

NUMBER 3/2026

ISSN 2324-3635

OCCASIONAL & DISCUSSION

PAPER SERIES

Equity in the Technology
Sector for Pasifika Learners
in Aotearoa New Zealand

Marion Muliaumaseali'i

Daisy Bentley-Gray

Evangelia Papoutsaki

Fe'ofa'aki Hafoka-Te'evale

ePress
Research with Impact



Equity in the Technology Sector for Pasifika Learners in
Aotearoa New Zealand

Marion Muliaumaseali'i, Daisy Bentley-Gray, Evangelia
Papoutsaki and Fe'ofa'aki Hafoka-Te'evale

Equity in the Technology Sector for Pasifika Learners in
Aotearoa New Zealand by Marion Muliaumaseali'i, Daisy
Bentley-Gray, Evangelia Papoutsaki and Fe'ofa'aki Hafoka-
Te'evale is licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0 International licence.

This publication may be cited as:

Muliaumaseali'i, M., Bentley-Gray, D., Papoutsaki, E., &
Hafoka-Te'evale, F. (2026). Equity in the Technology Sector
for Pasifika Learners in Aotearoa New Zealand. Occasional
and Discussion Paper 3/2026. ePress, Manukau Institute of
Technology and Unitec.

<https://doi.org/10.55457/ocds.116>

About this series:

Unitec ePress periodically publishes occasional and
discussion papers that discuss current and ongoing research
authored by members of staff and their research associates.
All papers are blind reviewed. For more papers in this series
please visit: [www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/index.php/category/
publications/epress-series/discussion-and-occasionalpapers](http://www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/index.php/category/publications/epress-series/discussion-and-occasionalpapers).

Cover design by Penny Thomson

Contact:

epress@unitec.ac.nz
www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/
Manukau Institute of Technology and Unitec
Private Bag 92025, Victoria Street West
Auckland 1142
New Zealand



Equity in the Technology Sector for Pasifika Learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

Marion Muliaumaseali'i, Daisy Bentley-Gray, Evangelia Papoutsaki
and Fe'ofa'aki Hafoka-Te'evale

Abstract

Pasifika peoples remain significantly underrepresented in Aotearoa New Zealand's technology sector; despite comprising 8.9% of the population they make up less than 3% of those in digital and IT pathways. This disparity reflects structural inequities that constrain access, progression and representation, with clear impacts on workforce participation, education and economic outcomes. Using Pacific research methodologies, this qualitative study evaluates the effectiveness of micro-credentials and Pasifika-led IT programmes in addressing these inequities. Drawing on the lived experiences of Pasifika educators and IT professionals, the research shows how communities leverage cultural capital and collective advocacy to navigate Eurocentric systems while maintaining cultural identity. Findings indicate that industry-sponsored micro-credentials offer flexible upskilling, but lack cultural relevance and do not provide clear pathways to postgraduate education. In contrast, Pasifika-led programmes achieve stronger outcomes through culturally responsive approaches that align with community values and learning practices. However, these programmes face structural barriers, including limited funding and exclusion from accredited provider systems. The study identifies how systemic racism operates across education and employment pathways in the technology sector. It provides evidence-based recommendations for policies and practices that centre cultural relevance, community leadership, and equitable access to strengthen inclusive STEM education outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Pasifika, racial equity, technology sector, micro-credentials, STEM education, cultural capital, Pacific research methodologies, Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

The technology sector in Aotearoa New Zealand faces a persistent equity challenge regarding Pasifika participation. Despite constituting 8.9% of the national population (Stats NZ, 2023), Pasifika peoples represent less than 3% of those engaged in digital technologies and information technology career pathways (Chiang, 2022; Ministry of Education [MoE], 1995; Ministry for Pacific Peoples [MPP], 2019). This stark underrepresentation reflects broader patterns of systemic inequality that limit Pasifika advancement across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare and employment (Naepi, 2019; Tanielu & Johnson, 2014).

The complexity of Pasifika experiences in Aotearoa is characterised by diverse cultural backgrounds, varied migration histories, and ongoing navigation of Eurocentric institutional frameworks (Anae, 2001; Manuela & Sibley, 2013). While Pasifika communities demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of discrimination and socioeconomic disparities (Mayeda et al., 2014; Teevale & Teu, 2018), structural barriers continue to impede equitable participation (Bentley-Gray, 2021) in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields (MPP, 2019). A disconnection between the tech sector, the government and other agencies has resulted in a huge shortage of qualified people in the sector (MPP, 2019).

This research emerges from a partnership between Te Pūkenga New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology and industry technology partners, aimed at evaluating IT programme effectiveness delivered through micro-credentials for Pasifika educators. Te Pūkenga has since been disestablished under the Education and Training (Vocational Education and Training System) Amendment Bill 2025, with Unitec being amalgamated with Manukau Institute of Technology as of January 2026. The study was hosted by Ngā Wai a Te Tūi Māori and Indigenous Research Centre at Unitec, building upon previous research evaluating micro-credential programmes for Māori teachers. Te Pūkenga's Te Rito equity framework, which centred improved access, success and wellbeing for Māori and Pasifika students (Te Pūkenga, 2021), provided the institutional context for this investigation.

The study addresses three critical research questions: How do industry-sponsored partnerships that enhance educators' capabilities through micro-credentials influence pathways to postgraduate studies? How effective are Pasifika-led IT programmes at bridging equity gaps and fostering inclusion in the tech sector? How do these programmes address systemic racism and inform inclusive STEM education policies? By centring Pasifika voices and employing culturally appropriate research methodologies, this study contributes to understanding both barriers and solutions for equitable tech-sector participation.

Literature review

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND PASIFIKA UNDERREPRESENTATION

Pasifika communities in Aotearoa navigate complex intersections of cultural identity and institutional inequity. Their experiences reflect diversity across ethnic backgrounds and migration patterns while sharing common challenges related to Eurocentric educational and employment systems (Anae, 2001; Manuela & Sibley, 2013). Research consistently identifies systemic racism and structural inequalities as significant barriers across sectors (Bentley-Gray, 2021; Naepi, 2019), often compounded by unconscious biases and persistent stereotypes (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Sibley et al., 2011). This paper refers to Pasifika and Pacific peoples synonymously as terms for people of Pacific descent living in Aotearoa.

In the technology sector specifically, Worth (2023) highlights how systemic barriers in both education and employment contribute to disproportionately low Pasifika participation. These barriers include limited exposure to technology careers within Pasifika communities, misalignment between educational pathways and industry requirements, and workplace cultures that may not recognise or value Pasifika cultural perspectives and skills. Digital.Govt.NZ (2022) explains that statistics show an alarming digital exclusion of Pacific peoples in the age group 16 to 65 years who are digitally enabled in comparison to other New Zealanders. Therefore, the growing concern is that this digital exclusion means the advancement in technology in industries such as manufacturing, where a large proportion of the workforce is Pacific, poses a risk of higher unemployment if and when manual labour is replaced by technology (MPP, 2019).

MICRO-CREDENTIALS AS EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

Micro-credentials, defined in Aotearoa as targeted learning units carrying 1–40 credits at New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework Levels 4–8 (University of Auckland, 2024), represent an emerging approach to flexible professional development. These credentials aim to address specific industry needs through supporting focused skills development, while accommodating the constraints faced by working professionals.

However, the effectiveness of micro-credentials for Pasifika learners remains contested. While promoted as accessible upskilling tools, critics highlight potential misalignment with cultural contexts and existing curriculum frameworks, such as the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) system (MoE, 1995). The literature suggests that without cultural relevance and clear progression pathways, micro-credentials may fail to address underlying inequities in educational and employment outcomes.

CULTURAL CAPITAL AND COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY

Central to understanding Pasifika experiences is the concept of cultural capital – the knowledge, skills and perspectives rooted in communal values and traditional practices. Mila-Schaaf (2010) describes how Pasifika individuals

develop ‘polycultural capital’, enabling them to navigate multiple cultural contexts while maintaining cultural identity. This often involves gaining ‘cumulative advantage’ through innovative solutions or ‘work-arounds’ in restrictive institutional environments. Pasifika success is often framed through collectivist values; however, this binary between collective and individual is limiting. Research shows Pasifika individuals navigate both simultaneously, drawing on collective identity while exercising individual agency (Fainga’a-Manu Sione et al., 2023).

Collective advocacy emerges as a powerful mechanism for addressing systemic inequities. Community-driven initiatives demonstrate how Pasifika-led solutions can bridge digital divides and create culturally responsive educational opportunities (Tuitama, 2020). According to Digital.Govt.NZ (2022), active Pacific community involvement in designing training, services and initiatives is critical in successfully addressing the digital-exclusion gap. Pacific church communities provide platforms, which enable Pacific peoples to participate in locally led digital initiatives aimed to build capacity (Digital.Govt.NZ, 2022). These approaches align with collectivist values inherent in Pasifika cultures, where community wellbeing takes precedence over individual advancement.

Methodology

The increase in Pacific research has been the result of a growing interest in Pacific issues, and with it the acknowledgement of a lack of Pacific wisdom and culture in the research environment. Pacific research methodologies (PRMs) were employed to ensure culturally appropriate investigation and analysis. Following Anae (2019), who identified 18 PRMs utilised by Pacific scholars, the research team used a blended approach similar to that of Timiniko, Aumua, Pitovao and Bentley-Gray (Te Pūkenga, 2021), combining five complementary methodologies that reflected the diverse Pacific ethnic backgrounds of participants and researchers.

PACIFIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The following research methodologies were utilised at various phases of the research, from the initial stage of the project, in the formation of the research group, to the communication with participants, and the relationships between the research team and participants, and between the research team members:

Kakala (Tongan) emphasises communal participation and intergenerational knowledge transfer, respecting elders’ wisdom and preserving cultural knowledge through collective engagement (Carter et al., 2018).

Talanoa (Tongan) facilitates open dialogues with participants, described by Vaiioleti (2006, p. 24) as “the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations.” This methodology centres reciprocity, respect and participant agency (Bentley-Gray, 2023; Muliaumaseali’i, 2017; Muliaumaseali’i & Akama, 2023).

Teu le Vā (Sāmoan) nurtures relational spaces between researchers

and participants, adapted by Muliaumaseali'i (2017, 2022) as a co-design methodology that emphasises "beautifying the space in-between" (Muliaumaseali'i & Akama, 2023) to foster trust and collaboration.

Tivaevae (Cook Islands) reflects collaborative storytelling and holistic analysis, signifying the importance of weaving diverse elements into harmonious understanding, much like the cultural practice of creating intricate patchwork quilts (Maua-Hodges, 2016).

Vanua (Fijian) grounds the research in interconnected cultural and ecological contexts, emphasising holistic approaches that incorporate sociopolitical, environmental and cultural aspects in research and analysis (Hau'ofa, 1994).

PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The study involved six Pasifika professionals representing diverse ethnic backgrounds and professional roles, including educators from primary and secondary schools and IT industry specialists (Table 1). Participant demographics reflected the research aim to capture varied perspectives on tech-sector participation and educational pathways.

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS.

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation
1	35+	Male	<i>Kūki 'Āirani (Cook Islander)</i>	<i>Senior IT teacher</i>
2	35+	Male	<i>Sāmoan</i>	<i>Assistant Digital Librarian</i>
3	40+	Male	<i>Sāmoan</i>	<i>General Manager of an airport vehicle lease service</i>
4	59	Female	<i>Sāmoan</i>	<i>Primary-school Assistant Principal and Digital Lead</i>
5	40+	Female	<i>Sāmoan</i>	<i>Enterprise Applications Manager in solar energy industry</i>
6	35+	Female	<i>Sāmoan</i>	<i>Primary-school Teacher Aide</i>

Due to challenges that included limited participation from originally targeted schools, time constraints cited by potential participants, and concurrent research activities, the research team adapted their approach. The methodology combined semi-structured interviews with participatory action research principles (Baum et al., 2006), allowing for organic relationship development and fluid engagement between researchers and participants.

Data collection occurred through in-depth interviews focusing on lived experiences, cultural navigation strategies, and perspectives on existing educational and professional development programmes. The approach prioritised participant voice and agency while maintaining cultural safety through appropriate PRM application, including Talanoa.

The researchers ensured that the talanoa with each of the participants provided a space in which they were comfortable and felt safe, enabling them to share their stories without restrictions (Vaioleti, 2006; Muliaumaseali'i, 2017; Bentley-Gray, 2023; Maua-Hodges, 2016). Grounded in the five PRMs, it was important that the participants felt no inhibitions about what they shared. As Pacific people, the researchers and each participant were culturally interconnected (Hau'ofa, 1994), enabling them to navigate and nurture both the online and in-person spaces (Muliaumaseali'i, 2017, 2022) in which the talanoa occurred. Each participant selected the medium in which the talanoa occurred, and, due largely to time restrictions and incompatible work and personal commitments, five out of six talanoa were conducted online.

Findings

The findings are drawn from the nuanced responses to the research questions and demonstrate that Pasifika people are adept at mastering racist environments while trying to maintain their cultural values and identity by gaining cumulative advantage (Mila-Schaaf, 2010). This position of power moves far away from the known deficit lens found in research about Pacific peoples.

The overarching themes of polycultural capital and cumulative advantage are legacies of the early Pasifika migrants who settled in Aotearoa (Mila-Schaaf, 2010). Cumulative advantage is identified through each participant's innovative 'work-around' in restrictive, and in this context, inequitable, spaces. Pasifika individuals navigate both themes simultaneously, drawing on collective identity while exercising individual agency (Fainga'a-Manu Sione et al., 2023). Polycultural or cultural capital is a key factor in the success of Pasifika gaining cumulative advantage and has continued to contribute to generations of Pasifika in diaspora (Mila-Schaaf, 2010). The research found that the participants bridged the gap of equity and racial justice in their professional environments by employing polycultural capital to gain a cumulative advantage.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

Participants reported mixed experiences with micro-credentials as professional development tools. While appreciating the flexibility and practical applicability of micro-credential programmes, several significant limitations emerged. Participant 1, who is a senior IT teacher, noted the cultural misalignment – “A *micro-credential focused on Pasifika would have been great*” – highlighting how programmes with strong Māori cultural focus did not adequately address Pasifika educational contexts and student needs.

The challenge of curriculum relevance proved particularly significant. Participants found that, despite offering updated devices and supportive cohort experiences, micro-credential programmes lacked alignment with NCEA requirements, leading to default usage of existing curriculum materials. This misalignment meant that new learning and sponsored technology remained underutilised in classroom practice.

Regarding pathways to postgraduate education, participants identified structural barriers, including time constraints and financial pressures.

Participant 1 emphasised:

To appeal to professionals, postgraduate studies would need to be structured similarly to micro-credentials, as time and money are barriers to furthering their education.

The research revealed that while micro-credentials provide accessible skills development, they do not effectively encourage progression to advanced qualifications.

Participant 2, who successfully completed IT qualifications through certificate-to-degree progression, noted isolation in the learning process:

There was six of us all together, but then I didn't see them and I was the only [one] that finished. ... Before that [getting a degree in IT], I had no idea what tech means to me...

Support services, while available for general academic skills, lacked technical IT knowledge necessary for targeted assistance, requiring students to develop independent learning strategies. Hence, the success of the participant was largely due to their efforts in seeking specific tech support, which was found online.

PASIFIKA-LED PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS

Pasifika-led programmes demonstrated superior effectiveness in addressing cultural barriers and community needs. Participant 3 explains:

[I] am heavily involved in community and stuff to try and get kids into ... IT ... and STEM in schools.

Participant 4's Pasifika-led initiative, WhanauConnect, exemplifies an innovative community-centred approach. As a primary-school Assistant Principal with two master's degrees, Participant 4 described the programme as "*bringing a solution from the community*," emphasising how research findings directly inform programme development.

WhanauConnect addresses three critical levers: gaining access, developing skills and building trust. The programme recognises that Pasifika families with multiple children face significant barriers to accessing traditional upskilling opportunities at universities or polytechnics. By bringing digital-literacy education directly to the school community, the programme eliminates transportation, childcare and scheduling barriers.

The holistic approach includes parents as learners alongside their children, addressing digital safety, online literacy and technical skills through culturally responsive pedagogy. Participant 6 noted initial concerns about costs:

There were a lot of us that attended because, you know, everyone was thinking, Oh, how much is it going to cost us?

The programme's free accessibility proved crucial for community engagement and participation.

Furthermore, Pasifika-led programmes are significant, as highlighted by

Participant 6:

If you create the environment, where the kids can actually learn, but then also cater it to the kids' interest, it'll stick a lot better, but then they'll also be a lot more interested in the actual industry that they're studying.

Pacific-led programmes ensure the needs of communities are reflected, and having Pacific expertise provides a level of interest for success. Participant 6 also emphasised the value of mentorship for young people entering the industry:

Setting up mentorship, giving young ones that come into the industry just a bit of a leg-up in terms of understanding the industry's life, but then also just some words of wisdom that people can share with them.

However, systemic barriers limit the sustainability and recognition of Pasifika-led initiatives. Participant 4 expressed frustration with structural exclusion:

I see no islanders on the list. ... I said to them, how do you get on this list? I'm looking at this list, and it's all Pālagi [European]. There's no Pacific provider providing the PLD in the digital space.

This exclusion from the Ministry of Education's accredited professional learning and development provider list reflects broader patterns of institutional gatekeeping that marginalise Pasifika expertise.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND INDUSTRY NAVIGATION

Pasifika IT professionals reported complex experiences navigating Eurocentric workplace environments while maintaining cultural identity. Participant 1 mentioned that there are "... not many people in our community in this sector." Similarly, Participant 3 explained, "We don't have a strong prevalence of Pasifika faces in tech." A general manager with over 20 years of industry experience, Participant 3 described creating separate professional personas to counter stereotypes: participants felt compelled to distance themselves from 'islander' identity to gain professional credibility, often de-emphasising collaborative traits to address assumptions about Pacific cultural approaches to work.

The importance of industry exposure emerged as a critical factor in addressing underrepresentation, which Participant 5 emphasised:

I think it's exposure to the actual industry, because everything has a technical aspect to it. But not everybody knows that you can actually do it for any of your interests.

This highlights how limited awareness of technology career diversity contributes to low participation rates within Pasifika communities.

Cultural intelligence emerged as an undervalued asset in industry settings. Participant 5, who is an Enterprise Applications Manager, argued:

Pasifika have cultural intelligence. You really have emotional intelligence and the IQ. But if you understand that, cultural

intelligence is a financial benefit to you, like your culture, how you work, how you think, within the context of technology, it's a massive benefit.

This perspective challenges deficit narratives about cultural difference while highlighting the economic value of diverse perspectives.

Recruitment practices revealed systemic biases limiting Pasifika participation. Participant 5 confronted exclusionary job advertisements:

I said to a general manager at Datacom, your job ad is incredibly whitewashed. How did you think somebody that was Pasifika would see themselves when the job ad is five years of this language, this certification?

This critique identifies how technical requirements and language choices can inadvertently exclude candidates from non-traditional educational backgrounds.

Community engagement strategies differed significantly from mainstream approaches. Participants emphasised targeting “influencers” within Pasifika networks. For example, Participant 5 stated:

I will always target my comments to the influencer. And the influencer to me is Mum, Dad, the church leader, Grandma, Grandpa, Auntie, not the child.

This approach recognises collective decision-making processes and community authority structures that influence individual educational and career choices.

Discussion

The findings reveal a complex landscape in which Pasifika communities demonstrate remarkable adaptability and innovation while confronting persistent structural barriers. The concept of cumulative advantage, as described by Mila-Schaaf (2010), manifests throughout participant experiences as creative problem-solving within restrictive systems. This challenges deficit-based narratives about Pasifika educational and employment outcomes, instead highlighting resilience and strategic navigation of inequitable environments.

The cultural relevance gap in micro-credentials reflects broader challenges in educational programme design that fails to account for diverse learner needs and contexts. While flexibility and practical application provide value, the absence of cultural grounding and curriculum alignment limits effectiveness for Pasifika educators and students. This suggests that technology education initiatives require co-design approaches that centre community knowledge and pedagogical preferences.

Pasifika-led programmes demonstrate superior outcomes through community-centred approaches that address practical barriers while maintaining cultural integrity. The success of initiatives like WhanauConnect illustrates how education delivered by Pasifika for Pasifika can bridge equity

gaps effectively. Digital.Govt.NZ (2022) highlights that Pacific people respond better to information provided by other Pacific people. However, systemic exclusion from formal recognition and funding structures limits scalability and sustainability of these innovations.

The persistence of systemic racism in technology-sector recruitment and workplace cultures requires targeted interventions beyond individual skill development. Participants' experiences highlight how cultural intelligence and diverse perspectives provide economic and innovative value that remains under-recognised in industry settings. Addressing these biases requires comprehensive approaches, including inclusive recruitment practices, cultural competency training and recognition of alternative qualification pathways.

Recommendations

Based on research findings, the following recommendations address systemic inequities while building upon Pasifika community strengths and innovations:

CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

Develop micro-credential programmes specifically tailored for Pasifika contexts, incorporating cultural values and pedagogical approaches that resonate with community learning preferences.

Create flexible postgraduate study options that accommodate work-life balance expectations and cultural commitments while providing clear progression pathways from vocational training.

Establish robust Recognition of Prior Learning frameworks that formally recognise and translate Pasifika cultural and technical expertise into accredited qualifications.

Increase dedicated funding for Pasifika-led IT programmes that demonstrate effectiveness in addressing community needs through holistic, family-centred approaches.

MENTORSHIP AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Implement comprehensive mentorship programmes connecting established Pasifika technology professionals with students and early-career professionals. These relationships should provide both technical guidance and cultural support for navigating industry environments while maintaining cultural identity.

Invest in targeted apprenticeship programmes specifically designed for Pasifika youth, creating clear pathways from secondary education into technology careers while addressing financial and cultural barriers to participation.

INDUSTRY INCLUSION AND REPRESENTATION

Advocate for inclusion of qualified Pasifika providers on official professional learning and development accreditation lists, addressing current structural

exclusion from formal recognition systems.

Develop inclusive recruitment policies that recognise cultural intelligence as valuable professional capability rather than deficit.

Increase visibility of Pasifika technology professionals through community-focused events and professional networks that provide role models and networking opportunities for aspiring professionals.

Implement cultural intelligence training for non-Pasifika professionals to foster inclusive workplace environments that value diverse perspectives and approaches.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND POLICY REFORM

Engage comprehensively with Pasifika communities, including key influencers such as parents, church leaders and extended family networks, to promote technology education and career awareness.

Recognise collective decision-making processes and authority structures that influence individual educational choices.

Ensure government digital-transformation policies incorporate Pasifika perspectives through co-design processes that centre community knowledge and priorities.

Transition to equity-focused, long-term funding mechanisms that sustain Pasifika-led initiatives while recognising their demonstrated effectiveness.

Address systemic barriers preventing Pasifika educators from achieving recognition as accredited providers in digital education.

Develop clear pathways for Pasifika IT experts to contribute to curriculum development and educational policy formation through partnerships with organisations representing Pacific technology professionals.

Conclusion

This research provides critical insights into Pasifika experiences within Aotearoa's technology sector, revealing both systemic barriers and community-generated solutions. The study demonstrates how Pasifika individuals and communities employ cultural capital and collective advocacy to navigate inequitable systems while maintaining cultural identity and values. These findings challenge deficit-based narratives about Pacific educational and employment outcomes, instead highlighting resilience, innovation and strategic adaptation.

Key findings indicate that industry-sponsored micro-credentials, while offering flexible professional development opportunities, require cultural grounding and curriculum alignment to effectively serve Pasifika learners. Pasifika-led programmes demonstrate superior effectiveness in bridging equity gaps through community-centred approaches, though structural exclusion from formal recognition systems limits their impact and sustainability.

The persistence of systemic racism in technology-sector recruitment, workplace cultures and educational institutions requires comprehensive intervention beyond individual skill development. Participants' experiences

reveal how cultural intelligence and diverse perspectives provide economic and innovative value that remains under-recognised in mainstream industry settings.

Future research should examine the long-term outcomes of Pasifika-led educational initiatives and investigate policy mechanisms that support community-driven solutions while addressing structural barriers. Additionally, comparative studies across different technology sectors could identify specific industry contexts where Pasifika participation and leadership might be enhanced through targeted interventions.

The study's employment of Pacific research methodologies demonstrates the value of culturally appropriate research approaches in generating authentic insights and maintaining community agency throughout the research process. This methodological contribution supports broader arguments for decolonising research practices in education and technology sectors.

By centring Pasifika voices and experiences, this research contributes to understanding how racial equity can be advanced in technology education and employment through recognition of community strengths, removal of structural barriers, and creation of inclusive policies that value cultural diversity as an asset rather than a challenge to be overcome.

References

- Allen, J., & Bruce, T. (2017). Constructing the other: News media representations of a predominantly 'brown' community in New Zealand. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 23(1), 225–244. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v23i1.33>
- Anae, M. (2001). The new Vikings of the sunrise: New Zealand-borns in the information age. In C. Macpherson, P. Spoonley & M. Anae (Eds.), *Tangata o te moana nui: The evolving identities of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (pp. 101–121). Dunmore Press.
- Anae, M. (2019). Pacific research methodologies and relational ethics. In K. Hyttan (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.529>
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60(10), 854–857. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.028662>
- Bentley-Gray, D. (2021). Pacific peoples in tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Ekistics and the New Habitat*, 81(3), 55–60. <https://doi.org/10.53910/26531313-E2021813629>
- Bentley-Gray, D. (2023). *Talanoa: Pushing boundaries to promote Pacific ways of being in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Occasional and Discussion Paper Series (2023:1). ePress, MIT and Unitec. <https://doi.org/10.34074/ocds.102>
- Carter, L., Fa'avae, D., & Mara, D. (2018). Pasifika education research in the 21st century. In M. Tomlins-Jahnke, S. Styres, S. Lilley & D. Zinga (Eds.), *Indigenous education: New directions in theory and practice* (pp. 156–174). University of Alberta Press.
- Chiang, J. (May 16, 2022). Microsoft backing Māori and Pacific wāhine in tech industry. *ITBrief NZ*. <https://itbrief.co.nz/story/microsoft-backing-maori-and-pacific-wahine-in-tech-industry>

- Digital.Govt.NZ. (2022). *Report: Digital inclusion user insights – Pacific peoples*. <https://www.digital.govt.nz/dmsdocument/179~report-digital-inclusion-user-insights-pacific-peoples/html>
- Fainga'a-Manu Sione, I., Stanley, G., & Enari, D. (2023). Collective or individual – why not both? *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 132(1), 165–180. <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/items/01d153c2-11df-442e-85af-a31701d81573>
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our sea of islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6(1), 148–161. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23701593>
- Manuela, S., & Sibley, C. G. (2013). The Pacific Identity and Wellbeing Scale (PIWBS): A culturally-appropriate self-report measure for Pacific peoples in New Zealand. *Social Indicators Research*, 112(1), 83–103. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24719174>
- Maua-Hodges, T. (2016). Tivaevae: A multi-metaphorical model for Pasifika education. In M. Tomlins-Jahnke, S. Styres, S. Lilley & D. Zinga (Eds.), *Indigenous education: New directions in theory and practice* (pp. 194–208). University of Alberta Press.
- Mayeda, D. T., Keil, M., Dutton, H. D., & 'Ofamo'oni, I. (2014). "You've gotta set a precedent": Māori and Pacific voices on student success in higher education. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 10(2), 165–179. <http://doi.org/10.1177/117718011401000206>
- Mila-Schaaf, K. (2010). *Polycultural capital and the Pasifika second generation: Negotiating identities in diasporic spaces* [PhD thesis, Massey University]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/1713>
- Ministry for Pacific Peoples. (2019). *The lalanga fou languages and high tech fono report*. <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Aotearoa-The-Lalanga-Fou-Languages-and-High-Tech-Fono-Report.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (1995). *Technology in the New Zealand curriculum*. Learning Media.
- Muliaumaseali'i, M. V. (2017). *The space in-between: An ethnographic study of mobile technology and social change in rural Samoa* [PhD thesis, RMIT University]. Research Repository. <https://doi.org/10.25439/rmt.27581973>
- Muliaumaseali'i, M. (2022). "Text messages from the grave": Connecting the mobile phone with the Samoan concept of Va Tapuia. *Okinawan Journal of Island Studies*, 1, 143–158. <https://riis.skr.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/publication/ojs/okinawan-journal-of-island-studies-ojs-volume-3-number-1/>
- Muliaumaseali'i, M., & Akama, Y. (2023). Teu le vā: Relational practice in social innovation. In Y. Akama & J. Yee (Eds.), *Entanglements of designing social innovation in the Asia-Pacific*. Routledge.
- Naepi, S. (2019). Why isn't my professor Pasifika? A snapshot of the academic workforce in New Zealand universities. *MAI Journal*, 8(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2019.8.2.9>
- Sibley, C. G., Stewart, K., Houkamau, C., Manuela, S., Perry, R., Wootton, L. W., Harding, J. F., Zhang, Y., Sengupta, N., Robertson, A., Hoverd, W. J., West-Newman, T., & Asbrock, F. (2011). Ethnic group stereotypes in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 40(2), 25–36. <https://www.psychology.org.nz/journal-archive/NZJP-Sibley.pdf>
- Stats NZ. (2023). *2023 Census population counts (by ethnic group, age, and Māori descent) and dwelling counts*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/>
- Tanielu, R., & Johnson, A. (2014). *This is home: An update on the state of Pasifika people in New Zealand*. The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit.
- Te Pūkenga. (2021). *Te Rito: Insights from learners and staff – opportunities to enhance success for Te Pūkenga Pacific learners and Pacific staff*. <https://www.nzist.ac.nz/assets/Our-Pathway/Learner-Journey/Te-Rito-Insights-from-Pacific-learners-Part-Two1.pdf>
- Teevale, T., & Teu, A. (2018). What enabled and disabled first-year Pacific student achievement at university? *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 26(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.30688/janzssa.2018.04>
- Tuitama, R. F. (2020). *Digital spaces: Pasifika parents and caregivers talanoa on the impact of digital technologies* [Master's thesis, Unitec Institute of Technology]. Research Bank. <https://hdl.handle.net/10652/4978>
- University of Auckland. (2024). *Micro-credentials policy*. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/about-the-university/policy-hub/education-student-experience/micro-credentials-short-courses/micro-credentials-policy.html>
- Vaiotei, T. M. (2006). Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 12(1), 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v12i1.296>
- Worth, T. (2023). *Barriers to diversity in the Aotearoa tech sector*. Toi Mai Workforce Development Council. <https://toimai.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Screen-version-Barriers-to-diversity-in-the-Aotearoa-tech-sector.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers acknowledge all participants who generously shared their experiences and insights. We are grateful to Dila Beisembayeva at Te Pūkenga who facilitated their micro-credentials programme and access to participants for this research, and to Ngā Wai a Te Tūi Māori and Indigenous Research Centre at MIT and Unitec for institutional support. Special recognition goes to our Research Office, Tūāpapa Rangahau, for facilitating this collaboration, and to Ako Aotearoa, who funded this research.

AUTHORS

Dr Marion Muliaumaseali'i is a Pacific ethnographer, systems designer and researcher based in Australia, whose work sits at the intersection of Indigenous epistemology, education and participatory design, grounded in Pasifika relational frameworks, particularly the Sāmoan concept of *vā*. Her PhD thesis, *The space in-between: An ethnographic study of mobile technology and social change in rural Samoa* (RMIT, 2017), has influenced the body of work she has developed around how institutions can be redesigned to better serve marginalised communities. She is Executive Founder of the Village Response Collective, where she advocates for and delivers social change for Pasifika communities.

Daisy Bentley-Gray is an accomplished educator and research leader with more than 25 years' experience across secondary and tertiary education in Sāmoa and Aotearoa New Zealand. As Interim Manager Pacific Success at MIT and Unitec and Chair of the Pacific Research Fono (PRF), she is dedicated to advancing Pacific learner success and promoting inclusive research practices. Recently bestowed with the chiefly orator titles Soalo and Laupu'e through her paternal great-grandmother's lineage in Samauga, Savai'i, Daisy proudly upholds her Sāmoan

heritage. She is a devoted wife, mother of five, and respected community leader with deep ancestral connections throughout Sāmoa.

Dr Evangelia Papoutsaki is Convenor of SICRI (Small Island Cultures Research Initiative), and an Associate Professor and Executive Editor of ePress at MIT and Unitec. Her professional background and academic interests are on island studies and communication for social change. She has extensive experience in the Pacific, including her previous position as Head of Communication Arts Department at DWU in Papua New Guinea, involvement in major research projects and editorial roles – *Island Studies Journal* and *SHIMA*, *Okinawa Journal of Island Studies*, *Contemporary PNG Studies Journal* and *Pacific Journalism Review* – and has published three edited volumes on Pacific communication issues.

Fe'ofa'aki Hafoka-Te'evale is a Tongan researcher based in Aotearoa New Zealand, who has worked at Unitec since 2017. She is the Research and Administration Lead for Ngā Wai a Te Tūi Māori and Indigenous Research Centre, where she supports and advances research that benefits Māori, Pacific and Indigenous communities. She holds a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics from the University of Auckland. Her research interests are on Pacific heritage languages, language maintenance and revitalisation, and the ways Pacific identities are constructed and negotiated in contemporary Aotearoa. Fe'ofa'aki is committed to promoting Pacific knowledge, languages and cultures, and contributing to culturally responsive and equitable educational opportunities for Pacific and minority learners, families and communities across Aotearoa.