

Tertiary education and Pacific: Foundation to leadership and beyond the horizon

Introduction

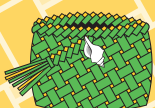
Pacific learners face unique challenges in tertiary education, yet their cultural values and educational approaches offer significant potential for transformative change. This briefing paper explores the current state of tertiary education for Pacific learners, identifies key issues using PIAAC data, and highlights the importance of Pacific values and educational practices.

The Manako programme is provided by Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence (NCTTE), and was formerly known as the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Cultural Capability (ALNACC) programme. The Manako programme continues our partnership with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to enhance educational capability across Aotearoa New Zealand. Embracing our roots and expertise in literacy, numeracy, and both Māori and Pacific cultural capability, the Manako programme expands our commitment to delivering inclusive and effective education, informed by the values and needs of all New Zealanders.

PIAAC is the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, and an initiative of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). The OECD is an international, intergovernmental organisation with 38 Member countries, whose message is “Better policies for better lives”.

Current state and challenges

Pacific learners often experience lower educational outcomes compared to other groups. PIAAC data reveal significant gaps in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills among Pacific adults. These disparities are influenced by socio-economic factors, limited access to resources, and a lack of culturally responsive teaching practices.



Key issues

» Socio-economic barriers:

- » Many Pacific learners come from low-income backgrounds, which affects their access to quality education and support services.

» Cultural disconnect:

- » Traditional educational models often fail to incorporate Pacific values, cultural obligations, and relevant cultural ways of teaching and learning, leading to disengagement and lower retention rates.
- » The priority that Pacific learners and fanau place on cultural obligations often commits them financially, therefore restricting their resources for education.

» Limited leadership opportunities:

- » There is a lack of pathways for Pacific learners to transition from foundational education to leadership roles within the tertiary sector.

Pacific values and educational practices

Pacific education is deeply rooted in values such as alofa (love), vā (relationships) and fonua (land and community). These values emphasis collective wellbeing, respect, and interconnectedness, which are crucial for creating supportive learning environments.

Innovative approaches

» Culturally responsive teaching:

- » Incorporating Pacific values into the curriculum can enhance engagement and learning outcomes. This includes using culturally relevant language, materials, and teaching methods that reflect Pacific worldviews.

» Community involvement:

- » Strengthening ties between educational institutions and Pacific communities can provide better support for learners and ensure that educational practices are aligned with community needs.

» Leadership development:

- » Creating clear pathways for Pacific learners to move into leadership roles can inspire and motivate others, fostering a culture of aspiration and achievement.



Recommendations for tertiary education and policy makers

» Policy reform:

- » Advocate for policies that address socio-economic barriers and promote equity in education.

» Professional development:

- » Provide training for educators on culturally responsive teaching practices and Pacific values.

» Research and evaluation:

- » Conduct ongoing research to evaluate the effectiveness of educational initiatives and make data-driven improvements.

Conclusion

When tertiary education authentically connects with Pacific values and understanding, it holds immense potential for fostering leadership and innovation. By addressing current challenges and embracing Pacific values, we can create a more inclusive and effective education system that benefits all learners.

