrave's (2005) "*Fa'afaletui* model " and Mulitalo-Lauta (2001) "*Lalaga*" from Samoa; and Bishop (1998) and Smith's (1999) *Kaupapa Māori* research methodology from New Zealand. These research frameworks embody valuable guidelines and protocols to be observed when conducting research with Pasifika and Maori people.

Significantly, Pasifika Methodology includes the process of collaboration, participation, and consultation, where the Pasfika people become important stakeholders. This process is an important aspect for the Pasifika researcher and their Pasifika participants and communities. Dialogue assists the establishment of a strong research engagement

between the two entities. Two-way, collaborative dialogue builds trust between the Pasifika researcher and Pasifika communities and participants. Historically this has not been the case because Westernized research approaches have dominated academic thought and, as a consequence, a sense of mistrust has occurred due to the lack of clarity of research purpose, design, and ownership. The Pasifika Education Research Guidelines (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001, p. 8) support the idea that consultation, therefore, is essential in helping to create such research partnerships. If research is to make meaningful contributions to Pacific societies, then its primary purpose is to reclaim Pacific knowledge and values for Pacific peoples.

4.7 Tongan Research Methodology

Tongans have ventured into the realm of higher education and research and have developed Indigenous research frameworks which have added to the growing literature in the education field. Well-known contemporary commentators in Tongan research have continued to fabricate and design numerous research models such as Thaman's (1988, 1996, 2002) *Kakala* model , later added to by Johansson-Fua (2006); Mahina(2004b) and Ka'ili's (2008) model of *Tauhi-Vā*; Vaioleti's (2003, 2011) model of *Talanoa* and Manulua; Tu'itahi's (2011) *Fonua* model; Manu'atu's (2000) model of *Mālie-Māfana*, and Kalāvite's (2010) model of *Toungāue* and *tā-vā kāinga*. I have also developed an emerging model known as *Kalia-Langimālie* model which makes reference to the seafaring nature of Tongans, and their journey and adaptation to life in Aotearoa. Education is a socio-cultural journey likened to the *Kalia-Langimālie* framework, which can explain the

obstacles and challenges of pursuing learning. The *Kalia-Langimālie* model metaphorically encompasses, holistic and life-long learning and the journey of a Tongan male learner in Aotearoa, and with the application of *tā* and *vā* and it seeks to provide meaningful understanding of the stepping stones and stumbling blocks encountered in the journey.

4.7.1 *Kakala* research methodology

Kakala (fragrant flowers) epitomizes many things in the Tongan culture; a plant, a garland, a gift, a responsibility, an obligation, even a task to be completed. To academics, *kakala* is a framework, a leadership model, a teaching model, a health model, and more importantly an indigenous research methodology that has relevantly fused indigenous and Western epistemologies in a coherent manner. Thaman (1988) clarifies that kakala is imperative in the context of Tongan culture; especially its hierarchical nature which enveloped and encompassed by core values of obligation (fatongia), respect (*faka'apa'apa),* love *('ofa*), loyalty *(mamahi'i me'a*), and obedience (*talangofua). Kakala* are ranked just as people are ranked, even when they are woven together into garlands, they are ranked.

Konai Helu Thaman (1988) took the making of *kakala* from being just conventional Tongan knowledge, and fabricated it academically as a metaphor to be widely used across the Pacific to explain the processes and procedures of research. In the context of indigenous research, *kakala* has shed light on and set benchmarks to guide research protocols and processes pertaining to indigenous research. The *Kakala* Research

Framework (KRF) has been chosen not only because it embodies the key essential elements of Pasifika-Tongan epistemologies, but also because of the connotations of beauty, relevancy, value, ownership and its reciprocal references to the stakeholders of the communities.

Kakala, in this research context, represents the processes and stages of making a *kahoa* (garland, usually worn around the neck), or a *sisi* (garland, usually worn around the waist) in Tonga. At a personal level, I am quite overwhelmed at how effectively this cultural knowledge really can explain Western processes of research within a Tongan framework; that is, in a relevant and meaningful way. This Tongan research framework from the outset was seen as appropriate for this project, for it brings to it cultural relevancy, meaningful knowledge, respect, and wisdom. *Kakala* epitomizes the richness of our indigenous heritages, and the need to undertake research from an indigenous frame of mind. Using this framework has given me a wealth of confidence, the knowledge to make this research culturally worthwhile, but most significantly as a Tongan researching Tongan people.

What are the components and stages that comprise the *Kakala* research framework? Vaioleti (2006, p. 25) a prominent Tongan scholar in the field of Pasifika-Tongan research methodology describes *kakala* as "fragrant flowers and leaves weaved together in special ways, according to the need of the occasion it is woven for". In most Pacific cultures, there is a special mythology and etiquette associated with *kakala*. The making of *kakala* (*tui kakala*) involves three different processes; *toli, tui,* and *luva.* However, in

2006 the *Kakala* research framework was enriched and extended by ʻAna Taufeʻulungaki and Seula Johansson-Fua after taking guidance from its original creator, Konai Thaman, and making reference to the work of Linita Manuʻatu (2000). As a consequence the Kakala research framework was transformed from a three to a six phase approach. *Teu, Mālie,* and *Māfana* were added to the original *Toli, Tui,* and *Luva* phases.

Thaman (2009, p. 5) refers to "two additional 'steps' (*teu* and *māfana/mālie*)" and acknowledges this in a research study in Tonga known as Sustainable Livelihood and Education Project (SLEP). *Teu* is at the beginning of the *Kakala* process whilst *Mālie* and *Māfana* – Manuʻatu's (2000) evaluative and monitoring components –appear after the three original phases, *Toli, Tui,* and *Luva*.

4.7.2 *Teu* – Conceptualization

When making a traditional *kakala, teu* is the process of selection of the flowers to be used, which must be appropriate for the occasion and the wearer. Likewise, before the weaving (*tui kakala*) phase begins, the purpose and reason for the *tui kakala* and how the research is to be shaped in a Pasifika – or in this case, Tongan – context must be addressed. *Teu* is influenced and defined by overarching cultural perceptions, values, beliefs, and assumptions. Careful planning and preparation is taken with consultation to make sure that the researcher has understood and conceptualised the whole research concept. This is a very critical stage because it set the boundaries, variables, and scope of the research. *Teu* deals with what you're going to do, why you're doing it, and how it is going to be done. *Teu* defines and pictures the layout of the whole project from

beginning to end in a meaningful way, where one can see clearly from the outset the very purpose of taking the research.

"*Fōfola e fala ka e talanoa e kāinga*" as mentioned in chapter 2, is important in the conceptualisation and planning stage, because it calls for collaboration and consultation amongst the stakeholders. Making the research inclusive of stakeholders in the community is another way of making the research relevant and meaningful, knowing that what is about to be done is for the benefit of the community. *Talanoa , tālanga*, and *tālave* all come into action, where the researcher seeks to build, re- validate, and make references to all relevant stakeholders for their feedback and suggestions. In the research context, then, teu encompasses the preparation processes whereby the researcher constructs the research proposal, gains ethics approval from the institution, and consults with stakeholders. Once this is done, the stage is ready for the second act, which is *toli*.

4.7.3   *Toli* – Data Collection

Toli kakala (picking and selecting fragrant flowers) in Tonga is a done in a very delicate manner, to make sure that fragrance and the appealing nature of the *Kakala* is not diminished or lessened. *Toli* is the process of picking, selecting and grading the flowers and leaves to be used to make the *Kakala*. How the flowers are picked, and put into the basket is done skillfully. One must also know the exact time to pick a particular *Kakala*, and how to delicately pluck it from the tree or plant. When this is not done properly, the permeating aroma and beauty of the kakala is compromised. When collected, the

flowers are carefully graded according to their level of cultural meaning, the purpose of the event, and the anticipated recipient of the *Kakala*.

In the research context, toli encompasses the research question, the participants, the context within which the research is to be undertaken and the community that will benefit from the research. With reference to the research for this thesis it also includes the collection of data through a literature review, *talanoa, tālanga*, and *tālave* and statistical information about the participants from the school. These elements were woven together in the making of the *Kakala*. Once this stage is completed, it allows the second stage of the research to be conducted.

4.7.4   *Tui* – Data Analysis

Tui is an ancient art form where the kakala is skillfully woven according to cultural pattern and knowledge. When the all the elements of the tui kakala are at hand, allowing for ranking and selection, the weaving begins. The time taken to complete the tui *Kakala* depends on the complexity of the pattern selected, the purpose of the occasion, and the anticipated recipients of the kakala. The beauty and the aroma of the tui kakala reflects on how skillfully and intricately the kakala is woven and is dependent on getting right the exact combination and arrangement. The visual beauty and pattern of the *tui kakala* is also a cultural knowledge and *'alaha* (aroma) of it reflects the skill of the *kakala* maker. During the *tui* process, knowing what to weave and put at the front of the *kakala* is known as *fungani*, and it's usually the flowers with the highest ranking. The rest are woven into the background in a pattern only understood by the

kakala maker. In practice, the researcher is responsible to dissect and take the most relevant information from the context of *talanoa, tālave*, and *tālanga* and to use it appropriately.

Applied to the research context, tui is the process whereby the researcher with cultural knowledge in hand, uses indigenous research methodology to dissect and analyse information and knowledge from the participants. Through continuous *talanoa, tālave*, and *tālanga*, the researcher is open to integrate and make changes to achieve research objectives. This is often referred to as collaboration and dialogue and the very purpose of it is to synthesize and revalidate information. Cultural knowledge and competency is quite significant during this stage, especially in terms of making meaning and connections; without this, even rich information could end up with invalid conclusions.

4.7.5 *Luva* – Presentation

Luva, represents an element of *fatongia* (obligation) in Tongan society, where one wholeheartedly and devotedly aspires to give the best there is. Fatongia is at the core of Tongan culture; everyone has fatongia which is the very essence of being Tongan. Lafitani (2011) believes that the word *fatongia* originated from the pandanus plant (*fā*), with its ripe fragrant fruits (*fu'ai fā momoho*) that are permeated graciously *(tongia)* when plucked (*paki'i or mapaki*). *Mapaki e faa, ka 'oku kei 'alaha* speaks metaphorically of one's *fatongia*: it must permeate its fragrance, *'alaha kakala*, worthwhile, relevant, and meaningful. So in in this research context the *fatongia* of the researcher is not just to embody and articulate the wisdom of the indigenous, but to offer the best. When a

particular *fatongia*/obligations fulfilled to the utmost capability, it is referred to as *'alaha kakala* (permeating fragrance), meaning that it has significantly influenced everyone. This corresponds to the kakala: when it is woven (*tui*) delicately with wisdom and passion, then the kakala will permeate fragrance *('alaha kakala).*

Luva is done to acknowledge that a particular task is completed and stakeholders need to take ownership of it. Pasifika–Tongan research must recognise the presence of indigenous stakeholders in order to make research relevant and meaningful. Pasifika and Tongan culture is well-known for the basic value of reciprocity underpinned by core values of *'ofa, fatongia, talangofua*, and *mamahi'i me'a. Luva,* however, is quite different to the Maori practice of "*koha*" (gift-giving) and Samoan *meaalofa* (gift) in the sense that these two are given beforehand, whereas luva, is done at the end as symbolic acceptance and a commitment to reciprocity and accountability.

However, it could also refer to the undying passion of the researcher when conducting the research, an ongoing commitment to the cause. It embodies putting thoughts which contain the wisdom and knowledge of those who contributed onto paper and, and the presentation of this to the stakeholders. This is the stage where the research is given, presented, or returned for the benefit of the community, but it is also done to acknowledge the partnership and process of dialogue that was used. In this research context, luva is not just the stage where the researcher is expected to acknowledge and deliver the finished product, but it embodies an act of constant commitment right from the *teu* stage. It's not just about the researcher, but also refers to all stakeholders, even

the participants and supervisors, families, and friends who have indirectly or directly contributed to the task.

Realistically, *luva* can be an overarching concept from teu to the *napangapangamālie* stage, where it reflects the momentum and the commitment needed to complete the task.

4.7.6   *Māfana* – Empowerment and Transformation

Māfana is a Tongan concept that encompasses meaningful cultural connections and empowerment. *Māfana* is an aesthetic sense of euphoria that comes when one feels included and involved. Usually, in a Tongan celebration, you see the expression of māfana, when people just jump up out of nowhere to take part in the celebration, even to make a speech as a token of their being *māfana*. Like many Tongan concepts, *Māfana* does not translate easily into English, so is difficult to quantify or to define. Similar to *luva*, *māfana* is an overarching concept which must be cultivated and set from the beginning to the end of the research. It is essential that the researcher carefully maintains māfana to make the research relevant and worthwhile.

The concept of *māfana* in this research context represents the reciprocal relationships and empowerment between and amongst the researcher and the stakeholders. Māfana is closely related to t*auelangi* (climatic euphoria) and *fatongia/luva*. When the researcher and the stakeholders are reciprocally connected and empowered from the beginning and during the *luva* process, māfana permeates within, causes a climatic point referred

to as *tauelangi*. Both the researcher and the stakeholders are culturally transformed and transfigured through tauelangi; feeling included, empowered, and strengthened. It is the role of the researcher to make sure the stakeholders are included in the research process, and to relevantly acknowledge their wisdom and knowledge. When protocols and procedures are appropriately followed, a sense of *māfana* is achieved, causing the research to be worthwhile, meaningful, and relevant. *Tauelangi* is achieved when the research is worthwhile and meaningful.

4.7.7 *Napangapangamālie*

Adding an extension to the *Kakala* research framework provides a better application and continuation of the framework. *Napangapangamālie* (Balanced will) offers an appraisal entity to the process, which makes it significant and valid. Dr Sitiveni Halapua (2009), in a report that recommends political reforms in Tonga, refers to *napangapangamālie* as "balanced will, not majority, or minority will", but one that finds the corresponding and dissecting needs within the stakeholders. The word itself speaks of sustainability, relevancy, holisticity, balance, equality and equity, and coherence, and for any research to use this, merit the standards of reliability, validity, and legitimacy. *Mālie* itself does not fully merit or encompass the desires and aspirations of indigenous research. Though *mālie* speaks to relevance and worth, adding *napangapanga* to the context enhances the end result of *Kakala* research framework. By combining the two words *napangapanga* and *mālie*, *napangapangamālie* encompasses totality, worthwhileness, relevance, and balance, and accepts that both indigenous and Western epistemologies,

and all stakeholders of every ranking and status, are duly recognised and acknowledged. In a formal Tongan gathering, orators must set the tone right from the beginning by acknowledging "who's who" in the gathering. That tone setting is like putting people into their rightful places, demanding respect and humility. Orators also ask for a gender balance and equity, where both gender are respected and acknowledged.

The beauty of this concept acknowledges that there is diversity yet there can be unity, and that different ideologies, people, and communities have different aspirations and perceptions. *Napangapangamālie* actually fuses in the sense that, though all ideas and practices may have their differences, at the end there is a compromising platform of taking what is best and most relevant for Pasifika-Tongan people. *Napangapangamālie* endorses another relevant Tongan research concept of consultation and dialogue called *"fōfola ē fala kae alea e kāinga"* (Roll out the mats so the family can dialogue) which embodies the whole process of consultation and dialoguing in research. People will raise their own ideas, there will be chaotic discursions and sharings, but at the end a consensus view is achieved which weaves and fabricates unity in a Tongan way; when that happens, it is often referred to a *napangapangamālie.*

In this research context, the concept of *Napangapangamālie* provides what is lacking in many Indigenous research frameworks – a concept that envelops the beginning to the end, past to future, time and space. Moreover, it has a monitoring component that asks if what has been done is equally beneficial to all the stakeholders.

Fig 4. (KRF)REVISED KAKALA RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Adapted from Konai Helu-Thaman's model of kakala research framework (1988)

KAKALA 'ALAHA

(i)TEU

Planning

(vi) NAPANGAPANGAMĀLIE

Balance, sustainability

(ii) TOLI

Empowerment,

Engagement

(v) MĀFANA

Relevance

(iii) TUI

Analysis

(iv) LUVA

Presentation
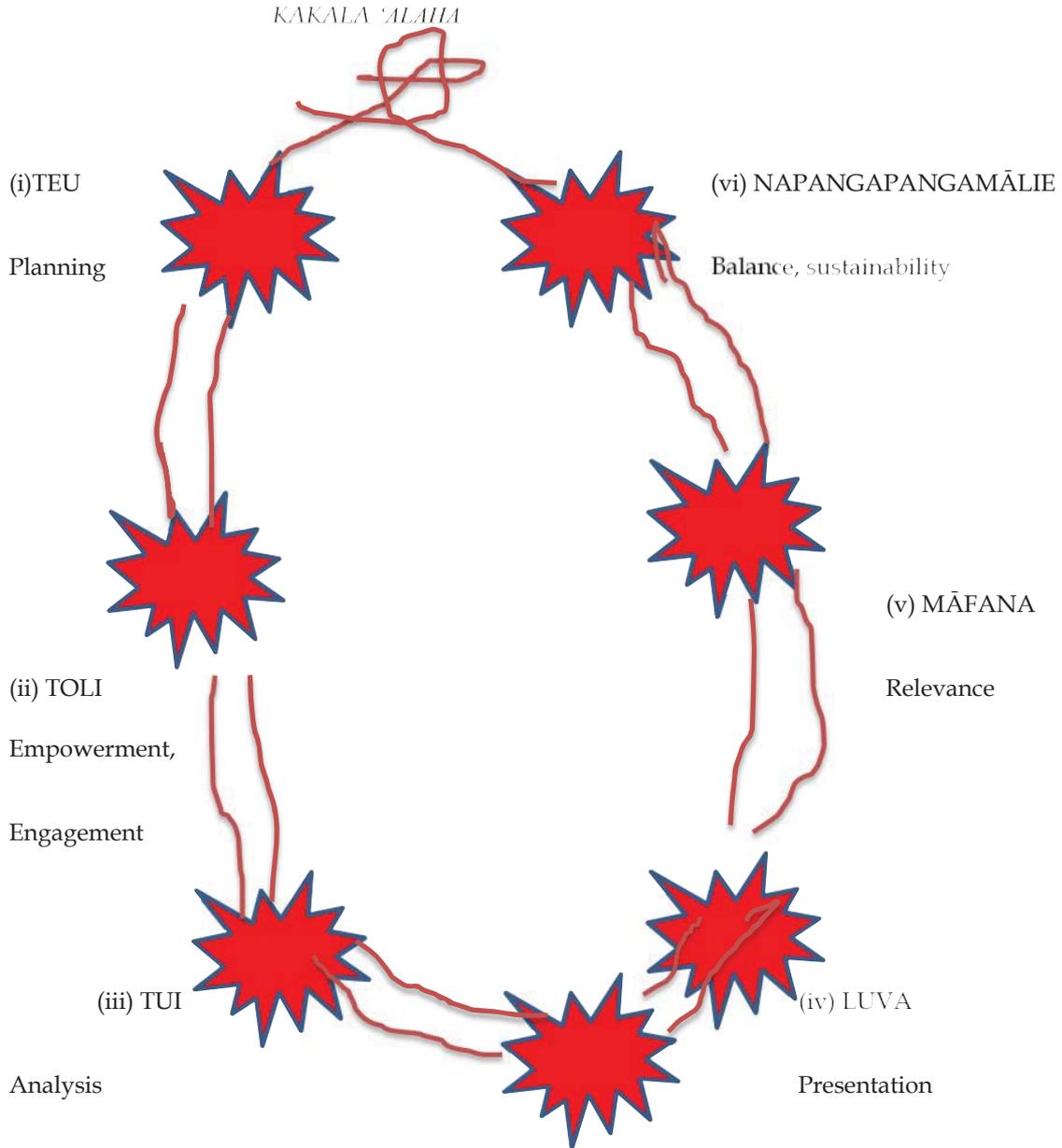
4.8 Methods of Data Collection

The methods and frameworks used for data collection processes reflect that of an indigenous research framework. These were carefully selected and developed to allow the capture of my participants' voices and experiences of higher education in A/NZ.

4.8.1 *Talanoa*

Talanoa is a framework or methodology that emerges from within Tonga's own cultural and social epistemology. As a method of research based on the indigenous research paradigm, rooted in the oratory tradition, *talanoa* is a Tongan approach to data collection which is widely used by Pasifika researchers today(Vaioleti, 2003,2006; Vaka, 2014). In this study, *talanoa* is considered a very appropriate and meaningful way of collecting data in Pasifika contexts, such as in Tonga, where customs and indigenous or traditional knowledge are imparted through stories, songs, dance, and poems. Sitiveni Halapua's (2007) seminal presentations at the University of Hawaii of *talanoa* as a potential mode for conflict resolution following the Fiji coup of 2000, has led a growing number of Pasifika commentators to re-surface talanoa as a culturally appropriate research methodology.

Halapua (2007, p. 1) refers to *talanoa* as "engaging in dialogue with telling or telling stories to each other absent (of) concealment of the inner feelings and the experiences that resonate in our hearts and minds". Vaioleti (2006, p. 21) offers to break the word in two forms, tala as "inform, relate, or tell and noa as nothing in particular". So for

Vaioleti (2006, p. 21), talanoa literally is talking about nothing, or something without any particular agenda or "personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations". In addition, *talanoa* implies that the conversation had to begin from nothing to something. Halapua (2003, p. 18) further explains that *talanoa* is also a philosophy that involves "an open dialogue where people can speak from their hearts and where there are no preconceptions". Furthermore, *talanoa* is considered to be an appropriate approach when researching Pasifika educational and social issues because it helps "to bridge the gap between researchers and participants, so that they feel free to communicate with each other openly" (Otsuka, 2006, p .2).

Talanoa does not necessarily conform to the Western methods of formal interview, participant observation and so forth, nor is it identical with chatting or formal discussions outside of Tongan cultural contexts. Realistically, it's not all about what you say or how you say it, but it's about building trust and relationship from nothing. Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 94) reminds us of that even silence is far from empty: "it is a way of knowing, there is eloquence in silence pedagogy of deep engagement between participants". This stresses a very important argument that *talanoa* research framework must be undertaken with a deep understanding between the researcher and the participants. It requires deep inter-personal relationships and emotional sharing between all parties involved. Vaioleti (2006) further maintains that an indigenous synthesis of the knowledge, anecdotes, passions, and epistemologies made available by *talanoa* generate relevant knowledge and possibilities for addressing Tongan issues.

Latu (2009) believes that *talanoa* allows more *mo'oni* (pure, real, and authentic) information to be available for Tongan research than data derived from other research methods. Pasifika-Tongan cultural knowledge, values, and wisdom were imparted through talanoa. Therefore, as Halapua (2007) explains, via *talanoa* the spoken word rather than written has been the preferred norm of learning and communication.Talanoa significantly provides space and time where human ideas and experiences are communicated. It enables the participants to gather and develop a sense of belonging together in *"noa"*, nothing, without a pre-determined agenda. Otsuka (2006) implies that, if research is conducted in an inappropriate and insensitive manner (for example, protocols are ignored), the research findings would not be valid.

This research also undertook to differentiate *talanoa,* and add *tālave* and *tālanga* as two interrelating components, which have richness in depth and meaning for research. Both *tālanga* and *tālave* challenge the academic discrediting of *talanoa* as metaphorically unimportant and superficial, lacking the depth needed to gather relevant and meaningful data. The addition of *tālanga* and *tālave* illustrate the strength of the *talanoa* framework as a coherent and appropriate paradigm for Tongan research.

4.8.2   *Tālave and tālanga*

It is interesting to note that though *talanoa* is increasingly accepted as a Pasifika research methodology, there has not been any attempt to deconstruct the word and add more derivations and meaning to it. This research has attempted to make this distinction and add *tālave* and *tālanga* to the richness of *talanoa*. Because *talanoa* envelops quite a wide

range of meaning and distinctions, using *tālave* and *tālanga* adds boldness and strength to *talanoa* methodology.

Tālave which literally means to make connection is likened to unstructured interviewing or informal *talanoa*, and was used through the period of data collection and continued to the writing up stage of this research project. *Tālave* has one possible variant, ta-lave. *Tā* refers to a number of activities – to beat, to play, to set an example, to carve out something, even an invitation for a set task. However, it can be used as a noun which comes before a verb, to explain an action taken in a pluralistic form, like *ta-kai*, let's eat; *ta-'alu*, let's go; or *tā–lave*, let's talk. Additionally, Ka'ili (2008, p. 2) explains that *tā* has multiple definitions inclusive of time such as "beats, rhythms, tempos, performances, as well as actions" indicating *fai*, or "to do".

Ka'ili (2008) affirms the notion of *fai* by describing it as a verb to signal "perform [ance] or engage [ment]". Ka'ili's (2008) explanations of *tā,* make the meaning of *lave* – to hint, to bond and to connect – quite meaningful especially when time is taken in context. In Tonga, *tālave* can be taken to mean chatting informally, where the metaphorical language of *heliaki* is used. *Tālave* is important, because it allows an informal sense of communication gauged by mutual understanding, where the participant is given space (*tā-vā*) and time to freely hint, bond, and connect beyond the restriction of *tapu* (sacred). Whether it is monological or dialogical, *tālave* helps the researcher to be at ease, and to move beyond certain limitations of cultural *tapu* and religion, in order to grasp and absorb relevant and meaningful data.

The study used *tālave*, unstructured interviewing, where "the style of questioning is usually very informal and the phrasing and sequencing of questions vary from interview to interview" (Bryman, 2004, p. 314). The rationale was to get people to open up and express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace. The content of the interviews is shaped by what the respondents' views. Unstructured interviewing parallels *tālave,* the researcher and the participants are talking about issues relating to the research in a much more informal way, although the researcher can guide the conversation to lure out the information needed for the research.

Tālanga is used in this research context to refer to any form of *talanoa* such as focus group discussions, where the purpose is to enlighten, deliberate, and constructively elaborate on a particular issue. *Tālanga* also has one possible derivative, *tā-langa*. *Tā* has the same contextual meaning as in *tā-lave*, which again signifies varieties of activities within a space of time. *Langa* means to form, to generate, and to constructively engage. Interestingly, *tālanga* is different from *tālave* in the sense of its formality and some of its protocols. People, when speaking in a *tālanga* forum, often acknowledge the presence of, those of ranking and status. Language is chosen appropriately out of respect, but that does not prevent the speaker from trying to make a point or ague defensively over a subject matter. This form of *talanoa* enhances research processes, especially when participants are equally given space and time to story and voice their perceptions though they are mindful of those who are present.

4.9   Data Analysis

Cohen, et al. (2000, p. 282) define data analysis as "a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the de-contextualised data". Burns (2000) and Creswell (2008) state that in order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, a researcher must be able to engage in the analysis of the data collected during the research process. Therefore, a "researcher must be clear what he/she wants the data to do as this will determine the kind of analysis that is undertaken" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 61). The conceptual structure, or "net that contains [my] epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33) is grounded theory with an emphasis towards post colonialism and the Tongan framework of *kakala* and *tā-vā* (time–space) theory of reality. Tongan Tā-*vā* (time-space) theory, (Ka'ili, 2008; Māhina, 2008), and Thaman's (1988) *Kakala* framework are used to make sense of how Tongan students are operating and interfacing in a Western time and space continuum.

During the *tui* phase of the *kakala* process, *talanoa, tālave, and tālanga* conversations with my research participants were recorded electronically, translated and transcribed manually into English, and carefully analysed with critical lenses. Electronic program or software were not available to code the conversations, since the language used was both English and Tongan.

Talanoa sessions were first completed, coded to create thematic evidence, which was used as deliberating and deviating points for *tālanga* and *tālave.* A conservative method

of coding was adopted and used as an inductive generative process of developing theory from data, to disclose developing patterns and categories. Strauss & Corbin (1990, p. 57) explain that "Coding represents the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways". My role as a researcher during the *tui kakala* process allowed me to have critical lenses when identifying themes pertaining to the experiences and voices of my participants. Coding processes and stages were used to significantly draw meaningful core correlations, relationships, and representations from the data.

Open coding, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), is the first step of a theoretical analysis towards the discovery of categories and their properties. It is done to highlight data that the researcher believes may have an importance beyond the simple description of the context of the data.   Using open coding as Strauss and Corbin explain, (1990, p. 97) "fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories, their properties, and dimensional locations". Variables involved in the phenomenon are identified, labelled, categorised, and related together in an outline form. The beginning stage of the open coding stage, especially with the *talanoa* sessions, allows the researcher to gain broad thematic representations of the voices and experiences of the participants. These also enable the researcher to have a sense of direction and knowledge of where to utilise *tālanga* and *tālave* to deepen these thematic representations. Most importantly, at the opening stage, the coding process allows a general scan through to identify main

thematic ideas and principles that document connection and meaning which correspond to research questions and objectives.

Throughout the *tui kakala* process, once possible thematic representations were identified, strengthened, and woven, I searched for consistencies amongst thematic representations, comparable and contrasting meanings, and categories generated from the data. Doing that allows me to make general remarks pertaining to comparable and contrasting voices of my participants' experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, once open coding of talanoa was completed, axial coding was undertaken to allow for analytical and theoretical analysis of possible structural and holistic connections between existing thematic voices. This was done to make sure that the *kakala* (garland) fully represented the voices and experiences of my participants.

Axial coding is the next stage after open coding. In axial coding, data are put together in new ways. This is achieved by utilising a "coding paradigm", that is, a system of coding that seeks to identify causal relationships between categories. The aim of the coding paradigm is to make explicit connections between categories and sub-categories. This process is often referred to as the "paradigm model" and involves explaining and understanding relationships between categories in order to understand the phenomenon to which they relate. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 97) further elaborate that using axial coding means "put [ting] those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its sub-categories".

Selective coding is done after having found the core variable or what is thought to be the core, the tentative core. The core explains the voices and experiences of the participants in resolving their main concern. Selective coding also involves the process of selecting and identifying the core category and systematically relating it to other categories. It involves validating those relationships, filling in, and refining and developing those categories. Additionally, Charmaz (2006) explains that selective coding involves clarifying, making connections and causal relationships, through validation and refinement. The core category is the central phenomenon around which all other categories are based. Validation is done by generating hypothetical relationships between categories and using voices from the field to test these hypotheses.

The last stage in the coding process is the theoretical coding which involves how core variables and known relationships and representations fit into the research objectives and questions, either with an existing theoretical framework by the researcher developing a framework that explains the whole related scenario. This is done to make a holistic representation of the whole data, and how they have been integrated and synthesised to represent the voices of the participants.

4.10   Participants

The participants in this study are Tongan male learners (either Tongan- or New Zealand-born). Several studies have been conducted on how to select participants (Johnson and Christensen, 2008), but few have really provided guidelines for selecting

actual sample sizes. Bernard (2000, p. 178) observed that most ethnographic studies are based on thirty to sixty interviews, while argued that fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample size in qualitative research. Morse (1994, p. 225) outlined more detailed guidelines, recommending at least six participants for phenomenological studies; approximately thirty to fifty participants for ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and ethno science studies; and one hundred to two hundred units of the item being studied in qualitative ethnography. Creswell's (1994, 2008) ranges are a little different. He recommended between five and twenty-five interviews for a phenomenological study and twenty to thirty for a grounded theory study.

However, this study uses 23 Tongan males for *talanoa*, and three focus groups of about 5 Tongan male learners each were also selected for *tālanga*, and 5 for *tālave*, that is a total of 43 participants. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, who are aged 19-55 years. Participants were invited and recruited from South and West Auckland where there is a large proportion of Tongan settlement. A series of visits were undertaken to nominated learning institutions – Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT), UNITEC, BEST Education, Massey University-Albany, Auckland University of Technology, and Auckland University – which have Tongan Student Associations, through which I was able to establish contact and select participants. Basically, selection criteria included:

i.   Tongan male students who are currently taking courses in any learning institutions from polytechnic, private training institution to university

ii.   Tongan male students who have recently completed or dropped-out from either university or polytechnic

4.11   Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are vital in any educational research, and include consideration of potential harm to participants, informed consent (Cohen et al., 2000), and right of withdrawal from the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; 2003; 2008). Of primary importance is to ensure that there is no harm done to the participants in the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Therefore, a good qualitative study is one that is conducted in an ethical manner. Confidentiality is very important so that participants will not feel threatened and, therefore, willingly share with the researcher (Patton, 2002). Informed consent is also very important to make sure that both the researcher and the participants have a mutual understanding of their relationship so that commitment from both parties is genuine.

The maintenance of confidentiality is especially critical and I explained its importance to the students before they signed consent forms and agreed to engage in talanoa, tālave and tālanga. As a mechanism to protect participants, consent forms were used to ensure anonymity and prevent participants from being targets of criticism. With an explanation of ethical expectations and written consent forms, each participant received copies of the consent forms that they signed.

Recognising that I needed to adhere to a high standard of ethics, I recalled a research study involving Tongan participants in Fua's (2006, p. 3) work entitled "Emerging Themes and Methodologies from Educational Research in Tonga". She listed a number of ethics which Tongan participants were adamant that researchers maintain, such as: The privacy of the people must be protected; Research must be culturally appropriate regarding relationships and culture; Respect must be shown when conducting interviews and in the research tools used; the process should promote loyalty and be consensual and non-confrontational. These features are only a few of the many that Fua mentions. These guidelines are among the primary principles undergirding the practices required to build relationships predicated on Pacific values like *tauhi vā* (protecting and nurturing relationships), *mateaki'i me'a* (loyalty), and *faka'apa'apa* (respect). These are clearly stated ethics and guidelines that I consciously worked to observe throughout the research process. Protecting participants' identities and responses was a top priority for me. With regard to the *talanoa* that took place individually and collectively, all text-based data (hard-copies of transcripts of interviews, and my written field notes) were stored in a locked file cabinet at my personal place of residence. Moreover, the confidentiality of computerised data was maintained in a password protected computer at my home.

4.12 Summary

This chapter deliberates on the need to have clear methodology and method in research especially with issues that are affecting Pasifika people in A/NZ. However having

established *founga fekumi*, helps to decide the sequence, guidelines and ethical standard of this research. It was imperative also that this research selects and developed Tongan conceptual framework and paradigm as benchmark. The using of *Kakala* as a research framework significantly merits the relevancy and meaningful of using indigenous and Pasifika research framework as guidelines.

The addition of *napangapangamālie* to the course of *kakala* stages further strengthens the need to have reliable, balanced, circularity, totality and relevancy to the research process. *Napangapangamālie* actually fuses the sense that, though all ideas and practices may have their differences, at the end there is a compromising platform of taking what is best and most relevant for Pasifika-Tongan people in A/NZ.

The chapter concludes with the extension of *talanoa* to use *tālanga* and *tālave* which merit the use of indigenous framework for data collection. Indigenous methodology provides insights protocols of how research is conducted appropriately and fittingly for Pasifika issues. Using *tālave* and *tālanga* help to provide richness in the data collection especially when voices of the participants were identified and used.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUMBLING BLOCKS – MAKATŪKIA

5.1   Introduction

Findings in this chapter specifically elucidate on *'makatūkia'* (stumbling blocks), as experienced and described by my study participants through *'talanoa'*, *'tālanga'*, and *'tālave'*. Tongan male experiences in higher education in Aotearoa are products of many inter–relating and overarching elements of cultural, economic and political institutions, intensified by the tides of globalisation. Findings from previous research conducted by Tongan academics such as Faleolo (2012), Havea (2011), Hingano (1984), Ka'ili (2008), Koloto (2003), Koloto, Kātoanga and Tatila (2006), Kalāvite (2010), Manu'atu (2000), 'Otunuku (2011), Saltiban (2012), Tu'itahi (2009), and Vaioleti (2011), support the premises of this research.

Tongan families have made a sacrifice in migrating from the tiny isles of the sea, searching for better education and a pleasant life. In making the transition, their ancestors were formally exposed to, and taught through, the Western modes of learning, and influenced by the tides of social, political, and economic changes. Some tried to strengthen and redefine their identity through *lotu* (religion) and *ako* (formal education) as a means of adapting and adjusting to their new world, though it came with negative effects. Others tried to make necessary adjustments to survive life in this new world, but found themselves immersed in the ways of the Pakeha. Battled with

confusion, confounded by many voices and choices through *tā* (time) and *vā* (space), many have drifted and deviated, with no sense of purpose and direction (Ka'ili, 2008; Māhina, 2004, 2006b, 2007).

Inherently, Tongan male learning journeys and experiences are unique because they mirror resiliency, struggle, and persistence amidst challenges and obstacles. Exploring and understanding the *makatūkia* (stumbling blocks)and *makatu'u* (stepping stones) pertaining to the voices and experiences of Tongan male learners in higher education, provides necessary insights and knowledge to help Tongan students succeed in their academic endeavours and pursuits.

This chapter specifically outlines key research findings, reiterated by the voices of Tongan male learners' explaining, in particular, their stumbling blocks. Findings were analysed and categorised under seven headings: family; self-perception/belief; peers and friends; time and space; institutional support; *lotu*; and finance. However, fig 4 depicts these factors, and overarching dynamics, that have contributed to upsetting the journey of Tongan males in higher education. Each variable is not independent of the others, but has an overarching influence and impact. Voices and experiences of Tongan male learners were captured using the indigenous research framework of *talanoa*, *tālave* and *tālanga*, to reveal and unfold the richness of Tongan male learning experiences and voices.

Figure 4: Makatūkia – Stumbling blocks at HE
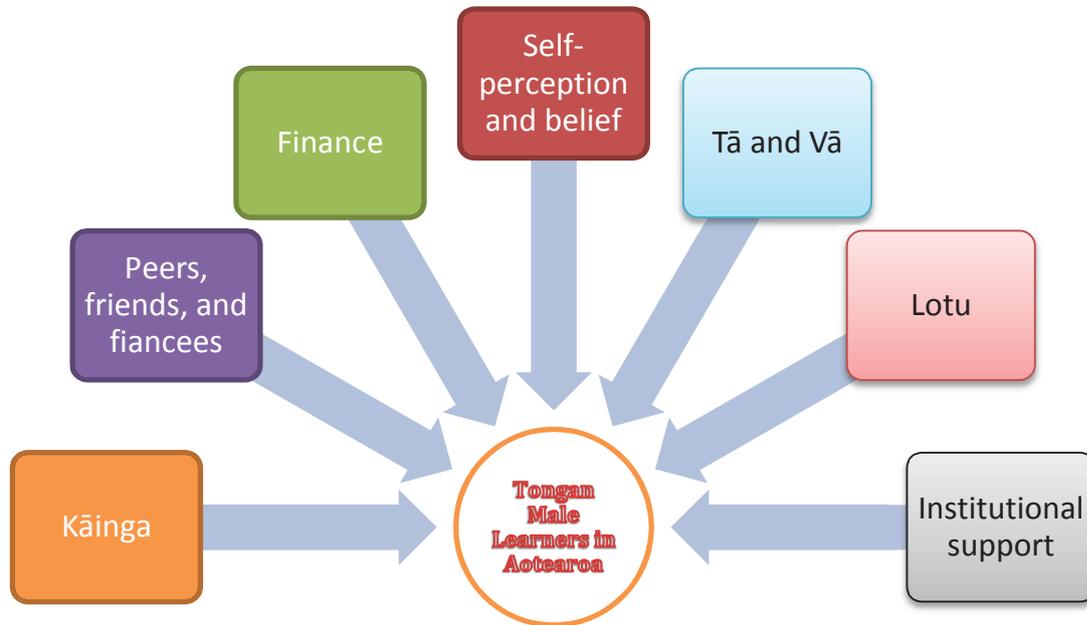
5.2 *Kāinga*

This research assumed from the beginning that family played a decisive role in shaping and affecting Tongan male learners in higher education. Findings from this research reveal very strong indictments against *kāinga,* extended family as a *makatūkia* for Tongan males' participation, retention, and completion of higher education; in particular, these relate to lack of resources and space, responsibilities, relationships, and motivations. Most Tongan *kāinga* who relocated during the first and second waves of migration were not well educated, and worked as low-paid, unskilled laborers (Fusitu'a & Coxon, 1998; Fa'anunu, 2007; Tu'itahi, 2009). Inexperience in this new country, as well as poor communication skills, made it probable that there would be looming

challenges trying to build a successful family life. Study participants' (N38) spoke strongly of the adversities and challenges imposed by *kāinga* on male learners.

5.2.1 Lack of resources and space

Participants (N33) stated that Tongans centered their life on *kāinga*, extended families. The strong affinity to kinship allowed Tongans to live with big extended families. Realistically this is true, as within a normal, Tongan household you could find relatives who have come from Tonga for further education, families that are visiting or been granted visas through the Pasifika Quota Access, or others who have been here but are now overstaying. In addition are the daily visitors of friends, relatives, and church and community people. This was, essentially, a survival strategy, where resources and space were shared ('Alatini, 2004; Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2011; Tu'itahi, 2009); however it poses severe limitations on resources and space pertaining to successful participation and completion of higher education. Higher education needs quality time and adequate space for completion of assignments, deep reflection, and critical readings. Feedback and responses from this research identified strong perceptions and indictments pertaining to the obstacles of large families with limited space. Two of my participants related their experiences:

Hoputu: Both my parents migrated here in the 1980s. Both were not well educated and found life here in Aotearoa unbearable at times. There were many of us, included uncles, aunts, and cousins who were illegally sharing spaces with us and everything was not always enough, food on the table, school tuition, and even a space to study at home. The

home environment was not helping either; we have to get used to it, having to go without some basic stuff for some time. My desire to pursue higher education was severely compromised. (Tālave)

Matu: I find it very frustrating when I have people around at home, yelling and making all sort of noises, and are very inconsiderate of what you do. However, our kind of home having people and relatives around, sharing things, and families staying over for weeks from the islands, were not conducive to my learning. (Tālave)

Study participants (N33) mentioned that lack of resources and space at home had generated a lot of obstacles, such as poor attitude and behaviour, absence of motivation and incentive, lower self-esteem, and poor health. One of the key barriers that participants described was their home environment not being conducive to study; lack of space was often one of the primary causes. Most students found that the best time to study was late at night, when living spaces were free for them to do their work. Tongans have a strong sense of kinship, which is seen in how people relate to each other, including how they look after relatives when they visit. Consequently, the timing and endless arrival of these visits inherently affects male learners. The frequency of having quite large groups travelling from the islands for work, sports, or community or school fundraising was quite high.

Participants noted that this was a major distraction, as revealed in the voices of these two respondents:

Siale Tonga: I still remember that when I grew up I had to share the room with 4-6 of my brothers and cousins. It was very overcrowded, having no sense of privacy, or solitude. I learnt to know that there is no such thing as privacy, and trying to put an effort to complete assignments or study for an exam, is always a challenge. I had to do it somewhere else (Talanoa).

Hone: I remember having to stay with my family in the garage, because my parents were overstayers. In the cold and winter months, we had to squeeze tight to make us warm. We moved from place to place trying to avoid being caught and sent home. We also had to change school from time to time, and that affected us. None of us made it to uni or polytechnic; it was just too much living the life I lived (Talanoa).

5.2.2 Conflicting responsibilities

Tongan males are taught to step up and accept family responsibilities, for example providing for their families, especially their younger brothers or sisters, or lending a helping hand to their parents or extended families. Many of this study's participants grew up in large families and were acquainted with these responsibilities; however, some felt it was a conflicting burden, and had had to choose between pursuing their educational dream and fulfilling their family responsibilities. Others tried to do both, although in the end their educational endeavours were commonly compromised. One participant related this:

Sokisoki: I remember seeing my parents struggling to put food on the table, and being the oldest sibling I learnt fast to accept responsibilities. I did well at school, even playing

rugby, but I decided to give my parents a helping hand by working after high school. Being the oldest I believe it is my personality to help provide a secured future for my younger brothers and sisters and help them to achieve that. (Tālave)

Participants (N35) also understood the magnitude of having diverse responsibilities, especially with big families, or trying to get started with a young family. Another participant talked about the burden of family responsibilities, such as funerals, birthdays, marriages, and community fundraising:

Tokemoana: I am always overwhelmed by how we Tongans keep up with the cost of funerals, marriage, birthdays, and attending community fundraisings. Not to mention when our relatives are visiting us and are returning home, we also make monetary donations, from our limited earnings (Tālave).

Tokemoana's concerns represent those of a significant amount of this study's participants, especially those of New Zealand-born Tongans, who see no value in remaining attached to these cultural and social protocols (Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2011; Vaioleti, 2011) and view spending money on them as unnecessary and needless. Most participants openly shared about the burden of looking after their family, and its ripple effects on their educational endeavours. Pako's story, below, explains one of the disadvantages of having large families, because of its overburdening responsibilities.

Vignette 5.2.2.1   A Tongan male's response to family responsibilities

Pako: Every year we have people coming over to visit us, we also have people from our community back in Tonga, who come through church and community fundraising, farming contracts, or as a team playing community rugby or league competition here. We also have church people who have their weekly weekend meeting 'faikava' here at my place, with my mom and dad's relatives and friends who are here almost every day just to chat and talanoa.

Researcher: did that happen quite often?

Pako: I think you should know that…we have quite a bit of space here, a very big garage which has been renovated for that purpose, and also a backyard where we used to roast pigs and make 'umu' (earth oven) there almost every Sunday. 'Faikava', is a weekly meeting, every weekend, and church meetings here every month, and also our community meetings. Not to mention relatives using our space for cooking and roasting pigs for church and family occasions.

Researcher: How does this affect your studies?

Pako: Indeed it is affecting me. I live here, but don't really study here. I always make sure that I do all my stuff at school, and if I wanted to study here, I have to make an early nap, before waking up late in the night and do some study. Weekends are the worse and busiest time here from Friday night to Sunday night, because 'faikava' and singing goes all the way through the night. Sometimes I joined them just to ease up the distraction,

but then I got carried away with drinking too much kava, and not doing my school stuff.

(Talanoa)

Pako's story clearly illustrates the realities of migration processes for Tongans moving to New Zealand, and the overarching influence to fulfill family responsibilities. Those who initially moved here were often looked up to as providers for those that would later follow. Having more people continuing to come from the islands, squeezing into a limited space with little available resources, did not always provide a positive learning environment (Fa'anunu, 2007; Tu'itahi, 2009). Participants from this research detailed the repercussions of fulfilling family responsibilities in relation to the educational experiences of Tongan males.

5.2.3 Inappropriate influences

Participants (N32) related stories of growing up in state houses and poor neighbourhoods where they saw overcrowding, weekend parties, street fighting, drugs, and police cars on constant patrol. They believed that trying to shape and build a decent and successful life was frustrating, and trying to find a good role model was even harder. Many found it even more challenging to live up to the dreams and the expectations of their parents. Role models were hard to find; it was not always a conducive setting for nurturing role models, as most Tongan families were unskilled and working in minimum-pay jobs, and living in state housing, where daily life was a struggle, and crimes and violence were numerous('Alatini, 2004). One of my research participants related this:

Vignette 5.2.3.1   A Tongan male's response to inappropriate influences

> *Langakali: I grew up knowing that my parents were not well educated, and I desired to pursue higher education. Most unfortunately my parents got separated, and my older siblings deviated to drinking and becoming a problem with the law, some of them end up in jails, and it was quite sad especially for my single mother who was working hard to provide for us.*

> *Researcher: Did this affect you?*

> *Langakali: I blamed a lot of things, and end up blaming me. I wanted to look up to someone, but there was none that I could relate to. There was not much family 'talanoa' at home, my mom was quite busy working long hours, and some of us were left to find our own way through. It was hard, because there was no sense of direction, or purpose being given to us. I think, it was all up to us individually, whether you want something bigger, or not. (Talanoa)*

It is most unfortunate that in making the transition from Tonga to Aotearoa, Tongans were also affected socially and psychologically. Most study participants believed that Tongan males were struggling to find positive influences and good role models, which severely limited their chance to pursue higher education. When good role models were not found at home, some looked elsewhere to find positive influences and direction, but were often distracted, and deviated to wrong pathways, such as drugs and crimes (Tanielu & Johnson, 2013; 2014).

5.2.4   Absence of family support

Support and understanding are quite an important family legacy; it is something that needs constant nourishment, especially in relation to the academic journey of male learners ('Alatini, 2004; Faleolo, 2012; Kalāvite, 2010, Tu'itahi, 2009). Participants (N32) in this research also believed that parents were too confused to provide full support and encouragement to continue studying, due to lack of understanding and communication. One of my participants related the following story.

Vignette 5.2.4.1   A Tongan male's response on family support and understanding

Kukuvalu: I remember that during my NCEA years at school, both of my parents were not attending any of my school interviews nor progress report day. Both were frightened to meet my teachers, because their English were not good enough. I try to persuade them, but in the end it was just me. However, when I played rugby for the school, first IV, they never missed a game day, nor picking me up from school after training. I was thinking that maybe rugby was more important to them than my school work. On my first Pasifika orientation at polytechnic, I was invited to attend with my parents; unfortunately they never made the commitment to come with me, saying that I am old enough now to make good choices.

Researcher: Were you affected by this lack of support and understanding?

Kukuvalu: Of course I was affected by this. I felt that they did not appreciate me doing well in my educational endeavour. During my polytechnic years I never had any

acknowledgement, even a parent's convo, like how school is like, and so forth. I felt

isolated and secluded. I needed them (parents) to appreciate my academic endeavour; it

really makes a lot of difference. I really had to dig deep to complete my studies. (Talanoa)

Kukuvalu's response is representative of the majority of my participants (N30) who spoke strongly of how parents' lack of understanding and commitment affected their academic performance. Kukuvalu felt that parents do play a pivotal role in the education of their children. Parents often felt their most important role was to make sure that there was always food on the table and a roof over their family's heads, but it does not end there. Many of my participants, including Kukuvalu, also vocalised the mismatch between parental support and understanding, and their commitment to take proactive ownership of the welfare of their children, especially when their siblings were making the transition to higher education (Hingano, 1984; 'Otunuku, 2011; Salitiban, 2012). As mentioned previously, the majority of the first and second waves of Tongan migrants to Aotearoa were those with little education and relatively low competency in English. As a result, parents elected not to take full ownership and participation in their children's education, which did affect the future of their children's abilities to pursue and persist in the challenges and obstacles of higher education (Fa'anunu, 2007).

5.2.5 Overburden of socio-cultural rituals

Tongan culture possesses rich and rigid rituals and socio-cultural ceremonies, such as funerals, baptisms, marriages, birthdays; special occasions such as graduation, bestowal of chiefly titles; church events such as dedication of a new chapel, and welcoming of a

new *faifekau*, pastor and reverend, and *misinale*, church donations. Participants (N33) believed that Tongans in Aotearoa are very much attached and devoted to these socio-cultural rituals, either at family, church, or community level (Havea, 2012; Kalāvite, 2010). Most participants reiterated that these rituals were important, but were affecting them because of the time and resources that are dedicated to and invested in them.

Vignette 5.2.5.1   A Tongan male's response on cultural rituals

> *Painimutu: I come from a very big family. My dad was the 'matapule tauhifonua' (talking chief) there, and he had responsibilities to his chief, and the village. Here in New Zealand, the paramount chief had visited and installed me as the 'matapule', after my dad had passed away. Now I have the responsibility of looking after my community here in Aotearoa, and Tonga. It is quite challenging, trying to balance time and resources, when I need to provide for my family and my role as a 'matapule' to my community here in Aotearoa and Tonga.*

> *Researcher: How does that affect your education?*

> *Painimutu: I do not have the time, or the resources to complete my studies. Now I have to put my studies on hold, and try to do my other responsibilities, at home and also to the community. In my house we have a 'faikava', a community fundraising every weekend, to raise enough money to sponsor scholarships back home. I don't think I will be able to complete my studies and it's just too much now on my plate. (Talanoa)*

Painimutu's story represents that of many who despise and are caught in the socio-cultural web, where rituals and ceremonies are observed and have implications. These socio-cultural rituals, when performed and observed, are costly and time consuming and this has real implications for Tongan households and educational welfare here in Aotearoa.

5.2.6 Inaccessibility, flatting, and boarding

Most Tongan families live a long way from major tertiary learning institutions, at places where state houses are available and renting is a bit cheaper (Alatini, 2002; Tanielu & Johnson, 2013; 2014). Transportation costs also affect timely attendance and truancy of most learners. Participants (N28) mentioned that the impact of travelling long hours, and the cost of taking the trip daily, affected their attendance and enthusiasm. Most participants identified flatting, staying in hostels, and boarding as factors that are affecting Tongan males. They agreed that having to stay away from home, often gave Tongan males a new sense of superficial freedom, with undesirable influences. Participants(N30) believed that having this space and time allowed Tongan males to host or attend parties every weekend, miss classes very often, and allowed other friends to visit, which distracted them from their studies. Views of participants were expressed in one focus group as detailed below.

Vignette 5.2.6.1 A group of Tongan males' responses on transportation and flatting

Kuka: I was not flatting, but I had a friend who was boarding with others. Every weekend I was invited for a party at their place, and I often wondered what all the celebration was for? I only attended out of courtesy, though this was like a routine ritual. I got distracted and decided just kindly come up with excuses not to attend.

Paka: My friends tended to visit me a lot, knowing they could come for a nap, find some food, even just to watch videos. At times I felt that they were distracting me, but I was too sincere and kind to tell them off.

Lailo: It's a great learning curve, where you learn how to survive on your own. The only negative part about this is when you feel lonely and isolated and miss home especially when you're coming from the island. Staying so close to uni, and city night life, I was tempted to take time off, and enjoy night life.

Kamakama: I was on scholarship, which allowed me to stay in hostels. It was nice having to stay very close, but I found it too tempting to do things which affected my studies, like going to movies, nights out with friends, and so forth.

Tupa: I came from Tonga and was flatting with friends; most unfortunate I got distracted a lot with their lifestyles of drinking, smoking, and weekend parties. Though I choose for myself, it's hard trying to stay on the right course. (Tālanga, Focus Group C)

Participants also indicated that transport was an issue.

Fonu: I chose to stay home with my parents, because it was expensive if I had chosen to go flatting. I had to take two bus routes, and also had to wake at 5 o'clock in the morning to be able to get into the first bus. It took me an hour and half to reach university. It was quite a tiring experience; you tend to be very exhausted.

Hakula: I travelled by train to school. It was very convenient; the only side effect to it has to find money to pay for my daily travel which was very expensive. It cost a fortune to have me at school every day, so I choose to go only on days that I had lectures.

Sokisoki: We were staying very far from uni… and I had to come by car, a trip which took me more than an hour. It was very expensive also trying to sustain my travel cost. I relied on my parents for my petrol money, and sometimes I had to stay home because my car was empty, and I could not afford a bus trip also.

Te'efoo: I travelled by car which took me more than two hours, just one way trip. I had to wake up early to catch the early morning traffic. I had no choice; if I had to find a flat closer, it would cost me a lot. I had a family which I stayed with during the week, but sometimes I had to drive back, if the house was full of visitors. (Tālanga, Focus Group A)

The above *tālanga* represents the consensual views of my participants, who reflected on the negative impacts of inaccessibility and flatting for Tongan male learners in higher education. Most Tongan families stay in state houses, located away from the major metropolitan areas where most training providers are located('Alatini, 2002; Tanielu & Johnson, 2013; 2014). As expressed by many participants (N26), exposure to a new environment, being surrounded by new people, and exploring a new sense of freedom,

all contributed to Tongan learners becoming distracted and deviating from their educational goals.

5.3   Self-Perception and Belief

Participants (N35) believed that self-perception and belief were critically important when studying in higher education. It was evident from my data gathering sessions that all of my participants shared reflections of their journey that were emotional and personal, but underneath it showed how they were affected when they lacked self-perception and belief. It was evident that society has a preconception of an individual's ability, based on the learner's ethnic background. Participants mentioned issues, such as how skin color and being ethnically Pasifika and Tongan, vanished dreams, masculinity, and physicality contributed to affecting the self-perception and belief of the Tongan male learners here in A/NZ.

5.3.1 Skin colour

Participants (N28) of this study believed that being brown in color and ethnically Tongan created stereotypes and a demographic definition that had affected many Pasifika and Tongan males; it placed a mental limitation on the minds of many, restricting their dreams and potential. National statistics have portrayed Pasifika males as a welfare burden causing social and economic problems (Salitiban, 2012). Even in higher education, statistics confirm that they are the highest underperforming and

underachieving group of people, with Tongan males as a casualty of this. Two of my participants related their stories, as detailed below.

Kaute kula : Sitting in the lecture room, full of students on the first day of the semester, the lecturer rose up at the podium, with his thick voice and said "turn to the person next to you, one of you is not going to make it in this course". I was confused but reflected deeply, because I have heard this many times, during my high school years, when I was told that I will never make it this far. Some of my tutors were not helpful in their attitude toward Pasifika students. It's like we were born to fail, and we are not good to think with our head. (Talanoa)

Heilala: I remember on my first day at engineering school and I was sitting there very polite, when all were so active in their discussions, and wanted to show off their knowledge. All of a sudden the tutor posed a question which none were able to answer; the tutor looked at me, and directed the question. I politely answered the question, which was a surprise to all, thinking I was sitting there knowing nothing. Sometime people underestimated and misjudged us because of our colour and background. (Talanoa)

Puafisi: I remember attending a very prestigious school here at North Shore, and I was put into the average class. When I told others, especially my Asian and Palangi friends that I wanted to be an electrical engineer, they gave me a funny look. Some even said, 'but you're in the average class'. When I left for Polytechnic, I was shocked and irritated to know that I am often overlooked because of my skin color and my ethnicity. Being in class, where it was mostly Asians, and Pakeha, sometimes you sense being treated

differently either in your assignments and assessment or class tutorial discussions. (Talanoa)

Both of these stories illustrate the perspective of many Tongan males, who feel that the views entrenched in the New Zealand education system are deep and profound and there contribute to gaps in access, participation, and completion in higher education. Some research participants also articulated how they felt about their belief that they were treated and viewed differently. Many felt that their skin colour, ethnicity, and smallness of their world view do not equip them well enough to face the challenges inherent in achieving their educational aspirations. Furthermore, participants also felt that it is inappropriate when people, and the educational, system make presuppositions based on skin colour and ethnicity.

5.3.2 Vanished dreams

The impetus for Tongans initially to leave their homeland came from the knowledge that the scarcity of resources, and being isolated and physically vulnerable would always be a barrier for their dreams. It was prudent for them to take their dreams somewhere else, and Aotearoa was deemed the right place. It is now about three generations since the first wave of Tongans set foot in Aotearoa, nevertheless only a few have been able to make it to higher education and reassert those same intellectual aspirations to their children (Kalāvite, 2010; Tu'itahi, 2009). Many of my research participants (N28) believed that many Tongan males have failed and lost touch with that deep self-perception and belief that their grandparents had come with. Conversely,

some participants stated that parents had fixed ideas about the kind of qualifications their sons should pursue, especially at university; university was seen as the apex of all learning, and anything else was second best. Participants further added that some went to university just to make their parents happy, but their interests and desires lay elsewhere. One of my participants shared the general view of many Tongans who despise this vanished dream:

Vignette 5.3.2.1   A Tongan male's response on vanished dreams

> *Ahivao: I remember growing up with no sense of purpose in life. There were so many negativities all around. At school, I felt that teachers were just there to collect their pay, nothing significant happened there. At home I saw no future in it; all my older siblings had found unskilled factory work and were enjoying receiving their weekly pay check. My mental frame was bizarre and confused and my future was like the same old Pasifika way, take the short cut, undetermined, confused, unemployed, or working as an unskilled labourer.*

> *Researcher: Was it hard trying to make a change?*

> *Ahivao: It was hard, because you would have to be ready to receive all the ridicule and mockery;, what makes it worse is they come mainly from your friends and families. I was shattered and broken, I felt guilty for trying too hard. I know that I must have the courage if I wanted to move forward and make a change.*

> *Researcher: How about choosing a career like you do now. Was it hard?*

Ahivao: I remembered when I first told my parents that I will pursue a career in nursing, I was told off immediately with a lot of painful laughter. Even attending Tongan faikava, I was always referred to as the 'Neesi faifa'ele' (Midwife), ridiculed with laughter. It was hard trying to accept what other see me doing.

Researcher: How well are you doing comparing to others?

Ahivao: I am struggling; because I believe that sometimes being brown there is a social phenomenon and prescription, which puts a limitation to what we can achieve. Majority in my class are Pakeha's and Asians and very few of us are Pasifika, and to make things worse, being a male Tongan. I often see it on the faces of others, thinking that we are not capable of reaching our potential. I have seen other Pasifika students in this programme, who have failed and chosen to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances. It's a pity but it is happening. (Talanoa)

This vignette represents many of my participant's (N30) views about their educational journey, and how their dreams and passion were shaped and influenced by those around them. Trying to escape social ridicule is difficult, especially when deciding to pursue a different path to what is deemed socially acceptable. So much negativity is being attached to being Pasifika, or even a Tongan male, especially when choosing courses that seem to deprive them of their masculinity. This negativity often comes from within the Tongan community itself. Physicality is part of being a Tongan male; being soft-spoken and pursuing courses such as nursing, chef, early childhood, is regarded as appropriate only for females. Ahivao also explained how Tongan people

can be sarcastic and cynical, and sometimes make ironic statements, which have double meanings. Within the realm of a Tongan social gathering circle, such as the faikava (kava party), the self-perception and self-worth that a person has built over several years can be destroyed in a few minutes. Ahivao also pointed out an interesting element of self–belief: others will decide our destiny when we allow them to create and decide it for us. Often, social ridicule and sarcasm lead many to see these as limitations and boundaries that affect what they can achieve in life.

5.3.3 Masculinity and physicality

Polynesian children growing up in A/NZ are exposed to the stardom of professional sports, which can create the desire to earn a lot of money and live life in the fast lane. Many of them, during their primary and high school years, are physically quite big for their age, and have had early exposure to physical sports. The uses of technology, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have enabled fame to be created overnight, along with the idolisation of those that have found fame and fortune playing sports. This instant fame and media coverage have contributed to the norm that Pasifika and Tongan male's physicality is best suited to sports.

Participants (N26) of this study confirmed that the instant stardom and appealing financial packages of professional sport have influenced the desire of Tongan males pursuing higher education opportunities. The lure to play professional sports has distracted a lot of Tongan male students from doing well at NCEA, which prepares and qualifies them for higher education studies. Some participants also reiterated that both

the home environment and communities are guilty of placing too much emphasis on, and support for, sports while neglecting support for education and higher educational opportunities.

Vignette 5.3.3.1 **A Tongan male's response on physicality and sports**

Tevunga: At high school I was quite good with my school work, and was not interested in any sports. I remember my teachers would always persuade me to try playing rugby or league. Most of us Tongans and other Pasifika males were naturally born big. During my senior years, I decided to play rugby and I instantly got so much attention from everyone. I got carried away. I left school, without a NCEA, pursued my rugby career, and that lead me to playing for the ITM cups, Super 15, and professional club rugby in France. Now sport, money, and fame is gone, and life is hard. I am contemplating going back to school, just to have a secure future.

Researcher: What has been the problem? And how does this affect you?

Tevunga: Well, like many of our Tongan males, we are led to believe that this glory and fame will never fade away, but look at me, if only I had made an investment in my education. I am now speaking to many of our youngsters, [telling them to] play sports, its good, but never leave education, it's yours for life. I got injured and the future changed all of a sudden. Talanoa)

Tujunga's story acknowledges one of the factors that are affecting Tongan males' persistence and experiences in higher education. The masculinity and physicality of

Tongan males has meant that they are led to believe that they are naturally born to play and succeed in physical sports. Inevitably, only a few have the opportunity to excel and earn a livelihood from professional sports, leaving many to tussle with unemployment and earning minimum wages.

5.3.4 Self-preparation

Participants (N26) commented that Tongan male students were not academically equipped and prepared to make the transition from high school to higher education. Most were marginal performers at secondary school, and low self-esteem coupled with other socio-cultural barriers meant the challenges of higher education were too much to handle. Participants also commented that schools where most of our Pasifika and Tongan males enrolled failed to equip them effectively to meet the challenges of higher education (Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2011). Two participants shared their stories:

Tukuhali: We barely made it to the university or polytec and being there in an environment where competition is the norm, it was hard trying to persuade you to keep hanging on. (Tālave)

Tokemoana: I attended one of the most prestigious schools in town, and there were many of us Pasifika boys. NCEA was a challenge because of the time, space, and commitment needed for it. Most of us were average performers. When we enrolled at higher education, our academic preparation at high school meant that many of us needed to seek extra help. (Tālave)

The growing academic underachievement of most Tongan males at high school means that few will have the chance to progress further, to higher education. It can be posited from the NCEA results from 2013, especially from schools populated mostly by Pasifika, that Tongan males have fewer chances of making it in higher. Many of those who have been able to make the transition have subsequently failed because of the inadequacy of their academic skills to meet the challenges and commitment of higher education studies.

5.4   *Lotu*

During the 18th century, Christianity came to Oceania through the London Missionaries Societies (LMS) and the Catholic Missionaries from the Society of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The new religion, *(lotu)* embedded a strong sense of conviction and unwavering faith among the inhabitants of Oceania. Many took their faith with them, when making the transition to metropolitan countries, and it became a symbol of cultural identity and survival. During the period of trying to adapt to Western ways and globalization, *lotu* became more receptive to changes, bringing in more challenges and apprehensions (Havea, 2011; Latu, 2012). Many of my participants recognised that modernisation and globalisation has taken the influences of *lotu* to a new level, where its rigid ritual and doctrines are affecting the members through increasing financial obligations, demanding more time and resources, mismanagement, and doctrinal fallacy.

5.4.1 Doctrinal fallacy and mismanagement

Tonga has many churches, and most of them are home-created, that deviated from mainstream churches that were brought by the LMS and Catholic missionaries; most of these churches are present have been established by migrants in their new countries. Churches need members to sustain them through donations and financial security. Participants (N34) of this study believed that church leaders were vocally strong in making sure that members were obeying and loyal to the cause of the church, regardless of the repercussions of this (Havea, 2011; Latu, 2012). There have been reports in the media of money laundering and misappropriation of church funds, loss of church properties, and even family properties (Kakalu, June, 2015). Participants believed that Tongan families are severely affected by the church leaders' mismanagement of their resources. Two of my participants reflected on this issue:

Si Kula: We have built this church from scratch, and through the sacrifices of our members. It's sad to hear that but it is really true, now there is so much to do with the lotu here than in Tonga. We keep donating, and doing fundraising while our church leaders are mismanaging the funds, and the sad part of it is when we lost our church property, because our money has gone missing, and being told its God's purpose and will.

Researcher: How does this affect you?

Si Kula: Our members have been deprived, shattered, and destroyed by this. My family had to miss out on a lot of things, just because of this. I would have gone back and completed my studies at uni, even to support my siblings for a better education. There

are so many things now that I believe that I might have done differently if this had not happened.

Ohaikula: I used to be the finance controller of our lotu, and the faifekau moved to remove me, because I was persistent about asking about his financial disposal. Most of the members were not aware of his dealings and how our money was used.

Researcher: *How does this affect you?*

Ohaikula: For years it has been affecting us, our children and our families. We were taught not to question, and obey willingly and wholeheartedly. We are doing this to give us comfort of what has been happening to us. We have been deprived of living a better life, and especially giving our kids a chance for a better education (Talanoa).

These stories represent the similar experiences of many who now despise their association with the *lotu* and are searching for meaning somewhere else. They believe that they have been brainwashed and are victims of money-making and scandals. The church appears to only be interested in maintaining their sheepfold, and for the money to keep pouring in.

5.4.2   Financial tithing

Participants (N34) articulated their concern about the increasing financial burden of tithing, church rituals, and its conflicting temporal nature. Some participants have requested the church to perform a more shepherd leadership role, where deprived and underprivileged members are looked after. Others have also voiced their concern for

the youth, where a great deal of them, especially young men, are unemployed, unskilled, and have deviated from the fold. Participants believed that the whole emphasis of *lotu* had changed to focus more on collecting money, rather than ministering spiritually and physically to its members in need. One of my participants, *Sialetafa*, shared his opinion on this:

Vignette 5.4.2.1   A Tongan male's response on lotu financial commitment

> *Sialetafa: Every weekend, we had to make food, which we have to distribute to our families and friends seeking donations for our new church building and land. For years we have to keep up with the payment, it drained us all financially and emotionally. In our household, nothing was saved; all was given in the name of the church.*

> *Researcher: How has that affected your educational goals?*

> *Sialetafa: My parents were committed to the church tithing above anything else. I had to leave school immediately after high school and look for a job to help them keep up with their church contributions. I was gutted and sad, but still I did it out of respect to my parents. (Talanoa)*

Sialetafa's insight represents that of many participants (N35) in this research, who voiced strong resentment and indictment of the conflicting and obligatory rituals and role of lotu in Aotearoa. Its blurred financial system has burdened a lot of families, draining their resources and time, and denying family members from giving their male siblings opportunities to pursue higher education.

5.4.3 Demanding programmes and callings

Another challenging issue expressed by my participants (N30) was the demand of church programmes, such as choir practice, conferences, youth activities, firesides, and even church assignments and callings. Being active members of the lotu requires time and effort to attend, and participate in, these church programmes. The highlight of the year for most Tongan lotu here in Aotearoa is '*Faka-Me'* (white Sunday) and their annual church conferences. *Faka-Me* is an annual, traditional service that is held in recognition of the importance of children and youth; it takes hours of preparation by children, youth, and Sunday school teachers beforehand.

In this event, children and youth perform items such as vignettes, songs, and dances of praise and worship. It is usually held in May, thus coinciding with preparation for the final exams of first semester for most tertiary institutions. Church conferences are also held during the year, and they are time and resource demanding. Research participants felt that committing to these church programmes and callings was especially troublesome, because of its conflicting burdens. Below is a vignette that illustrates the realities that Tongan male students face when managing their time and the expectations that are placed on them in terms of being part of lotu.

Vignette 5.4.3.1 A Tongan male's response on Lotu's calling and obligations

> *Kaute Kula: I am a Youth Counsellor, a Sunday school teacher, and a Mutual Advisor. It's quite hard trying to keep up with these callings, because it demands your time and effort. Every weekend I have to prepare two lessons to be taught to two different classes,*

and every Wednesday I also have to attend six to eight Youth mutual activities where I look after youth activities, both young men and young women.

Researcher: Are all these church assignments affecting you?

Kaute Kula: As a young father, a husband, and also a student who is trying very hard to complete a qualification, and have compromised my studies just not affect my family. Last year, I took a semester off, and this year, I have withdrawn from some of my papers, just to give me enough to hang on. Researcher: How about your family?

Kaute Kula: As a young father, I feel that I need more time at home with my kids, but I don't have that. I despise the fact that I missed out on some monumental things in my family. I am grateful for my wife, but I believe it has been very unfair for her to be given some of my responsibilities, just because I need to attend to church assignments. (Talanoa)

The above vignette vividly illustrates the perceptions of many of my participants (N30), who felt that church assignments and callings were too demanding, and affected not only their studies and their families, but also their work. The time, energy, and commitment required by the church, as illustrated in *Kaute Kula's* story, highlights how study can become a secondary priority. For *Kaute Kula*, as with many of the other participants, the fact that church commitments were often intertwined with family obligations meant that it provided a real barrier in trying to meet both the demands of tertiary education and being a father and a male provider. It is disheartening to see that lotu is becoming a burden for members, which is deeply affecting them. Most of my

participants believed that lotu is still very much male dominated and, because of that, Tongan males are overburdened by their obligations, and the belief that they must contribute, regardless of other commitments. The need for transparency and effective leadership and service in lotu is affecting our Tongan male learners at higher education.

5.5   Peers, friends and partners

Research shows that enduring and persisting at higher education is an important socio-cultural skill centered on constructing effective social networks; male learners are predominantly affected (Irwin, 2012; Kalāvite, 2010). Failing to skillfully navigate often puts the learner in a detrimental and damaging learning environment. Making the transition to higher education can prove to be difficult, psychologically and emotionally. Many research findings have pointed out that peers, friends, and fiancées affect the welfare and performance of male students at higher education (Koloto et al., 2006; Kalāvite, 2010; Irwin, 2007). A significant number of participants (N30) voiced negative experiences involving peers, friends and fiancées, where some even felt deserted and isolated.

5.5.1   Deserted, isolated, and lack of networking skills

Participants (N28) believed that having no dependable friends, and feeling deserted and isolated made the higher education journey difficult and unbearable. Research posits that male learners lack the social networking skills that enable them to adapt to new environments (Irwin, 2012). This often happens in their first year, when students come

to university alone, or when friends became separated due to being enrolled in different programmes. For example, *Tevunga* found himself isolated from his friends who were studying at university, as they were based at the city campus, whereas he had to relocate to the Grafton campus where the medical school is located. He recounted difficulties during the beginning of medical school, when he found himself isolated from his friends:

Vignette 5.5.1.1   A Tongan male's response on being lonely and deserted

> *Tevunga: I made it to Medical school, and it was quite an accomplishment that I was very proud of myself. The semester started and I found myself as the only Tongan male in the program [with] lots of Asians and Pakeha, and I wondered often of what I might become. It was quite hard trying to make it, when the standards were quite high. I saw others having peer discussions – like the Asians in their corners, even the Indians and Pakeha. I felt quite discouraged not having friends to share lecture notes and to have group discussions.*

> *Researcher: Was it important for you to have friends?*

> *Tevunga: I failed to really cope with my surroundings and part of that was because I needed to have friends with whom we can share and discuss notes and assignments. You just cannot do it by yourself, you need good back up. Things were getting hard and difficult especially with medical school; it's quite a demanding program nothing but the best. (Talanoa)*

Another participant also expressed how he found it difficult to make friends, especially coming from the Island, and being unfamiliar with the institutional environment.

> *Ohaikula: I came fresh from Tonga, and it was my first year at university. I remember walking around the campus feeling shocked and nervous. It was so crowded, and full of people, all throughout the day. People are just minding their own, and don't seem to care who you are, and why you are there. I was new to almost everything, I was culturally shocked and sometimes my mind went drifting away. (Talanoa)*

'*Ohaikula's* story represents the views of many male Tongan learners who made it here to the university from the Islands, or from rural areas, but were not expecting the cultural and psychological shock of university life. Participants also believed that when students failed to cultivate networking and social skills, especially in their first year, their academic journey became harder and unbearable. Various factors, such as being exposed to new things, freedom and time flexibility, proximities of social life, trends of fashion and just being an adolescent all contribute to this cultural and psychological shock.

5.5.2 Disruptive and inappropriate influences

Tongan males love chatting, either in pairs, *tālave* or *tālanga*, in groups in school, at church, at the rugby field, or on family occasions. Participants (N30) in this study believed that most Tongan males loved to have drinking or *faikava* buddies, but the time taken in social chatting and enjoyment often disrupted those who were pursuing higher education. Peers and friends formed a major stumbling block to their studies, especially

when they themselves were not in higher education, or are were just looking for good times there. They sometimes proved to be a disruption that could not easily be overcome; students found it problematic not to surrender to peer-pressure, which took them away from their lectures and education (see also Irwin, 2011, 2013). In this case, many students found it difficult to manage this type of friend, as they did not want to offend them. One participant mentioned the following:

Motelolo: It's hard saying 'no', especially being a Tongan male, if you turned and walked 'away you would be called many ridiculing names. Having that pride and ego I guess, it allows others to exploit you, even when you feel like giving up. (Talanoa)

Even at church, kava drinking usually occurs every weekend, attracting a lot of people to sing and drink all through the night. Kava is an addictive intoxicant that sedates and anaethetises the body and can lead to a deeply relaxed state the following day. Another participant related the following:

Tuitui: At church, our minister encouraged us young men to come and join them in their faikava circle. This was done to discourage us from going out with our friends and getting drunk during the weekend. I thought it was a good idea, but then when I got involved, and learnt to play the lead guitar it's hard, trying to put a stop into it, it's quite addictive you know, it's hard trying to let it go.(Talanoa)

Young males may be sexually active and attracted to entering serious relationships, which can be emotionally detrimental, or even destructive, at times. They have a natural curiosity about sex, and they are going to satisfy it one way or the other. There

has been an increase in young Pasifika girls becoming pregnant and having abortions, which also affects young men's careers and lives. Being young, and sexually active, can distract young men from achieving in their educational endeavours. One of my participants related his story:

> *Tevunga: When I started here this year, I have been seeing three different girlfriends now. You're not a man until you're seen with a girl on your side. I know my grades are not good this semester, because I have been too serious with this girlfriend thing, missing some lecturers and part of my assessments. (Talanoa)*

Tevunga's reflection represents the view of my participants, who also believed that young, single, adult, Tongan males are sexually active and attracted to opposite sex relationships, distracting them from their studies. Arriving at higher education full of energy and excitement, most choose to try out new pathways, new choices, and other new experiences, at the cost of their educational endeavours.

5.6   Finance

National statistics show growing disparities between rich and poor in Aotearoa. The Salvation Army's 2013 and 2014 social policy papers on Pasifika people in Aotearoa confirmed that there was a strong correlation between poverty/level of income and educational underachievement. However, there is also a higher percentage of Tongans who are unemployed, or at the bottom end of the income ladder, and are being employed as unskilled and untrained workers. The impact of being financially secure is significant. More than 70% of Tongans earn their livelihood from unskilled and semi-

skilled jobs, and the trend of increasing male learners in higher education in New Zealand was minimal, compared to other ethnicities (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Participants (N28) in this research believed that Tongan male learners and their families are affected by issues such as increasing poverty and inflation, part time work, student loans, gambling, and lack of financial literacy.

5.6.1 Poverty and inflation

For the last five years, prices of goods and services have increased dramatically, especially housing and food items, while the minimum wage has remained fairly low. This has affected a lot of Tongan families, especially big families, who struggle to provide food and shelter each day. 'This is home' (2014), a recent social survey report by the Salvation Army, illustrates the poverty face by Pasifika people in Aotearoa. Participants of this research believed that Tongans faced quite a number of problems, and most stemmed from being "below the line" income earners, unemployed, or relying on welfare while trying to sustain big families. This is clearly reflected in the education sector, where there are a lot of underachievers, drop outs, and push outs from high school that cannot be expected to enter higher education. One of my participants voiced his experiences:

> *Samoa: Life is dramatically chaotic, seeing my parents struggling hard, trying to break this poverty cycle, but it's even harder when you got nothing behind your back. The paycheck I receive weekly all goes to food and accommodation, and it's hard trying to live from paycheck to paycheck. You work really hard, and still you still have nothing, it's*

quite disheartening, but that's reality of being poor and living on a minimum wage.

(Talanoa)

The above talanoa describes the living conditions of most Tongans and how it has affected them, especially in their desire to gain a good education. Most of my participants believed that conditions were getting worse. After getting a high school education, Tongan males end up taking unskilled labouring work, with a minimum pay rate.

5.6.2 Student loans and expensive tuition fees

Participants (N25) from this research commented that Tongan students were opposed to the student loan scheme for various reasons, complexity of the process, such as time frame and other related issues , uncertainty of course completion, and need for immediate repayment at the end. Those who had a student loan and had withdrawn from their studies were further discouraged from completing their programmes. Rising tuition fees and the lengthy duration of many academic programmes at higher education institutions made some give serious thought as to whether it was worth taking the journey. One of my participants said:

Pipitongi: My parents could not afford to pay for my tuition, so I took a student loan. Many of us Tongans, who were there at the time, were all on student loan. Now I am still repaying it, though I have withdrawn for personal reasons. I am now discouraged from completing my studies, until my loan is fully paid. But look at the tuition man, it is so expensive, you can't afford going back, when you still have much to pay. (Talanoa)

Pipitongi's assertion identifies the repercussions of taking a student loan, and the rising cost of tuition and other related expenses, such as textbooks and laptops, and how this can discourage and deter others from pursuing higher education. Tanielu & Johnson (2014) reported that the cost of education, especially for specialist degrees such as engineering, medicine, and law, are exponentially increasing, while the living wage remains constantly the same. In reality, a lot of Tongans will not be able to afford to pursue further education. Coupled with the long duration of courses and its academic uncertainty, some are also further deterred from pursuing higher education.

5.6.3 Lack of financial literacy and gambling

Finance is a very important aspect of literacy, where one must learn how to prioritise spending and saving prudently. Tongan culture is very openhanded, where people learn to donate and give generously – their time, goods, or money for a worthwhile cause. Most of my participants commented that Tongan people should learn to give only to the extent where they would not have to borrow or take unnecessary loans that impact the welfare of the family. Participants (N26) of this research reiterated that the problem lay with people continuously donating or hosting expensive family occasions when they had limited resources. Some of our Pasifika and Tongan male elite, who have chosen to forego their educational pursuits and play well-paying professional sports, have lacked financial literacy, and now end up struggling to provide for their family.

One method of trying to get easy money is gambling, which severely affects a lot of Tongan males. Participants of this study believed that currently gambling is a very sensitive issue because it is affecting Tongan families. People dream of winning big and living comfortably. Tongan men are mostly involved with gambling, which continues to affect Tongan families, emotionally, and financially. Lack of financial literacy limits the skills and resources that families need to help their Tongan male learners to succeed in higher education (Tu'itahi, Po'uhila, Hand & Htay, 2004). A group of participants shared their views on this issue.

Vignette 5.6.3.1: A group of Tongan males' responses on financial literacy

'Elili: Financial literacy is very critical for us Tongans, so that we learn to plan accordingly on how to spend our limited resources wisely.

Tafola: We hear so many fundraising within our community every week. Every weekend my Dad would go to his faikava party or TAB and waste money there, while brothers went gambling, that leaves us with nothing at the beginning of the week. I had to loan from friends for my bus fare to uni

Kuku: Gambling is a big thing with us Tongan, and it's affecting our family to the core, and plus we would rather donate and host expensive family occasions, when we know that we are behind on many of our bills.

Tuila: I remember gambling with my pay-check and went home broke. The funny thing is I had to come again, to win back my money, only to lose everything. That really affected my studies, my family, and me. At the end I had to seek professional help.

Toʻo: It's a hard ask, we too learn of it, but our lotu and culture taught us to give, and donate, which is quite contradictory to the concept of financial literacy.

Researcher: How does this affect Tongan male learners?

ʻElili: I am currently studying, working part time, having a young family, and too many bills to look after. I had to scrape hard in order to survive. It affects me badly, especially my mental capacity to think and concentrate on my studies, even meeting deadlines, knowing that I have other bills to pay, because I have to send money home to Tonga

Tafola: Education then become the second, or third in the priority list, and no wonder we see more and more of us are going straight to find employment. Look at our Tongan families, most of us living in State House quarters, living on welfare, or unskilled minimum wage.

Kuku: I was destroyed emotionally and financially, and it also cost me my education and my career, even my family. Such an addictive habit, you win small, you lose big time.

Tuila: Financial literacy is about accepting and prioritising your needs and wants. When you fail to recognize that your education and those around you are important, then it's like If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. (Tālanga, Focus Group B)

The *tālanga* above illustrates the belief that lack of financial literacy and gambling are inherent among Tongan families, and is affecting them, especially in their ability to provide a wholesome education for their male learners. Research on gambling for Tongans identified gambling as a growing problem; with males as potentially the most affected gender (Tu'itahi, Po'uhila, Hand & Htay, 2004). Tongan males need to be informed of the importance of financial literacy, to enable them to make better decisions regarding the financial welfare of their family.

5.6.4   Part time work

Participants (N26) of this study believed that Tongan males are forced to work part time because of circumstances, which drastically affects their educational journey. Some intend to engage in part time work in order to provide extra cash needed for their families and studies. However, many are tempted to work full time, while putting their studies on hold, while others are struggling to complete their studies because of the extra burden on their time created by work. Tongan male learners, especially those with extra commitments, such as having a young family, or living with a large, extended family, find it difficult to strike a balance between family responsibilities, academic endeavours and work commitments. Potential Tongan male students have increasingly chosen to make the decision to work part time to support their families who are struggling to keep up with bills and mortgages. One of my participants relates this:

Vignette 5.5.4.1   A Tongan male's response on working part time

> *Kukuvalu: When you have so many commitments, it's natural that you must find work to help your family. I have a very young family, with so many responsibilities, especially school stuff for my kids, and their education, household chores that need to attend to.*

> *Researcher: How do you balance life and education?*

> *Kukuvalu: It's hard trying to juggle a lot of things at one time, especially being a father and a husband and trying to study; it's even harder and challenging, knowing that you have people relying on you for their wellbeing. (Talanoa)*

Kukuvalu's assertion is similar to many of my participants who have young families and are pursuing higher educational dreams, but are affected by financial and temporal responsibilities. Some had chosen to put their studies on hold and were finding it hard to pursue their dream again due to increasing responsibilities and financial debts. However all participants agreed that income and financial security are very important for successful tertiary education. Financial support helps counter important barriers highlighted previously, such as time and space constraints due to working part time, transport costs, and purchasing study equipment. One of my participants related his story:

> *Kulukona: A big struggle for me would be the financial aspect. It's hard having to work and carry the financial burden at home. I come home and feeling exhausted every day, and could not be able to do any studies. (Talanoa)*

Kulukona's story again echoes the reality that most Pasifika and Tonga males are facing, especially when the need to support their families challenges and competes with their educational endeavours, and compromises their study.

5.7   Institutional Support

Making the transition from high school to tertiary education is not easy. Recent research findings show that institutional support plays a vital role in shaping the stumbling blocks and stepping stones of the learners (Chu, et al., 2013; Irwin, 2013; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b). It requires support from different stakeholders such as family, community, lotu, and friends. However most of my participants felt that there could be improvement in how higher learning institutions deliver support and pastoral care for their students, especially underachievers and Pasifika. Many of my participants articulated problems, inappropriate orientation and induction programmes, such as lack of Pasifika space and staff, ineffective mentoring programmes, lack of effective peer tutorial and academic support, and lack of academic bridging programmes, and study incentives.

5.7.1 Inappropriate Pasifika orientation and induction

 Orientation and induction is an important milestone for an effective transition into higher learning. Participants (N28) voiced dissatisfaction and frustration over the standards and processes of orientation and induction at higher education institutions. They felt that the level of commitment made by tertiary providers was not affirmative

and informative enough to ignite passion for learning and did not recognise Pasifika values and cultures. Inappropriate and unfitting orientation and induction discourages Tongan male learners from persisting and enduring in their studies. One of my participants shares this vignette.

Vignette 5.7.1.1   *A Tongan male's response on induction and orientation*

> *Mohokoi: All of us Pasifika students were sitting together in a big lecture theatre, and there were people who were sitting in the front near to the podium, who were talking to us on various issues. It was quite boring, and long also.*

> *Researcher: What could have been done better?*

> *Mohokoi: The induction and the orientation should have focused more on how Pasifika and Tongans can make it at higher education. There should have been more Pasifika/Tongan role models speaking to us, we could have smaller groups discussions and talanoa, and also Pasifika academics speaking to us on issues of higher education, and also people from support services that are there to help us. (Talanoa)*

Mohokoi's assertion represents that of many of my informants, who voiced concerns that most tertiary providers lack meaningful and worthwhile orientation programmes. The informants believed the ineffective orientation and induction promoted discouragement and disillusionment. Some of my participants (N24) were nervous and anxious about making the transition, and were also affected when the induction programmes were not implemented properly. Two informants shared their stories:

Tokemoana: I came on my first day feeling hyped up, ready to tackle any challenge. The orientation programme was chaos – unorganised, and very boring. I felt let down by this kind of encouragement. I sat there and left as I saw no worth in it. (Tālave)

Matu: We sat there early morning feeing hyped up. It was our first day quite an achievement for us Tongan. It was so crowded inside, and noisy. It was like our church sermons on Sunday, boring and long. (Tālave)

Both assertions represent the views of many of my participants, who communicated the need to implement orientation and induction programmes that purposively weave the values and cultures of the Pasifika people into it. Most participants revealed that some of the important services which they were unaware of should have been told to them during orientation programme.

5.7.2 Lack of cultural space

Pasifika and Tongan male learners are a minority in higher education in Aotearoa. My participants believed that, by being a minority, they were insignificant to the needs of the training providers, hence providing for their academic prerequisites was not a priority. They believed that having no cultural space allowed a feeling of disenchantment and disillusionment to develop. Participants (N30) believed that Tongan male learners also needed bridging skills, such as writing and reading that would enable them to function effectively in their chosen career. Participants also agreed that most tertiary training providers lacked the necessary mechanisms to identify underachievers early, and act on this. Most institutions only intervened after

students were identified with a failing grade, whereas a previously administered diagnostic assessment could have helped to lift their performance and save them from failing. Participants (N30) also mentioned that most Tongan male learners who were able to make it to university were average performers and would have failed if they were not given any form of academic support or help. In my research, participants (N30) raised their concerns over this issue.

Vignette 5.7.2.1: A group of Tongan males' responses on cultural space and academic potential

> *Kuka: I was at uni when there was no such thing as a cultural space for us Pasifika. It was hard trying to meet your friends and talanoa on assignments.*

> *Paka: Even now, we still have no cultural space; you know, the international students have one, because they bring a lot of money to the institution, and here we have none, because we are not contributing anything.*

> *Lailo: That's sad, most of our academic institutions are more business-oriented now, and I think we are a burden to our system especially with our high percentage of failure and withdrawal.*

> *Kamakama: Look at the Maori they have a cultural space in almost every institution, (laughing) even international students have better spaces and services, our space it's just a very small room, with few tables there; it's a mockery to us, seeing that kind of space given to Pasifika people.*

Tupa: It's because, they are the tangata whenua of this land. We are a minority with so much financial burden.

Researcher: Is having this space important to you academically?

Kuka: Of course, it's a place where we meet up, and talanoa, tālave, and tālanga with our friends on several issues, and so forth. It's a relaxation place, where you just go there and relax, and enjoy the company of others.

Paka: To me a cultural space represents commitment of the uni/polytechnic that they value the presence of Pasifika people here in Aoteraoa, and the contributions of Pasifika students at the institutions.

Lailo: Its true, cultural space is us, and having that is like giving us an assurance that we are important to the institution…without it…we are nothing…we are not important…

Kamakama: We learn differently from the Pakeha…we tend to learn in groups better, and we love talanoa, and tālanga. Having a cultural space is like acknowledging and valuing our Pasifika way of learning. (Tālanga, Focus Group C)

The views of these participants (N30) highlight the common opinion pertaining to lack of cultural space and academic programmes that are needed to strengthen Tongan male learners. Orientation and establishment of cultural spaces are deemed relevant because they provide a focal point for cultural identity and a place for meaningful dialogue and communication. Tongan and Pasifika learners also felt that there was a lack of relevant

academic support and services that could have enabled them to persist more effectively in higher education.

5.7.3 Institutional Culture

The culture of higher education was identified by all participants as an obstacle, because they found it challenging to transition to self-directed learning, which has demanding expectations. What they had experienced at high school was totally different to what was expected of them at tertiary education. The amount of commitment needed, in terms of readings, assignments, laboratories, and tutorials, was overwhelming. Additionally, the time needed to study for tests and semmester finals, and to compile research and sources for research projects, was too demanding and labour intensive.

Research participants also found self-directed learning difficult, as they were used to being "spoon-fed" at high school. Having to find resources for assignments was one of the main difficulties that participants faced. They did not recognise that researching for material, such as searching through databases and knowing where to look for resources, was a skill that came with practice, and also that there were support people at the university who could help (see also Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2012). One of my participants related his experiences:

> *Hōputu: I sat there trying very hard to listen and at the same time trying to write my notes. At the end of the day, I found it hard to understand what I had written down in*

my lecture notes, quite distressing and embarrassing. Secondly, trying to get resources from the library, especially journals, periodicals, newspapers…. it was frustrating learning to master these skills. (Tālave)

5.7.4   Stigmatising

Growing up as a minority in any society has its barriers and obstacles. Learners at higher education institutes are identified through their ethnic affiliations, courses taken, and competency level. Participants (N26) believed that as an ethnic minority they were exposed to stigma and stereotyping. These created obstacles to meaningful engagement in learning, as participants explained their involvement in classrooms was constrained by their anxiety at being stigmatised and branded as another island "coconut". The extract below is an exchange between focus group members discussing issues about asking questions during lectures and tutorials.

Vignette 5.7.4.1:   A group of Tongan males' responses on cultural stigmatising

'Elili: I hate sitting in a tutorial where you're the only Pasifika student. Sometimes I do want to say something, but I get too reserved because I do not want others to think of me as "coconut"

Tafola: That's true aye, especially when you say something, and it's against their belief system, man you can tell just by looking at their eyes, that they are totally uncomfortable with it.

Kuku: I remember meeting a friend from the Middle East, and he asked me if I was doing a BA or BSc, I asked him, why? He said, most of your people are doing BA and BSc instead of Commerce, Engineering and Law. I was a bit furious, saying 'is this because we are not good enough for other professional courses?' Many have presupposition of us that we are not capable of doing better.

Tuila: I remember when I submitted an assignment, and I got a D grade. I was shocked because I did put a lot of effort into it. I went and saw my tutor, and I was told straight, that the piece of work was not mine. He later apologised saying that he overlooked my work.

Tupa: Being a medical student, I was asked by some of my Asian friends whether I made it there through the Pasifika quota system. I was a bit angry, and irritated with people who think that we are not capable of competing academically. (Tālanga, Focus Group B)

The above *tālanga* vividly portrays how Tongan males felt when attending tutorial classes, including feeling ridiculed because of their opinion. Some, who had matriculated into higher degrees and highly competitive programmes such as medicine, law, and engineering, were sometimes overwhelmed with the assumptions and perceptions of mainstream society. Some were reluctant to state opinions or make comments in class, for fear of being stigmatised, or viewed as incompetent. Others felt discouraged from attending classes and were affected by their continual absence.

5.8   Conflicting time and space

Participants (N28) believed that Tongan male learners in Aotearoa operated in a different *tā-vā* to that of their parents and home surroundings. While *tā-vā* theorists claim that order is one of its beliefs, conflict is also an inevitable attribute within this continuum, such as *vālelei*, and *vātamaki*. Tongans who have brought their dynamic way of life to Aotearoa, and have tirelessly tried to instigate that upon their siblings, are now finding conflicting winds and colliding experiences which have led to *vātamaki*, or "dissonance and disharmonious social spaces" (Ka'ili, 2008, p. 144).

Vātamaki occurs in every layer of society, where the learner is confronted and diverted from the expected norms and values of *anga-fakatonga*, and also the Western mainstream culture. Tongan male learners are consciously open minded and liberal in their views, and have faced staunch disapproval from their conservative parents, who were very much "old school" in their ways. *Vātamaki* also occurs at learning institutions where Tongan male learners feel detached and fragmented from the learning institution, or socially isolated. *Vātamaki* also exists at the macro level, when the learner chooses to deviate from the existing institutional and cultural norms and values, causing distraction, isolation, and disengagement. Responses from below *tālanga* (focus group) explain the different layers of *vātamaki and fēpakipaki* in relation to Tongan male learners.

Vignette 5.8.1.1   Group of Tongan males' responses on vātamaki.

Fonu: I hate it when my parents are continuously sending money to our relatives in Tonga, when we have so much to pay for here, especially the education of my younger siblings, rent, and so forth.

Hakula: My problem is different, because I chose to move away from parents when I was still at uni, and stayed with friends. It was not a good choice, because I tended to pick up choices and behaviour, which I was not used to. I smoked and got into the habit of drinking a lot, had a child to my girlfriend, and even ended up in jail.

Sokisoki: Having a young family, and trying to raise them up the Tongan way is quite a challenge. I am trying very hard to pursue my studies, but at the same time, my parents need my time and help to fulfil some of their community and lotu responsibilities, which my wife sees as unnecessary.

Te'efoo: I decided recently to relinquish all my lotu responsibilities just to concentrate on my studies. Now I am having a big argument with my parents, who told me off that I should not have done that. I am confused because I really need to concentrate on my studies.

Manini: Recently I had baby son to my girlfriend. My parents were not aware of it, until now, and I was told to withdraw from my studies, and find a job to look after my son. Now I am thinking of compromising my studies. (Tālanga, Focus Group A)

The *tālanga* above clearly states the diverging elements of *vātamaki* and *fēpakipaki*, at different layers of society, from individual to institutional experiences. The commonality is that it affects the participants' ability to endure and persist in their educational endeavours.

5.8.1 "Old school" versus "new school"

Older Pasifika and Tongan people tend to mix together in groups for survival, and are inclined to follow the old ways that they were brought up with in the Islands. Their children, some of whom immigrated at a young age, or were born here, are accustomed to the ways of the Pakeha. This creates a generational shift and confusion. Participants of this research communicated that they felt their parents did not understand the practicalities and realities of higher education and what this meant in terms of demands on their time. Their parents were old-timers in terms of taste, fashion, and the information age. However, as some students acknowledged, parents would never be able to understand the time required to meet the demands of university, if they themselves had not been to university (see also Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2011).

Participants (N26) of this study articulated that Tongan male learners were much more open to change, while their parents were quite conservative, viewing their old ways as better. Parents believed that the new ways were making their children weaker and ill-disciplined, unable to weather obstacles because of their easygoing attitude. The clash between the old and new has created tension and confusion in relationships. Sometimes Tongan male learners lived a dual lifestyle: the life of an obedient son at home, while

behaving the opposite with friends. Participants believed that the rift was further aggravated when Tongan male learners assumed that in attaining and reaching university, or higher education, they had matured enough to make choices for themselves, and parents should simply play a supporting role. My participants shared their experiences of this socio-cultural confrontation and how it affected them in their academic endeavours.

Vignette 5.8.1.2:   *A group of Tongan males' responses on old school vs new school*

'Elili: I remembered my first year at uni, I was thrilled to step foot and explore the life ahead of me. My parents had counselled me and taught me of the value of a good education. Now I wanted some sense of time and space, which I don't have at home, and went flatting. My parents don't see it that way, and are not happy with my decision.

Tafola: My parents had to come to school every time I was in trouble. Being away from home and my parents too, I am trying hard to prove them wrong – that I can make it to the end with my education.

Kuku: My parents wanted me to become a faifekau, something that is a tradition to our family. Lotu was also very important. Now I choose to defy their desire and move away from home. They have culturally excluded me from the family, because of my choice, and I am trying very hard to prove them wrong.

Tuila: I have been trying to tell my parents that I'm different, as I was born here. They believed that I am too soft, too palangi, and I have too many excuses about life

Tupa: When I choose differently, I must make sure that I do not step on other people's toes, and at the end, it does not bring shame and misfortune to my family. I have chosen differently, and sometimes against my parents will. My journey now is a choice that I have made by myself alone, and I want my parents to respect me for that. (Tālanga, Focus Group B)

The *tālanga* above illustrates the views of my participants, that often the socialisation process, under which they were brought up, has hindered their capacity and desire to excel in higher education. Reputation and shame are two social elements that affect how people do things and their relationship to others, especially for those operating with an "old school" mindset.

5.8.2 Conflicting and complex desires, heart, and mind

Participants (N28) of this research have identified that the inter-relating elements of desire *(ongo),* heart *(loto),* and body *(sino)* are perceptions in higher education. When these elements are in disharmony it creates confusion, disillusionment, and depression. A learner can be in the learning institution with his physical body, while his heart and desire are detached, somewhere else. The absence of a keen desire and willing heart diminishes the energy and the motivation level of the physical body to comprehend and persist through the obstacles of higher education. Likewise, when the heart and desire are willingly strong and present, but the physical body lacks the energy and bodily willingness to function and persist, progress will be hard to make. Participants in this research concurred that the main cause of these conflicting and colliding elements was

because the learner failed to keep the *tā-vā* between *ongo, loto*, and *sino* equally balanced and composed. It is also important to recognise that healthy spaces need attention and quality time to flourish and to grow independently (Vaka, 2014). A *tālanga* was held on this issue, and various participants reflected on the conflicting elements of desire *(ongo)*, heart *(loto)*, and body *(sino)*.

Interestingly participants believed that, western learning encompasses an education of the mind, while indigenous learning calls for education of the *loto* and *ongo*. *No'oloto* (garland of the heart) optimises learning of the heart and the desire to shape character and attitude. Participants (N28) believed that New Zealand Tongans lacked elements to stimulate *ongo* and *loto* to help overcome the challenges of higher education.

Vignette 5.8.2.1: A group of Tongan males' responses to the conflicting elements of ongo, loto, and sino.

> *Fonu: We Tongan males love physicality, and often we take time and space to engage and look for such activities, but at the end we exhaust our bodily energy, thus making it difficult for our desire and heart to focus on assignments, and exams. Higher education is not a test of our physical strength, but more to it is our ability to use our heart and desire.*
>
> *Hakulā: I remember when my Dad passed away, and it was my last year at uni, I was struggling to complete my program because I felt empty inside. I was physically fit, but that emptiness kept coming back. I decided to take time off, and complete my program later.*

Sokisoki: I was very close to my family when I grew up; my departure from higher education was a major life experience. I struggled; I felt I was physically fit and sound, but then my heart desire was not there. I was far from home. After two semesters, I withdrew and went back home.

Te'efoo: I left home, because I had an argument with my parents, a very ugly one. I went ahead with life and decided to get married and settle down. No matter how hard I tried I was not making any progress, so I decided that I should go back home and make peace with my parents, something that I should have done long ago.

Manini: At school we were taught to use our mind a lot, and thinking was done on that mode. Everything was based on thinking, and how well one articulates. Indigenous education taught us that we need to educate our heart (loto) and desire (ongo) so that we can persist in things that we do in life, and be successful. **(***Tālanga, Focus Group A***)**

The above *tālanga* elucidates the complexities of the overarching elements of *ongo*, *loto*, and *sino*, and how they affect the persistence and experiences of Tongan male learners at higher education. It helps present a clear picture of the *uho* (content) and *fuo* (shape) of the obstacles that Tongan males are facing. Participants further stressed how the influence of having an unhealthy body, with a reluctant desire and unwilling heart, affected Tongan males' persistence and experiences at higher education.

5.9   SUMMARY

Several significant findings have emerged from this research pertaining to the stumbling blocks that affect Tongan male learners in higher education. The first is family, which is a key factor with issues such as lack of resources and space, lack of understanding and support, conflicting responsibilities, socio-cultural rituals, and inappropriate influences. The research findings indicate that these family issues are common and strongly influence the shaping of experiences and perceptions of Tongan male learners in higher education. The strong family-oriented connections of *anga faka tonga*, and the upbringing of Tongans in Aotearoa, still play a major role in the future of Tongans and their educational endeavours.

This research also identifies self-efficacy, self-perception and belief as important factors, with issues such as vanished dreams, skin colour, masculinity and competency playing key roles. The results indicate that socio-cultural institutions shape and influence views of competency and self–esteem, and are translated into barriers that affect male Tongan learners.

Lotu, as I initially speculated, was identified as an inevitable barrier to Tongan male learners, with various key issues such as church mismanagement and doctrinal fallacy, financial commitments, and demanding callings and programmes. The significance of lotu to Tongans has made its impact felt on Tongan families and their endeavours to provide better education for their siblings. This research articulates the personal experiences and voices of male Tongans, and how lotu has affected them to the core.

Peers, friends, and fiancées are also identified as a significant barrier to the learning of Tongan males, with issues such as feeling isolated and deserted, social disruption to studies, and inappropriate influences. This research strongly indicates that Tongan males lack the necessary social skills and coping mechanisms to counter, adapt, and adjust to their new life in higher education, with its demanding schedules and commitments.

This research also identifies finance as a major barrier affecting the desire and ability of Tongan male learners, with various issues such as poverty and influence, part time working, student loans and expensive tuition fees, lack of financial literacy, and gambling. The majority of Tongan males are the breadwinners for their families, and this affects their choices and experiences at higher education. This result reinforces the previous findings of various researchers that point to inflation and poverty as barriers.

Institutional support is also identified as a major barrier to Tongan male learners, with challenges such as lack of cultural space and academic support, inappropriate orientation and induction, institutional culture, and stigmatising. Participants believed that Tongan male learners are affected when institutions lack proactive strategies to address underachievement.

Lastly, *tā-vā*, an overarching factor that is embedded in the Tongan way of life, is identified as a barrier to Tongan male learners, with issues such as old school versus new school thinking, and conflicts between desire, mind, and body. Expressed by the participants were the concepts of *loto, ongo,* and *sino*, and their conflicting and

perplexing elements, which shape and influence the experiences and perceptions of Tongan male learners. Generational differences, coupled with westernisation, have contributed to shape, *fuo* the kind of obstacles and how they affect the content, *uho* of Tongan male learners.

The following chapter looks at the stepping stones that have shaped the experiences of Tongan learners in higher education.

CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH RESULTS

MAKATU'U

6.1 Introduction

This chapter further illuminates the voices of Tongan male learners in relation to their experiences; identifying *makatu'u*, stepping stones, that have enabled them to succeed in higher education in Aotearoa. Though Pasifika and Tongans have increasingly made their presence felt in Aotearoa, statistical gaps in health, education, and unemployment have made it obvious that they represent the most vulnerable sector in society (Johnson, 2012; Tanielu & Johnson, 2013, 2014). Current literature on Pasifika education has continued to investigate ways to address problems of access, retention, and completion, especially for under-achievers; however existing statistics show increasingly negative fallout (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Findings from this research enunciate and support the inherently embedded and overarching variables that are continuing to affect the learning experiences of Tongan males in higher education. Voices expressed in this research illustrate the influence of *'anga faka tonga, kāinga*, and *lotu,* combined with institutional factors, such as economics and politics that have continued to shape the *makatu'u for* Tongan males.

Interestingly enough, literature posits that people are fundamentally and characteristically inclined either to 'individual' or 'collective' orientations; however Tongan people's perceptions and practices are more collective and communalistic. It

has been evident from this study that Tongan male learners have 'collectivist orientations', which continue to shape, motivate, and inform them through their educational journey and experiences.

Most Tongans take great pride in formal schooling and the need to pursue further education. Limited opportunities coupled with inadequate and scarce resources and the desire to pursue better education have seen many Tongans seek opportunities abroad. Though making the transition to Aoteraoa was quite a difficult venture and has affected a lot of Tongans in their endeavour to embrace higher education opportunities, some have prevailed and successfully gained higher qualification honours. It is evident from success stories uncovered in this research, that there had been *makatu'u* stepping stones, which have helped Tongan male learners to overcome challenges in higher education.

This chapter explicitly profiles key research findings, through the voices of Tongan male learners expounding in particular their *makatu'u*. Participants, through the use of the data gathering tools of *talanoa, tālanga,* and *tālave,* were able to share deep perceptions and experiences pertaining to their experiences in higher education. Findings from this investigation were thematically analysed and categorised under seven headings: *kāinga*, self- perception/belief, peers and friends, *tā-vā*, institutional support, *lotu*, and finance (***see fig.5 diagram***). Voices of the participants were used to explain various issues and themes that arose from the research.

Figure 5: Makatu'u: Stepping Stones in Higher Education

Kainga

self perception and belief

Lotu

Peers, friends, and partners

Finance

Insitutional culture, structure, and support

Ta-va
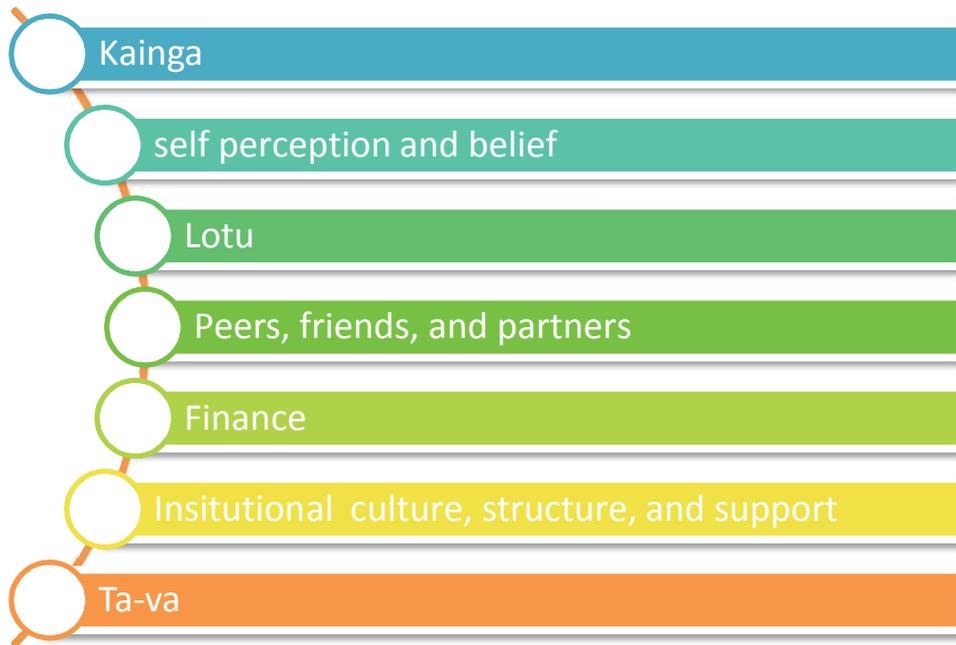
6.2   *Kāinga*

Family involvement and engagement has long been identified as a key factor for academic success (Biddulph et al., 2003; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Salitiban, 2012; Tu'itahi, 2009), though it has not been specifically linked to Tongan male learners. Tongans who have migrated to Aotearoa tend to struggle together, sharing resources, and learning to adjust and adapt to their surroundings. Participants claimed that *kāinga* represented the strongest voices pertaining to Tongan male experiences at higher education. Memories of struggling with life have helped to build a sense of resilience and persistence to succeed at higher education. Participants (N35) claimed that *kāinga* and family influence have a positive impact on Tongan male learners. It has become evident from this research that 'invisible' or 'visible' parents and *kāinga* embed a strong influence in

Tongan male learners to succeed. Outcomes from this research demonstrate *kāinga* as a *makatuliki* for Tongan males' participation, retention, and completion in higher education in relation to issues such as *'ofa* and reciprocity, understanding, and *talanoa, fatongia,* family influence and role models.

6.2.1 *'Ofa*, pride, and reciprocity

The first wave of migrants to set foot in Aotearoa was obviously visionaries who were ambitious. Participants (N33) believed that *'ofa* (love/charity) and reciprocity (*feveitokai'aki*) were advantageous for their survival, especially when most of them lived with close-knit families, akin to Tongan values. Tongan males were presumed to become head of their *kāinga* and were also expected to practice *'ofa* and *feveitokai'aki*. Participants in this research recognised the desire and aspirations of their parents, and their reasons for finding a future in Aotearoa.

In recognition of family trials and tribulations, participants believed that having to witness what parents and their *kāinga* had been through to get them to higher education, helped to instill in them both *'ofa* and reciprocity. Participants asserted that they had come to higher education due to their parents *'ofa,* and to endure it to graduation was a token of reciprocity and heartfelt appreciation to their parents and *kāinga.* It was also evident from the findings that participants expressed a collective mentality as a reason for pursuing and persisting at higher education. Participants claimed that their educational journey was a collective effort of families and *kāinga*. A *tālanga* from participants further clarifies this.

Vignette 6.2.1.1: A group of Tongan males' tālanga on 'ofa and reciprocity

Fonu: I was born here, and was raised in the anga-fakatonga. Every family home evening, our parents would speak to us about their desire to see us take pride in our education, and the reasons why we came to Aotearoa and so forth. Hearing their stories instilled in me a strong desire to succeed, and a sense of unconditional love for their sacrifice.

Hakula: Being a New Zealand-born Tongan, I learnt to be very liberal minded. I reminisce about being taught by my parents of the values of love, reciprocity, respect, and good education, and how I can help my family and kāinga, for me, it's a take and give thing.

Sokisoki: I am proud of my parents, and they are the reason why I am here, and my purpose for keeping on pushing to the end.

Te'efoo: I am fortunate to have my parents who instilled in me pride and courage to go all the way. All I want to do is to make my family proud and do something to give back and show I am forever grateful for their love and support.

Manini: I love my parents and kāinga for not giving up on us, and forever wanting to see us through, that's massive. I am happy that I have a legacy to hold on to, and to be able to give back.

On reciprocity

Te'efoo: My parents have done their part, and being here, I have to play my part too and make sure that I will not let them down.

Manini: My parents and kāinga have done so much for my sake, and I am fortunate to have them give their utmost support for my studies. Now it's my turn to give back what my parents and kāinga have done for me..

Fonu: I am not just a uni- student, I too have chores at home, I cook, I wash. I look after the young ones, even, my relatives when there is a need, I drive for my elderly nanas, aunts, and uncles for their appointments, if I have time; even our lotu, and community programmes, it's all about playing a part, and knowing yourself.

Hakula: I believe that my journey here is not of my own. My being here alone is not only of me, but can be attributed to my kāinga and parents. At home, I helped out doing small things like cooking for my parents when they were tired. (Tālanga, Focus Group A)

Without doubt, the *tālanga* above represents strong voices from participants (N33) in relation to *'ofa* and *feveitokai'aki*, and how these values have helped shape the experiences of Tongan, male learners. Participants spoke strongly of these as a major factor in their educational endeavours. Participants spoke of how their parents have so much *'ofa*, and instilled in them the desire and expectation to do well. Participants seemed to willingly accept that part of their desire to succeed was to make their parents and *kāinga* proud. It was also interesting that they attributed their journey and accomplishments as a collective effort with parents and *kāinga*. Participants claimed that to succeed in their educational endeavour was also a success for their parents and *kāinga*, which was reflected in their strong desire to help their families. Two participants further related their stories in the following vignette.

Vignette 6.2.1.2: Tongan males' tālave on family and pride

> *Matu: Both of my parents were not educated, but their desire to see us through was strong. I could see the pride and happiness in their faces. My educational journey and my being here, is all about my parents, family, and kāinga. (Tālave)*

> *Hoputu: Pride is what makes you strong, it feeds your desire to persist and succeed, I have seen that every day, through the eyes of my parents, the pride of seeing us succeed and do well, the fruits of their labour that means a lot me because it's a legacy that I need to keep alive. (Tālave)*

The *tālanga* and *tālave* above elucidate how participants felt about expectations and pressure to do well, and how that translated into family pride and obligation on their part, as well as the responsibility placed upon them to fulfil the expectations of their *kāinga*. Participants (N33) believed that having these kind of experiences helped to instil in them a higher purpose and gave them reason to succeed. Such learning and life experiences epitomise the complexities and multilayered nature in which university, family, and students relate and intersect.

6.2.2 *Talanoa* as moral support and *koloa*

Participants (N34) in this research illustrated that family *talanoa* and understanding were very critical to the success and persistence of Tongan male learners. Participants asserted that parents who had some form of formal education, and were educated past secondary school, were more likely to provide better *talanoa* and understanding for

their children. Participants also claimed that there was a positive correlation between parents' educational background and educational success of male learners. Such parents would persistently ask questions, pay for extra tutorial assistance, do follow-up visits, provide counselling and advice, chooses career courses and papers, and was invested heavily in their children (Latu, 2009).

Findings show that home support and understanding were also important, especially when students were burdened with assignments and exam preparations. Being stressed and exhausted from tight schedules and academic expectations, Tongan male learners need family *talanoa or pōlave* (casual talk), to give them space to revitalise their energy and help them focus on their studies. *Talanoa* or *pōlave,* as mentioned by participants, was imperative because it alleviated pressure and provided comfort to neutralise negative tensions and influences. Three participants shared their stories on this:

Vignette 6.2.2.1: Tongan males talanoa on understanding and support

> *Painimutu: I remember coming home every day feeling exhausted and tired, the moment I stepped inside the house, my Mom would always call me and ask about my day, food was ready even my room, which was messy done and cleaned. After dinner my Dad and I would have a pōlave about my studies, having this really helped me to stay focused on my goals. Having a meaningful and worthwhile talanoa helped and shaped me to stay focused. (Talanoa)*

> *Ohaikula: Being a young dad, I was truly blessed to have a spouse who supported me wholeheartedly. I studied full time and my time with my family was severely*

compromised. But I had something really important, I needed to have some kind of family talanoa and tālave and every weekend my wife would take me out from my busy schedule and try to motivate me up with jokes, and doing fun activities, a cup of hot chocolate. I found that very enriching, especially when I needed a break, I did find that very refreshing and rejuvenating. (Talanoa)

Puafisi: My parents were not well educated but they supported me. They wanted me to explain how things were done at uni, and all the academic requirements of my course. It was great having time to talanoa with them; even my brothers and sisters were part of my numerous talanoa, where I expressed to them my ups, my frustrations. It is great to have people who actually listen to your journey. I felt that they valued my education and were proud of my achievement. (Talanoa)

Researcher: What about when you have parents and kāinga, who understand.

Huni: The journey is worth taking when you have people who are very close to you and understand you well. (Talanoa)

Motelolo: I believed that being a family-oriented person, with a young family, you would always find commotion and distractions. My kids will always ask for my time, to take them to the park, swimming pool, even to McDonalds, but what helps me is having a spouse who knows and understands the pressure of having assignments and exams. (Talanoa)

Participants (N34) expressed the importance of having positive *talanoa* and meaningful understanding from parents and *kāinga*. Findings also suggest that *talanoa* is a form of

koloa, legacy/heritage, either as socio-cultural knowledge, or life/learning experiences, often shared by parents and *kāinga* to their children Every Tongan *kāinga* has a rich legacy of *koloa tukufakaholo*, family heritage that is commonly transmitted through *talanoa* and *pōlave*. Participants also believed that when parents and *kāinga* allowed space for *talanoa*, especially to their male children a context of mutual understanding, wisdom, and trust could be created and observed. Simple mistakes can be positively averted when family *talanoa* is done appropriately and effectively, for positive reinforcement. Such family *talanoa* is deemed relevant for the learning experiences of Tongan males (Latu, 2009). Three participants further shared their experiences:

Vignette 6.2.2.2: Tongan male voices on *talanoa* as a *koloa*

> *Pipitongi: I got distracted in my first year; I knew that I must let my parents know about it. One night I came home from school, it was unusual to see my parents at the living room that late. I was asked to sit down and a long talanoa began. It was very positive very uplifting with so many teary faces. I am thankful to have such loving parents who know and understand me well. (Talanoa)*

> *Kautekula: One thing that I remember vividly about my parents was their effort to be there and talanoa with me, especially when I looked depressed and awkward. I believe that they knew how I needed them just to relate my frustration and even my successful moments. (Talanoa)*

Mohok oi: I am fortunate to have been brought up by my nanas. I remember, every weekend, I would sit down and we would just pōlave on any issue, I was always amazed at their wealth of knowledge of the Tongan cultures and traditions. (Talanoa)

Findings concurred on the importance of family *talanoa*, which provides a meaningful forum and platform, where Tongan male learners are able to confront their problems, or even their successes, and receive advice and words of wisdom from their parents, older siblings, and *kāinga*. Participants also highlighted the importance of family *talanoa*, which helped to alleviate depression, confusion, and misunderstanding through open dialogue. This aspect of *talanoa* strengthens the persistence and perseverance of Tongan males at higher education.

6.2.3   Stepping up with fatongia

Fatongia, obligation, is part of the Tongan cosmos, where males are taught to take responsibility, especially for their socio-cultural obligations. Findings show that *fatongia* is woven and fabricated with love (*'ofa,*) obedience *(talangofua)* and loyalty, (*mamahi'i me'a*) and is embedded in the lives of Tongan males. Though some participants were born here, in Aotearoa, the influence of *anga fakatonga*, and *lotu* were declared influential and prominent, strongly shaping their perceptions of *fatongia*. As mentioned previously, Tongan households are always crowded with relatives, friends, and visitors (Faleolo, 2012; Havea, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010; Tu'itahi, 2009); each and every one is given, and expected to perform, a *fatongia*.

More than 30 of the participants thought that learning to take responsibility helped them to value educational opportunities wisely. It helped cultivate a sense of purpose and a strong desire to persist through challenges and barriers. According to the participants, stepping up to responsibilities also meant cultivating a positive work ethic that meets the demands and expectations of higher education. Three participants shared their voices:

Vignette 6.2.3.1: Tongan males' *tālave* **on** *fatongia*

> *Matu: I remember seeing my parents struggling to put food on the table, and being the oldest sibling I learnt fast to accept responsibilities. Being the oldest I believe it was my duty and obligation to help provide a secure future for my younger brothers and sisters and help them to achieve that. As a mature learner I am thankful that I have been taught responsibilities well. (Tālave)*

> *Sipesipa: We lived in a three-bedroom flat, though we were overcrowded because there were six of us children, and also uncles and aunts who were living with us. It was these memories and family responsibilities that have helped me to weather challenges during my educational endeavour. (Tālave)*

> *Tokemoana: Having brothers and sisters who are older than you really is an advantage. I grew up seeing them making sure that we younger ones were given all the resources and opportunities to pursue better education. The expectation now is that I do my part and fulfill my responsibilities. (Tālave)*

The majority of participants (N33) also expressed that male Tongans learnt their *fatongia* as an act of reciprocity, unselfish deeds, and obedience. Findings further affirm that many Tongan males have chosen to forego their educational ambitions just to make sure that there was support and resources for the younger ones to make it through to higher education. Others wanted to support their parents through paying bills and mortgages. According to participants, such unselfish deeds have helped them to value education more, and even pursue it more vigorously when the opportunity arises. Participants reasoned that they made that choice knowing their younger siblings would be given a choice of better education. Some also referred to the advantage of having big and close *kāinga*, and how tapping into that network had helped them in their educational journey. One participant shared his story in the following vignette.

Vignette 6.2.3.2: A Tongan male's *talanoa* on *fatongia*

> *Mohokoi: I was most fortunate to have very understanding and supportive parents, in-laws, brothers and sisters, and kāinga who willingly stepped in to help us in many ways, such as baby sitting, groceries, or even just a family gathering, a visit and talanoa… it has indeed helped us to move closer to achieving our goals.*

> *Here in Aotearoa, we need to cultivate our relationships with our kāinga, because I believe our chance of succeeding at higher education depends on the help rendered to us by our parents, in-laws, and kāinga. (Talanoa)*

Mohokoi's inclinations represent a significant portion of the perceptions of the participants (N35), who see the positive value attached to *kāinga*. Participants openly

shared about the burden of looking after their family, but also mentioned how *kāinga* can be utilised in a positive way, such as *talanoa* to provide emotional, spiritual, and temporal support when they needed the space and time to pursue their educational goals.

6.2.4   Appropriate influences and role models

The significance of having appropriate and positive influences was seen as a stepping stone for Tongan male learners. Participants (N35) passionately expressed how *kāinga* and positive family influences had helped them to make worthwhile and meaningful decisions. Findings refer to these influences, such as the educational experiences of parents, and older siblings or relatives, as important because they set the stage and standards for others to follow. Participants also confirmed that seeing their parents or family members courageously pursuing education just to prove to them that it could be done have also helped. Having positive influences and good role models significantly helped create a more conducive environment for Tongan male learners to succeed. Five participants related this:

Vignette 6.2.4.1: Tongan male *tālanga* on appropriate influences

> *Kuka: Both of my parents have been very clear about their expectations, and were strict on us. I cannot say that I have made the right choices every time, but having them on my side, has helped me to learn from my mistakes and make better choices.*

Lailo: We grew up with a single mother and with the care of my nana. I knew how hard it was for my mother to provide for us, but seeing what she did made me understand the purpose of her sacrifice, I am forever grateful for my family.

Paka: Seeing my Dad going back to school and graduating from uni was big for me. I believed he wanted to prove to us, that it can be done.

Kamakama: I grew up in a very tough home environment, where there were so many problems. Later on I was raised by my grandparents, back in Tonga, and later sent here for further education. I am fortunate to have been brought up well.

Tupa: I was born here but was raised in Tonga and later came here for my education. My years in Tonga were quite influential and have helped shape my life. I was brought up well with many good role models.

Researcher: Did this affect you?

Kuka: Indeed, it created an environment where I was comfortable to succeed, and also the kind of support that they gave me. I am fortunate to have good parents who have influenced us.

Paka: Of course having their influence on me made me understood why I needed to do my part. I have been led astray at times but having my family and their influences on me has helped me to stay on course and steer myself around barriers and obstacles.

Lailo: Well, deep down I am forever grateful, for without these positive influences I would not have been able to be where I am today.

Kamakama: Indeed…I am proud to have people who influenced me for good. I am fortunate that I still have them, and often seek their advice when I need help

Tupa: I am grateful that I was being sent back to Tonga, where I learnt life and got to appreciate what I have, especially the opportunity to pursue higher education. (Tālave, Focus Group, C)

The *tālanga* voices above strongly exemplify how Tongan male learners attribute their success to positive family influence and role models. Makatuʻu , such as an encouraging learning environment, role models, and positive influence, were important because they set boundaries and standards where learners strived to succeed. Participants (N35) attributed their perseverance and persistence in higher education to what they learnt and experienced at home, where parental influence and role models were identified as significant. According to participants, when parents and families are unified in priorities and aspirations, a strong message is given to learners that failing is not an option.

6.3   Self-Perception and Belief

Self-belief and change are the cornerstones of progress and the empowerment of peoples and nations. Though learning experiences are irrefutably influenced by outside factors, without exception the context within which students intrinsically influence their own learning cannot be ignored. Participants (N24) claimed that Tongan male learners significantly contribute to their own educational outcomes through their personal attributes, attitudes, self-perception, motivation, behaviour, and family background.

Participants asserted that self-perception and belief played significant roles and had a tremendous impact on the academic outcomes of Tongan male learners. Participants also expressed that factors such as having an unwavering dream, self–sacrifice, self-preparation and competency, masculinity and physicality, and role models all played significant roles for Tongan males' perceptions and experiences of higher education.

6.3.1 Unwavering vision, goals, and a big heart

Participants (N25) affirmed that possessing an unwavering vision, dreams, and goals had helped them to succeed and persist through challenges and barriers. According to participants, visions and dreams were bi-products of socio-cultural experiences, which were expressed and reformulated by life and learning experiences. Participants' spoke of visions and dreams related to them by their parents, and how living the life they had made them realise how important it was to fulfil their dreams. Hardships and poverty made them strong physically and emotionally, with a strong will to succeed. Participants expressed that having a vision is necessary, but one must also have a stout heart in order to weather the challenges of higher education. According to the participants, when vision and dreams are understood, sacrifices become more meaningful and worthwhile, especially when there is a need to move against barriers and obstacles. Two participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.3.1.1: Tongan males' talanoa on vision and stout heart

> *Hingano: I was fortunate to have loving parents who raised us well. My parents expressed to each of us their visions and dreams, and cautioned us to make use of the educational opportunities and make them proud. When I saw them doing what they did to put food on the table and provide a shelter for us, I felt humbled and chastened, and more determined to succeed. (Talanoa)*

> *Vaohehea: My first year at uni, it was hard, quite a struggle but I made it. My Dad always told me to make sure that I have stout heart, loto lahi - you know. (Talanoa)*

> **Researcher:** *How does having a dream help you?*

> *Hingano: It helped me to remain focused and know my purpose. Knowing your dream and vision has always created in me a strong desire, with a stout heart, I can overcome my weakness especially the distractions and barriers. (Talanoa)*

> *Vaohehea: I am always amazed at the dedication and perseverance of the Asian, to me they come with a vision and deep conviction to succeed. Truly to make it here you have to have deep meanings and a stout heart to keep doing and keep going. (Talanoa)*

The *talanoa* above represented participants' (N25) perceptions and experiences pertaining to having a meaningful vision and courageous heart. Participants strongly expressed that having a vision and a courageous heart was critically important when facing challenges and obstacles at higher education. It helped them stay true to their course. It was evident from my data gathering sessions that participants shared

profound emotional and personal experiences of their journey. Many also related how they were affected during their educational journey, but showed courage and resolution to weather obstacles and barriers. Two participants related this:

Vignette 6.3.1.2: Tongan male's talanoa on stout heart

> *Motelolo: Setting goals creates a journey with a real sense of purpose; it's like a compass, and a milestone in life. (Talanoa)*

> *Mohokoi: I have failed in numerous ways but that did not discourage me. I am glad that I have never let the perceptions of others, dictate who I am. (Talanoa)*

Interestingly enough, participants reiterated that possessing a stout heart with a vision and goal-setting skills – such as having the end in mind with a determined heart and desire to succeed – have helped them to endure obstacles and challenges. According to participants, circumstances and life experiences define the kind of visions people have and, to an extent, how they react to situations and opportunities.

6.3.2 Masculinity and physicality

Physically, most Pasifika and Tongan males are quite big for their age; this gives them an upper hand in most professional sports. Often this does not translate into an educational advantage. However, participants (N23) claimed that masculinity was a bi-product of nature and nurture. The socio-cultural upbringing of Tongan males created an edge for them to succeed at higher education; for example, the ability to create social networks, positive achievements in sports, gender physicality and having space and

time to do things. Findings from this research indicate that Tongan males are good at tapping into both same and opposite sex study groups, were skilful at social networking, and had flexibility and skills with *tā-vā* .

Participants (N26) acknowledged that Tongan males have more space and time to engage in social learning networks than females, in terms of the socio-cultural boundaries and limitations. Another issue worth mentioning was the pride given to males because of their responsibility and obligation to the *kāinga*. According to the participants, Tongan males are the carriers of family pride and traditions, and are supposedly given support to pursue their higher education to better provide for *kāinga* responsibilities. Findings also indicate that male learners who played physical sports could apply and translate their masculinity and experiences of endurance and persistence to learning. Four participants elaborated on this:

Vignette 6.3.2.1 Tongan males' voices on masculinity and physicality

> *Samoa: At polytechnic, it was easy for us Pasifika/Tongan boys to gather together to discuss assignments and do preparations for exams, because we were flexible with our time and space. I found that quite expedient and comfortable to learning engagement, especially having the flexibility of time and space to engage in it. (Talanoa)*

> *Tuitui: My Dad used to remind me and my two other brothers that we were responsible for looking after them (parents) and the kāinga, and that we carry our family name and legacy, not the girls. For that we must make sure we complete our studies. (Talanoa)*

Painimutu: I have learnt from rugby the art of discipline, self-control, and time management. All these have been so helpful to me in my learning. Our Pasifika boys should be able to translate their physical and emotional experiences in sport to learning. (Talanoa)

The above *tālave* and *tālanga* exemplify how masculinity has affected the learning experiences of Tongan males. The socio-cultural and physical construct of masculinity have predominantly given Tongan male learners some advantages in persisting through their learning journey. Findings from this research explicate that Tongan males are being perceived differently to females because of their expected roles and responsibilities. The expectations on them to perform and succeed are considerable.

6.3.3   Self-sacrifice and hard work

Though many Tongan males have increasingly abandoned opportunities to pursue higher education, recent findings in the literature concur that the transition from high school to higher education is influenced by hard work and self–preparation (Irwin, 2012; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Madjar et al., 2011; Salitiban, 2012). Recent literature also confirms that Pasifika and Tongan students are talented, but they need to be consistent in their work ethic and their desire to sacrifice for something better and more worthwhile. Participants (N30) related how success is denoted by hard work and consistently having a strong work ethic. They also described attributes associated with hard work and self-preparation such as determination, will power, endurance, and perseverance. Participants were mostly unified in the belief that success will come to

those who are willing to make a sacrifice and put in the hard work. Four participants related the following:

Vignette 6.3.3.1 Tongan male talanoa on hard work and self-sacrifice

Painimutu: I have learnt that success comes from hard work. I am a firm believer that if you really want something, you've got to sweat for it. (Talanoa)

Vaoheheha: I believe in hard work, something that I have seen in my parents, and my older siblings, who have gone the extra mile to give me this opportunity. It has truly inspired me to reach where I am right now. (Talanoa)

Sialetafa: There is no substitute for hard work, something that one must earn. I was fortunate to have been taught of this, and through it I have seen the fruits of it. (Talanoa)

Sikula: I grew up in very big household, but each of us was given a task to do. Every day I would make sure that I completed my task. (Talanoa)

Participants (N30) were vocally strong in the belief that being successful meant going the extra mile and being committed to working twice as hard as other non-Tongan students. Participants claimed that the bulk of Pasifika students who made it to higher education were mostly average NCEA performers. According to the participants, dt was likely that most would struggle if they did not have a strong work ethic, perseverance, and commitment. Participants illustrated that Tongan males were successful at higher education because of a changed mind-set and a strong work ethic. Two participants explained:

Vignette 6.3.3.2 Tongan male talanoa on changed mind-set

> *Pako: My first week at uni, I observed one important thing. I saw most of the Asians in the library. Even on weekends, at night, while most of our people were still enjoying the hype. I changed how I committed to my study. (Talanoa)*

> *Heilala: I was an average student at high school but I knew I must mentally change and adapt in order to succeed. I knew I had the potential to go far, what got me going was the desire to be somebody. (Talanoa)*

The *talanoa* above demonstrate that successes in higher education were attributed to a consistent, strong work ethic with undying persistence and perseverance. Participants (N30) highlighted the importance of self-sacrifice coupled with hard work as a *makatu'u* for Tongan male students at higher education. Participants attributed their success to strong work ethic reasons such as proving others wrong, family reputation and honour, and a better future.

6.4   Lotu

Travelling through South Auckland it is easy to visually recognise the presence of Pasifika and Tongan people, most importantly through the church buildings that have been built for their *lotu*. The migrants felt that *lotu* helped to connect them to their homeland and establish a sense of belonging and identity for themselves. *Lotu* came to the forefront and became intertwined and embedded into the lives of Tongans in

Aotearoa, forging a symbol of cultural identity and survival. Participants (N33) strongly voiced the significant role of *lotu* amongst Tongans in Aotearoa.

Equally, findings from this ethnic-gender specific research strongly articulate that that there are significant elements of *lotu* that have helped Tongan male learners to persist and persevere through the challenges of higher education. These include pastoral counselling, family focused teachings, spiritual orientations, financial contributions, *faikava* and *talanoa* sessions. Findings of this research further illustrate that there is a strong positive correlation between spirituality and *lotu* with the success of Tongan males at higher education.

6.4.1 Pastoral care

Pasifika and Tongan people face many obstacles in trying to raise their large families, especially with the growing generational gap and influences of globalisation. More than 30 of the participants echoed that *lotu* played an important role in facilitating pastoral care and counselling for members. The role of the *faifekau* was regarded as imperative, especially when diffusing and mediating family and personal problems. Participants revealed that when they are faced with family and personal problems that severely affect their studies and personal life they tend to seek the care and counselling of the *faifekau*.

However, the *faifekau* does not only provide counselling for related problems, but also provides words of encouragement to members, especially youth and young couples

where the husband is pursuing higher education. According to the participants, having the *faifekau* provide words of counselling and encouragement, has encouraged more young families to make worthwhile sacrifices in order to better fulfil their *kāinga* and *lotu* responsibilities. Several participants reiterated this:

Vignette 6.4.1.1: Tongan male tālanga on pastoral care and counselling

Kuka: Lotu was a significant part of our family life, attending church, being involved in various kāinga and community activities and so forth. Us males, we had more counselling and interviews like before every school term, for temple trips, callings, and birthdays. I found this quite important and relevant, because it helped me stay focused and positively oriented on my educational journey.

Lailo: As a young father, there were times that my marriage, family and education were severely affected, but I was fortunate to have the wise counselling of my Bishop.

Paka: I am fortunate to have my family and lotu to lean on in times of difficulty. My faifekau is one of my best friends, and I always seek his wise counselling, especially when I am confronted with choices that affect me.

Kamakama: I find that useful, especially when I have so many things in my head and I just need someone to relate to and have the confidence to make changes to my life.

Tupa: It's not just the faifekau leading the way, but I have found people are attuned to helping others, and that is lotu. (Tālanga, Focus group C)

The contributions of these participants, then, relate the value of exploring the services of the lotu through the faifekau and how that has helped them become grounded, with better choices and decision making. Participants reiterated that the role of the faifekau was critical and relevant in providing encouragement and support, especially to male learners who play significant leadership roles for their *kāinga* and lotu. According to the participants, having parents and youth involved at local parishes has helped encourage more students to participate and engage with higher education. Two participants shared their experiences about this:

Vignette 6.4.1.2: Tongan males' talanoa on congregational support

> *Tuitui: There were eight of us who were pursuing higher education degrees from our lotu. We were like a cohort; we struggled together and often shared our successes and challenges. It was good learning from others and in return helps us to help others also.*

> *Ahivao: I believe that I am fortunate to have the support of many people in my lotu who have helped me to create a sense of purpose. Others positively gave me moral support, even financial help. (Talanoa)*

Participants also claimed that growing up in the church helped to create a positive and supportive environment that empowered and motivated Tongan male learners to succeed. Equally importantly, participants claimed that *lotu* has significantly encouraged members to pursue higher education, through *pō ako*, counselling and pastoral care, financial incentives, firesides, and conferences focusing on education.

Participants believed that the leadership of the *lotu* can do much to help families, especially youth, realise their potential.

6.4.2 Family focused and temporal assistance

Participants (N32) explained that *lotu* helped to strengthen the importance of family, and also ensured the needs of the family were meet. According to the participants, success starts at home, and when quality time is soundly spend at home it helps to build characters that are resilient when facing obstacles and challenges. Participants claimed that having a well-balanced environment at home helped to nurture success for Tongan male learners. Participants also mentioned the role of *lotu* in providing fellowship and temporal assistance, such as family home visits, food and monetary vouchers, were regarded as essential. Participants also revealed that financial assistance that was sponsored by the *lotu* as a means of encouraging members to pursue higher educational achievements was also significant. Participants claimed that some *lotu* were very supportive of pushing their youth to pursue higher education, either through government scholarship schemes or church incentives. Participants mentioned their experiences:

Vignette 6.4.2.1: Tongan male tālanga on family focus and assistance

> *'Elili: One thing that I like about my church is that they are very family-oriented and when I needed help, especially food or payment of my bills. There were so many people with open hands who wanted to help us.*

Kuku: Every year, I receive monetary help from my church as a token of appreciation and support for my educational journey. It's not much, but it's a show of appreciation and support.

Tafola: The bishop knows how hard I struggled with my studies, and also to provide for my family. Receiving help from my church has helped me to focus more on my studies.

Tuila: Every month, church members visit us to spiritually counsel us, but also to offer us temporal help such as food vouchers and so forth. It has been very helpful, especially when I have the challenge of studying full time and trying to look after a big family. (Tālanga, Focus Group B)

The above *tālanga* exemplifies how influential and powerful *lotu* can be when playing a positive role, especially to members who are struggling but committed to succeeding at higher education. Though, as indicated in Chapter Five, there are some *lotu* who continue to exploit the resources of the members and negative affect them, many participants' experience is that *lotu* has a positive influential role in providing help for their members. Participants were adamant that *lotu* does play a pivotal role in facilitating positive family influence and temporal assistances to male learners.

6.4.3 Spiritual strength and faith

Spirituality in Oceania has been embedded in the lives of the people and is reflected in their devotion to life sacrifices within the *lotu*. Spirituality is an important concept for understanding how Tongan male learners and adults relate to cosmos and one another.

Indeed, spirituality is a widely held cross-cultural phenomenon across Oceania, whilst its expression varies between and within cultures. Mulitalo-Lauta (2000, p. 17) described spirituality as the "emotional and intellectual values of Pacific peoples". Interestingly, participants (N32) spoke about their faith and spirituality as significant when confronting the challenges of higher education.

Participants recognised and asserted that their faith and spirituality had allowed them to exercise self-control and positive coping mechanisms. Practically, most of the participants attributed their relationship with God as an important source from which to draw strength when they were struggling with challenges, in both their personal and academic lives. Such tussles were frequently because the two were so interrelated and entangled that they were unable to be separated. This resulted in inner conflict, with both aspects of their life competing for time and attention and participants feeling they were unable to manage the situation. Participants noted that although, at times, they were not active church-goers, they still believed in God and this spirituality provided them with an important coping mechanism through believing in something bigger than them. A group of Tongan students, through a *tālanga*, shared their thoughts:

Vignette 6.4.3.1 Tongan male tālanga on faith and spirituality

> *Fonu: I left on a two year mission for my church, and now having the opportunity to pursue my education, it has given me so much faith and strength, despite distractions and challenges, to make meanings of life.*

Hakula: I have learnt to give generously, love unconditionally, and not to be judgmental of others. That has helped me to make sense of what I am, especially that inner peace and calm that you look for when things are not right.

Sokisoki: I have learnt that to make good decisions you need to have emotional and intellectual attributes, and I have found that with my faith in God. Faith has given me the power to believe, and make sense of my troubles and tribulations.

Te'efoo: I don't go to church that often because I believe that religion is what you do at home, and to others.

Manini: I am no superhuman, but I am special and peculiar, having God-given attributes with which I can do all things, if I really believe in it. (Tālanga, Focus Group A)

The *tālanga* above illustrates how Tongan male learners perceive faith and spiritual strength, and how it can help them overcome their obstacles and challenges encountered at higher education. According to the participants, spiritual strength does not necessarily correlate with attending church, but with having the understanding and strength to persevere through challenges and obstacles. Participants also found that their spirituality and belief in God had given them purpose and a sense of direction in life. Spiritual strength is what helped them make wise and bold decisions.

6.4.4   Confidence and self-discipline

Participants (N31) suggested that *lotu* had helped them to build their self–confidence and enabled them to develop the resilience needed to succeed at higher education.

Participants claimed that confidence and self-discipline were vital to learning, especially when there were varying academic demands combined with socio-economic pressures. Participants reflected that the spiritual sense of *lotu* helped them to believe in their ability to weather challenges and also cultivate the ability to prioritise effectively. According to the participants, Tongan males are confronted with socio-economic pressures, which drastically shape character and behavior. The influence of *lotu* on self-discipline was identified as an important aspect of success. This influence refers to the guidance of *lotu* on the students' life and educational discipline. Participants also claimed *lotu* helped them to create clear academic boundaries, and confront their studies with confidence through better time management and effective prioritisation. Two participants shared their experiences of this.

Vignette 6.4.4.1 Tongan male talanoa on confidence and self-discipline

Tuitui: I grew up as a troubled kid, was stood down from school on many occasions. I was saved after going through Salvation Army counselling. I am glad that I have made drastic change to my life, especially with a chance of completing my studies.

Tevunga: Being a Tongan male and having many friends at uni, you're confronted with choices that could affect you. I guess it's all about you, standing firm and holding your ground. At the end of the day, only I am accountable for what I do.

The voices of these two participants further exemplify the significant contribution of *lotu*, and how it has been utilised to empower and strengthen the lives of male Tongan learners. Participants acknowledged that spiritual aspects of *lotu* had helped them to

create meaningful discipline in their lives and enabled them to confront their fears and apprehensions.

6.4.5 Wisdom and *faka potopoto*

More than 32 of the participants claimed that *lotu* has helped Tongan male learners to cultivate wisdom (*poto*) and knowledge (*'ilo*). Participants deduced that *lotu* and its spiritual dimensions provide the necessary insights to empower male learners to withstand the challenges and obstacles of higher learning. Its influences and teachings are believed to contain the ingredients needed to make informed and wise decisions, even to change lives. Participants reiterated that Tongan male learners who possessed *'ilo* and *poto,* and have sought the guidance of their *faifekau* and *kāinga* through *talanoa*, showed great resiliency and decision making. Participants believed that through *lotu*, members were taught to make worthwhile and wise decisions collectively as a family. Three participants shared their views about this:

Vignette 6.4.5.1 Tongan male talanoa on wisdom and faka-potopoto

> *Hehea: I was the first in the family to make it to uni, and I was so proud, but stubborn and stiff-necked at the same time. I fell into the pit of my own vile decisions and that's when I learnt to admit that I needed to listen. Now I believe that I am wiser than yesterday.*

Pako: Growing up as a Tongan, you count yourself lucky, I think because you have so many people around you to support you, lotu was important; it has helped me to choose wisely.

Kulukona: It's massive, though I don't go to church often, I have learnt to internalise some of the principles of lotu, which have helped me quit drinking, drugs. I have been able to live a clean life; most importantly…it has helped me to really focus on completing my studies. (Talanoa)

The above *talanoa* further details how *lotu* and its spiritual orientations have deeply influenced participants in terms of better decision making, and life redirection. As evidenced by participants' comments (N32), Tongan male learners were often caught in a social web of frustration, depression, and self-doubt, aggravated by drug abuse and alcohol, but *lotu* and its spiritual orientations allowed them to recover from their problems. Participants believed that when learning and life experiences become dramatic and chaotic, the spirituality of *lotu* provides a refuge, a beacon of hope, where learners can reach for inner peace.

6.5 Peers, friends, and partners

Findings from this research have reiterated the significant contributions of peers, friends, and fiancées to Tongan male learners in higher education,26 of the participants claiming they had a significant influence on their experiences. Their endurance and persistence at higher education was affected by their ability to manipulate and use their socio-cultural skills. According to the participants, Tongan male learners attribute their

success to having like-minded friends who want to succeed, and are positive influences, and are involved in social/academic networking and study groups.

6.5.1 Mutual interests and like-mindedness

Participants (N27) suggested that having a like-minded friend with similar goals and commitment helped create a successful academic journey. Friends who share the same interests and commitment provide a positive platform for intellectual sharing and networking for resources and help: like-minded in the sense that they too have a positive approach towards studying and learning, and are highly inspired and driven. These friends often formed the foundation for the study groups that participants felt were extremely helpful in terms of preparing for assignments, tests, and exams. Friends could be either female or male, and were also from other Pasifika islands. Two participants shared their experiences:

Vignette 6.5.1.1 Tongan male talanoa on mutual interest and like-mindedness

> *Vaohehea: I came from Tonga, and barely made it to university. My first year, first semester was a failure. I decided to stick with friends that would help me succeed, and I am grateful for these friends, who have helped me. I would not be at this stage if I had not chosen my friends wisely.*

> *Sialetafa: I was not good at Math, and I was drawn to some friends who happened to get together and discuss assignments and stuff. I was fortunate to receive their help. I would have dropped out, but had the guts to hang on with good friends.*

The value of having like-minded friends was emphasised by participants, who supported the need for Tongan male learners to carefully choose friends who could help them succeed. Participants claimed that having friends who began their studies with determination and purpose helped to charge others with the same vigour and energy; this helped to reassert a sense of purpose and reason for being there when this was lost. Despite sometimes getting carried away with wrong choices, participants were able to reassess their objectives and purpose due to having friends that stayed true to their course.

6.5.2   Community of learners

Participants (N28) claimed that successful Tongan male learners attributed their success to having study groups and peer tutorial support. Tongan male students find *talanoa* learning and dialogue a conducive and meaningful way to learn. Participants proposed that Tongan male learners were more successful when their learning was done in groups, especially with laboratory work, assignment discussions, and exam preparations. Participants further noted that having other Tongan and Pasifika friends was an instrumental factor against feeling isolated and lonely at university, and becoming lost and academically distracted. Participants felt that only other Tongan students could relate to their experiences at university and the struggles and challenges they faced. Two participants shared their feelings about this:

Vignette 6.5.2.1 Tongan male talanoa on community of learners

> *Puafisi: I remember every Wednesday we had a faifekau visiting us, to give us spiritual nourishment, which was organised by our Tongan Student Association. I always felt nourished by his messages. The Association also organised group studies, and peer discussion to help others in their studies, even tutorial groups.*

> *Sikula: I came from Tonga, and it was quite hard trying to get adjusted and adapted, but having other Tongans around was quite helpful. Study commitments and pressure to pass exams was hard, but seeing others struggling and being successful really gave me the extra energy to hold on.*

Participants attested that having study groups, peer tutorial support, and *talanoa* dialogue learning was significant to their ability to adjust and adapt to the institutional learning culture. According to the participants, Tongan male learners need the space and time provided by having a community of learners to really cultivate the necessary study habits and skills to persevere against the challenges of higher education.

6.5.3 *Amatakiloa*

Amatakiloa, torch-leading light, is an annual conference sponsored by the Tongan Tertiary Students Association (TTSA) in Aotearoa, and emphasises the need to take a collective approach to learning through open *talanoa* and support. It started in 1991, with member associations across the major learning institutions in Aotearoa, as a way of empowering and providing networks for students to cope with the challenges of

higher education. *Amatakiloa* has attracted thousands of Tongan students annually, across Aotearoa and the Pacific, who collectively share success stories in learning at higher education. Moreover participants, (N27) in this research claimed that the annual conference had helped to provide Tongan students here in Aotearoa with a sense of identity and pride in their culture, as well as networking skills while successfully pursuing their studies. Some participants shared their stories:

*Vignette 6.5.3.1 A **group of Tongan males talanoa on Amatakiloa***

> *Pako: What I like about it is the ability to come back and use this network to help me in my studies, such as resources, study groups, and just a talanoa with friends, when things are getting rough and tough.*

> *Pipitongi: People told me that Ama is just a waste of time. I came out of it feeling I had enjoyed it and recharged, because it is held during the semester holidays.*

> *Langakali: I grew up here, and I happened to mingle mostly with palangis, but somehow I felt empty inside, especially with who I am. Attending Ama, for the first time was like an eye opener. I felt enriched and connected, knowing my roots and who I am.*

> *Kulukona: Last year was the first time for me to attend the Ama after 20 years. I have seen changes and how young people feel inspired by being with people of their kind.*

> *Ahivao: Most of us came to this conference not knowing each other, and what they are doing, even from their villages and roots back in Tonga. To me it's getting the connection and networking. (Talanoa)*

Participants (N25) indicated that the formation of a Tongan Tertiary students' association and the annual *Amatakiloa* conference help to provide better networks through which students can find out about the important services that they need to tap into in order to succeed. Shared experiences and voices are also able to be communicated though *talanoa* sessions, and help to enrich experiences for Tongan male learners. According to the participants, Tongan male learners learn through *Amatakiloa*, important academic networks such as the student learning center, study groups, peer discussions, or social gatherings. When these socio-cultural networks are utilised positively, better things happened.

6.5.4 Positive support and influence

Participants (N30) indicated that friendship and fellowship play an essential role in the experiences of Tongan male learners; both provide an important coping mechanism for participants. Participants claimed that having trusted friends helped to provide an effective channel for *talanoa,* and supplied a non-critical ear to listen to their frustrations and successes in terms of dealing with pressures of being a Tongan male learner in higher education. Findings also suggest that friendship and fellowship provide a positive platform that male learners can utilise for better decision making and positive learning influences. Participants indicated that the pressure to succeed, despite the commitments and expectations for Pasifika, especially Tongan male learners, are enormous, and that having good role models helps to cultivate a spirit of persistence against obstacles and challenges. Participants also found trusted friends were a great

source of moral encouragement and spiritual support, especially during times when they found it difficult to deal with their studies. Three participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.5.4.1 Tongan males' voices on positive support and influence

> *Painimutu: True friends are those who don't change colours, and are there for you when you need them. I had people who seemed to know their way around. They helped and they've always offered to give me notes and stuff. I am grateful to have people like that. (Talanoa)*

> *Huni: I barely made it to polytechnic. I had a Samoan and a Fijian friend, they were my opposite but somehow I felt attracted to their good influences. They shared with me stories of hardships and problems which I related to. How I wanted to thank them for reminding me who I am. (Talanoa)*

> *Vaohehea: Good friends were hard to find, especially those that would help you succeed. I have found my educational journey quite rewarding, especially with friends that I have, and the things that I have accomplished so far. (Talanoa)*

Participants claimed that choosing good friends, peers and fiancées provided a significant source of positive support, resources, and networking. Tongan male learners positively attributed their journey to friends and peers who took similar programmes with them, as they were able to give advice and to relate to the realities of the program, as well as of being a tertiary student. Participants also shared how having close relationships had helped them see life differently, and having a supportive partner also

pushed them harder to succeed. Participants proved that having friends outside university life was also helpful, especially when they had wealth of experiences, and were supportive and understanding of the learners' situation. Two participants elaborated on this:

Vignette 6.5.4.2: Tongan male tālave on outside influence and partners

> *Tokemoana: At our church we have a faikava every weekend. I find that quite challenging to have friends from all sorts talking and sharing things from most important to least important, have a good laugh, which helps me dilute the anxiety and pressures from my studies.*

> *Sipesipa: When I started uni, I met up with this girl who was so intelligent. I learnt so much from her, being on time, organized and not only that, I have learnt to be confident in myself and what I do.*

> *Hoputu: Most of my close friends were those that I grew up and went to high school with. They did not make it to higher education, but I have learnt quite a lot from them. They positively supported me and challenge me to succeed (Tālave)*

Findings from this research significantly indicate that friends, peers, and partners have a significant influence on Tongan male learners. According to the participants, successful Tongan male learners are those who skillfully choose friends who are a positive influence, and are at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing.

Participants further attested that choosing good friends at the beginning helped them develop a strong character in order to survive through higher education.

6.5.5 Social and Academic Networking

Within the spectrum of any learning institution, there are embedded social and academic networks designed to enhance learning. Participants (N28) confirmed that through networking, male learners learnt of important student learning services, such as counselling, student learning center, and notes and study tips. Networking can break down socio-cultural barriers by empowering learners to seek help beyond their comfort zone and usual cultural circle. Some higher education institutions and faculties have clubs and associations that students are encouraged to exploit to their own advantage. Participants attested that learning from others, especially Asians, Pakeha, and other Pasifika – particularly when their completion and success rates were above those of the Tongans' – was relevant to one's journey. Four participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.5.5.1: Tongan male tālanga on social networking

> *Kuka: One day I came to the library and saw some of my classmates (Asians).They were talking about the assignment. I asked if I could join them, they were so friendly, and since then I have learnt that I need the help of others and need to open up to other people who might help me.*

Lailo: I came from Tonga, and most of my friends in class were either palangi or Asians. I believe that to be successful, you must navigate yourself out from your comfort zone, and try to meet people, who might think and do things differently.

Paka: Some of us Tongan failed because we never take the chance to create opportunities for ourselves; we wait for it and even blame others for our failure. There are people here who want to help you, but you must learn to know it and how to use them.

Kamakama: I was lucky that I went and joined this club, though most of them were palangi but somehow I have learnt from them few important tips on how to survive this higher education.

Tupa: I find in this educational journey, you need to have a lot of help and the support of others also. (Tālanga, Focus Group C)

The above statements testify to the importance to the learning of Tongan male learners of networking, especially given that learning institutions can be quite big and complex in nature. Findings from this research illustrate the importance of utilising social and academic networking to their advantage for ethnic minority learners, such as Tongan males.

6.6 Finance

Findings from this research assert that financial issues play a pivotal role in influencing access, participation, retention, and completion of higher education for Tongan males. Participants (N26) attested that those with a financially sound background had access to

financial resources, had more room for making choices about their future and were more likely to pursue and succeed in higher education. Findings also suggest that an increase in income and welfare of Tongan families has a direct influence on Tongan males' access, participation, and completion of higher education. Variables that contribute to Tongan male learners' success include sound financial literacy, access to student loans, community and *lotu* financial incentives, parental income and support, and Pasifika scholarships.

6.6.1 Financial Literacy

Literature argues that Pasifika and Tongans need to take particular notice of their spending and saving, for it can have a grave impact on the health and educational welfare of their children (Johnson, 2012; Tanielu & Johnson, 2013, 2014). Participants (N29) claimed that successful Tongans were those who understood the need to invest in education and took care to prioritise their spending and to live within their means; being prudent with family income and how money was being spent made sacrifices and family challenges more meaningful. Findings from this research also indicate that through hardship individuals can learn to make sacrifices, saving for worthwhile goals such as higher education. Participants shared stories of their hardships and reflected on how budgeting allowed them to succeed. Three participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.6.1.1: Tongan male talanoa on financial literacy

> *Puafisi: We lived from pay check to pay check, but I was amazed at how my parents looked after us with the desire to get us to higher education. I have always appreciated the honesty and vigilance of my parents and their desire to get us educated. All of us kids were always very mindful of our parents.*

> *Pako: I salute my Mom, a very prudent lady, who fed and cooked for us, amazingly yet she managed to save money and budget wisely for our education. All of us were well educated all because of her sacrifice.*

> *Motelolo: Here in Aotearoa, I think we put too much blame on others, however we have to look at ourselves first, especially where and how we spend our money and time. If we spend it on educating our kids, I believe there is always a better chance for a brighter future (Talanoa)*

The above *talanoa* further exemplifies the significance of financial literacy to the educational welfare of Tongan male learners. Participants believed they learnt financial literacy through having a hard life and learning to make sacrifices. Despite growing up struggling, with parents having two odd jobs to enable the family to survive, getting to higher education was always going to be hard. Participants also illustrated the importance of Tongan families in being honest about, and prudent with, their family income. Being financially transparent and accountable at home had a positive influence on family members, and on how their resources were being used. Participants believed

that when accountability and transparency were practiced, family members were also willing to play their part, especially if they were currently pursuing higher education.

6.6.2 Student Loan

Pasifika and Tongan students are more likely to be recipients of student loans because of their socio-economic background. Participants (N28) asserted that the government student loan schemes enabled many from low income families to make it to higher education; university fees and tuitions are increasingly expensive, and those from low income families struggle with this. The student loan scheme provides an opportunity for many to make their dreams come true; participants felt that without a student loan they would not have made it to higher education, because of financial constraints. Pasifika and Tongan communities relied on student loans to get their children off to higher education. Two participants related their stories:

Vignette 6.6.2.1: Tongan males talanoa on student loan

> *Ohaikula: My parents could not afford to pay for my tuition, it was very expensive, so the only option was using the student loan. I have accumulated quite a bit of debt to pay, so there is no point leaving without finishing. I am much more determined to complete my programmes and start paying my loan.*

> *Langakali: I knew my parents could not afford to pay my tuition, so I applied for a student loan. I am fortunate to have this scheme, because without it I would not have made it here.*

Kautekula: Some think that the student loan is like a free ride. I don't think so, at the end we are going to pay it back. I am very prudent with my spending, and also very serious with my studies. (Talanoa)

The above stories exemplify the significance of the contribution of the student loan scheme to learners with challenging financial backgrounds. It has helped Tongan families to allow their children a head start, through pursuing higher education.

6.6.3 Parental and *kāinga* support

Participant (N33) in this research claimed that parental and *kāinga* financial contributions to Tongan male learners and relatives played a significant role in their educational journey. Participants stated that most Tongan male students stayed with their parents while studying and this helped them with their financial commitments and resources for their studies, as parents usually paid most of the bills, and also contributed to their children's tuition fees and other school expenses.

Participants agreed that their parents had done so much for them, going the extra mile to ensure that there was food on the table and resources for their education. Others who came from the Islands, or other places and stayed with their *kāinga*, also mentioned how fortunate they were that these host families shared everything they had, and even helped them financially. Those who had completed their programmes spoke proudly of how their parents had helped them succeed. All participants agreed that any financial support from families and *kāinga* was a great help to their studies, mainly because of the

opportunity cost if students had to work long hours in order to pay for their education. Three participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.6.3.1: Tongan males talanoa on kāinga support

> *Siale Tafa: Well, I don't pay rent, everything's done for me. Yeah, I mean, you know some families you have to like, you know, do certain chores and stuff whereas at home with me I don't have to do anything. I'm just left to concentrate on my studies and stuff. I know it sounds a bit selfish and stuff but it's always been that way with my parents and our family.*

> *Tuitui: With Mum and Dad helping and my sister supporting me financially. So [my brother] sort of supported us through like when I was at [college], like he would be the one to help us with train tickets, bus fares and lunches.*

> *Huni: Every month, we have a kāinga get-together, where we meet up as families, and also to donate money for funerals, educational purposes, sports, birthdays, and relatives who come from Tonga. They always put money in an envelope and give it to me to support me in my studies. I find that very helpful, but I know that I must return and reciprocate that when I complete my studies.*

> *Vaohehea: I came from Tonga for my studies, but I am very fortunate to have relatives who have provided me with accommodation and financial support. I am also very grateful for my village kāinga who has also given me financial support. (Talanoa)*

Voices from the *talanoa* above emphasise the importance of the financial contributions from family and *kāinga* to Tongan male learners. Older siblings were important sources of family support, especially in terms of assisting the family financially, as highlighted above; this is consistent with the important Tongan practice of older siblings caring for and nurturing younger siblings.

6.6.4 Scholarship and financial assistance

Opportunities for scholarships are very competitive and community and *kāinga* scholarships and financial incentives have proved to be both significant and valuable. Participants (N28) described the positive, influential effort of various communities and *lotu* to support students from their communities to make it to higher education. Various Tongan churches have also contributed small funds as an incentive for students who successfully make it to higher education; participants believed that this is a positive way of investing in their members. The churches also held an annual conference to mark the achievements of their students, and to provide them with financial support. Participants also related how some churches have some sort of a financial fund or scholarship, funded through *faikava,* which is given to students to enable them to pursue higher education. Such incentives provided a positive impact and influence on youth desiring to pursue higher education. According to the participants, many Tongan *faikava* through community and *lotu* had pledged financial support for Tongan male learners. Four participants related their stories about this:

Vignette 6.6.4.1*: Tongan males tālanga on scholarship and financial assistance*

> *'Elili**:** I am fortunate to have the support of my lotu, especially with their financial assistance, which has enabled me to buy some much-needed resources and equipment for my studies.*

> *Tafola: The faifekau approached me to say that I had been selected with others who have made it to higher education to attend a special dinner. Every year, each of us was given some form of financial assistance based on our academic performance. Such incentives have helped me become more determined and forever grateful for what others have done to help us.*

> *Kuku: My kāinga and community have supported me throughout my study. Though I am not the only one who got supported, however, it has been so handy to have been given some sort of assistance every year.*

> *Tuila: I am appreciative of the effort of the Tongan faikava who have contributed so much to many causes in our community. I am proud to say that they make a big difference in the lives of those who receive their donations. As a recipient of their goodwill donation, I am grateful for it. (Tālanga, Focus Group B)*

The above *tālanga* illustrate the significant roles played by *lotu* and community in encouraging and supporting their youth and people to pursue higher education. Participants claimed that such goodwill and support has created in them a sense of commitment, not only to complete their qualifications but also to give something to the community in return.

6.7   Institutional Support

Increasing dropouts in the numbers of Pasifika and Tongan male school leavers who do not make it to higher education, coupled with the escalating failure of higher educational institutions to increase retention and completion rates, has caused government and policy makers to look at how to curb this problem. Participants (N30) claimed that the role of the institution was vital and significant for the transitioning, retention, and completion processes of learners. Recently, institutions and policy makers have specifically designed policies and strategies, based on research, to increase access, participation, and completion of Pasfika learners at higher education. Findings from this research significantly reiterate that institutional support plays a vital role in shaping and providing stepping stones to Tongan male learners. Participants emphasise the positive contributions of higher educational institutions such as academic support, peer tutorial, faculty/ethnic association, counselling and health support, cultural space, and access to information.

6.7.1   Academic support

Most Pasifika and Tongan male learners who have made it to higher education previously lacked the necessary academic skills and competencies to succeed; this caused them to seek academic support and help immediately. Participants in this research reported that access to, and consistent use of, academic support services dramatically improved their academic skills. Participants (N29) claimed that academic support and Pasifika staff provided valuable inspiration for Tongan male learners. They

believed that having Pasifika support staff who specifically dealt with student problems and learning was extremely helpful. Participants also reiterated the need for Pasifika and Tongan male learners to exploit the academic support services in order to improve their learning skills and increase their chances of succeeding at higher education. Four participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.7.1.1: Tongan male talanoa on academic support

> *Tevunga: I came through as a mature learner, and that was hard enough, knowing that I have to work extra hard to keep up with the academic standards and expectations. One thing that I am very thankful for, was the student learning center, where I have learnt skills like note taking, writing essays, time management, and even budgeting and so forth.*

> *Ahivao: The student learning center was the place where I went to seek help. Since I have attended many of their workshops, or even sought help when I needed it, my grades have improved.*

> *Puafisi: Most of us Tongans are shy to admit, or even to let others know, that we need help. I had friends who did not use the centre, until I told them that I am using it, and have done well.*

> *Tuitui: One thing that I like about the learning centre is when I am being well looked after, even having Pasifika staff to help me with what I need. It's awesome to have that kind of service. (Talanoa)*

The above *talanoa* further illustrate the significant role played by the student learning centre and academic support to Pasifika and Tongan male learners. According to the participants, exploiting all the necessary services helped them improve their academic and social skills. Pasifika staff also helped break down barriers and indecisiveness regarding seeking the help from the learning centre.

6.7.2   Pasifika orientation

Most institutions have recognised the need to address the problems of Pasifika underachievers and have specifically initiated orientation and induction programmes tailor-made for their needs. Participants (N30) believed that such a programme would help students become aware of the available services and resources suitable for their needs. Participants claimed that through a tailor-made Pasifika orientation programme, students familiarised themselves with common obstacles and challenges, and were empowered by role model speakers, alumni, and even Pasifika staff, who spoke directly on the importance of perseverance at higher education. Participants spoke strongly of the importance of having their families and parents attending their orientation, and how this helped build better communication networks, as well as facilitating ownership and understanding of the commitment needed to succeed at higher education. Parents and families attending orientation could be told about the importance of their support and contribution towards their children's educational journey. Participants believed that such initiatives helped create a sense of ownership within Tongan communities,

with the educational provider demonstrating their commitment to the success of their children. Three participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.7.2.1: Tongan males' responses on orientation and induction

> *Heilala: One thing that I find very impressive about my institution was when they first called us for the orientation. I was surprised that they needed my family there. The programme was very impressive, having quite successful people to speak to us on how to succeed, with staff talking on how to make use of the services that uni provides.*

> *Tuitui: I believe that one thing that we need as Pasifika and Tongans knows that we are important, not just there for the numbers, and having an institution that fronts up with programmes and services like this is an indicator that they are serious about us.*

> *Motelolo: I was impressed with the kind of commitment and programmes that my institution has for orientation. It was very focused and family-oriented which reflects our Pasifika and Tongan values.*

> *Sikula: I was fortunate to have come from Tonga and attended my orientation. It was great getting to understand a lot of the services and resources that one could exploit (Talanoa)*

The above *talanoa* spoke of the importance of having a specific Pasifika orientation and induction, especially with the interests and values of the stakeholders taken into consideration. According to the participants, success for Tongan male learners meant

exploiting the academic orientation and induction events, and having their community and *kāinga* included in their learning experiences and journey.

6.7.3   Pasifika space

There are two kind of spaces that Pasifika and Tongan students need, first a physical space and secondly an academic space; this refers to the ability of Pasifika and Tongans to fit themselves into academic constructs and structures, in terms of what it means to be Tongan, and how this is fused into course content, delivery and teaching. Participants (N29) believed that a dedicated Pasifika space is significant to the experiences of Tongan males in education. Having Pasifika languages taught at some institutions truly reflects the intention and passion to include Pasifika pedagogy and values by that institution, but more importantly it enables Pasifika students to rediscover their identity and set values.

Participants strongly asserted that having a Pasifika space reflected that the institution was serious about Pasifika presence and success. Many higher education institutions have initiated well-documented strategies to deal with Pasfika learners, and included there in the provisions was the creation of a Pasfika space. Participants believed that having a space, right at the institution, with available resources for studies, enabled them to take greater advantage of the opportunities offered at the institution. The space is also a cultural room where students meet up for peer discussions, networking, or just to relax. The physical and learning environment of a higher institution is always big and complex, with students trying to figure out its layout and how best to use it.

However a Pasifika space helped them to quickly acquaint themselves with the physical and learning environment of the school. Three participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.7.3.1: A group of Tongan males' responses on Pasifika space

> *Mohokoi : I love having this space, it's so handy to do so many things, you get to accomplish many things like meeting people who might help you in your assignment or even just to catch up, having a peer tutorial here or just getting a free coffee or hot chocolate. And most importantly, a friendly update with the Pasifika staff in academic support workshops and extra tutorial classes.*

> *Hone: When I took the Tongan language paper, it helped me to know who I am, and where I am from, especially my heritage and also of my purpose here at this institution. I have learnt to appreciate more of my culture and its language. I have also had the opportunity of meeting up with friends in this course who have helped me on other courses.*

> *Samoa: I came from Tonga, and being here at this space has helped me to get grounded with friends who were usually here to discuss assignments, and share resources and even getting help with academic writing and so forth. I am truly grateful for what this space is doing for us Tongans and Pasifika. (Talanoa)*

The above *talanoa* illustrate the role played by an academic and physical space for Pasifika and Tongans at higher education institutions. Participants believed that both

academic and physical spaces helped them to recognise their cultural roots, as well as the services that were available to them.

6.7.4: Access to information

The growth of technology has abruptly changed the landscape of access and usage of information and communication. Media and Internet access have made it possible for Pasifika people to take note of and participate in important polces that affect them. Even for major events, like the annual ASB Polyfest and the Pasifika Art festival, institutions and service providers have showcased their services and initiatives to help Pasifika people. Participants (N29) claimed that access to information has helped many Pasifika and Tongans find out about the vast learning opportunities. Information and opportunities to pursue higher education are now more readily available than ever before. Participants asserted that when strategies and entitlements are explained and communicated clearly to Pasifika and Tongan people, informed decisions will be made, with less apprehension. Participants also believed that access to information had helped them to plan and make informed decisions to pursue higher education. Several participants shared their stories:

Vignette 6.7.4.1: A group of Tongan males' response on Pasifika space

> *'Elili: I learnt of the opportunity to pursue further studies when the Pasifika people came to my church and explained the opportunities and the need for us Tongans to pursue further education.*

Tafola: I wanted to do construction and hearing this ad on the radio 531pi I was interested to seek other opportunities. I am now grateful, that I have taken this pathway, it has been very rewarding.

Kuku: My family went to a Pasifika orientation, and we were astonished to hear of the commitment that this institution has for Pasifika people. I was so attracted to it, and now, it is like a family legacy to come to this institution.

Tuila: Lately I have seen a lot of community-based projects, which I believe has helped improve the awareness level of Tongans to services like health, and education. I believe that if that can be done effectively, it will help to increase the number of Tongan male learners at higher education. (Tālanga, Focus Group B)

According to participants, access to information is important for making informed decisions, and this can be achieved when education providers, policy makers, and government are proactive in providing timely information for the public, especially ethnic minorities. Participants also believe that when these initiatives and strategies are community-based, they will receive better support and participation.

6.7.5 Pasifika Strategy

The need to improve the academic performance of ethnic minorities in Aotearoa has prompted government and institutions to address access, participation, and completion of Pasifika students through the implementation of effective policies and practices. Allocations of funds and research with specialised strategies and policies have unfolded

various issues that are significant to the learning journey of Pasifika and Tongan male learners. Participants (N28) claimed that having a Pasifika Unit, with the purpose of increasing access, participation, and completion had significantly created many positive outcomes for Pasifika learners. Participants believed that having these services and staff to support them with initiatives enabled them to persist in the face of the challenges of higher education. Three participants shared their experiences:

Vignette 6.7.5.1: A group of Tongan males' talanoa on Pasifika Unit and strategies

> *Hingano: I completed my undergraduate degree somewhere but was attracted to this institution because of their initiatives and directions to help Pasfika students*

> *Vaohehea: I am grateful to have chosen this institution as a partner in my learning journey. It has been so challenging, but having these people with their dedicated services and help has given me hope that I can complete my journey.*

> *Heilala: This year, we were asked to take part in a launching of a Pasifika Strategy for our institution. We heard about the initiatives planned to help Pasifika learners successful. I have seen these initiatives unfold, and the outcomes. I am grateful that such investment is made to help us Pasifika in Aotearoa.*

The *talanoa* above portrays the positive impact of having a specific Pasifika Unit and strategies to target improving outcomes for Pasifika learners. According to the participants, it made them feel important that they were being looked after, and that their success meant something to the institution.

6.8   Nurturing *tā* and *vā*

Pasifika and Tongans are now increasingly a significant ethnic minority in Aotearoa. There is a growing rift amongst the New Zealand- and the Tonga-born Tongans, pertaining to socio-cultural issues. Tongan indigenous knowledge and value systems are circular and non-linear; through understanding of *tā-vā*, the world of Tongans is better understood.

Participants (N26) claimed that Tongan male students usually lived in fabricated socio-cultural worlds: the most important of these is the world in which they were brought up, second is the world which they explore and encounter their educational endeavours, even the world in which they share and do things with their friends and peers, and the *lotu* and so forth. Underpinning these worlds is the indigenous concept of *tā-vā* through *loto* (heart), *ongo* (desire), and *sino* (body) which Tongans use to make meanings with realities, such as *vālelei, vāofi, fetaulaki*, and *fetauhi'aki*. Participants believed that Tongan male learners who succeed at higher education are those that are able to create harmonious and meaningful socio-spatial relations when transiting from one world to another. The elements of *loto, ongo,* and *sino* were also harmoniously cultivated.

6.8.1   *Vālelei*

Vālelei is the harmonious and positive spaces that are created for socio-cultural cohesion. It occurs when the learner is able to make meaningful connections to, and

sense of, the different socio-spatial relations. Within every multifaceted layer of society, appear socio-culturally defined norms that people observe and perceive with expected roles and responsibilities. When one is able to keep a harmonious *tā-vā* within the defined socio-spatial spectrum, *vālelei* is acknowledged and harmonised. Participants (N28) believed that when positive outcomes are achieved, it is because the learner is able to continuously harmonised socio-spatial relations.

Participants believed that *vālelei* is an important ingredient for successful endeavour at higher education. The Tongan male learners must be able to create a harmonious space at home, with the *kāinga* who is perceived to be at the forefront of supporting the learner. The learner must also be able to find balance between the requirements of lotu and ako, where the spiritual aspect of lotu played a significant role. Most important is the harmonious space created at the institution when the learner finds harmonious *tā-vā* in his relationship to friends, academic support, institutional culture, and so forth. Participants also believed that the learner must find harmonious *tā-vā* with the law, and become a model citizen in keeping and adhering to the rules of law.

Vignette 6.8.1.1: Tongan males' tālanga on vālelei

> *Kuka: As a young father who has so many responsibilities at home, and lotu, I always make sure that I keep an eye on my role as a father to my kids, and a husband to my wife, that I keep that in a harmonious level and space. When things are not in order, I find that quite distracting to my studies*

Paka: I have done some wrongs in my life, and now I am trying to amend it by creating that harmonious space especially with my parents, I feel that I am now ready to move to the next level and commit myself to my studies.

Lailo: At school I have friends, and one of the things that I always try to create is a space where I know and feel that what I am doing is ethically the right thing

Kamakama: I believe that keeping a healthy ta-va with the institution is imperative. I have managed to do that, and I have seen the benefits of doing that, such as access to academic help and support, having likeminded friends who help you, and so forth.

Tupa: Being the youngest in the family with five brothers and two sisters, I find it quite challenging to keep my vālelei with my older brothers and sisters. However, I have learnt that keeping my tā-vā has been helpful to me, especially having the opportunity to share with them my problems, getting their support financially when I need it, and so forth. (Tālanga, Focus Group C)

Participants' comments, above, emphasise the importance of maintaining harmony on different socio-spatial levels, and how that has helped in their persistence and endurance at higher education. Participants also believed that there are several and different worlds, such as *kāinga, lotu,* institutions, friends, and law, where Tongan male learners must learn to constantly keep a harmonious space. According to the participants, when *vālelei* is constantly kept and nurtured, success at higher education is likely to be achieved.

6.8.2 *Vāfeinofi*

Pasifika and Tongan people, after migrating to Aotearoa, stayed with a close-knit *kāinga*. When a group of people moved from one place to another, they also attracted and encouraged their families and *kāinga* to move with them. *Vāfeinofi* is a concept that explains the importance of being connected, attached, and united with your roots, dreams, and aspirations. Participants (N26) in this research illustrated the importance of making the connection, catching the dream, and being able to create that opportunity. Participants claimed that *vāfeinofi* helped to create a sense of socio-cultural cohesion, where Tongan male learners harmoniously adhere to the etiquette of society. Though time has changed, and there is a generational shift in many aspects of life, participants asserted that successful Tongans had the strength of knowing and connecting to the past, *kāinga*, and their rich heritage. Participants shared their stories about *vāfeinofi*:

Vignette 6.8.2.1: Tongan males' responses on vāfeinofi

> *Sikula: My courses in Pasifika education have taught me a lot of things about me and my culture. I have come to understand why we do things differently, and why I need at times to make connections to my past, to my families, friends, and even here at my institution. Somehow we do not see, that the very people who helped us, are mostly our loved ones.*

> *Kukuvalu: It has been so encouraging seeing my journey, and what I have accomplished so far. I'm glad that I have been able to cultivate good friends, and connect to a good network of peers, families, even at church, which has helped me along the way.*

Motelolo: I grew up here but I love knowing my relatives, attending funerals, and other Tongan occasions. It's a way of keeping the culture, keeping that family connection alive. I am indebted to many of them who have given me financial help and words of encouragement, which have helped me to accomplish my goals.

Painimutu: I know that I have an obligation to my kāinga, family, and loved ones, they are my reasons for being here .I frequently keeps very close contact with them, even on Facebook, and email, and Skype. It has been so helpful knowing I have their support. (Talanoa)

The above *talanoa* illustrates the importance of *vāfeinofi*, and its influential role in affecting Tongan male learners in Aotearoa. Participants believed that the concept of staying connected to *kāinga*, families, friends, peers, and institutional cultures, are gravely important for Tongan male learners. Participants vocally accentuated the importance of the stakeholders' role in making an effort to support Tongan male learners to reach their destination. Participants further illustrated that we now live in a world where we would be lost if we had no connection to others. Likewise, participants believe that *vāfeinofi* is an extension of that, but incorporates making connections with those that are potentially helpful to the cause.

6.8.3 *Fetaulaki*

Participants (N26) claimed that in order for Tongan males to succeed at higher education, they must learn to create a balance between the *ongo* (desires), *loto* (heart), and *fakakaukau* (mind). When two contrasting practices are divergent, yet are able to

find a point of mutual understanding, it is often referred to as *fetaulaki* or *femahino'aki*. Participants believed that successful Tongan male learners are able to create mutual understanding *fetaulaki* and *femahino'aki* through *ongo, loto,* and *fakakaukau*. When these three senses are equally looked after and positively nourished, Tongan male learners would have the time and space to pursue and persist at higher education. Three participants shared their thoughts about this:

Vignette 6.8.3.1: Tongan males' responses on fetaulaki and femahino'aki

> *Heilala: Being born and raised here is hard, especially trying to merge the two at times, but I have learnt how to make the transition from one to another, even how to learn my duties at home and also to my kāinga, and what I do here at school. It is very important to me, especially when I need space and time to do my studies, even in what is expected of me.*

> *Hingano: In our Tongan society, we are allowed to dialogue and talanoa, and I find that quite important when our family come together to talanoa. It's important that we are allowed to see things differently but operate on a same wavelength and endnote.*

> *Sialetafa: I have learnt that usually when I listen to my parents or even my kāinga that does not necessarily mean that I do what they say, but somehow I tend to understand who I am. I have learnt that knowing and performing my responsibilities is another way to find common ground and mutual understanding. (Talanoa)*

Participants claimed that in order for Tongan male learners to succeed at higher education they must learn to connect the dots and find a mutual space for understanding and communication. *Fetaulaki* and *femahino'aki* allowed consensus and a unified understanding and vision of the benefits of pursuing higher education.

6.9 Summary

A number of significant outcomes emerged from this research regarding *makatu'u*, stepping stones that are enabling Tongan male learners at higher education in Aotearoa. The most prominent of these is *kāinga*, which encompasses factors such as '*ofa* and reciprocity, *fatongia, talanoa* and support, appropriate influences, and financial support. It was evident from the research findings that these issues were invariably embedded and intertwined, shaping the experiences of Tongan male learners. Participants felt very strongly about the impact *kāinga* had on their learning and life experiences.

Another very strong influence that was identified in this research is *lotu*, a very dominant force, with significant contributions to the learning experiences of Tongan male learners, both spiritually and physically. Key factors of *lotu*, such as pastoral care and counselling, family focused and temporal assistance, spiritual strength and faith, self-discipline and confidence, and wisdom were identified as significant.

Institutional culture, structure, and support were also identified as significant stepping stones for Tongan male learners. The roles of both government and learning institutions influence the capacity of Tongans to pursue higher education. Key factors such as

academic support and Pasifika staff, Pasfika orientation and induction, a dedicated Pasifika space, access to information and communication, Pasifika advancement unit, and strategies were identified.

Peers, friends, and partners were identified as one of the strongest stepping stones for Tongan male learners. Findings from this research indicate that Tongan male learners are affected and influenced by their social and learning networks, with key issues being finding others with mutual interest and like-mindedness, having a community of learners, *Amatakiloa*, support and positive influence, and social and academic networking. It was evident that when Tongan male learners confront these issues positively, their educational journey was more likely to succeed.

Findings from this research suggest that finance plays a pivotal role in relation to access, participation, and completion for Tongan male learners at higher education. Though participants recognised the financial struggle of most Tongans, they claimed that there were associated issues and factors that needed to be strengthened to increase participation and completion for Tongan males. Key issues such as financial literacy, access to student loans, parental and *kāinga* support, scholarships and financial incentives were identified from the findings.

Another significant stepping stone that was mentioned in the research findings was self-perception and belief. It was apparent from the findings that those with an unwavering vision and strong work ethic were able to persevere through the challenges

of higher education. Interestingly enough, masculinity and gender physicality were claimed as an advantage for Tongan male learners when pursuing higher education.

Lastly, findings also indicated the overarching influence of *tā-vā* to the learning experiences of Tongan male learners. Success to most Tongan male learners was all about managing time and space against the worlds of *kāinga*, peers, finance, *lotu*, and institutional culture. When *ongo, loto,* and *sino* are harmoniously cultivated, *vālelei, vāfeinofi, fetaulaki,* and *femahino'aki* all contribute to the success of Tongan male learners in higher education.

All the stepping stones and cornerstones that have been identified by this research have shaped (*fuo*) the lived experiences (*uho*) of Tongan male learners in higher education in Aotearoa. The following chapters discuss the research findings further in terms of gaps in the literature and implications on policies and practices

CHAPTER 7

Tālanga: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter fuses together gaps uncovered in the literature with the findings from this research through a dialectical platform using a Tongan proverb; *fōfola ē falá kae alea e kāingá,* rolling out the mat for the kin to dialogue". Importantly, *fōfola ē falá kae alea e kāingá* envelops an indigenous concept that has been explored by many Tongan researchers (Vaka, 2014; Tu'itahi, 2009) as a benchmark and framework for community and stakeholders searching for ownership and participation, and vying for meaningful dialogue and ownership on critical issues such as health and education. The concept explores the relevancy of having a common space, the *fala* (Tongan mat), which symbolises a consensual platform and forum where new and old voices are being heralded, negotiated, and woven together for meaningful and relevant application. In relation to this study, it is expedient and judicious to *fōfola* (roll out) the *fala kae alea e kāingá*, therefore providing a thread and space for the constructing, negotiating, and weaving of the prevailing *'ilo,* knowledge and the new *'ilo,* thus recognizing the circularity of the *kāinga*'s voices (all my participants in this research).

This chapter begins with a glimpse of how Tongans view and perceive their world, and then an outlook on *ako, poto*, and *'ilo* in a Tongan context, to shed light on the meanings of Tongan male learners' journeys. Evidence from the research recognises that some

stepping stones and stumbling blocks are inherently overarching and prevalent, whilst others, such as *kāinga*, *lotu,* and cosmos, are broader. Significantly, this chapter bridges and synthesises major findings from this research, thus informing and showcasing new significant themes of what success meant for Tongan male learners, especially at higher education.

In retrospect, chapters five and six have specifically articulated on findings: the stepping stones and stumbling blocks pertaining to the learning experiences of Tongan male learners. The stumbling blocks and stepping stones have been theorised (chapter 3) using post-colonialism, social constructivism, and *tā-vā kāinga* (time-space relatedness/relationships) in relation to the four worlds of Tongan male learners: *kāinga,* self, *lotu*, and cosmos. These mirror the overarching, prevalent issues and themes that have emerged from the findings of this research, which explain how a Tongan male learner makes meaning of his learning experiences through his perceived worlds. Correspondingly, through the conceptual lenses above, several themes have distinctively evolved from this research: socio-economic inequality, collective dreams and journeys, tensions and confusions, and understanding the culture of the institution. These themes are critically discussed to identify their overlapping and overarching influences with implications on Tongan male learners' educational journeys.

7.2 Tongan notions of their world

The seminal works of Mahina, Ka'ili, Vaioleti, Halapua, Hau'ofa, Helu-Thaman, Smith, and Taufe'ulungaki have stimulated rethinking on how to contextualise indigenous

concepts and epistemologies to charter new meanings and solutions for the growing public disenchantment over Pasifika and Tongan education in Oceania. Indigenous Tongans view their world as circular, holistic, communal, and collective, compared to the Western linear, individualistic perspective. Tongan people create meanings of their world through the conceptions of *talanoa, tālanga,* and *tālave,* and performing their *fatongia*, which reflects their circular, collective nature. The findings of this research positively correlate with the notions and perceptions formed from a study of the literature that clarifies how the Tongan and Pasifika way of life is characteristically communally-oriented and collective (Thaman, 2006; Ka'ili, 2005; 2008; Mahina, 2002; 2008; Vaioleti, 2011; Vaka, 2014). Therefore, Tongan male experiences of higher education are shaped and influenced by how they interact and perceive their worlds individually and collectively. Figure 6 below, shows how Tongans perceive and experience their world through a circular, collective lens.

Fig 6. Tongans' circular view of the world (Vaka, 2014)
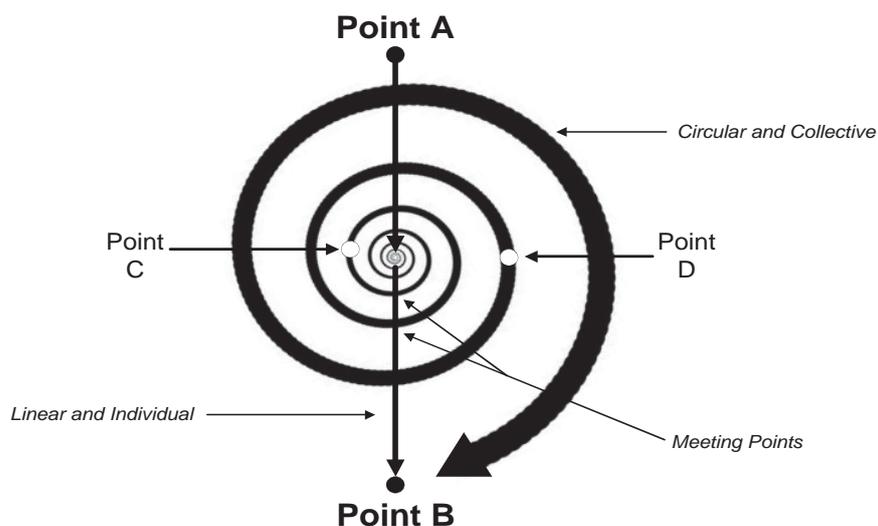
Significantly, through non-linearity and circularity, Tongans see things holistically, as processes with multi-variables rather than direct cause and effect. Perceptions of reality and worldviews are inclined towards, and embedded in, their knowledge system, cultural values, and *lotu.* Their understanding of the world and surroundings influences their life and learning experiences and how they oblige and perform their responsibilities. In reality, the nature of Tongan socio-cultural institutions does not often allow direct speaking about, or reference to, certain issues because of restrained relationships, taboo, and respect. However, *heliaki* (metaphorical speaking) is used as a tool for communicating the meaning to the audience in an indirect and circular way. *Talanoa heliaki* (talking metaphorically) is wittingly and purposely communicating in a circular and collective manner; to travel from point A to point B, one considers taking the route to C and D. With a linear approach, the journey would be straight and specific, whereas a non-linear, circular approach encompasses circularity and diversity, allowing reality to be holistically and socially constructed. Truth and reality must encompass deeper meanings that only come through using a circular lens that allows the researcher to see things both inside and outside the box.

To illustrate this point, I remember several years ago being told by my grandfather, who was a *matāpule* (talking chief), that to date and marry a Tongan girl meant accepting and taking responsibility for the bride's *kāinga* – dad, mom, uncles, and aunts, cousins, and the in-laws – and learning to love everything in the in-law's household. Through my years of married life I have witnessed and experienced this as a

reality, when I have been obliged to perform my responsibilities, especially to my wife's *kāinga*. I see my world through a circular lens, and the circularity of my responsibilities allows me to understand life holistically, especially my responsibilities and what is expected of me. Participants' voices strongly reiterated the circularity of their responsibilities and the expectations that were required of them as Tongan males. Striking a balance in performing all of their responsibilities helped them to successfully complete their studies.

When I undertook this research it was expected that I would follow cultural protocols (Massey University Ethics guideline), especially when inviting my participants. It was beneficial for me to explain and set the stage in order for participants to feel assured and confident in imparting and sharing knowledge, with a sense of respect and esteem. In fact most of my participants knew very little about me and asked questions about my parents, my village, and *kāinga* in order to establish familiarity and connection and create meaningful dialogue. This is circularity in action: the questions seemed to have no bearing on the purpose of the occasion, but in general fit in to the bigger picture. Usually, for Tongans, a sense of commonality is expected to be part of any *talanoa, tālanga,* or *tālave,* to accommodate meaningful connection and purpose. I was surprised that some of them were able to make a genealogical link with me, either through my mother or father, or through my wife.

Responses from this research empirically reiterate how Tongans perceive reality by taking a circular and non-linear approach with collectivistic lenses. Through the vigour

of using *talanoa, tālave*, and *tālanga*, realities and meanings were created and evolved as participants responded and interacted within a flexible mode, with no controlled agenda, and an acknowledgement of the disparities in others. Additionally, this supported Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) premise that reality is socially constructed through individual and communal lenses.

The use of these indigenous methods as a research tool further enhances the premise that there are diverging voices to reality, and there is a need to see things with circularity and collectiveness. For example, voices gathered from this study articulated the overarching relationships (*kāinga*) between many of the variables that shaped the experiences of Tongan learners at higher education. In retrospect, referring to Fig.5 n order to travel from point A to point B, one must consider points C and D, before arriving at point B, because they also influence the educational journey of a Tongan. Taufe'ulungaki (2004, p. 25) stated clearly "that knowledge is not expected to be achieved for its own sake but only if it is worthwhile and benefits others". This research articulates that, *ako* – the searching for *'ilo* in Aotearoa by Pasifika and Tongans – must be worthwhile, meaningful and lifelong. It includes learning important cultural values and practical skills for survival within the community. In saying that, a circular and collectivistic approach enhances the notion that reality does not attribute nor destine from one point of departure to another point of transit or destination. Hence, this research theorises that the journey and experiences of a Tongan male learner should be

viewed in a circular way, using collectivistic and holistic lenses to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

7.3   Education in Context

Ako is a Pan Pasifika concept that has received reputable attention in academic writings, even in Aotearoa (Bishop, 2008). Because, with the help of the LMS missionaries, Tonga was one of the first countries in Oceania to inaugurate formal education, the concept of *ako* was initially used there. Churchwood made close reference to it (1959, p.125) explaining that *ako* is "to be clever or skillful, to understand what to do and be able to do it". Initially the concept of *ako* was general because it included elements of *poto* and *'ilo*. However, the introduction of Western education and Western religion changed the meanings and concepts of *'ilo, ako,* and *poto.*

Thaman (2003, p. 2) defined *ako* in relation to formal education as "an introduction to worthwhile learning" and made an important distinction between formal education (organised, institutionalised learning such as schools, colleges, and universities) and non-formal education (organised but not institutionalised learning). Thaman (ibid, p. 1) further stated, "*poto* is knowing who I am, knowing what to do and doing it well". Through her writings, Thaman (1995, 1999, 2001) further stipulated that *ako* is the process of learning, searching, and teaching, while *'ilo* denotes the process of acquiring knowledge and information through *ako. Poto* stands for wisdom, the aptitude to use *'ilo* wisely, within the context of *ako* and Tongan society. The educated and wise Tongan male, therefore, applies *'ilo* to attain *poto* in a meaningful and positive way.

Findings from this research strongly articulate that the Tongan context of *poto* is not necessarily about attaining academic qualifications through *ako;* instead it is about how *'ilo* – which could be academic, socio-cultural or religious – is practiced to maintain harmonious space through *tauhi vā* with *fonua, lotu*, and *kāinga*. It was evident from this research that there was a strong, positive correlation between achieving *poto* and *tauhi-vā* with *kāinga, lotu*, self, and the cosmos. More important was the belief that *fakapotopoto,* acquired wisdom, comes from acknowledging that *'ilo* and *poto* come from different dimensions and striving to become *tangata kakato*, a completed and holistic being. When these dimensions are thoroughly acquired through *fakapotopoto* and utilised meaningfully, Tongans refer to this as *tangata kakato* (holistic/completed being).

Figure 7: *Tangata kakato* (Holistic/completed being)
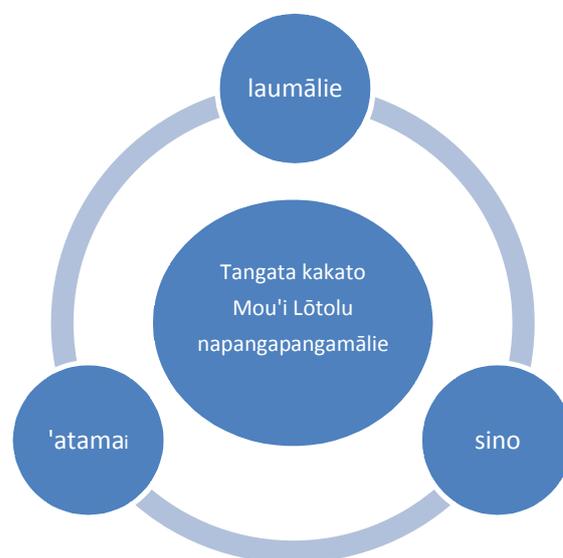
The concept of *tangata kakato* (fig.7) contains the three main aspects of how Tongans holistically perceive *'ilo, ako,* and *poto* through achieving *mou'i faka-sino* (physical well-

being), *mou'i faka-'atamai (*intellectual well-being), and *mou'i faka-laumālie* (spiritual well-being). It denotes *fakapotopoto*, and being able to negotiate and navigate coherently and harmoniously within the realms of *kāinga*, self, cosmos, and *lotu.* Kavaliku (1966, p. 13) referred to *tangata kakato*, as a "man of wisdom, an ideal, a thing of value". Similarly, *tangata kakato* epitomises the apex of getting *poto,* through *ako* and *'ilo,* where all the dimensions of *sino* (body), *'atamai* (intelligence), and *laumālie* (soul/heart) are taken into consideration. Additionally, the stage of *tangata kakato* envelops harmonious and complete function, known as *nāpagapangamālie*, meaning balanced and holistically composed. It acknowledges that all strands of *poto* and *'ilo* must be equally cultivated in order to have a holistic being, with a balanced outcome. This research resonates how success for Tongan male learners permeates from the fact that all dimensions of *'ilo* and *poto* to achieve *tangata kakato* are meaningfully utilised.

Konai Helu Thaman (2003, p. 2) argued that education in Aotearoa, particularly for ethnic minorities such as Pasifika and Tongans, continues to be "culturally undemocratic in the sense that their organisation, administration and curricula have not recognised the diversity of ways in which Pacific peoples communicate, relate to others, think and learn". Additionally, *ako, 'ilo, poto*, and achieving *tangata kakato* is about people: their cultural values and circular way of seeing and doing things, through their embedded culture and epistemologies. For Tongan males to be successful in Aotearoa, it is important that the context of building *tangata kakato* is taken on board and should also be reflected in educational policies and practices. Findings from this research claim

that successful Tongan male learners in Aotearoa are striving for *tangata kakato*, and have persistently learnt to hold on to their knowledge and values and embrace them through *kāinga*, self, *lotu*, and cosmos. Most importantly participants claimed that to achieve *tangata kakato* is a life searching journey where *fakapotopoto* and the *loto* of Tonga matters most.

7.3.1 *Ko Tonga mo'unga ki he loto*

To Tongans, the search for *poto* and becoming *tangata kakato* envelops the importance of *uho* and *fuo*. *Uho* signifies the inner being, the core and centrality of things, in which *fuo* permeates the outer characteristics. These two intersecting concepts coincide with *loto* (heart) and *mata/fofonga* (face). The ongoing intersection between *fofonga-fuo* and *loto-uho* is equally significant to the learning and life experiences of being a Tongan male. Tongans refer to *loto-uho* as heart, the centre, depth, and inner-spirit, (Vaka, 2014). On the other hand, *fofonga-fuo* has a number of meanings that include shape, pattern, eyes, face, representative, surface, and point (Schneider, 1977; Vaka, 2014). Likewise, Tongans believe that *fofonga* and *loto* characteristically and symmetrically reflect the onus and characteristics of being Tongan. Through performing *fatongia* and conforming to socio-cultural expectations and obligations, Tongan male learners' learn to be *fofonga poto* and *lotopoto* which allow them to become *tangata kakato.*

Additionally, Tu'itahi (2014, p.12) described *matapoto*, which has similar connotations to *fofonga poto*, as being "witty and shrewd", but on a higher level it means being "astute and highly intelligent", while *lotopoto*, is being "judicious, and wise with higher

ethical/spiritual consciousness". Both *fofonga poto* and *lotopoto* exemplify the outside and inside characteristics of being Tongan. *Fakapotopoto* connects *fofonga* and *loto,* explaining the Tongan perception of living a worthwhile and meaningful life; it builds characters inside out. The opposite, *fakavalevale,* socially deviant and unappreciative, explains the mismatch between *poto* and *'ilo* and its ill effects. Tongan male learners' personalities incline towards either *fakapotopoto or fakavalevale*, which are judged by how one contributes meaningfully to the *kāinga, lotu, fonua*, and cosmos. For Tongan male learners, being unsuccessful at higher education was often the result of poor decisions, *fakavalevale*, which cost them their future.

 The findings of this research postulate that successful Tongan male learners are able to contextualise and intrinsically cultivate connections between *fofonga-fuo* and *loto-uho.* Two concepts that profoundly explain the connection between *fofonga* and *loto* are *no'oloto*, and *kanoloto*. Significantly, *no'oloto* embodies two words, *no'o*, which means to bind together, engage, to connect, and *loto,* heart/soul. In this research context *no'oloto* literally means binding the *fofonga* and *loto* by engaging, empowering, and nurturing the heart; a lifelong journey where one encompasses learning through *no'oloto* to become *tangata kakato*.

No'oloto is a deeper level and process of constructing meaning, by accumulating knowledge and values. *No'oloto* exemplifies that learning is a journey and a process where the learner continually collects, assesses, and evaluates knowledge and values. Tongan male learners learn, through *no'oloto*, how to internalise and reflect the

importance of becoming *tangata kakato*, and the ability to navigate and negotiate holistically. Most importantly, a Tongan, anywhere, can survive all the odds in life if searching to become *tangata kakato* is meaningfully bound to the *loto*, and is being reciprocated daily.

Additionally, there is a Tongan saying, *koe 'olunga he kaliloa,* which literally means "to rest one's head on the long pillow"; however the proverb means "to rest one's head on the mother's arm." In Tonga, in the evening, the children rest their heads on their mother's arm, even their grandma's while she tells them protocols, values and norms of behaviour, the problems of the family and of the country, soothes their fears, heals their wounds, answers questions, and is a philosopher and provider. Perhaps there is a need for parents and *kāinga* to revive and continue practicing this old wisdom, because our people are feeling disenchanted and disillusioned. However, findings of this research explain the paramount roles of the *kāinga*, especially the parents; the hardships and struggles that have helped to nurture *no'oloto,* building a deeper sense of understanding and appreciation which have led to the success of many Tongan male learners.

However, the search for becoming *tangata kakato* does not end with *no'oloto,* but is a prerequisite to *kanoloto*: *Kano*, which means central, part of, and inclusive, and *loto*, inner soul and heart. *Kanoloto,* then, exemplifies that all learning must be embedded to become an integral part of the *fofonga* and *loto.* In a literal sense, the process of *tangata kakato* simply demands that when knowledge and principles are *no'o* to the *loto*, it sinks

in and becomes a part of it – *kanoloto* epitomises meaningful application of knowledge and values. Adding *kanoloto* to the circular learning process exemplifies the higher learning process of internalising and embracing values and principles, thus achieving *tangata kakato*. Moreover, to motivate a Tongan male learner to learn or oblige, the *loto*, heart or soul, is crucial. This is quite important, because it explains that the searching to become *poto*, and achieving *tangata kakato*, is based on accepting the premise that knowledge and meaning must be (re)navigated and (re)negotiated continually; thus the processes of *no'oloto* and *kanoloto* are expedient to becoming *tangata kakato*.

Significantly, the journey to reach *tangata kakato* is best exemplified by the old Tongan saying, "*Tonga mo'unga ki he loto*", which literally means "the mountain of Tonga is the heart". Tongans are well known for their prowess, persistence, mental endurance, and loving and compassionate hearts. Additionally, the physical smallness of Tonga means that you will find no mountain there; however Tongans refer to the *loto* as their only mountain, which helps them conquer obstacles in life,

 Similarly, the term *fo'i piliote* (just a dot) refers to a physical representation of where Tongans' heritage is, but symbolically reflects its geographical smallness and scarce resources. Furthermore, *si'i kae ha* (small but significant) explains Tongans' mental capacity to persist and persevere through challenges. It also signifies that despite coming from "just a dot" they have high aspirations to succeed. Tonga's only resources are its people and their compassionate hearts; truly their *loto* is their most valuable possession. *Loto* is their mountain and, to conquer anything, first and foremost the *loto*

must be passionately nourished and cultivated through the processes of *kanoloto* and *no'oloto*.

Physically, then, there is no mountain in Tonga, but metaphorically one will find a mountain through the *loto* of the Tongans. Tongans believe that *loto* is the centre of all things, because if the *loto* is desirous enough, then nothing is impossible. In reality, there is no bigger obstacle in life than a *loto* that is reluctant and hesitant, but for a heart that is willing, eager, and passionate, the sky is the limit. Similarly, participants talked of *lotolah*i, a stout/brave heart, as a quality that enables them to weather obstacles and challenges. When *loto* becomes the only mountain, the educational journey becomes more meaningful and worthwhile, even allowing timely sacrifices. Throughout this study, participants concurred that despite facing myriad difficulties, when the heart is inspired and encouraged, nothing is impossible.

7.3.2 Being a Tongan male learner

"It's a way of seeking to provide and reciprocate". One of the questions that was asked during the data collection process was *"What does it mean to be a Tongan male learner?"* The quote above reflects the majority of participants' responses: being a Tongan male learner is never a small task, especially when the welfare, responsibilities, expectations, and hopes of the *kāinga, lotu,* and *fonua* are shouldered on him. A *talanoa* was related by my grand uncle, who happened to tutor the late King of Tonga, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, at Nafualu-Tupou College in the 1930s. When the young Prince was sent to Newington for his college years and later to Sydney University, he had a

very close friend, Molitoni Fisiihoi Finau. They were both competitive in their studies, but the young Prince was even more determined to succeed. When Finau asked him why he was so determined and persistent the Prince humbly replied, "You know Finau; you are alright, for you can have so many excuses not to make it here. As for me, I have none. There are so many burdens on my shoulders, my family, my *kāinga*, my people and my country; I am here for Tonga" (Finau, 1994). That statement literally represents the bold conviction of many successful Tongan male learners, and why they persist and endure the challenges of higher education in Aotearoa.

Further to this, one participant shared that being a Tongan male learner through *ako* "is, to go, to find and to bring" (*Tālave*, Fekena). He did so ingeniously by splitting the word *ako* into 'a', 'k' and 'o', whereby a represents *'alu*, to take an educational journey; k denotes *kumi*, searching, engaging, and learning through critical lenses, and o represents '*omi*, to bring about results, to make a worthwhile contribution. The findings agreed that one of the main reasons for Tongan male learners to pursue higher education was to fulfill their responsibilities and reciprocate, through their *fatongia*, a sense *'ofa* and *hounga'ia*, especially for what their *kāinga* and community had done for them. These successful Tongan male learners possess a holistic understanding of the purpose of *ako, 'ilo,* and *poto*, and the need to fulfil their responsibilities through serving and providing for their *kāinga* and community. The findings also reiterated the premise that successful Tongan male learners are those that have a deep, cultural understanding of their responsibilities and obligations to *kāinga, lotu,* and *fonua.*

It was also evident from the findings that although quite a number of participants were born and raised in Aotearoa, their sense of meaning and understanding of what it meant to be a Tongan male learner was deep and very moving. The influence of *anga-fakatonga* and *lotu* was acknowledged as significant, especially on a Tongan male learner's self-efficacy of *ako, 'ilo,* and *poto,* particularly when adapting and adjusting to life in Aotearoa. Through life and learning experiences successful Tongan male learners have come to understand the sacrifices that were made for them, and have built a sense of purpose and meaning in order to attain success at higher education.

7.4 **The worlds of Tongan male learners**

The journey to achieve *poto* and *tangata kakato* necessitates Tongan male learners successfully charting their journey through the worlds of; *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos (refer to fig.8, pg. 283). When analysing the concept of worlds from the research findings, several significant variables emerged to inform the experiences of Tongan male learners at higher education. Firstly, Tongan males had their own perception of the worlds in which they live and how these worlds were affecting them. Growing up with a circular and collectivistic paradigm, surrounded by Tongan parents, friends, and *kāinga*, Tongan values and knowledge system, formed their first world. Secondly, the worlds of *kita,* is represented by *loto-uho*, the soul and heart of the person, through circular learning, Tongan male learners independently and collectively make choices, thus building character and self-esteem. Additionally, *lotolahi,* brave heart, *fofonga poto*, and *lotopoto,* all contributed to the life-learning process of *no'oloto* and *kanoloto*, and the

quest to achieve *tangata kakato*, holistic being. Self-efficacy connotes the importance of building positive self-belief and self–determination, to create resilience to challenges and obstacles. Thirdly, *lotu* represents another influential world that fundamentally shapes Tongan male attitudes and behaviours and adds another dimension to *poto* and *tangata kakato*. The influences of *kāinga,* self, and *lotu* are significant, which can be both detrimental and beneficial to the cause of Tongan male learners.

Nonetheless, as the learning journey unfolds, their cosmos and institutional entities, such as working place, learning providers, and government agencies, take significant control and influence life's choices. Learners increasingly succumbed to overarching forces from the worlds in which they live. It is evident that these overarching and overlapping worlds continually shape and define life and learning experiences. Previous studies of Pasifika and Tongan learners in Aotearoa have pointed out that there are distinct worlds that guide and influence learning experiences (Hau'ofa, 2003b; Havea, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Kalāvite & Hoogland, 2005; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b ; 'Otunuku, 2011; Salitiban, 2012).

This research further builds on this premise of distinct/multiple worlds, by portraying four inter-relating worlds; *kāinga*, self, *lotu*, and cosmos, to highlight and encompass the stumbling blocks and stepping stones that are affecting Tongan male learners in higher education. The growing divide in socio-economic wellbeing is reflected in a downturn in numbers of Tongan and Pasifika men pursuing higher education. Both government interventions and educational institutions have failed to guide and retain these students

through to completion, emphasising the need to scrutinise current policies and practices (Johnson, 2012; Tanielu & Johnson, 2013, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). This research substantiates the need to understand the worlds of the ethnic minority learners, such as Tongans, and to draw insights from their voices on how to improve access, participation, and completion. They see, perceive, and do things differently, and that does not mean that they do not have the potential to succeed; it is a matter of exploiting their strengths. In fact, voices of the participants further authenticate how the worlds of Tongans are closely inter-related and strong in their daily lives. Indeed, identifying and synthesising the roles and influences of their worlds provides better insight into how best to alleviate the issues and ascertain better policies and strategies for Pasifika and Tongan male learners.

Figure 8. The worlds of Tongan male learner
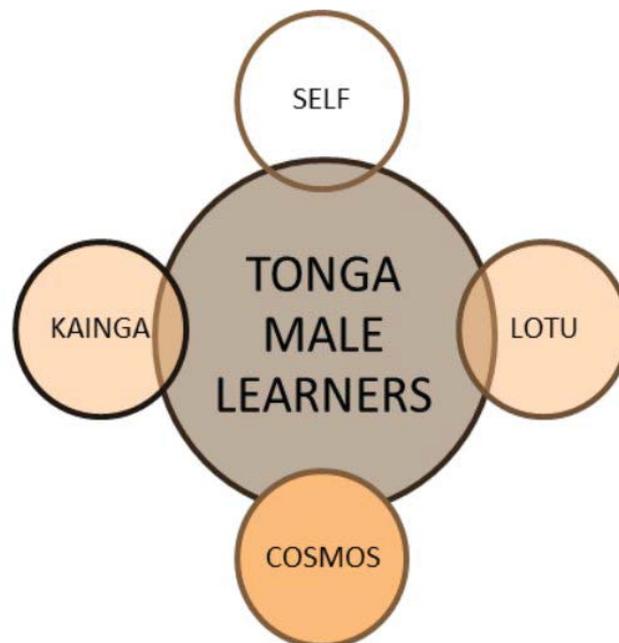
7.4.1 *Kāinga*

Findings from this research illuminate *kāinga* as a significant world that shapes and influences the lives and learning experiences of Tongan male learners. Within the world of the *kāinga* are the nuclear family, extended family, friends, partners and peers, and community. From birth to death, *kāinga* plays an integral part in shaping and moulding life and learning through the process of socialisation. Negotiating and navigating these contexts proved to be challenging for male Tongan learners. Contemporary research validates that students with *kāinga* who have high educational expectations and who are devoted to supporting and encouraging them as much as their resources permit, have higher accomplishments (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003; Havea, 2011; Kalāvite & Hoogland, 2005; Kalāvite, 2010; 'Otunuku, 2011; Salitiban, 2012).

It has been recognised that the *kāinga* understands of the learner's learning and educational expectations, and the opportunity to contribute ideas about practices can increase student motivation and skills (Chu et al., 2013; Madjar et al., 2010a; 2010b). These findings also concur with how the world of the *kāinga* plays a pivotal role in facilitating or obstructing the learning journey of Pasifika learners. The influence of peers and partners was also theorised by researchers to affect the learning experience of Pasifika and Tongan learners (Kalāvite, 2010; Salitiban, 2012). The embedded nature of the cultural interface and cultural values plays a significant role in affecting and influencing learners' learning experiences.

However, this research was significant and unique in many aspects because it was one of the first to explore the factors of minority, ethnicity, and gender in relation to identifying the stumbling blocks and stepping stones for learning in higher education. This research theorises, from the outset, that Tongan males play a pivotal role in the circles of *kāinga*, and that there is a strong correlation between the world of *kāinga* and that of the learner. The prevalence of respect and the solidarity of the Tongan family structure were communicated clearly and continually throughout the findings of this research. Tongans talk of family in the context of extended circles and make references to the importance of observing and cultivating harmonious space for family, community, and *fonua*.

 The findings of this research also maintain the significance of the inter-dynamics that arise from various overarching variables within the domain of *kāinga,* such as community, peers and partners, extended family, values, and *anga fakatonga*. Successful Tongan male learners were those that were able to find balance within their familial obligations and the expectations posed by generational change and intergenerational family conflict. The findings also note that the cultural gaps between *kāinga* and Tongan male learners have become increasingly widened and evident, as well as the importance of having skills to negotiate and navigate harmonious *tā-vā kāinga*.

7.4.2 Self /kita

Self–belief is a world of its own and explains how life and learning experiences significantly and continually influence an individual's characteristics, attributes, and qualities. Research evidence shows that forming a cultural identity is an ongoing process of negotiation and integration (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002, 2004; Thaman, 1992, 1995, 1996a). Research shows there is a strong correlation between formation of self-identity, self-belief, and achieving success at higher education. The concept of self explains how learners make sense of their world and the worlds of *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos, and how conflicts and challenges often arise to influence their journey. Several findings by Pasifika and Tongan researchers have articulated the importance of the formation of self-identity and self-belief to learning experiences (Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; Manu'atu, 2000; Marat et al., 2011).

This research provides ethnic-gender specificity to formation of self and how it is negotiated and navigated through *tā-vā kāinga*, in relation to Tongan male life and learning experiences. *Kita* literally means self, and *'ilo'i hoto kita* means knowing thy self; socio-cultural boundaries and limitations are very important concepts in Tonga. Within the cultural protocols of Tonga, when a person formally addresses an audience, a *fakataputapu* is given at the beginning to acknowledge respect and authority. It denotes that for a Tongan to fulfil any responsibilities, even to embark on a learning journey, they must first learn to know themselves – *'ilo'i hoto kita* – roots, background, and

heritage, which give meaning to the reasons behind fulfilling responsibilities and obligations.

Formation of self in Tonga is often associated with moving from *vale* (ignorant) to *'ilo*, thus achieving *poto* and *tangata kakato.* Research shows that becoming Tongan and *tangata kakato* – and, in this context, a successful Tongan male learner – encompasses a holistic approach to both gender and ethnicity. The findings of this research delineate how being a Tongan male learner comes with responsibility and reciprocity, solidarity and respect, love and obedience. Through *tā-vā kāinga*, self is continually re-negotiated and re-navigated to allow meaningful transition throughout the four worlds of Tongan male learners. Stereotypes of self – such as big, strong, lazy, brown, athletic, stubborn, unemployed, reckless, and hasty – have a significant influence on the learning experiences of Tongan male learners. The findings of this research articulate that successful Tongan male learners are those with a positive self-image and outlook of themselves and able to make the transition from one world to another confidentially and optimistically.

Findings from this research describe how Tongan male learners (re)navigate and (re)negotiate through these worlds, even shifting their cultural boundaries in order to find the appropriate *tā-vā*, space and time, for their learning. Through *tā-vā kāinga,* and making the transit from one world to another, and even internalising and living these principles, Tongan male learners often feel alone and caught between cultural and academic tensions. By understanding self, Tongan male learners learn also to deal with

these tensions and collisions between their cultural identities and the identity posed by the worlds of academia, *lotu*, and the cosmos.

7.4.3 *Lotu*

In this context, *lotu* refers to religion and church, and is an important aspect of being Tongan. As mentioned in previous chapters (4, 5, and 6), *lotu* is embedded in the cultural lives of Tongans, and wherever they may be there is always a replication of Tongan *lotu* as a symbol of unity and solidarity (Fa'anunu, 2009; Havea, 2011). *Lotu*, as an transplanted institution, has increasingly transformed itself to suit the growing generational needs of those that settled, or were born, in Aotearoa. Additionally there are many elements of *lotu* that the research participants reiterated, such as the role of the *faifekau,* outreach and youth programmes, tithing and contributions, and fellowship and support. The might and influence of *lotu* have contributed diversely to the life and learning experiences of Tongan male learners in higher education.

Tongan male learners described *lotu* as being similar to a learning institution; as a setting where Tongan values and norms are strengthened and reinforced. It is a world of its own due to the significant contributions and influence that it has on the lives of Tongans, and how it has evolved and been embedded into Tongan culture. However, tension has been created in the growing confusion between the old and the new, the conservative and the liberal-minded Tongan *kāinga* in Aotearoa.

There has been little documented research on *lotu* and Pasifika education, and this contributes to the problem of making hypothetical generalisations. However the very few who have written on this issue have articulated that the influences of *lotu* on Pasifika learners are significant and substantial. Otherwise, it (Havea, 2011) was not specific enough to make valid and reliable explanations in relation to the learning experiences of Tongan male learners.

Findings from this research clearly reiterate the significant contributions of *lotu* on the lives of Tongan male learners. The role of *lotu* was strongly communicated by all participants; they spoke openly of their connection to *lotu*, the pressure to attend and take responsibility, the network and assistance that comes from it, and the source of support that helps those in need. Although attending *lotu* was a symbol of survival, unity, and solidarity, it is also clear that it illuminated both feelings of unity and disconnect within Tongan culture. While *lotu* was the place where Tongan culture was most prominent, for some, being in church was a harsh reminder of the financial exploitation, time wasted, and psychological confusion that have occurred across many generations.

Some New Zealand-born Tongan male learners felt disconnected when services were conducted in Tongan, since they had limited knowledge of the language. Others felt distracted because of the competing obligations and responsibilities that demanded their time and resources. However, this research strongly posits that successful Tongan male learners were those who were able to take advantage of the positive contributions

of *lotu*, despite setbacks and deviations. They believed that *lotu* had helped them in their quest of becoming *tangata kakato.*

The world of *lotu* further exemplified overarching, inherent, and prevalent issues that cannot be understood in isolation. Findings show that not all *lotu* were the same: while some remain orthodox and conservative, there are significant numbers who have taken drastic measures to invest and help their members accomplish educational goals. When *lotu* is directly invested in members' wellbeing – demonstrated through activities such as youth counselling, *talanoa faikava,* educational expos and power ups, parent interviews, financial assistance, home visits, and teachings – the result is always overwhelming. Such activities include helping members to exploit educational and employment opportunities, having more initiatives to support family through pastoral care and counselling, financial hardship grants, and youth programmes. However when *lotu* is perceived as becoming too obsessed with absorbing finances, time, and talents from members without reciprocal exchange and investment, the result is not conducive to support Tongan males' learning. This is significant because Tongan male learners are believed to be the future of the church and it is important that investment and initiatives are set up to help them succeed.

7.4.4 Institutional and Cosmos

The word cosmos is used here to represent the various overarching macro layers of influence that are affecting Tongan male learners. This is one of the biggest worlds of the Tongan male learner, equipping them with powerful elements that influence their

educational experiences. Here the academic, social, economic, and political institutions are all fused together to represent the nature of tensions, opportunities, authority, and power resting on these structural entities, and how influential they are in shaping the access, participation, retention, and completion of Tongan male learners in Aotearoa. Well-documented research and findings have articulated how these structural entities have significantly shaped and defined the learning experiences of Pasifika and Tongan learners (Chu et al., 2013; Irwin, 2013, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; Vaioleti, 2011).

Interestingly, current political institutions play an integral part in the journey of Pasifika and Tongan learners in Aotearoa. Policies and practices initiated by local government, government ministries, and learning institutions have significant impact on participation, access, retention, and completion of Pasifika and Tongan learners. Disparities in access and participation of Tongans and Pasifika learners have prompted many stakeholders to question the direction of government policies.

Pasifika and Tongans are under-represented in local government and at the highest levels of decision-making. For the first time in history, a Tongan parliamentarian has been elected to New Zealand Parliament (in 2014), which was quite a momentous occasion. The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, though an important ministry, is treated as a minor within the current National government, which reflects their commitment to the Pasifika cause. The Ministry of Education, through partnership with other organisations such as TEC, NZQA, and other institutions, have initiated a policy

framework and research hub, which informs strategic policies and practices to help Pasifika and Tongans. Further to this, some learning institutions and policy makers are increasingly sympathetic to the cause of Pasifika and are taking drastic measures to improve participation, retention, and completion.

The economic environment reflects the vulnerability of Pasifika and Tongan populations, who are affected by doing unskilled and semi-skilled work. Current statistics show the increasing gap in wealth and power, which influences access, participation, retention, and completion of minority and ethnic learners, such as Pasifika and Tongan male learners. The findings of this study maintain that the size of Tongan families and the commitment to put food on the table and shelter above their heads have pushed a lot of young men to fast track their sports careers, and even take early employment to help their families. Family commitments and obligations have also put pressure on Tongan males making choices regarding their education (Johnson, 2012; Statistics New Zealand, 2013; Tanielu &Johnson, 2013, 2014).

Academic institutions are pushing for more funding to provide for equity and equality; on the other hand the international rankings of many are affected, causing strategic moves to look at how to make courses academically challenging and competitive. Others have launched specific initiatives to target minority learners and increase access, retention, and completion. Yet, there is a scarcity of well-documented research on strategies to improve the outcomes of Pasifika learners, as they represent the most vulnerable group in Aotearoa. The educational outcomes are still not very encouraging

given the resources, time and effort that have been spending on trying to find possible solutions. Findings from this research strongly indicate that there needs to be a specifically Pasifika unit, with Pasifika staff continually probing ways to improve Pasifika learners. Having a Pasifika unit as part of the learning institution indicates deep commitment to finding ways to improve access, retention, and completion of Pasifika leaners.

Financial initiatives provided by academic institutions play a significant role in attracting and encouraging Pasifika learners. Alternative pathways are also important, especially for skills that demand immediate employment, such as construction and industrial skills. Networks and peer support were also significant, playing an important role in facilitating learning. An academic and cultural space is important to Tongan and Pasifika learners, and there is also a need to initiate community partnerships through *lotu* and community groups, to revive their sense of support and the importance of higher education.

7.5 Major Themes

This research thesis has identified a range of factors that contribute to formulation of major themes to provide a better understanding of issues that influence the educational journey of Tongan male learners. Through the voices of Tongan male learners and the four worlds which they traverse, four overarching themes arise to explain the complications of their journey: socio-economic inequality, passions and visions, tensions and pressures, and understanding the culture of the learning institution.

7.5.1 Socio-Economic Inequalities

Contemporary research and literature have validated that socio-economic inequalities, such as education, are related to class and ethnicity. I theorised from the outset (Chapter 3) that the experiences of Tongan males are influenced by elements of socio-economic inequalities. Western institutions and practices control access to wealth, education, and decision-making. Lack of access to better education has continued to derail many in the poverty cycle. Pasifika and Tongan people are struggling because they do not have the resources or the power to make dramatic changes. They have been affected by issues such as poverty, lack of employable skills, restricted access to higher education, and demography since making Aotearoa their home. The socio-economic gap is still blatantly overlooked, with no realistic and long term solution (Anae et al., 2002; Benseman et al., 2006; Johnson, 2011, 2012; Johnson & Tanielu, 2013, 2014; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b).

7.5.2 Poverty and Health

Current statistics and data from contemporary research further reiterate the growing divide and pattern of inequality in Aotearoa, showcasing Pasifika and Tongans with the poorest economic, educational, and health outcomes (Johnston, 2012; Johnson & Tanielu, 2013, 2014; Vaka,2014). While significant progress has been made in increasing overall socio-economic access and participation rates for Pasifika and Tongan, closer investigation of the data shows the faultline of poverty is dramatically increasing. Current statistical evidence from Tanielu and Johnson (2014) shows that the percentage

of poverty has dramatically risen from 14% in the 1980s, to 27% by 2014 with more than 285,000 New Zealand children living in poverty. About 70% of these are from Maori and Pasifika families. More than 60% of all families in Aotearoa are living below the national mean income, with 180,000 children regularly without basic necessities, and 6% living in severe poverty. Similarly, OECD (2013) reports that the gap between the richest and the poorest is widening – the top 20% of the population earn five times as much as the bottom 20%. Truly there is an increasing socio-economic divide, which affects the well-being of Pasifika and Tongans pursuing higher education.

Tongan *kāinga* and families who live in poverty are likely to be exposed to severe health and economic issues, such as hunger and living in cold, over-crowded houses. Sick children do not usually see the doctor, as parents cannot afford to pay for transportation and other related costs. On a daily basis parents struggle to provide a decent lunch for their offspring, let alone providing stationary and school uniforms. Realistically, living in poverty has lasting repercussions, causing behavioral problems, truancy, and being stood down from school, followed by academic disorientation, unemployment, and potentially committing crimes. This vicious cycle explains how poverty has a ripple effect on Pasifika and Tongans. Many resort to the culture of fast food and takeaways because of working long hours for minimum wages and the rising cost of eating healthily. Such eating habits have brought health-related problems, such as obesity, eating disorders, gout, and high blood pressure. Health and wellbeing and having the ability to successfully pursue higher education are important (Vaka, 2014).

Despite this however, there is a saying, "where there is a will there is a way", and indeed that has been the situation for many successful participants, who have battled against the odds, growing up with these socio-economic impediments. Despite these stumbling blocks, participants spoke valiantly of how their experiences of poverty and living with these everyday issues had given them determination, purpose, and meaning to persist at, and pursue higher education. They also spoke positively of how the *kāinga* way of life shared and pulled resources together to enable Tongan male learners to pursue higher education goals. Seeing how families sacrificed their well-being for learning created greater willpower and energy to accomplish goals.

7.5.3 Access and Participation

Tongans' low participation rates in major public services sectors such as health, education, and employment are due to several complex inter-related factors. These include lack of employment skills, poverty, lifestyle factors, and financial resources. The growing disparities in wealth distribution have also affected access and participation of Tongans male in higher education. Current statistics reveal that that there are more Pasifika and Tongan males enrolled in Private Training Institutions (PTEs), which offer primarily low level certificates and diplomas, rather than the higher status degrees presented at Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs – mainly universities and polytechnics). Such a differential in educational opportunities and qualifications stems from the status quo in the socio-political institutions that privilege one dominant group over others. Despite numerous attempts to divert and invigorate policies and practices

to bridge access and participation gaps (Irwin, 2013, 2011; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; MOE- Pasifika Plan 2012-2017; Statistics New Zealand, 2014), there has been no overwhelming change. The growing rift has affected Pasifika and Tongan male learners, especially their participation, access, and completion at higher education.

Bishop et al. (2009, p. 2) stated, "What precludes significant advancement being made in addressing these educational disparities is that current educational policies and practices were developed and continue to be developed within a framework of neo/colonialism and as a result continue to serve the interests of a mono-cultural elite". Participants from this study reiterated the growing rift created by poverty, unemployment, and the struggles of growing up in their communities, which were branded with symptoms of negativity and failure. Crimes, gambling, violence, and other more minor offences and felonies have increasingly affected Tongan and Pasifika communities and their youth.

The numbers of Pasifika inmates in prison and those undertaking community service have also increased dramatically. The overrepresentation of Pasifika in prisons is a growing concern, especially for the resources spent to rehabilitate them, and the increasing trend of youth offenders. Pasifika came third in offender rates with 12% in total, with the number projected to continually increase (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). There seems to be an increase in Pasifika and Tongan youths committing petty and serious crimes, which restrains them from pursuing further education. Many have pointed to the system, stating that it fails to address the problems appropriately, and is

encouraging more Pasifika and Tongans to follow that trend (Nakhid et al., 2009, 2012; Tanielu and Johnson, 2013, 2014). Participants also made reference to growing up in a neighborhood where parties and crimes were numerous. Some, however, spoke valiantly of how they stood up against these influences and were able to commit themselves to doing something better. They attributed their strength to good role models and positive family influences.

Another area that shows huge disparity and is affecting the wellbeing of Tongan families is access to housing and affordable accommodation. Most Tongan families are concentrated in places where State houses are available, such as South and West Auckland. In fact, there is also a positive correlation between rising youth problems and crimes and places with high Pasifika population. The performances of schools in these areas are not good when compared to others and this has affected the future of many young people who desire to pursue higher education. Significant disparities in work and income distribution have affected a lot of Tongan and Pasifika families, especially in terms of access to affordable housing and living spaces. Many have experienced abrupt and successive relocation caused by working opportunities, appropriate living space, and rising cost of renting, all of which affect the learning of Tongan male learners (Tanielu and Johnson, 2013, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

Pasifika people have experienced great declines in rates of home ownership. The number of Tongan families that owned, or partly owned, their own house has changed between 2001 and 2013. About 15.3% percent owned residential property, while more

that 66% were in rental housing, either in State houses or private houses (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). This is significant, because Tongans need a positive home environment for successful learning. Participants in this study articulated their frustration over overcrowding, and lack of space due to families allowing relatives to stay with them, expensive accommodation they could not afford, and instability within the home environment due to successive family relocations. Despite these problems, findings also affirmed that the experience of having to relocate and growing up with overcrowded *kāinga* had helped them to persevere through their learning journey.

7.5.4   Income and earnings

The continuous call for a living wage reflects that people at the lower end of the economic scale are struggling and are severely affected in trying to adequately provide for their family. Calls for an increase in the minimum wage confirm that a living wage is not just about money; it's about people trying to survive. In reality, many of the working Tongan population are struggling and are forced to work long hours at more than one job. Given that the average annual income for Tongans aged 15 and above is $15,300, which is significantly lower than the national average, parents are struggling to support their family (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The repercussions of this have surfaced in many aspects, such as higher unemployment with less employable skills. Because Tongan males are the mainstay of the Tongan *kāinga*, this has pressured them to find jobs to look after their families. Therefore, most find work as unskilled or semi-

skilled laborers, with the risk of becoming unemployed or lay off. Additionally, there is also a significant 17.1% of Tongans unemployed and living on welfare.

Statistics New Zealand (2014) labels Tongans as the fastest growing ethnic group in Aotearoa, with a huge young population. If the current cycle is not broken, there are likely to be many more living on welfare with less employable skills. For this reason, therefore, to break the cycle, it is imperative that more Tongan males continue their education to get the necessary skills that would help them gain better paid jobs in the market. The perpetuation of this problem adds more strain and tensions on *kāinga* and their ability to exploit educational opportunities in Aotearoa. Well-documented research by, Havea (2011), Kalāvite (2010, 2012), Salitiban (2012) and Tu'itahi (2009) concur about the problems created by lack of employable skills in Tongan families overseas. When one or two in the family were able to achieve higher education qualifications, there has been a cyclic change in a lot of aspects in the *kāinga,* such as family members being more likely to follow and pursue higher education. The findings from this research articulate the impact of those who make the *kāinga* proud, and become the first to receive higher education honours, often becoming *Amatakiloa*, torchlight for others to follow.

Resources and living spaces were collectively shared for those living with big *kāinga* and frequent visitors from the Islands. Often these were not enough; however there is always *kavenga,* obligation either for church, *kāinga*, or Tongan visitors. Younger Tongan males are forced to seek full-time employment as unskilled laborers to help out their

families, who are also at risk of committing felonies and offences. Having to work with no sets of skills perpetuates the inequality and poverty cycle, as most face the risk of being unemployed and living on a minimum wage. Participants in this study spoke of the hardships they faced because they did not possess the resources to provide for their families, while concentrating and putting more effort into their studies. On the other hand, others spoke prudently of how these life learning experiences had forced them to open their eyes and appreciate the sacrifices their parents and *kāinga* had made for them. These participants believed that seeing hardship and how families pooled resources together to help them succeed helped them to persevere through the obstacles and challenges of their educational journey.

Pressure to find means and resources for well-being have forced many to resort to unethical practices, such as gambling and drug dealing. Increasing inflation and the boom in real estate have meant that rent and mortgages consumed most of their wages leaving meager resources for well-being and education (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Participants in this study concluded that the most addicted gamblers in the Tongan community are males, which affected the well-being of the family members. Research on gambling shows that many of these people are increasingly vulnerable due to seeking easy means to cash and money. Problems seemed to outweigh any benefits, with Pasifika males as principal players. Statistics on addictive gambling showed that Pasifika churches were encouraging gambling through housie and bingo as a major source of income; sadly it sends out mixed signals to the Pasifika community (Tuʻitahi,

Guttenbeil-Po'uhila, Hand, & Htay, 2004). The addictive nature of this has caused many issues, such as family problems and violence, but there is little awareness of seeking professional counselling and treatment ('Ofanoa & Raeburn, 2014).

7.5.5 Aspirations, vision and passion

The historical foundation of modern Tonga at Pouono, Vava'u, in 1839 saw King George Tupou I addressing his people with a spiritual prayer; *"Oh God our Father, I give unto you my land and my people, and all generations of people who follow after me. I offer them to be protected by Heaven".* The King cited from the Old Testament (Hosea 4:6), "*Oku 'auha hoku kakai koe masiva 'ilo*", my people are perishing from the lack of vision (BYU-H, 2007). Such profound admonishment has embedded itself in the hearts and minds of Tongans, especially the value of catching a vision and achieving higher education.

In this study, participants disclosed how a strong desire and collective aspiration through self, *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos, meaningfully impelled Tongan male learners to thrive in their educational journey. There are many factors that have shaped of Tongan male learners' aspirations and passion to succeed, such as pride and reciprocity, *masiva* (poverty), open *talanoa, fatongia*, positive influences, *lotolahi*, faith, and belief. Participants believed that their parents had made the right choice to raise them in Aotearoa, which allowed them better opportunities in life. Literature on Tongans in Aotearoa concurs that desire and aspiration to succeed and pursue higher education are influenced by *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos (Faleolo, 2012; Fehoko, 2014; Havea, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010; Latu, 2009; Mahina, 2006, 2008; Manu'atu, 2000; Tu'itahi, 2009; Vaioleti,

2011; Vaka, 2014). However, findings of this study were unique because of its gender specificity.

7.5.6 Faith and *lotu*

The Tongan motto, "*Koe 'Otua mo Tonga ko hoku tofi'a*", which literally means, "God and Tonga are my inheritance", symbolises the significance of *lotu* in the lives of Tongans. Though *lotu* was brought by the LMS in the 17th century, it has become an embedded force in Tongan's lives. Tonga, a very small island, is famously referred to as *fo'i piliote,* just a dot, which explains its lack of resources, and material wealth. However, Tongans are proud of its smallness and that heritage. *Si'i kae hā*, small but significant, explains the Tongan mentality and spiritual strength of coming from a *fo'i piliote*, but desiring to make an impact, to succeed, especially in higher education. For Tongans, their inheritance and their wealth is God, and is proudly referred to as their *fungani mata'ikoloa*, prized possession; the belief that, with God, they can achieve the impossible.

Findings of this study significantly point to the strong influence of *lotu* in the lives of the Tongan students, self-sacrifices and *kāinga* in Aotearoa (see also, Havea, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010). Participants proudly reiterated and acknowledged the influence of *lotu* in helping them to aspire and press forward with vigilance and purpose. Participants also provided an insightful perspective on how the spiritual dimensions of *lotu* inspired them with *lotolahi*, *mafulahi, lotopoto, and fofonga poto* to succeed at higher education. Through various youth programmes, counselling sessions, bible study sessions, and

other outreach programmes, both spiritually and physically, participants felt they were provided with a strong passion and faith to succeed in their studies.

The concepts of *no'oloto* and *kanoloto* are deepened through the exercise of faith and work. Faith alone cannot, in itself, create success, until sacrifice is made accordingly. Tongans males learned to understand the meaning of self-sacrifice and helped internalise the principles of *lotu* into their daily lives through *no'oloto* and *kanoloto*, which allowed them to be more passionate and eager to succeed. Findings of this study concur that *lotu* instills a strong sense of faith and confidence, allowing participants to persevere with passion and vision. Financial incentives and other programmes also helped participants to vigorously press forward with their dreams and passions and offer opportunities for others to succeed. Participants also referred to congregational support through constructive *talanoa*, power up study programmes, youth programmes, and other *lotu*-sponsored activities as ways to give back to the community, and enable others to have the same opportunity of pursuing higher education.

7.5.7   Pastoral care and Counselling

Participants highlighted the role played by their minsters, members, and the fellowships were significant in helping them succeed. Facing problems and how to overcome them is one of the major stumbling blocks for Tongan male learners. However, results from this study show that successful participants create healthy relationships with their ministers through open and confidential dialogue, especially on issues that were affecting their studies. Successive and continuous *talanoa* help build

confidence and self-esteem and alleviate negativity, which plagues a lot of Tongan male learners. Participants felt that having the confidence to seek help through the ministers was an important commitment, as well as knowing that there was confidentiality and protection of privacy. The findings also provide significant evidence that there is a generational shift, whereby New Zealand-born Tongans are often not comfortable to talk to the ministers when they are facing problems. Most Tongan churches are now equipped with qualified pastoral leaders to help address these problems.

7.5.8 Kāfataha pea tākanga ʻetau fohe

Tongans were notable *kalia* builders and seafarers, and *kafa* (coconut fiber rope) was specially made to connect body-parts of the *kalia*. The strength and durability of the *kalia* rested on how well the *kafa* fastened the *katea/hama,* outrigger of the *kalia,* through the skillful hands of the master builder, *tufunga-vaka*. *Kāfataha* entails the unique and elaborative methods and skills of fastening the *kafa*, allowing the *kalia* to become one part.

Kāfataha also entails oneness and togetherness, the importance of all the body parts, and their coherent purpose. Clearly, the success of the journey rests on how the body parts remain tied together during the journey, against winds and rough waves of the ocean, and the knowledge of the *kaivai*, navigator, when facing Moana nui. However, the concept of *kāfataha*, as explained by Halapua (2013) is about building, development, and working towards some common goal. Clearly, working together as a team is critically important for any sea voyage to reach safety. It does not necessarily disregard or

underestimate fierce storms and weather that makes Moana nui unpredictable and often volatile.

Equally important is the concept of *tākanga 'etau fohe', pea lūsia ki taulanga*, which literally means paddle together in unity and, though weatherworn, the voyage will persevere and persist to reach home. This concept speaks of unity through appreciating and acknowledging diversity, and explains the importance of working together, remaining content, and employing passion to succeed. It also explains the importance of working as a team, *kāinga* and all stakeholders, for the duration of the journey. Findings of this study relay an important message pertaining to the importance of *kāinga*, *lotu*, self, and the cosmos, taking ownership and responsibility for the learning journey of Tongan male learners. Successful male learners did not sway or forget their ultimate goal and aspiration to make their *kāinga* proud. Achievement was regarded as a token of appreciation and gratitude for what their parents and *kāinga*, *lotu,* and cosmos had done for them during their educational journey.

This research empirically reiterates that Tongan male learners collectively possess strong aspirations and a vision to succeed. They attributed their success to the effort of others and the visions, sacrifices, and willing hands of *kāinga, lotu*, cosmos and self, which supported them throughout their studies. Any form of achievement or success was deemed to be a collective blessing, which was always acknowledged and reciprocated through *mamahi'ime'a* (loyalty*)*, *talangofua* (obedience), *fatongia (*obligation*)*, and *'ofa (*love*)*. One participant recalled how his parents first arrived here in the 1980s,

and his Dad affirmed, *"koe hē mai ki he fonua ni koe siofaki ha kaha'u ma'a kimoutolu"*, which means "the sole reason for moving here was to give you the best opportunity to secure a better future" (Talanoa, Fuekafa). Truly this represents the mandate of many Tongans who have taken the opportunity to make Aotearoa their home, the opportunity to make a difference. However, many have forgotten the dreams and aspirations that caused their *kāinga* to migrate to Aotearoa. Another participant said:

One of the reasons that we lose our enthusiasm in life is because we become ungrateful for what our parents have done for us. We let what was once an opportunity for our parents becomes common to us. We get so accustomed to the goodness, it becomes a routine. Be grateful for how far our parents have come to give us a better life. (Talanoa, Sialetafa)

This is a profound statement because it frankly testifies to some of the challenges that Tongan males face here in Aotearoa and how they have deviated away from the dreams of their parents.

Tongans are a communal people, so it is not surprising that their educational journey and success is acknowledged and attributed to *kāinga,* self, *lotu*, and cosmos. I remember when I first came to Aotearoa, in the early '90s, most of my *kāinga* came to bid me farewell and to give me words of encouragement and wisdom. My Dad cautioned me in front of my *kāinga*; *"Foha, 'alu 'o fai e ako ke 'osi, he koe fiefia'anga ia e fonua, lotu moe fāmili"*, which literally means, "My son, go and pursue your education, your success will bring honor to family, *lotu,* and country". There was little reference

that my education was solely for my own growth. The need of *fonua, lotu*, and *kāinga* was in front of me as the reason for my education.

Tongans' passions and aspirations to succeed are firmly built on communalism, and often acknowledged as an "ownership gesture" (Kalāvite, 2010, 2013). I also remember when attending various graduation celebrations, a biography is often included during the occasion, informing everybody of the background, genealogy, and roots. Participants of this study strongly agreed that all stakeholders are acknowledged because of their effort and ownership during the educational journey of the learner. The recognition of *fonua, kāinga*, and *lotu* exemplify the Tongan saying that it takes an island/community to raise a child, which is true when success is cherished and celebrated.

7.5.9 *Makafetoli'aki*

Tongans were skilled limestone sculptors and builders, as evidenced by the erecting of the *Langi*, ancient tombs, and *Ha'amonga 'a Maui* trilithon. It is believed that such extraordinary megalithic artwork and craftsmanship started during the time of Tu'itatui, the 11th Tu'itonga, and approximately 800 years ago (Latukefu, 1974). Present day remains of these ancient relics reveal the skills and knowledge of the early Tongan dynasty and kingship. The meaning of *makafetoli'aki* is believed to have originated from this time. Literally it comprises two words: *maka* means stone and *fetoli'aki*, equally and inter-changeably chipping away, so in a literal sense it means reciprocally fragmenting and chipping away the limestone to produce the masterwork. The building of the *Langi*

and the *Ha'amonga* was an arduous effort that needed precision and skill. Through *makafetoli'aki, tufunga maka*, skilled stone sculptors, were able to shape and contour the form and building of the stonework.

Makafetoli'aki is used in this research context to explain that producing success for Tongan male learners is not just the work of one person, but requires the collective and reciprocal efforts of all stakeholders. It requires constant chipping, contouring, and polishing. *Makafetoli'aki* informs how success for Tongan male learners must be a collective and reciprocal effort, demanding regularity and constant contribution and determination from *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos. Contemporary literature supports the notion that *kāinga* and stakeholders are passionate about seeing their families succeed. They provide significant impetus, which allows Tongan male learners an opportunity to pursue higher education, in return acknowledging their help as part of the learning journey (Havea, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Manu'atu & Kepa, 2006; Salitiban, 2012; Tu'itahi, 2014).

Clearly, participants believed that their *kāinga* were passionate about their educational journey because it allowed the *kāinga* some form of socio-cultural recognition with economic benefits. An important point arising from this finding was that many participants became successful in their educational journey because they obligingly toiled with their *kāinga* and they desired and aspired to thrive for their *kāinga*. It was suggested that being successful in their studies was the only acceptable way to satisfy and reciprocate the tireless effort and support of their *kāinga*.

These findings suggest that parents and stakeholders must understand that, for many Tongan male learners, the value of *kāinga* contributions is critically significant to them. *Kāinga* can also contribute by molding and inserting values and characteristics that help Tongan male learners to persist and persevere through challenges. Some participants stated that their passion to succeed was the result of the advice their parents gave based on their academic and life experiences. Constant *pōtalanoa*, night chatting, and updates helped to remind them of their goals and the importance of succeeding. It was noted in this study that many participants realised that their parents, despite many of them having limited education, could assist them through *talanoa*, which alleviated the pressures and load of studying. It was also noted that the influence of well-educated parents also played a significant psychological and academic role for some participants. According to the interview data, some participants were motivated to succeed because they wanted to be as successful as their parents were. Other respondents indicated that their parents had been able to assist them by giving academic help and advice, which helped their understanding and knowledge of some subject areas. *Makafetoli'aki,* then, highlights that success for Tongan male learners at higher education requires constant and regular support from all stakeholders, especially the *kāinga*, who play a vital role in their educational journey.

7.5.10 Strain and confusion

Within the worlds of the Tongan male learners, there are prevailing conflicts that cause strain and confusion, or even harmony, when traversing and transiting from one world

to another, and how they perceive and conceptualise reality through these worlds. First is the struggle between the individual and his worlds, and second is the battle of competing knowledge and values, the circular and collective against linear and individualistic. These competing elements and issues have potentially supported or constrained the learning experiences of Tongan male learners and their relationship with the stakeholders and worlds within which they operate. Reaching their destination successfully depended on how resourceful Tongan males react to their worlds and the support they receive from stakeholders.

Tongan culture operates on a circular platform, different to that of the Western world; this is supported by various contemporary commentators and also reflected in the findings of this research (Faleolo, 2012; Havea, 2011; Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Koloto, 2003; Salitiban, 2012; Thaman, 1988; Vaioleti, 2011; Vaka, 2014). Successful Tongan male learners are those who are able to negotiate and navigate their way through the worlds of *lotu*, self, *kāinga*, and cosmos in order to succeed in higher education. Within these worlds there are complications and harmony, which can be aggravated or pacified by different tensions and pressures. This overarching theme particularly relates to how participants (re)navigate and (re)negotiate their way through thin and thick, rough and calm barriers and obstacles, through their life and learning experiences.

Tongans here in Aotearoa are deeply proud of their heritage. The last Rugby World Cup, held here in 2011, bore witness to how Tongans passionately display their pride. Twenty-first century Aotearoa, with second and third generation New Zealand-born

Tongans, poses a growing rift in language and socio-economic values. Some are increasingly liberal and open-minded about what aspects of Tongan values and culture need to be changed. The *lotu* itself is finding it hard to run Tongan language services for the youth because many of them do not understand the language and doctrinal values. In fact, some *lotu* have provided bi-lingual services to encourage more youth into the fold, thus connecting them to the values of the *lotu*. Others have initiated language nests through early childhood learning as a way of reinserting language and cultural values. The growing financial responsibilities of *lotu* have posed financial problems for families, though some *lotu* also provide financial assistance, which helps offset these financial burdens.

Cultural rituals, such as funerals, birthdays, and marriages, have increasingly become a financial burden with added psychological anxiety, which affects families for prolonged periods of time. Others do not forget their responsibility to their motherland, and send money there when it is needed, while the family struggles to pay rent and other financial commitments, such as school tuition, within New Zealand. Moreover, the size of the *kāinga* and how Tongans accommodate relatives and friends, despite limited space and financial resources, adds to tensions and pressure. The media have portrayed negative stereotypes of Pasifika and Tongans as a "burden" for New Zealand, especially with unemployment, and aggravated by increasing numbers of crime-related offences (Johnston & Tanielu, 2013, 2014). The influences of gambling, drugs, and alcohol also pose increasing tensions and pressure for Tongan families, ruining the lives of many.

These socio-economic issues have created tensions and pressures that affect the lives of Tongan male learners in Aotearoa.

7.5.11 *Loto lahi moe mafu lahi*

Although these tensions and pressures are competing and damaging, many are able to negotiate and navigate their way through and find success, which is significant and unique to the findings of this study. Tongans believe that *loto* is central to the socio-physical wellbeing, and must be positively cultivated and motivated when facing challenges. This bonds with the Tongan saying, *"Koe Tonga mo'unga ki he loto",* "the mountain of Tonga is the heart". To conquer life and learning one must learn to nourish and contain the power of *loto*. When that is contained and nurtured, success becomes possible. The findings of this research speak significantly of how loto is cultivated and become important to the educational journey of the Tonga male *lotolahi* and *mafulahi,* literally mean stout heart and brave heart, and are an aspect of being Tongan that drives many to succeed, despite facing tumultuous tensions and pressures. These two concepts are related and connected to *no'oloto* and *kanoloto*, previously discussed, where values and knowledge are being individually internalised. Socio-economic circumstances, such as poverty, social ridicule, stereotyping, and low achievement in education, financial commitment to *lotu* and families, and racial partiality were viewed by many participants as undesirable and have resulted in stumbling blocks for many.

In fact, amidst these stumbling blocks Tongan male learners' shows characters to persist, adapt and persevere. According to many participants, circumstances have

inspired them to step up with *lotolahi* and *mafulahi* to succeed in their educational endeavours. Participants believed that when they faced these demanding circumstances, they tended to develop and internalise coping mechanisms, which enabled them to succeed at higher education. Tongan male learners refer to the processes of *kanoloto* and *no'oloto* as potentially significant, helping them to internalise values and knowledge that were essential to equip them with *lotolahi* and *mafulahi* to withstand and overcome obstacles.

Tongans also regard academic failure as *fakamā*, bringing shame, disgrace, or ignominy. *Fakamā* is a socially ridiculed ailment, which labels family and *kāinga* for decades. Participants reiterated that one of their motives for pushing to the limit was to make sure that their *kāinga* and family would not be ridiculed for being failures. Research related to Asian, African, and Latino students in the United States of America revealed that successful students had the same ambitions and desires as successful Tongan students. Pasifika and Aboriginal students in Australia possess similar traits and ambitions against socio-economic pressures and tensions (Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Salitiban, 2012).

Findings of this study emphasise that having *lotolahi* and *mafulahi* positively push Tongan male learners to the limit, thus allowing them to think critically. Success becomes not just a personal crusade, but hinges on the common good for the *kāinga* and family, thus making the educational journey more meaningful and worthwhile. Pressures and tensions, such as the negative preconceptions of some *papālangi* towards

Tongans, competing responsibilities, *masiva,* and lack of participation, access, and completion for Tongans at higher education, has actually motivated many participants to persist and persevere. If failure is regarded by Tongans as being socially unacceptable and a malaise, then pursuing and persevering to succeed is utterly important, and needs complete support and help from parents, *kāinga*, *lotu,* and cosmos. Role models, especially Tongans who have successfully made it to the top, can be used to provide a benchmark and pathway to many who are struggling to succeed, or to make a start. The findings of this study provide evidence that *lotolahi* and *mafulahi* are bi-products of positive nourishment and encouragement through *kāinga*, family, *lotu*, and cosmos.

7.5.12   *Fakalotofale*

Literature shows that Pasifika and Tongans have a history of navigating and traversing Oceania and one aspect of their survival was their *kāinga* orientation and focus: sharing resources and space and realising the importance of the welfare of the group (Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; Latu, 2009; Tahaafe, 2003; Tu'itahi, 2014). *Fakalotofale'ia* is a Tongan concept that can be used to refer to how Tongan male learners approach the tensions and pressures of living in Aotearoa. It consists of three words, *faka*, the way of; *loto*, inside or heart; and *fale*, house or household (Churchward, 1953). In this research context it means the process by which *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos deal with tensions and rigidities by inserting harmony and agreement. Through *"pikipiki katea kae vaevae melenga"* and *"fōfola*

e fala kae alea e kāinga", Tongans learn to pacify situations through a circular and communal approach.

Interestingly, *fakalotofale'ia* through *talanoa, tālave*, and *tālanga* can be used to nullify and pacify problems and tensions within the context of *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos. It provides a sense of open and closed dialogue with unity and understanding when nullifying problems and obstacles. This concept has been taken on board by health workers, especially for issues of mental health, youth problems, gambling, and suicide (Tahaafe, 2003). In this research context *fakalotofale'ia* is not restrictive to the medium and mode of verbal correspondence, but could also apply to the physical support that *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos provide for Tongan male learners. An important aspect of the findings unique to this study was the use of *fakalotofale'ia*, which was regarded as a form of *koloa*, wealth and knowledge. Participants felt that through *fakalotofale'ia*, personal sharing and talking, they learned to diffuse tensions and pressures, especially the rigidity and demands of higher education. Having parents, siblings, and *kāinga* who listened and wanted to initiate a form of correspondence made their educational journey more meaningful and worthwhile (Latu, 2009).

Tongans are circular and communally oriented, and through *fakalotofale'ia,* keeping a healthy and harmonious relationship is important. Tongan male learners learn the importance of creating harmonious space *vā* using *vālelei* and *vāfeinofi*. These two concepts are unique to the findings of this study (see chapter 6). Participants reiterated that successful Tongan male learners were those that were able to continuously

navigate and negotiate harmonious relations within the worlds of *kāinga*, self, *lotu*, and cosmos. The findings of this study also point out that participants were able to resort to *kāinga* and family for help and assistance when they struggled financially, or were emotionally disoriented.

Additionally *lotu*, through its moral teachings, was represented as an important tool that provides a sense of balance, peace, and stability. This was seen as an important role of the *faifekau*, through family counselling and spiritual advice. Congregational members provided significant fellowship and support, which was also highlighted by this study. Participants also shared how *lotu* helped them, physically and spiritually to weather the tensions and pressures of higher education. This study provides significant certainty of the importance of *fakalotofale'ia* through *kāinga*, *lotu*, and cosmos to the learning experiences of Tongan male students.

7.5.13   *Faka papālangi moe fakatonga*

Findings from this research show that there are situations in Aotearoa where the two cultures are densely competing, which affects Tongan male learners. Conflicts of identity and character have triggered numerous intergenerational clashes and issues. More than half of the total Tongan population were born and raised in Aotearoa, and are continuously facing tension and pressures when navigating and negotiating through the worlds of *faka papālangi* to *faka tonga* or vice versa (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Making the transition to and from *anga fakatonga* and *faka papālangi*, Tongans learn through the acculturation process elements of integration, separation,

marginalisation, and assimilation. It was evident from this study that successful Tongan male learners were those that were able to practice bi-culturalism, having the ability to negotiate and navigate successfully between the two cultures. Consistent with Morton-Lee (2003) and Fehoko (2014) who support the premise that Tongans living overseas are increasingly exposed to these processes and are redeveloping identity to suit their educational journey, participants in this study articulated that they were experiencing competing identity dilemmas and issues, which affected their learning experiences and ambitions.

Others totally connected with their roots, while some tried to operate within the boundaries of bi-culturalism and multi-culturalism thus creating *vālelei* and *vāfeinofi* (chapter 6). A few tended to switch from being *kāinga*-oriented to living with friends, gangs, and partners and totally or partially changed their outlook on life, which created *vātamaki* and *vāmamaʻo* (chapter 5) with their *kāinga*, self, *lotu,* and cosmos. At the extreme, some intended to become Westerners, *papālangi*, whom they perceived to set the norms of success, fashion, and wealth. All in all, there were tensions and pressures everywhere.

The study illustrates major tensions and pressures that some Tongan male learners face when pursuing higher education, such as the home environment, *tā-vā* of space and time in relation to responsibilities, resources, support, kāinga, *lotu*, and cosmos. Findings of this study echoed how participants felt that they possessed superior knowledge and were wiser than their migrant parents from remote villages on coral

atolls. Others were trying to operate with a Tongan world view, which inhibited them from creating meaningful connections. Participants in this study reiterated that when tensions and pressures are not dealt with properly, it reduces enthusiasm and effort to persist at overcoming challenges and obstacles. Many felt that being Tongan gave them a reason to make a difference, and were able to create positive learning networks, which helped them in their studies. This study empirically claims the importance of being able to operate on a multi-cultural platform.

Tongan *kāinga* accept that Western education helps increase socio-economic mobility, however that has come with change. Increasingly there are more New Zealand-born Tongans who are struggling to speak their own language, and are culturally incompetent, causing cultural disorientation. Institutions are increasingly disorienting them from their cultural values, hence creating disruption and conflict between the home and learning environment. This is the criticism of Said and other indigenous post-colonialists, who argued that higher education, and failure to recognise the importance of alternative knowledge imposed discursive knowledge on to others as truth (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Said, 1978; Smith, 1999). This study emphasises that the idea that to be intrinsically Tongan or *papālangi* is better, is misleading and culturally eccentric. However, participants believed that to be successful, the journey must take into consideration positive elements and reinforcements from both cultures that would allow the learner to successfully reach their goal.

The identity of Tongan males in Aotearoa is informed by both *faka pālangi and fakatonga*. Within the multicultural society of Aotearoa, Tongan male learners have learnt to create multiple identities in order to traverse the worlds of *lotu*, *kāinga*, self, and cosmos. *Tā-vā* as a concept (chapter 3) explains how Tongan male learners continually contextualise, negotiate, and navigate themselves in a different time and space, creating their sense of identity and meaning. This study concurs that Tongan male learners' sense of meaning and identity affects their perception and learning experiences. Using Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural tenet, Tongan male learners shape their identities through a process of construction and co-construction. This is necessary and expedient as Tongan male learners must adjust and adapt to the rapid changes of globalisation.

Participants spoke of how they skillfully navigated and negotiated their roles and responsibilities as sons, fathers, cousins, and so forth to meet their responsibilities while pursuing their education. Participants provided ways to allow positive cultural interface, firstly taking on what was valuable from Tongan culture, and secondly effectively navigating and negotiating their roles and responsibilities to allow harmonious time and space for their studies. This is very important because it challenges the tenet that Tongan male learners need to socially construct their own reality and how they can operate and make the transition from one world to another, in order to succeed in their educational endeavour. This thesis theorises that Tongan male learners need to redevelop and reformulate their identity to make meaningful contributions to *kāinga*, self, *lotu*, and cosmos. Findings from this study reiterate that

successful Tongan male learners are those who are able to strategically and purposefully align their identity to exploit and understand the culture of the learning institution.

7.5.14 Institutional culture

Higher education in Aotearoa is still very much a European/Pakeha controlled and embedded institution. Comprised of diverse layers of curriculum pedagogies, academics and administrators, the whole phenomenon and organisational culture of the learning institutions are western embedded, nevertheless Pasifika scholars have strongly voiced the need to contextualise and decolonise the pedagogical framework to suit the learning needs of the minority (Smith, 1999; Thaman, 1988; Vaioleti, 2011). This is also the criticism of Said and other indigenous post-colonialists, who have argued that higher education institutions fail to recognise the importance of alternative knowledge, thereby imposing discursive knowledge on to others as truth (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Irwin, 2011, 2013; Smith, 1999).

7.5.15 Incentives and strategies

The increasing in numbers of Pasifika and Tongan underachievers has prompted many government ministries and institutions to take strategic measures to address this problem. These measures include a Pasifika Plan, funded research projects, a Pasifika Unit, Pasifika advancement and equity plan, and more Pasifika staff. Many believe that the socio-academic environment of the learning institution needs to be simplified and

contextualised to fit the needs of Pasifika and Tongan students. Pasifika and Tongan students often experience a competing socio-academic tension, which compromises their educational journey. This study supports previous literature that indicates that organisational incentives and strategies provide a positive and conducive environment for Tongans and Pasifika to succeed (Havea, 2012; Irwin, 2011, 2013; Kalāvite, 2010; Lipine, 2012; Salitiban, 2013; Vaioleti; 2012).

The in-house strategies and assistance that academic institutions have prescribed and tailor made for Pasifika and Tongans should cater for more access, participation, and completion. Through *fakalotofale'ia*, institutions could facilitate successful and worthwhile learning experiences, such as a specific Pasifika learning space, meaningful orientation and induction, academic counselling and support, writing retreats, and *talanoa* conferences. Massey University Pasifika Directorate is well-known for its Pasifika@ Massey Strategy "Pearl of wisdom" (2013), which outlined practical visions and outcomes for helping Pasifika learners to succeed. The strategy specifically outlined how resources could be utilised through community dialogue and empowerment to increase Pasifika and Tongan access, retention, and completion at higher education. Other institutions, such as Manukau Institute of Technology's Pasifika Office and Pasifika Development Plan, and AUT's Pasifika Advancement Unit also add dimensions to how institutions develop plans and initiatives to help Tongan and Pasifika learners.

Literature has also reiterated that there are socio-economic circumstances and conflicts in Aotearoa that have caused problems for many Tongans in the past, and are still being perpetuated (Kalāvite, 2010, 2012; Tu'itahi, 2009; Vaioleti, 2012). The importance of *tauhi vā* is also highlighted in this study, how cultivating *va*, through *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos helps to pacify tensions and pressures. Undoubtedly, findings from this study verify the significant role played by learning institutions when *kāinga* and community are given ownership of their learning endeavours. This was significant, especially when learners felt that there were resources to tap into to assist their educational journey.

7.5.16   Learning environment

Exploring how conducive the environment of the learning institution is to the learning experience of the Tongan male learner is also crucial. Tongan male learners find higher education a huge step, both psychologically and academically. Nahkid (2003, 2006) recounts how staff from her institution declined a proposal to provide extra help to Pasifika and Maori on the basis of discrimination and favouritism against others. This raises an important ethical question around faculty helping raise the bar for underachievers: how far can we go to provide support and help to underachievers succeed, knowing the whole curricula and institutional culture is Western-oriented. Again, most Pasifika post-colonial thinkers, such as Thaman (1988, 1996a, 1999, 2003), Taufe'ulungaki (2002, 2005), Bishop (2003), and Smith (1999) would argue that the disparities in education in New Zealand are a by-product of the Western paradigm and

epistemologies being fused into the mainstream learning, and which needs unpacking through decolonising methodologies and strategies. These Pasifika post-colonial thinkers support the fact that programmes and spaces created for Pasifika are oriented and designed to help the learners adapt to the learning mindset expected by the learning institution.

The findings of this research concur that programmes for Tongan and Pasifika advancement, must be specifically oriented and relevant for supporting Tongan and Pasifika students' success. They must help learners become skilled navigators, able to positively exploit and negotiate the world and culture of the institutional provider through curriculum, pedagogies, organisational structure, and assessments. Successful Tongan male learners were those that were able to cope and adjust to the rigid demands and expectations of the academic institution. Evident from the study is that mature Tongan-born males were more resilient to the culture and rigidity of learning institutions than those who were born in Aotearoa. Reasons, such as ability to seek help and ask questions, managing time wisely, creation of study groups and networking, helped them to cope and understand the demands of higher education.

On the other hand, those who were struggling did not cope and adjust to the demands and culture of the learning institution. Evidence from this study concurs that young Tongan males had a tendency to fail because they lacked networking skills and coping mechanisms to understand the expectations and rituals of higher education, and were not well-grounded with the rigidity and expectation of higher education. Those that

were successful were able to navigate and negotiate around the academic services designed to help them. Well-documented studies have articulated how Pasifika and students from low decile schools were struggling with the transitional process from high school to higher education for reasons such as a mis-match between the students' learning abilities and the learning provider, and the socio-psychological ability of the students to master the whole institutional network of the learning institution (Irwin, 2011, 2013; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b; Nakhid et al., 2007; 2002). On the other hand, however, significant issues needed to be taken seriously by Tongan male learners; these include, time management, writing and learning skills, and social and networking skills, utilising peer support, and attending tutorials to better understand the culture of the institution.

7.5.17 Language Barrier

Vygotsky (1978) postulated that learning is permeated and continually constructed from a socio-cultural context, where language and symbols play an integral part. From this standpoint, I theorised (chapter 3) that Tongan male learners were struggling to understand and meet the standards and expectations of higher education institutions because of the difficulty posed by language literacy transition and the ability to mentally translate and transcribe information. The demand to comprehend and show competency in English literacy skills, such as writing, deter a lot of Pasifika and Tongans from completion their studies. Studies in language literacy state that Tongans face difficulty at higher education because of the language barrier, which contributes to

other academic malfunctions (Anae et al., 2001). Thaman (2002, p. 22) claimed that Tongan learners often stumbled to make mental literacy coding because they "are continually engaged in the translation of foreign educational and other ideas into their own language." Such mental transcribing and translation often means it takes more time to comprehend course content and the skills necessary to matriculate, which adds to withdrawals and failure to complete programmes. Evidence from this research also confirmed that successful Tongan male learners were those that sought and exploited the assistance of the learning institution – writing and study skills, academic counselling, and peer tutorials – and often made more of an effort to ask for help.

7.5.18 Time and Space

Tongan male learners tend to navigate and negotiate a different time and space (*tā-vā*) to those of other cultural groups (Ka'ili, 2005; Kalāvite, 2012; Mahina, 2004b). A mismatch often happened when trying to adjust and adapt to the setting and academic rituals of higher education. Tonga is thought to be the place where time begins, and that has been embedded in the lives of many Tongans. This coincides with the saying, "*koe taimi-fakatonga pe*", which literally means, "it's just Tongan time". This symbolises the attitude of breezing through life, of being concerned only with the now, and not with issues affecting the future. Kalāvite (2010) also highlighted similar problems faced by Tongan students, such as disorientation and procrastinating causing deferral of course work and putting pressure on studies. Unsuccessful students were those that were struggling to manage and prioritise their learning commitments against the

responsibilities of *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos. Studies show that Tongans and Pasifika students who made it to higher education were more vulnerable to failure than other ethnic groups because of the embedded socio-economic tensions and argue that higher educational institutions must invest in connecting to the worlds of these learners to enable worthwhile and meaningful learning experiences (Irwin, 2011, 2013; Madjar et al., 2010a, 2010b). However, findings of this study strongly concur that institutional support, such as Pasifika staff peer support and home visits, significantly alters outcomes for underachieving Pasifika students.

Understanding the time and space of the learning institution is critical for successful engagement. Additionally, finding of this research postulate that successful students are those that are able to recognise the imperative of time, and the space needed for them to compete and complete their studies. Courses and assessment are structured according to time and space, and students are expected to plan and execute solid time management and study skills to master this. Evidence from this study also recognises the importance of a specific study space for Tongans and Pasifika at higher education institutions, and how this can be utilised to provide support and academic help for underachievers. Successful students are those who are able to make the transition from "Tongan time" to higher education time and to find the necessary space to exploit learning.

Lastly, another factor that affects Tongan male learners is culture shock and the freedom that comes with it. Tongan learners have grown up in an environment where

learning is circular and non-linear, while institutional learning requires linear and critical/open thinking. The commotion and tangle between the two often creates misunderstanding and confusion. The findings of this study point out that Tongan male learner who were able to cope and adjust to the rituals and rigidity of learning institution were successful. Often those that were failing were those that could not cope with the culture shock and became victims of desperation and underachievement.

7.6   Summary

Tongan male learners searching for success at higher education was the main focus of this research. Findings from this research indicate that the multiple worlds of Tongan male learners play a major role in shaping their experiences, perceptions, stumbling blocks, and stepping stones. This study concurs with other contemporary writers such as Thaman (2001, 2003, 2004), Taufe'ulungaki (2002, 2003b, 2011) and Vaioleti (2011) that the worlds of Tongan learners must be understood to inform and comprehend the circularity of the Tongan worldview and epistemology. However, it also provides further clarification on how Tongans view *ako, 'ilo, poto, fakapotopoto,* and *tangata kakato* in a circular framework in contrast to Western linearity. *Tangata kakato* is the totality of *poto fakapotopoto* and is achieved when *loto,'atamai,* and *sino* are harmonized and coherently cultivated.

Additionally, *uho* and *fuo* further elucidate how our actions and behaviours are the reflections of our *loto.* Both characterise and inform how our inner being complements our outer motives and characters. This explains why *fofonga poto* and l*otopoto*, illuminate

how successful Tongan male learners intrinsically value responsibilities and relationships. The Tongan saying **"Ko Tonga mo'unga ki he loto"**, explicates the *uho* and *fuo* of *loto*, and the strength that permeates causing positive implications and success. It envelops the search of successful Tongan male learners to cultivate, connect, and harmonise (*napangapangamālie*) their worlds through *no'oloto* and *kanoloto*. Māhina (2007 articulated that Tongan students' academic achievement is attributed to their aptitude to cultivate and harmonise their *tā-vā kāinga*, especially the socio-cultural transition and interface between the Tongan and Western cultures.

Importantly, what is distinctive to this study in terms of what it adds to the general literature is that successful Tongan male learners were able to perform their and harmonise positive relationships through the worlds of *kāinga, lotu, kita* and cosmos. Although, socio-cultural confusion and struggle affect their academic journey, specific factors such as positive role models and *loto lahi, 'ofa,* and *kātaki*, (faith, pastoral care and counselling, understanding and utilising the culture and support mechanisms of the academic institution such as Pasifika learning support) have helped and motivated them to succeed. Successful Tongan male learners were able to renegotiate and redefine their identities.

Constant renegotiating of the cultural interface, where they constantly redevelop their identities, can help Tongan students to succeed in New Zealand tertiary education. This implies that when Tongan students and their supporters are at the same *tā-vā kāinga* (time-space relationships) then there is mutual understanding amongst the group that

can help students' education. Therefore, within the Tongan epistemological paradigm, it is argued that Tongan students' academic achievement is developed through *fetokoni'aki*, reciprocating and helping others, *fakapotopoto*, provident living and *fakatoukatea*, mutually and equally aligned in both the Tongan and New Zealand cultures. The next, and final chapter, encloses the conclusions, implications and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 8: AOFANGATUKU

Conceptual framework and Conclusion

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, and Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. (Epeli Hau'ofa, 2008, p. 39)

8.1 Introduction

Hau'ofa, in his seminal work, related that, "whatever we produce must not be a version of our existing reality, which is largely a creation of imperialism; it must be different, and of our own making. We should not forget that human reality is human creation. If we fail to create our own, someone else will do it for us by default" (1993, pp. 128-129). This consequently propelled me to look at how to develop a conceptual framework, not only to understand the reality of Tongan male learners, but also to help stakeholders provide appropriate strategies and practices to support Tongan male learners and Pasifika in higher education in Aotearoa. Truly, a noble and intelligent Pasifika scholar is one who strongly believes that we can "draw inspiration from the diverse patterns that have emerged from the successes and failures in our adaptation to the influences of the sea. We may even together make new sounds, new rhythms, new choreographies, and new songs and verses about how wonderful and terrible the sea is, and how we cannot live without it" (Hau'ofa, 2008, p. 57).

Significantly, Hau'ofa reminds us of our strength, our values, our heritage, our knowledge, all of which we can explore, nourish, and exploit. Our Pasifika people need to be constantly reminded of their strength and wisdom, and the surroundings that facilitated them to become prodigious navigators of Oceania. Within us, Tongans have the knowledge and wisdom to participate, guide, and help our younger generation to reach their true potential.

This chapter is primarily concerns with developing an indigenous framework to determine and recognise how successful Tongan male learners can navigate and negotiate their worlds of *kita, lotu, kāinga,* and cosmos while finding success at higher education in A/NZ. In this chapter I explore the Tongan concept of *Kalia-Langimālie* with reference to the concepts of *tā-vā* and *fakatoukatea mo potupotutatau,* to explain the journey of Tongan male learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

The findings of this research have demonstrated that male Tongans learners in higher education exist in and navigate four worlds: these include the worlds of self, *kāinga* (extended family) and others, cosmos, and *lotu* (church, religion), all of which influence their experiences and hold the balance to good health, wellbeing, and success during their higher education journey. These overarching and overlapping four worlds, through *tā-vā kāinga*, also present both stepping stones and stumbling blocks encountered by Tongan male learners engaged in higher education; the stepping stones and stumbling blocks have been thoroughly discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Kalia-Langimālie has been developed as a conceptual framework to describe the necessary strengths, aptitude, knowledge, values, and resources needed by Tongan male learners to (re)negotiate and (re)navigate through their multiple worlds in order for them to succeed at higher education. *Kalia-Langimālie* demonstrates the need to holistically understand the journey of Tongan male learners in A/NZ and the challenges that are affecting them.

The relationship and influences of these four worlds on the learning journey are depicted in the diagram below (fig 9):

*Figure 9: **Kalia-Langimālie and the four worlds of Tongans male learners in Aotearoa New Zealand.***
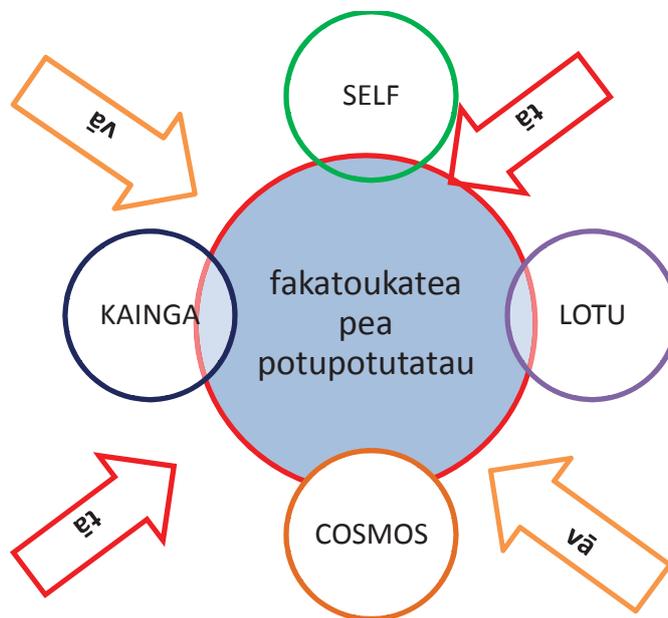
The framework developed here envisages possible scenarios for understanding, issues related to access, retention, and completion of Tongan male learners in A/NZ, and for

improving these. The chapter examines the concept of *Kalia-Langimālie* as a life equation equal to space (*vā*) plus time (*tā*) divided by (fp) *fakatoukatea-potupotutatau*; hence **KL= T+V/fp**. From the outset, this research has articulated that successful Tongan male learners are those who skillfully (re)navigate and (re)negotiate their various worlds to achieve a balanced *tā-vā*. Harmonising and cultivating the conflicting and antagonistic elements of these worlds requires skills by the learner to exploit the available resources and support mechanisms for his educational journey. This conceptual framework of *Kalia Langimālie* contends that when Tongan male learners are supported with the provision of necessary and adequate time and space and are able to create balance between them, there is greater possibility of finding success.

8.2   *Kalia-Langimālie*: An ancient concept with a modern application

Kalia Langimālie is comprised of two terms, *kalia* and *langimālie*. Putting the two words together signifies the importance of finding the right balance between man and nature. The term *Kalia* refers to the ancient double outrigger sailing vessels that were used by the Tongans for their expeditions. The *kalia* were built to withstand the rigorous conditions of the ocean and wind. *Langimālie* is also made up of two words; first *langi*, which has diverse meanings such as the sky, a mount, a face, a song, and a chiefly burial ground. *Mālie* means right, joyous, and delightful. Literally, in this research context, *langimālie* denotes favorable wind and sky, *fakatoukatea* and *potupotutatau*, a mutually and holistically aligned and balanced environment, which gives rise to the appropriate time and space for the navigator to make the decision to set sail, change

direction, and pursue his destination. *Langimālie* encompasses the nature of relationships and support that is conducive to the success of the journey. A successful journey depends on paying careful attention to the importance of space and time that is continually cultivated and observed before and during the journey.

There have been rarity of references to the concept of *langimālie* in relation to Pasifika and Tongan research, but this research has taken it to the next level, presenting it as a conceptual framework to explain the educational journey of Tongan male learners at higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The significance of *langimālie* is expedient for documenting the journey and voices of Tongan male learners. Another important concept that is also used concurrently with *langimālie* is *kalia*, the double outrigger canoe. Though there have been limited references to *langimālie* and *Vaka* Pasifika, *kalia*, or even *pōpao* in relation to the journey of Pasifika and Tongan learners, it is now increasingly being used in the health sector as a framework for health promotion and healthy living (Fotu & Tafa, 2009). However, this research uses *kalia-langimālie* to embody the holistic nature of the educational journey of Tongan males in Aotearoa. The concept deeply reiterates the notions and nature of circularity and communality, thus opposing linearity and individuality. Several scholars (Smith, 1999; Thaman, 1988; Vaioleti, 2011) have identified and argued that Pasifika methodologies and epistemologies must be used to acknowledge ownership and relevancy.

It is evident from contemporary findings (Campbell, 2001) that Tongans possessed superior maritime knowledge, which enabled them to create an empire in Oceania. The

first images and journals about the Tongans' aptitude for maritime exploring, warfare, and *kalia* construction, were documented by the explorers in the 16th century, by missionaries, and later by academics such as archeologists, linguists, and anthropologists (Latukefu, 1974). Pasifika and Tongans were well known seafarers who mastered the art of *kalia* sailing through trading, warfare, and exploration. The art and skills of navigating were protected and taught by skilled and specialised people who were the guardians of that knowledge (Latukefu, 1976). Every successful navigator and seafarer learnt the skills of reading nature's maps (for example, the positions of the stars, patterns of waves and winds, behaviours of seabirds), and the ability to steer the *kalia* against strong winds and rough seas. The builders designed and built *kalia* that could withstand long and unpredictable journeys, even choosing the best wood and trees with the necessary strength. All of those engaged in *kalia* making and operating also learned their *tauhi-vā*, and *fakatoukatea* to *kāinga, fonua* and the cosmos, through performing their responsibilities and observing taboos. It was believed that having a harmonious *tauhi-vā*, helped build a strong *kalia* and prescribed *langimālie,* for a safe and successful journey (Campbell, 2001).

Moana nui, the home for Tongans and Pasifika, is a vast ocean; in fact the largest in the world, but that did not hinder them from conquering, traversing, and charting new places. Tongans also built enormous *langi*, (specially constructed burial mounds for chiefs and kings), and other stone trilithons, such as the *Ha'amonga 'a Maui*, (see section 3.18) with stones that were skillfully cut and transported from neighbouring, but

distant, islands. Such magnificent and arduous work demanded elaborate maritime networks and skills. Tongans' history also makes numerous references to this civilization that built these stone monuments (Campbell, 2001). Explorers, traders, missionaries and colonialists were perplexed at how these people might have settled *Moana nui,* and puzzled and marveled that they had the technology and manpower to successfully achieve these massive stone constructions. It can be concluded that they achieved these feats because they knew how to maintain and keep a harmonious *ta-va* with their worlds, even against all odds; thus, to safely traverse through the mighty, ferocious, and vast *Moana nui*, and safely reach their destinations (Campbell, 2001; Latukefu, 1974).

Equivalent to these worlds of the ancient Tongan navigators are the worlds of the modern Tongan male learner; who must take into consideration many element when pursuing his educational endeavours. Like the ancestors of old, Tongan male learners in Aotearoa are at the crossroads of time and space, concurrently (re)navigating and (re)negotiating *tauhi-vā* with their *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos, taking their journey and charting new heights of ambition. For today's Tongan male learner, a modern seafarer, "*Moana nui"* has become increasingly volatile and unpredictable, through the erratic impacts of globalisation. Weather patterns and socio-physical surroundings are now more ferocious than ever, making it hard for seafarers to reach their destinations. Tongans who have called Aotearoa New Zealand home, have been affected by the tides of globalisation, and through their worlds have found little success. Indeed, success has

meant that the learner must recognise the supportive and reciprocal elements within the continuum of *kāinga*, *lotu*, self, and cosmos and to create harmony and stability (Kalāvite, 2010; Salitiban, 2011; Tu'itahi, 2009; Vaioleti, 2011).

Kalia-Langimālie, then, is ancient knowledge with a modern application, and has been conceptualised as an indigenous framework relevant for understanding Tongan learners in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is most appropriate that the Tongan male learners make reference to indigenous skills and knowledge to help them (re)navigate and (re)negotiate their educational journey. Research and statistics have confirmed that Pasifika and Tongan male learners are falling behind academically, causing multifarious socio-economic disruptions, and that the current approaches need urgent reconsideration and refinement (Kalāvite, 2010, 2012; Ketu'u, 2014; 'Otunuku, 2011; Statistics New Zealand, 2014; Vaioleti, 2011). Pasifika scholars have also articulated the need to develop an indigenous conceptual framework to make meaningful applications to practices (Taufe'ulungaki, 2003a, 2004). Indigenous researchers believe that if Pasfika and Tongans were given appropriate support and resources, with reference to their cultural values and knowledge, success will follow.

Through exploring the worlds of Tongan male learners, I have developed a conceptual framework, outlined in this thesis, to explain how Tongan males can find success at higher education in Aotearoa. **KL= T+V/fp** explains that for *langimālie* to exist and be sustained, the learner must constantly and continuously (re)negotiate and re(navigate) the appropriate time and meaningful space needed for their educational journey.

Finding the balance between *tā and vā* is *fakatoukatea potupotutatau*: equally and symmetrically balanced (fp), a concept that describes skills in nurturing and cultivating and constancy and harmony. For every action there needs to be an equity and equality factor that weighs the pros and cons of it, hence *fakatoukatea potupotutatau* assesses the best time (*tā*) that could yield meaningful space (*vā*), for successful journey for Tongan male learners.

The unpredictable nature and the inherent tensions and complexities of the *kāinga,* self, *lotu*, and cosmos make the journey problematic. As the findings show, the successful learner must learn to accept challenges and obstacles, and therefore needs, at times, to re(navigate), in order to know his exact bearing and location (latitude and longitude) against his destination, even to re(negotiate), knowing that some boundaries have shifted or been overstepped, and some responsibilities have also been neglected and overlooked. Tongans who have migrated overseas have had to realign a lot of their responsibilities and time to meet the demands of keeping their space with *lotu*, *kāinga*, self, and cosmos. It seems that often the most successful learners are those that have skillfully adapted and adjusted their responsibilities against time and space.

The conceptual framework, **KL=T+V/fp,** does not ascertain that there is one fixed variable of *tā-vā* because *langimālie* and *fakatoukatea potupotutatau,* like *tā-vā,* varies according to each individual/*kāinga* context and the overarching worlds that shape learning experiences. *Langimālie* is also circular and nonlinear in approach. However, this conceptual framework agrees that appropriate *tā* (time) and *vā* (space) must be

cultivated, nourished, and persistently composed in order for the learner to embark on a learning journey and be successful. In addition, the adoption of *fakatoukatea potupotutatau* as a skill in composing meaningful combinations of time and space (*tā-vā*) for successful learning further concurs with the findings of this research. This conceptual framework proposes that successful learners must learn to create and take the opportunities (*langimālie*) to compose the necessary space and time that is conducive to their learning endeavours. Successful learners must learn to cultivate their worlds through *tā-vā*, in order for the learner to dance to the time beat *(taimi tonu)* and relate to the space appropriately and successfully.

8.3 *Taimi Tonu*: The appropriate time and beat

The ancient Tongan calendar is closely linked to agricultural and seafaring activities. Names of the months reflect weather patterns and the associated activities that must correspond to these. Tongans knew which months to cease long seafaring travel, when to arrange fishing trips, and also when to plant certain types of root tubes and to harvest them. Such knowledge was important because it reflected the importance of appropriate time and beat (*taimi tonu*). Significantly, a well-known Tongan proverb, "*pikipiki katea kae vaevae melenga*" is believed to have originated when Tongans took exploration and warfare expeditions before the arrival of the white explorers (Latukefu, 1974; Churchward, 1953). *Pikipiki* literally means to join or link together, whereas *katea* refers to the hull of the canoe. Literally speaking, *Pikipiki katea kae vaevae melenga* is the act of bringing together, connecting or linking the hull of the *kalia /pōpao* in order to

enable the *vaevae*, sharing or distribution of the *melenga* (catch/food). Interestingly, *taimi tonu* envelops the careful calculation of when *melenga* is collectively shared during the expedition. This is carefully done to make sure that they will not run out of *melenga* before they reached their destination.

Another important concept that validates the importance of *taimi tonu* is *tākanga 'etau fohe*, which means striking our paddles in unison. This proverb also originated from sea faring travel, and the need for all the paddlers to take ownership and commit to paddling together in a rhythmic tone and beat. For the *kalia* to move faster and swiftly against currents and big waves, the paddlers must work together to strike equally and collectively. This concept reiterates the importance of communality and collectivity in relation to life and learning experiences. It also denotes an important saying, that it takes a whole village to educate a child.

Essentially, this concept of *tā-vā* are used in this research context to refer to the timely contributions and support of all stakeholders through the *kāinga, lotu*, self, and cosmos in relation to the educational journey of the Tongan male learners. Tongan male learners must learn to share their voices, experiences, and values with their *kāinga*, *lotu* and cosmos, which will help them chart their journey more successfully. This is similar to the ancient exploring/warfare expeditions where the long, arduous voyage was stricken with the uncertainties of the ocean, and to make it to the destination safely the *kalia* must be paddled uniformly with timely sharing of resources. Finding the best space and time, research participants were connected together, (*pikipiki hama*) and

tākanga 'etau fohe, (paddling together through sharing their stories, frustrations and success), which was an act of survival, (*vaevae melenga*). Better still was the richness and *taimi tonu* of their stories, which helped provide encouragement and a benchmark for future success. Quite appropriately, (fp) *fakatoukatea potupotutatau* symbolise the journey of the researcher looking for information, and the coming together of the participants to share their knowledge and their voices, which the researcher was able to draw on.

Tongan male learners in Aotearoa New Zealand are faced with a tumultuous array of stumbling blocks and stepping stones. Having said that, these overarching variables of *kāinga, lotu*, self and cosmos shape and influence *tā* (time and beat), when pursuing higher education. The works of Ka'ili (2005, 2007), Kalāvite (2010, 2013) and Mahina (2004b) have helped to elevate *tā-vā* as a theoretical lens when addressing issues of ethnic specificities. Ancient seafarers learnt how to read nature and the variations of climate according to moon, stars, and sun. Nothing was accidental, as has often been proposed by many Western theoretical assumptions that have contested the skills of the Moanan people. Rituals and ceremonies were observed and conducted at the right time in order to receive the blessings of the Gods, which were regarded as omnipotent. Various Pasifika researchers have conducted studies to explore and identify appropriate pedagogical strategies to enhance Pasifika learners' success in the classroom (Manu'atu, 2000; Vaioleti, 2011). Results show the importance of implementing appropriate *tā* for stakeholders, especially *kāinga* and community support for learning.

Indeed, for Tongans, the opportunities to exploit and reach for new heights do exist, yet the risk is increasingly high and costly, so the journey must be equally well calculated and planned. So the question is; when is the right or most appropriate time and how can time be skillfully calculated, cultivated, and exploited to yield optimum success? *Tā* (time) implies a lot of variables that need to be considered when pursuing higher education. Making reference back to the research findings and the *Langimālie* conceptual framework *tā* envelops and espouses a number of elements including age and maturity; generational gaps; managing and prioritising of time; timeframe of study, choices, and courses of study; timely intervention with strategies, policies, and practices; and timely giving to and receiving from *lotu*, *kāinga*/community support, and cosmos.

8.3.1   Age and maturity

This research concurs with findings from previous research (Kalāvite, 2010, 2013; 'Otunuku, 2011) that success at higher education comes with age and a matured attitude. Mature, adult Tongan male learners cope and adjust much better with their study load, and make better informed choices than those entering tertiary education straight from high school. Mature students are better at finding and utilising appropriate resources and networks conducive for their study. Mature students also appear to show initiative and have the motivation to persist and persevere through their studies. Conversely, the younger students are energetic but appear to need close support to make informed choices and show accountability.

8.3.2 Generational gaps

It is clear from the findings that there needs to be more understanding from *kāinga and lotu* those that were born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand because of the environment and surroundings that are influencing them. The rapid advancements of technology, fashion, and taste have transformed and made the generational gap even wider and more visible. Successful Tongan male learners have grown up in a home environment where *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos played a pivotal role in bridging the knowledge gap. The findings from this research reinforce that when *kāinga*, parents, and church leaders operate on a similar *tā-vā* to that of their children, then success is almost assured. Educational practices and pedagogies must also acknowledge the generational gaps within the cultures and diverse ethnicities in A/NZ.

8.3.3 Managing time

The growing tensions between the worlds of Tongan male learner entail that success comes through making the time to create meaningful and worthwhile outcomes. Many overwhelmed with meeting obligations and responsibilities that demand their time and resources. Successful Tongan male learners are those that are able to effectively make the time to complete assignments, attend extra classes, and seek help and advice, and share successes and tribulations with family and friends.

8.3.4 Choices

Making informed choices around given opportunities are important, especially regarding career choices and length of study. Previous research and current statistics concur (Middleton, 2008,2011) that most Pasifika and Tongan students perform better in practical and technical courses compared to more academically demanding programmes such as medicine and law. The majority of Tongan male students leaves high school with poor NCEA achievement, and does not pursue other career choices offered by technical and vocational providers. Successful Tongan male learners are those who have been wisely counseled by parents, academic counselors, and peers to choose courses that correlate to their academic capacity and interests.

8.3.5 Timely intervention

Findings from this research concur that when institutional intervention is initiated in a timely and consistent manner, it helps Tongan male learners persist and persevere successfully in their journey. Significantly, quality Pasifika induction programmes, Pasifika learning support, counselling, and Pasifika Cluster tutorial learning form an important base for Tongan male learners to confidently utilise. Findings further support the importance of providing help early – especially to first year and at-risk students – and continuously providing pastoral care and support through their journey.

8.3.6 Support

It takes a village to raise a child is a wise old saying that resonates with the findings of this research. *Kāinga* and *lotu* play a significant part in shaping a self that withstands obstacles and perseveres through challenges. Successful Tongan male learners make reference to positive pastoral support from *lotu*, and from parental support in a timely manner, which collectively helps them to press forward and succeed.

The findings of this research espouse that achieving appropriate *tā* (time and beat) can be quite exhausting and confusing because there are many factors that need to be considered. This research identifies overarching variables from the worlds of the Tongan male learner that constantly shape their learning experiences. Tongan male learners are much more successful when they are mature, or possess a sense of maturity which enables them to withstand challenges and obstacles. Generational gaps also highlight the need to understand time differences between Tongan born and New Zealand born learners, especially the age difference between them. However, most New Zealand born Tongans possess more liberal thinking and open mindedness, which can create tension and rigidity with the more traditional Tongan born parents. Effectively given and timely support by *kāinga, lotu*, and cosmos provide stepping stones for success.

8.4 *Tauhi Vā*

Vā plays an important part because it provides the completing factor in the equation. *Kalia Langimālie* (KL=T+V/fp) demands that *tā* must be added with *vā*, the space in equity and equality divided by *fakatoukatea potupotutatau. Vā* plays an important role when exploring the educational journey and experiences of Tongan male learners in Aotearoa. Likewise, ancient seafarers were not only skillful with their knowledge of *tā* but also with *vā*; knowing how to keep and harmoniously cultivate relationships and make meaningful connections through *fatongia,* with *kāinga*, self, *lotu* and cosmos. Preparation for an expedition was collectively done, mutually planned through the division of labour, delegation of responsibilities, and fulfilling obligations and so forth. The Tongan proverb, **"tā ki liku tā ki fanga"** means expert on weather beaten coast or on shielded inlet. This proverb refers to one who is skillful in more than one (or many) setting. Collectively, everyone plays an important role, whether big or small, for the success of the journey. Skilled craftsmen who built the *kalia* and those who made preparations were sacredly given taboo, while the women prepared food for the journey. Sacrifices were also made before the Gods, acknowledging their omnipotence and seeking favourable winds and good speed. Acquiring a harmonious space, then, is important; it embodies the collectivity and totality of *fatongia, fakatoukatea,* and *napangapangamālie*.

Similar to ancient navigators and seafarers, Tongan male learners must also learn to harmoniously cultivate their *vā* through the worlds of *kāinga,* self, *lotu,* and cosmos.

This undertaking confirms that successful Tongan male learners are those that able to (re)navigate and (re)negotiate boundaries and space through meeting their obligations and responsibilities. Tongan learners must be able to transit from one world to another, making sensible connections and meanings, which allow them to see things holistically. It is a continuous and circular process bringing the past to the front, while the future is at the back. The concept of *vā* is an overarching paradigm that is circular and non-linear, causing us to only have a pictorial understanding at each particular vantage point.

Making close reference to the research findings, the *Kalia-Langimālie* conceptual framework of KL= T+V/fp demands that for Tongan male learners to succeed at higher education, a harmonious *vā* must be pleasantly cultivated and equal in force to *tā* so that the essence of *fakatoukatea potupotutatau(fp)* is achieved and maintained. Successful Tongan male learners are those that are able to create a harmonious space that equals the force of *tā,* thus maintaining the essence of *fakatoukatea potupotutatau* and forging the best possible *langimālie* for a successful endeavour. The *kalia-langimālie* conceptual framework envisages that creation of a harmonious *tā-vā* is imperative to the learning experiences of male Tongans.

8.4.1   *Makafētoli'aki*

Tongan male learners must understand that success is a reciprocal commodity that demands knowing your role and performing it. Success is a team effort and can only be achieved when there is a sense of mutuality, and reciprocity is continuously cultivated

and maintained. This research maintains that keeping and cultivating success includes maintaining a healthy space through mutuality and reciprocity.

8.4.2   *'Ofa moe mamahi'ime'a*

Tongan male learners must have a deep conviction of the purpose of their journey, through internalising it and believing in their capacity to create meaningful space. Love of learning and attributing success to others is important. This research also reiterates the importance of *'ofa* (love) and *mamahi'ime'a* (loyalty and commitment) to the successful journey of Tongan male learners. Successful Tongans maintain that seeing and experiencing hardships motivate them to have deeper *'ofa* for their parents and love of learning.

8.4.3   Self–belief, role models

Self-belief, role models, and vision are important to cultivate. Tongan male learners must build self-efficacy and self-belief through creating positive self-esteem. Having positive influences from role models is also significant for creating positive space and vision. Successful Tongan male learners attested that seeing other successful Tongans helped them to create a vision that propelled them to success.

8.4.4   Balanced and symmetrical

Tongans believe that to be successful one must holistically balance the aspects of *mou'i lōtolu*, (the physical, the mental, and the spiritual) (Vaka, 2014). Finding symmetry and proportion is deemed significant because, without these, there can be dire

consequences. Success is meant to be a lifelong journey and seeking to attain *napangapangamālie* adds more meaning to life. The *kalia* itself must be equally balanced and symmetrical; the structure is built to withstand the ferocious waves and storms of the ocean. Everyone involved in preparations and the actual voyage knows their responsibilities and collectively and harmoniously provide for the welfare of the journey. Likewise, when self, *lotu, kāinga,* and cosmos are harmoniously cultivated and empowered Tongan male learners are more likely to succeed.

8.4.5   *Mālie and Māfana*

Cultivating a warm and relevant *va* is important for the success of the learner. *Mālie* epitomises the learner's search to make sense of his learning environment and internal need for success. *Māfana* arises from the learner understanding and feeling compelled by the need to succeed throughout his learning experiences. When the pedagogical framework is aligned to create relevant and meaningful learning experiences, Tongan male learners are confident of themselves and their potential to succeed.

8.4.6   *Tā ki liku, tā ki fanga*

This saying denotes the importance of finding balance and symmetry with nature. It also means that for the journey to be successful, the learner must be continuously mindful of the importance of maintaining a harmonious space between all of his worlds. Likewise, in the *kalia* journey of old, the navigator was also mindful of all his surroundings, including the sea, weather, the *kalia-katea* (the crew and the people

aboard), and the *melenga* (food and resources). Tongan male learners in Aotearoa New Zealand must undertake their journey as a culmination of diverse and numerous collective efforts of many stakeholders. Stakeholders must align supportive resources for successful engagement and be mindful of the surroundings that influence the lives of Tongan male learners. Successful learners are always mindful of their journey and their surroundings.

8.5   *Fakatoukatea*

European explorers in the 17th -19th centuries recorded the artistic nature of the Tongans in building *kalia*. Double-hulled *kalia* were recorded as being built to provide speed, space, and balance against the gruesome nature of the ocean. The term *fakatoukatea* contains two parts; *fakatou*, which can be literally translated as mutually inclusive and significant, and *katea*, which means the hull of the *kalia*. In a simple sense *fakatoukatea*, signifies that both the right and left hulls, (*katea*) of the *kalia* are equally important and significant to the strength, speed, space, and durability of the *kalia*. However, *fakatoukatea* also refers to the skill of the navigator when facing the challenges of the ocean while managing the crew to safety. *Potupotutatau* refers to stability and proportion to the journey (Campbell, 2001 Latukefu, 1974).

Significantly, Tongati'o (2010) added another dimension to the notion of *fakatoukatea*, applying it to learners who are multi taskers and simultaneously skillful. Mafile'o (2008) also added another facet to it, as "skills in opposite directions". *Fakatoukatea* in the framework of this research denotes Tongan male learners who are multi/bi-

culturally competent. It also encourages the ability to discern and allow compatibility, thus increasing the range of opportunities and efforts to persevere when encountering stumbling blocks. Clearly, Tongan male learners must be multi taskers and simultaneously skillful if they are to succeed at higher education. However, the *langimālie* equation of **KL= T+S /fp** speaks of the importance of also maintaining a balanced and harmonious environment that is conducive to successful learning. Trying to find that point of equilibrium is *potupotutatau*, consciously finding balance within the worlds of *lotu, kita, kāinga*, and cosmos. The findings of this research indicate that successful Tongan male learners are those that are able to attend to all the significant aspects of their lives, and thus to maintain a sense of harmony and balance. Stumbling blocks are numerous and too challenging; however, those that are successful, although not invincible, are able to find their way through and around them. In reality, *fakatoukatea* entails the need for Tongan male learners to be able to skillfully and harmoniously balance their worlds of time and space, such as between the worlds of the *Pālangi* and Tongans.

8.6 *Lūsia ki Taulanga*: Musing by the Harbour

"He stood in the storm, and when the wind did not blow he adjusted his sails" (Anonymous)

Every sea journey is unpredictable, as the forces of nature must be understood and navigated. Mariners and seafarers of old knew of the challenges and obstacles of long distance seafaring. However, that did not deter them from seeking to explore new grounds and defy the odds of nature. This conceptual framework *(Kalia-Langimālie)*

stipulates that *lūsia* means persistence and being wittingly determined to press forward despite obstacles and challenges to reach *taulanga*, harbour and home. When all preparations are completed for the expedition, words of wisdom are imparted to remind the seafarers of their roots and of the obligations that they carry with them. From their calm and protected home, the shallow, calm sea can abruptly be turned into deep, fierce water with an impeccable simple twist of the weather. Laughter and amusement can suddenly turn to misery, despair, and loss of hope of seeing another new day. However, team work, reading the signs of nature, and being courageous and resilient against crosswinds and crosscurrents helped them persevere in their journey. Tongan male learners in A/NZ must also maintain the "I can do it" attitude and create a change of mindset with a strong work ethic and vision of success. For so long many have been acculturated and marginalised, with low self-esteem and self-denial of opportunities to rise above life's barriers.

The title of this thesis, "*Kātaki ē mamá moe hopohopokia*", further highlights the significance of *lūsia ki taulanga;* when the voyage is clouded with uncertainties and problems, the mariner must not lose sight of making it to safety. When the destination is projected, the distance is calculated with the speed that is required; milestones of the journey are also acknowledged with possible contingency scenarios for challenges and obstacles. The mariner knows that there are always challenges and obstacles, but, despite the odds, reaching the destination is always the priority. Both concepts, *fakatoukatea - potupotutatau* encompass character, team work, collectivity, vision, self-

belief, and perseverance to achieve goals. *Kāinga* sacrifice things for something more worthwhile and meaningful. As this study shows, successful Tongan male learners are those who are able to endure and persevere in the face of multifarious obstacles and challenges through cultivating positive and harmonious *tā-vā*.

8.7   *Fanā fotu pea tau fonua*: Finding success and finally reaching land

Kalia-Langimālie provides possible scenario for a harmonious and conducive environment of time and space for Tongan male learners to succeed at higher education. *Fanā fotu* epitomises how all variables must be coherently arranged through *tā-vā kāinga*, and are holistically stable and balanced *(fakatoukatea-potupotutatau)*, thus success is certain. *Fanā* refers to the middle pole of the *kalia* to which the sail is attached when the *kalia* is approaching a possible destination. Usually the *fanā* is always *fotu*, (sighted from afar), thus giving moments of joy and triumph for all.

Fanā fotu can also be applied to individuals and *kāinga* who have defied all odds and made tremendous achievements and contributions for education in A/NZ. Their examples of persistence and endurance have made it possible for others to follow and reach their goals and visions. When *fonua* (land) is sighted, it provides a sense of relief, success, and emotion for all, knowing the sacrifice, challenges, and obstacles that had daunted their hopes have all come to an end. The learner, when approaching the finishing line, is always relieved to see and acknowledge what has been done collectively, and the tears and effort that were shed, all for the success of the journey.

8.8 Implications of this research

This research has explored the perceptions and experiences of Tongan male learners at higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand, by identifying *makatūkia* (stumbling blocks) and *makatu'u* (stepping stones) that they have encountered on their journey. The growing underachievement of Pasifika and Tongan students in A/NZ prompted this research to interrogate possible scenarios and practices that could enhance access, participation, retention, and completion of studies. This was done through the voices of the participants, which were captured using Tongan *talanoa, tālanga,* and *tālave*. Voices of the participants were thematically coded to identify significant variables which impacted on the experiences of Tongan male learners. The findings provide important research implications.

Firstly, this research builds on previous research to add another dimension to Pasifika and Tongan methods of research in Aotearoa New Zealand. One of the challenges faced by contemporary researchers of Pasifika and Tongan issues in Aotearoa New Zealand is to find compatible research methods that can meaningfully dissect information that is true to their heritage and meanings. The use of *talanoa* is now increasingly accepted as a valid and reliable Pasifika and Tongan data collection method, although it has been criticised as lacking depth and structure. However, this research addressed those criticisms by including *tālave* and *tālanga* with *talanoa*, so adding to the richness and validity of Pasifika and Tongan research methods. Adding *tālave* and *tālanga* to the

framework of *talanoa* allow more depth to data collection process especially when indigenous issues are being examined.

Secondly, this research bolstered the use of Tongan methodology for researching issues relating to Tongans. Although there are established and well known research methodologies such as *kakala*, this research moved further to refine it. The unpacking of *kakala* as a research methodology is presented here, with the additions of ʻ*alaha* and *napangapangamālie* to provide richness and meaning to this well-known and well utilized qualitative research methodology. This research has argued that adding ʻ*alaha*, after *teu*, *toli*, *tui*, and *luva* signifies a bond between the giver and the receiver, that what was given, represent something that was done best. It challenges the receiver to sense and take ownership of that ʻ*alaha*, and continue on with that legacy. It acknowledges that a sense of mutual trust and obligation exists. ʻ*Alaha* also adds a sense of responsibility, that what is given must be put to good use for all. *Napapangamaile* ends the process with a challenge of maintaining proportion, sustainability, and balance.

Thirdly, this research adds to the understanding of *tā-vā kāinga* (Kalāvite, 2010), time space relationships, between the learners and their worlds of *kita*, *kāinga*, *lotu*, and cosmos as they navigate through their multiple realities of stepping stones and stumbling blocks. The gender specificity of this research allowed deeper voices to be shared and understood, especially in terms of the *tā-vā kāinga* between self, *lotu*, *kāinga*, and cosmos and how they influence Tongan male learners. It further provides empirical literature for the understanding of socio-cultural factors that are influencing and

enhancing success for male learners. I have also identified possible stumbling blocks and stepping stones that need to be understood and taken into account during formulation of policies and practices designed especially for finding solutions for at risk students.

Lastly, the development of the *Kalia-Langimālie* model further puts the problems into perspective. This model provides an understanding of the worlds of Tongan learners and how to help them to succeed. The model offers an equation (**KL=t+v/fp),** which purports that for Tongan male learners to be successful, *tā* and *vā*, of *kāinga*, self, *lotu,* and cosmos must be skillfully cultivated. The *Kalia-Langimālie* model is about finding the best possible time and space to excel and continuously seeking to harmoniously charters a meaningful and holistic life. The essence of *Kalia-Langimālie* is that when stakeholders take ownership of the learning they collectively contribute to making the journey successful.

8.9 Implications for policy, practice and student experience

This research has implications for policy initiatives, practices and successful student experiences. The outcomes of this research indicate overarching influence of *kita, lotu, kāinga*, and cosmos in shaping participation, retention and completion of Tongan male learners in HE. This is clearly reflected in statistics of ethnic participation, retention and completion; numbers are still very insignificant. HE in A/NZ is still very much dominated by the Pakeha's culture and norms and are embedded in the educational system. This is mirrored in the current educational trend and pedagogical practices. The

demand for an increase in access, retention and completion for Pasifika and Tongan male learners at HE should be reflected in policies and practices of TEC, relevant government ministries and educational providers'. This research has strongly put forward relevant claims of the need to;

i.   Specifically identify, encourage and increase opportunities to conduct research on issues that are affecting Pasifika and male learners at HE

ii.   Provide alternative pedagogical and educational pathways for Pasifika and Tongan male learners from pre- school to HE

iii.   Provide more opportunities, initiatives and schemes that would specifically target more participation, retention and completion for Pasifika and Tongan male learners

iv.   TEC and MOE to encourage educational providers to provide practical emphasis and guidelines targeting at risk Pasifika and Tongan male learners at secondary and HE

v.   Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs to play pivotal role in encouraging positive public influence sharing from successful Pasifika and Tongan male learners through media

vi.   Provide forum for Pasifika dialogue and talanoa on issues that are affecting their children at HE

vii.   Encourage Pasifika Tertiary Students gathering like the Amatakiloa to create social networks for successful learning and successful transition to HE

8.10　Limitations of this research

This qualitative research has undoubtedly provided quite a significant understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Tongan male learners at higher education in A/NZ, especially through their *tā-vā kāinga* with their *lotu, kāinga,* self, and cosmos. However, some limitations of this research have been identified. Firstly, the gender specificity of this research on Tongan males provides a limited dimension to the discussion. Gender specific research limits the strength of the generalisations to a wider group; for example, Tongan females. Secondly, the concentration of the sample size within the Auckland area has limited the geographical spread of voices and students from other parts of A/NZ that might have brought different experiences and perceptions to this study. Thirdly, the sample size again does not provide a good representation of the geo-social of Tongans in Aotearoa New Zealand. Lastly, being a male Tongan, a learner, and a researcher, I may have introduced ambiguity and bias into this research, despite trying to be as objective as possible.

8.10　Further Research

The completion of this research has opened the door for further research that can broaden and facilitate our understanding of how to help Tongan learners flourish academically in A/NZ. Findings of this research indicate the need for further research and practical action to bridge increasing gaps in access, participation, retention, and completion in higher education. Firstly, gender ethnic specific research on Tongan female learners could unearth reasons behind why female learners are performing

much better across the board than Tongan male learners. This would provide a better diagnostic and summative approach to at-risk students. This kind of research would add more excitements and gender balance to this research, as well as providing a comparative view, especially in relation to female stepping stones and stumbling blocks. Secondly, further comparative and inter-generational research is needed to identify issues that are affecting those that are of mixed heritage and are born and raised here in A/NZ. The findings of this research did indicate that Tongan-born male learners were doing much better than their New Zealand-born counterparts because they were able to operate coherently with their *tā-vā kāinga* within their *lotu*, self, *kāinga,* and cosmos. Those that were born here in Aotearoa New Zealand seemed to have more liberal thinking and were often uncomfortable operating and making the transition from one world to another. Having research focused specifically on this aspect will help uncover a significant understanding of Tongan learners' academic journeys in A/NZ. Consequently, such research could inform more specific ways of helping this specific group of Tongans.

Thirdly, it is recommended that research is undertaken to explore the influence of Tongan Student Associations and the role of Amatakiloa as a modern day Tongan gathering and networking event, and how effective these are in providing an academic and social platform for learners at higher education. Amatakiloa has existed for over twenty years, and there appear to be mixed perceptions about its role and contributions.

Though this research has touched on it, a more thorough study is needed to unveil the contributions of such gatherings to the socio-academic welfare of Tongan learners.

Lastly a more comprehensive, comparable and longitudinal research on Tongan students from pre-school, primary school, and secondary to higher education is needed to trace roots, and other overarching variables that might influence the success of Tongan learners. Evidence from this research pointed to the socio-cultural background, through socialisation, as a contributing factor in shaping the success of Tongan learners. Having research of this magnitude would help form a significant understanding of factors that are contributing to the success of Tongan learners.

8.11 FINAL WORD

By drawing on the experiences of Tongan male learners engaged in higher education and training in Aotearoa New Zealand, this thesis identifies the stumbling blocks and stepping stones that they faced. Based on this, the thesis makes suggestions to mitigate the challenges and obstacles. Moreover, by identifying the stepping stones, it is hoped that these can be replicated and implemented to improve participation, access, retention, and completion of Tongans in higher education in A/NZ.

Certainly, voices of the participants reiterate that the worlds of the Tongan male learners of *lotu, kita, kāinga* and cosmos are multi-layered and complex and have constantly influenced and shaped their experiences and rates of access, participation, retention, and completion in higher education. Tongan male learners who were able to

master and skillfully cultivate their *tā-vā kāinga*, (time space relationships), were able to beat the odds. Significantly, the findings of this research are that *anga fakatonga* and *kāinga* are very influential because they provide the greatest contrasting challenge and positive reinforcement for Tongan male journey in higher education. Tongan values build self-esteem and *kita*, and provides a platform for *lotu* and its positive influence on members and success in higher education.

The development of the *kalia-langimālie* conceptual framework demonstrates the need for all stakeholders to look deeply at the variables that are affecting the success of Tongan male learners. The framework provides a holistic and circular understanding of *tā-vā kāinga* through the worlds of *kāinga, lotu, kita* and cosmos and how they can positively contribute to the success of Tongan male learners. When time and space, *tā-vā kāinga* are equally and skillfully cultivated this creates *fakatoukatea–potupotutatau*, a sense of harmony, symmetry, and balance, thus creating a conducive environment for success in higher education.

The bulk of writings on Pasifika people in A/NZ have taken a Pan-Pacific approach. However, the migration experiences of Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand are not necessarily the same due to differing immigration policies and relations between the various countries of the Pacific and A/NZ. Therefore, rather than adopting a Pan-Pacific approach for this research, I have undertaken an ethnic gender specific approach based on the experiences of Tongan male learners. Furthermore, it was considered that a ethnic gender specific approach would provide a nuanced view for exploring the key

issues in regards to steeping stones and stumbling blocks for Tongan male learners. Thus, Tongan male learners were chosen to address the research questions, given that I too identify as a Tongan male learner.

The findings of this research further reiterate the need for Tongan male learners to find positive reinforcement through *no'oloto, kanoloto*, and *napangapangamālie* when facing the socio-cultural interface and transitioning from one world to another. When socio-cultural values are deeply integrated and cultivated, Tongans find it easier to transit from one world to another competently and harmoniously. The process itself acknowledges the need to have a deep sense of understanding when cultivating values. The framework also acknowledges the importance of cultural competency when operating in both cultures, Tongan and Palangi, for the success of Tongan male learners.

Until there is a chance for change, Tongan male learners in A/NZ will need to work tenaciously to overcome the stumbling blocks and stigmas associated with being a minority entity in higher education. As their numbers in higher education continue to remain minimal, the challenge will remain for Tongan and other Pasifika students to gain a greater voice, representation, and empowerment.

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Glossary

ako: learning

anga faka-Pālangi: western habits

anga faka-Tonga: the ways of the Tongans such as, custom, morals and values

akonaki'i: to exhort

'atamai: mind, mental power

'alaha : fragrance and sweet smelling of the kakala

'atamai kovi: irrational and senseless

anga ta'e faka'apa'apa: ill-mannered and impolite

aofangatuku: conclusion

'eiki: noble or chief

'ofa : love, charity

faifekau: minister ,bishop or church reverend

faikava:, talking and drinking round the kava bowl

faiva: dance skillfully or correspondingly cohesive in harmony

faka'aki'akimui: to act modestly

faka'apa'apa or *fefaka'apa'apa'aki:* mutual respect; respectfulness

fakafalala: trusting on other people

fakafonua: for country,

fakamā: shameful, disgraceful, ignominy (Churchward,1959, p. 65).

fakamamahi: generating discomfort or distress

fakama'umau: self-control

fakamolemole: compassion and empathy

faka-papālangi: the European way

fakakoloa: to enrich

fakasiasi: for the church

fakataha/fono: meeting

fakatoukatea: multi taskers and simultaneously skillful

fakatōkilalo: generosity and kindness

faka-Tonga; according to the Tongan way

falala: to lean against or on something.

fale'i; direction and counselling

fāmili: extended family; family, relatives.

fanāfotu : sighted from afar

fānau: children.

fatongia,: responsibilities and obligations

fatungamotu'a: custom and tradition

fekumi: investigation

fe'ofo'ofani: to be friendly with one another; express love to others through helpfulness and sharing.

fie-Pālangi: acting like a *Pālangi* or European.

fono: town or village meeting.

fonua ; referred to both people and the physical environment.

fua kavenga: to bear the weight or burden

fungani : top row of flowers on a kakala

founga:; method, procedure, plan

fuo: content

Heilala: (Garcinia sessilis) *Heilala* is the most sacred of Tongan plants *(Garcinia sessilis),* the unusual bright red flowers of which are used in special garlands (Thaman, 1993, p. 91)

heliaki: literally means saying one thing and meaning another, is specific only to *ta'anga* (poetry) and *tufungalea* (speech-designing) and *faivalea* speech-giving (Māhina, 2004b).

hou'eiki: aristocratic morality/ chiefs; plural of „*eiki*

'ilo: knowledge

kāinga: large social unit based on kinship and headed by a 'ulumotu'a

kahoa: necklaces / leis; garland, usually of fresh flowers, but sometimes of paper, shells, etc., hung about the neck of the person being greeted.

kakala: sweet-smelling flowers, or trees or plants bearing sweet-smelling flowers, of any kind (Churchward, 1959) .

katea: hull of the kalia

kātoanga: festivities

kavenga: carrying the burden; in other words fulfilment of their responsibilities and obligations

kavenga fakafonua: community obligations

koloa: valuables, wealth of the society such as *tapa* and mats.

: values, what ones value

kupesi: pattern stencils for *tapa* making

kumifonua: migration and searching for new land,

langafonua: building and nurturing the land

laumālie: spirit or soul

loto: (inside, the interior, imagination) mind, heart, stomach.

loto-māfana: warm – heartedness, excited

lototō: generosity

lotu: religion

lūsia : press forward

luva: to give away something to someone

māfana: warm, heartfelt, friendly, cordial

makafetoli'aki : reciprocity and mutuality

makatu'u : stepping stones

makateka: stumbling blocks

mamahi'iime'a: loyalty and commitment

mana: power, force or energy; spiritual power

mālie: the aesthetically pleasing state

mālie-māfana: aesthetically pleasing state and the emotional feeling of warmth

mateaki: loyalty

melenga: food prepared for kalia travellers.

mo'ui: livelihood

mou'i fakapotopoto : living sensibly

mou'i lōtolu : envelops physical, spiritual and mental attributes

napangapangamālie : balanced and symmetrical

ngaahi tukufakaholo: customs and traditions

ngāue fakataha : working together or cooperation)

nofo ā kāinga : how extended Tongan families live

'ofa: love; kindness; affection

ongo: feelings, emotion

'Otua: God Almighty

Pālangi or Papālangi: European; white man

 Pakeha : or people of European descent in New Zealand.

Pakeha: Māori name for Caucasians

Pasifika: The terms Pasifika, Pasifiki or Pasefika refer to Pacific Islanders or Pacific Island people.

poto: wise, skillful

pō talanoa :talking among, talking through the night

potupotutatau : balanced

siasi: church

ta'ehounga: ungrateful

tā: taimi

tā nafa: beating drum

takavaha: to be at sea, on the way (when voyaging) (Churchward, 1959, p.442).

talanoa: to tell stories or relate experiences etc. (Churchward, 1959). *Talanoa:* as a Tongan research methodology

talanoa 'i : critically deliberated

talanoa fakaako : educational stories; stories to learn from

talanoa loto: deep reflection,

talanoa mālie: meaningful and interesting stories

talatalaifale: household counselling not intended for outside ears

tālanga – constructive talanoa or focus group discussion

tālave: informally talk or make connection

talangofua: obedience

talateu: introduction

talatalaifale: kāinga advice

taimi: time

taimi faka tonga: Tongan time

taimi tonu: timely intervention

tangata kakato: complete and balanced being.

tā-vā kāinga: time-space relationships

tatau, potupotutatau and mālie: "symmetry, harmony and beauty" (Mahina, 2005, p. 170).

taufonua: the arrival of a journey

tauhi vā: nurturing good relationships

taulanga: harbour

toka'i: considerate

toungāue: working together: a Tongan research methodology

tui: belief

tui fakalotu: religious belief

tūkufua: to navigate for

uho: content

ulumotu'a: the head of an extended family

'ulungaanga faka-Tonga: main/authentic Tongan way

'ulungaanga mahu'inga: core values

'ulungaanga faka'apa'apa: good and respectable behaviour

va: relationships

vaha'a: space in between.

vale: foolish, silly, ignorant, unskilled, incapable, incompetent

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Kātaki e mamá moe hopohopokia:

Persistence and experiences of male Tongan learners at Higher education in Aotearoa

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher(s) Introduction

The researcher, Mr Olikoni Tanaki Taʻai, is a Tongan educationalist. He has worked for the Latter Day Saints –Educational System for number of years, teaching middle and secondary level. Mr Tanaki worked also at the University of the South Pacific-Tonga Campus as an administrator and a tutor for foundation and degree program courses and was doing consultancy work for Ministry of Training and Employment in Tonga. Apart from paid employment, He has recently been awarded a NZAID scholarship, and is now undertaking this research as a NZAID PhD scholar through Massey University –Albany Campus.

Project Description and Invitation

The research asks the question: "What are the factors that influence persistence and experiences of Tongan male learners at Higher education in Aotearoa"? It provides an exploration of the socio-cultural constructs of education amongst male Tongan learners living in Aotearoa, and considers finding stumbling blocks and stepping stones. Educational accomplishment for Tongans in New Zealand is Government priority according to the Pacific Plan 2009- 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2009). Though these are well recognized in papers and policies, unfortunately for decades a wide disparity has existed in the tertiary participation rates and subsequently in the socio-economic status of the Tongans compared to that of Pākehā and Asian populations (Anae., et al,2002).The last official census was in 2006 which put the total population for

Tongans slightly above 50,000, 56% were born here in Aotearoa with 80% making their home in Auckland. Close to 75% of the total Tongan population is below the age of 25. About 65% has a formal high school qualification, which is 10% lower than the national average. As a result more than 80% derived their livelihood from unskilled and semi-unskilled employment, which put them in very vulnerable position in today's changing society.(Statistics New Zealand: Tongan People in New Zealand, 2007). It is important to note that the gender distribution is almost evenly balanced; however male Tongans are being outnumbered by female in areas of secondary to tertiary participation and completion. So in reality male Tongans are quite a vulnerable group, and with a growing adult population the trend of unskilled Tongan male will continue to increase dramatically. So this research seeks to:

1. To explore persistence and experiences of male Tongan learners at Higher education

2. To provide insights and understanding of possible stumbling blocks and potential stepping stones of Tongan male in Higher education

3. To document the research process and develop a possible research methodology for conducting research with male Tongan learners and other Pasifika learners'.

It is hoped that by exploring persistence and experiences of male Tongan learners a body of knowledge will be created that may be drawn upon to improve the access, participation, retention and completion of male Tongan learners in Aotearoa.

This study seeks your sincere consent and participation through Talanoa and focus group sessions. It is anticipated that this study will yield significant outcomes to inform policies and practice especially on addressing the issues of Tongan male learners in Higher Education. If you agree to participate, there are also consent forms and confidential agreement form that you will complete in due time to facilitate the ethical part of this research.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Participants will be accessed through the New Zealand Tongan Tertiary Association and its umbrella and affiliated organisations such as the Auckland University Tongan Student Association, Auckland University of Technology Tongan Student Association and others. Phone contact will be made and information sheets

sent for potential participants. A follow up phone call will be made to a key contact person within these organisations with whom I would have initially made contact with. Once participants have identified and volunteered, I will contact them individually to introduce myself and the research.

Participants for this study will be selected from these set criterions using purposive sampling from Auckland region that are either born in Tonga or Aotearoa.

a. Tongan male learners who are currently studying at university or polytechnics

b. Tongan male learners who either have recently graduated or dropped out from university or Polytechnics

Several studies have been conducted on how to select participants.(Johnson,1990; Trotter 1991) but few have really provided guideline for selection actual sample sizes. Bernard (2000:178) observed that most ethnographic studies are based on thirty-sixty interviews, while Bertaux (1981) argued that fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample size in qualitative research. Morse (1994:225) outlined more detailed guidelines. She recommended at least six participants for phenomenological studies; approximately thirty-fifty participants for ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and ethno science studies; and one hundred to two hundred units of the item being studied in qualitative ethnography. Creswell's (1998) ranges are a little different. He recommended between five and twenty-five interviews for a phenomenological study and twenty-thirty for a grounded theory study. Data collected from the *talanoa and tālanga sessions* will be information rich. Therefore sample size is adequate for this research project and data saturation can be reached with these numbers.

Participants will then be given possible time scheduled for talanoa sessions, with further schedule be organised to hold the '*tālanga*' ' or focus group discussions. At the focus group discussion, participants will have the option of sharing insights on their persistence and experiences and research questions will occur. The study also anticipates a minimal discomfort or risks to participants' as they will relate only to experiences and persistence in higher education. If any discomfort is experienced, the researcher will consult the assistance of the 3 supervisors; if it is cultural, the cultural supervisor will be consulted before responding to the situation.

Project Procedures

Once the Ethics application is approved by MUHEC, participants are identified and have them complete their consent forms, a scheduled will be tabulate and given to

allow participants to provide best and possible time and place for talanoa and focus group sessions. Talanoa sessions will be completed first before the initiating of focus group sessions. A total of 1hour is expected for the talanoa while 1 ½ hours is expected for focus group sessions.

Data Management

Data collected from both talanoa and focus group will be transcribed and use by the researcher to construct possible stepping stones and stumbling blocks of male Tongan learners at Higher education. All audio recordings and transcripts will be kept separately in the researcher's space at Home in a locked filing cabinet which can only be accessed by the researcher. All transcribed information will be stored in the researcher's personal computer and desktop which are both password protected. All physical copies will be locked in the assigned filing cabinet. All data will be kept with the School of Education   for a period of 5 years. The supervisor will be responsible for the shredding and destruction of any other data not required for the final report. Participants will be assured that confidentiality will be maintained at all times. No identifying features, such as names, occupation or places will be reproduced in any material arising from this research that is placed in the public domain

Participant's Rights

The rights of the participants are that:

- (i) Their participation is voluntary and all information given will be confidential;

- (ii) They have the right to remain anonymous and withdraw their co-operation at any time up to the focus group sessions.

- (iii) They can decline to answer any question during the research process and seek further clarification on any issue;

- (iv) The names of institutions will be kept anonymous and all other personal information quoted including the identity of the individuals will also remain anonymous other than to the researcher and her supervisors;

- (v) The confidentiality of the participants will be protected through the removal of all personal identifiers such as names and addresses from both physical and computer-held records and their replacement with a code. The key that links the codes to the identifying information will be kept separate and secure. All the data used for published research will be archived indefinitely after the

submission of her thesis while all other information will be destroyed 5 years after the submission of her thesis.

- (vi)Participant s will be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is completed.

Project Contacts

If you have any queries regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

The researcher can be contacted at this address:

'Olikoni Tanaki/Doctoral Student	**Dr Michael Irwin**
School of Education	**Primary Super visor-Senior Lecturer**
Massey University-Albany Campus	**School of Education**
Private Bag	**Massey University- Albany Campus**
North Shore	**Private Bag, North Shore**
Mob: 021233208	**Tel : 094140800 , extension 41479**
Email: vaiolikoni@gmail.com	**Email: m.r.irwin@massey.ac.nz**

Compulsory Statements

1. **APPLICATIONS TO A REGIONAL HEALTH & DISABILITY ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Use the approval statement from the relevant Health & Disability Ethics Committee:

2. **MUHEC APPLICATIONS**

The following statement is compulsory and MUST be included:

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application **12/068.** If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Chair Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 9570, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B : Ethics approval

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
ALBANY

14 November 2012

'Olikoni Tanaki
c/- Dr M Irwin
College of Education
Massey University
Albany

Dear 'Olikoni

HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL APPLICATION – MUHECN 12/068
Kataki e Mama Moe Hopokia: Experiences of Tongan Male Learners in Higher Education in Aotearoa

Thank you for your application. It has been fully considered, and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, a reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ralph Bathurst
Chair
Human Ethics Committee: Northern

cc: Dr M Irwin
College of Education

Appendix C: Consent Form/Individual

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Kātaki e mamá moe hopohopokia:

Persistence and experiences of male Tongan learners at Higher education in Aotearoa

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: _____   **date:** _____

Full Name printed _____

Appendix D: Consent Form/Focus Group

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Kātaki e mamá moe hopohopokia

Persistence and experiences of male Tongan learners at Higher education in Aotearoa

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

Full Name printed _____

Appendix E: Confidential Agreement

Kātaki e mamá moe hopohopokia:

Persistence and experiences of male Tongan learners at Higher education in Aotearoa

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I _____ (Full Name - printed)

agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project   (Title of Project)

I will not retain or copy any information involving the project.

Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

Appendix F : PARTICIPANTS PROFILE (*TALANOA*)

No	Code	QUALIFICATION	INSTITUTION
1	Siale Tonga	Post Grad	Massey University
2	Hone	Undergrad	AUT
3	Ohaikula	Certificate	MIT
4	Pako	Undergrad	Te Wananga o Aotearoa
5	Langakali	Diploma	Best Education
6	Kukuvalu	Diploma	MIT
7	Painimutu	Post Grad	Auckland University
8	Puafisi	Undergrad	UNITEC
9	Ahivao	Post- Grad	Waikato University
10	Tevunga	Undergrad	Massey University
11	Sī Kula	Undergrad	UNITEC
12	Sialetafa	Diploma	MIT
13	Kautekula	Undergrad	Massey University
14	Motelolo	Certificate	Best Education
15	Tuitui	Undergrad	Auck University
16	Samoa	Diploma	MIT
17	Pipitongi	Cert	Best Education
18	Kulukona	Undergrad	AIS St Helen
19	Huni	Certificate	AIS St Helen
20	Hingano	Post Grad	AUT
21	Heilala	Undergrad	AUT
22	Vaohehea	Diploma	MIT
23	Mohokoi	Certificate	Massey University

- **Tongan kakala(native flowers) are used to represent the identity of the participants**

Appendix G: PARTICIPANTS PROFILE (*TĀLANGA & TĀLAVE*)

No	Code	QUALIFICATION	INSTITUTION
		FOCUS GROUP A	
1	Fonu	Post Grad	AUT
2	Hakulā	Undergrad	AUT
3	Sokisoki	Cert	AIS St Helen
4	Te'efoo	Diploma	AIS St Helen
5	Manini	Cert	UNITEC
		FOCUS GROUP B	
1	'Elili	Undergrad	Massey University
2	Tafola	Cert	Best Education
3	Kuku	Post grad	Massey University
4	Tuila	Diploma	Te Whare wananga
5	To'o	Undergrad	Massey University
		FOCUS GROUP C	
1	Kuka	Cert	MIT
2	Paka	Undergrad	MIT
3	Lailo	Undergrad	Waikato University
4	Kamakama	Diploma	Best Education
5	Tupa	Cert	Best Education
		TĀLAVE PARTICIPANTS	
1	Matu	Undergrad	Auckland Uni
2	Tokemoana	Post Grad	Auckland Uni
3	Sokisoki	Cert	Auckland Uni
4	Sipesipa	Undergrad	Auckland Uni
5	Hōputu	Diploma	Massey University

- Tongan marine species are used to represent the names of my participants