

**An Exploration of The Early Career Experiences of Tongan Nationals On Returning  
Home After Tertiary Education Abroad.**

By

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### **Abstract**

While there is some understanding of the study abroad phenomenon there is still very limited research specifically focused on Tongan nationals who have completed tertiary education abroad and have returned to Tonga. There is also little known about what happens to young people on their return home and how their early career develops. With that in mind, this dissertation sets out to explore not only the study abroad experience but also the early career experiences of a number of young Tongan people who have returned to their homeland. There are four guiding questions to this dissertation, which are:

1. What were the motivators behind seeking university education?
2. What were the participants' career aspirations and dreams?
3. What were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad?
4. What was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?

The questions were addressed within a narrative inquiry framework. The findings of this dissertation were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Data was collected using in-depth interviews with ten participants.

The study revealed that family was a strong motivator for the participants of this study, while other contributing factors were potential career development, residency status and scholarship availability. The majority of the participants aspired to pursue a career in business, healthcare and education. Participants encountered numerous benefits from the study abroad experience, for example academic and professional qualifications and network development. There were also significant challenges such as financial hardship, language barriers, peer pressure, culture shock, family expectations and a lack of freedom.

Overall participants were very clear that the benefits outweighed the challenges. The return home offered new career and personal challenges. Some had issues applying knowledge to the workplace while others encountered unexpected cultural and adjustment issues. Finally, in this 'early career' phase several were still reflecting on their career and saw their first job as a steppingstone to future study and career pathways.

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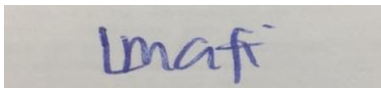
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**Attestation of Authorship**

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 acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a University or other institution of higher learning.



Losaline Vaimoho Mafi

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**Ethical Approval**

Ethics Approval number 19/50

Approval granted on 4 March 2019

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Chapter 1: Introduction

I begin this chapter with an introduction to the context of where this research study took place. Tonga, a constitutional monarchy which is said to have never been colonized by foreign power, considers education as one of the central elements that has contributed to the development of its country. The importance of education is apparent from its history. Primary schools were first established as early as 1828 and secondary education 38 years later (Taufa, 1979). Initially, formal education was introduced to Tonga by the missionaries. This was not only for religious and moral reasons but for the people of Tonga to gain the necessary skills such as writing, literacy and numeracy to allow them to understand the new Christian faith (Campbell, 1992). As a result, Tongan people were taught how to read and write (Taumoevalau, 1998). At the time, schools around the kingdom used Tongan language as a medium of instruction. However, today part of the main requirements in high school is English language proficiency as English is used throughout high schools as a compulsory assessment language (Moore, Leslie, & Lavis, 2005).

By 1862, the island nation accepted Christianity which together with the establishment of the constitutional government, came the demand for people to be educated to take up the various roles in the newly established government. In 1876, the Tongan government passed the first Act, for which they regulated education. This ensured that it was compulsory for children aged 7-16 years old to attend school (Ministry of Education, 2017). The Act was later revised to ensure that education was a requirement for children aged 5-16, making absenteeism an offence other than if the child was sick. Children were not permitted to leave the school grounds unless they were granted permission by the school officer (Ministry of Education, 2017). Education began branching out in the island nation. The government began building new schools in the villages, and taxpayers were required to pay with a ten-dollar penalty fee if anyone failed to comply with the government's regulations. Women were instructed to weave the matting for the flooring of the new buildings, with a one-dollar fine if they were unable to do so (Ministry of Education, 2017).

In the hierarchical society that thrives in Tonga, commoners view education as a means of upward mobility. Many Tongan families make significant sacrifices to educate their children, despite the costs. Tongan families are very proud when a family member accomplishes an academic achievement, and the certificate is often exhibited on the lounge wall (Taufa, 1979). Usually, the whole family, together with other members who reside overseas,

attend the prize-giving ceremony. In addition, radio messages are sent to the academic achiever to praise them for their success and hard work.

Tongan people began migrating to New Zealand (NZ) in the mid-1960s and 1970s, primarily for socio-economic reasons. In NZ, Tongan people are often categorised under the 'Pacific Island' or 'Pasifika' ethnic grouping. It has been recognised that there has been an increasing number of Pasifika or Pacific Island people that are participating in tertiary education. In fact, since 2009, there has been a 12.1% increase in the number of Pasifika students aged 15 years and above attending formal tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2018). Allen (1963), compared the national budget spending on education made by the Tongan government (14%), Russia (3.2%), England (3.2%), and America (3.1%). He concluded his study with a hopeful note, believing that Tonga chose to develop its educational system to benefit its people and the generations to come. Throughout the Pacific Islands, Tonga is considered to be the highest educated nation in the Pacific. It is believed that Tonga held the highest number of PhDs per capita in the world (Potautaine & Mahina, 2007). However, despite these revelations, statistics show that Tongan people were regarded as under-performers in New Zealand's educational system (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010).

## **1.2 Why study Tongan nationals and their career experiences?**

While there is some understanding of the study abroad phenomenon (Findlay, Prazeres, McCollum, & Pacwood, 2017; Waters, Brooks, & Wilson, 2011; Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae, 2006), there is still very limited research specifically focused on Tongan nationals who have completed tertiary education abroad and have returned to Tonga to work. There is also little known about what happens to young people on their return home and how their career develops and unfolds. With that in mind, this dissertation sets out to explore not only the study abroad experience but also the early career experiences of a number of young Tongan people who have returned to their homeland and are in the early stages of developing their career. There are four guiding questions to this dissertation, which are:

1. What were the motivators behind seeking university education?
2. What were the participants' career aspirations and dreams?
3. What were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad?
4. What was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the different career experiences of each participant in terms of what their aspirations were versus the reality of their early career experiences after repatriating to Tonga.

My own experience as a Tongan national student currently undertaking my post-graduate degree in Business has been a catalyst for undertaking this dissertation. About eight years ago I left home (Tonga) in the hope of pursuing a better educational opportunities. As a result, New Zealand became my new home. In this study, I seek to explore the participants motivations for seeking tertiary education abroad, their career aspirations and dreams, benefits and challenges they each encountered abroad, and finally their early career stories since returning to Tonga.

### **1.3 Dissertation structure**

This dissertation is presented in five main chapters. The first chapter consists of the introduction on the research topic with background information about Tonga and the significance of this research paper, the rationale for studying young Tongan students and the importance of further research in this area.

Chapter 2, a literature review, begins with a discussion on the literature that examines the various motivations behind seeking tertiary education and the career aspirations and dreams of young Tongans. The next section explores the benefits and challenges that students experience while abroad at tertiary education. The final section examines the career stories of young Tongan students that return to Tonga after tertiary education.

Chapter 3 presents the researcher's philosophical stance, as well as the research process used. It provides an explanation on ontology, epistemology and the rationale behind the narrative enquiry methodology. In addition, this chapter also provides a discussion of the data collection process and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 outlines the findings. The themes are structured in four main sections as per the four research questions: (1) what were the motivators behind seeking university education? (2) what were the participants' career aspirations and dreams, (3) what were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad? (4) what was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the key findings resulting from the research process.

The final chapter (6) provides an overview of the dissertation, re-iterates the main findings, identifies the study limitations and finally suggests areas for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Migrating great distances primarily for educational purposes is not considered a new phenomenon. In this chapter a selection of relevant literature is discussed to provide the background knowledge on the research question that guides this study, which is: *an exploration of the early career experiences of Tongan national on returning home after tertiary education abroad*. In order to address the research question, there are four guiding questions to this dissertation: (1) the motivators behind seeking tertiary education abroad; (2) career aspirations and dreams; (3) the benefits and challenges of studying abroad; and (4) the process of returning home to Tonga. Due to the limited and outdated literature based on Tongan students, this chapter draws on literature from various countries in order to address the research topic. The next section addresses the main motivators for seeking tertiary education abroad with subsequent sections following order outlined above.

### 2.2 Motivations

Given the limited opportunities for tertiary education available in Tonga, a majority of Tonga's high-achieving graduates are motivated to study abroad to achieve their undergraduate and post-graduate degrees (Gibson & McKenzie, 2009). In Tonga however, there are several local funded tertiary education institutions, either provided by the government or privately. One main university that currently exists is the University of The South Pacific (USP), which was established in Tonga in 1971. Students are able to commence their studies in Tonga but were required to complete their studies at the main USP campus in Fiji. There were only a limited number of courses offered in Tonga depending on the availability of tutors as well as the number of students applying to enrol in that particular course. Graduation ceremonies for their respective degrees were also held in Fiji (University of the South Pacific, 2019). There are some courses now that are able to hold their graduating ceremonies in Tonga.

USP has upgraded its courses now where students can now complete their full degrees in Tonga and have their graduations in Tonga. Students can also take up to Masters level and Postgraduate diplomas at USP. There are other Tertiary level institutions as well in Tonga, not just USP. There's Lo'au University, 'Atenisi University (now running again) and there is also the higher institute of education (Tonga Institute of Education) under the Ministry of Education that are running tertiary courses and have programs linked to AIS St. Helen's Institute of Education in NZ for students to continue their education there.

In addition to this, there are also agencies in the Pacific offering various scholarships to Tongan citizens, particularly from New Zealand and Australian Aid schemes. Such scholarships are offered through funding given to the Government of Tonga to distribute to students seeking further studies overseas. This is a way of ensuring that students are given the ability to gain new knowledge and skills. Upon completion of their respective studies, students are then obligated upon their return to Tonga to apply their newfound knowledge and set of skills for the betterment of their country. Returning scholars are under contract to the Government of Tonga to work for 2 years before they seek employment elsewhere (Ministry of Education, 2017). Should the returning scholar fail to keep to this contract of working for the Government of Tonga for the two years, they must repay the full scholarship amount that was used during their studies abroad. There are also other scholarship programmes offered to the people of Tonga from other aid agencies, for example the World Bank, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), World Health Organisation (WHO), and Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2017). There are also some countries such as China, Brunei, India, and Taiwan that offer scholarships to Tongan students in the hope that the country as a whole will benefit from the return of these scholars with their upgraded skills and knowledge gained while pursuing further studies overseas (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Tonga too has its own scholarships awarded to students known as the Tonga Awards where the government funds full scholarship in areas of need up to Postgraduate level. The recipients of this scholarship are expected to return home and work for the government to build the field of study that they had received their scholarship on. Due to the overwhelming financial hardships faced by many Tongan families to pay the expensive tertiary tuition fees, great pressure is placed on students to strive to receive scholarships for further studies abroad. As part of the cultural traditions of Tonga, women are highly valued and admired by their family. It is easier for parents to let go of their sons for further studies overseas. In a descriptive study conducted by Taufa (1979), the author highlighted the emphasis that Tongan families place on their sons due to the traditional male dominant society that still thrives in Tonga. Tonga is still a very patriarchal society with everything from land to personal possessions being passed on from the father to the first-born son. Taufa (1979) emphasized that Tongan families are motivated to educate their sons because upon his return, it is expected he would take responsibly to raise the family's standard of living. He will also be carrying forth the family name since his surname will never be altered prior to or after marriage. Whereas for women, the money spent on

educating them will most likely benefit her husband's family on marriage (Taufa, 1979). In the Tongan culture, once a woman is married, her belongings are taken to her husband's home. Her surname is changed to her husband's surname and she is expected to strive to make her husband's home her own. This social practice still thrives in Tonga although in recent times, there have been some changes.

Apparent changes in the traditions are now being seen in some modern Western family scenarios. In a report issued by the Tongan Ministry of Education (2017), it was revealed that there were higher numbers of female students attending both secondary and tertiary education in Tonga. Whereas in the past, education had always been the main focus for Tongan sons, it has become apparent that daughters were now entering higher education to tertiary level whereas in the past, daughters were just educated up to primary school level. Moreover, the Report showed that female students are enrolling into programs that used to be predominantly male oriented such as Accounting, Engineering and Medicine. Statistics in the Report attest to this change. For example the report stated that one Accounting class had 39 female students and 5 male students enrolled for the first semester. Other programs such as in Agricultural studies, 16 female students were enrolled compared to 9 male students (Ministry of Education, 2017). These comparisons are just some of the changes that are visible in the Tongan educational system. It is evident that Tongans are slowly letting go of some of their traditional expectations and are more accepting of their daughters seeking further education. This trend also highlights that girls are more than capable and motivated to succeed in fields that were previously male dominated.

Like other developing nations, Tonga has more university graduates than skilled farmers and tradesmen (Walsh, 1972). Tonga has always and will continue to depend largely on Agriculture. Land is passed on from generation to generation and farming is therefore sometimes the only way to provide food for families as well as a means to bolster family finances. Most of the farming knowledge is passed down from generation to generation without any formal training. Agricultural studies is a new phenomenon in Tonga but it is starting to be very popular with students. There are tertiary institutes set up solely for the primary study of agriculture e.g Hango Agricultural College at 'Eua (Ministry of Education, 2017). The popularity and motivation to study Agriculture stems from the fact that land is available, and it is very apparent that should proper cultivation of land be done, there is a significant amount of money to be made in this sector.

A further motivation to acquire professional roles also known as white-collared jobs, is that they possess high status in the Tongan society in comparison to those of a blue-collared less skilled job. Walsh (1972) noted that the majority of the population would rather work for the Government as their way of serving the country because of the status such employment brings. The higher status of those that work for the Government is due to the fact that it is mostly returning scholars that occupy the major roles in the different government ministries. This higher status is also attributed to those doing office work whilst those that are working outside in the agricultural area must work outside in all weather conditions. In Tonga those that work in the office are often perceived as more intelligent and smarter than those working on the farm since education is not required when farming.

While young people seek the opportunity to study abroad as a means to improve their skill development and open up career opportunities (Findlay, Prazeres, McCollum, & Packwood, 2017), many find the move overseas very challenging due to significant adjustment issues leading to culture shock (Dickmann & Harris, 2005). Changes not only in the weather, the language, the food as well as the teaching methods at tertiary level, can be quite overwhelming for most students. Studies also reveal that students often face discrimination when they study abroad (Harry, Dodd, & Chinyamurindi, 2017). Because students come from islands that some people have never heard of, it is very easy for these students to be looked down upon and marginalised. Language can also be a barrier and a cause of discrimination, especially when students have accents from their respective islands and therefore pronunciation of some English words are very difficult at times. One study found that for some students the challenges of education abroad often made them reconsider their initial career plans (Robertson, Hoare, & Harwood, 2011). After completing tertiary education, studies (Findlay et al., 2017) have revealed that some students elect to remain in the host country while others return home to contribute to the development of their country with their new-found knowledge and skills. Those that elected to remain in their host countries did so with the knowledge that they would have to pay back the funds they received under their scholarship. Many of these individuals were clear that the decision to return home was not to be seen as a failure, but rather a commitment to creating better opportunities and building a better world in their birthplace (Findlay et al., 2017).

### **2.3 Career aspirations and dreams**

'Career' has been a key influential concept in western societies. Bimrose and Brown (2014) described career as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (p. 204). Career can be defined as a "sequence of positions occupied by a person during the course of a lifetime" (Demel & Mayrhofer, 2010, p. 302). Career development is seen as a lifelong process which initially begins from early childhood (Richarson & Watt, 2006). Choosing a career is often not a straightforward process and may not be accomplished unless certain requirements have been met or certain obstacles have been avoided. Furthermore, a choice is seen as an opportunity or right to choose between different things (Richarson & Watt, 2006). Therefore, both terms are associated with issues of selecting a profession or an occupation. The term career aspirations is defined by researchers as "information about an individual's interests and hopes, unfettered by reality" (Hellenga, Amber, & Rhodes, 2002, p. 200). As a result, looking to the future, a career not only has implications on the individual itself but also their personal identity and the society (Collin & Young, 2000). The term 'career' is a very broad term and is defined in various ways, but for the purpose of this study we will focus on the definitions mentioned above.

Current literature on 'career' is primarily associated with the social sciences around motivational and psychological literature (Hellenga, Amber, & Rhodes, 2002). This literature reveals important issues which include, the impact of parents' influence, the need to educate students in regard to their career choices, and issues around the ineffectiveness of the school curriculum and its relevance to the work environment. It is also understood that the literature on careers is primarily focused on tertiary students, teenagers, and children. The process of career choice takes place in a person's entire life cycle given the decisions they make and the selection of occupation they choose (Cohen-Scali, 2003). Various studies highlight that career development is closely linked with situational support (e.g. Avey et al., 2010). Noe and Wilk (1993) argue that self-development, situational support and individual motivation are closely linked. In other words, this means that the presence of either an educator or supervisor can assist a student with their efforts in developing a career, such as taking up a course or trying to find their interest.

A study was conducted to assess the level of awareness students had about the relevance of their school education on their career (Johnson, 2000). The sample of this study was primary, middle and high school students. An interesting insight from this study was that the majority of the high school students failed to identify the relevance of their schoolwork

to the jobs they aspired to hold in the future. Johnson (2000) also confirms this finding in his study whereby a total of 37,500 students were interviewed and only 2.2 per cent of students could identify the relationship between their academic learning and their performance on the job. He also claims the importance of understanding the perceptions of students about their education as it is essential to prepare them for the changing nature of contemporary work (Johnson, 2000).

The formation of career goals is related to the perceived aspirations and talents of an individual (Ismail & Ramly, 2011). Different generations have their own set of perspectives about their career goals and desires, in such a way that generation X is different to generation Y (Ismail, Rahum, Lee, & Thahir, 2016). Travelling abroad for educational purposes is not considered a new phenomenon (Pabel & Prideaux, 2012). This trend began in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and today, the education of international students has developed into a highly competitive international business (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999). Initially studying abroad in tertiary education only attracted a few students but it is now considered an important element in preparing oneself for living and working in this fast-changing global and political world we live in (Nisser, 2010).

The perceptions individuals possess about a certain career play a major role in making that specific career attractive to them in the long run. However, this has been found inadequate for many students around the world (Johnson, 2000). For many students, when left alone they end up dissatisfied and with unfulfilling careers. Studies show that many students have a low level of awareness about the various career options that are available to them and as a result they end up in the wrong career pathway. Very often students have unrealistic expectations about their jobs, and this usually happens because they complete their qualifications with minimal knowledge about specific professions or job prospects (Dhesi, 2001)

Among many students, there is still a great deal of uncertainty about getting into a professional career. Nowadays, young people are highly influenced by the media as well as the wishes of their parents (Bimrose & Brown, 2014). In some families, choosing a career is not something that is recommended as children are brought in with their careers already mapped out for them by their parents (Burlin, 1976). There are some careers that are seen as a trademark of some families and this is very evident in Tonga regarding the study of theology and the new generations that want to be pastors or preachers. In their mind, because their grandparents worked in this field preaching the word of the Lord, and

their parents continued it, then they must also continue the family name in this career area. There is also no doubt in the minds of these parents that their children must continue in this career since that is what their family has been known to be doing for many generations. A young person's career; having been chosen by the parents or elderlies; is often due to finding a better means of raising the standard of living and for a long-lasting economic up lifter for the educatee and his/her family (Mahina, 2007). While some young people take time out to investigate the jobs in demand and go down that pathway, others are more focused on the monetary aspects (Bridgstock, 2009).

Young people need to test their assumptions and beliefs about specific careers before they decide to invest more energy, time and resources to that specific career (Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi, 2002). Positive assumptions often make the occupation attractive and encourage more people towards that career pathway, whereas, negative assumptions create avoidance and abandonment (Cheetham & Chivers, 2001). Therefore, developing the expertise required for this globally competitive environment has become an on-going process. Workers are continuously required to add skills and enhance their expertise in the workplace, and Technology is increasingly seen to eliminate old-skilled jobs and develop new job skills (Bruce, Edington, & Olkin, 2003). This is the reason why there is a need to find careers that matches the need from the global market for skilled expertise in different and new fields in the markets.

## **2.4 Studying abroad**

While students move abroad to fulfil their career aspirations and dreams at universities, there are often different circumstances that can influence their experiences as students overseas. These can be beneficial or considered a challenge. Bourdieu (1990) suggests that individuals studying abroad are not primarily trying to achieve social advantage but rather they are embarking on an adventure that may offer fun and unknown challenges throughout the journey. Other research suggests that individuals tend to move abroad as part of developing their careers or because they are given the opportunity to seek new experiences (Myers and Pringle, 2005; Thorn, 2009). Individuals are thus given the opportunity to pursue their dreams in a process of creating and re-creating themselves (Bourdieu, 1990). Studying overseas is also recognized as a way to enhance a student's potential employability as the experience of living and travelling abroad facilitates the development of new knowledge and skills (Pabel & Prideaux, 2012). Employers recognize that students studying abroad become exposed to global issues and develop a global

perspective (Fee & Grey, 2011) and this in turn also adds to their employability and understanding of cross-cultural issues (Pabel et al., 2012).

For some students, it seemed that their career paths were already mapped out by senior family members and this included the expectation that they would enrol in specific educational programmes including study abroad at a University or Tertiary Institute (Fee & Grey, 2011). While there was considerable family pressure to do these things, other students reported that studying abroad was an opportunity to escape cultural and family expectations and lead a more flexible and autonomous life (Waters, Brooks, & Wilson, 2011). Studying overseas was always seen as the best option in comparison to the local educational institutes. Studies also suggest that often the Pasifika culture may clash with the demands of a student life. Bensemanet et al., (2006) reveal in their study that although many students grew up with the expectation from the family that they would attend tertiary education, in reality there was often only minimum support from parents during their studies. Other expectations from parents included participation in family and church activities, as well as supporting sick and elderly family members. Often these expectations and commitments were seen to be more important than education. When other students are seen studying in the evenings, Tongan students must attend various church functions. Even during the weekends, where students are supposed to be relaxing, there is always some form of church activity or family occasion that must be attended.

This process was often seen as fostering citizenship in young people so that when they are mature enough and are out in the society, they already have the knowledge and understanding as well as skills to address different situations in life (i.e. They have learned to know, learned to do, and learned to live with their society). The world is changing at a very fast pace and increasing global mobility is resulting in more diverse populations. Students become exposed to diversity when they travel and study abroad and their ability to adapt to these changes is another positive outcome from the international experience (Bakalis & Joiner, 2007). As a result, they develop an understanding of the host culture, in return broadening their view of the world, their future jobs and themselves (Fee & Grey, 2011).

According to Bakewell (2008), the decision to enroll at university is seen as a shift in an individual's life towards effective time management, greater financial responsibility, and freedom. One of the main challenges that students face at universities around the world are financial constraints. Much of the literature on financial issues at universities tends to

focus on government funding programs (Metha, Newbold , & O'Rourke , 2011), and the way in which students manage their money (Borden et al., 2008; Eckel & Grossman, 2002; Falahati & Paim, 2011). To gain the benefit of a tertiary education most international students studying abroad have to rely on their parents for financial support (Falahati & Paim, 2011) or through government aids scholarships.

## **2.5 The process of returning home**

Studies are predominantly focused on expatriation. However, very little attention is given to the repatriation process once the assignment is completed and the individual is required to return home (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Often, this is because there is an expectation that the home culture, its people and work habits still remain the same before the individual moved abroad and that there should not be any difficulties with re-adjusting back home. However, Hyder & Lovblad (2007) argues that the repatriation process can just be as difficult.

Repatriation is defined by researchers as “the return from overseas employment” (Herman & Tetrick, 2009, p. 71) and is arguably an important transition in this global career. In the repatriation literature, the phenomenon called reverse culture shock has been used to discuss the experiences of individuals returning home (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). This is because while the individual is abroad completing the assignment, there are various changes that often occur in the home environment. However, the individual completing the assignment abroad may have a picture of the home society and the home environment may also expect that specific individual to be same person they were before they left abroad (Baruch & Altman, 2002). In turn, the expectations set out by the individual may not be in line with reality, which results in culture shock. Individuals that travel abroad for educational purposes often have the desire to return home to their home country for various reasons which demonstrates a multidimensional structure of a status passage (Thieme, 2014). Individuals often face situations that may influence them to stay at their current destination, move further or to simply return to the home country. In addition, and noted previously, there are various scholarship programs that require individuals to return back to their home country, while others do not (Thieme, 2014).

Certain young adults perceive employment in the home country as their way of contributing to the national economic and social development of their nation. Okuwa and Campbell (2017), mentioned that throughout the study, young adults completing tertiary education abroad yearn to return home and find a job that can influence others. When

individuals choose to return home, they are often unprepared to face the challenges of returning home, which includes psychological adjustment, looking for a job and getting back to the old lifestyle. There is a strong association between the type of funding a Tongan student receives and their intention to return home. In modern society, young adults appear to pursue a broader range of career pathways, becoming independent, and then returning home (Warner, Henderson-Wilson, & Andrews, 2012). The perception of returning home has ideally been associated with “back-tacking” (Roberts, 2007, p. 265) or often described as a “syndrome”, or seen as “incompletely launched” (Schnaiberg & Goldenberg, 1989, p. 251). However, these perceptions are based on studies that were conducted in the early 1980s and 1990s. When comparing the lives of the current generation and to those from previous cohort, there are considerable differences (Smart & Sanson, 2005). For example, it is relatively straightforward to notice the difference because, the risk of unemployment has risen dramatically, educational careers have lengthened, and young people with qualifications entering the labor market has increased significantly (Roberts, 2007).

## **2.6 Chapter Summary**

The literature review provided reveals that further research is required on this topic. Although there is an increasing number of studies conducted on career experiences it is important to note that very limited studies are specifically focused on Tongan nationals and their career experiences abroad and also the process of returning home to Tonga.

Thus, this dissertation sets out to contribute to the career’s literature by exploring the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad. Here, it contributes to the current literature by conducting research on Tongan nationals as it appears that limited studies have been focused on this group. This dissertation aims to contribute to this research gap. Given this, the research questions that shape this study are:

- What were the motivators behind seeking university education?
- What were the participants career aspirations and dreams?
- What were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad?
- What was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?

The following chapter seeks to describe the research process used in order address the research questions of this dissertations. It also provides the researchers philosophical stance, the methodology used, ethical considerations and data collection process.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The primary objective of this study is to explore the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad. As previously mentioned in the last chapter, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the significant literature gaps on the career experiences of Tongan nationals. In doing so, this dissertation is guided by the four following research questions; (1) what were the participants' motivators behind seeking tertiary education; (2) what were their career aspirations and dreams; (3) what were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad; and (4) what were their early career stories since returning home to Tonga? This chapter discusses the research methods undertaken to address the primary objective mentioned above. The structure of this chapter is as follows: (1) an outline of my research philosophy; (2) followed by a discussion on the chosen research methodology; (3) a description of the research methodology, which includes ethics, the recruitment of participants, the process of conducting research and analysing data. The chapter concludes with a brief reflection on my development as a researcher and a summary of the key points of the chapter.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

Qualitative research helps researchers achieve valuable insights into local perspectives of a particular study, providing specific and rich data (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Qualitative research drawing on a narrative approach is different as it enables the researcher to explore human reality through the stories of people to represent the world as it is (Treloar, Stone, McMillan, & Flakus, 2015). Research is shaped by the philosophical beliefs, values and concepts of the individual researcher. These set of beliefs or worldviews are known as research paradigms. These paradigms influence the ontological and epistemological stance, which then determines the research framework (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Ontology refers to the study of being or reality. Qualitative research means embracing the notion of multiple realities and multiple forms of evidence. Researchers analyse the actual words of participants and elicit a range of perspectives and themes (Cresswell, 2013). Epistemology refers to the way of understanding what we already know and explaining how we know it. Ontology and epistemology are an integral part of the researcher's theoretical perspective and the research paradigm chosen for a particular research study (Crotty, 1998; Crewell, 2003).

Although the researcher can choose a particular method to gather data, this choice is influenced by the research methodology. A methodology is a strategy or framework

influencing one's decision to follow a specific research process and adopt particular research methods (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The researcher must align their ontological and epistemological stance to their desired research outcomes. The ontological belief of the researcher in this study is that each participant uses social interaction and their personal experiences to convey their realities (Grant & Giddings, 2002). As a result, a subjective epistemology is followed where, the researcher (myself), enters the participant's real-life early career experiences in an attempt to understand this particular phenomenon. Therefore, I chose to use narrative inquiry as I believe that it was the appropriate methodology to capture the early career stories of the young Tongan participants in this study.

### **3.3 Methodology: Narrative Inquiry**

In this section, the chosen methodology is discussed. As previously mentioned, narrative inquiry was identified as a suitable methodology to capture the unique career stories of the young Tongan participants in this study. Narrative inquiry is seen as 'an old practice' because as human beings, throughout history we have shared lived and told stories as a way of creating meaning in our daily lives (Clandinin, 2006). This methodology is multidisciplinary and is primarily focused on the stories of people (Fraser, 2004). The term 'inquiry' seeks to explore real-life events and how individuals make sense of these. This is achieved through interaction between the researcher and the participant to draw out their career stories which are used throughout this study (Fraser, 2008; & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, narrative inquiry is seen as an appropriate methodology for the researcher to explore the early career experiences of the participants on returning home after tertiary education abroad. More specifically the research questions are:

- What were the motivators behind participant's seeking university education?
- What were the participant's career aspirations and dreams?
- What were the benefits and challenges of studying abroad?
- What was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?

These unique career stories were then analysed by the researcher (myself) to draw out 'themes' which are patterns that are consistent throughout the data set. Drawing out themes and interpretations are crucial tasks in qualitative research as it requires the researcher to be reflexive in the process to ensure they have a "good sense of your positionality onto the research you are conducting" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 367).

Storytelling is part of human nature. Whether we narrate stories to ourselves or others, it is a representation of our identities and societies (Plummer, 1995). Storytelling is seen as a way to engage in dialogue with others to unearth hidden ideas. This approach allows participants to reflect and make sense of their experiences together with the researcher, thus bringing the term 'inquiry' into the narrative research process. Storytelling requires more than reciting events, it usually involves wholeness, where there is a beginning, middle section, and an end, with trials, defeats, triumphs and achievements (Terrell, 1990). The use of storytelling allows the researcher to explore the participants social, cultural experiences and values (Clandinin, 2006; Melinda et al., 2014).

In Tonga, storytelling continues to be a communal activity at kava ceremonies, family events or at church. Sometimes, during such occasions, poetic compositions are performed for that specific occasion (Wolfgram, 1993). In many Tongan families, grandparents are usually the storytellers to their grandchildren. Stories told are often based on their life and how so much has changed in the way of living in the Tongan community and the Tongan culture. At church, storytelling is an essential part of Sunday's service. It is therefore fitting that the researcher chose to use storytelling as it plays a significant role in Tongan society and the narratives told by the participants allows the researcher to understand the cultural and social factors which have shaped the participants' experiences.

For the researcher to understand the career experiences of the participants in this study and how they made sense of the events which took place, it was required that the researcher acted as an interpreter and an active listener of these shared stories. Also, it required a level of reflexivity and observation from the researcher. This refers to a continuous process of reflection to develop awareness and understanding of the stories told (Darawsheh, 2014). Reflexivity involves reflecting and understanding the process of conducting research and how this shapes the outcomes of the study (Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001). The various benefits and contribution of this process include; enhanced "trustworthiness" and "integrity" of the data and the role of the researcher (Finlay, 2002; Nadin & Cassell, 2006). This is an ongoing process where the researcher is required to continuously think deeply about the given topic (Cassell & Symon, 2004). It is seen as an important part when conducting research, referring to this study, reflection and reflexivity were practiced throughout the research phase in order for me (the researcher) to be aware of any bias. With this process in mind, I kept an interview diary. After each interview I would document: what went well and why; the challenges and why; and how the

researcher might approach it better or differently next time. I also used the diary as a checklist to keep a record of demographics or to ask questions that come to mind during the interview process so that I wouldn't interrupt the conversational process. Before each interview, I reviewed my notes to ensure that my discussion guidelines were followed.

On completion of all the interviews, it was time for me to analyse the data into themes. This process is known as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2017), an ongoing process which was previously mentioned. Furthermore, the explorations of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on their return home after tertiary education involved interpretation of their career stories beyond their narrative. As a result, this aligns with the interpretive paradigm which requires a deep understanding of reality (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

### **3.4 Research Design**

This section provides a discussion on the research design and the reasons for the choice of the various methods and processes.

#### **3.4.1 Ethical Considerations**

The primary objective of this study is to explore the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad. I (the researcher) was aware that some of the discussions could have been personal hence the importance of adhering to the ethical principles of the AUT Ethics Committee guidelines. I was required to complete an application form to the university's ethics committee to ensure that research practices that I undertook would comply with the ethical standards of conducting research, particularly in a cross-cultural context. An approval letter from the ethics committee was received on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019 with certain amendments, these include;

- A revision to ensure there was consistency between the consent form, participant information sheet and researcher safety protocol;
- A separate amendment to the participant information sheet;
- An amendment to the general project detail;
- An amendment to the informed and voluntary consent section;
- An amendment to the respect for rights section; and
- Amendments were made to ensure koha will be given.

I then revised the application and made changes to meet the requirements of the Ethics committee which were signed off by my supervisors. Subsequent to this I was given ethics approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee to carry out the research study. Having received this approval, I began the process of participant recruitment.

### **3.4.2 Recruitment**

To qualify for this study, the selection of participants was based on the following criteria: (1) Tongan; (2) between the ages of 18-35; and (3) completed tertiary education abroad. Participants who met the criteria were invited to participate in this study. The sampling procedure was intentional (Gray, 2013) in that the participants were required to be Tongan, meet the age range, and have completed tertiary education abroad. This was to ensure that the participants would be able to provide information that would assist in providing insights to meet the purpose of the study. The age range 18-35 was chosen as it was the appropriate age for students to graduate from high school and enter tertiary education abroad.

In order to source participants for this study, I used snowball sampling, explicitly drawing initially on my personal networks. Snowball sampling usually begins with one recruit, who then recruits another participant, and consequently expands the sample group (Etikan, Alkassim, & Abubakar, 2015). The closeness of the Tongan communities made this task less onerous, so the recruitment of participants was a straightforward task as the current participants also had friends that were willing to participate. As a result, this process took approximately 3 weeks.

The recruitment process began with emails being sent to potential participants. The initial contact included a short introduction of myself, details about the research to be carried out, and the criteria for inclusion (refer to Appendix 2). Once the potential participants confirmed and expressed their willingness to participate, the researcher sent an email thanking them together with an attached copy of the Consent Form (refer to Appendix 4) and the Information Participant Sheet (refer to Appendix 3). Arrangements to meet were negotiated including a suitable place (e.g. available office space). I planned to use a specific office space but if this was not suitable for the participant, we agreed to meet elsewhere. Ten individuals expressed their interest to participate, six participants were obtained from personal networks, the seventh participant was unable to attend the

interview due to unforeseen circumstances. So, an additional four recruits were referred to the researcher (myself) by two existing participants.

### **3.4.3 Gathering the stories**

In the field of qualitative research, in-depth interviews are one of the most common modes to collect data as it allows the participants to express a vivid picture of their perspective on a specific topic (Milena, Dainora, & Alin, 2008). In this research semi structured interviews were used with questions being open-ended to allow participants to take full ownership and tell their career stories in their own words and in their own time. (Refer to Appendix 5). This approach allowed a more in-depth exploration of the participant's career experiences. It gave participants time to think and reflect on their journey and share honest experiences that occurred to them. Thus, I referred to a discussion guideline to assist in the collection of each career story and ensure that the research questions were addressed through the participant's telling of their stories (Gillham, 2000).

In-depth interviews usually consist of personal histories, experiences, perspectives, and often touch on particularly sensitive topics (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest , & Namey, 2005). As a result, it is essential that the interview process is flexible to ensure that the interview is led by the participant and not the researcher. During the interview phase, the researcher becomes the 'student' and in turn, the participant becomes the 'teacher' (Treloar et al., 2015). The process of conducting an in-depth interview tends to be a longer process as it is time consuming to capture the stories of each participant. By asking open-ended questions, the researcher is able to actively listen to the participant's stories (Gillham, 2000) and probe or draw out various aspects relating to the research questions. It is the researcher's responsibility to construct their meaning on what is seen or heard during the interview process and make appropriate and measured inquiries to develop a more profound and meaningful understanding of the stories collected.

### **3.4.4 Doing the research**

A discussion guide was developed, which comprised four broad areas which reflected the research questions. The first section focused on the motivators behind seeking tertiary education abroad. The second section explored the participant's career aspirations and dreams, followed by the challenges and benefits of studying abroad. The final section discussed the early career stories of each participant since returning home to Tonga.

Each in-depth interview was conducted one-on-one with participants and ranged in duration between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. Having a discussion guide was crucial as it allowed me as the researcher to keep track of the research purpose and also ask relevant questions about the study. Planning was essential to ensure that the process of collecting the stories was efficient. While I (the researcher) was in Tonga for a short period, I had to ensure that the interviews would not clash with one another and allow time for reflection or adjust the guidelines before commencing the next interview. I had to be flexible because these participants were working and were available at different timeframes. All interviews were conducted in Tonga in an independent office space that was convenient for both the participant and the researcher. This choice was necessary given the closeness of the Tongan community and to ensure confidentiality. I was also aware of the researcher safety protocol, so I made sure that all interviews were held away from the home space of either the participant or myself. The researcher safety protocol is a document that consists of information about the research project. As the researcher, I am the person responsible for interacting with participants, so it was important that I was familiar with the social and cultural context of the research and also with the safety measures. Stories were collected using an audio recording device on my cell phone and I also carried out some limited notetaking during the course of the interview. Note-taking during the interview process was necessary as there were questions that came to mind as the participant shared their story and rather than interrupt the storytelling, I would write down the questions and ask them later during the interview process. On some occasions the participant would address this question in their subsequent storytelling.

The interview process was both an exciting and nerve-wrecking experience. Generally, I arrived at the agreed interview location early and while I waited, I skimmed through my interview guidelines to familiarise myself with the questions. Upon the participant's arrival, I would introduce myself and start a conversation to create a friendly environment and build trust with the participant (Seidman, 2005). I would start the interview by thanking the participants for taking time out of their busy schedules to take part in this study. I then explained the purpose of the research, reassuring confidentiality and went through the participant information sheet to ensure that the participant was familiar with every aspect of the research study.

During the interviews, I (the researcher) felt that there were times when some participants were hesitant to share their career stories and often it was because they felt a lack of immediate connection with either myself (the researcher) and/or the research process

(King & Horrocks, 2010). When this happened, I would often share my thoughts to develop further trust to enable the participants to share their career experiences. However, I was always careful that all information shared with me remained confidential (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

The interviews were concluded with a recap of the main discussion questions. I then referred to my checklist of specific questions/issues/areas if the participants had not mentioned or discussed these aspects during the interview process. When I felt that we had covered the key research points I thanked the participants, inviting them one last time to share anything further that they would like to share but had not had the opportunity to do so in the research storytelling so far. Once that was completed, I invited the participant to share with me how they felt about the research storytelling experience. The purpose here was for me to get a better understanding of the participant's perspectives, not only so that I can learn from the process, but also so that I could address any further comments or issues about the research process. Invariably, they viewed it as a very positive and joyous experience and as I brought the interview session to a close, I presented each participant with a small Koha gift as a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

#### **3.4.5 Analysis of the data**

In the field of qualitative research, there are a variety of ways to analyse the information gathered from the in-depth narrative interviews (Creswell, 2003). I (the researcher) chose to use Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to analyse all data collected. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis is a process used to identify consistent themes and patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2017; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This method enables the researcher to draw out, identify, analyse and interpret themes within qualitative data so it is often used in research that seeks to uncover and understand the way participants think, their feelings and actions (Braun & Clarke, 2017). The steps discussed outline the process that I followed to prepare and analyse the data. In addition to this, I kept notes on each interview about my thoughts and reflections.

The first step was the transcription of the recorded verbal interviews to written text (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003), printing the transcriptions if required, and keeping electronic copies of data records for ease of access. Some researchers choose to skip this step and analyse their stories directly from the recorded interviews. Some researchers choose to have their interviews transcribed by a third party, i.e. a professional as they have the skills to meticulously process each transcript and they also have the equipment to speed up the

process (Fraser, 2004). Researchers often give this task to third parties because it is a time-consuming task and it usually takes longer to transcribe than it did to collect the actual data (Gibbs, 2007). However, for this study, I decided to do this task as this was my first big project and I wanted to reflect on what each participant said during the interview process. One of the advantages of conducting this task was that I was already familiar with the stories, the context of the interview and participants' accents, which could have been a barrier to an external transcriber (Gale et al., 2013).

The transcribing process began with each interview recording stored securely onto the recording device, which will be destroyed upon the completion of this dissertation in line with ethics requirements. I then proceeded to type up all ten transcripts using Microsoft Word. There was no specific guideline on how to conduct the transcription process, so I transcribed each interview word-for-word to portray the reality of the data and ensure consistency of format and presentation between the ten transcriptions. (Gibbs, 2007).

The second step was processing the overview of career stories of each participant. As the researcher, it was vital for me to get an overall picture of the stories to get a general feel of the information gathered. From this; and guided by the interview questions; I focused on each career story as some were clearer or easier to follow and understand in comparison to other interviews (Fraser, 2004). As a result, this concentration enabled me to pay attention to each interview. When analysing the stories, I stepped away for a bit to make sense of the information with a few strategies in mind on how to ensure that the data will be presented in a manner that: (1) the unique career stories of reality and experiences of each participant are told accordingly; (2) will intrigue readers in a way that will allow readers to follow through this research process to the final section; (3) will highlight the critical career experiences that each participant experienced. I thought that it was important that others might have the opportunity to listen and reflect on key aspects of the Tongan Study experience as a way forward when pursuing their own tertiary study abroad.

The third step involved categorising the data into general themes using words that were consistent across the career stories. Due to the sample size (ten participants), I chose to conduct the thematic analysis of each transcript manually rather than using software such as NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). These were then categorised into chunks with a label to identify each particular theme and who said what. Next I grouped the information into categories, drawing out similar themes and regrouping critical words to convey the career stories of each participant (Treloar et al., 2015). Also, I looked to the field notes, the

descriptions of the various settings, and the tone of the interview to further inform the analysis process. During this phase, it allowed me as the researcher to draw out themes that were similar or different between participants and were worth exploring. I continued to write a research diary to enable me to further reflect on the research process and in particular the process of analysis.

### **3.5 My development as a researcher**

My role as a researcher has been a continuous learning process. Before I started this research study, I had minimal knowledge and expertise on the process of conducting research and the importance of aligning your research philosophy, research methodology and methods. However, as part of the university's MBus requirements, I was required to complete two research papers called 'Introduction to Research Methods' and 'Qualitative Research Methods'. This study included a smaller research project whereby I was required to conduct a face-to-face interview with another student in the class and then transcribe the data. This transcription, along with two additional transcripts from two classmates, were then analysed drawing on the process discussed in more detail in the previous section (Braun and Clark, 2017). This experience was invaluable in introducing me to the necessary theory, concepts, frameworks and practices of qualitative research and stimulated my interest in narrative inquiry.

In addition to the above; my personal context is an integral part of the research process and consequently on my development. I have a strong cultural connection with the research in terms of the topic (I am completing my post graduate study abroad) and as a young Tongan woman I grew up in Tonga and am steeped in Tongan cultural traditions and practices. As a young adult, I moved to New Zealand to undertake university study and as I look to completing my Masters dissertation in the near future I plan to return to Tonga and develop my career in my home country. The opportunity to do this research has been very positive and enabled me to closely identify with my participants and recognize this connection through the choice of a subjectivist methodology to frame the research.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter covers key aspects around my research methodology and the actual research process undertaken by myself (the researcher). In the earlier sections of this chapter I have discussed my philosophical stance and ontological and epistemological perspectives. Narrative inquiry was identified as a suitable methodology, as it empowers

the participants to tell their stories and for myself (the researcher) to understand the cultural and social influences which have shaped participant study and career experiences. Throughout this whole process, I have reflected on the research process and as such, I have been able to document my ongoing learning around research theory and practice. This chapter also discusses the research process, including participant recruitment, ethical considerations and the gathering and analyzing of the career stories. Finally, this chapter closes with a brief reflection on my own development as a researcher and my insider positioning as a young Tongan woman undertaking postgraduate research within my own world (Ryan & Mooney, 2018). The following chapter consists of a discussion on the findings of this study.

## Chapter 4: Research Finding & Data Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings that resulted from the career stories of the ten participants who volunteered to be part of this research. All participants had completed tertiary education abroad and are now employed in Tonga in various professional roles in their chosen fields. All the participants are determined to advance in their career to assist their families to improve their standard of living as well as creating opportunities for themselves. The key themes that emerged from the career stories are presented in the following sections which also reflect the research questions: (1) what were the motivators behind seeking tertiary education; (2) what were their career aspirations and dreams; (3) what were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad; and, (4) what was their early career story since returning home to Tonga. Illustrative quotes will be used throughout the chapter to support the findings presented.

### 4.2 Overview of the participants career stories

This section is an overview of the participant's early career stories. They were well-educated, having completed their secondary studies in Tonga before moving abroad for tertiary education. The participants were interviewed in Tonga and were aged in their mid 20's, except for Lupe and Chris who were in their 30's. The table below highlights each participant's university qualifications, tertiary education provider, and their current role at the time of the interview.

**Table 4.2.1 Female Participants**

Participant	Tertiary education provider	Major	Field of employment at the time interview
Silia	Pacific University	Accounting and Economics	Auditor
Jane	Pacific University	Accounting and Economics	Finance
Ofa	Pacific University	Creative Arts	Community worker
Suliana	New Zealand University	Management and Human Resource Management (HR)	Human Resources role
Lupe	New Zealand University	Psychology	Health care

**Table 4.2.2 Male Participants**

Participant	Tertiary education provider	Major	Job
Mason	Pacific University	Medicine and Surgery	Health Care
Anderson	Pacific University	Accounting and Public Administration Management	Finance and Administration
Jason	New Zealand University	Biomedicine	Education
Viliami	Pacific University	Science and Mathematics	Education
Chris	Pacific University	Accounting and Mathematics	Education

### 4.3 Motivations

This section explores the motivational factors that influenced participants to seek tertiary education abroad. Amongst the themes identified, family was a strong motivator for individuals to pursue tertiary education. In addition, future career development was considered as an influential factor. However, other contributing factors facilitated university studies such as individual future life and career development, residency and scholarships availability and options. These factors were not necessarily the primary reasons and no one person was specifically driven by just one of these motivations.

#### 4.3.1 Family

There was a variety of motivations amongst the participants. As previously stated, family was a dominant theme. This is because kinship ties are still quite important in Tongan society. Participants addressed family in various ways. Several individuals were motivated due to the expectations set out by their parents. Other participants were role models for their younger siblings, so they felt obligated to provide positive examples for their younger siblings to aspire to. Lastly, some participants encountered family tragedy and as a result, this became a motivator to support their family.

##### 4.3.1.1 Expectations

As part of growing up in a Tongan family, parents often set out expectations for their children to fulfil, education being an important aspect. Silia; during her interview; emphasized this by stating: *my family, they wanted me to get a degree*. On the other hand, Mason grew up in a family that was known in the academic field, as a result, he felt that he should fall in line with that expectation. Also, he had a few family members that were

studying and working in the Health sector so that, in itself, was a motivator. Although it was an expectation set out by his parents, Mason was willing to fulfil this not only because he excelled in his studies, but he was also very passionate about it:

*I had quite a lot of family members who were generally studying the medical field and were also working in the local hospital in Tonga. I felt that was a motivator for me to just try to prove that I could also do that as well (Mason).*

Anderson also came from a family similar to Mason. His family was known in Tonga for their academic achievements in the field of medicine, business and teaching. Due to this, he felt obligated to pursue tertiary education. He believes that fulfilling this was his way of giving back to his family for their love and support throughout his life:

*it was a must for us to go study overseas. I didn't want to attend university at first but because of the family background (Anderson).*

Like Mason and Anderson, Jason also belongs to a family known in the Tongan community for their academic achievements and their commitment to Tupou College. He was raised in a family where both parents were university graduates. As a result, Jason and his siblings were taught from a very young age that education was important:

*my parents both attended university in Australia, [where] they completed their bachelor and master's degree. At a very young age, my siblings and I were taught that education is essential, and I believe this is because my parents value education (Jason).*

While growing up, Chris was constantly reminded by his parents to do well in school in order to do well in life. It was the small encouragements made by his parents during family prayer or before seeing him off to school that motivated him to attend university:

*my parents, they encourage me to do further studies to make life much easier for me than it was for them (Chris).*

#### **4.3.1.2 Role model**

Following the Tongan way of life, there are specific roles to be fulfilled depending on one's gender. In a Tongan family, the brothers are seen as subordinates to their sisters, and from a young age, the eldest daughter is expected to be a leader for the rest of her siblings. As a result, the girls are required to be positive examples to the rest of the family. Jane spoke about her experience while growing up as a child and the struggle her family encountered. Her older siblings had minimal education and Jane wanted to change that:

*The struggle we went through with the family and the older siblings, they didn't have a degree, so I wanted to top them (Jane).*

Suliana also grew up in a family with a limited educational background. Her parents did not complete high school and her older siblings struggled to complete their tertiary studies. Since she was the eldest daughter, she felt obligated to complete tertiary education and be a positive example to the rest of her siblings:

*I grew up in a family with very little educational background. My parents [dropped out of] high school. As for my older [siblings], they barely finished their studies abroad ...therefore, I had to be [an] exemplar to my younger siblings (Suliana).*

#### **4.3.1.3 Support**

Lupe's father died suddenly when she was young, and she was struck by the struggle her mother faced trying to raise her family without a main source of income. As a result, Lupe was determined to study hard:

*winning scholarships was the only way that I could think of to alleviate the financial strain on the mother's shoulders. Studying abroad was the only way that I could ensure that I would be able to get a good job to look after my mother and my siblings (Lupe).*

Viliami also grew up in an underprivileged family, but he was not overtly conscious of this because his parents did their best to provide food, clothes and a roof over their heads. However, he too took on the expectations from his parents to pursue tertiary education to provide for his family:

*growing up poor at the village... I had the feeling that I had to provide for the family as I was the second eldest in the family (Viliami).*

#### **4.3.2 Personal future career development**

This subsection focuses on the participant's future career development concerning their motivations for seeking tertiary education. While participants were predominantly motivated by family, some individuals also talked of personal future career development. In their way, they believed that this was an opportunity for themselves to develop a career in the world and make a change to their upbringing. Silia shared: *I wanted to get a degree to get a good job in the future ...to expand my knowledge.* Also, Suliana saw the opportunity

of moving abroad as a way of contributing to their family business, not only now but into the future:

*I wanted to pursue further education overseas so that I can gain knowledge ...I saw how my parents struggled at times in providing for our family (Suliana).*

Jane took this opportunity as a key to long-term independence, *I wanted to get the qualification ...in order to be independent and not have to rely on other people and their support (Jane)*. Since tertiary education in Tonga is limited, students are required to move abroad for further education. Jason shared: *knowing that I would be able to expand my knowledge further than what Tonga has to offer ...was an opportunity.*

#### **4.3.3 Residency and Scholarships (an enabler)**

This final subsection discusses issues around residency and scholarships and the influence these issues had on the participant's decision in seeking tertiary education abroad. Although residency and scholarships are not specific motivations, they are important factors which enabled these participants to attend university abroad.

Residency was identified as one of the major factors that supported university study for the participants decision-making process. For participants like Jason and Suliana, this opportunity meant that they were not required to pay for international student fees as they were eligible for New Zealand's (NZ) StudyLink program. It also meant they could seek medical assistance if they were ill while abroad as a citizen rather than an international person, Jason shared:

*Citizenship meant I had the opportunity that not many Tongan students had. To me, I saw this as an opportunity because many fellow Tongan individuals are willing to study but due to financial constraints, they are not able to fulfil this dream (Jason).*

In addition to residency, scholarships were another influential factor that helped facilitate university education abroad. The scholarships offered in Tonga are usually from different departments of the government, secondary school or from various churches. For participants like Lupe, Mason, and Chris they believed that they were fortunate to be nominated as scholarship recipients. As a result, it had allowed them to pursue their dreams in the field of education. Lupe shared that as a result of her father's sudden death, the only way to ensure that she would be able to look after her family was to do well

academically and to achieve a scholarship as there was no other source of money available from her family:

*There was no source of income for our family, so my mother struggled to do her best to feed and look after four girls from the age of 12 to 5. Winning scholarships was the only way that I could think of to alleviate the financial strain on my mother's shoulders (Lupe).*

#### **4.4 Career Aspirations and Dreams**

This section aims to analyse the career aspirations and dreams of each participant. It explores their initial career plans before embarking on their journey abroad to fulfil their career goals. The research question that shapes this section is: what were the participant's careers aspirations and dreams. The majority of the participants aspired to pursue a career in business, some in the medical field, and one participant as a teacher. These are the career pathways that young Tongan people often prefer to pursue

##### **4.4.1. A career in Business**

As a young girl, Silia was uncertain about what her future career pathway might be. She knew in the back of her mind that she wanted to do something in Commerce. Throughout high school, she took Economics and Accounting papers, so she felt that she had to pursue a career in that field. When interviewed, it was clear that she was still very unsure about her career path:

*I still don't know what I want to be now, but I always knew that I wanted to do something in Commerce. Throughout high school, I took Economics and Accounting (Silia).*

On the other hand, Jane talked about her sole focus on business and finance. When she began her journey in secondary school, she knew that she would pursue the field of Accountancy. At year 9, her chosen subjects were Accounting and Economics, which she continued to pursue through high school to university. She enjoyed her classes because she found the subjects easy and her family convinced her to pursue this field as it was seen as a good-paying job.

*I [am] not sure why, but when I was in primary school, I always thought about working with money. I was obsessed with money, I guess. I took accounting and economics since form 3 so I guess that [was] when I was 13 years old and then I guess I liked it because of the teacher and it was easy ...when I enrolled to*

*university, of course I [would not] choose anything else but double major in Accounting and Economics because apparently they get paid well (Jane).*

Anderson mentioned that while he was still in high school, he enjoyed Accounting and Economics. Also, he also had family members that were accountants, which fostered his interests further. He shared his aspirations of wanting to pursue this career overseas.

*When I was in high school, I studied accounting and [teachers]talked about those recognized and well-respected accountants, and I wanted to be one of those well respected and recognized accountants, not only in Tonga but also the Pacific.*

#### **4.4.2 A career in the Health department**

Lupe reflected back to when she was a young girl, where she clearly remembers her father working at the local hospital as a psychiatrist. She grew up familiar with issues around mental health and while her father was studying, they lived on-site at a mental health facility. This experience itself inspired her as a young girl to help individuals that could not help themselves:

*My father had been a psychiatrist at the psychiatric unit of the local hospital so as a young child I had always been surrounded by mentally challenged patients ...From a young age I wanted to help those that could not help themselves (Lupe).*

Ofa, as a young girl, was passionate about being a pediatrician as she was very interested in helping young people. She knew that becoming a pediatrician was her destined career because she enjoyed working with children:

*Growing up, in my mind, I was so set on being a pediatrician. Personally, I love children and I am always interested and fascinated in the way they express themselves (Ofa).*

Mason had always aspired to be a doctor. While family was important in seeding this ambition. Mason also had some other career and life interests and dreamt of working in tourism, in terms of travelling and being a diplomat:

*I [have] always wanted to be a doctor but I didn't know why. Only first obviously because I excelled in the science field. But apart from this I also wanted to work in tourism, in terms of travelling, foreign affairs as well ...I also found out in the medical aspects, if you work in public health they also travel. So, I feel like it was beneficial for me to eventually become a doctor (Mason).*

Jason, at a young age, was always interested in a career in the Health Profession, mainly as a medical doctor, or any part of the medical field that would help him learn to improve the health of others. During his years at secondary school, he excelled in his Biology and Chemistry classes.

*At a young age, I was intrigued with human biology and learning about the different systems in the body as it amazed me.*

Viliami grew up in a Christian family. His parents worked for the local church and as young children, he and his siblings were told that after completing high school they must work for a religious community in Tonga. For Viliami, he was uncertain about the career path he wanted to pursue but had an interest in science and mathematics during high school:

*[we] were told from a very young age that we were to work for the church of Tonga. Growing up with these dreams being instilled to us ...we didn't know what the meaning of why we had to work for the church ...now we know that working here [for] the church it's not just for anything but my family (Viliami).*

As a young person, Suliana dreamed of being a nurse. She enjoyed science and excelled in the field. Throughout her junior years in high school, she wanted to become a pediatric nurse and provide care for children in Tonga.

*When I was in high school, I always dreamt of being a nurse working at the local hospital because I excelled in the field and I enjoy helping people. However, because my parents operate a family business, I felt I had no choice but to pursue the field (Suliana).*

#### **4.4.3 A career in Education**

Chris's passion from a very young age was to be a teacher. He enjoyed helping classmates during his years at high school and knew that this was the career path he wanted to pursue:

*I always dreamt of being a teacher. When I was in form 7, they asked me what I hoped to do in the next 5 years, and I told them that I hope to be a teacher (Chris).*

#### **4.5 Benefits and Challenges of studying abroad**

While participants were abroad pursuing their university education, there were different circumstances which shaped their experiences as young Tongan students. This next section discusses the benefits and challenges of tertiary education abroad. The factors discussed below were the main discussion points for the individuals of this study. Despite

the number of challenges, they faced, these participants still believed that the challenges outweighed the benefits.

#### **4.5.1 Benefits**

There were several benefits that participants spoke of while abroad for their tertiary education. These benefits include: the achievement of professional qualifications from a recognized tertiary education provider; the development of networks as a result of meeting new people; support groups and schemes provided by the university; availability of resources; and the support of family members overseas. These benefits are further discussed below.

##### **4.5.1.1 Professional qualifications**

Participants believed that the credentials received as a result of studying abroad are better than any they could gain in Tonga. For example, Lupe shared: *the benefits of studying overseas was better than any local credentials that I would have received*. For Suliana, it was *the knowledge and skills I've gained, I was able to apply it here in Tonga*.

In addition to credentials, others believed that studying abroad opened opportunities for them. *Being away opened more doors of opportunity because you're not just limited in Tonga, but you're also associated with different cultures and you're exposed to more aspects of life* (Jane).

Ofa believes attending university abroad has given her the skills and ability to influence Tonga's growing generation by expanding their career options and trying to make her pathway a valued and alternative norm: *having this career pathway can expand the career options that our young people grow up to learn as becoming a norm to our society. It isn't only about doctors and lawyers, but they're also creative artists*.

##### **4.5.1.2 Network development**

Participants discussed one of the positives of studying overseas was meeting new people from different countries and cultures. Anderson believed that it was a benefit associating with other cultures because: *it allows you to adapt easily, especially if you decide to work abroad*. Chris saw the importance of meeting new people from different countries and although he has graduated from university, he still manages to keep in touch with them: *we're still using Facebook to communicate and check on each other*.

#### 4.5.1.3 Support groups

Jason shared that an important benefit for him, while he was still studying abroad, was the level of support he received as a student while studying Bio-Medicine at the University of Auckland:

*support schemes for Pasifika that help students with their studies, providing free tutorials and in general, free help with uni workload.*

#### 4.5.1.4 Availability of resources

Silia, Jane and Anderson studied at the University of the South Pacific while domiciled in Tonga and the majority of their lectures and classes were all available via the internet. If they had questions, they were required to email their lecturers based in Fiji. Other important resources such as access to the library, internet, computers, science labs were limited. These factors were perceived as barriers that impeded their progress. Moving abroad opened up opportunities to access the required resources which have assisted them with their studies.

Moving to Fiji for Anderson meant that he now could have face-to-face interactions with lecturers: *physical interactions with lecturers that are more experienced in the field.*

Jason also agreed with this stating that: *growing up in Tonga at secondary school, we never had the equipment that we had overseas. But moving overseas and having this equipment helped us complete our assignment.*

#### 4.5.1.5 Family

Some participants thought that the move abroad and away from family and cultural norms meant they had the space to pursue their studies. Jane shared: *being away from family, I was able to just focus on my studies.* However, Anderson believed that being in a situation where you had no choice but be independent and time-away from the collective way of being, gave him time to focus on himself:

*you don't have to rely on your family to support you as you can learn the hard way to survive the world (Anderson).*

Conversely, Suliana lived with family members in New Zealand and saw that as a benefit because she felt there was family support: *In NZ we lived with my dad's sister, so we had a family to support us.* While Anderson was studying in Tonga, he felt the moral and financial support offered by his family motivated him to succeed in his studies: *family, they*

*[were] there to support me and motivate me and also financially, I had no expenses as everything was provided.*

#### **4.5.2 Challenges**

While the participants were overseas pursuing their career aspirations, there were various challenges encountered. These included financial constraints, language barriers, peer pressures, freedom, and the challenges of leaving their loved ones behind. These challenges shaped their career experiences as young Tongan students.

##### **4.5.2.1 Financial constraints**

Anderson and Chris shared their financial struggles while they were overseas. They knew that their families could not provide for them at times and that was an experience they will never forget. Anderson shared: *sometimes family couldn't provide for my needs*. Chris also remembered struggling financially while at Fiji, *there were instances where I had no money as a result, I would eat crackers and noodles daily*.

##### **4.5.2.2 Language barrier**

Some participants experienced a language barrier because in Tonga some secondary schools do not require students to speak English. For Jason this challenge affected his studies:

*I was raised in Tonga and most of the time I would speak in Tongan, at home and school. We were taught in English for some of the subjects, but most of the time we spoke in Tongan*

*...speaking in English was a really big challenge for me, learning to communicate, the environment itself and the differences of being revolved around it. Besides, the science field itself was a challenge: while you're learning to speak in English, you're also learning to speak the Science language ...I always had to go look for someone that is Tongan who is studying Science so that we can work out together our lecture notes (Jason).*

Viliami also experienced the language barrier: *in our classroom, we were taught in Tongan but when you go overseas, everything is in English*.

##### **4.5.2.3 Peer pressure**

In terms of social activities, Mason struggled with peer pressure:

*in terms of social activities [and] drinking, that was one of the challenges I had. I mean, drinking on the weekend was fine but on my first few years of Uni, I would occasionally drink on the weekdays when we had classes and sometimes, I'd miss class because of this (Mason).*

Anderson also shared the same experience: *I often skipped class to drink. My friends often skipped class and they also made me want to skip class.*

#### **4.5.2.4 Cultural clash**

Many participants experienced lifestyle adjustment issues when moving abroad to study. While in Fiji, Jane associated with different people from other countries and she: *felt like I would have to try and fit in, especially coming from a little island and [trying] to fit in with other people.*

Other participants mentioned adjusting to the education system. Moving from Tonga to New Zealand, Suliana found this a challenge: *New Zealand's education system was different from what I was used to.* Mason found the first few years a challenge in terms of adapting to the changes in the curriculum: *what I was studying is nothing compared to what you learn in high school ...it's very difficult for me to adapt from just doing biology, chemistry, and English. You have to collectively learn all these things and then apply them to the medical aspect, which has its additional information.*

Aside from the university experience, Suliana recalled having to catch public transport every day and trying to get around New Zealand as challenging. Lupe also shared: *the culture clash was also very obvious and became a challenge. The fact that NZ was a much bigger place than our island was also an issue as I had to start learning about the public transport system.*

#### **4.5.2.5 Family**

For each participant, moving abroad for educational purposes meant leaving their family and loved ones behind for the very first time. Jane shared: *being away from family for the first time ...I was homesick.*

Anderson also felt homesick and as a result it affected his studies because at times it made him want to give up: *sometimes when [I am] alone, I miss home and it made me not want to study anymore.*

Lupe found it difficult to be away from her mother and siblings: *being away from my mother and my siblings. This was the first time for me to be away from them and it was a very difficult time, but I had to keep reminding myself why I was doing this.* She noted, that although she lived with family while she was in NZ, she did not have complete freedom. There were certain obligations she had to fulfil even when she felt ill: *I always had to watch what I said, ate, and I was not given the freedom that I had living with my mother.*

Ofa felt she had no family support throughout her journey as a creative artist. While she was overseas, she received very limited support from family and also the community. This is due to the gendered nature of cultural traditions and perceptions around whether being a creative artist was a legitimate and viable career: *for me, the challenges are having to convince our community and our family how rewarding this career path is.*

For Jason home was always Tonga. Like other participants, it was the first time he had left his family to live in a foreign country: *I left my family to move overseas and study ...although I lived with my older sisters, but I was still quite new to it.*

Viliami also reflected on the challenge of leaving the comfort of home to live in a place that felt so foreign: *the challenge was trying to establish a space of comfort for me to study and for others to feel that it is ok for us to live together.*

#### **4.5.2.5.1 Expectations**

As a result of family expectations, some students struggled with stress, depression and procrastination. It was during Silia's final semester before graduating that she felt under so much pressure, she feared failure: *I was procrastinating and stressing over completing my assignments. I was also depressed, some days I would lock myself in my room.*

Since Mason's studies were funded by his parents in the first few years, he felt pressured to do well because he knew how hard they worked for him to attend university. As a result, he also felt stressed: *there [was] a lot of pressure on [me] because I was being funded by [my] parents pocket alone and [I] had to do well, if not [I] was just wasting their time ..it added an extra amount of stress that I was already feeling.*

#### **4.5.2.5.2 Freedom**

The lack of freedom was an issue for most of the female participants. Tongan parents can be very strict in terms of imposing curfews and attending social events. For Silia, as a student at USP in Tonga, there were situations where she felt she needed time out from studying to relax and enjoy time out with her friends. Due to how strict her parents were, she felt her freedom to do so was severely restricted in comparison to when she was in Fiji where she had no family member to monitor her and stop her from having fun: *there is no complete freedom, if you want to go out on a Friday and stuff but you have your family here and sometimes they stop you.*

In contrast, Jane saw freedom while overseas as a challenge because this meant she had to take responsibility and ensure she kept on track with her studies and the assignments that had to be completed: *I was on my own which meant I had to be more mature. I didn't trust myself to [stay on campus] alone.* To her, it was a way of ensuring that her goals were in place: *trying to stay in line with my goals and education.*

#### **4.6 Early career stories**

The previous sections have covered the motivational factors that influenced participants to undertake tertiary education. It then discussed the careers dreams and aspirations before undertaking study abroad as well as the challenges and benefits participants faced while overseas. This final section captures the early career stories of each participant since returning home to Tonga.

##### **4.6.1 Applying knowledge to the workforce**

Some participants identified trying to apply knowledge and skills from university to the organisation as a challenge. For example, Chris, after graduating from University and moving back to Tonga to work as a teacher at Tupou College spoke of the difficulties:

*I think university and life at work are very different, especially trying to apply what you have studied to the workforce, it is very challenging. The content in what I learnt in Fiji is different from Tonga (Chris).*

Suliana moved back to Tonga after graduating from University. She is now employed by her parents as their HR manager and she also assists in the Accounts and Information Technology team. She shared:

*it has been a challenge, returning home and trying to re-adjust to Tonga. For example, the food, people and also the work environment. Trying to adjust to the*

*work environment, the schedules and also working with other people can be very challenging (Suliana).*

Suliana also found it difficult to apply the knowledge and skills she has gained at university to her role working with a Tongan workforce.

#### **4.6.2 Cultural Challenges**

In Tonga, we live in a close-knitted culture with traditional norms that surround Tongan people, especially Tongan women. Since returning home to Tonga, Ofa realized it was such a norm for Tongan families to push their children down a career pathway of sports (e.g. rugby or rugby league), law, business or medical doctor as it is these occupations that are given high status in the Tongan community. Her inspiration to be involved in the Tongan community was to break with convention by participating in different youth programs which then led her to pursue a career pathway in the Creative Arts. Ofa sees this as a way to create more job opportunities in Tonga and inspire younger people who wish to pursue this field in the future.

*there's no big job opportunity for Creative Arts here in Tonga. As what I mentioned before, creative arts is not an industry that is very popular or supported in Tonga, so as a creative artist person, you have to create your opportunity you have to create your platform and it's so difficult when we're here in Tonga, where it is against culture and tradition (Ofa).*

Ofa now facilitates community dance lessons for various age groups. In the field of Creative Arts, there is very limited support provided in Tonga and, at the time of the interview, limited job opportunities. This is because it challenges our Tongan culture. where women are restricted to only performing graceful cultural dances known as the tau'olunga. She believes by challenging this cultural norm opportunities for women who are passionate about Creative Arts will open:

*it's so hard to convince parents to allow their kids to take part in a platform like this [hip-hop or contemporary dance] because to themselves it feels like they're being pushed far away from culture and tradition to something so modern and foreign (Ofa).*

As a young artist, she believes this is her way of empowering young people who do not want to pursue the field of education but are blessed with the talent of dancing to earn a future for themselves:

*they can easily use the gifts and talents to earn an income for themselves and to become very independent people who do not need to rely on their parents ...they can use those gifts and talents to self-provide for themselves (Ofa).*

Lupe moved back to Tonga and as part of the scholarship obligation, she was required to work for the Government for two years. While there, she became the first psychiatric social worker in Tonga. She was in charge of conducting social reports that involve family and the living situation of registered patients as well as forensic reporting. For Lupe, one of the most challenging aspects of her job was that families were not used to having their private circumstances reported on. *The stigma and shame attached to mental illness still had a strong pull in the culture of Tongan families.* Also, the vehicle she used at the time was also known as the crazy vehicle: *the vehicle that I was using at the time became known as the 'crazy vehicle' and families were ashamed to be seen with me or to be interviewed.* Tongan people presumed she was a medical doctor as she had no standard uniform but all that the local people knew about hospitals where employees were either nurses or medical doctors. She had to break boundaries from what the local Tongan people knew about hospital staff. Lupe shared: *I had a lot of explaining about my post and what I was supposed to do.*

#### **4.6.3 A learning curve**

Mason has been working at the local hospital as a junior doctor. He believes returning home is his way of contributing his knowledge to the Tongan community and putting his studies to good use. Working in Tonga meant he was at home, close to his family and loved ones. He believes that working in Tonga has been a learning experience:

*learning different management guidelines in Tonga, [which] is so much more different compared to Fiji. This has allowed me to understand more about how they manage things here in Tonga compared to Fiji. As a result, this experience has broadened our minds and how we can apply the knowledge to the job (Mason).*

Mason also talked about the political issues that occur in his current workplace, he shared:

*there are quite a few political issues in there in terms of hierarchy, whom to respect and whom not to. In Tonga, it is quite different. You have to respect. I do know that often, junior doctors get bullied by senior doctors and those are some of the political issues that you see (Mason).*

#### 4.6.4 A steppingstone

While some participants have returned to Tonga and are working in their chosen professions, others are not there yet and are still searching. For this group, their current role is seen as a stepping stone and a process of career clarification where further study and different employment may result.

Silia returned from university and was immediately employed at the Ministry of Revenue and Customs. She first began her role as a daily paid employee, until she recently became a permanent employee. At the Ministry of Finance, she worked in the Consumption Tax (CT) division and audit department. Silia now has a more technical role at the service unit issuing assessments to taxpayers. *[It] is a very technical job and I feel like my degree is not enough in doing this job. I feel like I need to pursue further studies and just from the lack of experience in doing this job ...I feel like I learn a lot from this job.*

Anderson is a financial analyst for the Government. He believes his job at the moment has no relevance to what he studied at university but believes:

*it is a good foundation for my career. Due to Tonga having a lot of debt to other countries, I wanted to start there and have an overview of how Tonga is managing their funds to pay the loan and [to know if] we are even able to pay the loans.*

Anderson saw the job vacancy and immediately applied for the job. In terms of this work experience, he stated: *I haven't learnt a lot of stuff because it is just about debt.* Looking to the future, he seeks to continue his studies abroad to broaden the scope of the job opportunities available in his career profession.

Jason is currently working at a local college as a Science teacher for year 9 and 12:

*Initially, I had no plans on being a teacher, however, given the opportunity I thought this would be a great learning experience for myself. It has been a to challenge teaching kids and trying to help them with their studies because we have the obedient ones and the very disobedient students. In addition, he shares, the pay isn't much and it has been a struggle surviving on that but other than that, I'd say the job has given me an insight to what teachers deal with and also has allowed me to help students out (Jason).*

For Jason, he believes that working with the community and other people has been a great way of learning to communicate, interact and work as a team to help improve his skills. He also seeks to continue further studies abroad.

Viliami graduated university and moved back to Tonga and is also now teaching at College level. He seeks to pursue further education in the near future: *I'm still seeking further education. Maybe in 10 years.* Viliami first started conducting support work for the college before he began his teaching career. *I was helping around doing support work for the college before I started teaching.* Now that he has completed tertiary education, he now understands the reason his parents were so eager for him to attend university.

Jane commenced her job as soon as she moved back to Tonga following in the footsteps of her brother who also works for the same company. She is employed at a public accounting firm as a junior accountant in providing tax advisory services for companies that need help with their taxes. *I believe it's a really good job to start with, especially just graduating from university. This is because I am not just focused on one thing, I get to do different things like a tax to compile the accounts and audits.* Jane also seeks to complete a certified public accounting (CPA) course to meet state and experience requirements, not only in Tonga but around the world.

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

Overall, this chapter has provided the themes that emerged as findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with the ten participants in this research. The chapter begins by outlining the motivations behind participants seeking university education abroad. Each person was influenced by a variety of factors with no one factor common to all. Career aspirations and dreams pre-study abroad were then explored and explained. The majority of the participants wanted to pursue a career in either business, the medical field, or as teachers. Following this, the challenges and benefits of studying abroad are discussed, while the final section explores the participant's career stories since returning to Tonga. While some participants are settled in their career at this point it is evident that other participants are still seeking to expand their horizons through further study. In the next chapter, further analysis of the key findings, drawing on the relevant literature explored in chapter 2 will be discussed in order to gain a deeper understanding of participants' unique career stories.

## Chapter 5: Discussions

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the key themes from the findings will be discussed drawing on the relevant literature. The chapter is organised as follows; first, the appropriate definitions around careers and a discussion on how participants were selected, the second section reminds the reader of the motivators that influenced participants to seek tertiary education abroad, followed by the third section which covers the career aspirations and dreams. The fourth section discusses the benefits and challenges of studying abroad and finally, the early career stories of each participant since returning home to Tonga end this discussion chapter.

### 5.2 Overview of the findings

In this section the key findings are summarized from the previous chapter. The four main research questions are shown in Table 5.2 (below) with the main themes from the findings in the right section. Within each key theme there are sub-themes that came to the fore as participants' told their career stories and these are discussed over the following sections.

Table 5.2 Overview of Themes

Questions	Main themes
What were motivators behind seeking university education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expectations</li> <li>○ Role model</li> <li>○ Support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Personal future career development</li> <li>• Residency and scholarships</li> </ul>
What were the participants career aspirations and dreams?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Teaching</li> </ul>
What were the benefits and challenges of studying abroad?	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional qualifications</li> <li>• Network development</li> <li>• Support groups</li> <li>• Availability of resources</li> <li>• Family</li> </ul> <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial constraints</li> <li>• Language barrier</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Cultural clash</li> <li>• Family               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expectations</li> <li>○ Freedom</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

What was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying knowledge to the workforce</li> <li>• Cultural challenges</li> <li>• A learning curve</li> <li>• A stepping stone</li> </ul>
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### 5.3 Motivations

As previously mentioned in the early chapters, this section explores the participant's motivations for seeking tertiary education abroad. While all the participants motivations were diverse, family was a strong motivator. There were other contributing factors identified by the participants, such as their personal future career development and additional factors like residency and scholarships, which were seen as enablers for certain participants in this dissertation to undertake university education. These motivators are further explored in the following section.

#### 5.3.1 Family

One of the prominent themes that emerged from the data analysis was family. This was seen by participants as a key influencer in their decision to move abroad for tertiary education purposes. In the family, some sub-themes were identified. These include family expectations, role-modelling and family support. Considering Tonga's traditional culture and the importance of family, this was not an unexpected finding.

##### 5.3.1.1 Expectations

In this study, three participants grew up in a family surrounded by high academic achievers, like their parents or other close relatives, which as a result, set out expectations of tertiary education from a young age. In studies looking at education, there has been a growing interest in the involvement of parents in their children's career development (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Mannan & Blackwell, 1992; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). Wilson et al., (1992) show how expectations have a significant influence on an individual's occupational achievement. They also note how the educational levels achieved by parents influenced their children's achievement. For example, parents that completed higher educational levels had a strong influence on their children's studies and held high expectations of them (Wilson et al., 1992). This is consistent with another study by Trusty (1998), who found that the expectations set out by parents had a direct influence on their children's educational achievements. Although an additional two participants in this study were not from families with high educational achievements, they were motivated by the expectations set out by their parents. They wanted their children to have a broad range of

career options instead of going through the struggles they experienced as parents to provide for their family needs by relying heavily on agriculture.

#### **5.3.1.2 Role model**

Role models are seen as people that can influence others in some way (Quimby & DeSaints, 2006). Studies reveal that individuals seek role models that are similar to them, for example either by race or gender (Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004). Indeed, researchers suggest that role models can influence women's career decisions Wahl and Blackhurst (2000). However, there is limited literature focused on the specific gender roles of Tongan society and the importance of role models. For example, in Tonga, the brothers are subordinate to their sisters. Because of this, females are required to be positive role models for the rest of the family. In this study, two female participants identified the importance of family and role modelling as key influencers on their decision to study abroad at university. These two participants wanted to be at the forefront of changing family perceptions of education because they were both from families with minimal professional qualifications.

#### **5.3.1.3 Support**

In this study, two participants encountered family tragedy or grew up in an underprivileged family. As a result, these circumstances influenced their drive to succeed academically in order to support their family financially. For these participants, pursuing tertiary education abroad was their way of contributing towards their family but most importantly, supporting their families financially. To date, literature on the career motivations for seeking tertiary education for Tongan students remains under researched. Much of the current literature on international students at university focuses on the struggles they face (Reynolds & Constatine, 2007) rather than looking at the student's wider familial environment.

#### **5.3.2 Personal Future Career Development**

For some participants the expectations of family mapped out their career paths premised on gaining the necessary tertiary qualifications, for others, their motivation was their own personal future career development. Higher education and training have been identified as essential to take part in the competitive global economy today (Opengart & Short, 2002). Studies reveal that students enter university to develop generic skills, which are regarded as essential skills for employment (Bridgstock, 2009). Due to the changes in the labour market, organisations are in search of adaptable, mobile, and skilled workers. This, in turn, has influenced individuals to gain the skills and knowledge required in the labour market to

qualify for a job (Opengart & Short, 2002). For the participants in this study, in addition to the family, they were also willing to study for their future career development to gain independence and importantly in terms of Tongan cultural norms, contribute financially to their family.

### **5.3.3 Residency and Scholarships (an enabler)**

Given the limited opportunities of tertiary education in Tonga and families facing financial hardship to provide tertiary education for their children abroad, residency and scholarships are seen as enablers for many Tongan students. In this study, two participants identified their eligibility as New Zealand citizens enabled their tertiary education dream to become a reality. For them, it meant not being categorized as an international student and paying more expensive enrolment fees alongside access to the student loan scheme and allowances. Affordable medical services available in New Zealand helped, not only themselves as individuals but also their families. There are a variety of agencies that offer scholarships from New Zealand, Australia, World Bank, Japanese International Cooperation Agency and other scholarship programs, funded by the Tonga government. Out of the ten participants in the study, three identified themselves as scholarship recipients.

Two participants were awarded scholarships to study at the University of the South Pacific and Fiji National University, while the other was awarded a scholarship to study at a New Zealand University.

Once the scholarship has been completed, scholars are required to return back to their home country for two years to contribute to the social and economic development, which not only happens in Tonga but also other countries around the world (Ministry of Education, 2017; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019). In doing so, it allows the scholarship recipients to impact their country's development in sharing new skills and knowledge from their experience abroad.

## **5.4 Career Aspirations and Dreams**

This next section provides a discussion on the participants initial career aspirations and dreams before embarking of their journey abroad to fulfill their actual career goals at tertiary education. In this research, there were three main themes that were apparent from the previous chapter. The ten individuals in this study anticipated three various career pathways namely; to pursue a career in business, in the Health Department and also a

career in education. These themes are further discussed in the following section. As previously discussed in the literature review chapter, many researchers describe career development as a lifelong process which initially begins from early childhood (. Magnuson & Starr, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2006). As a result, different generations have their own set of perspectives about a certain career goal, in such a way that generation X is different to generation Y (Ismail, Rahum, Lee, & Thahrir, 2016). This in turn influences an individual's perception regarding a specific career as it can influence their behavior towards that career pathway in the long run (Johnson, 2000).

To date, the educational achievements and career aspirations of children from small ethnic groups remain an area of interest to researchers (Archer and Francis, 2007 & Crozier and Davies, 2006). Young Tongan nationals still remain under researched as do those from other Pacific nations, like Fiji, Samoa and other neighboring islands. The career aspirations of an individual can be seen as a reflection of their intention to focus on a specific career field. When looking at career aspirations, there are a variety of influential factors. These include gender, race, socioeconomic status, parents' education and occupations, and parental expectations (Capelletti et al., 2010). Gender has been identified as a powerful influencer over vocational behaviour (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Overall, women have fewer career options due to discrimination and cultural norms and expectations, resulting in occupational segregation as many women opt for a narrow range of occupations (Crawford, 2002; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000).

#### **5.4.1 A career in Business**

In this research, three participants aspired to pursue a career in business from a very young age. In their career stories, they highlighted the importance of their time at high school as this was a key influencer in paving their career choice and also reflected on the subject choices available at high school. These individuals presented a career interest ranging from accounting, economics and finance. Interestingly, in this study, it was mostly the female participants who aspired to pursue more business orientated and traditionally male dominated career pathways. This contradicts studies such as those by Crawford (2002) and Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) where women were often found opting for a narrow range of female dominated career occupations. One participant felt uncertain about her career aspirations but decided to follow through in the business field due to the future career opportunities that business had to offer. Although there is limited research on young people who do not know what type of role or job profession they may aspire to, (Staff et al., 2010), Arnett (2010) found that young adults are postponing their career and family

formation to seek formal education and explore various life directions before arriving at their final career choice. The age range of between 18-25 years old, is characterized as a time of uncertainty in terms of future career planning (Jensen, 2000). Staff et al., (2010) highlight that in terms of gender differences, young women were more likely to be uncertain about their career aspirations compared to young men due to lifestyle preferences, family obligations and expectations.

#### ***5.4.2 A career in the Health department***

A career pathway in health was identified as the most dominant career choice amongst the participants of this study. A total of six participants (three male and three female) were interested in pursuing a career in the Tongan Health Department in their early years at high school. This resonates with findings by Zuckermann (1977), that young people develop an interest in science at an early age in comparison to other professions. This again suggests the influence of a school curricula. Moreover, Eiduson and Beckman (1973) argue that young boys showed a persistent interest in science between the age of 10-14 years old, while girls developed this interest later. Although these studies are somewhat outdated, they appear applicable to this current study which perhaps is more reflective of the traditional curricula still found in Tonga and the value given to the more conventional and established professions. The participants indicated an interest in psychology, pediatrics, medicine or science in general. This was mainly triggered by growing up as young children and seeing their parents work in healthcare, which in turn, made them want to pursue a similar career pathway to help those who were in need, mentally and physically. According to Wahl & Blackhurst (2000), the career aspirations of children were highly associated with their parent's occupations. Further, a mother's occupation had a direct impact on her children's aspirations because they were likely to be more cognizant of the tasks their mothers did for a living. The level of education parents achieved can also have a strong relation with the career aspirations of youth (Mau & Bikos, 2000) thus, overall parents play a vital role in influencing the career choices of their children (Burlin, 1976).

#### ***5.4.3 A career in Education***

When other careers offered better salaries, working conditions and social prestige, teaching is often considered less attractive as a career. Due to the increasing shortage of teachers globally, researchers have taken an interest in understanding the motives behind individuals that choose to enter the teaching profession. Results indicate that individuals are strongly motivated because they are willing to work with children (Moran et al., 2001;

Richardson & Watt, 2006). A study conducted in the U.K, found similar results, that individuals choice of entering the teaching profession was because they had the desire to work with children or adolescents and it was one way they could contribute to society by educating the youth (OECD, 2005). Richardson and Watt (2008), found that participants felt that other jobs were too demanding compared to teaching. Therefore, the participants of Watt and Richardson (2008) wanted to specifically focus on time with family and working with children. For others, teaching was viewed as an alternative career, a backup plan (Richardson & Watt, 2008). From the ten participants in this research, only one person had a career interest in becoming a teacher. This participant expressed his interest in this profession from a very young age. As the above studies indicate he enjoys working with other students and helping them academically in their studies.

## **5.5 Benefits and Challenges of studying abroad**

This dissertation builds on the limited literature on the early career experiences of young Tongan nationals, by exploring their career experiences, including the career benefits and challenges encountered by participants while at university. In doing so, it contributes to the literature as the career experiences of Tongan nationals has been researched to a lesser extent in comparison to those amongst developing countries, therefore this study offers a new insight into this demographic group.

### **5.5.1 Benefits**

Given the opportunity to study abroad, the participants identified key benefits that emerged from their career stories which were the achievement of a professional qualification, network development, the availability of support groups at the university, availability of resources, and having the support of family members. The following section provides an in-depth discussion on the key themes identified.

#### **5.5.1.1 Professional qualifications**

A major theme that emerged as a result of analyzing the benefits of studying abroad was the achievement of professional qualifications. In this study, four participants saw the benefit of studying abroad meant achieving a professional degree that was recognizable globally and importantly, also in Tonga. Achieving the qualification meant enhancing the career development and career experiences for participants on their return to Tonga. This allowed them to contribute towards Tonga's social and economic development through their newfound skills and knowledge gained from tertiary education abroad. All participants agreed that this was greatly valued by their employer and family in Tonga. In New Zealand,

Allen-Meares (2010) revealed in her study that migrants with no local New Zealand qualifications or job experience struggle when applying for their first role after relocating to NZ. In light of this, should the participants in this study decide someday to move from Tonga to NZ or elsewhere for a new job, they may have a better chance at employment.

#### **5.5.1.2 Network development**

Another contributing theme that resulted from the analysis of the benefits was the development of personal and professional networks. Two participants discussed how the experience of studying abroad has given them opportunities to meet new people from different cultures and different parts of the world. Participants expressed how they developed new friendships and strong bonds as they got to know other university students. Furthermore, some participants still keep in contact through social media platforms for future reference and other opportunities when travelling abroad. As a result, participants learned to communicate in different ways and in more than just one language (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). For example, participants spoke of becoming more culturally aware of other groups including how to approach individuals from different cultures (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). Furthermore, participants formed friendships with local residents when abroad and through these interactions developed international networks. This benefit of studying abroad is consistent with other studies that point out where individuals are placed in an unfamiliar environment, they meet individuals that are like-minded and establish networks (Andresen et al., 2014; Ceric & Crawford, 2016). Networking can be seen as beneficial to the Tongan community as such networks can also provide support through funding or donations (Fee & Grey, 2011).

#### **5.5.1.3 Support groups**

As noted previously, one of the greatest challenge's individuals face when travelling away from their home country is the need to adjust to the new environment where issues such as language, personal traits and cultural identity can come to the fore (Shay & Baack, 2004). One participant recalled how the availability of support groups at university were critical to making the transition into this new environment. This particular individual was studying biomedical sciences at a New Zealand University and had limited experience of speaking only English. Research suggests that when students are placed on international placements, they can suffer from various difficulties such as isolation, having to be independent, and other adjustment challenges (Cage et al. 2018).

#### **5.5.1.4 Availability of resources**

The participants in this dissertation grew up in Tonga, where the availability of technology and other study resources are extremely limited. As a result of attending university abroad, five participants identified access to superior resources as a contributing benefit to their studies. Due to the increasing use of technology, it has challenged the traditional approach to education in Tonga. Beyond Tonga, in some higher education institutions, students are not required to be physically present in class to gain access to the lecture materials as this is available online (Aliev, 2019). While online course delivery appeals to some students in the tertiary environment, studies such as that done by Newman-Ford et al., (2008) show the positive impact classroom attendance can have on academic performance. Certainly, the students in this research who enrolled in University studies delivered at the Tongan campus via an online platform, found that this mode of delivery had an adverse impact on their academic performance. They felt disadvantaged because of the lack of face to face interaction with their lecturers. Various researchers approach the necessity of face to face interaction differently. Some researchers simply brush it off, despite knowing the results indicate a positive relationship between performance and face to face interaction (e.g. Thatcher et al., 2007). Other studies such as Aliev (2019) and Newman-Ford et al., (2008) predominantly focused on the availability and benefits of technological advancements, however, limited research (Newman-Ford et al., 2008) has explored other aspects that impact on students such access to libraries, science laboratories and other equipment. All these resources were viewed by participants as important for their academic development and achievement.

#### **5.5.1.5 Family**

The transition to university often requires students to make significant adjustments no matter where they are located. This theme was discussed by participants from a variety of perspectives. On the one hand, one participant saw the move abroad as a way of having time out from family to solely focus on their studies. She specifically wanted to escape the crowded environment of their family and simply focus on her studies. Another participant found the opportunity of attending university abroad as a way of being independent and saw it as a time to focus on self. These examples align with the findings of Pan (2014), who found that one of the reasons children were motivated to study abroad was that they saw it as a way to relax and escape family obligations. Pan (2014) also noted how individuals often seek to escape from an 'ordinary' life to experience an adventure in a different and more challenging environment. On the other hand, another participant felt that having the support by other family members in their new environment while abroad

was beneficial towards their studies. According to Urquhart and Pooley (2007), having forms of social support in the host country to assist individuals during their time at university can be significant. In this study based on the experiences of Tongan students, reinforces the importance of support from family in terms of positive physical and mental health.

### **5.5.2 Challenges**

The second sub-section focuses on the challenges identified by the participants, which were financial constraints, language barriers, peer pressure, cultural clashes, family expectations and the lack of freedom given by the family to their children. All participants believe that despite the challenges, the benefits and results achieved outweighed the challenges they experienced.

#### **5.5.2.1 Financial constraints**

Studies that explore the financial constraints encountered by university students tend to focus on what government funding programs are available (Metha, Newbold , & O'Rourke , 2011) and how university students manage their finances (Borden et al., 2008; Eckel & Grossman, 2002; Falahati & Paim, 2011 ). Very limited studies have looked at (Bourdieu, 1990) how students who move abroad to study manage financially and often have to rely on their parents for financial support (Bourdieu, 1990). International students from different countries face financial problems because they are required to spend money on education fees and their personal living expenses. As a result, international students are often found to rely on their parents to take full responsibility of their financial situation (Falahati & Paim, 2011). In this research, two participants identified the financial struggles they faced while abroad at university. There were instances where they struggled to afford food, but this did not make them give up on their career dream.

#### **5.5.2.2 Language barrier**

The language barrier was a challenge to some participants, as English was their second language. Some participants had attended a secondary school where speaking in English was not compulsory. For this group, the ability to learn English while at university was a significant challenge but also an achievement. Sherraden et al., (2008) point out that one's ability to learn a language, solve problems and have good communication skills prepares an individual to live and work in the ever-changing global economy of today. Nicolle & Lou (2019) identified the role English speaking universities have in facilitating second language speakers understanding of the English language to provide a positive university

experience for students. Early intervention, during the first few years at university, can allow the student to adapt easily to the university (Nicolle & Lou, 2019). Researchers insist that looking beyond an individual's adaptive beliefs and language ability could result in crucial insights into their personal experience (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This resonates with the participants of this study as they believe the experience of learning to speak and write in English, while challenging, has contributed towards their personal development and experience.

#### **5.5.2.3 Peer pressure**

Research suggests that peers play an important role in an individual's social and emotional development (Allen-Meares, 2010). Peer-pressure is seen as how an individual is influenced by others, which results in changed behavior (Allen-Meares, 2010). Kandel (1992) argues that peer-pressure can be a mental or emotional force from people in the same age or gender group to act in a certain way. Additionally, Waqas et al., (2015) argue that students at university are vulnerable to peer-pressure because they are at a stage in their lives where they have not established their values, they are new to student life so can be easily influenced by others. Today, with the growth of social media platforms, peer-pressure continues to surround students at high school and university (Allen-Meares, 2010). Unfortunately, in many instances, students fail to notice the severity of the choices they make as they try and fit in with those they associate with (Allen-Meares, 2010; Taiwo, 2011). Although peers can be seen as a support system for youth in terms of developing new skills or extracurricular activities, they can also have a negative influence. Peers can influence others to use drug, alcohol, skip classes, or be involved in other anti-social behaviours (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2018). Two male participants in this dissertation encountered this challenge. For these participants, moving abroad and experiencing a new lifestyle that seemingly offered freedom and having no family around, they found themselves influenced by their newfound friends. They identified times when they skipped university classes to party and drink alcohol with friends. Although peer pressure to conform was spoken off as a challenge, both participants who succumbed did in the end, manage to graduate from university.

#### **5.5.2.4 Cultural clash**

Culture while difficult to define, is generally viewed as the shared beliefs and values of a particular social group (Mohammadi, Evans, & Jones, 2007). Within each culture there is a range of values, norms and assumptions which creates the larger cultural group (Pabel et al., 2012). As a result of the changes in technology and other influential factors such as

political unrest and discrimination (Mohammadi, Evans , & Jones, 2007), this has led to migration and increasing cultural diversity. The clash of cultures is a term used to describe the conflict between two different groups. The history of colonization and migration gives us many examples of how such clashes occur during the interaction process of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. As a result of cultural adjustment to the host country, stress has been highly associated with affecting the experience of international students (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). In addition, students experience other more typical stressors that can impact their performance at university. These include, the challenges of adapting to the foreign country, academic pressures, homesickness, financial demands and other contributing factors which can result in psychological distress (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). In terms of this study several of the participants spoke of such experiences while at university. Four participants shared the struggles of moving from the small island of Tonga to a bigger and more populated country like New Zealand or Fiji where everything was new (e.g. catching public transport) and different (navigating their way around an unfamiliar and much larger city). It took a lot of time for them to adjust to their new environment both educationally and socially.

#### **5.5.2.5 Family**

In Tongan society, the family is core hence an essential aspect of the community. Families place great emphasis on religion, Tongan culture and education. As a result, Tongan families can place high expectations on their children to succeed academically as it is seen as socially desirable, upward social mobility for the family. Thus, families can place a great amount of pressure on individuals, which in turn can influence their level of performance. Additionally, as noted earlier, due to the cultural traditions in Tongan society, women continue to hold a privileged status in comparison to men.

##### **5.5.2.5.1 Expectations**

The concept of family expectations can influence an individual's level of performance at university and often lead to stress and other health-related issues. There is currently limited literature on the expectations that Tongan parents place on their children, especially in education. Although seemingly outdated but nonetheless relevant to this study, Trusty (1998) emphasized the educational expectations that Asian-American parents have on their children in comparison to African American and Hispanic students. The study revealed that Asian American parents were often upset if their child's grades were below an (A-). This was in contrast to students from other families as the expectations placed on them were lower. Parents felt that providing a good education for

their children allows scope for upward mobility. Likewise, Gloria and Ho (2003) found that students felt the support and the involvement of family, pressured individuals to excel academically. As a result, students felt an intense amount of stress and pressure to meet the requirements of anxious, expectant parents (Ang & Huan, 2006). Several participants in this study encountered these same situations where they felt pressured to succeed academically because their parents funded their studies. This impacted on their performance at university and their mental state as it caused stress, depression and procrastination. In saying this, such high expectations did not stop participants from achieving their educational goals.

#### **5.5.2.5.2 Freedom**

Immigrant university students often have different cultural beliefs, values and priorities. According to Kalsner and Pistole (2003), these value systems of the home country can impact on the student's university life. As a result, this situation can cause stress for students and impact on their level of academic performance. This is because in the home country they are expected to be respectful, especially to the elders in the family and families often lack a realistic understanding of the demands of university life abroad (Wolf, Harper, & Harper, 2009). As noted above, for centuries, women in Tongan society have held a privileged status in comparison to men. To illustrate, even if a man holds a highly ranked title, he would be required to undertake lowly duties at his sister's funeral or children's wedding (Filihia, 2001). Because of these traditions, Tongan parents and the wider family often place strict rules on their daughters. This was found to be the case for some female participants in this research. One felt that while at university, her family did not understand the social life attached to being a student. She needed time to relax from studying and enjoy the company of her friends and social activities. Social restrictions made this participant feel isolated from her friends. For another young female participant, who was used to the strict lifestyle she lived back in Tonga, having freedom frightened her. Cemalcilar & Falbo (2008) found that while young ethnic minority people at university were willing to adopt and adapt to the way of living in their host country, this to an extent, did not affect their cultural identity. Experiencing a new way of life can be challenging, but as this participant highlighted, while she did struggle with the freedom attending university abroad, she still managed to achieve her educational goals.

### **5.6 Early Career Stories**

This section examines the early career stories of participants since returning home to Tonga after pursuing tertiary education abroad. The main themes discussed in this section

are: applying knowledge to the workforce, cultural challenges, learning curve, and acquiring a job as a stepping stone. The themes identified contribute to the current literature on career development.

### **5.6.1 Applying knowledge to the workforce**

In recent years, researchers have placed significant attention on the transfer of knowledge (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). Despite this, the transition from university to the workplace remains an under-researched topic in New Zealand (Leberman, McDonald, & Doyle, 2006). Given the spotlight graduates receive, and the expectations organisations place on them in terms of their immediate ability to perform certain tasks upon employment, this lack of research is surprising. Cox and Clutterbuck (2014) identified various factors which influence an individual's ability to transfer knowledge to the work environment. These include their perception towards the work environment and if they believe it is supportive of their development, their motivation levels, access to peer support and the extent organisational interventions such as coaching and mentoring are available. These factors assist individuals in the transition phase as they can facilitate a graduate's ability to apply the skills and knowledge learnt through tertiary study to the paid work environment (Jackson, 2014). In this present study, some individuals struggled to apply the knowledge and skills from university to the organisation they were employed in. Participants felt the courses taught in university are offered on a global view and these are sometimes more advanced than the system that is used in some of the organisations in Tonga, hence the need to match theory with practice as the reality of some workplaces in Tonga is very different from what was learnt at university. In Tonga, many organisations are comparatively small and under-resourced so they lack the support discussed above as many employers believe that graduates should be able to perform their allocated tasks immediately after graduating from university (Asian Development Bank, 2008; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019).

### **5.6.2 Cultural Challenges**

When looking at the academic literature on cultural challenges a lot of the focus has been on expatriation (Harzing and Christenen, 2004; Scullion and Brewster, 2001, Guzzo and Noonan, 1994) with less attention given to the process of repatriation. There is still limited information about expatriates and what happens when they return home (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Many researchers interested in the area appear to assume that the process of returning home is not as problematic as expatriation (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). This is because the process of returning home is deemed simple as the individual returns

to a familiar cultural setting with the belief that it will be the same as before they left. For many Human Resource Managers, the process of repatriation is often regarded as a frustration point (Paik et al., 2002). The concept of culture shock has been widely discussed by many researchers (Cox, 2004) in the field of expatriation. However, when talking of repatriation, the phenomenon is usually known as reverse culture shock (Baruch & Altman, 2002; Bossard & Peterson, 2005). This scenario was consistent with two participants of this study. While they were overseas pursuing their career goals in the creative arts and psychology, they were exposed to a different way of living compared to the traditional norms that shape the Tongan culture. Such cultural norms include the way women dance, known as the tau'olunga (a graceful dance performed by women), a home with them abroad and in turn, the home environment expects the person returning home to be the same individual as they were before they left abroad (Martin, 1984).

### **5.6.3 A learning curve**

Changes in society, such as expanding and more sophisticated technologies alongside the increase in the globalization of organisations has challenged the way we work (Opengart & Short, 2002). Thus, continuous learning is important for individuals working in organisations and the organisation itself to stay competitive in the global market (Murtonen et al., 2008). Murtonen (2008), identified the different forms of learning that now take place in an organisational environment. Examples of what people learn at work include: enhancing their personal development, problem-solving and decision making, working as a team, developing strategic networks and working under pressure. In addition to the positive forms of learning, there are other negative aspects in which individuals learn from work, which include how to minimize their duties, and certain work disadvantages in the field. These 'good and bad' scenarios were evident in this research where one participant spoke of the positive attributes; they were learning at the hospital in terms of the management guidelines and how these were used as a learning platform to apply knowledge to specific experiences. In contrast they noted the political issues that were evident at the hospital and concluded that these were the downside to working in this environment.

### **5.6.4 A steppingstone**

It is known that young workers face obstacles in the early stages of their career development (Gregg & Tominey 2005). Early unemployment experiences and young workers acquiring low-productivity and temporary jobs are well documented in the literature (Gregg & Tominey 2005; Eliason & Storrie, 2006). Additional literature shows that

temporary contracts do not necessarily lead to a better job in the future (Booth et al., 2002). Countries around the world are intervening and adopting a youth target market, which seeks to offer jobs for youth with no previous paid work experience as employers are hesitant to offer employment to young workers due to the lack of experience. For example, Hamilton (2010) identify the effective impacts of apprenticeship programs on youth in Brazil. Although the participants in this study did not encounter unemployment on their return home to Tonga, they were in the same age bracket and in some instances, had no previous work experience. It was evident however, that the majority of the individuals in this dissertation were still searching for their 'dream role' and were using their current roles as a process of career clarification. For example, one believes their current role as the financial analyst for the Government will provide a foundation for a future career. Similarly, another was given an opportunity to teach at the local college and viewed this as a learning curve. Yet another participant spoke of pursuing further studies in the near future while another participant, believed their current role as an accountant was a good job to start with after university. Here, it is evident that these individuals still seek to continue developing their career progression either by continuing their studies abroad or considering other, alternative roles and/or organisations.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This dissertation builds on the limited literature on the early career experiences of young Tongan nationals, by exploring their career experiences, including the career benefits and challenges encountered by participants while at university. The career experiences of Tongan nationals have been researched to a lesser extent in comparison to those of other developing countries (e.g. China), therefore this study offers a new insight into this demographic group. In this chapter the findings outlined in chapter four, were discussed in light of a selection of literature. The motivational factors that influenced individuals into studying abroad were similar to those of other expatriate student groups, a mixture of family factors, personal career development and other enablers such as residency and scholarships were spoken about. Furthermore, participants' career aspirations, categorized into three main career pathways ranging from, business, health, and in teaching reflect the influences of family and the traditional expectations still prevalent within Tongan secondary education and society. Insights into the benefits and challenges participants encountered at university and their early career stories since returning home after tertiary education abroad show that for some, repatriation was not straight forward. The next concluding chapter, will provide an overview of this dissertation, highlight some

concluding thoughts, identify the contributions, limitations and, suggest future areas for further research.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Overview of the Research**

This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation, including the research objectives, implications of the study, the limitations of this research and future areas for further research. In this study, the objective was to explore the early career experiences of young Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad. In order to answer the research objective, there were four guiding research questions: (1) the participants motivators for seeking university education; (2) the participants career aspirations and dreams; (3) the challenges and benefits of studying abroad; and (4) their early career stories since returning home to Tonga.

In order to answer the proposed research question, the researcher used narrative inquiry as the research methodology. This methodology empowers the participants to tell their unique career stories and allows the researcher to understand the cultural and social influences which have shaped the participants career experiences (Fraser, 2008; Clandinin, 2006). In total, there were ten semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions to allow the participants to take full ownership and tell their career stories in their own words and pace. My role as the researcher was to actively listen to the participants' stories (Gillham, 2000). Given that the researcher is from the same ethnic group as the participants and very conversant with Tongan cultural traditions and practices, the researcher has a strong cultural connection with the research topic as she is currently completing post graduate study abroad.

The first section of this dissertation explored the motivational factors that influenced participants into studying abroad. The findings revealed a similarity to other expatriate students where there was a mixture of family factors such as role modelling to the rest of the siblings and as a support person to help provide for the family. Other factors include personal career development together with other enablers such as residency and scholarships. However, no one person was specifically motivated by one factor.

Before embarking on their career journey abroad at university, the participants in this research had career aspirations as young people. There were three different career pathways in which all ten participants were interested in pursuing before attending university. All participants expressed an interest in pursuing a career in one of the following fields: business, healthcare and education in Tonga. Here, a career in the healthcare sector was found to be the most prominent career choice with six participants

interested in this field. This reflects the influence of the traditional science orientated subjects taught at high school and the limited options endorsed by parents and also available as professional career pathways in Tongan society.

While the participants in this study were abroad at tertiary education, they experienced a mixture of benefits and challenges. Here, they identified the key benefits as achieving professional qualifications that were recognized around the world, network development, being more culturally aware of other ethnic groups, the availability of support groups at university which assisted participants in the transition of moving from Tonga to NZ, the availability of face-to-face interactions with lecturers and access to libraries, science laboratories and related equipment. Participants also found it beneficial that they had family members in the host country to assist in their adjustment process abroad.

In addition to the benefits there were certain challenges which individuals encountered while abroad. The participants identified these challenges as financial, language barriers and peer pressure. There were also significant issues with cultural shock as participants came to terms with a very different educational, social and cultural context. This was further complicated by the family expectations laid on the participants as they moved abroad for study purposes and was especially challenging for the young women whose new found freedom was often monitored and managed remotely from home.

Upon the completion of the study abroad participants returned to Tonga and shared their early career stories. Individuals identified the struggles they faced in trying to apply the knowledge they gained from university to their employing organisation. They spoke of the cultural challenges they faced when trying to readjust back to the 'smallness' of Tonga. Some participants also saw their current jobs as a steep learning curve while others saw it as a stepping stone and as part of their career development while they reflected on what the next step might be in their career trajectory.

The findings of this study suggest that tertiary education abroad plays a significant role in enhancing the career development of young Tongan nationals by opening up the scope of opportunities that might not otherwise have been possible or known. It also reaffirms the importance placed on family in the Tongan society. This study gives an insight into tensions felt by young male and female tertiary educated Tongans to meet the obligations and expectations of their family members while also being cognizant of their future and choice of career pathway.

## **6.2 Implications of the Study**

As previously mentioned, there are several key findings in this dissertation that not only make this study insightful but also shed light on the early career experiences of young Tongan nationals and their return home after tertiary education. It provides a unique contribution to the careers literature as it explores the motivators for seeking tertiary education abroad, the career aspirations and dreams, the benefits and challenges of studying abroad, and also their early career stories since returning home to Tonga. The findings of this dissertation can be useful for Tongan organisations seeking to employ Tongan students after completing their studies abroad.

The study of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals still remains under-researched. The career experiences of individuals from developed countries have been largely explored by various researchers in comparison to those from developing countries such as Tonga. As a result, this dissertation aims to contribute to these gaps by exploring the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on their return home after tertiary education abroad. This dissertation suggest that education plays an important role in enhancing the career development of Tongan nationals and culture continues to have a strong influence on the careers of the young Tongan women.

This dissertation has implications for young Tongan nationals that are living in Tonga and are planning on moving abroad for tertiary education purposes. It can prepare and better inform students that are planning to further their career abroad as it can allow them to learn about the benefits, challenges and the experiences which the participants of this study have shared. Key findings of this dissertation can benefit future Tongan students, for example; obtaining professional qualifications, the availability of resources, support groups at university and network development. Students may also have the chance to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges which were discussed in earlier chapters of the problem's participants encountered while abroad, preparing themselves for what they may encounter. They can also learn about the early career experiences of these participants since they returned to Tonga.

Moreover, the main findings of this dissertation can also have important implications for Tongan employers, such as the Government or private organisations that are offering scholarship programs to their employees or looking to employ students that studied abroad. Organisations can use technical training, formal and informal networking to support the

student transition from education to work (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). Further, Tongan employers can use this information to support their workers' career development and their ability to adapt to the organisation. It can also assist managers with strategies that can assist in improved job performance and employee retention (Fontinha et al., 2017). As young Tongan students, the process of repatriating back home to Tonga can be challenging as students try and re-adapt to their old environments and they may need greater organisational support to assist their adjustment and engagement in their new workplaces.

### **6.3 Limitations**

While this dissertation is unique in that it captures the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on their return home after tertiary education, there are a number of limitations to this study. This exploratory research drew on a limited sample size of ten participants, a number appropriate for a dissertation. Although the findings shed light on the early career experiences of these specific young Tongan nationals, the key findings may not represent all of the Tongan nationals that studied abroad and moved back home to Tonga as others may have different encountered different career prospects and experiences.

Moreover, the career stories shared by participants were recollections from their past (at least 3 years ago), so there is a possibility that there were some parts of their stories which were excluded (Kim J. , 2015), or in some instances forgotten about (Kim, 2015; Polkinghome, 1995). However, generally, storytelling does not require participants to remember all the specific details, instead it requires the individual to tell their story and what is real and meaningful to them. Thus, narrative inquiry was chosen for this purpose as it allows the participants to tell their career stories on real-life events and how they each make sense of it (Fraser, 2004). In addition, there were also limitations regarding the sources that were drawn on in the literature. Many of these articles were published more than 10 to 15 years ago. The lack of more up to date articles reflects the dearth of contemporary research on the 'study abroad and early career experiences' of young Tongan people.

### **6.4 Future Research**

The topics which were discussed throughout this research can provide a platform for future studies in this field. There is a need to expand on the research of the early career experiences of young Tongan nationals on their return home after tertiary education abroad. An exploration of Tongan nationals may be of interest as this is a growing ethnic

group in NZ and throughout the Pacific. The key finding of this dissertation can be used as a starting point to develop this under-researched field. This will in turn allow a better understanding of the career experiences of young Tongan nationals and their return home after tertiary education abroad.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the career experiences of Tongan nationals and their return to Tonga after tertiary education abroad, studies can use a larger sample size. In addition, future studies can focus on Tongan nationals that studied in NZ and have returned to Tonga for a longer period. These individuals would be 'mid career' in contrast to the 'early career' status of the participants in this study and would likely give additional and valuable insights into the career stories of Tongans who study abroad and return home.

To summarize, this dissertation was framed by four guiding research questions: "What were the motivators behind seeking university education?", "What were the participants career aspirations and dreams?", "What were the challenges and benefits of studying abroad?", and "What was their early career story since returning home to Tonga?". The study revealed that family was a strong motivator for the participants of this study, there were other contributing factors that facilitated university education, such as future career development, residency and scholarship. In terms of career aspirations, the majority of the participants aspired to pursue a career in business, followed by healthcare and education. While the participants were abroad pursuing tertiary education, they encountered numerous benefits which include the achievement of professional qualifications, network development, the availability of support groups, important educational resources and high levels of family support. The challenges participants encountered were financial constraints, language barriers, peer pressure, culture shock, family expectations and a lack of freedom. Overall participants were very clear that the benefits outweighed the challenges. Lastly, in terms of the early career stories, some participants had issues with applying knowledge to the workplace, others encountered cultural challenges, some participants saw moving back to Tonga as a learning curve, while others saw their jobs as a stepping stone to future career developments and pathways. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the current literature on career experiences.

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## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Letter
- Appendix 2: Invitation to Participants
- Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (English and Spanish version)
- Appendix 4: Consent Form (English and Spanish version)
- Appendix 5: Interview Guidelines
- Appendix 6: Researcher Safety Protocol

## Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Letter



### AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

14 March 2019  
Barbara Myers  
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Barbara

Re Ethics Application: **19/50 An exploration of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals returning home after tertiary education**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 13 March 2022.

### Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Include the full statement about withdrawal in the Consent Form: "I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible"

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation, then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor

Executive Manager

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

## Appendix 2: Invitation to Participants

The logo for AUT (Auckland University of Technology) is displayed in white text on a black rectangular background.

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Dear *Participant*,

**RE: Invitation to participate in Master of Business Dissertation Research.**

My name is Losaline Mafi and I am a current Master of Business (MBus) student at AUT University. I am sending this email as you have been identified as a potential participant for my research thesis titled "***An exploration of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad***".

For the purpose of this research I am seeking participants who meet the following criteria:

- Are between the ages of 18 and 35.
- Completed tertiary education abroad
- Tongan

I have attached a Participant Information Sheet to this email for further details of this research. If you feel you meet the requirements and are interested in participating, please return to me the completed Consent Form which is also attached. Alternatively, you may contact me via the details provided below.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Losaline Mafi  
AUT University Student  
Ph: 0211190563  
Email: cdd8609@aut.ac.nz

### Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet



13 February 2019

#### Project Title

An exploration of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad

#### An Invitation

My name is Losaline Mafi, I am currently a student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) completing my Master's degree in Human Resource Management and Employment Relations discipline. I wish to invite you to participate in this research study as it contributes toward the completion of my dissertation as part of the requirements of my Master's degree. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any given time, prior to the completion of data collection without being disadvantaged in any way.

#### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research study is to obtain data from participants in order to explore the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education. This research aims to understand the career experiences of participants (aged 18-35, Tongan and completed tertiary education abroad), in terms of what their aspirations were versus the reality of their early career experiences after repatriating to Tonga. This research will result in a Dissertation, and can likely result in a journal article, research article, conference article, and/or media.

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

You have personally been identified by myself, or by a participant in the research study as qualifying to participate in this research project. You have been selected as a possible candidate as you have been recognised as meeting the selection criteria, which are participants (aged 18-35, Tongan and completed tertiary education abroad).

#### 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 prior to the completion of data collection.

#### What will happen in this research?

This research project involves in-depth interviews with 6-8 participants conducted by the researcher. All interviews will be conducted face-to-face using an audio recording device

and some limited note taking during the course of the interview to ensure that all attention is on the participant. All gathered data will be transcribed by myself. Should you choose to participate, you will be invited to attend the interview last 1-1.5 hours, where you will be asked questions regarding your early career experiences on returning home after tertiary education abroad. Questions will be open ended to ensure that you have the space to tell your stories in your own words. The interview will be held at an independent space whereby it will be convenient for the participant and myself. All data will be kept in a secure location and may be used for additional post-dissertation purposes. I will be the only person to have access to recorded interviews. The anonymous transcript may be shared with my supervisors, Dr Barbara Myers and Dr Irene Ryan as guidance in the data analysing phase. All collected data will be stored securely at AUT, separate from Consent Forms. For all Consenting participants who wish to take part in this study, I (Losaline Mafi) will not include any personal information in this study that may lead you as the participant to being identified.

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

I do not expect any risks to occur when participating in the research project because questions are open-ended regarding your early career experiences and you have the power to control how much information you are willing to disclose. Should there be discomfort, please feel free to pause interview and answer in your own time and comfort level suitable for you.

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

It is anticipated that this research does not pose any risks. If there is some discomfort, please note the above response i.e. you are free to pause the interview and answer in your own time and comfort level suitable for you.

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

The benefit of choosing to participate in this research project is to give you an opportunity to provide data that has the potential to increase the knowledge base and literature on young Tongan adults and their early career experiences. This research project will assist me as it will contribute towards the completion of my dissertation as part of the requirements of AUT MBus program.

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

As previously mentioned, the details of interview will be confidential, however we note that given the size and nature of the pool of potential participants confidentiality will be of a limited nature. The researcher will ask participants at the end of the interview whether there is anything they have shared that they do not want to be in the final study. Participants will have another opportunity to remove any information which they are uncomfortable with in terms of confidentiality when they review their transcripts. Participants are given the option to obtain a copy of their transcripts and a summary of research findings by ticking the appropriate boxes in the Consent Form.

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

There are no financial costs when choosing to participate in this study. The interview can take 1-1.5 hours. Transport to interview location and getting comfortable can likely extend time.

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

You are given 2 weeks to consider this invitation. You can accept or decline prior to this timeframe.

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

You will be given the opportunity to receive a copy of the findings once the study has been completed. You can do this by ticking the appropriate box in the Consent Form.

**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, *Barbara Myers*, [Barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz), +64 9 921 9999 ext 5366.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

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

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Losaline Mafi

[Cdd8609@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Cdd8609@aut.ac.nz)

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Barbara Myers

Irene Ryan

+64 9 921 9999 ext 5366

+64 9 921 9999 ext 5102

[Barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz)

[irene.ryan@aut.ac.nz](mailto:irene.ryan@aut.ac.nz)

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on**

***type the date final ethics approval was granted, AUTECH Reference number type the reference number.***

## Appendix 4: Consent Form



*Project title:* An exploration of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on returning home after tertiary education abroad.

*Project Supervisor:* Barbara Myers (Primary) and Irene Ryan (Secondary)

*Researcher:* Losaline Mafi

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 13 February 2019.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of my interview transcript for review (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible

Participant's

signature : .....

Participant's

name:.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the  
date on which the final approval was granted AUTECH Reference number type the AUTECH  
reference number

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

## **Appendix 5: Interview Guidelines**

### **A. Motivators**

1. Can you tell me about what motivated you to study abroad? (probe: family, roles, ambitions).
2. Were your studies self-funded or were you on a scholarship?
3. For how long did you study?
4. At which tertiary education provider? (probe: did you have a specific dream tertiary education provider)

### **B. Career aspirations**

1. Looking back, can you tell me about your career dreams and aspirations as a young person? (probe: teaching, accountant, pediatrician, lawyer)
2. What sparked your interest in this profession? (probe: family influence, personal interest)
3. At what point did you decide to pursue this career profession? If so, if not, why? (probe: at high school, tertiary education)

### **C. Benefits and Challenges**

1. Tell me about the benefits you encountered while studying abroad (probe: network development, knowledge and skills, qualifications)
2. What were the highlights or achievements while at university?
3. Tell me about the challenges (probe: homesick, cultural adjustments, financial constraints)
4. Were these benefits and challenges expected before embarking on your journey abroad?

### **D. Early career stories**

1. Tell me your career story in Tonga since you have started working (probe: roles, organisation, qualification, transition from education to employment)
2. How has your career developed so far? (probe: organisational support, training, network development)
3. How do you feel about where your career is at now? (probe: are you where you want to be)
4. Moving back to Tonga, do you feel it has helped your career development?
5. Where do you see yourself in five years? (probe: continuing further studies, moving to a new job)

## Appendix 6: Researcher Safety Protocol



### **Project title and brief description:**

An exploration of the early career experiences of Tongan nationals on retuning home after tertiary education abroad. This research project aims to understand the different career experiences of each participant in terms of what their aspirations were versus the reality of their early career experiences after repatriating to Tonga.

### **Applicant**

Dr Barbara Myers

### **Primary Researcher**

Losaline Mafi

### **Where is the research being undertaken?**

The interviews will be conducted in an independent space whereby it will be convenient for the participant and the primary researcher (Losaline Mafi). It is likely that this will occur at an available conference room at an available office in Nuku'alofa. Individuals present at the interview location will be the researcher and the participant as this is considered confidential. There are no permissions required as the office building belongs to the family of the researcher. All participants are familiar with the chosen location as they are all locals. The researcher and participant will be responsible for arranging own means of transport. Free parking will be available for those who wish to drive. Hotel and accommodations are located a block away from the office location.

### **Who will be collecting the data and interacting with participants?**

The primary researcher (Losaline Mafi) is responsible for collecting all data. This includes recordings and any note taking.

### **How familiar is the researcher with the social or cultural context of the research ?**

The primary researcher (Losaline Mafi) is of Tongan ethnicity and is familiar with the cultural context of Tonga. Consultation has occurred between the primary researcher (Losaline Mafi), primary supervisor (Barbara Myers) and co-supervisor (Irene Ryan) during a one-on-one meeting on November 2018. Consultation also occurred with the primary researchers parents and in-class preparation as part of AUT MBus classes. Both supervisors will ensure that this project will follow research protocols and deadlines. There

are no local tensions and there are minimal risks associated with this research project as the participant has full control over what they want to disclose in the interview process. The researcher has consulted the community leader in Tonga regarding this research project. Also, *act in a culturally and socially sensitive way, remembering that she is a guest and that it is the participants who are doing the researchers the favor by agreeing to participate and share their stories.*

**How safe are the activities in which the researcher is taking part?**

This research project is associated with minimal risk. The researcher is of Tongan ethnicity and therefore is aware of the cultural context of Tonga. The researcher is responsible of arranging transport to interview location. Both supervisors will be notified on the date of interviews and the owners of the office space used will be present in the building.

**What level of access to support is available?**

Both supervisors (Barbara Myers and Irene Ryan) will be available should assistance be required. Participants will be notified in the Participant Information Sheet of their contact details. An additional support person based in Tonga (locally) will also be available should assistance assistance be required.

**What emergency plans are in place? Who can help?**

Have suitable contact networks in the field and ensure that there is some sort of confirmation process before and after an appointment. This may include actions such as the researcher ensuring that she is reporting to a colleague when conducting interviews with participant or ensuring that a colleague has a schedule of her visits for a particular morning or afternoon. The researcher will ensure to adhere to the AUT safety protocol. The local community leaders have been advised regarding this research project. The researcher will ensure to notify both supervisors when the interviews are scheduled for. *Don't forget to update your safety protocol regularly:*

**DATE FOR NEXT REVIEW**

14<sup>th</sup> March 2019.