Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
The relationship between lotu and ako for Pacific University Students in New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy in Social Policy

At Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand

Sesimani Havea
2011
Improving the educational achievement of Pacific peoples is an on-going development issue in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This thesis explored the relationship between *lotu* (spirituality/faith/church) and *ako* (formal education) amongst Pacific university students. *Lotu* is defined within the context of the Christian tradition. The value of *lotu* is used interchangeably throughout this thesis with spirituality, faith, and church. *Ako* as defined within the context of this study is a Tongan term signifying education or the formal process of learning. The primary objective of this study is to identify the mechanisms by which *lotu* influences academic achievement of Pacific university students. A blend of qualitative ethnography and the *Talanoa* approach provided the conceptual framework. Two focus groups and eight individual interviews of Pacific students and graduates were conducted. The findings suggest a positive relationship between *lotu* and educational achievement for Pacific university students. The participants described their spirituality as a personal relationship with Christ which was reflected in their active practicing of: prayer; reading, studying and meditating on the Word of God; and attending church fellowship. Spirituality for the respondents was also emulated in their relationships, with God, with their *kainga* and with other people. These relationships were key motivations for their desire to succeed in their academic pursuits. Linked to the significance of these relationships was the participants’ definition of academic achievement which was beyond the mere attainment of a qualification but also about their ability to reciprocally give back to their *kainga* and increase their community’s wellbeing. In the midst of the inevitable trials and tribulations of the respondents’ social and academic journeys, their spirituality gave them hope, wisdom (*poto*) and courage to persevere in order to complete their studies. The findings suggest a need for continued support of Pacific students using the pastoral care model, as well as better collaborative approaches to policy making among tertiary institutions, key educational policy agencies and the Pasifika community.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“...Seek first His [God] Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6: 33, NIV).

First and foremost I want to thank Jesus, my Lord for His wisdom, and guidance which has enabled me to complete this thesis project. All praise, honour and glory to Him, for the promises of His Word, which has given me the peace, and courage to keep going to the end.

I would also love to dedicate this thesis to my awesome husband Palatasa, and our three wonderful children, Nasoni, Siutaisa and Lueni Jasmine. I thank God for all of you for your understanding, patience and encouragement through this challenging but rewarding journey. I simply could not have completed the thesis without your patient support.

I want to pay tribute to my supervisors, Dr Mary Nash and Dr Tracie Mafiele’o. A huge malo ‘aupito (thank you very much in Tongan), for sharing your knowledge, wisdom, and experience. Your professionalism in guiding me through the journey was invaluable.

I also dedicate this thesis to my parents, Samiuela Taufa (Dad) and, Latu Fua’i’api Taufa (Mum). Thank you Mum and Dad for your vision of a better life for me and Temaleti Manu (sister), Lueni Taufa (sister), and Samiuela Liukanasi Alaska Taufa (brother). I am truly grateful for your inspiration, encouragement and prayers throughout this journey.

Last but not least I want to dedicate this thesis to all Pacific scholars. My hope and prayer is that you will grow in your knowledge of God and realise that God desires for you to be successful. Achievement in education was his design and plan for all of us.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..........................................................................................................................1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....................................................................................................2

TABLE OF CONTENTS...........................................................................................................3

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ...............................................................................................7

  Background and rationale for the project ................................................................. 8
  Justification for this research ................................................................................. 9
  Definition of terms .................................................................................................. 13
  Thesis format ............................................................................................................ 15

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPACT OF LOTU AND CULTURE ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT .....................................................................................17

  Introduction ............................................................................................................ 17
  Defining spirituality ............................................................................................... 17
    Challenges in defining Spirituality ................................................................. 17
    Understanding spirituality within the context of study ................................ 19
  Lotu and Culture from a Pacific perspective ...................................................... 23
  The positive influences of spirituality ............................................................... 29
  Spirituality and educational achievement .......................................................... 30
    Challenges in researching the interface between spirituality and education ..................................................................................................................30
  Relationship with God and its impact on educational achievement 31
  Prayer and its impact on educational achievement .......................................... 33
  Character development and its impact on educational achievement .......... 34
  Spiritual Intelligence and its impact on educational achievement ... 35
  Pastoral care and its impact on educational achievement ......................... 36
  Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 38
CHAPTER 3: AKO AND CULTURE WITHIN A PACIFIC CONTEXT ..........40
  Introduction........................................................................................................ 40
  Defining Education ............................................................................................. 40
  Pacific notions of ako ......................................................................................... 41
  Pacific notions of educational achievement.................................................. 46
  General overview of current socio-economic status of Pacific peoples in
  New Zealand ...................................................................................................... 47
  An overview of Pasifika educational performance across the three
  educational sectors ............................................................................................ 48
  Current policy initiatives for Pacific peoples within the tertiary sector.... 49
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 52

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ..............................................53
  Introduction.......................................................................................................... 53
  Thesis objectives ................................................................................................. 53
  Methodology ........................................................................................................ 53
  Methods ............................................................................................................... 56
  Research Design process.................................................................................... 58
    Participant selection and recruitment .............................................................. 58
    Conducting the focus groups ......................................................................... 61
    Conducting the interviews .............................................................................. 62
  Data analysis ....................................................................................................... 64
  Limitations .......................................................................................................... 65
  Ethical issues ....................................................................................................... 65
    Researcher stance ............................................................................................. 65
    Maintenance of confidentiality ......................................................................... 66

CHAPTER 5: STORIES OF PACIFIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND
  GRADUATES .................................................................................................68
  Introduction ......................................................................................................... 68
  Theme one: Spirituality ..................................................................................... 68
Spirituality as a personal relationship with God.............................. 69
Ways of growing spiritually............................................................ 70
Spirituality as whole of life experience........................................ 71
Relationship with others as an important aspect of spirituality ...... 73
Spirituality as a Pacific cultural value........................................... 74
Theme Two: Education and motivations to succeed....................... 75
  Kainga as a key motivator for educational success......................... 76
  Role modeling as motivation for educational success................... 78
  Relationship with God as a motivation to succeed in the academy . 79
  Education as a gateway to many possibilities ............................... 80
  Education as a life-long journey.................................................. 81
  Educational achievement as the ability to give back to one’s kainga
  and community ........................................................................... 82
  God as the source of educational achievement .............................. 83
Theme three: Spirituality and educational achievement ................. 84
  Spirituality as a source of hope for the academic journey ............ 85
  Spirituality as source of wisdom for the academic journey........... 86
  Spirituality as a source of courage for the academic journey ......... 88
  Pastoral support provided by Pacific community on campus ...... 90
  The role of the church community ................................................ 90
  University experience strengthens spirituality............................ 91
Divergent issues from focus groups discussions ......................... 92
Conclusion ..................................................................................... 93

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION ......................................95
Introduction .................................................................................... 95
Theme one: Spirituality................................................................. 97
  Spirituality as a personal relationship with God......................... 97
  Ways of staying strong spiritually................................................ 99
Spirituality as a whole of life experience .................................................. 101

Theme two: Spirituality and Educational Achievement ......................... 103
  God as a source and a motivation for educational success ................. 104
  Spirituality as a source of hope for the academic journey ............ 105
  Spirituality as a source of poto or wisdom for the academic journey ................................................................. 106
  Spirituality as a source of courage for the academic journey ......... 108

Theme three: Lotu and Pacific cultures .................................................. 110
  Spirituality as an integral part of Pacific cultures ......................... 111
  Pastoral support provided by the Pacific community on campus .. 112
  The role of the church community ............................................. 113

Theme four: Lotu and Ako and Pacific cultures ........................................ 115
  ‘Ofa for the kainga as a key motivator for educational success ...... 115
  Role modeling as a motivator ..................................................... 119
  Educational achievement as the ability to give back to your kainga and community ......................................................... 120

Implications of findings for social policy development in the area of
tertiary education for Pacific peoples ............................................. 122

Conclusion ....................................................................................... 125

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION ................................................................ 128
  Implications and recommendations .............................................. 129
  Suggestions for further research ............................................... 132

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................. 135

GLOSSARY ..................................................................................... 153

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ............................................. 155
APPENDIX 2: MASSEY ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER ...................... 156
APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION SHEET .......................................... 157