

Female Experiences of Secondary Education in Tonga:  
Takuilau College in Lapaha

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Te Ara Poutama

## Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study exploring the meanings of secondary education in Tonga for female students from the perspectives of migrant Tongan women who are living in Auckland, New Zealand. These six women were born and raised in the village of Lapaha in the Hahake (eastern) district of Tonga's main island, Tongatapu, and are aged between forty-two and fifty-eight years old. During their childhood and adolescent years they attended Takuilau College, which is the Catholic co-educational secondary school in Lapaha village catering for Form 1 to Form 6 students; the New Zealand equivalent to Year 7 to Year 12.

The research is framed by firstly, a specific inquiry into their understandings of success and failure for female students, and secondly, a general inquiry into their experiences of secondary education at a Catholic high school for girls and boys in a Tongan village setting. The study's main finding is that although the Tongan secondary education system is weighted heavily on whether senior students pass or fail state examinations held at the end of every school year, the women retained loyal ties to their former Catholic high school irrespective of whether they, themselves, had passed or failed state examinations. As adult migrants, some were involved in an ex-student group established in Auckland, New Zealand, aimed at fundraising for, and supporting the current students of, Takuilau college.

The thesis has used the research framework of *kakala* designed by Tongan education academic Konai Helu-Thaman to carry out online *talanoa* or interview discussions with the participants by a culture-informed process. Such a process centres the Tongan language and aspects of cultural identity – a common village of descent – as the research methods by which to establish relationships, communicate familiarly, and co-construct the women's stories of female experiences of secondary education in Tonga. The study argues that exchanging *talanoa* about personal reflections and reconfiguring *kakala* as not only a research model, but also a framework for learning in Tongan society, is a valid approach for gathering deep qualitative insights into how Tongan women, in this case, attribute meaning to their past experiences as female students.

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Brown Pulu, T. (2018, February 4). Takuilau College 6th Form English. [Facebook](#)

## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Fe'aomoengalu Kautai

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I acknowledge the countless hours of work my supervisors Dr Teena Brown Pulu and Richard Pamatatau have put into my thesis and helping me every step of the way from start to finish. It has been a long two-and-a-half year journey to completion where I have had to modify the project according to Covid-19 protection protocols for student researchers. I thank Teena and Richard for their compassion and generous time and support.

The research participants were Catholic women of Lapaha village in Tonga who had migrated to Auckland, New Zealand. As a female descendant of Lapaha and Tatakamotonga, I can relate to their secondary school experiences and am grateful that they would share their stories and memories with me. The Sisters of Mercy New Zealand have been sympathetic to my yearning to research and write a thesis. I offer my sincere gratitude for their encouragement. I am proud to be a former teacher of Takuilau College in Tonga. Therefore, this humble work is for all Takuilau students and teachers, past and present, whom I have thought of to keep my spirits up when writing this study.



Figure 1: The late Principal and students of Takuilau College in Tonga.

## Dedication

In memory of Sitani Paulo Mahe, Principal of Takuilau College 2011 – 2022.



Figure 2: Sitani Paulo Mahe.

## Ethics Approval

The research conducted for this thesis was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 23 June 2021: Reference 21/50.

# Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is organised around two inquiries into the education experiences of former female students of Takuilau College, a Catholic co-educational secondary school for Forms 1-7 or Years 7-13 in the village of Lapaha in the Kingdom of Tonga. The first inquiry specifically focuses on perceptions of success and failure for female students, and the second is a general inquiry about female experiences of secondary education.

In many ways, this study reflects my own personal position as a religious sister and a former secondary school teacher of Takuilau College who believes that education ought to be couched in a holistic paradigm. Tonga's education system, I feel, should take into account the community life of the students and their social conditioning as Tongan daughters and sons who not only belong to families and villages, but to Christian denominational communities in village settings, such as the Catholic Church or the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Sadly, Tonga's secondary education system is solely focused on senior state examinations for Forms 5-7 or Years 11-13. This premises student success on passing exams taken in the English language, giving students and parents a narrow view of education in Tonga being anchored in the ability to acquire English language skills. I have always felt that such a one-sided approach to high school education in my country of origin has overlooked the significance of Tongan language, culture, and community oriented values, an argument that I make throughout the thesis.

The research underpinning the thesis is based on qualitative interviews with a small sample of six migrant Tongan women from Lapaha village now living in Auckland, New Zealand. The interviews were conducted by Zoom video conferencing due to the New Zealand Covid-19 protection framework preventing interviews from taking place in person. The main finding drawn from the interview conversations was that these women have views about success for females who have attended, or are attending, secondary school in Tonga that are not confined to academic achievement. From their social conditioning as Tongan daughters who went to a Catholic high school, they have inherited culture-specific values that attach importance to the whole person; that is, appreciating a person for being a member of this Catholic school community and recognising their talents and abilities outside of classroom learning for state exams.

In Tonga, religion or Christianity in its various denominations has been integrated into tradition and cultural knowledge to produce communal values that people live by and believe in. My research undertaking then, was to find out how the lived reality and social identity of

these migrant Tongan Catholic women had influenced their views of success and failure at secondary school. With that said, social conditioning within the Catholic school community of Takuilau College does reproduce personal ambition in students to achieve more in life. For different reasons, the women I interviewed had left their ancestral village of Lapaha for a new life in New Zealand, and were now members of the Tongan Catholic community in Auckland. Their personal experiences of shifting from Lapaha in Tonga to Auckland, New Zealand, were relatable to me in the sense they had their own personal ambitions of migrating to make more of their lives than the prospects they felt they had in Tonga.

A significant point that this thesis therefore analyses is that although academic achievement at high school in Tonga is not the be-all-end-all for the six interviewees, academic achievement is still recognised as a reward system of social mobility. Gaining state examination passes is seen as the vehicle enabling Tongan school leavers to acquire opportunities to pursue higher education overseas. Tongans are heavily socialised to see post-secondary qualifications as a form of accumulating social status. In this sense, those who have gained qualifications, especially at university level, are believed to be able to occupy a position of privilege in Tongan society in contrast to those without.

## Positioning the Researcher



Figure 3: Map of Lapaha in Tongatapu.

The map above shows the location of Lapaha village in the Hahake (eastern) district of Tongatapu. Tongatapu is the largest and most populated island in Tonga, a small island

developing state in the southwest Pacific Ocean made up of one-hundred-and-seventy islands and one-hundred-and-five thousand people. Although I was born in the old national hospital in the capital of Nuku'alofa in 1957, I have lived most of my life in Lapaha and have deep familial and social connections in the village and to village kin-and-kith who have migrated overseas to New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.

Coming from a Catholic family of eight children and being the third eldest, I grew up in a humble, modest home with a mother who took care of us and was involved in community affairs, and a hard-working father who was a crop farmer. My childhood was no different from other children living in the Catholic sector of Lapaha village. Centered around family and *kainga*, meaning extended family, my siblings and I followed the beliefs and practices of our devout Catholic parents who treasured tradition and communal values of *'apasia* (reverence), *'ofa* (love), *angafakatōkilalo* (humility), *vahevahemanava* (generosity), *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *fefaka'apa'apa'aki* (mutual respect), *toka'i fevahevahe'aki* (sharing), *fe'ofa'ofa ni* (to live in peace), *talangofua* (obedience), *mamahime'a* (commitment and loyalty), *fua kaveinga*, *faifatongia*, *fakahoko fatongia lelei*, (responsibility, duty, and obligation). Essentially, I grew up at home in Lapaha believing that this symbolised the core values of being Tongan.

As a Tongan woman of the villages of Lapaha and Tatakamotonga, the *'ulungaanga mahu'inga* (core values) I have named here form a process of social conditioning from childhood by which children are expected to grow up and live according to these principles or norms constituting Tongan society, church, and school. It was, and still is, commonly believed in Lapaha that the stronger one's commitment to these core values, the more likely their idealised behaviour will bring about benefits to one's *fāmili* (family), *siasi*, (church), *ako* (education), and *fonua* (people and land).

My relationship to Takuilau College was shaped by the years that I have worked at the school as a teacher and a religious sister of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. The Sisters of Mercy have supported my learning journey in New Zealand as a Form 6 or Year 12 student at Villa Maria College in Christchurch, an undergraduate student in her fifties who studied for a Bachelor's degree at the University of Canterbury, and as a postgraduate student in her sixties who studied for a Certificate in Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland. While undertaking this Master of Arts thesis at Auckland University of Technology in my mid-sixties, the Sisters of Mercy again supported my endeavours over a two-and-a-half year period. Here I was, an older nun struggling against the grain to complete my research on a topic close to my heart in the faculty of Māori and Indigenous development; the faculty where staff and fellow postgraduates showed genuine openness

and social acceptance towards my people and me, a Tongan student researcher and a second-language speaker of English.

Starting out on my thesis journey in 2020, I had intended to travel to Tonga to carry out face-to-face interviews with Form 6 or Year 12 female students at Takuilau College as the qualitative interview basis of the research project. On the 25th of March 2020, however, the New Zealand government announced a state of emergency due to Covid-19 cases and a nationwide lockdown which lasted until April 27th when restrictions were slightly relaxed. The international border remained closed for another two years, and my hopes for researching in my home village of Lapaha in Tonga were dampened.

In the latter half of 2021, I tried to apply for a research permit from the Prime Minister's Office at the Government of Tonga to conduct telephone interviews with Form 6 or Year 12 female students at Takuilau College. The staff in the Prime Minister's Office emailed a request for the names of the students, the names of their parents, the name of the principal, and the name of the school. This request was in direct conflict with the research ethics rules of the university where as the researcher, I am not allowed to share the personal contact details of participants with a third party, especially government officials who have power over the people of a country.

My supervisor advised me to stop email communication with the government officials, and we submitted a modified ethics application to interview migrant Tongan women in Auckland, New Zealand, who had attended Takuilau College. I have written this reflection to make Tongan researchers living overseas aware that obtaining a research permit from the Prime Minister's Office at the Government of Tonga is the country's policy, which we must respect and go through the application process if we want to conduct research in Tonga. The contradiction is that it is impossible for researchers who have ethics approval from western universities to obtain a research permit from the Tongan government because if we share the research participants' names with the government, we have immediately breached research ethics.

## Positioning the Research

The research is positioned in two interwoven fields of education in Tonga. The first field is context-specific; that is, secondary school education experiences for Catholic students with particular reference to female students. The participants I have interviewed completed secondary school a long time ago. Are their perceptions of secondary education relevant to students who are currently at school? Although this is a valid question, it is not the heart of

the study. Rather, what this research project has attempted to do is highlight how school experiences and perceptions of success and failure for female students are intricately tied to the Catholic culture of Takuilau College, which is part-and-parcel of the Catholic community in Lapaha village.



Figure 4: Senior English class, Takuilau College.

Catholic education in Tonga at primary and secondary school level and for one tertiary institute for technical training is administered by the Directorate of Catholic Education. The Catholic Directorate is responsible for overseeing the system in which Catholic schools operate, while Tonga's Ministry of Education is responsible for orchestrating the national curriculum framework in which subjects are taught and assessed by a national standard, especially for senior students undertaking state examinations. Purposefully, this thesis has shifted the focus away from a discussion that is limited to student experiences of state exams to surveying the ways in which former students of Takuilau College recollect their experiences of the whole school experience, including cultural, sporting, and social events that they remember warmly. To reiterate, an important aspect of Catholic education I wanted to find out about from the perspectives of migrant Tongan women who had attended Takuilau College was the school culture, and how it reflects the communal values of the wider Catholic community in Lapaha where the school is located.

The second field is generally related to Tongan education; that is, a consideration of education writings by notable Tongan scholars, Konai Helu-Thaman, Timote Vaoleti, Tevita Ka'ili, and 'Okusitino Mahina, who use cultural concepts as the basis for conceptualising the purpose and function of learning in Tongan society. My research approach looks at how the school culture of Takuilau College, a Catholic coeducational secondary school in Lapaha, intersects with, or diverges from, theories on Tongan education put forward by Tongan scholars who have advocated for Tongan-centred curricula and ways of teaching and learning.

Although the research has been carried out online from Auckland, New Zealand, the place of origin of which the participants' viewpoints are traced to is Takuilau College in Lapaha village of Tonga. It is here that I will briefly narrate the history of Takuilau College and its position within the social organisation of Lapaha. Established in 1975 by the late Tongan Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tonga and Niue, Patelesio Punou-ki-Hihifo, Takuilau College began with eighty students and three trained teachers. Father Lava 'Enosi was appointed the school principal along with two religious sisters as teaching staff, Sister Eileen Dwyer from the Sisters of Mercy and Sister Benedict Finau from the Nazareth Sisters. In addition, Father Line Folaumoeloa, the Parish Priest of Saint Michael's Church in Lapaha assisted with developing the religious education curriculum.

Up until the present day, Takuilau College has grown its student base to more than six hundred students from Forms 1-7 or Years 7-13 with the recruitment area being Lapaha and villages throughout Hahake district. Teaching staff have been recruited from religious sisters, priests, and brothers, local Tongan Catholics, as well as volunteers from the Tonga Peace Corps. The school has expressly practiced an English language policy as the medium of instruction in the classroom with the aim of capacity building student acquisition of western subjects, such as English, Math, and Science, for sitting state examinations at the senior level of Forms 5-7 or Years 11-13. Sustaining the day-to-day running of the school and teachers' salaries on a minimal budget allocated by the Directorate of Catholic Education has relied on generous donations of cash and goods from fundraising events organised by the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and the overseas associations of ex-Takuilau students in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.

The villages of Lapaha and Tatakamotonga are positioned side-by-side and together form the Mu'a district with a population of 7,325 people at the last Tonga Census 2021. The district itself is known as the ancient capital of the Tu'i Tonga empire, which ruled over the Tonga Islands for three-hundred years from 1200 to 1500. The Christian denominational communities that make up Lapaha and Tatakamotonga are recognised for being

hierarchical, conservative, and sticklers for tradition with Lapaha being the estate of Prince Kalaniuvalu Fotofili and Tatakamotonga being the estate of Prince Tungi Tuku'aho. Situated within this social structure, Takuilau College, despite being Catholic in culture, is not at odds with the local heritage by any means, but rather, the students and local teaching staff recruited to the school are predominantly Lapaha and Tatakamotonga villagers. If anything, the Tu'i Tonga origins and history of the place and people is integrated into Takuilau College's school culture and the importance attached to learning and taking pride in custom.

## Chapter-by-Chapter Breakdown

Chapter one, *Introduction*, presents the cultural and social context of the study by detailing the research inquiry in relation to the interviewees, six migrant Tongan Catholic women living in Auckland who have attended Takuilau College. This chapter speaks to my own childhood socialisation in Lapaha in Tonga, and impresses that the study relates to research on Tongan education in a Catholic school context, and to Tongan writers who discuss learning in terms of Tongan cultural concepts.

Chapter Two, *Literature*, is a review of the writings underpinning the research inquiry. By focusing on four Tongan writers, Konai Helu-Thaman, Timote Vaoleti, Tevita Ka'ili and 'Okusitino Mahina, the chapter discusses various meanings of education as a process of learning according to Tongan concepts and communal values.

Chapter Three, *Methods*, describes the research process used for data collection carried out by qualitative interviews via Zoom video conferencing with six participants. The research process is structured by adapting Konai Helu-Thaman's *Kakala* model and Timote Vaoleti's *Talanoa* principles as a method for conducting online *talanoa* between the researcher and the research participants. Synthesised into this Tongan research approach is co-constructed inquiry, a method of gathering small stories from participants and linking them to create deeper messages and meanings about migrant Tongan women's experiences of secondary education in Tonga.

Chapter Four, *Findings*, is divided into three parts. Part one presents a condensed version of the life stories of the six migrant Tongan Catholic women, providing the reader with contextual insight into their migration and resettlement journeys. Part two is an assemblage of excerpts from the participants' online *talanoa*, detailing their perceptions of success and failure in a Tongan Catholic high school environment together with overall impressions of school experiences. Part three is an assemblage of excerpts from the

participants' online *talanoa*, particularising their reflections on Tongan identity and future improvements for Takuilau College.

Chapter Five, *Discussion*, contextualises the main findings into two parts that make up the study. The first section discusses the participants' impressions of success and failure in Tonga's secondary education system, as well as their overall experiences of schooling at the local Catholic high school in their village. The second section contextualises the significance of Tongan identity within the Catholic school community.

Chapter Six, *Conclusion*, summarises the study, emphasising the foreground argument that the participants, irrespective of passing or failing state examinations in Tonga's secondary education system, had maintained connections to their Catholic school community as migrant Tongan women now residing in Auckland.

The *References* section lists the texts used for researching and writing the thesis. Also included at the end of the thesis is a *Glossary* of Tongan language terms with English translations, which is referenced to C Maxwell Churchward's *Tongan Dictionary: Tongan-English and English-Tongan* (2015) for the correct spelling in Tongan. The *Appendices* section has the participant information sheet and oral consent protocol that participants were asked to consent to according to the approval process for research ethics at Auckland University of Technology.

## Chapter Two: Literature

In this chapter, I focus expressly on literature published by four Tongan academics who were born and raised in the Kingdom of Tonga. Trained in the disciplines of education and anthropology these writers, despite living and working overseas, have contributed fundamental research on Tongan ways of learning, thinking, and knowing the social world. It could be argued that they have collectively established research principles in Tongan studies, and to some extent, Pacific studies.

I acknowledge that there is a broad range of publications about Pacific student success and failure in secondary education in South Pacific states and western countries with large settlements of Pacific ethnic communities, such as New Zealand. Discussions about secondary education in Tonga construct a narrative that I am familiar with from my years as a secondary school teacher at Takuilau College: under-resourced schools, poorly trained and lowly paid teachers, rural poverty and students that struggle with English literacy, and an outdated state education curriculum (Athanasou and Torrance, 2002; Kepa and Manu'atu, 2008; Schoone, 2010; Sopus et al, 2016; Spolsky et al, 1983; Tatafu et al, 2000).

English literacy challenges is the social issue that leaves me feeling frustrated and disheartened. I am an older Tongan woman who is a nun in my sixties. I labour to write in English. I have needed constant proof-reading, editing, rewriting, and thesis structuring support for two-and-a-half years from supervisors, learning advisors, and fellow religious sisters in order to fix the grammar and spelling mistakes and make plain sense in English. My whole thesis had to be proof read and edited by others and it was burdensome work for the supervision team to try to teach me English grammar and how to write as it should be; how to read and understand the literature; how to design research questions; how to conduct an interview; how to operate the video recording function on Zoom; how to analyse interview data, among a number of things.

A full-time thesis that takes one-year for postgraduate students with high literacy and research skills ran into a protracted extension period in my case, taking more than twice as long to move at a snail's pace to the finish line. I still have difficulty with reading comprehension and writing in English, and acknowledge that I have a limited understanding of what a thesis is meant to be, as well as the literature in education studies relating to this thesis topic. To accept that I have to cope with English literacy and research competency issues is hard to take at my age along with my social standing among the Tongan Catholic community as a religious sister.

Taking that into consideration, the rationale for concentrating on Tongan literature was straightforward from where I am standing and looking at the research topic. I wanted to gauge how Tongan concepts of learning, thinking, and knowing the social world might be applied to female student experiences of secondary education in Tonga, specifically for the research participants. The six participants who were migrant Tongan women in Auckland, New Zealand that had attended Takuilau College, a Catholic coeducational secondary school in Lapaha, deserved to have their interview *talanoa* (discussion) analysed in an appropriate social and cultural context. What was that context, and what do Tongan concepts and ways of knowing the social world we construct and cohabit look like?

The writers whose works I will discuss in a narrative format are Konai Helu-Thaman, an education professor based at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji; Timote Vaoileti, a retired education senior lecturer who taught at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand; Tevita Ka'ili, an anthropology professor at Brigham Young University in Hawai'i, United States; and 'Okusitino Mahina, a retired anthropology lecturer who taught at the University of Auckland in Auckland, New Zealand.

## Konai Helu-Thaman's *Kakala*

Konai Helu-Thaman is a Pacific Islands education specialist who has worked in a number of senior positions at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and has published extensively on integrating cultural values and Pacific languages into curricula and teaching practice. She is also a renowned poet.

One of her well cited articles is *Culture and Curriculum in the South Pacific* published almost three decades ago (Helu-Thaman, 1993). Here, she argued that her childhood upbringing in an extended family originating from the Ha'apai islands in Tonga socially conditioned her to have a strong sense of cultural identity (Helu-Thaman, 1993). Her sense of Tongan identity kept her grounded in the countries that she migrated to for secondary and university education from New Zealand to Fiji to the United States, and then back to Fiji where she settled and worked as a university academic.

Through four decades of writing on education in the Pacific Islands, Helu-Thaman has highlighted the significance of cultural knowledge systems as the first system in which a child is socially conditioned to understand a curriculum of teaching, learning, and development (Helu-Thaman, 1993, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2013; Fa'avae, 2016). She reasons that this informal view of education is meaningful, and if learnt by teachers, allows them to understand the ways in which students from small island developing states in the South

Pacific region have learnt how to learn. Emphasising the interconnectedness of the “physical, cultural, spiritual” world, Helu-Thaman argues that this kind of integrated approach to learning ought to be included in the formal education system of schooling (Helu-Thaman, 1993 p. 256). Interconnectedness in a Tongan social context of learning is accentuated in Helu-Thaman’s *kakala* research model, which takes the practice of creating a flower garland for gifting and uses the process as a metaphor for conducting research for community benefit. However, the *kakala* research model can also be understood as a form of Tongan pedagogy. *Kakala* contains three stages of *tolu*, *tui* and *luva*, which are verbs for picking and weaving flowers into a garland ready to give away as a present.

In *Chapter Three: Methods*, I discuss how the *kakala* research model is practiced for research purposes. However, as a former teacher of Takuilau College, I have also found Helu-Thaman’s likening of preparing, weaving, and gifting a garland of flowers to be relevant to teaching and learning. What I want to discuss here is how *kakala* can be looked upon as a Tongan way of learning. This proposition might be a slight deviation from what Helu-Thaman meant, but I will elaborate on this point more fully when analysing the interview data in *Chapter Five: Discussion*.

During my own childhood in the villages of Lapaha and Tatakamotonga, I was socially conditioned by *kainga* (extended family) who together performed *lakalaka*, which is considered to be the national *faiva* (dance) of Tonga. I often watched my grandmother and mother make *kakala* (garland of flowers) and *sisi* (waist band of flower garlands) for my father who during his young adulthood up until middle-age assumed the position of *fakapotu*, referring to the third dancer in the line of male dancers for Lapaha. The *fakapotu* is the best dancer, and it is a sought after position held in high regard among village dance groups in Tonga. I would be called on to help with collecting flowers from my *kainga* in Lapaha and Tatakamotonga, which gave me the opportunity to meet my relatives and form deep social connections with them; connections that I have maintained up until today.

Creating *kakala* requires knowledge and skill, and is guided by a specific three-step process of *tolu*, *tui* and *luva*, or picking, weaving, and gifting. This practice has stayed with me because it evokes warm memories of my mother, father, grandmother and *kainga*. From observing my informal teachers, my own mother and other women making *kakala*, I do not need a text book to tell me about it. In fact, I can actually make *kakala*, and I learnt first-hand from seeing the process in action and copying the women around me who were my teachers, mentors, and supporters.

Within Tongan society, the actual practice of *tolu*, *tui* and *luva* to create *kakala* is often used in the classroom. Particularly teachers in rural districts and outer islands who have a

high level of Tongan language proficiency have the cultural competency to not only show students how to make a flower garland, but also to explain the meaning of the terms, *toli*, *tui*, and *luva* in the context of the *kakala* process. Learning by watching and doing, listening and making connections, is how students are socially conditioned within Tongan society to acquire new skills without having to refer to English text books for information and instruction. Moreover, the materials used for creating *kakala* are natural, local, and easy-to-access by way of *kole*, or asking relatives and neighbours who have suitable flowers growing in their garden. Teaching students to make *kakala* in the classroom can be achieved without money and by using the natural resources that are available. For students, the moral of the lesson lies in reflecting on the time, skill, and *'ofa* or love that goes into creating a flower garland to give to a person for a special occasion.

Such a humble group exercise of making *kakala* opens up a shared space for teachers to collaborate with students to produce flower garlands and communicate the process in the Tongan language, which builds the students' appreciation of cultural identity in classroom learning. From my perspective as a former school teacher, I feel exercises like this, which are language and culture centred, produce not only flower garlands but positive classroom experiences and a deep sense of belonging to the school community and the wider village community. It is heartening for Tongan teachers to see students dressed their very best in school uniform and proudly wearing a *kakala* they helped their mother, grandmother, or aunt to make. On special occasions during the school year when the wider village community are invited into the school setting, students will attend with their families who have contributed their time, skill, and *'ofa* to making their child's *kakala*.

## Timote Vaioleti's *Talanoa*

Timote Vaioleti is a specialist in Pacific pedagogies in the New Zealand education system at primary and secondary levels of schooling. A retired senior lecturer at the University of Waikato School of Education, Vaioleti is attributed as the Tongan researcher who designed the *talanoa* research method. *Talanoa* adapts the Tongan tradition of exchanging ideas and resolving issues through different forums for talking as a method for interviewing Pacific research participants. This research method for collecting data aims to create a culturally safe space for personal or group communication through which people can discuss their social realities and common issues. Thus, by using *talanoa* as a culturally appropriate method of communication, the researcher can then develop a more authentic understanding of Pacific ways of knowing (Vaioleti, 2013, 2006).

Through his research, Vaioleti has advocated for Tongan students in the New Zealand primary and secondary education system to be given the opportunity to learn the Tongan language and the social context in which cultural beliefs and principles are applied. By combining Konai Helu-Thaman's *kakala* research model and his own *talanoa* method of data collection through culture-specific conversation, Vaioleti designed a research approach in which Tongan concepts and practices can be used in the New Zealand education system. As a collective term, *talanoa* has many meanings and social contexts in which different kinds of *talanoa* are considered appropriate. However, the underlying principle is that *talanoa* is a system of communication in which language and culture is deeply connected whereby one cannot operate without the other.

A literal translation of *talanoa* is "to talk in an informal way" by sharing stories and experiences (Churchward, 2015, p. 447). But *talanoa* can also take on the meaning of directing or announcing a public matter as *noa* can refer to a subject being common to all. *Talanoa* when applied as a research method is about being flexible, making space for others to talk, and allowing time for social connection and relationships to gel. Vaioleti's references to different kinds of *talanoa* communication, as in *talanoa faka'eke'eke* (formal interview), *talanoa'i* (storying), and *mālie* (pleasing and interesting exchange), shows that the research method adapts the style of talk to suit the social context in which data is being collected.

Within the secondary education system in Tonga, I believe the significance of Timote Vaioleti's *talanoa* research method can be applied when teachers recognise that the Tongan language is the fundamental marker of cultural identity. In my view, students engage in learning processes with greater confidence and competence if their first language is valued within the school curricula. I say this because Vaioleti's *talanoa* research method is grounded in a Tongan way of teaching and learning and relevant to my own experiences in Tonga.

I have found that the Tongan language is the most effective means of communication for interacting with students and assisting them to make sense of information in the school curricula in ways that they can relate to and understand. In classroom settings, students whose teachers use Tongan to explain information and ideas find that their students *talanoa*, or share stories of their lived experiences to make sense of the course content. *Talanoa* in classroom settings therefore strengthens relationships between teachers and students by allowing students to participate in their learning, rather than being set tasks that are beyond their level of English comprehension and off-putting.

## Tevita Ka'ili's *Tauhi Vā*

Tevita Kaili is a social anthropologist specialising in Tongan studies. His research is oriented in the relationship between the Tongan language and ensuing cultural concepts and practices. Currently Ka'ili is the Dean of the Faculty of Culture at Brigham Young University in Hawai'i in the United States.

A theory that Ka'ili has contributed to developing in Tongan studies is the concept of *vā*, meaning relational spaces, with specific reference to *tauhi vā*, meaning to maintain relationships. Adapting 'Okusitino Mahina's ideas on *tā* and *vā* as cultural referents to time and space in Tongan tradition, Ka'ili contextualised *tauhi vā* in the diasporic setting of Tongan migrants living on the island of Maui in the state of Hawai'i (Ka'ili, 2005). In this particular study, he argued that *vā* and *tauhi va* are the concepts that underpin how Tongans understand their social relationships across *tā* and *vā*, time and space. The narrative that Ka'ili told was that one time he had travelled from Washington state where he was studying as a doctoral student in anthropology to Maui in Hawai'i. Upon talking to a Tongan female vendor at a local market in Maui, they were able to strike up a warm and familiar conversation once their ancestral connections to Vava'u, the northern islands of Tonga, were established. Ka'ili thus saw that *tauhi vā* or maintaining relationships was a concept that could be applied to Tongans in the diaspora identifying with one another via common connections to places of origin in Tonga.

*Vā* therefore refers to the relational space between people, whereas *tauhi vā* refers to nurturing the socio-spatial ties between people through *talanoa*, conversation (Ka'ili, 2005, p. 89). Tongan education academic, Telesia Kalavite, cited Ka'ili's thoughts on *vā* as the root word for "mutual relations" and its variations (Kalavite, 2010, pp. 16-17).

*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 relationships [where] vālelei refers to harmonious and beautiful social space between people, and vātamaki signifies a disharmonious social space between people.*

In my case as a Tongan researcher interviewing migrant Tongan women in Auckland, women who were Catholic and had migrated from my home village of Lapaha in Tonga, it was important that these research participants were able to trust me enough to feel

comfortable sharing their personal stories of school experiences at Takuilau College. The concept of *tauhi vā* in a diasporic setting, as discussed by Tevita Ka’ili, applied to my situation. The way that I have interpreted the practice of *tauhi vā* in relation to my research project is that it was my *fatongia*, meaning my responsibility as a Tongan researcher to respect the *vā* (relational space) between us as female descendants from the same village and church community. If for some reason, my conduct disrupted the *vā* between myself and the *kaungafa’u*, meaning research participants, then that very disruption would harm our social connection resulting in *vātamaki*, meaning “a disharmonious social space” (Ka’ili cited in Kalavite, 2010, p. 17).

When relating the concept of *tauhi vā* to education settings in Tonga, the concept provides teachers with a way to understand how and why students maintain relationships within their peer groups at secondary school. What I learnt from interviewing the six migrant Tongan women for my research is that they were able to maintain the relationships they had nurtured among peers at Takuilau College right through to adulthood. The significance of *tauhi vā* in the research participants’ adult lives can be seen in the way that keeping up friendships with old school chums from Tonga symbolised the deeper bonds the migrant women had formed through their school experiences with Takuilau College. This is a point that I will expand on in *Chapter Five: Discussion* where I analyse the interview data.

## ‘Okusitino Mahina’s *Ako*

‘Okusitino Mahina is a social anthropologist specialising in the philosophy behind Tongan cultural concepts and associated practices. A former lecturer in anthropology at the University of Auckland, Mahina’s philosophical knowledge has been known to examine how Tongan cultural concepts are linked to *tala-e-fonua*, ancient stories of the land and people of Tonga. One of Mahina’s well read papers within education research circles explains his ‘Tongan Theory of *Ako* (Education)’ (Mahina, 2008). He argues that *ako* is the ability of a group or a society to think critically and apply various theories when studying or considering an issue in order to validate whether the theoretical approach is true when measured against individual viewpoints on the matter (Mahina, 2008). *Ako*, according to Mahina’s position, is not about individual perceptions, but represents a collective approach in which truth can be justified.

Mahina sees that education has become an institutional process that informs people’s perceptions of reality. However, his concern is that education in terms of formal

learning standardised by the state is often taken for granted without analysing the system in which it exists (Mahina, 2008, p. 70). For Mahina then, education is about applying skills of logic and rational thinking in classroom settings in which opposing ideas are weighed up to find the truth of the matter. Such an *ako* process allows learning to move “from *vale* (ignorance), to *'ilo* (knowledge), to *poto* (skill)” when finding answers to life’s tests and challenges (Mahina, 2008, p. 69). Thus, when one’s thinking is transformed from ignorance to skill due to the *ako* process of rigorous knowledge acquisition and skilful debate, the student becomes enlightend. The purpose of education is therefore to apply knowledge skilfully to see the truth of things via the method of critical analysis (Mahina, 1999, 2004, 2008, p. 70). ‘Atenisi Institute in Tonga, which was founded by the late Futa Helu who was ‘Okusitino Mahina’s teacher, is by Mahina’s opinion a “community of scholars and thinkers that has significantly advanced a culture of critical thinking” (Mahina, 2008, p. 70).

Mahina goes on to explain another theory of his on *ta* and *vā*, which he sees as epitomising how Tongans understand reality based on the concepts of time and space. Tongan society, the author believes, moves in a cyclic pattern in the way that Tongans “walk forward into the past, and walk backward into the future” (Mahina, 2008, p. 79). Mahina therefore asserts that the Tongan concept of time does not recognise the future because the future does not exist; only the past and the present exist and are known to be real and true. With that said, the author’s rationale is that Tongans value the past because the past has happened in time, and they also accept that the present time is real: thus, they walk backwards into the future looking to the past as their guide for living in the present.

On a deeply personal level as a Catholic religious sister, and a professional level as a former teacher at a Catholic secondary school, I disagree with Mahina’s model of *ako* because it goes against fundamental principles of Catholic education in Tonga. Mahina’s approach to education, in practice, is elitist because only students who can understand and apply critical thinking skills in English can participate in the education curricula and have a chance to learn and achieve under this system. This exclusive approach to education stands in direct conflict with the system under which Catholic schools operate in Tonga. Contrary to Mahina’s theory, schools like Takuilau College follow the directives and policies of the Catholic Directorate of Education. In principle, the directorate instructs Catholic schools to practice social inclusion in the classroom. The most fundamental way to do this is to address the class divisions in Tongan society by enrolling children from poorer sectors of society, irrespective of whether their families are Catholic or Protestant, to give them access to formal schooling.

## Chapter Three: Methods

As a Tongan researcher and an insider of the Tongan Catholic community in Auckland, New Zealand, and in Lapaha in Tonga, I believe that Timote Vaoleti was right to suggest that when researching among one's own people, it is important to choose methods that are related to and valued by them (Vaoleti, 2006). The theoretical framework and research methods used in this research symbolises, in my opinion, a Tongan methodology. The approach seeks to validate Tongan cultural values by using the Tongan language as the mode of communication to enable participants to articulate their stories and ideas about a topic that is familiar to them and their people.

During the data collection process, it was important that I could maintain trusting relationships with the participants by way of forming a cultural and spiritual connection to them as not only individual adults, but as people who belonged to Catholic families from Lapaha, my community and village in Tonga. Konai Helu-Thaman's *Kakala* model (Helu-Thaman, 2008) and Timote Vaoleti's principles around applying *Talanoa* as a research method (Vaoleti, 2006, 2011, 2017) have made a considerable impact on my own learning about how to construct a Tongan methodology. Their ideas were adapted and synthesised with co-constructed inquiry for the research approach that I designed to collect data by qualitative interview discussions through Zoom video conferencing.

### *Kakala* as Research Process

*Kakala* is Konai Helu-Thaman's (2002, 2008) research metaphor that likens the research process to making a garland of flowers in Tongan society in which the process involves three important steps of *toli*, the gathering of flowers, *tui*, the making of the garland, and *luva*, the social reciprocity of gifting the *kakala* as a present (Johansson-Fua., 2007; Thaman, 1995, 2005; Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2005, Kalavite, 2010; Fa'avae, 2016). Importantly in Tonga, this is considered the craft of women who often work collectively to produce multiple *kakala* for special occasions. The *toli* stage symbolises preparation, whereby the finest flowers are selected for their shape and scent, and then picked with care to avoid damaging the petals and stems for risk of losing the fragrance. This means the *kakala* is handled skilfully from the start of the garland making process to the end product so that the desired creation can be made as a gift. The women move on to the next stage of *tui*, or arranging and tying the flowers into a garland so that it is attractive and suitable for gifting to the recipient. The last

stage of *luva* symbolises the presentation of the garland to the recipient according to the social context of the occasion.

Helu-Thaman's research metaphor of *kakala* likens *toli* to the preparation stage of a research project in which the researcher identifies a question or a topic they want to find out about and sets out to gather the relevant information required to respond to the inquiry. *Tui* is the process of compiling and writing up the information in the report, and *luva* is the final stage of sharing the information so that it can be used for the benefit of the community. To reiterate, the *kakala* research metaphor represents the three-stage process of *toli*, as in data collection, *tui*, meaning to assemble information in the write-up of the research findings, and *luva*, which signals that the information in the report is ready to be disseminated.

As a first-time researcher, I reflected more on *toli*, the first stage of the *kakala* model because the preparation phase of the research process was the most patently clear to me. This involved recruiting participants, organising an interview schedule, and gathering the interview data. Tongan education academic, Telesia Kalavite, saw that the *tui* process of report writing in the *kakala* model was meaningful because at the second stage, the researcher has to methodically synthesise the findings into an integrated whole, similar to crafting an actual *kakala*, so that the research findings are ready to *luva* (to give) to others (Kalavite, 2010 p. 118).

## Online *Talanoa*

*Talanoa* is Timote Vaoleti's research method for engaging Tongan participants in reflective conversations as the data gathering process. Vaoleti likens the *talanoa* method to creating a communal space in which people feel at ease to recall their lived realities and personal issues, and perhaps their hopes or fears for the future. By using a culture-informed method to create an appropriate environment to *talanoa*, to exchange ideas and information through constructive discussion, Vaoleti believes the data that is generated will be more culturally authentic (Vaoleti, 2013, 2006).

In support of Vaoleti's position that *talanoa* is a culture-informed method of research, Tongan education academic Linita Manu'atu (2000a) felt that *talanoa* is a technique by which meaningful stories and relationships are constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed through a Tongan way of understanding our social world (Manu'atu, 2000). Vaoleti suggested that to be skilful at *talanoa* is vital for expressing the emotions and feelings of everyday life through talk that captures humour, nuance, and nostalgia (Vaoleti,

2013). He also saw that to authentically engage in *talanoa* as a research method requires the researcher to be an insider and a language speaker of the ethnic and cultural community being researched.

*Talanoa* was central to carrying out this research about migrant Tongan women's experiences of secondary education and feelings about success and failure at school. By creating an interview discussion space for online *talanoa* using Zoom video conferencing, our tradition-bound perspectives as migrant women descended from the same village of Lapaha, and even our different views on secondary education in Tonga, were exchanged in a way that that culturally made sense to us (Prescott, 2008).

Being Native speakers of the Tongan language was fundamental for achieving an authentic social exchange where our thoughts and feelings could be communicated through *talanoa*. Within a Tongan research framework, *talanoa* is much more than telling stories. To me, it is the reciprocal flow of lived reality between speakers of the same language who are genuinely listening, hearing, and responding to one another with regard to experiences that they know and are common to them. Vaioleti impressed that the *talanoa* research method derives from the Tongan tradition of being an ancient culture; one that passed on knowledge and history by word-of-mouth.

To paraphrase Vaioleti's sentiments, *Talanoa* therefore requires a skilful and trustworthy researcher to facilitate the "continuity" of the conversation, and "the authenticity and cultural integrity of knowledge" sharing (Vaioleti, 2003, p. 2). I came away from the online *talanoa* feeling genuinely relieved that we had created a space to express our experiences and meanings about issues that had affected our lives; we even spoke of solutions when we thought it was necessary (Prescott, 2008).

## Co-Constructed Inquiry

Synthesised into the overall design of the project was co-constructed inquiry; that is, a method of gathering and linking small stories from six migrant Tongan women recollecting their understandings of success and failure from when they attended Takuilau College during their state exam years of Forms 5-7 or Years 11-13. Now, as adult women settled in Auckland, New Zealand, they had a space to reflect on their youth, and perhaps articulate thoughts about growing up as Catholic school girls in Lapaha village that no other person had asked them before being interviewed for this research.

In saying that, I have borrowed from the work of several non-Tongan authors and adapted their general ideas to fit with a Tongan research approach (Bamberg 2004, 2006; Young, 2009, pp. 358-359; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Vaioleti, 2006). Co-constructing, by my understanding, means asking the participants during the online *talanoa* to share their “small stories” on a familiar topic that is known to them and their social identity group of former Catholic high school students (Young, 2009). These small stories are joined together as a “co-constructed narrative strand,” as Kathryn S. Young put it (Young, 2009). This means that small stories about a familiar experience shared by a social identity group about schooling can indicate a larger message relating to how this identity group is categorised by teachers, in particular, using gender, class, race, or religion to classify them (Young, 2009). My role as the researcher was to listen attentively to these small stories, and then *lalanga fakataha*, weave them together to create a larger, more detailed narrative.

I had to adapt the conventional method of co-constructed inquiry, which is purpose fitted for focus groups, rather than individual interviews. This is because the small stories generated from a group of participants with shared experiences around a topic they can all relate to is the basis of creating a “co-constructed narrative strand” (Young, 2009). However, individual online *talanoa* suited this particular research topic because it alleviated the risk of a group of participants feeling *fakama* (embarrassed) to speak up about their personal experiences of failure at school. Hence, a measure of cultural safety was given to participants in the way that they could open up to the researcher in a one-one-one interview discussion, without worrying what others might think of them if their academic history at school was not glowing due to failing state exams.

Video recording the online *talanoa* provided an ideal archive for visually extracting the participants’ emotions and feelings as they were sharing their small stories on the screen. It allowed me to see with my own eyes, the places where I could familiarly relate to the participants’ dialogue and was responsive by nodding in agreement, or verbalising agreement because I felt, on a personal level, that our lives connected in that small moment (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2006).

From my research experience of carrying out six online *talanoa*, I feel that the method of co-constructed inquiry is linked to a customary practice in Tonga and western Polynesian countries that are close to Tonga, as in Samoa, of sharing knowledge through *talanoa*. This research process makes cultural sense to me because the narratives produced in the Tongan language are “anchored in local institutional cultures and their interpretive practices” (Andrews, Sclater, Squire, and Teacher, 2004, p. xi).

I mean that the local culture of Takuilau College, the Catholic high school in Lapaha, is its own culture-specific institution. Although the school integrates the state curriculum and examinations system into its day-to-day running, the college itself – meaning the staff and students – distinguishes itself as a different education institution to other schools. Comparatively, the migrant Tongan women were immersed in their secondary education experiences when interviewing. They expressed their commitment to Catholic high school values, which they felt distinguished them from Tongans who had attended government high schools, and even from Tongans who had attended the Wesleyan Church high schools of Tupou College for boys and Queen Salote College for girls.

Co-constructed inquiry then, is an appropriate research method, even though it is not culture-bound. This particular method of querying to bring out small stories, and then weaving these insights into a larger narrative, allowed me to contextualize the Catholic school culture of Takuilau College through the migrant women's eyes and understand how they see the distinctiveness of the people and place (Taufe'ulungaki, 2003 cited in Kalavite, 2010, p. 114).

## Context of Recruitment

I recruited the six research participants by email using a method of purposeful snowballing. In Auckland, New Zealand, there is an association for ex-Takuilau College students. The group actively fundraises for their old high school in Lapaha and is known among the Lapaha Catholic community in Tonga for generously donating books, chairs, building supplies, and cash to support current students. From my social networks, I selected migrant Tongan women who had attended Takuilau College in Tonga and were known to have connections to the ex-Takuilau College students in Auckland.

Sending out individual research invitations to potential participants, I attached in the email the ethics documents of a participant information sheet and an oral consent protocol form so they understood that they would be video recorded giving their consent to participate in the research. I also included the indicative interview prompts, asking potential participants to read all the information, and think carefully as to whether they would agree to be interviewed. They had two weeks to respond. The email invitation and attached documents were translated into Tongan, alongside the English language version, and I made it clear that the interview discussion would be conducted in the Tongan language and participants needed to have internet access to interview via Zoom video conferencing. I received prompt email responses from six women interested in being research participants, which gave me

the motivation I needed to finish this study, after feeling downhearted about not being able to interview Takuilau College students in Tonga due to Covid-19 international border closures and the problems I had when trying to get a research permit from the Prime Minister's Office at the Government of Tonga.

However, I had another issue to carefully think through. The ex-student communities of Takuilau College in Tonga and Auckland are close-knit and maintain such dedicated communication on their mobile phones, Facebook messaging back-and-forth from one country to the other, it seemed like everyone knew everything about every person's business. Although I could guarantee the participants the confidentiality of their interview data because no Tongan person, Catholic or otherwise from a devoutly Christian Kingdom was going to interrogate a nun about her research interviews, their anonymity was a completely different matter. Given the closeness of this Catholic school community, more than likely the participants' *kainga* (extended family), friends, and quite possibly the Tongan neighbours, irrespective of whether they were affiliated to Takuilau College or not, would know they took part in the study. As long as I kept my part of the ethical obligation to maintain confidentiality of the research data, I had to accept that limited confidentiality was the most I could offer the participants because realistically, people would know who had been interviewed from word-of-mouth out in the community.

## Interview Prompts

I have elected to include the full schedule of interview prompts used in the online *talanoa* for the sake of transparency. As the researcher of this study, I have interpreted that the Tongan Catholic community, in particular the ex-students of Takuilau College in Auckland and Tonga, would be the niche readership wanting to find out the research findings based on the participants' responses to interview questions. It makes sense then, to incorporate the prompts in the thesis text, adding a brief description of how the schedule was designed.

### Introduction

*Can you tell me about yourself;*

*Your name and age;*

*The college you attended and the years you were there;*

*The subjects you sat for state examinations in senior high school.*

### Success and Failure

*What does success and failure mean to you?*

*What makes a person successful or a failure at secondary school?*

*How do you feel about secondary education when it comes to success and failure?*

### School Experiences

*What were some of the highlights of the school year that you looked forward to?*

*What was it like to be a senior student at your secondary school?*

*Can you describe the school culture at your secondary school?*

*What was your school experience like from junior classes to senior classes?*

### Tongan Identity

*Which language did you prefer your teachers to speak in classes, English or Tongan?*

*Can you tell me why you preferred this language?*

*What were some of the school events that show our Tongan culture?*

*Did you enjoy Tongan cultural events at school and what was it like for the students?*

### Reflections on the Future

*What did you do after finishing your secondary education?*

*In Tonga, what study and job opportunities are there for school leavers?*

*Is there anything about your old school you want improved for new secondary students?*

The interview prompts were organised under five thematic subheadings, introduction, success and failure, school experiences, Tongan identity, and reflections on the future. The subheadings were indicators of the social and cultural themes I wanted to explore in the online *talanoa* with the six participants. Placed straight after the prompts asking the participants to introduce themselves in terms of their connection to Takuilau College as former students, were the questions around success and failure and what this means for female students in Tonga's secondary education system. Expressly, I wanted to put this inquiry to the participants first because it was, by my understanding, the most straightforward way of asking about private matters, as in whether they had passed or failed state examinations in senior high school.

The tone of questioning, then moved away from the binary of success and failure centred on examinations to broader school experiences within the Catholic school culture, indicating sporting events, interschool gatherings, cultural and church related occasions. Continuing along the inquiry into school culture, the questions about Tongan identity sought to find out the participants' preferences for the language of learning and teaching in the classroom, and whether they felt Tongan language and culture was an integrated part of schooling. Lastly, the prods about what opportunities the participants had access to as school leavers in the past, and aspects of school life that could be developed for current and future students, was an ideal way to round off the interview discussion on a reflective note.

## Chapter Four: Findings (Part One)

At first, I had intended to include four migrant Tongan Catholic women from Lapaha village living in Auckland in the study. To recruit participants via an email snowballing method, I sent out an email invitation to participate in the research which noted: “Also, feel welcome to forward this email invitation to others whom you think would be interested in being part of the research.” The invitation and ethics documents I originally circulated were therefore forwarded on by migrant Tongan women to other migrant Tongan women living in Auckland who met the inclusion criteria of participants I wanted to recruit. In the end, six women contacted me to express their interest in being part of the study and I elected to increase the number of participants from four to six.

To clarify, the inclusion criteria on the email invitation stated that research participants had to be: “Former students of Takuilau College; adult women aged 20 years and over; migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand; members of the Lapaha community.” Thus, all of the participants were migrant Tongan women from Lapaha village who had completed their secondary education at Takuilau College with some having passed the highest qualification the college offered of sixth form (Year 12) certificate.

The participants were middle-age women who ranged between forty-two to fifty-eight years old. Although they had attended Takuilau College at different years, there were school experiences that they had in common. These shared experiences centred around having been Tongan Catholic school girls who were socially conditioned by Tongan Catholic school culture, a distinct form of *ako* (education) which I contextualise in Chapter 5: Discussion. In spite of some variations in their views of reflections on the future, the participants were able to articulate the cultural aspects of school life they had enjoyed alongside the areas they felt could be improved for current and future students of Takuilau College.

Chapter Four documents the findings of the study in three parts. Part one presented here is the participants’ life stories in a short format, emphasising when these women migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand, when they attended Takuilau College in Tonga, and what they did with their lives after finishing high school. Each of the six participants have been given pseudonyms in the chapter four write-up of the research findings. I felt that it was important to introduce the reader to the participants by narrating some common aspects of their lived experiences as migrant Tongan women. By doing so, the reader, whether they be Tongan or non-Tongan, is given a place in the thesis to appreciate the migration journeys of six women from the same rural village in Tonga to New Zealand’s largest city of Auckland.

## Life Stories

Sutita migrated with her children from Tonga to Auckland in 2006 staying with a maternal uncle at Glenn Innes for a few months before settling into her own place at Mt Roskill. After her husband's death in 2008, she returned to study at Best Pacific Institute of Education for a business diploma. Currently she is employed by Oceania Healthcare as a healthcare assistant. Sutita attended Takuilau College from 1979 to 1986 where she passed Tonga's school certificate qualification in Form 5 (Year 11). The school certificate subjects she sat state examinations for were English, Tongan, mathematics, home economics, and music. As a school leaver, she went on to attend St Joseph's Business College in Tonga from 1987 to 1989. She was employed by Tonga's Ministry of Education as a typing clerk with an accounting related role, and she married in 1993 and lived at Nuku'alofa. In 1995, she left her job to attend to her husband's health issues.

Naomi migrated from Tonga to Auckland in 2004 with a goal in mind to find work and financially support her parents back in the village. She also hoped for an opportunity to continue with her education while living in Aotearoa New Zealand. At first, she boarded with her cousin at Papatoetoe where she met and married a Tongan. She now has two children and her family is settled in their own place in Onehunga. She is forty-five years old and is employed as a health and safety officer and team leader by the Sanitarium health food company. From Form 1 to Form 6 (Year 7 to Year 12) she attended Takuilau College where she studied English, mathematics, Tongan, accounting, and economics. She is a current member of the New Zealand Takuilau ex-students association where she holds the position of the committee's accountant. Established in 1990s by the late Father Lava 'Enosi during his chaplaincy in Auckland, the purpose of the ex-students group is to unite Takuilau College alumnae living throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and financially fund-raise to provide resources to the school and its current student body.

Lute is forty-two years old and migrated from Tonga to Auckland in 2004 to live with one of her maternal uncles in Mangere. Upon arriving in Auckland, she hoped to return to study. For her secondary education, she attended Takuilau College until Form 5 (Year 11) where she took the subjects of English, Tongan, mathematics, science, home economics, and accounting. After Form 5, she continued with post-secondary education at St Joseph's Business College in Tonga. Presently, she has not long completed her training for elderly care and is employed by the St Catherine's rest home, which is owned by the Sisters of

Mercy Auckland charities limited. As a solo mother, she has two adolescent children under her care and lives with her family at Papatoetoe.

Susana visited New Zealand in 1996 for a holiday where she stayed with her mother's sister at Orakei. Whilst on holiday, she became ill. Since then, her parents and brother have migrated from Tonga to Auckland and now reside in Onehunga. She attended Takuilau College from 1987 to 1992 and studied English, Tongan, mathematics, science, typing, and religious education. She then continued her post-secondary education at St Joseph's Business College in Tonga. Despite her personal health issues, she is self-employed and runs a small start-up business that makes Tongan crafts to supplement her household income. Susana works closely with her former classmates who attended Takuilau College in fundraising to send cash and goods back to Takuilau College for the current students.

'Eseta migrated with her husband from Tonga to Auckland in 2008 in the hope of educating their six children and provide employment opportunities for them not available back home. She stayed with her sister for some time and then settled in her own place in Epsom. She was a stay-at-home mum while her husband worked, until he passed away. In Tonga, she attended Takuilau from 1976 to 1983, and in Form 5 (Year 11) she took the subjects of English, mathematics, Tongan, science, accounting, and home economics, passing her the school certificate qualification. In Form 6 (Year 12), her subject choices were English, mathematics, chemistry, history and biology. 'Eseta was the female head prefect of Takuilau College in Form 6 (Year 12) and recalls her time as a school leader with great affection. After studying for two years at St Joseph's Business College in Tonga, she worked at the Bank of Tonga. Currently, she is employed by the Mercy Hospice in Remuera for one day a week while studying full-time for a degree in accounting at Unitec's Mt Albert campus. She is fifty-eight years old and is the secretary of the New Zealand Takuilau ex-students association.

Malia migrated from Tonga to New Zealand straight after Form 7 (Year 13). She won a scholarship to study at Auckland University of Technology and was able to stay with one of her cousins at North Shore. During her time as a university student, she met and married a New Zealander and they now have two adolescent children. Malia is forty-six years old and at Takuilau College she studied science, mathematics, accounting, English, physics, and chemistry in Form 6 (Year 12). She is employed by a private company as a manufacturing manager of construction materials and lives with her family at Torbay.

## Chapter Four: Findings (Part Two)

Part two of the findings presents excerpts from the participants' online *talanoa* that have been organised around the themes of success and failure in Tonga's secondary education system, and school experiences. Intentionally, the excerpts assembled in part two and part three of the findings are meant to give the reader a full picture of the six migrant Tongan women's viewpoints. The emphasis is placed on the collective thinking that ensued, although the participants were reflecting individually in their one-on-one interviews with the researcher. In addition, I have cited the interview questions before each set of responses, and provided brief descriptions to signal to the main ideas and arguments that the questions generated.

### Success and Failure

What does success and failure mean to you? For the migrant Tongan women, the opening question stimulated a mind association between success and passing state examinations at their former Catholic secondary school in Tonga.

*Success is passing the exams and participating in the events of school.*

–Susana

*For me, success means the subjects that I studied at school and passed.*

–Naomi

*Success means passing the subjects you are studying. It means having the ability to complete the school requirements, including the exams. If you are able to accomplish the school's educational programme, that is success.*

–Lute

*Success is the ability to complete what is required of you in school and reach the top of your endeavours, such as passing exams.*

–Sutita

Some participants diverged from seeing success strictly in terms of passing examinations by acknowledging other forms of success. In this context, having good manners, valuing Catholic religious education, and doing community work were seen as measures of an accomplished person.

*Success goes together with good behaviour and religious education.*

–Naomi

*Success can be the ability to achieve good work that benefits your community. It can be a goal that you set yourself to achieve, or a project that is assigned to you of which you do your best to accomplish the tasks.*

–‘Eseta

*Success, for me, is about achieving my work plans within a certain period of time. It means that what I want out of life in the future will be achieved by the work that I do today.*

–Malia

Failure, by contrast, was entirely measured by failing the national examinations in the senior years of secondary school. Most participants felt that if a student was lacking in personal commitment to study, it meant that the student would not be adequately prepared to sit the end-of-year state examinations resulting in failure.

*Failure is based on exams. If your marks do not reach the pass mark in the national exams, then it's counted as a failure to achieve.*

–Susana

*Failure is not being able to complete what is required of you. For example, when you fail the national exams. In other words, it is beyond your capacity to pass the examinations.*

–‘Eseta

*Failure is being fearful of failing. Failure is lacking the self-confidence to face challenges courageously. It is when one submits to feeling ashamed of failing school exams, and the shame stops them from ever trying again in life to get an education.*

–Sutita

*Failure is not being able to prepare myself well throughout the year. I did not commit to my study by doing homework and what was required of me to do back then when I was at school.*

–Naomi

*Failure is when a person does not complete all the curriculum requirements of the school. Basically, it means that a student did not commit to the school work needed to be done; did not complete the required projects and got no marks for assessments.*

–Lute

*Failure happens when what I planned to achieve within a specific period of time for my own future was not accomplished.*

–Malia

What makes a person successful or not successful at secondary school? The question prompted responses in the form of advice from these middle-age Tongan women, who drew on lessons they had learnt from lived experience.

*There are certain things that lead to success. These are: making a personal commitment to study; getting support from parents and good teachers; having a healthy well-being is important for the brain and having enough rest for the body to function well.*

–Naomi

*I think, success is about making a commitment to pay attention to the instructions given by the teachers in the classroom; studying the course content and asking if it makes sense to you. Then applying what you learn in situations to confirm and validate your understanding of the knowledge. Besides, if you set a study plan, make time to study, do research on your own to gain more knowledge and information on the topic, then all of these actions will give you confidence to pass exams. The support of parents is important. But, success is entirely dependent on your commitment, ability, and determination to achieve.*

–Eseta

*The preparation that students do and the teachers' instructions are vital for preparing for exams and succeeding. Success at school encourages students to aim further for overseas education.*

–Sutita

*A person's purpose drives her to accomplish something in life. My purpose in life drives the actions I take to achieve my goals. For example, healthy competition with my friends at school motivated me to strive to pass exams.*

–Lute

*For me, the most important thing is that I have a work plan and a purpose to accomplish. What I really want to achieve is to be able to get there within the period of time that I have to complete my work.*

–Malia

*Things that lead to failure are: a lack of commitment to doing the work; playing around instead of studying; running away from school; behaving disobediently for teachers; not doing homework.*

–Sutita

*Failing exams means that you did not commit your time to study; you did not commit to do extra research; you failed to seek help on things that you do not understand about your topic.*

–Eseta

*Being lazy and rebelling against the school rules, plus putting friends first distracted my attention from the importance of education.*

–Lute

*Factors that contribute to failure at school are: not having a structure or work plan to timetable your study; not doing homework; not paying attention during classes; lack of support from home; lack of coaching or counselling to change your attitude.*

–Naomi

*If there is no plan or aim, then there is no purpose. If there is no purpose to what you are doing in life, then there is no meaning in life.*

–Malia

How do you feel about secondary education when it comes to success and failure? Overall, feelings of happiness, joy, and pride were the upshot of succeeding at secondary school in Tonga by passing state examinations.

*I am very happy and proud when I see my classmates are successful and pursue further education. Some have attained high qualifications and high paid jobs. Success can be attributed to the school where they were taught to value education.*

–Sutita

*Success brings great joy because I feel worthwhile knowing that I strived very hard during the year. I appreciate all the support from my home environment, from my family's prayers, from the extra hours I put into after-school and night study.*

–Naomi

*When I succeed at school, I am thrilled that my year of schoolwork has been accomplished.*

–Lute

*When Takuilau students succeed, we rejoice because our whole school community is successful.*

–Susana

*When we see success in the academic part of school life, we are happy. Also, there was success in the industrial arts and home economics subjects at school back then. I believe there are different pathways of success and each student has a gift or talent. For no one is the same and there are subjects or skills that all students are good at.*

–Malia

Although failure was the opposite of success, Naomi felt that failing at school motivated her to try again for a better result, while Susana held untrained teachers to account for the poor examination performance of students.

*When I fail at school, I am not happy because my schoolwork is not complete.*

–Lute

*Failure is not new for I have experienced failure. It is not a happy feeling. But, experiencing failure drove my determination to achieve better results in the future.*

–Naomi

*When students are not successful, the school ought to search for trained teachers. It is important to have trained teachers in secondary schools.*

–Susana

## School Experiences

What were some of the highlights of the school year that you looked forward to? Although examination results dominated the participants' memories of the school highpoint, there was some discussion around the Catholic secondary school retreats. Retreats are held annually for senior students to have time away from the regular school routine to reflect together on their relationship with their Catholic faith and the meaning of spirituality.

*The most meaningful event that I anticipated throughout my senior school years was the result of the exams coming out because it was a decisive factor for continuing my education after secondary school. My first attempt of passing Form 5 [Year 11] when sitting the Tonga school certificate exams failed. But, I felt strong enough and even more determined to try again. I had a desire to go overseas because there are more opportunities available there compared to living in Tonga.*

–Sutita

*Passing the national exams was the main goal of every student at school. It was a joyful time for me; that is, the motivation driving me towards my goal.*

–Lute

*The most important thing for me was to pass my Form 6 [Year 12] exams so that I had a chance to continue on to Form 7 [Year 13] at the government school. This was the only option open to me back then, as Form 7 was only available at the government high school which everyone tries to get into. I needed to do my utmost to improve my grades for admission into Form 7.*

–Malia

*I looked forward to special occasions, like our school retreat and renewal sessions, because they are critical for preparing us for life's challenges and building our spiritual, psychological, physical, emotional, social, and personal confidence not only*

*towards the internal, practice exams but the big final national exams at the end of the year.*

–Naomi

What was it like to be a senior student at your secondary school? The participants generally felt that being a senior student at Takuilau College was to be a role model for younger students to respect and look up to; a student leadership role that came with social responsibility and had to be taken seriously.

*I was the eldest in the family. I grew up thinking that if I am the eldest in the family I must be a role model for the rest of my siblings. I applied this thinking to my time at school because for me, being one of the senior students of the school meant I had to be responsible and set a good example to the rest of the students of the school.*

–Malia

*Being a senior student, I did my best to show good leadership and be a role model to the younger students. I wanted to inspire them to imitate my role model behaviour, so that when they became senior students, they would continue passing on good behaviour examples to the new entrants at secondary school.*

–Lute

*Being a senior student in Years 11 and 12 [Forms 5 and 6] at Takuilau College was empowering because good leadership is required so that younger students can learn to become good leaders from our leadership example. As one of the prefects, each morning I got to supervise a junior class when the teachers have their staff meeting. House activities presented more opportunities to play my role as a school leader, which inspires younger students to learn how to be a good leader.*

–Naomi

*I was very happy to be one of the senior students because I was involved in helping and supporting teachers, younger students, and parents. I was given opportunities to supervise students during school activities and that had helped me to develop a sense of good leadership for those under my responsibility.*

–Sutita

*I was the deputy head prefect. I was happy to have that role at school because it helped me to learn how to be a good leader. I always felt happy when younger students and my senior peers looked up to me as their leader. The role of a prefect prepared me to become a confident leader and to face the world with a mind to succeed in the world.*

–Susana

*I enjoyed being a senior student because the discipline I learned at school was excellent. Students were obedient, respectful, cooperative, well behaved, and understanding. There was genuine social cohesion among the student body in the sense that everyone knew who they were, how they were related to other students, and how to relate to the principal and teachers, and their role within the school community.*

–Eseta

Can you describe the school culture at your secondary school? The descriptions were a synthesis of Catholic morals - discipline and piety, amalgamated with Tongan ideals – respect and obedient behaviour.

*I remember that at Takuilau College, the teachers were mostly religious sisters and brothers as well as some lay people. Good behaviour was the number one priority in the Catholic school system. We were taught that a person is not worthy of academic success if they have bad manners. Each day, the school began and ended with prayers. I believe that teaching students their culture is one of the important tools for nurturing good attitudes in students.*

–Naomi

*As students, we were taught that Christianity is a living practice and we have to live by our Christian principles and cultural values. It was very important that students were taught to value good behaviour and respect the practices of the Catholic faith. For example, we used to celebrate Mass as a school community once a week or every two weeks.*

–Lute

*The school culture of my time was one of pride and was to be admired. Parents helped by teaching their children at home to behave according to our Tongan cultural values; that is, 'ulungaanga fakatonga, the Tongan way of life. Children were taught in the home to know who they are and how to be part of the community – their Tongan identity. Religious education at school emphasised Catholic Christian values, which were integrated with correct Tongan behaviour.*

–Susana

*The school culture at Takuilau College was exciting. Students who were responsible and respectful enjoyed the school discipline. They cooperated and helped one another, which was heart-warming and encouraging for the student leaders. At*

*school assemblies, students knew how to behave towards the principal and teachers by showing respect. Overall, there was strong commitment from the principal, teachers, and students when it came to the day-to-day running of the school.*

–Eseta

*I am happy with what I achieved at Takuilau College. The school discipline was crucial to my achievement, whereas some did not like it because the Catholic school culture was very strict. But I valued the strictness and high expectations of the teachers because it motivated me to study hard to pass exams. When I came here to Auckland, I held discipline up high as part of my personal approach towards achieving in education. At Takuilau College, learning to be disciplined about study taught me a lot for entering university education in New Zealand.*

–Malia

What was your school experience like from junior classes to senior classes?

Participants described their experiences at Takuilau College as meaningful and enriching. Some of the migrant Tongan women affirmed that they learned certain values and work ethics in secondary school, which they were able to put into practice in adult life.

*My school experience was great since Form 3 [Year 7]. I did not think I would reach Form 5 [Year 11]. After Form 5, I attended a different school and acquired workforce skills. Then I was employed and to this day, I am still working. My education journey took some years.*

–Sutita

*My school experience from Forms 1 to 6 [Years 7 to 12] were meaningful. For myself, it was a good choice to study at Takuilau College because it was close to my home. In Forms 1, 2, and 3, most of the people that I socialised with were people I knew from my village, and right up until Form 6, we were close. I was happy at school and benefited immensely from being a student there. When I left Takuilau College, I carried with me all the values I had learned, particularly 'ulungaanga lelei, good conduct.*

–Naomi

*I was very happy at school and am grateful for all my experiences and learning at Takuilau College. There, I learned to value having a good attitude in life along with academic achievement. Those school experiences brought me to this country. I am able to communicate in spoken English and write in English, and have the self-confidence to aspire to be successful in what I do, without the need of any outside assistance. Having learned English is very important for when you go overseas so that you are able to communicate in a new society and be confident in yourself.*

–Lute

*I had an enjoyable time schooling at Takuilau College from junior to senior classes and I have benefitted from living in New Zealand due to my education experiences back in Tonga. My life has been enriched from learning Tongan cultural ways. I learned by observing my grandparent's hard work of planting crops, carpentry skills, and weaving. I brought my knowledge and skills from Tonga with me and applied it to finding jobs, and I have been employed as a hairdresser and secretarial work for an Auckland law firm. I have worked in customer services, and industrial and insurance services. Now, I have started a small business of making Tongan crafts as a source of livelihood. My crafts are brought by the Tongan community in New Zealand and by Tongans living in other overseas countries.*

–Susana

*At Takuilau College, I learned to become a trusted leader. As the head girl, I learned to speak with confidence and to make decisions in front of the students, even though it was a challenging responsibility. Through my school leadership role, I learned discipline and communication skills: how to make connections and mingle with junior and senior students as equals. I feel that back then, students understood my role as a student leader and knew who we were as a Catholic high school. I consider that through these experiences, I won their respect. Now, as I recall my past experiences, I realise that my life has been enriched so much from my time at school. I share what I have learnt with my children for them to become good students and complete their study.*

–Eseta

*Education, to me, is invaluable. I grew up in a family where my parents found it financially difficult to provide for their children's needs. But, my parents strongly supported the value of education. My father felt that in life, if you do well in education you will have a better quality of life, a better salary, and be able to support your family. Education was vital in my family right from primary school to secondary school.*

–Malia

## Chapter Four: Findings (Part Three)

Part three of the findings presents excerpts from the participants' online *talanoa* that have been organised around the themes of Tongan identity within the context of a Catholic school community, and reflections on the future.

### Tongan Identity

Which language did you prefer your teachers to speak in classes, English or Tongan?

Largely the participants favoured Tongan as the language of the classroom with the reasoning that the subject content at school would have made clearer sense if communicated in their mother tongue.

*I preferred the Tongan language to use at school for most grew up in Tonga and the language makes sense to every Tongan and the cultural context of the world we know.*

–Susana

*I preferred the Tongan language. This the language that should be used to teach all school subjects in secondary education. Being taught in the Tongan language would have made sense to us and allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the subjects we were learning.*

–Lute

*I think the use of Tongan language in the classroom is better for it makes sense to the students, and it instils an in-depth understanding in the students with respect to their Tongan culture and values.*

–'Eseta

*I acknowledge that the Tongan language is very important to uphold and sustain. But, I remember that studying the Tongan language was restricted to Form 5 (Year 11) only, and that there was no Tongan language subject in Forms 6 and 7 (Years 12 and 13).*

–Malia

Can you tell me why you preferred this language? Being the mother tongue, meaning the first language that the migrant Tongan women had grown up speaking since childhood, Tongan was seen as the preferred language at school. The Tongan language carried the cultural values of students, allowing them to communicate from a place of equality and social inclusion.

*Tongan is the first language or the mother tongue of the school children in Tonga and the language of their childhood socialisation, development, and understanding. They use it at home and wherever they are in Tonga. I support Tongan language for the instruction of school subjects so that students can make sense of the subjects and gain a deeper understanding of what they are learning in school.*

–Lute

*The Tongan language is essentially the mode and means of communication and understanding among Tongan people. The Tongan language creates an equal place of understanding in Tongan society, since they were born with, and grew up with, the language. When we express our cultural concepts, values, and practices, the Tongan language is a fundamental aspect of being able to express ourselves fully.*

–Susana

*I prefer the Tongan language because it is the mother tongue of my homeland. It is important to me for sustaining my Tongan culture, and it is meaningful to us as Tongans that we can communicate in our mother tongue. At school, Tongan cultural events and the Tongan language express our Tongan cultural values and Tongan identity. The language teaches us to know our role and place as students, and to know how to behave with respect in our community.*

–Eseta

*The Tongan language is our mother tongue and it is vital that our Tongan citizens preserve our language for future generations. If we lose our language, then the essence of being Tongan or our Tonganess is at risk of being lost too.*

–Malia

*The Tongan language should be taught to Tongan children because it is the most important language for communicating with your own people. The language strengthens relationships among Tongan people and understanding because it makes all people equal. For example, some of the Tongan parents who live in New Zealand do not speak English to their children at home but only Tongan. This shows that the Tongan language is the most important language of communication and needs to be taught to Tongan children, even overseas, so they are able to communicate with their parents and grandparents. Otherwise, we will end up bringing an interpreter into family settings to help bridge the communication gap.*

–Sutita

What were some of the school events that show our Tongan culture? Generally, the participants felt that activities within the school community in which the Tongan language is used foremost, along with occasions where elements of Tongan culture, such as *faiva* (dance) is showcased, were meaningful and important to the student body.

*The Tongan language is important for it reveals the significance of the Tongan culture in Tongan cultural contexts. To address people in Tongan in a meeting demonstrates our society's protocols and the social rank of the class groups. This raises awareness among the meeting attendants of not only the purpose of the meeting but how we are located in Tongan society in terms of our social obligations and relationships to one another. The Tongan language is used to address the King with the highest honour and respect, then the members of the nobility, and lastly the commoners. Each rank is distinguished by its own class of language and meanings that is meaningful to Tongan people. When I explain an issue in Tongan to students and parents, it makes the issue comprehensible to them as a school community.*

–Sutita

*The Tongan language is crucial for expressing respect within the school community, and for students, it allows others to know who you are, where you come from, and what your role is as the school's students.*

–'Eseta

*The teaching of Tongan the Tongan language as a subject in secondary school is important for sustaining Tongan culture. The Tongan language preserves the significance of Tongan culture. The school programmes we had at Takuilau College, such as the culture day competitions, are ideal ways for students to learn how to maintain and preserve Tongan cultural ways of life.*

–Naomi

*Various school events that showcase our Tongan culture are important. Sporting events are always activities that bring out the students' pride in their school. Tongan performance arts, such as cultural dance for students, is a time for connecting with one another and showing the cultural significance of each group, the various villages, and who they are.*

–Lute

*Our Tongan cultural dance is important within the cultural events of the school. We grew up with cultural dance and it is part of who we are as Tongans. Now that I live in New Zealand with my children, I look back to Tonga and realise the significance of*

*our Tongan cultural dance, and in retrospect, I wish that I had learnt dance properly to be able to teach to my children.*

–Malia

Did you enjoy Tongan cultural events at school and what was it like for the students? Although the Catholic school Masses that Takuilau College students participated in were considered memorable times by Sutita, most of the participants associated cultural events with Tongan protocols that elevate *ngaahi talafakafonua* (traditions) as central to the life of the school community.

*I admired the Tongan cultural events we held at school because it honours our Tongan identity and makes me proud. The wearing of the ta'ovala [woven waist mat] is part of the school cultural uniform for cultural occasions. Each student is expected to attend our school Mass celebrations to show to honour our faith, our God. The opening of the Tongan parliament is an important occasion where students wear their ta'ovala and march together as a school to honour the King, the Tongan parliament, and the people of Tonga. The ta'ovala shows that we respect our Tongan identity and also shows others that the Tongan people have a heightened cultural awareness of who we are as a people.*

–Sutita

*I am proud of my Tongan culture and I have benefitted from studying Tongan language and culture at Takuilau College. Even when I moved overseas to live in Auckland, I took my culture with me. Tongan culture is rooted in a person's spirit and can never be taken away from you. Many Tongans who migrate for education still participate in Tongan cultural events and activities. I'm proud of my Tongan identity. It is like having ownership over being Tongan by ancestry.*

–Naomi

*I admire and value our Tongan cultural events. Cultural activities that we host promote our culture, our knowledge, and our traditional stories. At school, cultural events were a time of gathering, renewing our connections, and celebrating and promoting who we are as the people of Tonga: me'a fakatonga [Tongan ways], ngaahi talafakafonua [cultural traditions]. Takuilau students are proud of being Tongan.*

–Lute

*When I remember how much Takuilau students enjoyed the Tongan cultural events we had at school, it makes me happy. Our cultural events were a time when the students felt proud of who we are as the people of Tonga. The traditional costume of our Tongan culture shows our values of respect and love for our connection to our*

*past, our history, our ancestors. I remember that students felt so happy at the cultural events that they would wear their ta'ovala throughout the day until they went home to study in the evening.*

–Susana

*Tongan cultural events are sources of educational and cultural learning beyond academic learning in the classroom. For students learn to know their identity and Tongan way of life, they need to learn certain things about our cultural knowledge and heritage: their Tongan identity and history, their obligations and duties, and their role and responsibility within our school community in respect to the principal and teachers.*

–'Eseta

*Tongan cultural traditions are very important to us and personally unique to me. When I attend a cultural event where Tongan protocols are observed, I experience a sense of pride and revere for the occasion on a deeply personal level. Wearing our ta'ovala [woven waist mat] shows that I am a Tongan. I think it is good to preserve our cultural traditions, and also wearing ta'ovala is unique to Tonga and distinguishes our culture and language from other Pacific Island countries.*

–Malia

## Reflections on the Future

What did you do after finishing your secondary education? The participants' responses were a mix of advice offered to present-day Takuilau College students and recollections of entering the workforce or migrating overseas for further education.

*To this day, I still support Takuilau College, my mother school. I still encourage Takuilau students attending the college to contribute well to their mother school by committing to their studies and getting involved in the spiritual activities of the Catholic school and our church; celebrating Mass, going to retreats. These are aspects of the Catholic school culture that strengthen their relationships as students of the school community. Participating in spiritual life bolsters their self-esteem so that they have the confidence to find employment opportunities, develop their talents, and preserve their Tongan cultural identity. Having a sense of self-pride, self-respect, comes from learning how to behave well and connect with our people at home, in the village community, and in our country.*

–Sutita

*When I came to New Zealand, we formed a group of Takuilau ex-students who were in the same class at school. We are part of the New Zealand Takuilau ex-students association. Our purpose is to support the resourcing needs of Takuilau College, and*

*we have regular meetings for fundraising and women's craftwork, which we market and sell with the proceeds going back to the school.*

–Susana

*From my experiences, I encourage the present Takuilau students in the senior classes to find part-time work to earn some money. Senior students who are able to work part-time during the holidays can use this money to help pay for their school expenses. It lifts the financial burden on parents to come up with their children's needs for school. However, there is a lack of scholarships and job opportunities available in Tonga to support struggling families. Overseas aid donors to Tonga should distribute education funds equally among the poorer sector of society, rather than just giving out a few scholarships to academic achievers.*

–Lute

*I worked in customer services for eight years in Tonga. What I learnt at Takuilau College, I was able to apply in the workplace. I worked with mature people, much older than me. When I moved to New Zealand, I worked in customer services too. The values that I learnt at school – honesty, respect, truth, good communication, being organised – I apply in my job. I am in the leadership team of my work organisation, and it reminds me of my time at Takuilau College. I attribute my achievement to the fact that I was taught well at Takuilau college.*

–Naomi

*After completing Form 6 [Year 12] at Takuilau College, I wanted to continue on with Form 7 [Year 13]. I planned my life forward because I wanted to be successful and have a bright future. I went into Form 7 with the sole purpose of competing for a scholarship to study in New Zealand. I got a New Zealand scholarship entirely through my own effort. I came from a family who taught me to prioritise employment and getting money, and that my future depended on getting an education.*

–Malia

*When I was at school, I dreamed of continuing my education in subjects that I was interesting in studying to get a better job. In Tonga, parents tell us to do and what subjects they want us to study at secondary school, which I do not think is good. I have learnt to leave my children to choose their own pathway in education, and I support the subjects they are doing, their interests, because it is healthier that way for children.*

–Eseta

In Tonga, what study and job opportunities are there for school leavers? There were mixed responses to the question of job opportunities in the participants' home country. Naomi and Sutita felt that prospects for post-secondary education and employment existed,

while Malia was somewhat critical that employment sectors for school leavers had not been well developed.

*There are plenty of opportunities in Tonga. If I had stayed in Tonga, I would have gone on to study at the University of the South Pacific, or the Tonga Teachers Training Institute, or even studying business and opening up my own small business. There are scholarship opportunities for students to take up further study in Fiji, England, Australia and the U.S.A., provided by the government, aid donors, churches, and alumnae organisations. Students in Tonga can study trades, such as carpentry, and agriculture and horticulture. They can apply their skills in farming by growing export crops for the New Zealand market and also for local trade in Tonga.*

–Naomi

*If I stayed in Tonga, I believe there are opportunities for students to find work in trades, tourism and hospitality, arts and crafts, office work, banking, teaching.*

–Sutita

*Job opportunities should have been better developed in Tonga. If you are not successful in academic subjects at secondary school, then you will suffer. A variety of jobs should be available by now to cater for the different talents and skills so that school leavers can find employment and make a living. If there are no jobs, then young people can be attracted toward crime.*

–Malia

Is there anything about your old school you want improved for the new secondary students? This was the question that stimulated a variety of responses from the participants. The migrant Tongan women presented ideas and arguments that they felt would progress the quality of learning outcomes for students at their former Catholic secondary school in Tonga.

*The commencement of the school year is an important time to explain to students the importance of education and the purpose of getting an education. Individually, each and every student needs to make goals for themselves so they can stay focused on achieving their goals. Students are being asked to commit themselves to six to seven years in the secondary education system from Forms 1 to 6 [Years 7 to 12]. It is important for new entrants to set their goals and stay on track to achieve at every level.*

–Lute

*The spiritual life of the students is the most important aspect of secondary schooling, which I believe needs to be placed in the forefront of their minds. My daily homelife is praying in the morning and praying in the evening. I believe the blessings that I have received in life are due to maintaining a close relationship with my Catholic faith through prayers. These blessings remind me to be grateful for my childhood in Tonga and the life experiences I have been through.*

–Naomi

*I think it is important to encourage new students to be committed to studying at the start of school every year and to keep up their enthusiasm and hopes for future prosperity. This is a way of preventing students from running away from school, being fearful of school and feeling discouraged, or being lazy at schoolwork.*

–Sutita

*Looking back, I see that learning in Tonga was predominantly about learning academic subjects in the classroom. Students need encouragement and information about the importance of each subject and its value for further study and careers in the future, whether that be in Tonga or overseas. The role of teachers is important in supporting students to understand which study pathways suit them best in respect to their potential and what they want to accomplish with their lives. If students are not suited for academic subjects, they have other choices in which they can use their gifts and talents to pursue their interests.*

–Susana

*For me, it is important to teach the Tongan language in Forms 6 and 7 [Years 12 and 13] to sustain our mother tongue and our cultural values and knowledge. I have noticed that it is starting to become lost among the younger generations, and if we do not do something about it now, gradually it will be lost.*

–Malia

*I think the principal and teachers have to be committed to the fact that the Tongan secondary school system is entirely based on students achieving good exams results. It is up to the school, then, to provide opportunities for night study, to update the school computers and text books, to build up the students and teachers' morale and confidence, and to consult with the Catholic church and the government on how to make this happen. Parents have to support students at home by making sure they attend school, and encouraging them to work in class and do their homework. This will improve their children's education experiences. Parents also need to protect their children from things that do not benefit their education.*

–Eseta

## Chapter Five: Discussion

In Chapter One: Introduction, I explained that in modern Tongan society, Christianity in its denominational forms has been amalgamated into people's understandings of Tongan culture and tradition, thus producing a synthesis of shared beliefs that people structure and organise their lives around. Lapaha, where the six migrant Tongan Catholic women come from, is a close-knit village community and for Takuilau College, this village is the largest catchment area of students. The participants in this study have voiced that female students are able to apply their individual ambition to compete, succeed, and achieve in this Catholic school environment. Two points about secondary school education for females at Takuilau College were exemplified in Chapter Four: Findings (Part Two), where the six migrant Tongan Catholic women discussed their perceptions of success and failure at school and school experiences.

Firstly, participants attributed in part their desire to continue with their education after secondary school, along with their appreciation of discipline, respect, and being well-mannered and well-behaved in their migrant working lives to Catholic school values they had learned while attending Takuilau College in Tonga. Their social memory spanned twenty to up to forty-plus years ago as the participants were women aged between forty-two to fifty-eight years of age reflecting on their girlhoods and adolescent years in Lapaha village when they were aged eleven to eighteen years old. Their ability to speak confidently and freely during the online *talanoa*, I believe, signals to their maturity as accomplished, middle-age women, who themselves are mothers of adolescent and young adult children. Between them, they share a wealth of lived experience in Tonga and New Zealand to draw on when responding to questions about how the time they spent at Takuilau College influenced them in adulthood with regard to the decisions they made to migrate for education and employment opportunities.

Sutita and Susana made an important distinction, however, that I want to affirm here. They felt that when one Takuilau College ex-student had succeeded at furthering their education and bettering their employment, then it was taken as a win for this Catholic school community.

*I am very happy and proud when I see my classmates are successful and pursue further education. Some have attained high qualifications and high paid jobs. Success can be attributed to the school where they were taught to value education.*

–Sutita

*When Takuilau students succeed, we rejoice because our whole school community is successful.*

–Susana

The second point that can be drawn from part two of the findings on success and failure is that the participants clearly identified that academic achievement is the system of social mobility in Tonga and New Zealand. Passing state examinations has the power to determine where Tongan school leavers end up after high school, especially when it comes to acquiring the chance to study overseas. As I noted in Chapter One: Introduction, Tongan students are conditioned by their country's secondary education system, which weights the success of a high school according to its national examination pass rates. Thus, high school students understand that university qualifications are markers of social status. To have obtained tertiary qualifications, particularly at university degree level, means that a person has acquired the personal power and resources to move up in rank. Within Tongan society, which is highly stratified and class conscious, a person who has achieved a university degree is considered to be part of the upwardly mobile, educated, middle-class.

Malia, the only participant to have migrated from Tonga to Auckland, New Zealand, on a university scholarship, highlighted that the senior student mindset heading into national examinations at Takuilau College was fixed on passing exams. Not passing exams was therefore frowned upon as the opposite of success; that is, failure.

*The most important thing for me was to pass my Form 6 [Year 12] exams so that I had a chance to continue on to Form 7 [Year 13] at the government school. This was the only option open to me back then, as Form 7 was only available at the government high school which everyone tries to get into. I needed to do my utmost to improve my grades for admission into Form 7.*

–Malia

For the most part of Chapter Five: Discussion, I will turn my attention to considering the online *talanoa* excerpts documented in Chapter Four: Findings (Part Three). In part three of the findings, the six migrant Tongan Catholic women discussed Tongan identity within the secondary school environment that contributed to their social conditioning. They also spoke of how to create better learning outcomes for current and future students.

Part two of the findings demonstrated the structural power of the state examination system when it comes to disciplining Catholic high school students to focus solely on passing exams, not only for their individual advancement through the system, but also for elevating the school's public reputation. However, there are characteristics of Catholic education I am interested in discussing, particularly the value placed on Tongan language and culture. These qualities are linked to how the participants see that Takuilau College reflects the communal values of the wider Catholic community in Lapaha in relation to Tongan cultural identity. Moreover, I will offer brief explanations on how the Catholic school culture of Takuilau College intersects with, or diverges from, theories on Tongan centred learning and education by Timote Vaioleti, Tevita Ka'ili, 'Okusitino Mahina, and Konai Helu-Thaman.

## *Talanoa and Tauhi Vā*

*Talanoa* is a research method attributed to Tongan education specialist, Timote Vaioleti, who believed that this particular method requires the researcher to be an insider and an Indigenous language speaker of the Pacific community they are researching (Vaioleti, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2017). By comparison, Tongan anthropologist Tevita Ka'ili contended that *tauhi vā*, which is the practice of maintaining relationships in Tongan society, can be seen operating among diasporic Tongans when they relate to one another through their common connections to a place of origin in Tonga (Ka'ili, 2005).

The online *talanoa*, I believe, enabled the six migrant Tongan Catholic women to articulate their authentic views because the research conversations were conducted in the Tongan language. Communicating in Tongan was instrumental in creating *tauhi vā* during the research process; that is, the relational space that connected the researcher and the participants through our common origins of Lapaha village and Takuilau College.

Sutita offered her personal insights on the importance of passing on the Tongan language to the younger generation in the context of living overseas. From her position as a migrant Tongan woman and a single parent in Auckland, she felt that the Tongan language reinforced *tauhi vā*, or “relationships among Tongan people.” Different to the English language, which divided Tongans into class groups according to who had acquired English at secondary school and who had not, the Tongan language, in her view, “makes all people equal.”

*The Tongan language should be taught to Tongan children because it is the most important language for communicating with your own people. The language strengthens relationships among Tongan people and understanding because it makes all people equal. For example, some of the Tongan parents who live in New Zealand do not speak English to their children at home but only Tongan. This shows that the Tongan language is the most important language of communication and needs to be taught to Tongan children, even overseas, so they are able to communicate with their parents and grandparents. Otherwise, we will end up bringing an interpreter into family settings to help bridge the communication gap.*

–Sutita

Timote Violeti's *talanoa* (Vaiioleti, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2017) and Tevita Ka'ili's *tauhi vā* (Ka'ili, 2005) interconnect with Sutita's advocacy for maintaining the Tongan language in New Zealand, a cultural value that can be traced to growing up in Lapaha and attending Takuilau College. Lute explained this by stating that in the village, Tongan is the language of "childhood socialisation, development, and understanding." By her judgement, the Tongan language ought to be the language of classroom instruction in secondary education, given that the students are the ones who will benefit from learning and acquiring knowledge in their own language.

*Tongan is the first language or the mother tongue of the school children in the village and the language of their childhood socialisation, development, and understanding. They use it at home and wherever they are. I support Tongan language for the instruction of school subjects so that students can make sense of the subjects and gain a deeper understanding of what they are learning in school.*

–Lute

To reiterate Sutita and Lute's observations, the participants stressed that the Tongan language is the best-practice medium of communication in the classroom. In this sense, the mother tongue has the capacity to support relationship building between teachers and students, and among the wider school community. Centring Tongan as the language of education enables students to see the school learning environment as an extension of their home and village community, thus, strengthening their communal understanding and valuing of Tongan culture. At school, because students are not struggling to communicate and to be understood and accepted when communicating in Tongan, they feel that the Tongan language engenders equality among students.

Aligned with Ka'ili's notion of *tauhi vā* (Ka'ili, 2005), the Tongan language forms a space for interpersonal relationships to flourish; a social space that the six migrant Tongan women in this study have shown can sustain connections and shared values among former students of Takuilau College now living overseas. Auckland is a case-in-point, where Tongan migrants from Lapaha village who are past students are generally affiliated to the New Zealand Takuilau Ex-Students Association. During their Catholic school education in Lapaha, they developed their collective knowledge of how to practice *'ofa* (love), *faka'apa'apa* (respect), and *fetokoni'aki* (support) (Ka'ili, 2005, p. 88).

Now, as a group of migrant adult Tongans, their ability to maintain connections to one another and relationships of social reciprocity to Takuilau College has been enabled through their ability to communicate in Tongan, their mother tongue. And in my case, I believe that I was able to engage the participants in an online *talanoa* of research conversations in a manner of ease and equality because these very conversations were conducted in Tongan.

## Ako in a Tongan Catholic Context

Tongan anthropologist, 'Okusitino Mahina, argued that *ako* or forms of Tongan centred education are based in a collective setting where Tongan learners debate and come to an understanding of the truth about a topic of which they are learning (Mahina, 2008). Mahina's theory of *ako* was couched in critical thinking, or the process of evaluating facts and evidence in an objective and disinterested mode of analysis. As I have stated in Chapter Two: Literature, I do not see that such an approach to Tongan centred education is relevant or applicable to Tongan cultural values, but rather, seeks to replicate a westerncentric model of education within Tongan society.

When positioning the notion of *ako*, Tongan centred education, within a Tongan Catholic context, 'Eseta and Naomi both agreed that learning about Tongan culture and practices provide students with significant sources of knowledge. "Cultural knowledge and heritage," by their interpretive understanding, has a functional use in school settings, particularly for understanding roles, responsibilities, and duties within the community and wider Tongan society.

*Tongan cultural events are sources of educational and cultural learning beyond academic learning in the classroom. For students learn to know their identity and Tongan way of life, they need to learn certain things about our cultural knowledge*

*and heritage: their Tongan identity and history, their obligations and duties, and their role and responsibility within our school community in respect to the principal and teachers.*

–‘Eseta

*I am proud of my Tongan culture and I have benefitted from studying Tongan language and culture at Takuilau College. Even when I moved overseas to live in Auckland, I took my culture with me. Tongan culture is rooted in a person’s spirit and can never be taken away from you. Many Tongans who migrate for education still participate in Tongan cultural events and activities. I’m proud of my Tongan identity. It is like having ownership over being Tongan by ancestry.*

–Naomi

To reiterate ‘Eseta and Naomi’s discussion points, it was ‘Eseta who named the importance of creating opportunities for students to engage in “cultural learning beyond academic learning in the classroom.” In many ways, she was referring to the social conditioning processes of growing up in Lapaha village as part of the Tongan Catholic school community. In this context, children and young people are expected to learn the social norms, values, and skills they need to contribute to the life of the community.

Susana developed this discussion point further. Academic learning, on the one hand, is couched in a western education model: that is, subject oriented and centred on disciplining the individual to compete against class peers for examination passes and scholarship opportunities. Susana felt, on the other hand, that the Tongan culture significantly enriched each student’s knowledge and understanding of themselves in relation to their role and place within their community, or the people to whom they belong.

Cultural learning is therefore meaningful and has a practical component in helping young people attain a well-founded sense of social responsibility, along with the social skills needed for functioning as a productive member of the community. The participants carried their cultural learning with them from Lapaha to Auckland, and as adult migrant women were able to uphold loyal ties to their Catholic secondary school, their *famili* (family), their *kolo* (village), and the *fonua* (homeland).

## *Toli, Tui, and Luva in Learning*

*Kakala*, which is Konai Helu-Thaman’s research approach, comprises of three stages of *toli*, *tui* and *luva*, which are Tongan language verbs for picking and weaving flowers into a garland ready to present as a gift (Helu-Thaman, 1980, 1988, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000,

2002, 2003, 2008). Helu-Thaman's *kakala* framework used *toli* as the research preparation stage, *tui* as the stage of writing up the research findings, and *luva* as the last phase in the research process of disseminating the findings to the community.

In this study, I have found that Helu-Thaman's *kakala* framework applies to carrying out responsible research among one's own people with a mind to producing research that is beneficial to their communal interests. However, *kakala* is also a model that can be of practical use to Tongan centred learning processes. By this, the methods by which teachers co-create learning environments with their students defines whether the learning outcomes prioritises Tongan language and associated cultural values, or not.

On this point, Susana and Malia offered varied insights into the role of teachers in creating learning environments that meet the collective aspirations and needs of not only students but the communities they come from. Susana felt that it was the responsibility of teachers to guide students towards career pathways that match their "gifts and talents," whereas Malia saw that the teaching of Tongan language as a senior secondary school subject in Tonga was critical to language maintenance within Tongan society.

*Looking back, I see that learning in Tonga was predominantly about learning academic subjects in the classroom. Students need encouragement and information about the importance of each subject and its value for further study and careers in the future, whether that be in Tonga or overseas. The role of teachers is important in supporting students to understand which study pathways suit them best in respect to their potential and what they want to accomplish with their lives. If students are not suited for academic subjects, they have other choices in which they can use their gifts and talents to pursue their interests.*

–Susana

*For me, it is important to teach the Tongan language in Forms 6 and 7 [Years 12 and 13] to sustain our mother tongue and our cultural values and knowledge. I have noticed that it is starting to become lost among the younger generations, and if we do not do something about it now, gradually it will be lost.*

–Malia

To restate Susana's insights, she found that in Tonga, the secondary education system was based solely on academic achievement and the scholarly effort of the individual. Important areas of education were made subordinate, such as *faiva fakatonga* (performance art), sport, religious education, and cultural learning. In secondary education, Helu-Thaman's *toli* and *tui* processes of selecting materials and making a garland with the materials can be

likened to the teacher's duty of care to their student. By this, the teacher has a responsibility to guide the student in selecting information for making decisions about how "they can use their gifts and talents to pursue their interests."

By comparison, Malia took a firm stand on wanting to see the Tongan language taught as a subject in senior secondary school for Forms 6 and 7 (Years 12 and 13). To her, teaching the Tongan language across all years in the secondary curriculum is the most viable means of cultural transmission, and ensuring the continuity of "cultural values and knowledge" in light that the younger generation are at risk of losing this knowledge. Helu-Thaman's *luva*, or gifting a flower garland of knowledge, is seen as the final stage of the *kakala* research model; that is, the dissemination of research findings to the community being researched. In an education context *luva*, or knowledge sharing, can be likened to Malia's position on including the Tongan language in secondary education because sustaining our common "cultural values" is, in many ways, the gift of education in a Catholic school context.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

In conclusion, the Tongan secondary education system is weighted heavily on the pass rates of senior students in national examinations and the way by which high or low pass rates define whether a school is seen by the Tongan public as a success or a failure. However, the views of the students themselves count when validating the cultural, spiritual, and educational value of a school, and should be included and affirmed in research reports.

This qualitative study was organised around the online *talanoa* of six migrant Tongan Catholic women settled in Auckland, New Zealand. Although these migrant women recall the significance of state examinations in their past student lives, particularly in the way that exam results dictated career pathways, overall, they expressed loyalty and gratitude to the school community of staff and students of their time.

This was a formative time in their education where they learned certain values and moral codes, which they carried with them into adulthood; values such as discipline, respect, and being well-mannered and well-behaved. They also learned to treasure their Tongan language and culture, which they continued to cherish when migrating to, and resettling in, Aotearoa New Zealand. Regardless of passing or failing state examinations these Tongan women and mothers, who are now aged between forty-two and fifty-eight years old, were proud to be ex-students of Takuilau College in Lapaha village in Tonga. In their host country, some were members of the New Zealand Takuilau ex-students association whose purpose was to raise donations of cash and goods to support current students at Takuilau College in Tonga.

In terms of creating a culturally appropriate way to conduct the study, *talanoa*, the research method of Timote Vaoleti, and *kakala*, the research model of Konai Helu-Thaman, offered an adaptable framework for online *talanoa* discussions between the researcher and the participants. By culturally appropriate, I mean *talanoa* and *kakala* were purpose fitted for gathering deep qualitative insights into how these Tongan women make sense of, and create meaning about, their past experiences as female students of a Tongan Catholic co-educational high school.

From this research experience, I have gained a deep appreciation of the advantages of interviewing Tongan participants in our Indigenous language. When it comes to engaging Tongan language speakers for research related purposes, I believe our people can authentically articulate their true thoughts and feelings in their mother tongue.

## Limits of the Study

The limits of the study were set by the parameters of conducting a qualitative piece of research with a small sample of six participants. The online *talanoa* discussions with the six migrant Tongan Catholic women generated culturally rich data of meaningful small stories co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. These online exchanges averaging around forty-minutes allowed me to scope certain themes of success and failure at secondary school, Tongan language as the preferred language of instruction and a means of validating the students' cultural identity, and ways to improve learning outcomes for students.

The data collection process coupled with the small sample size, however, did not drill down on the common points that participants spoke of within the discussion themes. This is because my research objective was to gather responses to the questions I had organised under themes, rather than prodding the participants to elaborate on their reflections or develop their personal stories. I put much of this down to inexperience and the fact that this was the first research project I have conducted with actual participants.

The second restriction is that the research data recorded the opinions of middle-age migrant women where most attended secondary school in Tonga during the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s. Much has changed in Tongan society and the secondary education system since the late twentieth century. Therefore, it would not be wise to use the data collected from this study as baseline findings for making projections about the views and experiences of female students currently studying at Takuilau College in Lapaha village.

## Future Research

The possible areas for future research that can be developed from this study are firstly, an exploration of the learning benefits of using the Tongan language as the language of classroom instruction at the two main Catholic secondary schools in Tonga, Takuilau College in Lapaha village and 'Apifo'ou College in Ma'ufanga village.

A subsequent study with a specialist orientation in education studies could take a practice-led format of designing, piloting, and evaluating a secondary school curriculum of core subjects, apart from English, delivered in the Tongan language.

## Fakamālō Lahi Ki He Kolisi Takuilau

To conclude the writing up of this research, I offer a few words in my mother tongue. My humble sentiments express gratitude to the Takuilau College community, especially the late principal Sitani Paulo Mahe, and the people of Lapaha village for kindly supporting this small but meaningful study.

‘Oku ou fie ‘oatu heni, ha fakamālō lotohounga moe manatu‘ofa kiate koe, Sitani Paulo Mahe. Ko e puleako mānava‘ofa mo tōnunga. Kuo ke fakakoloa‘i e Kolisi Takuilau ki he tumutumu ‘oe mala‘e ‘akō ‘o ‘Taku he Lau.’ Neongo kuo ke tō tau, hei hō fatongia ‘i he ‘aho 3 ‘o Sune 2022. Kae tautautefito ki ho‘o tokoni, mo poupou, fakalotolahi, ‘ilo, poto moe ngāue fakasevāniti ki he ako’. Koe‘uhi, koe tokotaha vaivai pe ko au. Pehē foki e fakamālō lahi ki he kau ako lolotonga mo e kolisi tutuku Takuilau, ‘o pehē ki he kolope, ho‘omou māteaki‘i, foaki līoa mo poupou ki he ako ni. Fakatauangē, ko ho‘omou ‘anga‘ofā, moe foaki matakakano ki he Kolisi Takuilau lolotonga e tupulekina, fualelei pea ‘alaha ko e kakala mangoni ‘o laui kuonga.



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# Glossary

<i>Angafakatōkilalo</i>	Humility
<i>Ako</i>	Education
Anga faka'aki'akimui	Humility
'Apsia	Reverence
Faka'apa'apa	Respect
<i>Fāmili</i>	Family
<i>Fefaka'apa'apa'aki</i>	Mutual respect
'Faka'apa'apa	Respect
<i>Fe'ofa'ofa ni</i>	Live in peace
<i>Fua kaveinga</i>	Responsibility
<i>Faifatongia</i>	Responsibilities
<i>Fakahoko fatongia lelei</i>	Duty, obligations
<i>Fonua</i>	People and land
<i>Mamahi'ime'a</i>	Loyalty
<i>Mamahime'a</i>	Commitment and loyalty
'Ofa li'oa	Unconditional love
'Ofa	Love
<i>Siasi</i>	Church
<i>Toka'i fevahevahe'aki</i>	Sharing
<i>Talangofua</i>	Obedience
'Ulungaanga fakatonga	Tongan ontology
<i>Vahevahemanava</i>	Generosity
'Ulungaanga mahu'inga	Core values

# Appendices

## Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Female Experiences of Secondary Education in Tonga.

### An Invitation

*Malo e lelei!* My name is Fe'aomoengalu Kautai and I used to be a secondary school teacher in Tonga. Currently I am a postgraduate student at Auckland University of Technology. I am conducting research to find out about female experiences of secondary education in Tonga. This is an invitation to participate in my research. If you choose to participate or not, it will neither advantage or disadvantage you. The research findings will be used as part of my thesis for a Master of Philosophy degree and I will publish a journal article on the research.

### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to answer two queries. First, I want to find out how Tongan women who attended secondary school in Tonga recall their education experiences, and also, what their perceptions are of success and failure in the education system. Second, I want to know how the experiences of female former secondary students relate to the literature published about education success and failure in Tonga.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are a Tongan woman who attended secondary school in Tonga and has migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand. Also, you received an email invitation to participate in the research from me or your email networks.

### How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible. The research is carried out by an online interview via the Zoom video platform, and the interview is conducted in the Tongan language with the researcher. By emailing the researcher your interest in participating in an interview, reading this information sheet and consent form, and then by giving oral consent on the Zoom video platform before the interview, you are consenting to participate in the research.

### What will happen in this research?

For this research, the researcher will ask you questions about your experiences of secondary school in Tonga, such as the things about school that you liked or did not like, the highlights of the school year, and your preferred language for classroom learning (English or Tongan). The researcher will contact you to set up a date and time to conduct an online

interview and the interview will be video recorded on the Zoom video platform. The researcher will use the research findings to write a thesis for a Master of Philosophy degree and email you a copy of the thesis once it is examined and uploaded to the AUT Library repository for theses and dissertations.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

There might be some discomforts or risks in answering the interview questions on failure at school. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to, and you can withdraw from the research without giving a reason. You will not be named or identified in the research.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If you do experience discomfort or feel there are risks involved in answering the interview questions on failure at school, then I advise you not to answer certain questions that cause discomfort. You can tell Fe'ao either before or during the interview that you do not want to answer questions on failure at school and she will not ask any questions about failure. Alternatively, you can withdraw from the study without giving a reason.

### **What are the benefits?**

The benefits for the researcher is writing up the research findings for a postgraduate qualification, the Master of Philosophy degree. The thesis will present the experiences of former female students who have attended senior high school in Tonga, and how they understand success and failure in the secondary education system. The benefits for participants who choose to participate in an interview with the researcher is that they are contributing information to a new area of research on the experiences of secondary education in Tonga from the perspective of female students who have been through the education system.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Your privacy will be protected because you will not be named in the final report. Instead, a pseudonym will be used in the write-up of the research findings. However, only limited confidentiality can be offered to research participants.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The interview will take 40 minutes to an hour of your time to complete, and you have to be able to connect to the internet, either on a smartphone or a personal computer.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You have two weeks to consider this invitation.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will receive a copy of the thesis by email once it is examined and uploaded to the AUT Library repository for theses and dissertations.

### **What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor: Dr Teena Brown Pulu, Email: [teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz](mailto:teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz) | Telephone: +64 9 921 9999 Ext. 5227. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the AUTEK Secretariat: Email: [ethics@autec.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@autec.ac.nz) | Telephone: +64 9 921 9999 Ext. 6038.

### **Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Name: Fe'aomoengalu Kautai

Email: [vzc2475@aut.ac.nz](mailto:vzc2475@aut.ac.nz)

NZ Mobile: +64 210 853 6004

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Name: Dr Teena Brown Pulu

Email: [teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz](mailto:teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz)

Telephone: +64 9 921 9999 Ext. 5227

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on: 23 June 2021.

AUTEK Reference Number: 21/50.

# Tohi Fakamatala 'o e Fakatotolo

'Aho Ne Fa'u Ai 'a e Tohi Fakamatala 'o e Fakatotolo Ni

'Ulu'i Tohi 'o e Fakatotolo: Ngaahi A'usia 'a Fafine he Ako'anga Kolisi 'i Tonga.

## Ko e tohi fakaafe

*Mālō e lelei!* Ko hoku hingoa, ko Fe'aomoengalu Kautai pea na'a ku faiako 'i he ako'anga kolosi 'i Tonga. 'I he lolotonga ni 'oku ou ako 'i he 'Univesiti Fakatekinolosia 'a 'Okalani pea 'oku ou taki ha fakatotolo fekau'aki mo e ngaahi a'usia 'a fafine 'i he ako'anga e kolisi 'i Tonga. 'Oku ou fakaafe'i koe ke anga lelei 'o fili tau'atāina 'o kau he fakatotolo ni pea 'e 'ikai ha faingata'a kiate koe. Ko e ola 'o e fakatotolo ni 'e fakakakato 'aki ia hoku mata'itohi ko e MA 'i he Filosofia pehē foki ki hano pulusi ha ngaahi senolo atikolo 'o e fakatotolo.

## Ko e ha e taumu'a 'o e fakatotolo?

Ko e taumu'a 'o e fakatotolo ni 'oku fiema'u ke tali e fo'i fehu'i 'e ua. 'Uluaki ke u 'ilo pe 'oku fēfē e manatu pe fakakaukau 'a e fanauako fefine kolisi tutuku 'i Tonga felāve'i mo 'enau ngaahi a'usia, taukei mo e 'uhinga fakaako ki he lavame'a mo e tō. Ua, 'oku ou fiema'u ke u 'ilo pe 'oku anga fēfē e fehokotaki e ngaahi a'usia e fanauako fefine kolisi tutuku ki he ngaahi fakamatala ne pulusi he ngaahi pepa fekau'aki mo e lavame'a mo e tō 'i he ako 'i Tonga.

## Ne anga fēfē hono 'ilo'i au mo e 'uhinga 'oku fakaafe'i ai au ke u kau he fakatotolo ni?

Ko e fefine Tonga koe na'a ke ako in Tonga he ako'anga kolisi pea kuo ke hiki mai ki Aotearoa Nu'u Sila 'o nofo ai. 'Ikai ke ngata ai, na'a ke ma'u e 'imeili meiate au pē ko ho'o kaungāme'a 'oku mo fetu'utaki 'imeili 'o fakaafe'i koe ke kaumi ki he fakatotolo ni.

## 'E anga fēfē 'eku tali lelei ke u kau he fakatotolo ni?

Ko ho'o kaumi 'i he fakatotolo ni, 'oku ke tau'atāina kakato pe ki ai he ko ho'o fili. Pea ko ho'o fili ke kaumi pe 'ikai, 'e 'ikai hano lelei pe ko hano palopalema kiate koe. 'Oku malava pe ke fakangata ho'o kaumi he fakatotolo 'i ha fa'ahinga taimi pē. 'Okapau 'oku ke loto ke fakangata ho'o kaumi, pea 'e 'oatu leva e faingmālie kiate koe ke faka'ilonga'i ho'o ngaahi fakamatala 'o fakamavahe'i pea to'o 'aupito pē faka'atā ke hoko atu hono faka'aonga'i he fakatotolo. Ka 'okapau kuo 'osi fakamā'opo'opo e ngaahi fakamatala ia, 'e faingata'a ke toe fakamavahe'i ia. Ko e fakatotololo 'oku tataki 'aki 'a e ngaahi fehu'i ki he faka'eke'eke, 'o ta femātā'aki he founa ko e suumi vitiō (Zoom) he initanetī, pea ko e faka'eke'eke 'oku ou ngaūe aki e lea fakatonga ki he'ata talanoa. 'I ho'o 'imeili ki he taki 'o e fakatotolo, 'oku ke mahu'inga'ia ke kaumi ki he talanoa faka'eke'eke, lau e tohi fakamatala 'o e fakatotolo ko eni mo e tu'utu'uni e alepau lea, 'pea ke fakahā 'aki ho'o lea he suumi vitiō 'oku ke lotolelei ki ai kimu'a pea toki kamata e talanoa faka'eke'eke, 'oku ke alepau ke kaumi he fakatotolo.

## Ko hā e me'a 'e hoko he fakatololo ni?

'I he fakatotolo, 'e fakafehu'i koe he taki e fakatotolo fekau'aki mo ho'o ngaahi a'usia 'i he ako'anga kolisi 'i Tonga, pehē ki ho'o ngaahi me'a fekau'aki mo e 'apiako na'a ke sai'ia ai pe 'ikai sai'ia ai, ngaahi me'a tu'ukimu'a pe makehe 'o e ta'u fakaako, ko e hā ho'o fili he lea

fakatonga pe lea fakapilitānia 'oku ke pehē 'oku lelei ke faka'aonga'i 'i faleako, ki hono tatakī 'e ako. Te u fetu'utaki atu ke ta fokotu'u ha 'aho mo e taimi lelei ke fakahoko ai 'e ta talanoa faka'eke'eke suumi vitiō he initanetī, pea 'e lekooti 'o hiki tepi foki. Te u faka'aonga'i ho'o ngaahi fakamatala he fakatotolo ni ke fa'u 'aki e tohi 'o fakamo'oni'i ai e 'uhinga ki he mata'itohi ko e MA 'i he Filosofia. Hili hono sivi'i 'a e tohini pea tuku atu he laipeli 'a e 'Univesiti Fakatekinolosia 'a 'Okalani pea 'oatu leva hano tatau ma'au he 'imeili.

### **Ko e hā nai ha ngaahi palopalema pē faingata'a 'o e fakatotolo ni?**

'E malava pē ke 'i ai ha ngaahi palopalema pē faingata'a'ia 'o hoko ha ta'efiemālie he ngaahi fehu'i 'o fekau'aki mo e 'ikai lavame'a pē ko e tō he ako. 'Oku 'ikai fiema'u ia ke tali ha fehu'i 'oku 'ikai ke loto ki ai, pea 'oku malava pē ke fakafoki ho'o kau 'i he fakatotolo ni 'o 'ikai ke tukumai ha 'uhinga ia ki ai. 'E 'ikai ke fakahā ho hingoa pē 'e faka'ilonga'i he fakatotolo ni.

### **'E anga fēfē hano fakalelei'i e ngaahi palopalema pē faingata'a?**

'Okapau te ke a'usia ha palopalema pē faingata'a 'o hoko e ta'efiemālie 'i hono tali e ngaahi fehu'i, 'o fekau'aki mo e 'ikai lavame'a pē ko e tō he ako, 'oku 'ou pou pou kiate koe ke 'oua te ke tali e ngaahi fehu'i ko ia. 'E malava pē ke fakahā kia Fe'ao kimu'a pē 'i he lolotonga e faka'eke'eke, 'oku 'ikai ke loto ke tali e ngaahi fehu'i ko ia pea te ne ta'ofi ke faka'eke'eke koe e ngaahi fehu'i ko ia. Ko e faingamālie 'e taha, 'oku malava pē ke fakafoki ho'o kau he fakatotolo 'o 'ikai toe fiema'u ha 'uhinga ia ki ai.

### **Ko e hā e ngaahi lelei?**

Ko e ngaahi lelei e fakatotolo ni ki he taki ko hono fa'u e tohi 'oku ne fakamatala'i mo fakamo'oni'i ai 'ene'uhinga 'o makatu'unga ai e ma'u hono mata'itohi ko e MA 'i he Filosofia. Ko e tohi ni te ne tukumai mai e ngaahi 'ausia e fānauako fefine kolisi tutuku 'i Tonga, fakataha mo 'enau ngaahi 'ilo, taukei, mahu'inga'ia mo e 'uhinga 'o e lavame'a pē 'ikai lavame'a he potungāue ako. Ko e lelei ki he fānau ako fefine ne nau kau fakataha mo e taki he fakatotolo ni ko 'enau vahevahe mo tukumai ha ngaahi fakamatala 'o 'enau ngaahi a'usia, 'i ha founa fo'ou e fakatotolo 'o makatu'unga he'enau ngaahi a'usia 'i he ako'anga kolisi 'i Tonga 'o fakatatau ki he lau, fakakaukau mo e vakai 'a fefine ako kolisi kuo nau a'usia 'a e potungāue ako 'i Tonga.

### **'E anga fēfē hano malu'i hoku hingoa?**

'E malu'i ho hingoa 'o 'ikai faka'aonga'i ia he ola 'o e fakatotolo ni. Kā 'e fokotu'u ha hingoa fakapulipuli 'i hono fa'u mo fakamā'opo'opo e ola 'o e ngaahi fakamatala 'o e fakatotolo. Ka neongo ia, 'oku fakangatangata pē 'a e malu'i 'oku malava ke foaki ma'a kinautolu 'oku nau kau mai ki he fakatotolo ni.

### **Ko e hā e loloa e taimi 'i he kau he faka'eke'eke 'o e fakatotoloni?**

'E fe'unga mo e miniti 'e 40 ki he houa 'e taha e loloa 'o e taimi faka'eke'eke pea 'e faingofua kiate koe ke fetu'utaki mai he initanetī 'o faka'aonga 'i ho'o telefoni simaati (smartphone) pē ko ho'o komipiutā.

### **Ko e hā e taimi faingamālie 'oku tukumai ke u fakakaukau'i e fakaafe ni?**

Ko e uike pē 'e ua.

**'E lava ke u ma'u ha ola 'o e fakatotolo ni?**

'E te ke ma'u ha tatau e fakamatala 'o e tohini 'i he 'imeili, hili ia hono sivi'i pea tukuatu ki he Laipeli 'a e 'Univesiti Fakatekinolosia 'a 'Okalani 'a ia 'oku tauhi ai e ngaahi tohi natula tatau.

**Ko e hā e me'a teu fakahoko 'okapau 'oku 'i ai ha ngaahi me'a oku'ou hoha'a ki ai he fakatotolo ni?**

'Ofisa Pule Poloseki: Dr Teena Brown Pulu. Email: [teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz](mailto:teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz) | Telephone: +64 9 921 9999 Ext. 5227.

Ko e ngaahi hoha'a fekau'aki mo hono tataki e fakatotolo ni, kuo pau ke fakahā ki he 'Ofisi Sekelitali 'o e AUTEK: Email: [ethics@autec.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@autec.ac.nz) | Telephone: +64 9 921 9999 Ext. 6038.

**Ko hai teu fetu'utaki ki ai fekau'aki mo ha toe ngaahi fakamatala 'o e fakatotolo ni?**

Kataki, ka ke tauhi 'a e Pepa Fakamatala ko eni ki he kaha'u. 'Oku 'atā pē ke fetu'utaki ki he timi fakatotolo 'o hangē ko ia 'oku hā atu 'i lalo:

Tu'asila Fakaikiiki 'o e Tokotaha Fakatotolo:

Hingoa: Fe'aomoengalu Kautai

'Imeili: [vzc2475@aut.ac.nz](mailto:vzc2475@aut.ac.nz)

Telefoni to'oto'o Nu'usila: +64 210 853 6004

Tu'asila fakaikiiki 'o e 'Ofisa Pule 'o e Polōseki Fakatotolo:

Hingoa: Dr Teena Brown Pulu.

'Imeili: [teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz](mailto:teena.brown.pulu@aut.ac.nz)

Telefoni: +64 9 921 9999 Ext. 5227

Fakapaasi 'e he Komiti 'Efika 'a e 'Univesiti Fakatekinolosia 'a 'Okalani he 'aho 23 'o Sune 2021. Ne tali kakato e 'efika 'o e fakatotolo, AUTEK tohi fika fakaongoongolelei: 21/50.

# ORAL CONSENT PROTOCOL

For use when interviews are conducted by videoconference

*Project Title: Female Experiences of Secondary Education in Tonga*

*Project Supervisor: Dr Teena Brown Pulu*

*Researcher: Fe'aomoengalu Kautai*

*The participant joins the videoconference:*

- Do you agree to my recording your consent to participate?

*If they agree, then the record function will be activated and they will be asked the following:*

- Have you read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet?
- Do you have any questions about the research?
- Do you understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the interview will also be audio-recorded and transcribed?
- Do you understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (your choice) and that the interview will also be audio-recorded and transcribed?
- Do you understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (your choice) and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way?
- Do you understand that if you withdraw from the study then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used? However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.
- Do you agree to take part in this research?
- Do you wish to receive a summary of the research findings? Please tick one: Yes  
 No
- Do you want me to send you a copy of the audio recording for this consent? Yes  
 No

Please confirm your name and contact details.

Participant's name: .....

Participant's contact details (if appropriate):

.....

*I will now turn off the recording of the Consent and then start a separate recording for the interview.*

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on: 23 June 2021.*

*AUTEC reference number: 21/50.*

*Note: The participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## TU'UTU'UNI E ALEAPAU LEA

Ke faka'aonga'i he ngaahi talanoa faka'eke'eke 'i he vitiōkonifelenisi

*'Ulu'i Tohi 'o e fakatotolo: Ko e Ngaahi A'usia 'a Fafine 'i he Ako'anga Kolisi 'i Tonga.*

*'Ofisa Pule 'o e Fakatotolo : Dr Teena Brown Pulu*

*Tokotaha Taki Fakatotolo: Fe'aomoengalu Kautai.*

*Ko e tokotaha fakatotolo 'oku kau he vitiōkonifelenisi:*

- 'Oku ke fiamālie pe ki he'eku lekooti ho'o lotolelei ke kaumai he fakatotolo?

*'Okapau 'oku nau lotolelei, pea ko e misini lekooti 'o e tepi 'e fakamo'ui pea 'e fehu'i kiate kinautolu e ngaahi me'a ni:*

- Kuo ke lau pea mahino kiate koe e ngaahi fakahinohino 'i he fakatotolo fakaako ko eni 'i he Tohi Fakamatala?
- 'Oku 'i ai ha'o ngaahi fehu'i fekau'aki mo e fakatotolo?
- 'Oku mahino kiate koe 'e hiki e ngaahi fakamatala lolotonga e faka'eke'eke, pea 'e hiki tepi e ngaahi fakamatala ni he lea fakatonga pea toki liliu ia ki he lea fakapilitānia?
- 'Oku māhino kiate koe ko ho'o kaumai he fakatotolo ni 'oku ke fili tau'atāina pe, pea ko e faka'eke'eke 'e hiki tepi pea toki liliu ki he lea fakapilitania?
- 'Oku māhino kiate koe 'oku ke tau'atāina pe ho'o fili ke kau he fakatotolo ni pea 'oku ngofua pe ke fakangata ho'o kaumai 'i ha fa'ahinga taimi pe 'o 'ikai ke hoko ia ko ha palopalema kiate koe?
- 'Oku māhino kiate koe 'okapau 'e 'ikai te ke toe kaumai he fakatotolo ni, 'e malava pe ke ma'u e faingamālie ke fakamavahe'i ho'o ngaahi fakamatala, pea toe 'atā pe foki ke faka'aonga'i ia 'i he fakatotolo. Ka 'okapau kuo 'osi fakamā'opo'opo e ngaahi tefito'i fakamatala 'o e fakatotolo ni 'e faingata'a ke fakahoko e ngāue ko ia?
- 'Oku ke loto mo'oni ke kaumai he fakatotolo ko eni?
- 'Oku ke faka'amu ke ma'u e ngaahi fakamatala tefito 'o e fakatotolo ni? Kataki tiki e taha: 'lo  pē 'ikai
- 'Oku ke fiema'u ke u 'oatu ha tatau 'o e tepi ne lekooti ai ho'o lea 'oku ke lotolelei ki he aleapau ko eni?  
'lo  pē 'ikai

Kataki fakapapau'i ho hingoa mo e fakaikiiki ho ngaahi tu'asila:

Hingoa 'o e tokotaha 'oku kaumai he fakatotolo: .....

Tu'asila ('okapau 'oku ke fiema'u) :  
.....

*'I he taimi ni te u tamate'i 'e hiki tepi 'o e aleapau kae kamata leva he hiki tepi mavahe 'o e faka'eke'eke.*

*Ne fakapaasi 'e he Komiti 'Efika 'a e 'Univēsi Fakatekinolosia 'o 'Okalani he: 'aho 23 Sune 2021. AUTEK Fika Fakaongolelei: 21/50.*

*Fakatokanga'i: Ke tauhi 'e he tokotaha ne kau he fakatotolo ha tatau 'o e foomu ko eni.*