



Report

Addressing racial equity and justice in the tech sector for Pasifika learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

**By Daisy Bentley-Gray, Dr Marion Muliaumaseali'i,
and Dr Evangelia Papoutsaki**

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1 | Executive summary

“Despite facing significant challenges, including discrimination and socioeconomic disparities, Pasifika communities demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability.” (pg. 4)

This research focuses on the significant underrepresentation of Pasifika people in the Technology sector through the lens of Pasifika educators and professionals in Aotearoa. Educators share their perspectives on the ineffectiveness of micro-credentials in Digital Technologies, IT, and computer science pathways (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1995) and technology focused qualifications; at bridging equality, fairness and inclusion in the Tech sector and the barriers to postgraduate education. A micro-credential is defined in New Zealand as a unit of learning that certifies the achievement of a specific set of skills and knowledge, meets a particular need, includes an assessment, has a statement of purpose and clear learning outcomes, and demonstrates support from relevant industries, employers, or communities. These credentials typically carry a credit value of 1–40 credits and may be developed at levels 4–8 on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (University of Auckland, 2024). The second cohort are Pasifika professionals who work in Information Technology (IT), identify the gaps in current IT programmes for Pasifika working in the Industry.

The Pacific population makes up 8.9% of New Zealand’s population (Stats NZ, 2023). Yet, Pacific peoples engaged in Secondary and Tertiary education in Digital Technologies, IT, and computer science pathways, and careers in NZ represent an underwhelming minority of less than 3% (*Chiang, 2022; Ministry of Education [MoE], 1995*). Although Pacific participation in tertiary education is increasing, success rates and those participating in the IT field continue to be a focus for improvement. Hence, multiple initiatives involving various agencies, including government, education, community, and the private sector have been developed and aimed at improving Pacific participation and success in tertiary, and the Information Communication Technologies (ICT) sector.

Though some successes have been achieved, much more needs to be done in the secondary and vocational transition of Pasifika learners to be gainfully employed in the sector and pay equity achieved for upskilled Pasifika teachers

The experiences of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand are characterised by diversity and complexity, reflecting their varied cultural backgrounds and histories of migration (Anae, 2001; Manuela & Sibley, 2013; Bentley-Gray, 2021). Despite facing significant challenges, including discrimination and socioeconomic disparities, Pasifika communities demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability (Mayeda et al., 2014; Teevale & Teu, 2018). Systemic racism and structural inequalities continue to pose significant barriers for Pasifika peoples (Bentley-Gray, 2021) in various sectors, including education, healthcare, and employment (Naepi, 2019; Tanielu & Johnson, 2014). These challenges are often compounded by unconscious biases and stereotypes that persist in society (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Sibley et al., 2011). In the technology sector specifically, Pasifika peoples face significant underrepresentation and barriers to entry. Lim (2019) highlights that Pasifika participation in the tech industry is disproportionately low, with systemic barriers in education and employment contributing to this inequality.



2 | The partnership initiative

This research seeks to understand the lived experience of these [six] Pasifika professionals to identify the factors that contribute to the broader underrepresentation of Pacific peoples in the technology sector...” (pg.6)

The project, a partnership initiative between Te Pūkenga - New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology and a leading industry technology partner, aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of IT programmes delivered via micro-credentials to Pasifika educators and capture the experience of Pasifika professionals in the Tech sector or Education. Te Pūkenga’s Te Rito equity framework centers on improved access, success and wellbeing for Māori and Pasifika students (Te Pūkenga, n.d.). This research project was hosted and supported by Ngā Wai a Te Tūī Māori and Indigenous Research Centre (NwaTT) based at the Unitec Institute of Technology. NwaTT carries out externally funded research at the interface of Māori and Pasifika communities and vocational education. NwaTT is independent of, but partners closely with, Tūāpapa Rangahau Research Office at Unitec. Both NwaTT and Tuapapa Rangahau have a sustained record of research delivery capability. NwaTT also conducted an industry-funded research evaluation of the micro-credentials tech program for Māori teachers that preceded this research.

The evaluation for this project focuses on the experience of six Pacific teachers; one from the original cohort that completed the micro-credential. Other participants teach in support of Senior Leadership roles from Auckland Primary and Secondary schools and Pasifika IT Industry professionals. This research seeks to understand the lived experience of these Pasifika professionals to identify the factors that contribute to the broader underrepresentation of Pacific peoples in the technology sector through three key research questions:

- a) How are Industry sponsored partnerships that uplift educators' capability via micro-credentials influencing educators to research pathways to postgraduate studies?
- b) How effective are IT programmes delivered by Pasifika for Pasifika at bridging the gap of equality, fairness and inclusion for the marginalised in the tech sector?
- c) How effective are IT programmes delivered by Pasifika for Pasifika at addressing systemic racism to identify the potential for inclusive policies for Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) educators? (STEM is identified as a key gateway for interdisciplinary learning and integrated throughout the NZ Technology Curriculum; MoE, 2024)

3 | Key themes



“Collective advocacy has emerged as a powerful tool for Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand to address systemic inequities and promote their rights and interests.” (pg. 10)

Our research has identified a number of key emerging themes across the interviews that provide valuable insights into the creative, multifaceted nature and resilience of Pasifika peoples. These key themes shape the way Pasifika peoples navigate themselves through systemic racism, structural inequalities and unconscious biases towards solutions that increase participation in tech and tech education, catering to the needs of Pasifika despite the uneven playing field (Matapo & Baice, 2020; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009).

Cultural values

All participants referred to their cultural values as guides when seeking to create inclusive solutions or accumulative advantages (Mila-Schaaf, 2010) in their advocacy for equity and inclusion in tech spaces. Cultural Values play a significant role in shaping the identity and experiences of Pasifika people. Family and spirituality are central to Pasifika cultures, with a holistic view of well-being that emphasises collective and relational aspects (Manuela & Sibley, 2013). This worldview places family at the core of Pasifika cultures, valuing spiritual, physical, and mental well-being alongside other aspects of life that connect family and culture (Ioane & Tudor, 2017). The importance of spirituality is deeply ingrained in Pasifika communities, often manifesting through religious practices and contributing to the overall well-being of individuals (Toso, 2011). Understanding and respecting these cultural values is crucial for non-Pasifika professionals working with Pasifika communities, as it helps build trust and enables more effective engagement in various sectors, including healthcare and education.

Cultural capital

Pasifika cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and experiences valued within Pasifika communities but may not be fully recognised or utilised in mainstream New Zealand institutions. Our participants shared how their cultural insights have improved community access to resources and education in technology, but there is a need to actively cultivate and recognise this cultural capital (Media Design School, n.d.). Tuitama's (2020) research on digital spaces further underscores the importance of understanding how Pasifika cultural capital intersects with digital literacy and access, emphasising the need for culturally responsive approaches in education and technology initiatives. Mila-Schaaf (2010) posits that Pasifika maintain their cultural values and identity by gaining cumulative advantage to build their cultural capital and find balance in a Western society. *Cumulative advantage is the ability to find solutions or a "work around" in restrictive, and in this context, inequitable spaces.*

Collective advocacy

Collective advocacy has emerged as a powerful tool for Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand to address systemic inequities and promote their rights and interests. This approach aligns with the collectivist values inherent in Pasifika cultures, where community well-being is prioritised over individual gain. In the context of digital inclusion, collective advocacy has been instrumental in highlighting the digital divide affecting Pasifika communities and pushing for equitable access to technology and digital literacy programmes. Tuitama's (2020) research on Pasifika parents' perspectives on digital technologies provides valuable insights into the challenges and aspirations of Pasifika families in the digital age, informing advocacy efforts. Collective advocacy has also been evident in initiatives like the P-Tech programme, which has achieved 83% Māori and Pasifika representation in the programme, demonstrating the power of collaborative efforts between industry, education providers, and community organisations (Media Design School, n.d.). Through collective advocacy, Pasifika communities are not only addressing immediate concerns but also shaping policies and practices that will benefit future generations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Methodologies

A range of Pacific Research Methodologies (PRMs) exists that ensure research on Pacific matters is appropriately investigated and discussed. Anae (2019) identified 18 PRMs that have been theorised and utilised by Pacific scholars in research on Pacific matters. For the analysis of data on Pacific learners and Pacific staff in Te Pūkenga, the research team employed a combination of five PRMs (Kakala, Talanoa, Teu le va/Va, Vanua, and Tivaevae methodologies) to best reflect and represent the diverse Pacific ethnic groups and the team itself (Te Pūkenga, 2021). Therefore, it was ideal for this project to employ methodologies that reflected the participants' and possibly the Pacific researchers' ethnic backgrounds.

The research plan initially involved conducting observations and interviews in three schools with educators who had completed the Hangarau Matihiko Digital Interface Design and Programming Foundations micro-credential. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the research team had to readjust their approach. During the research process, the team encountered several challenges that necessitated adaptations to the original plan:

1. **Limited Participation:** Only two of the three identified schools participated fully in the micro-credential training, with one school withdrawing and only one staff attending from the third school.
2. **Time Constraints:** Graduates who were encouraged to participate cited time constraints due to existing workloads as a barrier to involvement.
3. **Competing Research:** At the same time, another team was conducting interviews for the Māori-focused micro-credential training, which may have contributed to participant availability challenges.

In response to these challenges, the research team adjusted their approach by expanding the participant pool to include non-teachers who are Pasifika in the tech sector and conducting secondary interviews in place of focus groups and leveraging personal networks to expedite recruitment and interviewing processes.

Pasifika experts

Our six participants and Pasifika experts, ranged from Teacher and Teacher Aides to Assistant Principals, IT professionals and IT policy specialists. Our research approach combined theory and practice, incorporating Participatory Action Research (Baum et al., 2006) and Design Thinking principles (Mouldey, 2018). This approach allowed for organic research relationships and fluid engagement between researchers and participants. The methodology was strongly influenced by Pasifika methodologies to ensure a culturally safe and appropriate approach.

Participant demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation
1	35+	Male	Cook Island Māori	Snr IT Teacher
2	35+	Male	Samoan	Digital Librarian Assistant
3	40+	Male	Samoan	General Manager of Lease Services at Auckland Airport.
4	59	Female	Samoan	Assistant Principal & Digital Lead-Primary School
5	40+	Female	Samoan	Enterprise Applications Manager in Solar Energy
6	35+	Female	Samoan	Primary School Teacher Aide

The following Pasifika methodologies were employed in all aspects of the project. As Pasifika researchers, it is our practice that Talanoa starts the moment the research team congregates. It begins with the initial email to collaborate (Tivaevae) and continues with the transfer of knowledge from our senior researchers to first time research assistant (Kakala). The awareness of Va is prominent throughout our interactions and demonstrated in how we negotiate our competing schedules and different time zones.

Kakala: a Tongan research methodology deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of Tonga. It emphasises communal participation, respect for elders, and the importance of oral history. Kakala values the preservation of cultural knowledge and the transmission of wisdom from one generation to another. While academic sources on Kakala may be limited, its importance in preserving Tongan cultural heritage is widely acknowledged within the Tongan community (Carter et al., 2018).

Talanoa: derived from a Tongan perspective which is described as “the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations” (Vaiolletti, 2006 p. 24). It is utilised by Pasifika researchers because it recognises the power of the participants through the principles of reciprocity, respect, and agency in the project (Bentley-Gray, 2023; Muliaumaseali’i, 2017).

Teu le Va or Va: This Samoan value of beautifying the space in-between” has been adapted by Muliaumaseali’i (2017, 2020, 2022) as a co-design methodology that considers nurturing the space between researcher and participant. Muliaumaseali’i has practised teu le va when designing with communities in the design thinking process involving cross functional teams from diverse backgrounds (Muliaumaseali’i, 2023).

Tivaevae: a Cook Islands methodology that reflects the cultural practice of creating intricate patchwork quilts. It signifies the importance of collaborative effort, storytelling, and the interweaving of diverse elements to create a harmonious whole. Tivaevae methodology is used to explore the complexities of relationships, history, and cultural identity (Maua-Hodges, 2016).

Vanua: The Vanua methodology, originating from Fijian culture, centres around the concept of Vanua, which refers to the land, people, and culture of Fiji. It emphasises a holistic approach, incorporating ecological, sociopolitical, and cultural aspects in research and decision-making. Vanua methodology values the interconnectedness of all elements within Fiji, recognising the importance of community and tradition (Hau’ofa, 1994).

4 | Key findings



“The critique of “whitewashed” job ads underscores how systemic bias can alienate Pasifika candidates.” (b.p. 1, pg. 20)

Our Key findings are drawn from the nuanced responses to the research questions and demonstrate that

Pasifika people are adept at mastering racist environments whilst 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 Pasifika 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. 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). We found that our participants bridged the gap of equity and racial justice in their professional environments by employing Polycultural capital to gain a cumulative advantage.

Question 1

How are Industry-sponsored partnerships that uplift educators’ capability via micro-credentials influencing educators to research pathways to postgraduate studies?

Participant 1 states “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.” This statement suggests that for postgraduate studies to attract professionals, they must adopt the flexible and focused structure of micro-credentials.

The reasoning is that time and money are significant barriers for working professionals who may not be able to commit to traditional, lengthy, and costly postgraduate programs.

Our findings indicate that sponsored micro-credentials with Industry partnerships for Pasifika Secondary teachers, provided updated new devices, the warmth and support of an ethnic specific co-hort and a curriculum suited to the advanced technological devices. However, the teachers found the micro-credentials lacked relevance to the NCEA curriculum causing a default to the usual curriculum which meant the new material, including the sponsored devices, were not useful. Our findings indicate a gender gap as Pasifika females lost interest in class stating they could not relate or as participant one put it “they could not see themselves in the Industry”. Although the training provided flexibility and specific upskilling relevant to the technology curriculum, aligning the micro-credential to the local curriculum could (and should) have been more explicit. This makes for innovation in the classroom, Professional Development and opportunities to cater programmes that bridge inequalities in the Technology sector such as gender and race participation. It is difficult for professionals to think about pursuing postgraduate studies because the benefits of tertiary study are not experienced until after graduation.

The Industry is responding to the lack of Pasifika employed in the Technology sector by helping Pasifika learners remove structural barriers through Industry sponsored scholarships. Participant 1 is the head of digital technology at a Secondary school in Auckland with high numbers of Pasifika and Māori students. This participant’s role is to create the curriculum at each year level. As a male Pasifika in technology, he was part of an Industry sponsored micro-credentials training to upskill Pasifika and Māori staff. The curriculum he tailors to the needs of the students is focused on bridging the disparities of the gender gap in Technology, and the need for female participation and using creative activities that are relatable to a Pasifika context yet requiring students to use core concepts in digital technologies. Students sought digital solutions to identify barriers for Pasifika, such as language apps or creating websites empowering cultural identity.

Participant 1 found that although the technical aspects of the training related well to the interests of his current students; it was clear that it had a strong cultural focus on Māori. A micro-credential focused on Pasifika would have been beneficial for him and his students who are of Pasifika heritage. “ I found that although the technical aspects of the training related well to the interests of his current students; it was clear that it had a strong cultural focus on Māori. A micro-credential focused on Pasifika would have been great. This comment indicates the participant values the training’s relevance but advocates for broader cultural inclusivity, particularly for Pasifika communities. Our participant shares that he has taken up other forms of micro-credential training as part of his Professional Development, finding the experience practical and being able to try the new learning immediately, were key benefits fitting around his schedule. Participant 1’s responses indicate that micro-credentials are sufficient to meet the demands of his role, but this kind of program does not encourage him to think or seek out opportunities to take up postgraduate studies. In comparison to the innovative and targeted learning opportunities block courses offer, postgraduate studies loses its appeal because of cost, the 1-2 year commitment and balancing family, community and social commitments.

Participant 2 shares the same sentiments when considering postgraduate studies. He is of Samoan descent and staircased his pathway to a degree through a Certificate in IT studies and then completed an IT Degree at Unitec NZ. He now works as the Digital Initiative Library Assistant at a tertiary institution. His previous experience was working in a factory and he decided to pursue a qualification to better his opportunities. Participant 2 states there were 5 other Pasifika students who took the same pathway to the degree but he was the only one who completed it citing difficulty in understanding the coursework. “There was 6 of us all together but then I didn’t see them and I was the only that finished “ The support from the Pasifika student centre was good for maths and literacy, but support staff did not have the knowledge in IT studies to provide targeted subject support. Participant 2 found his own solutions through Google and online resources. Participant 2 is now completing two postgraduate courses in Business, and Interpreting at different institutions. His drive to continue learning is for stability for his future and family and as a value-add to his IT qualification. Participant 2 is using his skills to help translate technology to his community and he may look at moving to Samoa to utilise his education and experience.

Participants 1 and 2 have different experiences in IT where one is leading to stackable learning modules that are flexible and work around his timetable. The other is a different kind of pathway involving staircasing into a full degree. Because participant 2 had other skills and life experience prior to study, he was able to identify a gap in the sector and enrolled in two different postgraduate courses. It demonstrates that sponsored micro-credentials or staircasing alone do not incentivise Pasifika to pursue further studies unless it aligns with their cultural values and demonstrates collective advocacy between Industry, Tertiary Institutions, and the community (Media Design School, n.d.)

Question 2

How effective are IT programmes delivered by Pasifika for Pasifika at bridging the gap of equality, fairness and inclusion for the marginalised in the tech sector?

Our findings indicate that IT programmes delivered by Pasifika for Pasifika require innovation to meet the learning needs of the community. Our participants with a Masters in Digital or an IT certificate find that although the content of their coursework meet the academic requirements, they do not frame the digital skills in culturally relevant ways. Our participants are bridging the equality gap by creating digital programmes that address cultural barriers, providing accessible learning platforms through funding and partnerships with Industry and Government. Fairness and inclusion are achieved through a holistic approach where the parents of their students are invited to learn together through Whanau Connect; a unique programme designed by participant 4.

Participant 4 and Participant 6 are educators at Robertson Road Primary School in Mangere, South Auckland, an area with a high population of Pasifika and Māori. Participant 4 is a Samoan, a mother of three and an experienced educator and digital technology leader. As an assistant principal and digital lead at a primary school, she has extensive experience in implementing digital education programmes for both students and their families. She holds two master’s degrees: a Master of Applied Practice focusing on the impact of digital technologies on Pasifika communities, and a Master of Technological Futures. Participant 6 is a teacher aide with a background in supporting students with special needs and brings a unique perspective to digital education in

Pacific communities. Her role involves working closely with two particular students and assisting others who face learning challenges. As a Samoan mother of four children, three of whom attend the same school where she works, Participant 6 has a personal investment in the educational outcomes of Pasifika students.

The Digital Lead involves leading the school's digital strategy, upskilling staff, implementing innovative programs, and ensuring that digital education is accessible and culturally relevant to the school community. Participant 4 developed the 'Whanau Connect' platform, focusing on three main levers: gaining access, developing skills, and building trust. The programme was created from the findings from her Masters that identified Pasifika parents were not engaged in their children's education due to limited education, the high cost of devices and time to upskill themselves. Participant 4 states "I'm bringing a solution, yeah, and it's coming from the community". Whanau Connect is how Participant 4 gained cumulative advantage for Pasifika in Tech. Her first thesis provided the data to build out a Pasifika digital framework for schools and communities. Pasifika families with more than four children struggle to find time to upskill themselves. Robertson Road Primary has students from the age of 5-13 years of age which is eight years of the student and parents' lives. Whanau Connect is bridging the limited access for parents to attend courses at a university or Polytechnic by bringing the courses to them. Participant 4 reflects on her first Masters and connects it back to Pasifika collective advocacy "You do qualifications not for yourself, but for the community."

Participant 6 participates in Whanau Connect both as a teacher aide and a parent. The programme is funded through Government grants and sponsorship from Industry. She recalls the concern around costs when Whanau Connect was advertised: "There were a lot of us that attended because, you know, everyone was thinking, Oh, how much is it going to cost us?" Parents have access to a series of workshops that address various aspects of digital literacy. These workshops, including topics such as online cyber safety and digital literacy, are provided free of charge. This accessibility is crucial in ensuring that marginalised communities have equal opportunities to develop digital skills and would not have been possible without the fusion of Pasifika cultural capital and technical skills gained through relevant qualifications by our participants. Another key aspect to its success has been the collective advocacy (Media Design School, n.d.) that engages key stakeholders to enable free access to digital learning.

These phenomenal outcomes are proving that disparities amongst marginalised communities in the Tech sector can be bridged. However, there are hierarchies and interdependencies that remove the decision-making power from the community or its leaders. Applicants have to apply for funding. Without funding there is no programme. Most grants prefer to see partnerships with stakeholders or Industry leaving communities dependent on whether stakeholders will not only agree to partner but also agree to the content of the programme. Participant 4 states this extends further up the hierarchy identifying a significant gap in the provision of IT professional development for educators. She notes the absence of Pasifika providers on the NZ Ministry of Education's accredited list for digital professional learning and development (PLD), explaining her disappointment: "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 palagi (European). There's no Pacific provider providing the PLD in the digital space." The rhetorical question "how do you get on this list?" underscores a feeling of exclusion or systemic barrier to entry for Pacific providers

and suggests that while Pasifika-led programmes can be highly effective, there is still a need for removing structural inequalities that gate-keep opportunities for the privileged. Our participants call for greater representation and recognition of Pasifika expertise in the broader educational technology sector.

Question 3

c) How effective are IT programmes delivered by Pasifika for Pasifika at addressing systemic racism to identify the potential for inclusive policies for STEM educators?

Our findings are based on the experiences of our participants who are Pasifika professionals in the IT Industry and their experiences of working in companies dominated by Euro-centric policies and procedures that hinder their career growth and ability to “be themselves”.

Participant 3 is a Samoan man in his 40s who works as a General Manager of Lease Services at Auckland Airport. He has over 20 years of experience in the IT industry. His experience as an IT professional who gained access to the industry through funded programs in low socio-economic areas; experienced culture shock upon entering an environment that further marginalised him through inherent stereotypes and unconscious biases. Having worked in the industry for two decades, he recalls having to create a “separate persona”, distancing himself from the “islander” identity to be taken seriously, often exaggerating his collaborative and cohesive traits to counter assumptions. He believes that the low numbers of Pasifika in IT is partly due to the lack of opportunities that provide relevant exposure to the community.

Participant 3 emphasised the importance of exposure to the industry because little is understood about the different genres IT is associated with. Participant 3 lists careers that might interest Pasifika applicants such as music, events and creative businesses stating: “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.”: The participant emphasises the importance of exposing young people to industry opportunities early, especially in ways that align with their personal interests. This increases both engagement and awareness that technical skills can apply across various fields.

In addition, Participant 3 highlighted the importance of culturally relevant teaching methods: “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.” There’s a strong call for learning environments that are tailored to students’ cultural contexts and interests. When education is relevant and engaging, it becomes more effective, leading to deeper interest in the industry.

Participant 3 also stressed the importance of mentorship: “ 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.” Having a Pasifika mentor would have provided the cultural safety that was missing for participant 3 early in his career. Participant 3 stresses the need for mentorship, particularly from those who share cultural backgrounds, like Pasifika mentors. Such

relationships can provide both guidance and a sense of belonging, which are often lacking but essential for success and confidence in professional settings.

Participant 5 is a Pacific woman in her early 40s who works as an Enterprise Applications Manager at a solar energy company. With approximately 10 years of experience in the tech sector, she brings valuable insights into the challenges faced by Pasifika communities in this field. One of the central issues raised by Participant 5 is the lack of visibility and representation of Pasifika people in the tech industry. She states, “We don’t have a strong prevalence of Pasifika faces in tech.” This underrepresentation contributes to systemic racism by reinforcing the perception that tech is not a space for Pasifika individuals. To counter this narrative, Participant 5 emphasises the importance of community-led initiatives such as Tech Talanoa. She notes, “These are fantastic, because all of a sudden we see our people doing the things that we hear about.” These initiatives not only provide visibility but also create role models, fostering a sense of belonging and possibility for Pasifika students. Participant 5 advocates for the integration of such culturally grounded programs into inclusive STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education policies. Her perspective offers critical insights into diversity and inclusion, highlighting that representation is not merely symbolic—it is foundational to achieving equity in the tech sector.

Participant 5 also emphasises the importance of cultural intelligence in the tech sector. She argues, “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 can inform inclusive policies by encouraging STEM educators to recognise and value the unique cultural perspectives and skills that Pasifika students bring to the field.

The interview reveals systemic issues in job advertisements and recruitment processes. Participant 5 recounts, “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 highlights the need for inclusive policies that address bias in recruitment and promote more inclusive language and requirements in job postings.

Further, Participant 5 discusses the importance of alternative pathways into the tech sector. She notes, “If you are to do a four to six months technology related qualification, you will repay that within 18 months, and your average salary will start at 50k now.” This suggests that inclusive policies for STEM educators could include promoting and developing shorter, more accessible tech qualifications as alternatives to traditional degree programs.

The interview also touches on the importance of targeting influencers within Pasifika communities. Participant 5 states, “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 could be incorporated into inclusive policies, encouraging STEM educators to engage with the wider Pasifika community, not just students.

This Participant also offers valuable insights into how cultural intelligence, recruitment practices, educational pathways, and community engagement can inform inclusive policies in the tech sector, especially for Pasifika communities.

- 1. Cultural Intelligence as a Financial and Strategic Asset:**
Participant 5 highlights that Pasifika individuals possess cultural intelligence—an often overlooked asset that combines emotional and intellectual strengths. By framing cultural intelligence as a financial benefit, she argues for its strategic value in the tech industry. This insight urges STEM educators and policymakers to view cultural perspectives not as deficits to be “overcome” but as strengths that can drive innovation and productivity.
- 2. Bias in Recruitment and Job Advertisements:**
The critique of “whitewashed” job ads underscores how systemic bias can alienate Pasifika candidates. Overly prescriptive requirements (e.g., years of experience, specific certifications) may exclude those with non-traditional or alternative qualifications. This suggests a need for inclusive recruitment policies that use accessible language and flexible criteria, allowing a broader, more diverse pool of applicants to engage with opportunities in tech.
- 3. Value of Alternative Educational Pathways:**
By emphasising the viability of short-term tech qualifications, Participant 5 challenges the dominance of traditional four-year degrees. Highlighting their economic return and accessibility, she advocates for these pathways as critical levers for inclusion. Inclusive STEM education policies could support the development and promotion of these programs to lower entry barriers for Pasifika and other underserved groups.
- 4. Community-Centered Engagement:**
The focus on community influencers (e.g., parents, church leaders) recognises the collective nature of decision-making in many Pasifika families. Effective inclusion efforts must extend them.

In conclusion, insights from our Pasifika professionals in IT suggest that effective IT programmes for Pasifika should focus on increasing visibility and representation, valuing cultural intelligence, addressing systemic biases in recruitment, promoting alternative educational pathways, and engaging with the wider Pasifika community. These approaches can help address systemic racism and inform more inclusive policies for STEM educators, ultimately leading to increased Pasifika participation in the tech sector.

5 | Conclusion



“By investing in these targeted actions, we can cultivate a tech ecosystem that not only includes Pasifika voices but is enriched and led by them.” (pg. 23)

This research has provided valuable insights into the experiences of Pasifika people in the technology sector and education, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural values, systemic barriers, and innovative solutions. The study reveals that Pasifika individuals are adept at navigating challenging environments while maintaining their cultural identity, often employing cumulative advantage and polycultural capital to bridge gaps in equity and racial justice.

Key findings demonstrate that:

1. Industry-sponsored micro-credentials provide flexible opportunities for upskilling but often lack clear pathways to postgraduate education.
2. Pasifika-led IT programs effectively address cultural barriers and provide accessible learning platforms through innovative approaches like the ‘Whanau Connect’ initiative.
3. Systemic racism in the tech sector persists, but Pasifika professionals are finding ways to overcome these challenges through cultural intelligence and alternative pathways.

Recommendations

To create a more inclusive and equitable digital education and technology sector in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is essential to recognise and uplift the unique strengths, cultural knowledge, and aspirations of Pasifika communities. The following recommendations, grouped thematically, address systemic inequities, enhancing representation, and fostering culturally grounded educational and professional opportunities. Centered on culturally relevant learning, mentorship, inclusive industry practices, and robust community engagement, these recommendations focus on aligning educational pathways and career development with Pasifika values and lived experiences. By investing in these targeted actions, we can cultivate a tech ecosystem that not only includes Pasifika voices but is enriched and led by them.

Culturally relevant education and learning pathways

- Develop culturally relevant micro-credential programs specifically tailored for Pasifika educators and students, incorporating Pasifika cultural values and contexts.
- Create more flexible and accessible postgraduate study options that align with Pasifika cultural values and accommodate work-life balance.
- Establish robust Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) frameworks to empower Pasifika individuals by formally valuing and translating their unique cultural and technical expertise into recognised qualifications.
- Increase funding and support for Pasifika-led IT programs that address community needs and provide holistic learning experiences for both students and families.

Mentorship, apprenticeships, and career development

- Implement mentorship programs that connect Pasifika professionals in the tech industry with aspiring Pasifika students and early-career professionals.
- Invest in targeted industry apprenticeships and mentorship programs for Pasifika youth to build a diverse tech pipeline and provide equitable career opportunities.

Representation and inclusion

- Advocate for the inclusion of Pasifika providers on the NZ Ministry of Education's accredited list for digital professional learning and development (PLD).
- Develop inclusive recruitment policies and job advertisements that recognise and value Pasifika cultural intelligence and experiences.
- Increase visibility and representation of Pasifika professionals in the tech sector through initiatives like tech Talanoa and other community-focused events.
- Incorporate cultural intelligence training for non-Pasifika professionals working in the tech sector to foster more inclusive work environments.

Community engagement and pathways

- Cultivate dynamic pathways from vocational training and entrepreneurship to inspire Pasifika learners to engage creatively with technology, fostering innovation and economic self-sufficiency beyond traditional employment models.
- Engage with wider Pasifika communities, including influencers such as parents, church leaders, and extended family members, to promote technology education and careers.

Engagement with policy and industry

- Formulate a comprehensive strategy to ensure government digital transformation policies are co-designed with and reflect Pasifika perspectives, fostering inclusive digital futures.
- Invest in and expand initiatives that cultivate Pasifika talent pipelines for tech leadership and governance roles, ensuring diverse voices shape the sector.
- Transition to equity-focused, long-term funding mechanisms to empower and sustain Pasifika-led IT programs, recognising their vital contribution and ensuring their continuity.

Future Projects

- Address and dismantle systemic barriers preventing Pasifika educators from achieving recognition as accredited providers in digital education.
- Develop and implement clear strategies enabling Pasifika IT experts to gain accreditation and actively contribute to curriculum development, in collaboration with organisations like Fibre Fale.
- Champion and advocate for inclusive certification pathways that formally validate Pasifika expertise in digital education, working with institutions such as Fibre Fale and Techtorium

By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive environments for Pasifika people in the technology sector and education, leveraging their unique cultural strengths and addressing systemic barriers to success.

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