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**TONGAN MOTHERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR YOUNG  
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND:  
*LUKULUKU 'A E KAU FA'Ē TONGA'  
KI HE AKO 'ENAU FĀNAU IIKI' 'I NU'U SILA***

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*An artificial Kakala Nusi Heilala made of beads and plastic*

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex nature of how Tongan mothers in New Zealand contribute to their young children's *ako* (learning, and general education) in their homes, in the early childhood centre and primary school settings, and in church and the community. It argues that the mothers' contribution to their children's *ako* is based mainly on their cultural background, educational experience in Tonga, and their Christian faith, plus new knowledge they have picked up in New Zealand. Through the use of *talanoa* (conversation, questions and discussion) in Tongan and English languages, data were gathered from a small community in a town in the North Island, New Zealand and were coded, analysed, and presented.

The participants draw on skills and knowledge of child-rearing strategies and educational practices experienced in Tonga before their migration to this country. However, when implemented in New Zealand, some aspects prove contradictory to the current practice in Aotearoa. The mothers find these emerging tensions frustrating, yet ongoing, but new learning in this country and their Christian faith help enhance their practice.

The findings show that the mothers' use of Tongan language, cultural values, beliefs, and practices, with the lived experience of their Christian faith, is effective in teaching the children social and moral education, while contributing to their academic learning and still be preserving their Tongan culture, language, and identity. The mothers' shared use of Tongan language, cultural values and Christian faith enable them to create and maintain good relationships with teachers and other mothers for making worthwhile contributions to their children's *ako* in the selected contexts. Most of the mothers are involved in most activities, and nearly all participate where Tongan language is used and Tongan culture and Christianity are practised. It is acknowledged that some contributions create dilemmas and mismatches of expectations between the women and mainstream educational institutions.

The women's efforts, accessing information in Tongan, and operating in education using *faka-Tonga* ways, and creating warm relationships among the mothers, teachers, and children who contribute to one another's learning reveal the complex nature of mothers' contributions to their children's education. They shuttle from one context to another, using their *faka-Tonga* ways, views and practices to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities, while going through transformation in their participation. Based on these findings, implications for mothers, teachers/educators, researchers, and policymakers are considered, and suggestions for future research directions are made that may benefit the growing Tongan population since it is they who have the main responsibility for young Tongan children's *ako* in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

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It is my hope that this small token to Tongan Mothers and their contribution to their children's education in Aotearoa will expand to benefit all children in New Zealand.

*Malo 'aupito  
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