

PACIFIC RESEARCH AND POLICY CENTRE

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The importance of *lotu* and *ako* for Pasifika tertiary achievement

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*Improving the educational achievement of Pacific people is an on-going development issue in New Zealand. Research by Sesimani Havea of Massey University explores the relationship between *lotu* (spirituality) and *ako* (education), and the ways in which *lotu* influences academic achievement of Pasifika tertiary students.*

Pasifika tertiary achievement

Pasifika people in New Zealand continue to experience low success in tertiary education, with only 13% achieving a higher qualification compared to other ethnic groups (Pakeha 30%; Asian 40% - 2013 Census), despite significant government investment in this area. This research explores the ways in which *lotu* (spirituality) can contribute to the academic success of Pasifika university students, and how academic and culturally appropriate support measures might incorporate stronger provision of spiritual support. Findings suggest a positive relationship between *lotu* and *ako* and academic success. Spiritual relationships were found to be a key motivator for participants' desire to succeed in their academic pursuits and give back to their community.

Key Points:

- There is a history of academic underperformance among Pasifika people in New Zealand, despite government intervention
- Research findings suggest a positive relationship between *lotu* and educational achievement, with spirituality being a key motivator for academic success
- Recommendations include a need for continuing pastoral care of Pasifika tertiary students, and better collaboration between tertiary institutions, key policy makers, and the Pasifika community.

Rationale for research

The population of Pasifika people in New Zealand is set to double by 2050. If the current trend of educational underperformance for Pasifika people continues, there will be serious implications for the New Zealand economy as a whole. A well-educated and skilful labour force is paramount to sustaining economic growth. Understanding the link between spirituality and academic achievement amongst Pasifika people can contribute to economic and social policy developments, particularly in the area of education policy, and teaching and learning methods.

Recommendations

This research recommends a need for continued support of Pasifika students using the pastoral care model, as well as better collaborative approaches to policy making among tertiary institutions, key educational policy agencies such as the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission, and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, and the Pasifika community.

*“Spirituality gave them hope, wisdom and courage to persevere [with] their studies.”
(Sesimani Havea)*

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