

Article

# Migrant women's views of secondary education in Tonga

Fe'aomoengalu Kautai

Teena Brown Pulu

## ABSTRACT

This article contextualises interview data selected from Fe'aomoengalu Kautai's online talanoa with Tongan migrant women in Auckland for her Master of Arts thesis. From the women's discussions of their secondary education experiences in Tonga, their place of birth, a particular theme emerged. They perceived the structure of Tonga's secondary education system to be weighted heavily on senior students passing state examinations in the English language. Reflecting on their high school years at Takuilau College in the 1970s and 1980s, participants believed that current students would benefit more from classroom teaching and learning in the Tongan language.

## KEYWORDS

Tonga, Auckland, migrant women, Tongan language, social equality

## Introduction

*Above all, we need to continue the process of reclaiming indigenous discourses by placing greater emphasis on our cultures and vernacular languages in our curriculum planning, teacher education and research activities. We need to continue to analyze indigenous structures, processes and emphases, and to find out about assumptions that underlie teaching and learning in our traditional societies. In this way, we may finally succeed in bringing about the kind of synthesis of the best of our cultures with that of our colonial mentors for the sake of learners in the twenty-first century; a century increasingly hailed as the 'Pacific century.'*

Almost three decades ago, Konai Helu-Thaman penned this statement in an essay appealing to Pacific educators (Helu-Thaman, 1995, p. 732). Here, she implored them to reconsider what formal education in schools could potentially look like in South Pacific countries. If Pacific Island states and societies were to integrate “vernacular languages” within school curriculums, it would prompt a transformational shift towards a relevant model of twenty-first century education (Helu-Thaman, 1995, p. 732). Upon reflection, Helu-Thaman was referring to Indigenous Pacific languages, rather than the vernacular in respect to dialects of a common language spoken by the ordinary people of a country, which in the mid-1990s would have been taken as a novel idea. The foremost rationale that we contemplate in this paper was the qualitative assertion “that there are aspects of Indigenous education which children will need for survival in the next century” (Helu-Thaman, 1995, p. 731). In the case of Tonga, such Indigenous characteristics were tied to the pedagogical responsibility of teachers to foster cultural ideals and practices in the classroom and school environment; ideals associated with respectful behaviour and protocols guiding communication and social exchange.

The position that we write from is that ideals and practices in a cultural sense are transmitted foremost through the language of a given society, and that Helu-Thaman's essay explains cross-cultural tensions which teachers, students, and school communities in Tonga are faced with, even today. That being, how to strike a balance between the western principle of teaching students that individual progress in a capitalist economy is a measure of success, alongside the communal principle of using knowledge acquired from one's education to address community needs as a measure of Tongan success. In Konai Helu-Thaman's essay, she pointed at teachers in Tonga, a South Pacific state, for uncritically complying with a western-styled education system based “on individual gain and competition” (Helu-Thaman, 1995, p. 731). She critiqued the actions of teachers as having been complicit in diminishing the cultural sovereignty of Indigenous ways of learning and knowing in formal schooling (Helu-Thaman, 1995, p. 731).

*For over one hundred years, we too have promoted (or at least accepted) this view of education, one that is diametrically opposed to our traditional notions of ako [learning], 'ilo [knowing], and poto [knowledgeable]: a view that is characterized by an overemphasis on individual gain*

*and competition, and not on maintaining good relationships; a view where the status of schools and teachers is based on the number of students who pass examinations irrespective of what is being learned or how their learning relates to the culture of which they are part.*

Since this seminal essay, Tongan researchers have elaborated on Helu-Thaman's ideas by analysing the experiences of Tongan learners in formal education settings with a focus on the New Zealand experience where the Tongan population was recorded at 82,389 people in the 2018 census (Frenghley-Vaipuna et al, 2011; Otunuku and Brown, 2007; Māhina, 2008a, 2008b; Kautai, 2022). The research focus has therefore migrated towards mitigating the strain and stressors for Tongan students who find themselves caught between, and conflicted by, two distinct systems of learning and knowing; a western education system and a Tongan cultural system anchored in collective beliefs and practices.

Detailing this point, Telesia Kalavite presented critical insights into the social and cultural context of Tongan post-secondary students studying in the tertiary education system of Aotearoa New Zealand (Kalavite, 2020). Highlighting interrelated themes when considering Tongan experiences of tertiary education in New Zealand, Kalavite argued that firstly, Tongan students ought to be disentangled from the homogenising discourse of Pacific students because it erased their cultural distinctiveness. Secondly, she situated Tongan students within the social and cultural context of families, communities, and churches, contending that an individual's motivation to obtain a tertiary qualification stemmed directly from communal values.

On a similar note to Konai Helu-Thaman, Telesia Kalavite believed that "academic success" for Tongans was derived from family "expectations" that tertiary education can provide the tools to enable a person to be "of practical" use in advancing their people's collective aspirations (Kalavite, 2020, p. 25).

*Many Tongan students in New Zealand tertiary education strive to obtain a good education so that they can be 'aonga (useful or of practical value) in conducting their fatongia (cultural proscribed obligations) to their famili/kainga, siasi [church], pule'anga [government], and fonua [country] competently. Therefore, Tongan students' academic success is driven by a strong community outlook and expectations which should be considered when teaching them*

*in the classroom. Tongan students' success depends on teachers' recognition and understanding of Tongan students' sociocultural context.*

Drawing out the fundamental similarity between Helu-Thaman and Kalavite's analyses, their writings intersect in placing pedagogical responsibility on teachers to engage in transformational practices that integrate the cultural fabric of collective identity into classroom learning for Tongan students. The key difference is geographic location and the limitations of proposing Tongan pedagogies be implemented in countries, apart from Tonga, where the national language is Tongan. Helu-Thaman directly addressed the work of teachers in Tonga's secondary schools in which it is possible to communicate with students in the Tongan language, or at least bilingually in Tongan and English. Kalavite, by comparison, alluded to the culture-specific learning needs of Tongan tertiary students enrolled across Aotearoa New Zealand's universities, technical institutes, or wānanga, meaning tertiary providers organised by Māori cultural values.

Having said that, this paper travels a different trajectory. We contextualise the interview data of six migrant women in Auckland when contemplating a particular part of their secondary education experiences in Tonga. These middle-aged women had attended Takuilau College in the 1970s and 1980s, a Catholic coeducational high school in Lapaha village. Through their high school years, they were residents of Lapaha where they lived with their parents and siblings. A particular theme emerged from individual interview conversations with Fe'aomoengalu Kautai for research conducted for a Master of Arts thesis in which they claimed that when they attended school, the structure of Tonga's secondary education system was weighted heavily on senior students passing state examinations set in the English language. In hindsight, they believed that in today's world social equality in the classroom was fundamental to student achievement at school. This meant that for students to improve their understanding of subject content and succeed, teachers needed to be facilitating teaching and learning in the Tongan language.

We therefore undertake a novel inquiry by offering an interpretive reading of the selected interview data. How might the participants' views on delivering the secondary education curriculum in Tonga in the mother tongue of high school students be influenced by their migrant experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand? The rationale for suggesting a link exists between this group's collective stand and their place of residence in Auckland can be traced to the fact that research published by Tongan authors on culturalising the curriculum has used scenarios from Aotearoa New Zealand, not Tonga (Frengley-Vaipuna, Kupu-MacIntyre, and Riley, 2011; Kalavite, 2020; Manu'atu, 2000; Otunuku and Brown, 2011; Māhina, 2008a, 2008b).

To be precise, there is a dearth of literature by Tongan authors on delivering the secondary education curriculum in the Tongan language in Tonga's high schools with the exception of Konai Helu-Thaman's essay of thirty years ago (Helu-Thaman, 1995). Research that lays emphasis on the experiences and culture-specific needs of Tongan students in the New Zealand secondary and tertiary education system has indeed advanced over the past two decades (Evans, 2018; Fa'avae, 2016, 2018; Otunuku, 2011). Arguably, however, the rationale of secondary teachers delivering culturally inclusive syllabi to accommodate Tongan and Pacific students (Rubin and Fa'avae, 2022) has, to a certain extent, been shaped by a specific intellectual terrain located in Aotearoa.

Within New Zealand education studies, Māori advancements in culturalising the curriculum have provided powerful and prominent critiques of, and alternatives to, the mainstream education system when it remains unaccommodating of Māori education philosophies and pedagogies (Bishop, 2003; Smith, 1997, 2000, 2012). Understandably, Māori-centred critiques of mainstream education have been critical in influencing ideas and thinking around teaching and learning practices best suited for Tongan and Pacific students.

## Methods

As mentioned earlier, the selected interview data has been extrapolated from the research findings of Fe'aomoengalu Kautai's Master of Arts thesis of which Teena Brown

Pulu was the primary supervisor and Richard Pamatatau was secondary supervisor. Due to the university's rules on research during Covid-19, an interview format of online talanoa (talk) was employed. By this, the postgraduate researcher carried out individual conversations via Zoom video conferencing, whereby each of the six interviews were video and sound recorded. Interviews were in Tongan, the first language of the interview participants who were six migrant women born in Tonga and residing permanently in Auckland. The interviewees were aged between forty-two and fifty-eight years old, whereas the researcher was a sixty-five year old Tongan Catholic nun of the Sisters of Mercy, New Zealand.

Fe'aomoengalu recruited people for her study by snowballing. Using her social networks in the Tongan Catholic community in Auckland, she emailed research invitations to potential participants. Attached to the emails were the ethics documents produced on university letterhead in Tongan and English; a participant information sheet explaining the study's purpose and the rights of the participant to withdraw, and a consent form. The inclusion criteria for voluntarily taking part in an online interview was firstly, participants had to be Tongan women living in Auckland over eighteen years of age who had attended Takuilau College in Tonga for secondary schooling. Secondly, volunteers had to come from the village of Lapaha in Tonga where Takuilau College is located.

The researcher, who hails from Lapaha and was a former teacher at Takuilau College, purposely wanted to recruit migrant women from her village to create a small qualitative sample of interview data where, assumedly, individual experiences of secondary education at this Catholic high school were likely to overlap. Relatedly, a narrative approach of co-constructed storying between the researcher and the participants was synthesised with Timote Vaoleti's talanoa method of interviewing in Tongan (Dwyer and Emerald, 2018; Vaoleti, 2006). Vaoleti's talanoa (talk) is a method whereby the cultural and linguistic commonalities of the interviewer and the discussants brings about closeness in a space, or *vā*, guided by communal relationships (Vaoleti, 2006). The narrative style of co-constructed storying seemed compatible with talanoa in the sense that the researcher's lived experiences of being part of the Lapaha Catholic

community may not only resonate with the participants' lived experiences, but could be enacted in social exchanges during interview conversations (Davis and Dwyer, 2018).

Originally Fe'aomoengalu had planned to recruit four participants for in-depth interviews of up to one hour each. However, when the snowballing recruitment process was put into play, six migrant women from Lapaha who had attended Takuilau College wanted to participate in the study. Completing six forty-to-sixty minute interviews and transcribing the data verbatim in the Tongan language as well as translating interview transcripts into English, required intense concentration and motivation for a condensed three month period. We have elected to stress the process of interviewing, transcribing, and translating because often researchers will downplay their bilingual and multilingual language capacities and focus their attention solely on research findings.

As Tongan women who have diverse lived experiences of being ethnically and culturally Tongan and different bilingual capabilities, we suggest bilingual researchers do not represent a homogeneous group, but rather that researchers construct meanings in the translation process in various, individual ways. Comparing ourselves as a case in point, Fe'aomoengalu Kautai speaks Tongan as a first language and English as a second language, while Teena speaks English as a first language and Tongan as a second language. Relatedly, Fe'aomoengalu was born and raised in Tonga and identifies as ethnically Tongan, whereas Teena was born and raised in New Zealand and identifies as ethnically Tongan, Māori, and European. Therefore, our social conditioning and understandings of being Tongan from childhood to adulthood as well as our preferred language of communication are by no means the same.

A blanket assumption prevails that bilingual researchers are presumably identical in the way they think and work with two languages. Bogusia Temple argued that there is an absence of meaningful academic discussion "about the effects of being bilingual on research" (Temple, 2006, p. 2).

*I challenge the view that everyone who is bilingual experiences the social world in the same way and therefore it does not matter who works on research as all bilingual researchers are in effect interchangeable.*

Allying with Bogusia Temple's qualitative assertion, we have found that for this study, who the bilingual researcher was in regard to the connections they shared with the participants to a common village of origin has had a considerable bearing on the manner in which the interview conversations were handled. As a consequence, the English translation of Tongan language transcripts were fashioned by the bilingual researcher's relationships to and knowledge of the participants. Being a Tongan migrant woman from the same village as the interviewees, a researcher known to them from mutual community networks, during the actual data collection Fe'aomoengalu was able to anticipate that the participants' answers were going to be similar to how she, herself, would have replied to the interview questions.

## Language and learning success

The six migrant women interviewed for the study were given pseudonyms in the research report. Their reactions to what success and failure means for female students at Takuilau College were strikingly homogeneous. Lute's account of success and failure captured how the participants understood the workings of Tonga's secondary education system. When recalling their years as senior high school students, success was narrowly defined by passing state examinations set by the government in the English language, while failure was identified in not passing state examinations (Kautai, 2022, p. 38, p. 40).

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

-Lute.

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

-Lute.

All the participants perceived Tonga's secondary education system to be hinged solely on teachers pushing senior students in Years 11 to 13 over the pass line of state examinations in a second language. However, five of the six participants opened up the social context on language and learning success in the class by answering questions in related ways on what language they preferred at secondary school, and why. Arguably, Lute gave the most articulate response by emphasising that if high school students were given an opportunity to be taught different subjects in Tongan, then their chances of learning success would increase (Kautai, 2022, p. 49).

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

-Lute

Susana added substance to Lute's argument. Her understanding was that Tongan, being the Indigenous language of the school and village communities and the country, creates a learning space of social equality in the classroom. Different to learning in English, learning in Tongan enables students to wholly articulate themselves in the language and culture that from the time of birth they have been socially conditioned by (Kautai, 2022, p. 49).

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

-Susana

'Eseta and Malia's sentiments were allied with a prevailing argument among Indigenous language activists. They asserted that Tongan is the "mother tongue" of the Indigenous population of Tonga. Thus, the intergenerational sustainability of Tongan as a living language in contemporary times will secure the future preservation of cultural identity and practices (Kautai, 2022, p. 49).

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

- 'Eseta

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

- Malia

Sutita's views touched on the social anxiety of losing the Tongan language across family generations. Communicating in Tongan not only constructed a unifying space of social equality among ethnic Tongans, but very acts of speaking the language affirmed relationships between a person and their family and community (Kautai, 2022, p. 49).

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

- Sutita

## Discussion

At a glance, the confidence in which the participants voiced why Tongan ought to be utilised as the language of the classroom at their former Catholic high school in Tonga was somewhat impressive. The researcher, who in 2017 emigrated from Tonga to New Zealand for postgraduate study, remarked that she was delighted with their support for school subjects to be taught in Tongan because this collective position represented her personal stance. Former Takuilau College students had never formally raised the possibility of appealing to the school to teach classes in Tongan for the betterment of student learning and achievement. But the data indicated that times had changed from a previous era when the Tongan state's narrow focus on students passing state examinations in English had resulted in parents' uncritically accepting English literacy was a defining measure of human intelligence.

Within the context of the Auckland locale, a particular rationale dictating the narrative had emerged from the participants' views on language and learning success. Auckland is the metropolitan and multicultural city where as migrant women, they resided permanently with their families as well as the place where the online interviews were conducted. We could argue that due to the interviewees no longer living in Lapaha, their origin village in Tonga, they had geographical distance in their daily lives from the village and school communities. They possessed an amount of social freedom to critically reflect on, and critique, how Takuilau College courses were delivered in their high school years. Yet, geographical distance was linked to another factor of the space of time, adding a layer of context that had to be considered when situating Auckland as the setting where interviewees assembled their ideas.

We mean to say that throughout the interview process the participants, who were in their forties and fifties, were recalling secondary education experiences that had eventuated in Tonga twenty-four to forty years ago. Emigrating from Tonga to Auckland at different intervals over a sixteen-year period from 1992 to 2008, for fourteen to thirty years all were residing in Auckland. Living overseas for a lengthy period of time involved undergoing a re-socialisation process of adjusting the values that in Tonga they were socially conditioned by to norms and customs of contemporary New Zealand. The norms

of their host country were not stagnant or stuck in time, but rather, played out in a state of continual modification.

Re-socialisation in this context can therefore concern personal growth, such as altering parental attitudes towards secondary education: in particular, accepting that adolescent children possess the human agency to make their own subject choices in relation to their preferred programme of study. Exemplifying this point was Eseta's interview discussion where she underlined that since becoming a parent in New Zealand, she had shifted her mindset away from the parenting behaviour of her parents in Tonga (Kautai, 2022, p. 53).

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

-Eseta

On that note, we return to how the participants' enthusiasm for Tonga's high school curricula to be taught in the Tongan language is influenced by their experiences as migrant women in Auckland. From the interview discussions, two interrelated points were raised about the utility of the mother tongue as the medium of classroom teaching and learning. Firstly, communicating in Tongan creates social equality in the secondary education system because the students, who are Native language speakers, are included in learning spaces and are afforded cultural safety to take part in the learning process.

The implication was that English, a second language for Tongan secondary students, has reinforced social stratification because only a fraction of students acquire the level of English proficiency required to learn effectively in the classroom and pass state examinations. Subsequent to this, a cultural sovereignty argument was articulated by the Tongan migrant women who, from an essentialist perspective, believed that their Indigenous language lay at the heart of Tongan identity. The threat was that: "If we lose

our language, then the essence of being Tongan or our Tonganess is at risk of being lost too" (Kautai, 2022, p. 49).

The idea that delivering high school curricula in the Tongan language can provide the means to correct student underachievement and preserve this Indigenous language is linked to Graham Smith's research into the aspirations of Māori communities in the 1980s and 1990s. A Māori educationist, Smith wrote an article explaining the social drivers for initiating Māori immersion and bilingual curricula in New Zealand in the late twentieth century (Smith, 2000, p. 57).

*...the development of the innovative response undertaken by the Māori people of New Zealand to the dual crises of educational underachievement on the one hand and the loss of language, knowledge, and culture on the other. In particular, I consider the critical intervention elements at the core of this revolution. That is, I examine the key elements that have generated change and intervention. These factors are generalised as Kaupapa Māori theory and practice, the significant component of which is centred on the use of traditional and contemporary notions of whanau (extended family) values, practices, and structures.*

Smith's article impresses that the rationale for putting into action education programmes delivered in te reo Māori or bilingually in Māori and English was tackling "educational underachievement" and preventing "the loss of language" (Smith, 2000, p. 57). Although cultural aspirations might overlap with the insights shared by the Tongan migrant women, there are social and historical differences in the establishment of Māori immersion and bilingual education making this educational project distinctive to the Tongan situation. Most notably, state formation has taken place in different ways when looking at the position of the Indigenous population in New Zealand and Tonga.

Modern New Zealand evolved from British colonial settler administrations where relationships with Māori people have been historically anchored in access to land and resources and arrangements of power (Sinclair, 1998, 1990). By contrast, modern Tonga grew out of a chiefly lineage acquiring constitutional power to be instituted as ruling monarchs with the support of nineteenth century protestant missionaries, such as Tonga's second prime minister Reverend Shirley Waldemar Baker (Rutherford, 1996). In respect to teaching secondary curricula in the Indigenous language of a nation-state, te

reo Māori operates along the lines of language revitalisation in New Zealand, a country where English is the dominant language. While Tongan is the dominant language in Tonga, a country where students attend high school to acquire English literacy.

Recently, anthropologists Arcia Tecun and S. Ata Siu'ulua questioned a prevalent Tongan idea about Tonga not being externally colonised in the nineteenth century by the British empire. In their article, *Tongan coloniality: contesting the 'never colonized' narrative*, they argued that to ensure Tonga's sovereignty as a modern nation-state partly depended on other states recognising this country's independent status. The authors saw the colonial apparatus of "global capitalism" upon which nation-states were predicated to be problematic in the sense that structurally the nation-state displaces pre-colonial notions of Indigeneity, a term for Indigenous social and political organisation (Tecun and Siu'ulua, 2023, p. 12).

*Modern Tonga on paper is in many regards the future many Indigenous peoples seek, yet it is still dependent on global recognition for its 'independence' within the frameworks of being a nation-state participating in a colonially racialized and gendered global capitalism. It must conform to what is considered the legitimate or civilized form of both political and social organization in order to be recognized.*

Tecun and Siu'ulua developed their personal viewpoints as anthropologists claiming Indigenous identities, despite the fact that they lived away from their ancestral homelands in Auckland, New Zealand, a country with a colonial-settler history and a large Indigenous Māori population. Woven into their migrant experiences of Auckland was a strong sense of forging connections with Indigenous peoples on an international level, while reconciling the fact that "many Indigenous people today live outside their most recent ancestral homelands" (Tecun and Siu'ulua, 2023, p. 13).

*Ka'ili makes ancestral Tongan connections to his home residence of Hawai'i, finding a belonging there, while also upholding the mana (authority) of Kanaka 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians). This process of constructing a temporal and spatial reality that privileges connection beyond modern nationalist boundaries is also contemporarily practical because many Indigenous people today live outside their most recent ancestral homelands. An Indigenous paradigm is*

*grounded in upholding the mana (honour) of present local elder Indigenous relatives and struggles, while being expansive and connected to complex Indigenous mobilities.*

The Auckland experience is the social factor connecting Tecun and Siu'ulua's idea of Indigenous people in today's world being part of international migration and mobility to the research participants advocating for Tonga's secondary curricula to be taught in Tongan. As a diasporic location, Auckland is a multicultural metropolis with half of the city's population of 1.6-plus million people categorised as Māori, Pacific, Asian, and other ethnic groups. For migrants from Pacific Island countries and their New Zealand-born descendants in particular, their borrowing and reworking of Māori strategies for maintaining language and communal values in an era of rapid cultural and intergenerational change is perceptible. In this study, this can be seen in the manner by which the participants have prioritised the Tongan language as the correct and culturally appropriate medium of communication and learning for secondary students in Tonga.

## Conclusion

Our concluding statement is that the selected interview data showed the research participants who interviewed for Fe'aomoengalu Kautai's Master of Arts thesis were in favour of Tonga's high school curricula being delivered in the Tongan language. Their group perspective was classroom learning conducted in Tongan addressed student participation and success in secondary school by creating social equality in the education system. They felt that allowing students to learn the curricula in Tongan would enable them to participate equally in school learning spaces, thus, improving possibilities for understanding subject content and student achievement. With that said, one has to situate such views within the participants' experiences as Tongan migrant women in New Zealand, a country where they have been re-socialised to value education curricula delivered in Indigenous languages as an essential measure for preserving cultural identity and belonging to an ancestral homeland.

## Disclosure

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

## ORCID

*Teena Brown Pulu*     [Teena Brown Pulu \(0000-0003-3707-1569\) \(orcid.org\)](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3707-1569)

## Acknowledgements

Fe'aomoengalu Kautai is currently residing in Tonga. With her consent and consultation, Teena Brown Pulu wrote the article. Thank you to Professor Paul Moon and Toa Raukura Amoamo for reviewing the final version.

## About the authors

Fe'aomoengalu Kautai undertook a Master of Arts degree in the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Development at Auckland University of Technology. Her thesis research examined the views of Tongan migrant women in Auckland, New Zealand, with regard to their secondary school experiences in Tonga.

Teena Brown Pulu has a PhD in anthropology from the University of Waikato. A senior lecturer in the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Development at Auckland University of Technology, she writes ethnographies of migrant communities in South Auckland and their transnational ties to countries of origin as well as kinfolk residing in other migrant destinations.



- Kalavite, T. (2020). Toungāue cooperative pedagogy for Tongan tertiary students' success. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 25(1): 17-29.
- Kautai, F. (2022). *Female experiences of secondary education in Tonga* [Master's thesis, Auckland University of Technology]. Tuwhera. [Female Experiences of Secondary Education in Tonga \(aut.ac.nz\)](https://aut.ac.nz)
- Manu'atu, L. (2000). Kātoanga Faiva: a pedagogical site for Tongan students. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 32(1): 73-80.
- Otunuku, M. (2011). *Tongan conceptions of schooling in New Zealand: Insights and possible solutions to underachievement* [PhD thesis, University of Auckland]. Research Space. [Tongan Conceptions of Schooling in New Zealand: Insights and Possible Solutions to Underachievement \(auckland.ac.nz\)](https://auckland.ac.nz)
- Otunuku, M., and Brown, G. T. L. (2011). Tongan students attitudes towards their subjects in New Zealand relative to their academic achievement. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 8(1): 117-128.
- Māhina, 'O. (2008a). From Vale (Ignorance) to 'Ilo (Knowledge) to Poto (Skill): The Tongan Theory of Ako (Education): Theorising Old Problems Anew. *AlterNative*, Special Edition/Special Issue: 67-96.
- Māhina, 'O. (2008b). Closing Remarks: Moanan Education: Disciplinary Practice vs. Form of Social Activity. *AlterNative*, Special Edition/Special Issue: 189-191.
- Rubin, J., and Fa'avae, D. (2022). Tapasā: An invitation to decolonize literacy teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. In *Global Meaning Making: Disrupting and Interrogating International Language and Literacy Research and Teaching*, edited by Lori Assaf et al. Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, Pp. 41-56.
- Rutherford, N. (1996). *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Sinclair, K. (1988). *A History of New Zealand*. Auckland: Penguin Books.

- Sinclair, K. (1990). *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, G. H. (1997). *The development of kaupapa Māori: theory and praxis* [PhD thesis, University of Auckland. Research Space. [The development of kaupapa Maori : theory and praxis \(auckland.ac.nz\)](https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/10289/10000)
- Smith, G. C. (2000). Māori education: Revolution and transformative action. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 24(1): 57-72.
- Smith, G. C. (2012). Interview: Kaupapa Māori: The dangers of domestication. *New Zealand Journal of Education Studies*, 47(2): 10-20.
- Tecun, A., and Siu'ulua, S. A. (2023). Tongan coloniality: contesting the 'never colonized' narrative. *Postcolonial Studies*, 26(1): 1-18.
- Temple, B. (2006). Being Bilingual: Issues for Cross-Language Research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 2(1): 1-15.
- Vaiolleti, T. (2006). Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 12(1): 21-34.