Students' Perceptions of higher education in Sāmoa:

Finagalo fa'aalia o alo ma fanau a'oa'oina ile Iunivesetē Aoao o Sāmoa

BY

ROSA FILOI

A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

School of Social and Cultural Studies
Victoria University of Wellington

2020

ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates and analyses Sāmoan student perceptions of higher education in Sāmoa. This work offers an insider's account of Sāmoan education in particular, focussing on current students belonging to the National University of Sāmoa (NUS). A Pasifika and Sociological framework was used in this study, employing Pasifika research methods of *talanoa* and aspects of *Fa'afaletui*. Nineteen NUS students and one student support staff were interviewed for this study. This thesis is not focussed on exploring linear pathways instead it focusses on student resilience in prioritizing their education. Thus, important of this work is to inform the National University of Sāmoa of their students' needs and the challenges they face in order to provide appropriate support that are culturally and socially responsive to a Sāmoan student's worldview.

Table of Contents

AGAGA FA'AFETAI (Acknowledgement)

First of all I'd like to acknowledge God through His Son Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit. It was only by God's grace that this thesis was possible and completed. As you read through this thesis, know that this is a testimony of His faithfulness and love. Many times I wanted to give up, and at one point I did, but He made a way and He gave me the desire and power to push through until the end. He gave me the confidence when I had none, He provided for my every single need, and even brought the people that I needed most to advise, encourage, and help me move along. Fa'afetai Iesu, i lou alofa fa'amaoni ia te a'u le tagata vaivai. Ia aua ne'i ia te a'u, ae ia toe fo'i atu le vi'iga ma le fa'afetai ia te Oe! To God be the glory forever and always.

To my participants, the students who generously offered their time and boldly shared their stories, for without them this study would also have not been possible. To Luagalau Foisagasina Eteuati Shon who's years of expertise at NUS and in supporting students, your voice was important in highlighting the struggles students faced. I hope I was able to honour you all in this work.

Thank you to the NZ Government on granting me the opportunity to study again through the NZ scholarships. Without this funding and scholarship this thesis also would not be possible. I am indebted to the scholarship and your team at Victoria especially with ensuring everything was in place for me to pursue further studies and in turn complete this project for my qualification.

I would like to thank Ryan Stuart, my ISO who constantly checked in with me and developed support plans to ensure I complete this project and fulfil the requirements of the scholarship. Thank you for believe in the potential you saw in me. Thank you also to Tim, Stephanie, Clemmie and Anthony. All your efforts to support me during my time in the scholarship program are very much appreciated.

Thank you to NUS, the Faculty of Arts –Dr Saui'a Louise, Assoc. Prof Tuiloma Susana, Ma'ilo Helen Social Science department, the former VC and current VC in allowing me to go on study leave and the support during my data collection. I hope through this study I will be able to give back to our NUS community and students.

Special mention to my greatest support and learning advisor who helped push me to get writing, Laura Kamau. Thank you so much for never turning me away, especially when I was at my lowest – God knew I needed you to give me the vouch of confidence in owning my voice as an indigenous young woman.

To my family, my late dad Fr Ricky who pushed and encouraged me to "hit the books" and continue to pursue higher education, if only you could see how many words I was able to write for this dissertation. Thank you mum for all your hard work in providing for us, and ensuring I went to school. Thank you for your prayers and reminding me to cry out to God for all my needs. I was given the best educational opportunities because of your love and support. To my papa Sa'u Filoi, your work ethic and integrity as an educator has challenged me to do the same and with this thesis, thank you for being strong in your faith, for God's

healing upon you to see me complete this journey. I can now come home to look after you and mama. And to my mama, thank you for your prayers, for words of encouragement and for always loving me. A special thank you to my sister Tamara and husband Farani who held the fort so I could be away to pursue this degree.

To my brother Satini and family who has been my constant support whilst being in Wellington. Fa'afetai lava Tini mo mea uma ao feagai ai ma a'oa'oga. Thank you uncle Rupi, aunty Luma, aunty Me and uncle Peni for looking out for me here in NZ. Fa'afetai alofa. Thank you also to aunty Quandovita and my Reid family at Wainui for always welcoming me when I need to come over. Special shout out to my sis Quandala and bro Pasi for the timeouts to have a good a laugh and check in with one another.

To my sister Faith, whom I shared this journey with from day one, it's been a great ride of learning and growing and bearing with one another. So grateful to share this journey with you! Thank you for pushing me to finish and for your words of wisdom. God truly spoke through you to tell me what I needed to hear. To my sisters, Losi and Tahere, thank you for your invaluable feedback on my writing and structuring. I appreciate taking time out of your own writing to check on mine.

To my prayer warriors Pualani and Karlina who constantly checked in and prayed with and for me at the different stages of the thesis, I appreciate you both. Thank you for reaching out when God puts me on your hearts. Thank you also to my brother Ano who gave me the necessary hard talks and tough love that pushed me to finish.

Not forgetting my postgrad sisters Alovale, Niusila, Honiara, Ainsley, Uilisese, and Dionne. Thank for the fellowship and journeying together. Your academic journeys and achievements encouraged me at different stages. Thank you sharing life with me, it has enriched me and I have learned so much from you all.

Thank you to Rev Tim and Mel Mackenzie and the St Michael's parish on Upland road for being the faith community I needed in my MA year. You have no idea how much being part of St Mike's meant to me. Your warm welcome and extension of grace has been humbling. Your way of life as a parish has inspired me in so many ways. Thank you for creating the space where I could feel the genuine invitation to come to the table to receive and to fellowship with our Father in heaven.

Thank you to the Chaplaincy team, to John Dennison, who was such an assurance of God's love for me and your team, Sonja, Tim, and Jessie. Ramsey house will always be a special place in my heart.

Special thank you to the Community of the Transfiguration for allowing me to be part of your community life in the most crucial time of my writing; especially to Luca who so graciously let me stay in her room and during the pandemic lockdown. To the Ramsey dwellers a.k.a flatmates, Ruby, Amanda, Etienne, Anna, Shanti and Jordan, thank you for making space for me to dwell with you and for being a great support during this time. Thank you to Cass who always dropped in to check in with us. Thank you for sharing life with me, I have learned so much from you all.

To the Unihall team and family, thank you Tom, Duncan and Maisie, for all the support whilst living at Unihall. Thank you to the RA and Senior Residents team – Louis, Michelle,

Jennifer, Kelland, Keaton, Alex and Connor, it was great working and learning from you all. Not forgetting my flatmates Sarah, Paige, and Anna.

To the Wellington Ohana and the residents of Pasifika housing, thank you for the times we shared meals and had a good laugh.

Special mention of Phil Fountain for your time and advice when I had thesis related questions to bounce off. Thank you for inviting me to your ethics session for your honours class even when I wasn't one of your students. That opportunity was God-ordained as it gave me the confidence and link I needed to complete the ethics process.

To all my postgrad friends I made through the NZAID program and my Sociology program, thank you for your friendship, your warm smiles and brief encounters. Special mention of Sina, Manisha, Htu, Maya, Lopeti, and Zelia whom we started the journey together,

To the FHSS team especially Magan, Sera and Suzanne of the SACS team, thank you so much for your warm smiles and for always being helpful.

And finally thank you to my supervisor Dr Jennifer de Saxe, for agreeing to take me on and for supporting me throughout this thesis. I appreciate all your feedback and efforts to see me through to the end.

With so much love and appreciation, I thank you to anyone I have left out. Pray God will pour His blessings over you all tenfold for the love, prayers, kindness and grace you have all extended to me. To God be the Glory.

I dedicate this thesis to God, to whom all the glory and praise belong, through His Son Jesus Christ. Also to my late dad, Rev. Richard Schwalger who taught me to never stop smiling, my mum Naumati Schwalger who reminds me to cry out to God always for any need, my papa Sa'u Filoi Lilo, who's faith in God has upheld him to see me finish this part of my journey and finally my mama, Topeta Filoi, who challenges me that everyone needs a dose of unconditional love.

GLOSSARY

Samoan and Pasifika terms

‘āiga	nuclear/extended family
alo ma fanau ā’oga	students
Fa’aSāmoa	the embodiment of the Samoan culture – the principles, values and beliefs that influence and control the behaviour and attitudes of Samoans
Iunivesete	university
Iunivesete Aoao o Samoa	National University of Samoa
nofo ā’oga	a student who leaves their immediate family to live with member(s) of an extended family for educational purposes.
Pasifika	a term referring to Pacific island people.

Abbreviations

BGW	–	Brown Girl Woke
CCS	–	Centre for Samoan Studies
ECE	–	Early Childhood Education
FOA	–	Faculty of Arts
FOBE	–	Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship
FOS	–	Faculty of Science
IOT	–	Institute of Technology
IHE	–	Institute of Higher Education
MESC	–	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture
NUS	–	National University of Samoa
PSET	–	Post-School Education and Training
SBS	–	Samoa Bureau of Statistics
SPECA	–	Samoa Primary Education Certificate Assessment
SQA	–	Samoa Qualifications Authority
SSS	–	Student Support Services
TVET	–	Technical and Vocational Education Training
USP	–	University of the South Pacific

List of Tables and Figures

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' perception of higher education plays a significant role in how they view and approach success throughout their academic journeys. For this exploratory qualitative study, 19 Samoan students who were currently attending the National University of Sāmoa (NUS), and one support staff, were interviewed to learn more about their experiences of higher education, capturing their perceptions of the institution. The main purpose of this research was to hear their voices around studying in an institution of higher learning in Samoa, so that appropriate support could be identified for them.

This thesis begins with the ambitions of the researcher as to why I chose to study this topic. It will then locate where the study fits in the discipline of Sociology. Next is a brief overview of the scene of where the study takes place in Samoa. This is followed by an overview of the Education system in Sāmoa, to locate where higher education sits, and the pathway that leads to entering NUS. The aims of the thesis will be outlined as well the research question(s) the thesis aims to answer. This chapter ends with the layout of the chapters that make up the rest of the thesis.

1.1 Sociology of higher education

It is important to locate this study within the discipline of Sociology and it's relation to higher education. The Sociology of Higher Education can be traced back to the works of Clark (1973; 2007) who pointed to two major areas of inquiry: the study of educational inequality beyond the secondary level and the social-psychological effects of college on students (Gumport, 2007). In subsequent years, lines of inquiry expanded to include two additional sub-fields: the profession of higher education and the occupations within it, and organizational theory from both single site and comparative perspectives (Lesley, 2016). It has expanded to include four emerging threads of investigation: "higher education as an institution, sociological studies of academic departments, the sociology of diversity, and sociological frameworks for higher education" (Gumport, 2007 as cited in Lesley, 2016, p.29).

Societal conditions spurred interest in the sociology of higher education (Clark 1973; 2007). This is more evident today as more questions arise within the institution as it continues to

progress and respond to societal needs. An approach advocated by Howard Becker and others in the symbolic interaction school of thought, is to see higher education through the definitions presented by students and other subordinate actors (Clark, 1973; 2007). This study focusses on the perceptions of the students in Sāmoa on higher education.

1.2 Why this topic

My interest in this topic came as a result of my participation and involvement in the institution of higher education: initially as a foundation student, undergoing university preparatory year at NUS, and then as an undergraduate at the Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), and later returning to NUS as a teaching staff member and finally returning to VUW to undertake post-graduate study. During my time as a student, I have been privileged to be given immense support at the institution of higher learning which has helped me navigate my way through higher education especially during my time at VUW. As a teaching staff at NUS, I want the same experience to be available for the students of NUS.

The Sāmoa Education Sector Plan (ESP), 2013 – 2018 noted an increase of students entering some form of Post-Secondary Education Training (PSET) in the last decade (MESC, 2013). NUS is the largest government PSET provider in Samoa, usually rounding up 75% of PSET enrolments (MESC, 2013). From 2003 to 2011, enrolment growth has been approximately 100% (from 1,423 to 2,823 students). In 2011, there were 3,022 students enrolled at NUS, including the Apprenticeship Scheme (MESC, 2013). With enrolments expanding since its establishment, NUS now have a roll of more than 3,000 students (NUS, 2020). The transition rate from Year 13 to higher education saw an increase over the years where in 2011 it rose from 57% in 2006 to 90% (MESC, 2013). Interestingly the higher transition rates from high school education to NUS have been driven by a growth in Government of Sāmoa scholarships. The institution of higher learning has seen a considerable growth not only in enrolments, but also in staffing, courses offered, and physical infrastructure (MESC, 2013).

Critical issues that are faced by PSET providers including NUS comprise of the following: student drop-out and the impact of student fees as a barrier to access. Constraints include inadequate knowledge and skills of many PSET lecturers and trainers and lack of budget to support programmes adequately. In 2011, 32.9% of the 152 permanent lecturers and trainers at NUS held a higher education qualification of either a master's or PhD degree. Learning resource materials and equipment, appropriate ICT support and access to library facilities and

resources are all key ingredients of PSET quality, although funding is the main constraint for a PSET provider. Without the necessary funding on an ongoing basis, it is extremely difficult to keep equipment up to date (MESC, 2013).

To date, the constraints affecting young people from all backgrounds enrolling and completing PSET programmes are not yet fully understood and documented. Although pathways and opportunities are available from secondary to PSET, the main barrier is the constraints with tuition fees. Further constraints worth noting that affect young people's participation include the following: fee levels that preclude students from poorer families; family and student limits on mobility; perceived relevance of programmes and associated weakened industry linkages; perceived low value of learning through non-formal education; Insufficient numbers of qualified teachers and trainers at all levels, restricting what programme can be offered; and limited learning pathways from secondary to PSET, and within PSET (MESC, 2013).

This study does not set out to address all issues raised by the ESP report; however the number of students in NUS is increasing. Thus, it is the hope that some of the findings of this study can offer insights to addressing the needs of the Sāmoan students at NUS. It must be noted that the latest ESP 2019 - 2024 was recently launched at the final stages of this thesis, and unfortunately a copy could not be obtained for more up to date information.

1.3 Background

It is important that the setting and context of where this study takes place is laid out. The following is a brief overview of Sāmoa to give context about the participants of this study who are Sāmoan students at the NUS and one student support staff.

Sāmoa

The independent state of Sāmoa, formerly known as Western Sāmoa, has as its motto *"E Fa'avae i le Atua Sāmoa"* which translates to *"Sāmoa is founded on God"*. It is a Christian nation, that is situated at the top of a small chain of submarine mountains formed by volcanic action millions of years ago (Meleisea et al, 1987). It lies between latitudes 130 and 150

south of the equator and between the longitudes 1680 and 1730 west. The Sāmoa group is located 2,600 miles southeast of Hawaii, 1,800 miles from New Zealand and 2,700 miles from Australia (SBS, 2016). Its nearest neighbour is American Sāmoa that is located at about 80 miles away (SBS, 2016). With a population of 198,012 persons (Wold Population Review, 2020), it sits on a land area of 2,830 square kilometres, comprising the two main islands of Upolu and Savai'i and eight very small islands: Apolima, Manono, Fanuatapu, Namu'a, Nu'utele, Nu'ulua and Nu'usafe'e (SBS, 2016; MESC, 2013; Malama et al, 1987). Refer to Figure 1 for map of Sāmoa.

Demographic

About 76% of the population lives in Upolu, with 20% in the urban area of the capital city, Apia. A high number of people move and stay in the middle part of Upolu Island for access to education services, communication, transportation, commercial activities, new land and employment opportunities (SBS, 2016). Sāmoa has the largest group of full-blooded Polynesian people when compared to its Polynesian members like Tonga, Cook Island, American Sāmoa, Tuvalu and Niue (SBS, 2016). 92.6% of the population are Sāmoans while 7% are Euronesians, or people with mixed European and Polynesian ancestors. About 0.4% of the population is Europeans. 75% of the population lives on the main island of Upolu.

Christianity

Sāmoa is a Christian nation as affirmed in its amended Constitution which was passed with the Constitution Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2016 in May, 2017 (Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, 2017). Currently, Christianity is referenced in the preamble to the Constitution, which states:

> *IN THE HOLY NAME OF GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, THE EVER LOVING WHEREAS sovereignty over the Universe belongs to the Omnipresent God alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Samoa within the limits prescribed by God's commandments is a sacred heritage WHEREAS the Leaders of Sāmoa have declared that Sāmoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Sāmoan custom and tradition (Constitution of the Independent State of Sāmoa, Preamble as cited in* http://www.palemene.ws/new/wp-content/uploads/Document/2016-Constitution-of-Samoa-Eng.pdf

Religious affiliation of the country are made up of 32% Christian Congregational Church of Samoa, 22% Methodist, 19% Roman Catholic, 15% Mormon, 4% Seventh-Day Adventist, 1.7% Worship Centre, 5.5% other Christian, 0.7% other, and 0.1% none (World Population Review, 2020). "It is a middle-income country with a per capital GDP of SAT $8,2992 in 2011, a population annual growth rate 0.8% and a Human Development Index of 0.688, placing Samoa 99th out of 187 countries, in the medium human development group" (MESC, 2013). As Sāmoa adopted Christianity it also adopted Christian values which are evident in the Sāmoan society and amongst its people today. These Christian values often govern everyday life, where prayer and being part of a faith community is a norm.

Fa'aSāmoa

Sāmoa is proud of its *Fa'aSāmoa*. It is the way of life for the people of Samoa or of Samoan descent (Matautia, 2016). It is how we walk, talk, and eat every day; it is present in formal occasions as well, completed with utmost respect (Matautia, 2016). The aiga (family) and the nu'u (village) are at the centre of the social structure in the *Fa'aSāmoa* (Matautia, 2016). This is the total make-up of the Sāmoan culture, which comprises visible and invisible characteristics and in turn forms the basis of principles, values and beliefs that influence and control the behaviour and attitudes of Samoans. *Fa'aSāmoa* is the "umbilical chord that attaches Sāmoan's to their culture" (Mulitalo-Lauta, 2000: 15). These values include *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *tautua* (service).

Social Structure

A hierarchical social structure and the principles of *Fa'aSāmoa* are organized around the *aiga* (family), and the nu'u (village) and the authority of matai (high chief) and fono (meeting) still exists today (O'Regan, 2006). At the centre is the *aiga* and *nu'u*. Each *aiga* is represented within the nu'u by a matai who is responsible for the family and the land. Decisions relating to the *nu'u* are made by the *matai* who meet regularly to debate issues (O'Regan, 2006). Traditionally, matai could be inherited despite gender, although male leadership was a prevalent norm. Anyone however could earn a matai title through service to the *aiga* and/or the *nu'u* (O'Regan, 2006). In the *nu'u* are the groupings that ensured everyone is accounted for from children until adulthood. These groups are made up of the *aualuma* (daughters of the

village), *faletua ma tausi* (wives of the matai), the *aumaga* (untitled men) and *tamaiti* (children). Roles, duties and obligations guide the relationships between these groups (Afamasaga, Moli & Kruse-Vaai, 2005). Consequently, everyone should know their place within the social structure which impacts on service and respect which is offered to those of higher status.

To further locate where NUS sits and the pathway to get there, an outline of the education system of Sāmoa will now be looked at. This will help give further context, for when the findings are presented and the discussion that will come in the chapters to follow.

1.4 Education in Samoa

Formal education was brought by the missionaries through the Sunday Schools and later established what was called *a'oga faife'au* which translates to *Pastor's school*. The *a'oga faife'au* focused on reading, writing and numeracy with basic knowledge of the world and the bible (O'Regan, 2006). Prior to formal education in Sāmoa, schooling in its earliest form would have involved the parents and the aiga. Based on oral tradition whereby knowledge was passed down through the generations by word of mouth through myths, legends, proverbs and song (Ma'ia'i, 1957, as cited in O'Regan, 2006).

Today, Education in Sāmoa comprises of early childhood education (ECE); government and non-government primary and secondary schools; and PSET providers whereby NUS is the largest (MESC, 2013). Policy, planning and regulation bodies comprise of MESC for schools and ECE, and the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) for PSET (MESC, 2013).

The education system in Sāmoa is structured so that one enters through pre-school, then moves on to primary school, followed by secondary school and/or college with the hope to continue to tertiary level. Government is the major provider of primary and secondary schools and/or college. Non-government education providers include church and missionary schools as well as a few private schools, which focus on ECE, primary and secondary/college level. Interestingly, this includes some ECE centres which are owned and run by pastor' wives, some by schoolboards of the local community and others are privately owned (MESC, 2013).

Primary education is compulsory from years 1 to 8 for children between the ages of 5 and 14 in accordance with the Education Act 2009. Sāmoa is dedicated to meeting its commitment to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal completion of primary education (MESC, 2013). Year 8 students sit the Sāmoa Primary Education Certificate Assessment (SPECA) before transitioning to secondary and/or college. At tertiary level or PSET, government and non-government both provide avenues which offer study opportunities in higher learning, technical and vocational education training (TVET) and apprenticeship. There are only two institutions of higher education in Sāmoa, which are NUS and the University of the South Pacific (USP).

The pathway through to higher education is to sit national examinations which are set out by MESC. In secondary school and/or college, year 12 students sit the Sāmoa Secondary Certificate (SSC) examination which determines their progress to year 13. At year 13 they would then sit the Sāmoa Secondary Leaver's Certificate (SSLC) which determines their entry into NUS or USP. Each institution would have their set requirements and criteria for admission. Generally students who choose to enrol into NUS, their main aim is to attain the grades from the SSLC required to be admitted to the *Foundation Program* previously known at the University Preparatory Year (UPY). Those who do not get admitted are offered alternative programs with the TVET options within NUS.

The Foundation Program delivered by NUS is an intense but crucial steppingstone before undertaking undergraduate studies at any university. The program comprises of a foundation certificate in Arts, Commerce, Science, Education, Nursing, and General Studies. This one-year functions as a transition between high school and undergraduate studies by introducing students to the learning environment and expectations of higher learning. Students, who leave Sāmoa on scholarship after their Foundation year, are often well prepared to transition into university study overseas. Scholarships are the main attraction of the Foundation Program with opportunities to study in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and locally at NUS. These scholarships which are "rewards" of this type of system, is competitive and merit based. Upon completion of the Foundation year, students can then continue on to further studies either at NUS or elsewhere. The diagram below illustrates the pathway to higher education in the education system of Sāmoa.

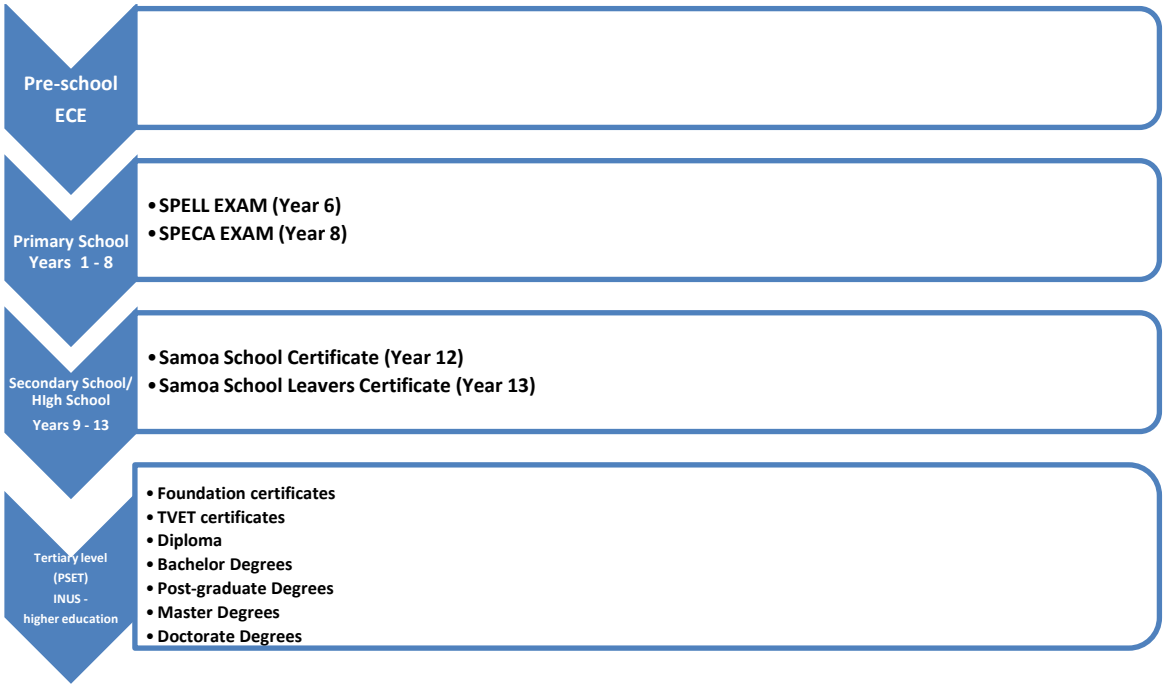

Fig 1. Pathway to higher education in Sāmoa

The National University of Samoa

Established in 1984 and by the Act of Parliament in 2006, the NUS is

> *"to provide a centre of excellence in the study of Sāmoa, the Sāmoan language and culture and tertiary level education that is relevant to the development of the economy and people of Sāmoa" (MESC, 2013).*

From its humble beginnings, NUS started out with the UPY program, now commonly known as the Foundation program. Today, NUS is can boast of its six Faculties: Faculty of Arts (FOA), Faculty of Business Entrepreneurship (FOBE), Faculty of Education (FOE), Faculty of Health Science (FOHS), Faculty of Science (FOS), and Faculty of Technical Education (FOTE); and the Centre for Sāmoan Studies and the Oloamanu Centre for Professional development (NUS, 2020). An increase in enrolments over the years has seen more than 2,000 students enrolled each year (NUS, 2019). NUS offer programs for qualifications at certificate, diploma, bachelors, post-graduate, masters and in the last three years, doctoral level.

According to NUS's strategic plan 2017 – 2021, the university aims to produce a "vibrant generation of graduates who are focused on issues that shape and contribute to Sāmoa's development" by 2021 (NUS Strategic Plan, 2017). The Plan urges the need to recognize

> "*that we are not defined by campus boundaries, but rather, by a tradition of active interaction and close engagement with communities and public issues whether these be social or economic." (NUS Strategic Plan, 2017).*

Acknowledging limitations that the institution faces with regards mainly to resources, infrastructure and funding, the emphasis is on what the university can draw on. In this case is community. This resonates with Hau'ofa's (1994) encouragement to fellow Pasifika people that "we should not be defined by the smallness of our islands but in the greatness of our oceans. We are the sea, we are the ocean. Oceania is us." And in this spirit, there is a call to be resilient despite constraints, as Sāmoan people do, which is something that will be argued within this study. The concept of resilience will be revisited in chapters to follow.

The university also aims to break down silos to allow both academics and professional staff to collaborate to improve the student experience with a focus on fundamental principles that value: "leadership, improvement, learning, expectations, relationships and alignments" (NUS Stategic Plan, 2017). This is a call for staff to work together to ensure the importance of cultivating a positive student experience for NUS students.

1.5 Purpose of thesis/ Purpose of study

At the heart of this thesis, is the student and for their voice to be heard. The aim of this study is to consider the perspectives of NUS students of higher education. This is based on what the students themselves identify as to what helps and hinders their educational journeys, as they navigate an institution of higher learning.

My hope is that the findings in this study could make further recommendations that could aid in achieving the aims in the NUS Strategic Plane as well as address some of the concerns raised in the Education sector plan.

Research Question

The main question posed in this thesis is: What are the perceptions of Sāmoan students of higher education in Sāmoa?

The key research questions for this research are outlined below:

What are the understandings and meanings of higher education?

How can I capture the voice of the Sāmoan student and their experience in higher education?

What helps and what hinders one's educational journey in higher education.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter one: Introduction

In this chapter, the aim and the purpose of the study are stated. Insight on the number of student enrolling in a PSET provider is increasing with NUS having the largest share – therefore this study is important. The background information on Sāmoa is laid out giving context of where the study takes place and of its people who are guided by the *Fa'aSāmoa* and Christian values. An overview of the education system is also laid out describing the pathways it offers, and the roadmap to higher education locating where NUS sits. The focus on students is emphasised from the NUS Strategic Plan which this aims to give insight. Finally the aims and objectives are stated.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A review of selected studies with regards to Sāmoan students and higher education was undertaken. The review begins with looking at studies pertaining to Pasefika students in higher education where it was mainly based in Aotearoa New Zealand. It then moves to look at studies conducted on Sāmoan students in higher education and found most were also conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand. The very few studies that were conducted on Sāmoan students in Sāmoa are then presented and commented on. Themes that are drawn from these studies are then identified and summarised as a possible forecast of what might be expected in the findings of this study. Finally, identifying the gap(s) that this study may be able to offer insight and contribute to.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter I illustrate the research journey, from its design phase to its implementation. It will highlight the twists and turns that were necessary for me, as a novice researcher still in the scaffolding stages of doing research. The framework will be explained and the methodology unpacked pointing to the significance of indigenous research methods interwoven with western and Sociological theories. I also highlight Pasifika researchers who have been bold to break grounds with their indigenous approaches and tell of their journeys as I try to find my way through my own. Some key points that I found helpful when approaching students and young people in research will be noted. And finally, the limitations that are inevitable as research practice often deviates from the research plan. The chapter ends with a brief overview of thematic analysis.

Chapter Four: Section 1: Sāmoan students' perspectives

This chapter summarises the responses from the students in relation to their own experiences based on their perceptions of higher education[1] and the meanings that they associated it with both as an institution, as well as a concept. In doing so, students were asked about their first impressions about the concept of higher education, their expectations if pursued and what they liked and disliked about being at university. This chapter highlights the importance of transitioning from high school or college to university, the impact of scholarships and the excitement and disappointment that was expressed from their expectations of higher education. The chapter will be organized around four main sub-themes: meanings of higher education, transitioning, impact of scholarships and experiences.

Chapter Five: Section 2: Sāmoan student support mechanisms.

This chapter explored the different types of support that were identified by the students both within NUS as an institution as well as outside of the NUS. The chapter is organized into two sub-themes: institutional support and social support which will be further unpacked to illustrate the experiences of the students. The students identified the role of academic staff, the student support services unit, and their peer sand student lead initiatives which offered them the institutional support at NUS. Furthermore, they also identified their family and their faith communities which made up their social support system.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This chapter attempts to deliberate the findings presented in chapter 4 and 5 with reference to the literature. It is organized accordingly with the following key themes that impacted on the students' perceptions of higher education: *transitioning, scholarships, institutional and personal factors, lack of resources and the role of the educator*. A key learning is the *resilience* students expressed in coping with the challenges they faced in higher education. The chapter concludes with the implications and limitations

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Recommendation

This chapter will summarize the whole study with reflections on the research journey.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review intended to uncover studies that were particular to Sāmoan students in higher education. Thus, studies exploring Pasifika students in higher education were drawn upon. These studies included Sāmoan students' perceptions and experiences. These included studies conducted in New Zealand such as Anae et al (2002), Matautia (2016), Nakhid (2006), Davidson-Toumu'a et al (2009), Nakhid et al (2007) and Mila-Schaaf et al (2010). Studies in Australia include Cuthill & Scull (2011) and in Hawaii, Uehara et al (2017). Studies that focussed primarily on Sāmoan students in higher education in the US, Aotearoa NZ and in Sāmoa are also reviewed.

Determining the term *Pasifika*

When searching for studies on Sāmoan students, most were based on *Pasifika* students which included Samoan students in Aotearoa NZ. Literature based on Aotearoa New Zealand, uses the term *Pasifika* which refers to people who have migrated from Pacific Island nations or who identify with Pacific Island nations because of ancestry or heritage, who are living in Aotearoa New Zealand (Siope, 2011). The term as noted by Nakhid (2006) is used collectively to refer to the people or students from the islands of the Pacific who have identified as coming from, or having their ethnicity originate from there. This term is also used in NZ statistics and census reports (Nakhid, 2006). For the purposes of this study the term *Pasifika* will be used to align with work that is prevalent in the literature. This is also in the spirit of strengthening research that is conducted by Pasifika people for Pasifika people. This study intends to make a contribution, however small, to the literature of Pasifika students in higher education.

2.1 Studies of Pasifika students in higher education

Pasifika success in higher education has become a prevalent theme especially in New Zealand (Anae et al, 2002; Siope 2011; Theodore et al, 2018), as well as Australia Cuthill & Scull (2011) and the US (Uehara et al (2017). It is the manifestation of what Siope (2011) calls the migrant dream. This refers to the hopes of the Pasifika migrants who have come to Aotearoa New Zealand, for a better life for themselves, with education the ticket to achieving

their “milk and honey” dreams. However, for these migrant dreamers, their children the so-called fat of the Promised land has soured, with Pasifika and Māori children sharing the same negative statistics of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, academic underachievement and poverty (Siope, 2011, p.11). The concept of the migrant dream is used as a metaphor for Pasifika people who migrate for the hope and promise of a good future. These ties back to a biblical reference of when the Israelites were in search of the Promised Land. The reference of Pasifika children being the fat of the land which according to Siope (2011) do not reflect the desired outcome of the migrant dream. This is specifically in the case of academic underachievement. Therefore various studies have focussed on Pasifika students in tertiary and higher education. Such studies have focused on participation, motivation, challenges and support for students (Anae et al, 2002) as well as factors that helped and hindered qualification completion (Theodore et al, 2018).

Pasifika students in higher education in Aotearoa NZ

Theodore et al (2018) identified factors that helped and hindered qualification completion amongst Pasifika graduates in New Zealand. This included external, institutional, and student personal factors which helped as well as hindered completion. External factors such as multiple obligations to family, employment, church and study often hindered completion. However this also served as a motivation. With the help of approachable, respectful and professional staff whom students could relate to offered institutional help; however this was a rare experience for most Pacific students. The presence of Pacific cultural spaces on campus, was a definite help, offering safe spaces for Pacific students to connect, and learn and build communities and connections with the wider university. Peer support was a major help for student completion. Personal factors that hinder students from speaking up about their studies included shyness and not asking for help. This is a major concern for Pacific learners as is noted throughout the literature. Theodore et al (2018) conclude that universities need to understand the realities that Pacific students face, and the factors that contribute to their success in higher education. This will allow for more effective cultural responsiveness from institutions for Pasifika students.

In their study of the experiences of Pasifika students at the Victoria University of Wellington, Davidson-Toumu’a & Dunbar (2009) echo similar issues. At the core of this study was the

role of the learning advisor in providing effective learning support for Pacific tertiary students. The focus was on predominantly Pacific Nation born Pasifika students (international students). Concerns were raised from the learning advisors that these students faced disruptions rooted in socio-religious-cultural and economic aspects as well as family pressures. It was a common expectation for Pacific students to contribute financially to their families. For mature students, studying overseas affects the immediate family and financial obligations. For younger students, meeting the expectations of their parents was important. This could mean the choice of courses or program to pursue at university (Anae et al, 2002).

The concept of time was unpacked from the international students' perspectives of how Western concepts of time caused them to feel anxious and burdened. The perceptions of time from a Western perspective often override that of another. Language barrier differed amongst some of these students. Shyness, unassertiveness and/or lacking in self-confidence were used to describe these students. However, the authors disputed this because these very same students were not shy at all. This was a misreading of Pacific behaviour from a Western contextual paradigm (Davidson-Toumu'a & Dunbar 2009). The study recommends for more strategic, research-led innovations and redefining the roles of support staff in tertiary education institutions. Learning advisors must look beyond their traditional roles, beyond their institution to effectively support Pasifika students.

Siope (2011) emphasises that teachers who were secure in their cultural identity were willing to encourage their students, because they taught from the heart. She talks about the migrant dream of Pacific islanders to see their children excel in education. Reflecting on her own schooling experiences as well as those of students from Auckland secondary schools, she highlights the challenges and opportunities Pasifika students face. The role of the teacher was the key to seeing Pacific migrant dream come true.

Mila-Schaaf & Robinson (2010) explore the relationship between culture and educational achievement amongst second generation or NZ born Pacific migrants in NZ. They use Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital taking a positive deviance approach. Unlike other studies of Pasifika students whereby the focus was on barriers that affected student's achievements and on failure; this study focussed on those who were successful to identify

factors associated with existing high performance. Put simply, to learn from achievement and success. Mila- Schaaf & Robinson (2010) found the importance of having access to Pacific cultural capital: speaking Pacific languages, feeling accepted by other Pacific peoples, and others, taking pride in Pacific identities and continuing to place importance on Pacific values. These were all associated with better educational outcomes.

Neglect of Pacific cultural capital – allowing Pacific knowledge traditions to deteriorate and failing to sustain Pacific languages and cultural values – appeared to be associated with disadvantageous educational outcomes. Motivation came from the migrant dream and the sacrifice of parents. For successful NZ-born Pacific professionals, they can negotiate dominant social spaces and in turn develop Polycultural capital. This would allow them cross cultural interrelationships, flexibility and fluidity across social spaces. Authors argue that there is value in nominating a strength-based and positive deviance approach to second generation or NZ-born Pacific scholarship and Pacific education research broadly. It offers the opportunity to interrogate key concepts and assumptions within our frameworks and focus (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson 2010).

Pasifika students in higher education in Australia and Hawaii

Similar findings are echoed in studies based in Australia and Hawaii although they bring up different themes. Cuthill & Scull (2011) note the issue of equitable access to higher education in Australia. Economic costs of higher education, appropriate support networks, limited family experience or understanding of higher education as well as no aspiration to attend at all were factors identified for the underrepresentation of people from low SES background (which include Pasifika people). The lack of appropriate information about higher education was a challenge for Pasifika communities. Stereotypes about fields that suited Pasifika students, such as sports and music affected the pathways and opportunities. The lack of role models within the community hindered the motivation and aspirations for young Pasifika people to pursue higher education. Parents striving for the migrant dream yet not being able to action this through supporting their children highlights a contradiction with the pursuit for higher education. Unlike the studies in NZ, it seems for Australia, the aspirations of young Pacific islanders to pursue higher education are low. Financial hardship is the main factor, whereby young people are pushed toward looking for a job after high school. Although some

students scored scholarships through sport, when they lost the scholarship due to poor academic performance, they fell back to factory work as the norm (Cuthill & Scull 2011).

In Hawaii, Uehara et al (2017) provides first-hand perspectives of Pacific Island students in higher education. Participants indicated that cultural beliefs and practices had a prevalent impact on how they experience learning in a Western university. As members of traditionally collective communities, time and money management were issues as these are characteristics of an individualistic society. Language barriers meant a reluctance to speak up in class, for fear they would be viewed as unintelligent. The study called on more flexibility in class, offering open spaces where students could participate freely without fear of judgement or ridicule. The teacher and student should be viewed as a collective. Intuitive understanding as opposed to individual understanding was important in viewing the student (Uehara et al 2017). The authors claim that Pacific Island students should be able to reflect on their culture, and how it influences their academic behaviours (Uehera et al 2017). Thus it is important to consider one's island home, its values and beliefs and how it contradicts with Western-based criteria for success as is required in higher education. This allows for a better understanding of the students' background which can offer insights into their learning needs and how better to support them.

Pasifika students in higher education in the Pacific

Raturi & Boultoun-Lewis (2014) captures the voices of beginner lecturers within higher education at various institutions in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). This study aimed to describe the educational experiences shaping the teaching and learning beliefs held by these beginner lecturers. Participants realized and agreed that there was a need to revisit curriculum and contextualise it in order to suit Pacific needs. This study also acknowledged the culture of silence within the Pacific. They believed that independent learning at university should be encouraged and developed. However this was effectively developed through engaging in constructive discussions. Support through peers and supervisors were acknowledged as helpful. The lecturers themselves identified this, pushing for all kinds of interactions in the classroom to be encouraged by the teachers. This included the fear to ask questions, and to do whatever the teacher told them to do. Lecturers and tutors have a key role as an agent of change to transform learning environments. Although Raturi & Boultoun-Lewis (2014) used

beginner lecturers as participants, these participants were students at the same time, in a graduate certificate course. The outcomes of the reflections were favourable to a student-focused approach. This study is important in this review as the voice of the participant is from both a student and teacher perspective.

2.2 Sāmoan students in higher education

Sāmoan students in higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand

In Petelo's (2003) study to listen to the voice of the students, she focused on the experience of students with Sāmoan background within the University of Canterbury and found that the dominant discourses and discursive practices impacted on the students in multiple ways. She notes that the experiences of the students "illustrated the exclusive and isolating effects of power relations, processes of normalisation, regimes of truth and power-knowledge" (Petelo, 2003). In her findings she notes that for the Sāmoan students, expectations placed upon them included their parents wanting their children graduate with the promise of improved employment prospects in the future. Students had to balance their responsibilities to accommodate both family and university activities which was a source of nourishment and support, as well as a frustration or hindrance to their academic achievements. "The attainment of educational qualifications was seen as one way through which financial status of those from lower socio-economic situations could be improved, both for the individual as well as for that of their extended family" (Petelo, 2003, p.161).

In the case of students who were from Sāmoa, they believed that when returning to Sāmoa, they would be in a better position to obtain employment and with a university education, they would be able to compete in the employment market. A degree also meant they would be able to fulfil their obligations in the future to their parents and to the *Fa'aSāmoa*, as having paid employment allows them to meet traditional financial commitments. Attaining a university qualification would also bring enhanced family status or pride. Obligations to the *Fa'aSāmoa* in Petelo's research were experienced slightly differently by the students from Sāmoa and the students who were born and reside in NZ. Students from Sāmoa were on scholarships and thus were disconnected from their families and less expected to contribute to their families.

Challenges of being at university included trying to adapt to an independent learning environment where the English language was a barrier. Often students felt alone and a lack of self-confidence to participate in class and complete assignments. Petelo (2003) identifies

generally accepted traditional Sāmoan cultural traits including: not questioning teachers, respect for elders, little eye contact and lowering oneself in the presence of elders, not interrupting a speaker (amongst others) which contributed to the barriers for Sāmoan students. A student from Sāmoa also noted his lack of confidence to approach lecturers in NZ because of his past experience with teachers in Sāmoa, where students did not talk so openly to their teachers outside the lecture room. Thus Petelo (2003) notes that students' reluctance to approach lecturers and tutors, and/or speak in tutorials was a consequence of being respectful of elders and speaking English as a second language. The Sāmoan students identified academic, social and personal support to be offered by their peers. The Sāmoan student association was acknowledged as a place of belonging where students felt accepted and visible.

Ng Shiu (2011) studied Sāmoan health learners at the University of Auckland where her thesis examined the enablers and barriers to academic success for these students. She draws on ideas of power and difference to demonstrate that culture and identity are fluid, historically located, and discursively constructed. An exploration of the competing demands of academia and home is also undertaken. She adopts an inductive qualitative methodological approach embedded within *Fa'aSāmoa.* Her findings point to key factors that constrain and enable their learning under the categories of individual agency, family, university, spirituality, and friends. Family support is a central concern where parents and students describe how family support for academia is embedded within *Fa'aSāmoa.* Some participants who had successfully managed the competing demands of academia and Sāmoan cultural obligations are expressed in this study. It also suggests that learning environments that facilitate meaningful engagement and participation enable positive learning outcomes. The results illuminate important teaching implications for educators when engaging with Pacific and other ethnic minority learners. In addition the results aid in formulating recruitment and retention initiatives for Sāmoan and Pacific tertiary health learners (Ng Shiu, 2011).

Similarly Penn (2010) in her thesis asked New Zealand-born Sāmoan students, what is the nature of their aiga (family) and cultural support frameworks (structures), and, further, to what extent and how and why do these students engage with such networks (processes)? The study focused on factors which aid and hinders successful completions for New Zealand-born

Sāmoans. The thesis challenges AUT to adopt policies and procedures which enable culturally responsive educational pedagogies and practices which honour indigenous minorities. The study uncovered that because of the *Fa'aSāmoa* processes, Sāmoan structures, especially family, are paramount in supporting educational success which they engender. The New Zealand-born Samoans were able to retain cultural affiliations so their lifestyle shows deep regard for *Fa'aSāmoa* identity. Through these affiliations, meaningful life metaphors become applied. Penn (2010) concluded that transforming staff so that they understand Pasifika peoples is crucial to growing Pasifika educational success. She advocates for staff development to be planned so that meaningful understandings of Pasifika concepts and frameworks become nurtured which AUT must embrace and action.

Mara (2014) focussed on Sāmoan matured female students raising issues of identity. This study highlighted the negative perceptions received by this group of students when receiving special academic support offered for Pasifika students. This study was conducted in New Zealand. Similarly, Iata (2001) looked at the experiences of a group of Samoan mature students aged 25 and over who had families at Victoria University, NZ. This study offers insight on the impact of tertiary study on the lives of these students and how it influenced their perception of knowledge production. Although these studies were focussed on mature students, family and *Fa'aSāmoa* were both key findings that helped the students in their academic journeys in higher education.

Utumapu-McBride et al (2008) looked at Sāmoan students in higher education comparing the experiences of Sāmoan students at NUS and Unitec (New Zealand). The study had a strong emphasis on the relationship between the students and their lecturers as well as the lack of appropriate resources to support the learning of the NUS students. The main difference between the learning process of the island-born and NZ-born Samoans was the use of the English language. The study identified ways that helped the students' learning were: peer support, family support, academic support, religious support, and support from their lecturer. Access to a Pasifika teacher or someone who genuinely took an interest in them and their wellbeing contributed greatly to successful learning. A comfortable environment was argued to be ensured before students could be comfortable to contribute fully in the classroom. Barriers to learning successfully focussed more on lecturers, regarding their

teaching methods, their personality and commitment to their profession. Other hindrances identified were around students' families, access to resources, language issues and lack of a Pasifika lecturer. For the Unitec students with families, they needed support for childcare thus depended on the support from their families.

Compared to the Unitec students, it was evident, that the NUS students struggled more with the demands of higher education. The major impact on academic success was the socialization within the home. The *Fa'aSāmoa* dictates that authority of the elders must be accepted by the young. This carried into higher education, conflicting with the learning environment thus impacting one's achievement levels. Students are often reluctant to ask questions within the class as is considered rude in the cultural context. As the literature states:

> *"Sāmoan students are disadvantaged by an oral culture that does not meet the literacy demands of a western school (Singh & Dooley, 2001). It also touches on the laid-back attitude, which has synonymously been associated with a culture that does not breed the necessary instinct to succeed in the western system." (Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008: 154).*

Utumapu-McBride et al (2008) urges the education system, on its ability to nurture and help students so they can succeed regardless of the system. Those who did do well had access to good teachers, relevant resources, supportive environment and language was not a barrier. The demands of an academic system are therefore questionable where these are unavailable and thus must be considered.

Sāmoan students in higher education in the US

A study of Sāmoan students in the US, Tsutsumoto (1998) examines the experiences of nine Sāmoan college students attending institutions of higher education in Los Angeles (California) County. This thesis sought students' perspectives on the barriers to higher education barriers to higher education for Sāmoan students; the means by which these students have dealt with or overcome these barriers; and their recommendations for improving the educational access and retention of Sāmoan and other Pacific American students. The study found that challenges to higher education for Sāmoan students were mostly being able to afford the rising cost of higher education while facing the challenge financial to be able to meet the obligations to family and kin. The lack of awareness and the

lack of support networks available which could provide them the necessary information that prepare students and their families on the expectations of higher education. Students relied on their families which was limited. Students criticised the few organizational structures that were available, where they identified the lack of a relevant Pasifika services, a specific homebase, or organization to support and form their own student-run entities. Poor academic achievement and increased involvement in gangs amongst Samoan youth was also another hindrance to accessing higher education. Other barriers faced at higher education were the marginalization of Sāmoan and other Pasifika American students associated with issues around minority groups, racism from faculty or other educational staff, and society in general.

What was helpful for these students were the student-run Pasifika clubs which addressed their needs and helped motivate the few Sāmoan students on campus to maintain their grades and do well. Students also wanted to see courses with Pasifika American experiences included like the ethnic courses available for Asian Americans, African Americans and Native American students. Tsutsumoto (1998) noted the need to increase the representation of Samoan and other Pasifika students in college in order to fulfil teaching roles to develop and teach these kinds of courses. Scholarships helped students ensure tuition, academic assistance, housing, book allowance and access to other services. Most students relied on themselves, their own personal strength and resilience to help reassure their educational success. This was reflected in their ability to endure hardship or a *fa'alavelave* (family obligation) where some would drop out of school for some time to help their families.

Interestingly this study stated that the students did not use family as an excuse for failure. The students understood they will return to complete their studies. Finishing their studies was expected from their families and was a given (Tsutsumoto, 1998). They drew upon the strengths of their parents, their siblings to keep going, to do better, and to achieve academically. The study concludes that Sāmoan students although with little structural support external to their family, maintained their enrolment by staying active with campus student-run Pasifika American clubs, athletics and/or encouragement from parents and family. This study contradicts other studies (Peng, 1978) which concluded that Sāmoan culture is not geared for educational achievement.

Samoan students in higher education in Samoa

Tuia (2018) found that when researching Sāmoan students studying at NUS in the Faculty of Education, incorporated local and cultural contexts for more relevant learning. He found that courses taught in these programs at NUS were filled with western ideas and methods adding on that most the lecturers teaching these courses were educated in New Zealand and Australia. Thus, he makes a point that the relevance of local knowledge and wisdom in education is not highly considered. His study also draws on *talanoa* and *nofo* methodologies as an appropriate method to research Sāmoan participants.

> *"Consequently, the courses in the NUS programs continue to utilise western ideas and methods, with very little context in all courses. This is due to the educational materials that lecturers use for their courses, which are mainly textbooks from western countries. In addition, most of these lecturers were educated in New Zealand and Australia and have given little consideration to the relevance of local knowledge and wisdom in education."*

Tuia argues that the program leans heavily on western theories rather than drawing on local examples, so that learners can connect local social, cultural and educational ideas to global ones. He calls out the impacts of colonialism which affect teacher education and argues for local values and knowledge to be included in addressing the Sāmoan local educational needs. This was reflected in the findings where the desire for courses to be contextualised, and representative of Sāmoan culture, rather than based solely on ideas, theories and examples from other countries; and the use of English language should be relevant for second-language speakers, and should be clearly understood and provide examples for comprehension (Tuia, 2018). Additionally the study showed students struggled with the lecturers mainly in communicating with them in English. The use of big English words and when the lecturer speaks in English was deemed difficult for the students to understand. Tuia's (2018) focus was amongst students in a higher education setting. It looked at Sāmoan local educational needs with a focus on teacher education arguing for the need to include local values and knowledge. The study focussed on students at the National University of Sāmoa, with a specific focus on the Faculty of Education. Tuia (2018) makes a strong case that Western theories of teaching and learning strongly influenced Education in Sāmoa.

Revisiting Utumapu-McBride et al (2008) and Tuia (2108) their studies focused on NUS students from the Faculty of Education. A key finding was the critique of the lecturers which was a prominent voice from the students. The way they related to students, their commitment and competency to teach was important for students to succeed. Other issues raised by students were the lack of resources and unrealistic expectations was evident in the student's responses. Students felt their parents did not understood well the expectations of higher education on its students. For example, the NUS students told of how they were growled if they stayed late at university to finish up work. Even at home, students told of how chores were more important than studying. And for those who did not live with their immediate families, they tried to finish studying early to save the electricity at night. Forces and influences that made it possible for students to study were sponsorships (Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008). Although higher education in Sāmoa opened new learning opportunities and exposure, the students in Sāmoa did not cope well with its setting and structure.

O'Regan (2006) focussed on mature students who were senior educators in Sāmoa studying towards a Masters of Teaching and learning degree long distance. These senior educators were studying from Sāmoa. Through the telling of these stories, O'Regan argues how these participants struggle with the demands of the western institutions and the demands of *Fa'aSāmoa*. Therefore she argues that the cultural values, beliefs and codes of behaviour of Pasifika students must be considered in order to provide meaningful programmes and learning experiences for them (O'Regan, 2006).

2.3 Common themes across studies on Pasifika students and Sāmoan students

It seems the pursuit of and participation in higher education for *Pasifika* students is related to the migrant dream. Many Sāmoans in this context share this dream for a better future for their children. Mila-Schaaf & Robinson (2010) identified the migrant dream and the sacrifice of parents as a motivation for success for students. Higher education was viewed as a western institution, given their *Pasifika* and Sāmoan identity, thus requiring relevant and appropriate support from the institutions that acknowledged their cultural beliefs and practices. Tuia (2018) argues for the case of Sāmoan students, foreign western concepts and content which dominate what is taught in the Sāmoan education system, is alien to the students.

Furthermore I highlight Theodore's et al (2018) suggestion of the external and institutional factors plus the internal and personal factors to encompass what Sāmoan students view as helpful and hindering in their academic journeys. The external and institutional factors include multiple obligations to family, employment, church and study hindered completion (Theodore et al, 2018; Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008; Petelo, 2003). However, these very same factors acted as motivation for some students which helped in their success (O'Regan, 2006, Tsutsumoto, 1998; Penn, 2010). Another major factor is the lack of financial support (Tsutsumoto, 1998) whereby scholarships and/or sponsorships ensured access for students. The lack of relevant resources and an unsupportive environment was also mentioned (Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008). The internal and personal factors include: shyness and fear of being ridiculed; language barriers which were all underlying reasons for not asking for help (Theodore et al, 2018; Cuthill & Scull, 2011; Uehara et al, 2017; Raturi & Boultoun-Lewis, 2014; Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008, Petelo, 2003). This culture of silence contradicts with the predominant oral culture of Pasifika people and specifically the *Fa'aSāmoa* that these students grow up in. Thus the *Fa'aSāmoa* both play an instrumental role in inspiring and motivating students, as well as hindering their participation in higher education. Family was acknowledged as the most important and major support for the students, as well as their peers, *Pasifika* student clubs and *Pasifika* and faith communities.

Finally, the role of the educator resonates throughout the literature. This role is very important to transform learning environments which can address the culture of silence amongst students. The role of the teacher was the key to seeing the migrant dream come true and those who were successful had access to good teachers (Raturi & Boultoun-Lewis, 2014; Tuia 2018; Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008). Educators are valued by students and considered role models. It is both motivating and encouraging to have one of your own as academic staff (Tsutsumoto, 1998). Students found that having *Pasifika* academic staff or staff in general who acknowledged and valued their cultural values and beliefs helped motivate them (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010).

2.4 Challenges of a higher education in a developing country

I remind the reader here that my study is situated within a higher education institution in a developing country. According to a report prepared by The World Bank (2000) half of

today's higher education students live in the developing world. It highlights the importance for countries to educate more of their young people to a higher standard where a degree is deemed a basic qualification for many skilled jobs (The World Bank, 2000). It acknowledges that higher education in developing countries face great strain where they are chronically underfunded, but face escalating demand. Challenges faced also include under qualified Faculty, who lack motivation, and are poorly rewarded. Students therefore would be poorly taught and curricula underdeveloped. Meanwhile developed countries are constantly raising the stakes. Therefore "many developing countries will need to work much harder just to maintain their position, let alone catch up" (The World Bank 2000, p.10).

Similarly as noted earlier in chapter 1, the Education Sector Plan records more students are transitioning from high school to higher education. A higher transition rate was observed from high school education to NUS linked to a growth in Government of Sāmoa scholarship (MESC 2013). However, the constraints point to learning resource material and equipment, appropriate ICT support and access to library facilities and resources are necessary to ensure PSET quality (MESC 2013). There is a lack of budget to support programmes adequately, inadequate knowledge and skills of many lecturers and trainers where in 2011, 32.9% of the 152 permanent lecturers and trainers at NUS held a higher education qualification of either a master's or PhD degree (MESC 2013). The report raised concerns that the constraints affecting young people from all backgrounds who are enrolled in a PSET program, where NUS is the largest, are not fully understood or documented (MESC 2013). It is important to acknowledge the challenges faced by higher education in Sāmoa, which offers an understanding around the perceptions of the students in my study.

2.5 Student voice in higher education

One of the objectives of this study is to capture the voice of the Sāmoan student in higher education in Sāmoa. This will inform their perception of higher education. Student voice is noted as becoming more popular in the literature (Bishop 2018). According to Seale (2010) Student voice is defined as

> *"listening to and valuing the views that students express regarding their learning experiences; communicating student views to people who are in a position to influence change; and treating students as equal partners in the evaluation of*

teaching and learning, thus empowering them to take a more active role in shaping or changing their education" (p.995).

Seale (2010) observes that there has been little research on voice in higher education that unpacks the meaning and effects of key concepts such as participation, or relations between learners and teachers, which are central to how we understand the mediation, listening to and reception of student voice. Seale (2010) argues, that in higher education the student voice literature is silent on the issue of power relationships between teachers and students. As a consequence, little attention is given to issues like equality and empowerment.

McLeod (2011, p. 181) identifies at least four common and overlapping uses of voice in educational discourse:

"voice-as-strategy (to achieve empowerment, transformation, equality); voice as-participation (in learning, in democratic processes); voice-as-right (to be heard, to have a say); and voice-as-difference (to promote inclusion, respect diversity, indicate equity)"

Student voice can frame and support inclusive curriculum projects, learning initiatives catering to diversity and creating spaces for student who are considered non-traditional to have their say, and their experiences shared and hopefully heard (McLeod, 2011). This constitutes a valuable acknowledgement of the students' perspective and experience, a strategy that is in contrast to responding only to teacher or bureaucratically-driven conceptions of learning. "All students have the capacity for voice, to give an account of themselves" (McLeod, 2011, p.183). The desires, the feelings and aspirations of students which motivate them to participate in and leave higher education need further investigations especially for case of the non-traditional students, their experiences and perspectives matter (Funston, 2011 as cited in Mcleod, 2011). However when engaging with student voice, McLeod (2011) advises to avoid further stigmatizing groups who are disadvantaged, in this case non-traditional students. Thus she advocates reframing the problem of student voice as a matter of listening, recognition and engaged dialogue. She poses the question: How are universities listening to student voice/s and how are they are responding – in terms of curriculum, certification, access, support? How can universities act appropriately to make education more inclusive?

Hall (2017) looks at student voice as a tale of two narratives – student voice as democratic and transformational and student voice as 'policy' and strategic initiative. She takes a critical stance to the literature and policy, exploring the current status of student voice and proposing a research focus that has the potential to involve students in a discussion about how their voice is heard and for what purpose (Hall, 2017). She cites Bahou (2011) in her work who points out three types of power which have the potential to influence student-teacher interactions. *Power over* based within hierarchical relationships (such of the student-teacher); *power from within* focussing on how we connect to others and our environment, and the way which this influences as individual's sense of agency; and *power with* which is established when there is a sense of 'shared influence' amongst equals (Bahou, 2011 as cited in Hall, 2017). Hall's (2017) intention in her study is to ask participants to define 'student voice' from their own perspective and to express their views on what this might look like, and how it might be *heard,* given they had a choice.

> *"we need to find a way to view student voice as something which is not only regarded as a 'tool' to improve measurable outcomes but as something that enables learners, individually and collectively, to contribute in a new way; as something that enables them to talk"* (Hall, 2017, p. 189).

Bishop (2018) argued to develop institutional approaches to student voice, which adopt a partnership approach. This radical approach would question roles students, academics and institutional staff can play in higher education. It would assist with problem solving at a local level and has the potential to help build a sense of community and social capital. It would be flexible allowing students and staff to be in charge at different stages and consider the balance of power and how that can be shifted between staff and students. He suggests that students and staff can navigate ways in which they can come together, exploring at what stages and what ways students can be involved. He claims that a partnership approach to enhancement and assurance efforts in learning and teaching can rekindle higher education as site for personal transformation to benefit the wider society countering consumerist and audit-focused approaches (Bishop, 2018).

Way Forward

Although the literature has captured the voice of Sāmoan students and their perceptions of higher education, the voice of students from Sāmoa is very limited. The focus to ask Sāmoan students of their perception of higher education in Sāmoa is not noted. Studies that did focus on Sāmoan students in Sāmoa, and at NUS, were limited to the Faculty of Education. Therefore more NUS student voices need to be heard. The dominant Sāmoan student voices are those outside of Sāmoa. This study will therefore contribute to what O'Regan (2006) states as "a Sāmoan worldview that would identify Sāmoan values and the way in which Sāmoan society creates meaning, structure and constructs reality" (p.25). It will also offer some insight to concerns raised by the Education sector plan report of the constraints affecting young people from all backgrounds enrolled at NUS. Nevertheless, more student voices is necessary for further development in higher education, even from one in a developing country like Sāmoa.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology used in this qualitative study. I explain and engage with Pasifika research methods highlighting their importance. I then attempt to weave these together with western methods, and Sociological theories to develop the framework I use in this study. I explain how I carried out the research, observations and limitations. I conclude this chapter with describing the thematic analysis.

Qualitative Research

Stake (2010) claims that Qualitative research is a holistic, detailed, rounded, contextual methodology. Similarly, Creswell (2012) argues that qualitative research is

> *"best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants through exploration" (p.16).*

As this study is located within the field of Sociology with a focus on students, a qualitative research approach to the study of human social interaction and knowledge production should be strongly advocated. Qualitative research allows the researcher to be empathetic and respectful. Furthermore, researchers can be an instrument, to observe actions and context, often intentionally playing a subjective role in the study, using personal experience in making interpretations (Stake, 2010). It is therefore important to note my position as the researcher in making such interpretation. This will be further discussed in the sections that follow.

The choice to use a qualitative research design and approach for this study are due to the following reasons:

This research utilised an exploratory study to capture a perception of higher education and student support by a specific group, in this case, Sāmoan students and/or youth, through the sharing of their experiences.

To capture the voice of the Sāmoan student, conducting interviews was deemed the best method to collect the data required.

As Stake (2010) points out: observations, interviewing, and examination of artefacts (including documents) are the most common methods of qualitative research. Interviews therefore was the main method of data collection plus a short questionnaire that was required to identify key information about the students. Nineteen students and one student support staff were interviewed using semi structured interviews.

3.1 Indigenous Approaches

As a Pasifika person, I was inspired by the work carried out by Pasifika researchers who strongly advocated to use appropriate research methods when conducting research on Pasifika people (Anae et al, 2002; Lee Hang, 2011; Smith, 2005). A thesis written by Bridget O'Regan (2006) reaffirmed the view held by most indigenous (Pasefika) scholars "that western-based methodologies are inappropriate for researching Pasefika people" (Lee Hang, 2011, p.54). Therefore, indigenous methods were considered for the purposes of this study.

A Samoan methodology?

In the same spirit, as a Sāmoan it was important to consider appropriate ways for me to approach my Sāmoan community and its people – in this case the students at the National University of Sāmoa. I was interested in how other Sāmoan researchers navigated through their research journeys and the methods they used.

Tuafuti (2011) in her search for a pure *Fa'aSāmoa* research methodology found that there was none and was convinced research is multi-dimensional and multi-methodological. This resonates with me, as someone who is also a "product of a colonial reality" as she claims. It is difficult to fully take on a purely indigenous approach that would not be forceful, short-term and tokenistic (Tuafuti, 2011). I also acknowledge that I am still familiarizing myself with qualitative research, and for the purposes of this thesis and my own personal journey, having insights to both indigenous and western research approaches act as a scaffold to my learning. However, it must also be acknowledged that it is a struggle to legitimise Pacific knowledge, beliefs and value systems in research, formal education and the academy (Tuafuti, 2011).

Lee Hang (2011) advised on undertaking research in Sāmoa where he emphasised the importance of language, and recommended that any research involving Sāmoan people, must be translated. This included information sheets, consent forms, and interview questions. The interviews themselves may also be conducted in Sāmoan depending on the participants and their preference. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances and time constraints the translations could not be carried out for the information sheets, consent forms and interview questions. The interviews were conducted bilingually, whereby I, as the researcher translating where necessary. Translations were also carried out when transcribing the interviews.

When conducting the interviews, cultural responsiveness came into play, especially in a Sāmoan context. As Filipo (2004) states,

> *"Patience is very important because there are cultural factors at play…for example, if the researcher is interviewing a participant at the participant's resident, the indirect and long responses could be influenced by a number of factors such as Samoan customs relating to hospitality (that is delaying tactics while awaiting a cup of Samoan cocoa or a meal), efforts to promote relationships (that is, getting to know the researcher better), difficulties with recall (the older the participant, the longer it may take them to recall information), exerting dominance through power – relations (that is, just laying politics), and a reluctance to share esoteric knowledge that the researcher is not privileged to know" (cited in Lee Hang, 2011, p.54)*

Lee Hang (2011) makes a good point regarding cultural protocols, and some of these took place during the interviews. The students in my study were of a much younger group of participants compared to those referred to by Lee Hang (2011). Despite the examples offered by Lee Hang which were more appropriate to an older group of Sāmoans, my study took advice from Tuia's methods which focused on students in Sāmoa.

Tuia (2018) uses the method of *talanoa* and *nofo* when he conducted his study with Sāmoan students in Samoa. *Talanoa* is perceived as a conversation with "deep connotation in the Samoan language in relation to research" (Tuia, 2018, p. 33). *Nofo* is known as sitting in

Sāmoan, and has a significant cultural relationship to *talanoa*, as both represent Sāmoan cultural protocols in doing research in Sāmoan cultural contexts. Tuia (2018) noted that the use of *nofo* allowed the students the freedom to move and talk amongst one another, while at the same time respecting the presence of the researcher. "The incorporation of cultural aspects of *talanoa* and *nofo* in research from the Sāmoan context relies on the people that are involved in the research (Tuia, 2018, p34). For Tuia's (2018) study he permitted the participants to act and move freely and not be subjected to the Samoan cultural protocols because of the researcher's presence .

Thus, as a novice researcher I take encouragement from Tuafiti (2011) that I need to learn how to weave together indigenous and western methods together, although I would like to be bold and lean more towards appropriate Pasefika approaches. The following two approaches were heavily considered for this study.

Talanoa and Fa'afaletui

The *talanoa method* (Vaioleti, 2006) and elements of the *Fa'afaletui* (Tamasese et al, 2006) were drawn upon as Pasifika approaches. The use of Vaioleti's *talanoa* method allowed for more meaningful engagement. It is a personal encounter where people are able "to share their issues, their realities and aspirations, allows more mo'oni (pure, real, authentic) information to be available for Pacific research than data received from other research methods" (Vaioleti, 2006, 21). The term *talanoa* comes from the Tongan language which is said to be made up of two conceptual parts: 'tala' meaning 'to inform, tell, relate and command, as well as to ask or apply' and 'noa' meaning 'of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular purely imaginary or void (Vaioleti, 2006 as cited in Suaalii-Sauni et al, 2014). The *Fa'afaletui* research method is sensitive and responsive to Sāmoan cultural norms. According to Tamasese et al (2005), "it is the critical process of weaving (tui) together all the different expressions of knowledge within various groupings" (p.302). It is a method that values collective discussions. The word *fa'afaletui,* on the other hand, is said to break down into three components parts: 'fa'a' – a causative prefix; 'fale' meaning a house or groups or houses; and 'tui' meaning weaving (Suaalii-Sauni et al, 2014).

Suaalii-Sauni (2014) advised researchers who seek to engage in open dialogue with a Samoan participant or groups of Samoan participants to use the *talanoa* as a method if they seek to gather information, whether serious and not, in any kind of manner (causal or formal). Fa'avae (2018) in his use of *talanoa* offered him an intimate process where he not only gathered data, but more importantly allowed learning of and imparting of knowledge in appropriate and meaningful ways. *Talanoa* was also used by Tuia's (2018) study as noted above. I now turn to the Western way of thinking to draw upon Sociological perspectives.

3.2 Sociological Lens

In informing my Sociological stance for this thesis, I draw upon the following Sociological theories. My intention here is to introduce and briefly outline the theories I have chosen and the purposes they will serve in my analysis for this thesis. I draw upon Functionalism, Credentialism, Reproduction theory, Stratification theory, and Feminist theory.

Functionalist theory

From a functional perspective, society is envisioned as an organic whole and is comprised of systems that are interconnected for the benefit of society (Lesley, 2016). Society is perceived as an organism made up of different parts, each with a function or role to play to ensure the stability of the society. Consequently, these different parts are all interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. Thus constant technological advances demand that skills must be increasingly upgraded where high-skill jobs are favoured (Lesley, 2016). Formal education offers high-skill acquisition which functionalism perceives is required by highly skilled occupations. As a result, the number of years that individuals are required to remain in the formal educational system continues to increase (Lesley 2016). The education system also functions as a filtering system for society where it plays a role of selecting and allocating individuals for future status in society (Parsons 1959 as cited in Lesley 2016). Hence, society is functional in that the positions with the highest level of occupational prestige, income, and power are fulfilled by those with the highest levels of skills. "Whereas others who are deemed to be less able are slotted early into lower educational tracks and eventually less skilled, lower level positions." (Lesley 2016, p. 30). Resulting social inequality is desirable from this theoretical position as some members of society do not aspire to more highly skilled positions, and for those who do, inequality can serve as a motivating force (Lesley 2016).

However, to fully rely on the functionalist view does not serve the purposes of this thesis. As noted by Collins' (1979, 2002) criticism of the functionalist view, who points out that there is little evidence to support the view that 1) the majority of jobs in modern society require more sophisticated knowledge and skills than in previous years and 2) that there is a positive relationship between formal education and productivity (Lesley, 2016).

Credentialism

Therefore looking at Credentialism theory which emerges from conflict theory asks us to consider the role the educational institutions and employer play in shaping the perceptions on educational qualifications. Collins (1979) uses the term 'cultural currency' to describe how education is used to purchase of desirable occupations (cited in Lesley, 2016). "Post-secondary education is perceived by students as a means to enter the power system, and it is the attainment of a credential rather than the acquisition of knowledge that is desired" (Lesley, 2016, p. 31). Consequently, it becomes a rite of passage as argued by Aronowiz and Giroux (1985), a signal that a process of educational socialization has taken place (Lesley, 2016). Collins (1979) argues this process is harmful for the struggle for dominance and prestige in the case of minority groups. More in line with a functionalist argument, Arrow (1973) suggests that higher education can be viewed as acting like a "double filter" for employers, firstly by selecting who enters university, and second by passing or failing them. Higher education is like a screening device sorting individuals of differing abilities (Lesley, 2016). There is a further debate around who wins or loses, whether the employers are getting their money's worth with the promise of more qualified, better for the job. However that is not relevant for this thesis. A last point to note from this perspective is the acknowledgement of new technological advances and the many possibilities information technology offers which challenges the relationships among formal education, skill acquisition and credentialing practices. There is also the ongoing debate regarding general versus specific skills and academic versus vocational education (Lesley, 2016). In this thesis, I find credentialism could be useful in how the students perceived higher education.

Reproduction theory

I now look to Reproduction theory, as it has a special focus on higher education and has been used by various studies on Pasifika students in higher education (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson,

2010). Originally advanced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) provides a rich arsenal of theory that is directly relevant to the field of higher education. "According to reproduction theory, in order to account for practices (action), the series of effects that underlie them can only be accounted for by illuminating them" (Lesley, 2016, p. 34). Bourdieu offers three concepts – capital, habitus, and field – as key to his theoretical formulation.

Capital as defined by Bourdieu (1984) is the set of actually usable resources and powers that exists as in the forms of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Capital can exist in objectified form, such as material properties, or in incorporated form as in cultural capital" (Lesley, 2016, p. 34). Thus cultural capital and social capital are two important concepts worth highlighting for the purpose of my thesis. Cultural capital referring to the culture of the dominant class is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system. Schools reinforce particular types of linguistic competence, authority patterns, and types of curricula (Lesley, 2016).

Social capital on the other hand comprised of social obligations or "connections". The size of the network of connections one has determines the social capital possessed by an individual (Lesley, 2016). Information is transmitted through networks. Thus in higher education, the most valuable is practical or theoretical knowledge of current and future worth of academic qualifications. Informed individuals make wise educational investments like choosing the most rewarding field of study (Lesley, 2016). Bourdieu provides a clear theoretical connection between families and the educational system (Lesley, 2016).

> *Children from privileged social backgrounds acquire cultural resources of the dominant class in the form of habits, good taste, and attitudes within the home environment. Upon entry into the educational system, students who are familiar with the dominant culture are able to receive and decode it Conversely, children who do not possess such experiences are disadvantaged and are less likely than their privileged classmates to be able to convert cultural capital into academic qualifications – specifically higher education credentials – which, according to Bourdieu (1986) are "academically sanctioned" (p. 248) and eventually converted into occupational status (cited in Lesley, 2016, p.35).*

It is worth mentioning the third component which is "habitus" that Bourdieu refers to a system of dispositions. Each individual is confined to one, and only one, position and this position is defined by *" (1) the positions that she or he occupies in the different fields,*

including the field of higher education institutions and (2) the distribution of powers that are active in each field" (Lesley, 2016,p.35).

Stratification theory

I draw on stratification theory to acknowledge ascriptive characteristics, or structural inequalities that exist within higher education. The degree to which individual's educational attainment is independent of ascriptive characteristics. These ascriptive characteristics, or structural inequalities, are identified as socioeconomic status (most commonly parents' education, occupation, and income), gender, ethnicity, and geographic location. Lesley (2016) makes note of studies using stratification theory with the following findings:

> *First, those who enter the post-secondary system historically have come and continue to come from higher socioeconomic origins. Second, women are both "winners" and "losers" in the battle against ascription. That is, enrolment of women in undergraduate programs has now exceeded enrolment of men, but they continue to be underrepresented in certain disciplines (e.g., engineering) and in graduate studies, and women with lower socioeconomic backgrounds are overrepresented in non-university institutions and underrepresented in universities (p. 32).*

Stratification theory therefore is useful to highlight issues around gender, socioeconomic background, and rural/urban residency, and the relationship between city size and region, family background, and ethnoreligious background on educational transition in higher education (Lesley, 2016). This is useful for the purposes of my study. However it has limitations where often it is not possible to determine characteristics of the individual, institutional aspects of the internal organization and processes of educational institutions that affect participation and attainment (Lesley, 2016). Perspectives do not allow for discussion of the processes behind these disparities where there is incomplete measure, correlations between socio-economic status and one's probability to continue on to post-secondary education. Although it is not unusual to conclude that a measure such as socioeconomic status is related to the probability that an individual will continue on to post-secondary education, it remains unclear as to how these correlations come about and hence serves as an incomplete measure (Lesley, 2016). Taking into account these limitations, my purpose of engaging with social stratification theory is simply to identify any inequality faced by the students in this study and whether this can be related to their socio-economic backgrounds.

Feminist theory

My initial thoughts of drawing on feminist theory were related to the studies on giving voice which referred to the early works of feminist theory as inspiration and motivation (McLeod, 2011; Petelo, 2003). The rise of women's history brought into the scene women's experiences and ways of doing, seeing and saying, which in turn raised questions of politics, counter stories and subjugated knowledge as central (Mcleod, 2011). Also the oral history movement of the 1960s, which McLeod (2011) cites Thompson's (1978) work that sought to hear *the voice of the past* through the memories and voices of *ordinary people.* A further discussion of the implication of voice is given in the next section as McLeod (2011) raises concerns of speaking of and for others.

As there is no specific feminist theory on higher education (Lesley, 2016), the principles of feminist theory in general which Chafetz's (2004) definition offers four features (1) gender is a system of inequality between males and females as sex categories by which things feminine are socially and culturally devalued and men enjoy greater access to scarce and valued resources; (2) gender inequality is produced socioculturally and is not immutable; (3) gender inequality is evaluated negatively as unjust, unfair, etc; (4) therefore, feminists should strive to eliminate gender inequality (2004: 965–966). As noted by Lesley (2016) research on women in higher education is mostly conducted from the perspective of gender stratification theory which focuses on gender differences, often along with other variables defining one's social location (e.g., class, race, gender orientation) in educational attainment. Therefore I do not intend to employ feminist theory to look at gender issues per se, as this has been covered by social stratification theory. However by its nature, I assume taking this stance might be contradicted later in this thesis. Meaning, if there are issues of gender that arise, they can both be viewed from social stratification theory and feminist theory.

3.3 Voice in social research

McLeod (2011) makes some interesting and wise observations when addressing voice in social research to guide me in this study. "The authenticity of voice in social research and of the complicated and complicit role of the researcher in rescuing voices and speaking on, for, with or about the identities (mis)represented by different voices" needs to be addressed (McLeod 2011, p.181). Additionally are the power relations in social research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In social research, the attitude to voice tends to take two main directions

according to McLeod (2011). First is the privileging and celebration of voice where "voice is given to, and heard from, the excluded the neglected, the ordinary; prominence is given to the perspectives and experiences (voice as difference) of research participants, commonly with a radical and social change agenda (McLeod, 2011). However, the ethical and epistemological issues around speaking for, or on behalf of others needs to be flagged about which voice is the loudest and the violence of speaking for others (McLeod, 2011).

In cases where privileged people speak for or on behalf of less privileged persons can result in further oppression of the group spoken for (Alcoff, 1991 cited in McLeod, 2011). Also the case of inequalities of power were identified between the researcher and researched (McLeod, 2011). Further warnings around the voice of the participant being lost through the organizing voice of the researcher and writer, in this case me. A question posed is how can I ensure that I do not impose my perspective upon my participants? Can research be conducted that does not turn the subjects of research into the 'objects' of research, and how might attention to voice mitigate or exacerbate these dangers? (McLeod, 2011). Strategies suggested by Richardson (1997) included heightened concern with research flexivity, notions of research as co-constructed and new ways of writing about and representing participant voice (cited in McLeod, 2011).

3.4 A Pasifika and Sociological Framework

Using Pasifika methods as expressed earlier, is my way of ensuring that I am able to address some of the concerns raised in the previous section. My rationale for drawing upon multiple theoretical perspectives is a result of my own experience with Sociology whereby my outlook is one of a holistic approach. It is impossible for me to see things from just one angle and ignore another. Also in the spirit of interconnectedness and interdependence, using multiple theories to inform my sociological lenses can give a better understanding of the perceptions of the students in this study. In weaving together the Pasifika research methods and the Sociological theories I offer a Pasifika and Sociological approach as my framework for this study.

Below is a diagram using a Venn diagram to illustrate how the Pasifika methods, the western methods and my sociological lens are woven together as the framework used for this study. The Venn diagram illustrates how these three components are interconnected, interdependent and interrelated.

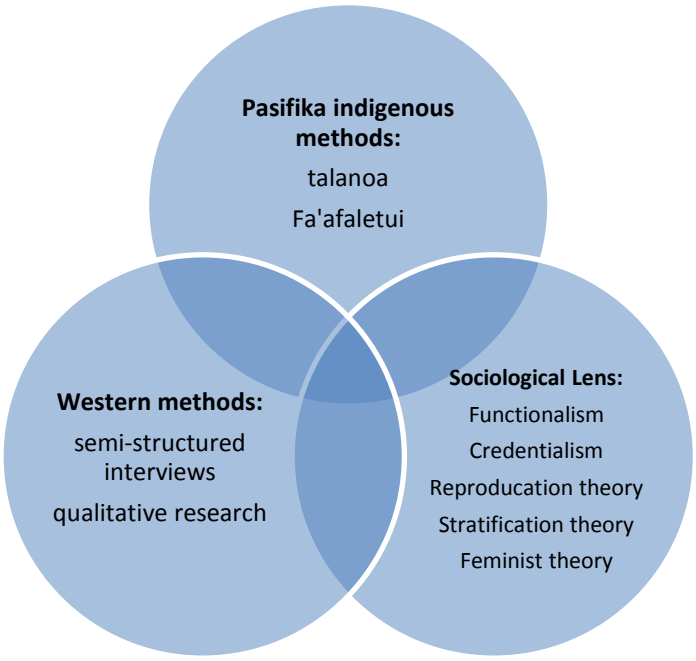

Fig 2. A Pasifika and Sociological Framework

3.5 Research Process

Participants

The participants of the study were made up of nineteen Samoan students who studied at the National University of Sāmoa plus one support staff from the Student Support Services (SSS) at the same institution. The students make up can be summarised in the table that follows. These students were in their 2nd and 3rd year of study at NUS, therefore they were able to refer to their foundation and undergraduate level of study as their experiences. In the flyer that was sent out, students who had at least one year of higher education experience were invited to participate. Although I wanted to ensure a gender balance as I had stated in my ethics application, this was more difficult given the time constraint. Therefore, I was open to whoever was available and wanted to participate. In most of the cases, students would bring their friends along and when they were asked if they wanted to participate they agreed because they wanted to accompany their friends.

As noted earlier, a short questionnaire was completed by the students to identify key information about them which would complement their stories. A brief overview of the students' demographic information is summarized in Table 1 at the end of this chapter. The

purpose of having this information is to give context on the participants that were involved in this study. It is the hope that this information gives background information to the students when their responses are presented in the findings.

Process of Recruitment

In recruiting students, flyers were posted around the university campus as well as given to students to pass around. Flyers were also sent to the respective Deans of the Faculties that were involved in this study to disseminate to their staff to invite students to participate. In my involvement with one of the student lead initiatives, whereby I sat in one of their meetings, I was able to tell them about my study and gave out flyers for those interested.

Students who were interested in the study came by to the Faculty office where contact information was exchanged and later arrangements made for the interviews to take place. Some students made contact via email, whereas others used facebook.

It is very important that I explain here my affiliation with NUS and some of the students. As briefly noted in the introduction of this thesis, I am a lecturer at NUS within the Faculty of Arts. I am currently on study leave in pursuit of a Masters' degree and hence this study. I have been teaching there since 2011. When returning to NUS to apply for ethical approval, I was also blessed to be given office space at the FOA to conduct my data collection. Therefore, when I mentioned earlier that students who were interested in the study were asked to either contact me on the information on the flyer or to come by the office where I would be based.

I explain my affiliation here because some of the students were once students in the foundation courses I taught from 2015 – 2017. Therefore my status as an NUS lecturer is important to acknowledge and how this would have affected the way the students responded to the invitation to participate as well as their responses during the interviews. Students were given a gift as thanks for their time and for sharing their stories. Initially in my research flyer, I had noted money in return for their time as I had noted in my ethics application, however I opted instead to give them phone credit and flash drives which I felt would be more useful for their educational journeys. Most of the students did not expect any gifts in return, and were

surprised when presented with the gifts, expressing their genuine desire to share their stories. This is also in line with the reciprocal nature of Pasifika methods whereby there must be a reciprocal process of giving back to the participants and community (O'Regan, 2006). I also intend to share the findings of this research with the participants and with NUS.

Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations such as the informed consent of the participant, confidentiality and anonymity were considered for this research. Consent forms were produced and signed by participants. Verbal consent was also given during interviews. Participants were made aware that all information shared in the interview would be kept confidential and in this write up of the study they are referred to with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Interview Guide

Accordingly interview questions comprised of five to ten questions. Students were primarily asked to introduce themselves and share about their educational journey leading up to attending university. The questions were derived from similar studies noted in the literature review. I decided on the questions based on previous studies on student experiences. Initially when meeting with the students I briefed them what the study was about and that they would be asked general questions around their experience of higher education.

The following were the main questions the students were asked:

What was your first impression of higher education/university?

What do you like/dislike about higher education?

Who supports you? Who helps you?

What/who motivates you?

What is success to you?

What advice would you give to someone thinking of attending university/higher education?

Application of *Talanoa* and *Fa'afaletui*

As it was semi-structured and using elements of *talanoa*, there was flexibility in the questions, for example, when following on with an issue the student would raise that was not in the set questions. The students were briefed that the interviews were to be treated like an informal conversation. When introducing the concept of *talanoa* whereby in the Samoan context we use the term *talanoaga,* I explained the latter term to the students and from there the interview would take its cue. The students were also encouraged to speak in whatever language they preferred. Due to time constraints, not all elements of the *talanoa* process could be implemented, as a normal *talanoa* could take up to more than two hours. Therefore, it can be argued that the interviews were basically semi-structure interviews with underpinning cultural values and elements of *talanoa*, as it was provided cultural appropriateness for the participants.

The *Fa'afaletui* underpinned the paired interviews which were gendered which was deemed appropriate in this cultural context and ensured the students were comfortable. The paired interviews, allowed the students to build on each other's views as well as agree and disagree based on their experiences shared. This also worked out very well given the time constraints the students and I had to work with.

Safe space

In planning the settings of the interviews, I wanted to ensure the participants would feel safe and free to share their story without fear or intimidation. I also wanted to make sure a clear recording could be captured, so eliminating noise and distracting sounds. Most importantly I wanted to meet the participants where they were at, where they would feel comfortable to be interviewed and the times that suited them and their schedule. I understood that I was taking up their precious time and I was meeting some of them in between their classes.

The settings of where the interviews took place were dependent on availability of space, as well as the convenience of the participants. Tutorial rooms on campus had to be pre-booked to ensure availability. Where an office was available, this was an option as well. However, the available times of the rooms did not coincide with the students' availability. So

eventually, interviews took place outdoors on the picnic tables where it was most convenient for the students as well as me.

Initially when deciding on booking rooms, my idea of safe space, was to ensure the privacy of the participant(s), as well as to best capture a clear audio recording of the interview(s). It is worth noting, that attempts to create safe space in the room/office (privately) did require much effort from myself as the researcher, to ensure participants offered input without feeling threatened or demeaned. Thus, the gendered paired interview was a great strategy which demonstrated ease from the participants to freely share their experiences. This was especially in the case where the pair were familiar with one another (friends). In the case of the one on one interviews, explaining that the interviews were going to be informal and that we were treating it as a *talanoa/ fa'atalatalanoaga* seemed to encourage the students to freely talk.

However, as was discovered, conducting interviews on the picnic tables (publicly) meant meeting the students where they were at – their own comfort zone – and the quality of the audio recording was not affected. One just had to have a good audio recording device and make sure it was positioned strategically for the best recording outcome. The outdoor interviews proved very convenient for both the students and me. The informal setting added to the informal *talanoa* that took place. This setting also allowed me to sit with the students and to be immersed in the students' context and to see from their perspective. I recall this feeling when I sat casually, as if I was one of the students myself, and dressed casually like the students which I feel helped break down any barriers that would have separated myself with students.

Insider/Outsider

This begs the question of whether I saw myself as an insider or outsider. As Naples (2004) states "Insiderness and outsiderness are not fixed or static positions, rather, they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations that are differentially experienced and expressed by community members" (p.373). Thus it is a fluid process whereby three key methodological points need to be acknowledged (Naples, 2004):

> *"As ethnographers we are never fully outside or inside the community; our relationship to the community is never expressed in general terms but is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in particular, everyday interactions; and these interactions are themselves located in shifting relationships among community residents (Naples, 2004, p.373).*

Fa'avae et al (2016) acknowledges their "insider" position in his study as a Tongan male, but notes that as a researcher, he has a role of trying to look more from an outsider position. He expresses that "looking from the outside as an insider means I am more able than outsiders to explain my research participants to other outsiders" (Fa'avae et al, 2016, p. 139). In the past, outsiders looking from the outside was the norm for Western researchers doing research on Pacific people (Fa'avae, et al, 2016).

Iata (2001) comments on his struggle as a Sāmoan researcher who had the same "mature student" status with his participants. He found that it was hard to draw the limit as an outsider looking into the experiences of the interviewees, and as an insider with similar experiences to those of the participants (Iata, 2001). It was realized that this was difficult to balance as there was room for interviewer bias.

Going back to my earlier point of me being a NUS lecturer, this allows me to be an outsider in the teacher/student relationship. My current status of being on study leave and have been out of the teaching scene for a year, further emphasizes this outsider stance. However this highlights my other current status of being a student myself which allows me to be an insider like the students themselves; my ethnicity of being Sāmoan, being able to communicate in Sāmoan also adds on to this stance. And given the majority of my participants being female, also adds more to that insiderness.

Researching youth and young people

Some key observations worth noting are approaches to consider when researching Sāmoan youths/young people are that safe spaces are vital. Meeting students where they were

comfortable to be met. When communicating with the students about arranging interview times, I intentionally did not want to use social media and messaging platforms such as facebook and messenger. I wanted to avoid this as I thought it was deemed inappropriate and unprofessional. However I found this was inevitable, given this was the most convenient form of communication for them and it worked out for my purposes as well.

3.6 Limitations

Size and selection of participants

Although I wanted to implement the full *talanoa* method for my study this was not ideal with my participants, as I was restricted to work around their availability as they had classes to attend, therefore limiting the time of the interviews. Thus, I argue that the *talanoa* method and the *fa'afaletui* underpinned how I conducted this study which provided a cultural appropriate approach for my participants.

I only chose three faculties at NUS to represent in this study, therefore leaving out the other four. My choice of choosing only the three faculties was because I wanted the study sample to be manageable. The three chosen faculties are the main three faculties which mirror the main the pathways students are accustomed to in high school. In high school when students reach form 5 (year 12) they choose a study pathway is split into Arts, Commerce and Science. Also these three faculties offer programs that are predominantly of higher learning in their nature.

Research plan vs research practice

As noted in the methodology, I initially wanted to conduct one on one interviews and then facilitate focus groups with the same sample of students, however, the plan was far from the reality. In my initial plan, I wanted to interview five students from each of the chosen faculties individually. I would then conduct three focus groups, by faculty, of these students. However this was not so, given the challenges of trying to meet with the students given their busy schedules. As noted earlier, I could only manage to meet with students in between their classes and thus, to organize for a second meeting was very difficult given their schedules.

I still carried on with the one on one interviews but instead of the focus groups, I opted for paired gendered interviews. This was deemed culturally appropriate for the group of participants as well as is underpinned by the *Fa'afaletui method* as noted above. This was also effective, particularly for cases whereby both participants were friends and felt comfortable and encouraged by each other to share about their experiences, and particularly when an uncomfortable memory or issue would come up during the interviews and they offered each other the moral support to either continue or discontinue on an issue.

3.7 Data Analysis

Whilst the data was being collected, analysis was taking place simultaneously throughout the study, as is emphasised by the works of Marshall and Rossman (1989) who advocate that data collection and analysis be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. This was helpful as the initial analytical notes that made during the data collection, were drawn upon again during the data analysis. Listening to the tapes numerous times during the transcription period reminded me of the setting of each interview, and the person being interviewed. This process was a very vulnerable one for me, as I was able to visualise that exact moment in time and the feelings felt during each one. This was really apparent during my final two interviews.

Transcribing and Translating

The interviews were all transcribed verbatim (word for word including all the pauses, giggles, ums in between), and notes that were taken were categorized, reviewed repeatedly and coded along the way. No other software was used except the function of the media player to slow down the play back of recordings to ensure nothing was missed during the transcribing.

As the interviews were conducted in both Sāmoan and English simultaneously, the transcripts were bilingual. The transcripts were translated by myself and were checked with one of the Sāmoan lecturers at VUW, Dr.Niusila Eteuati for comments and advice on the process of translations. Lee Hang (2011) notes that as a rule of thumb, "not to translate word for word, but to translate in a manner that keeps the meaning and essential ideas 'as close as possible' to its original form (p.53). He continues on to explain his use of 'as close as possible' to further advise that despite how skilful any translator may be, "no translation can truly convey the intended meaning and essence of the idea more than in the language it was originally stated in" (Lee Hang, 2011, p.53).

This was evident when translating Sāmoan texts, word for word translation could not be exercised as it was not grammatically correct in the English language. For these translations, I would translate them in summary and not word for word. This ensured the essence of what the participant said was not lost. In the case where the texts were bilingual, both in English and Sāmoan, Lee Hang (2011) encouraged the use of simple English and to also avoid translating word for word. However, I did attempt word for word translation in instances where the text was mostly in English and the participant had used one or two Sāmoan words within a sentence. In such cases, the participant chose to use a Sāmoan word instead of the English word.

An interesting observation from the translations showcased different levels of confidence and fluency in the English language amongst the participants. Students who were not fluent in English but chose to speak in English during the interviews demonstrated confidence to speak their second language. This could be a feature of being a student of higher learning, where English is the dominant language of command and teaching, that students are encouraged to speak it.

Thematic analysis

The choice to use thematic analysis was taking Braun and Clarkes' (2006) advice recommending this method as the first qualitative method of analysis researchers should learn. As someone who is still developing research skills, this was the best option for this study, as it would provide me with a necessary core skill in this area. As noted by Holloway & Todres (2003), being able to thematise meanings, is a generic skill for qualitative analysis.

Using thematic analysis, this research drew upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. The six steps they propose were followed:

1. Familiarise with the data
2. Generate initial codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review themes
5. Define themes
6. Write up.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that one's framework must be clarified.

> *"it is important that the theoretical position of a thematic analysis is made clear…any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the 'the world', 'reality' and so forth" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 9.*

Therefore, the Pasifika and Sociological framework stated earlier was employed in the analysis of the data. In terms of methods to thematic analysis, I lean more towards the essentialist/realist method as it offers to "report experiences, meanings and the reality of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9) which is relevant to how I approached my study.

Summary of themes and sub-themes

The themes that were drawn up for this study were primarily categorized under the three main headings: perceptions of students, student support and student strategies. After re-categorizing and reshuffling, I decided to present the findings in two sections. In the next two chapters the findings are presented. Chapter 4 will be presenting themes under the heading "Section 1: Sāmoan students' perceptions of higher education." This chapter focuses on the meanings of and experiences of higher education. Chapter 5 will be presenting themes under the heading: "Section 2: Sāmoan student support mechanisms" highlighting institutional and social support identified by the students. It is important to note these experiences are specifically centred on the National University of Sāmoa.

Background information of Students		
Total number of students	19	
Gender	13 Females	6 Males
Age range	19 – 27 years old	
Faculties	7 FOA students, 8 FOBE students 4 FOS students	
Year of study at NUS	1st year – 1 FOS student 2nd year – 9 FOBE students, 3 FOS students 3rd year – 6 FOA students	
Scholarship & Sponsorship	Scholarships & Sponsorship – 16 students MFAT – 10 students MESC - 4 students Kizuna Foundation – 1 students Other – 1 students	Privately funded – 3 students
First Generation student	Yes – 9	No - 10
Previous High School	Urban high school – 17	Rural high school – 2
Upolu & Savai'i	16 students come from Upolu	3 students originally come from Savai'i
Religion	All identified as Christians that included: Catholics, Seventh Day Adventist, EFKS (Presbyterian), Methodist and Pentecostal.	

Table 1. Background information of the students

4. SECTION 1: Sāmoan students' perception of Higher Education

"Higher education is a platform that provides me with a more in-depth and in detail knowledge of the things that I've been learning throughout my educational journey… It should be like a safe environment for me to study and thrive not only academically but as an individual to prepare me for the outside world and what awaits me after university." – excerpt from student interview.

Introduction

This chapter summarises the responses from the students in relation to their own experiences based on their perceptions of higher education[1] and the meanings that they associated it with both as an institution, as well as a concept. In doing so, students were asked about their first impressions about the concept of higher education, their expectations if pursued and what they liked and disliked about being at university. This chapter highlights the importance of transitioning from high school or college to university, the impact of scholarships and the excitement and disappointment that was expressed from their expectations of higher education. The chapter will be organized around four main sub-themes: meanings of higher education, transitioning, impact of scholarships and experiences. Throughout the chapter student quotes are used to illustrate and give more information on key points that make up the findings.

As noted in chapter 1, the pathway to enter into higher education in Samoa is laid out within the education system of Sāmoa. For purposes of giving context to the following subthemes and findings, it is important to be reminded here that each of these students have had more than one year of experience in higher education, in this case NUS. The first-year experience would be that of the Foundation year program or what was formerly known as the UPY.

4.1 Meanings of higher education

Higher education as both a concept and an institution

When describing what higher education meant to them the students' responses mostly referred to a higher and deeper level of learning: *"means that education is now at a higher*

[1] It must be noted that for most of the students interviewed, the terms *higher education* and *university* were not too familiar with the term *higher education* but had more understanding when I referred to the institution as *university.* Therefore, for the purposes of this study, these two terms were used interchangeably and are referred to as the same thing.

level." Another student expanded further referring to higher education as a platform for in-depth learning for the future that should be safe. Additionally it should be a place that prepares one for the future and life after university.

> *"It should be like a safe environment for me to study and thrive not only academically but as an individual to prepare me for the outside world and what awaits me after uni."*

Higher education is more complex with the promise of good teachers and professors. It is more than just the individual. It's about the future of a nation.

> *"NUS also stages good teachers, professors, some have finished their Masters and teaching us their education what they have learned. Higher education is far more complex than the other ones that we have come, we have used when we were young."*

> *"So higher education should be priority for all in order to work together for a great future of Sāmoa…thinking about my success, it's not just my family but also for all of Sāmoa. To seek for a better future…"*

Higher education, therefore, for the students was a higher level of learning compared to their previous educational experiences from primary through to high school or college. Their responses point to higher education as a platform to develop information and their learning, a safe environment to do so, with good teaching staff with the hope that it will prepare them for the future both individually and collectively.

4.2 Transitioning from high school to university

When the students were asked about their first impression of higher education, a major theme around transitioning emerged. This involved the shift from high school to university which

required them to adapt to the new setting. They often compared university to their previous high school, in terms of setting, pedagogy and student behaviour. Self-confidence was another factor that affected the transition for some of the students. Finally, there was the newfound freedom that the university setting offered which was viewed both in a positive and negative light by the students. The following documents the students' responses on transition.

It is most important to be reminded here that most of these experiences were at the Foundation year, which is deemed their first year experience of university. This Foundation year is considered a transition year for students from high school before proceeding on to commence an undergraduate degree, whether overseas or locally. However for the students in this study, it is difficult to separate their Foundation year experience from that of their undergraduate experience because they have undergone both in the same university (NUS) and the same setting.

Setting, pedagogy and students' initial perceptions

The students' initial response to talking about their perceptions of higher education was to compare it to high school or college. They highlighted the difference in the teaching and learning, as well as the disciplines and faculties. They also indicated the level of difficulty of the subjects they were taking.

> *"University it was a different environment/setting for learning compared to college you take notes during classes whereas here even though they give you lecture notes but they are only summary of the lectures but you have to pin point the main ideas that the lecturer is saying."*

> *"It's expanded, there's more learning and further development, building on what was taught in college as well as primary school level. The experience… I learned a lot…not only in theory stuff and also like practical stuff [because] I'm studying accounting."*

Students even compared how university was stricter with time and due dates, therefore the need for time management. At the same time they also noted the teachers in college and in university were different in terms of following them up on their assignments and ensuring they went to class.

> *"You don't get the same teachers you had in college they come after you about your assignments so it really changed how I see things when I came here."*

> *"In high school the teachers…they chase up the students about their assignments. They don't want the students to miss classes."*

Students who went to a religious school also noted how they had to adapt to the new environment the university setting brought. Coming from an all-girls school and not having religious rituals meant one student had to adapt. For another student she missed the familial feelings of her old high school and the support she was used to from the teachers.

> *"The transition was so difficult, because knowing that the college was (an) all-girls school so it was kind of hard to adapt to having boys around... spiritually that's a whole other story. Because back then in Mary (St Mary's College) we were taught religion, religion was part of our everyday norm. We had to pray five times a day…here it's up to you when you want to pray and where and how many times you want to pray. It was a pretty big transition from coming from a prayer revolved environment to a much different (environment)."*

> *"So when I got here like in just two weeks I didn't want to stay here again I wanted to go back to Pesega (Church College of Sāmoa) because it was a lot different…Pesega looked more like a university than here. I wanted to drop out of school because I didn't like the environment. Everyone was like family to me, especially the teachers,*

when I ask for something when I go to them for help, everything is complete, new and clean. When I leave home it's like I'm going to my other family. So different from here."

It seemed for the students, their initial thoughts when starting university was mainly comparing and contrasting to their previous high school. This illustrated a stark contrast of what they were familiar with in high school compared to university.

Difficulty in transition

Most of the students found it hard to transition to university. One student said she was *"quite nervous the first time."* There was a number who expressed worry and doubt in themselves. They felt a lack of self-confidence and were intimidated by the assumption that it would be hard and of how other students would perceive them.

"I thought lowly of myself, when I came to university, it's difficult. Sometimes I look at the students I think that they are smarter than me and I'm so afraid when I come to the university. Sometimes I look poorly thinking the other students make fun of me."

Students who went to school in the rural areas before attending university made the following comments on how this impacted their transition.

"My feeling of being a Savai'i person it's like it's biased by people here in the university especially students in Apia and students in Savai'i, the people that run the university are biased on us it makes us feel like we are down to ourselves and that we don't mind but it's like we are all Sāmoan and that."

"Until when I moved to uni I was actually literally scared to actually start uni aye I was like aw man people are gonna look down on Aleipata College like, imma be

honest, in my Foundation when people ask me what my school was I would be like I don't know, I wouldn't even say anything."

Lack of self-esteem and lack of self-confidence was highlighted by the student support staff, as one of the issues that have come up when working with students who struggle with literacy. She also comments on the students who come from the rural areas.

"The majority of our students who are noted to be struggling are students from Savaii and from high schools in the rural districts from Upolu. And these students from my own experience have very low literacy skills, essay writing, research and then of course parts of speech."

"Along with the poor basic literacy skills come the lack of self-esteem; lack of self-confidence, to speak up, that their idea is wrong."

It seems those who had a very difficult time transitioning had self-doubts and looked down upon themselves. Meeting new students from different high schools can be an overwhelming experience for the students. The lack of self-confidence was linked to the previous high school one attended and coming from the rural area. This was further linked to the students level of literacy skills, particularly in English.

Successful transitioning

Students who went to a school in the urban area found that their high school helped them with the transition. For example the student below talked about how coming from Savai'i and attending Sāmoa College prior to university helped him with his transition.

"When I heard about Sāmoa College, I thought it was only for half caste and palagi kids. I thought lowly of myself. And then my perspective changed, I was so happy, because when I went there, there were lots of Samoan kids. So when I was preparing to come to university my cousin and brother told me that it was going to be hard and

there would be many students in big lecture rooms but I had confidence from college to communicate with people, get to know other students and communicate with the lecturers to gain more understanding. So I got used to the lecturers and was able to gain more understanding on the subjects."

Another student who went to the same high school resonated that it was an easy transition because it was a similar experience with that in her previous school .

"But when I came and one week since NUS started and…its like I'm in college again nothing new it's just um new level of teaching in each subjects. But the process in school is like the same as in colleges."

Although most of the students found entering university hard, they eventually overcame their anxieties through self-affirming beliefs and their faith.

"The first thing I think at that time is the reason why I come to school is that I love my parents. The most important thing is to complete why I came to school. Study hard. Sometimes I'm struggling. Sometimes I'm stressed."

"So from the beginning during my first year, in foundation, it was very challenging in new area, new student, new teachers, but I eventually got used to it till now, in my final year, even though the first year was difficult it was kind of okay compared to now, it's much harder now. Although it's hard, if you put your heart into it and have the will then all will be okay."

Freedom

Most students felt there was much room for freedom in higher education. This freedom was viewed both in a positive and negative light by the students themselves.

"Here it's like open, it's up to you with what you do with your educational life whether you come, no one will come and tell you to do this or that whereas down in college like you're under control by the principal and teachers but up here it's up to you (laughs)"

"The teachers never worry about us; they have the mind-set that we as student will think responsibly about the fees that we pay."

Freedom allowed for a more flexible timetable.

"It's up to you what your schedule is whether you have your classes in the evenings or mornings. When I was in college, I always go to school early in the mornings but now I can sleep in, in the mornings."

One student acknowledged the free will students have to control the freedom they were offered at university. This freedom was perceived as life-long learning for the students with the onus being on the student to manage this freedom. Students acknowledged the challenges such as not turning up to class and submitting assignments on time as a consequence if this freedom is not managed well.

"It's like this is where the student is tested whether they can make it in life. If they know how to live, know how to manage their time and plan their life. They no longer have to depend on anyone to spoon feed them like a sheep who needs to be shooed into the gate. Over here there is so much freedom but this freedom is an opportunity to learn the values in life, for what they should do and shouldn't do. So here, the student has the freewill. So it's on the student whether they pass or not."

"Having too much freedom like it will allow me to not do my work and commit to my studies. I see it as a challenge that I need to overcome so I can fully concentrate on my studies."

The students' acknowledgment of freedom was not only a result of their experience with their previous high school, but also with their own families and *Fa'aSāmoa.* When the students mentioned teachers and principals, and parents entrusting their care into the hands of the teachers, this was common in high school as opposed to university. Students are no longer told to go to class, followed up on assignments by teachers. Therefore there is room for students to go about with whatever they please.

This then leads to an issue raised by the student support staff when she talked about academic counselling where students are referred to their office as at risk students with poor attendance and not submitting assignments on time or at all. Despite the students' responses pointing out their awareness of their responsibilities which include the need to manage this new found freedom they are offered at university, however students who fail to do so end up being referred as documented by the student support staff.

> *"Academic counselling in terms of talking with students with regards to poor attendance and failure to submit assignments on time…that sense that they are not taking their academic work seriously until they are referred. There isn't enough time to make up and most likely be failing because they are not able to catch up. Because they leave it too late. Sense of responsibility for them. That's my experience"*

Transitioning from high school to university was a major theme for the participants of this study as noted in the responses above. The constant comparison to high school revealed how their previous high schools impacted their experience of transition. This was in terms of the subjects they were majoring in, the teachers, the way of teaching and learning and the setting. Most who found it difficult and hard lacked self-esteem and admitted how they felt lowly of themselves. These feelings were associated with their previous high school, the new environment, the perception of other students and literacy skills. Those who transitioned well were from the urban areas compared to those from the rural areas. Freedom was brought up by the participants as both a positive and negative feature of university which most acknowledged was something that was part of their life-long learning

4.3 Impacts of Scholarships

The mention of scholarships was a main theme for the participants, as it impacted their view and participation in higher education. It is evident from the responses that attaining a scholarship to study at higher education was desired, primarily to study overseas and secondarily to continue studying whilst simultaneously be able to help the family financially. Government seemed to be the main provider of scholarships and sponsorships as well as some provided by private organizations and individuals. Thus, when the students continued to revisit their initial experience with higher education, again they would refer back to their Foundation experience which brought up the theme on scholarships.

Scholarship scheme

At NUS, scholarships to study overseas are the rewards on offer for the top foundation students each year. These scholarships are offered through the Tri-lateral Government partnership between Sāmoa, New Zealand and Australia. Students in the FOA, FOBE and FOS faculties are prioritised for these scholarships where they are distributed amongst these three faculties. The ranking of scholarships would be Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu and then Sāmoa. Students who make top five of each faculty would most likely win a scholarship to study in Australia and New Zealand. However the process has changed, whereby, now students who attain high averages based on their academic performance are invited to apply for a scholarship and those are awarded would have had to meet all the requirement and criteria set out by the scholarship provider – Australia and New Zealand. These scholarships were managed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Samoa (MFAT). It was a common practice for MFAT Samoa to host a briefing session at the start of the first semester each year to communicate the selection process and criteria to the students enrolled in the Foundation programme.

Even more so, there are scholarships offered by the Government of China, whereby those who have completed their foundation studies are eligible to apply. The criteria are set by the Chinese government and were processed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Samoa (MFAT). Local scholarships to study in Samoa at NUS are usually sponsored by the government of Samoa, through MFAT, MESC, and the Ministry of Health (MOH) for

nursing students. Other local scholarships include sponsorship by private organization such as the Yazaki Kizuna Foundation Scholarship (NUS Annual Report 2019).

Overseas scholarships

Most of the students firstly acknowledged how they missed out on a scholarship to study overseas. The response below is a summary of one of the students' ambitions towards a scholarship as well as his plans for when he was in foundation. It also points to importance of receiving a scholarship and what it meant for him and his family.

> *"We have one member working which is my dad… so I feel sorry for him he has to go apply for this huge loan at NPF, in order for me to proceed with my education. So after my foundation year, I did very well and I managed to get a local scholarship. I had two options, I mean three actually. If I didn't get an international scholarship, I will wait for the local MFAT scholarships and if I don't get a MFAT full scholarship I will apply for China. On that very same day I was going to apply for a scholarship to China, this was in 2018 and on that same day my dad called me to his office and he congratulated me, and I was like, for what? And he said, NUS called him that I got a MFAT full local scholarship and I was like, I should stay. Because it's shorter for me it's a period of three years, if I go to China it'll be longer and then when I come back my dad will retire already and no one's gonna provide for the family. So [I] really want someone to stay back on the island and provide for the family. My dad actually provide for everything since primary, primary to college and now to university. But since now I'm on scholarship, my dad is only providing for my transport fare, food on the table."*

Some students expressed their frustrations with the scholarship selection process which highlighted their insecurities towards the process, whereas others were unhappy with the lack of information communicated about the scholarships and processes

> *"How they like give out information, be specific…for example: scholarships, the scholarship and how they brief…they don't even brief us on how like how we get like*

book allowance [because] they just give out the letter but they don't even like do a meeting or do anything to brief [us]."

One student acknowledged her own carelessness as to why she lost her overseas scholarship to study in Fiji. However she was still able to secure a local scholarship.

"I spent too much time at the gym I lost my notes (laughs) so in the last semester I lost my maths book I lost my books I don't who took them at the time. So I studied in the dark I didn't know what I was studying so I got a scholarship to Fiji in the first round but the second time I got a local so I couldn't go overseas all because I spent too much time at the gym and losing all my books."

The desire for an attractive overseas scholarship was the promise of an international recognized qualification and overseas experience. However students who were unable to secure one felt sad for their family and accepted it as a call from God to stay in Sāmoa.

"I felt sad for my family, they had high expectations of me. They think I'm gonnna get a scholarship but I say no I think this is God's plan I don't have to go out I have to stay in Samoa and study. The other thing I wanted to get a scholarship was that the papers offered by NUS it's not really valid at overseas so my other aim after my degree I will aim to go overseas and get a job there but if I go with my certificate from here to look for job I can't get a good job so that's why I really wanted scholarship so that I can get a certificate that is appropriate for me."

"I tried to get a scholarship (overseas), but thank God I didn't get the scholarship but I got a local scholarship, then last year I was president for my faculty (and currently the NUSSA president). I can't explain it, only God answered my prayers."

Local scholarships

Interestingly, most of the students, when asked about how they felt coming back to the same institution to continue their studies towards their undergraduate degrees, acknowledged how grateful they were to have received a local scholarship. This to most of them was a great help to their families financially. For some it was a great privilege and were humbled to receive such an opportunity. And for others they accredited the scholarship as the main reason they were able to continue at university.

> *"It feels great as in I'm happy and privileged because it's not an opportunity that is easy to get, it's not an opportunity other students get, a lot of families with low income so I'm grateful I got this opportunity because my family is a low income family and this opportunity has allowed me to be one of the students under the MFAT local scholarship program which is great help financially for my family because to be honest if it wasn't for this I would not have continued my studies, the fees are too expensive. So there is much to be happy about in receiving this once in a lifetime opportunity."*

> *"Now I am on a local scholarship so it's okay not to help my parents with my fees so they don't have to worry about it….my text books and fees they're taken care of by the government (scholarship)."*

The student below is a recipient of the Yazaki Kizuna Foundation scholarship and he explains how this scholarship helps him and his family.

> *"My starting fee for the foundation year is 1,000 per semester and that's like 2,000 per year so my family didn't spend a penny on that and even from my foundation to my first to my second year they didn't spend a penny on that, I looked for a scholarship I want to help my family because you know we have, me and my brother here we are the same, only one person working, and my father makes 150 tala per week and that's a little money because my mother is a su'isu'i so yeah, the only thing*

that starting from foundation my mother always give me bus fare and now this time I'm doing my only bus fare."

Student resilience: Sponsorship

Those who missed out on the main scholarships found ways to seek sponsorship from other government ministries like MESC as well as private organizations/companies.

"so after my foundation year I applied to MESC for a sponsorship because I thought of my family and the tuition fees and text books were too expensive and I wanted to alleviate the financial burden from them because there were other financial obligations as well. So I applied to MESC and I they approved to sponsor me. So my parent, they only send me money for my lunch. As for the tuition fees and text books they are covered by MESC from my first year till now in my final year which is a great help for me and my family."

"for my school it's under MESC sponsorship I wanted to further studies for bachelor level I applied. I knew that I wasn't lucky with the local scholarship (MFAT) so I applied for MESC. So that's how I got this far. So it depends on the grades. So need to keep it high."

Other students' tuition fees were sponsored by individuals. One student shared how her participation with a non-for-profit organization called Brown Girl Woke (BGW) allowed her sponsorship from the founder of the organization.

"I also…BGW I asked them for help but they say if I participate in their program they can sponsor my tuition fees so I thank BGW I am able to get sponsorship for my tuition fees this semester. So my parents are also happy for the financial assistance and help to them regarding my fees which are almost $2,000 tala."

The mention of scholarships was a main theme for the participants, as it impacted their view and participation in higher education. It is evident from the responses that attaining a scholarship to study at higher education was desired, primarily to study overseas and secondarily to continue studying whilst simultaneously be able to help the family financially. Government seemed to be the main provider of scholarships and sponsorships as well as some provided by private organizations and individuals.

4.4 Experiences

It seemed the students were both excited and disappointed about being at university particularly NUS. This was reflected in their responses when asked about their first impressions as well as what they liked and disliked about being at university. There were a handful of students who were very excited to be at university. It was a dream for them and truly a privilege. This is worth noting and to be celebrated.

Excitement

Students who were very excited about coming to university (NUS) referred to this as a dream come true from their childhood. A few students desired to attend NUS one day as a result of witnessing their older siblings and cousins in the uniform when they were younger.

> *"So when I was in primary (school) I used to see my older siblings and cousins with their blue uniforms and I thought to myself, oh, one day I will wear that uniform too. So I came and now I am here, I feel so happy that this was something I saw with my siblings and cousins who have now graduated from NUS, and in my mind I wanted to be like them (graduate). So I worked hard from primary, through college and now here I am at NUS, there was no other place I wanted to go, this was the only place I wanted to come and attend and further my learning in the area of Art."*

As for other students, they were excited to be at university and learning new knowledge, which sets them apart from other kids in the village as well as hopefully be helpful to the

village and families. Coming to university is a privilege not only for the student but their whole community.

> *"I'm taking Archaeology, I can learn something new I can go back home and be the tough guy…It make me feel like I'm the most, makes me different from other kids in the village. I'm different in the society because of the knowledge we are getting from here…The student can understand the technology they can help their villages, their families. Science students and applied computing students – in my village there is only a few of us here at the NUS. And we can help our village and our families as an NUS student"*

Disappointment: unmet expectations

The expectation versus the reality as noted by the student's response summarised below showed how most students felt about what they expected when coming to NUS.

> *"That was my expectation, new equipment [and] new knowledge from teachers. Like overseas very advanced universities. Our university is not really that big. When you say university it's quite a big place to walk around. Really big facilities to walk and experience new information from libraries…that's my expectation of this university, but when I came here it's just the same like college."*

The expectations students had been based on their idea of what university was supposed to be. Students were also disappointed with the resources available at NUS which included availability of computers, study spaces and the library.

> *"Our university doesn't have enough resources to develop the knowledge of the students."*

> *"They don't have enough rooms for study, like just for study that's why the library is always full. And it doesn't give the other students the opportunity to go in and work. Cus it's always full. I remember I always got in trouble in my foundation year. That*

was my first impression it was always the resources and the texts. I wish it could be improved."

Further frustrations were related to the experiences with academic staff particularly with their attitude and commitment to their teaching. As well as the irrelevant course material that was prescribed by the lecturers.

"Only problem I had is my lecturer doesn't follow her word. That's the only problem She always says she's busy with her duty and stuff. But why doesn't she give it to another lecturer to come and conduct our class. I keep checking my emails but nothing comes through. So I don't know whether I'm gonna pass this subject or not because of this kind of stuff."

"Like our teacher because he's a part-timer but like it's a good paper, and like I wanna learn more but whenever he has meetings and stuff he doesn't come and just cancels that whole day just to get to his meeting. What's the point of coming here if you want to earn money here, you should commit here. I wish there was more teachers who would commit to their work, in uni. Because they know they're in uni."

"There are times when I ask the lecturer because I want to understand but she tells me off, so I'm like it's okay. So I go away without understanding and so I turn to my course reader and yet it's useless. The course reader is old. And when I question her about the course reader she yells at me like she is angry. It's like she doesn't want us to ask further questions. So to me, why does she take this course when she's too lazy to answer the students' questions?"

Other students were frustrated with the lack of development at the university and how their faculty undergraduate program did not have an internship opportunity whereas the undergraduate program hosted by another faculty did.

"The Faculty of Arts, like it feels like it's like being put below everything else. From what we experience, it feels like we are under every other faculty. Everything else it's always those faculties that are first...I mean like scholarship wise, internship wise, we've experienced that at MNRE they gave internships to science students and not even considering geography majors, like come on man!"

"I don't know if it's my motivation or this school has just lost its spirit."

Student resilience: seeking own resources

For the Science students, their attitude towards the lack of resources for their lab work demonstrated their resilience in accepting the way things were and they had to make the most of it. As noted below, it allowed them work together as a team given the resource constraints.

"Even though lack of chemicals…we accept it, we share it, we go with it. Like our last lab. Some are doing it. [Some] observe and some are writing it. It's a quicker way of doing things when there is a lack of resources."

These tie in with the collective values of the *Fa'aSāmoa* which the students are familiar with, whereby the sharing of resources is norm. Even in a setting like higher education where independent learning and individualism is encouraged, where there is a lack of resources, this may be a challenge.

A Positive Student Experience

The student support staff advocated for a positive student experience for the students at NUS. This included the work their unit was already doing in order to help the students have this positive experience. This includes, providing them with the space to study and the resources like computers. As well as the literacy and communication skills in English which helps build students' confidence.

"Positive experience when they enter until they leave. And so SSP provides assistance, help them gain that, enable them to communicate better to feel better

about themselves kind of thing. For example we provide this space. We are providing those tables with the roofs that provides additional spaces on their own. And the students are aware… And then of course the computer lab downstairs, everyone doesn't have a laptop. The library is always full, so we have those down here to assist the students, we would like that extended as well. To at least help our students who do not have the resources." Hope it helps them have a positive experience feeling good about themselves and express themselves in tutorial groups and outside of that be able to communicate with friends…and that it continues to build. "So one of the biggest issues is they struggle with English and because the comprehension is not so good, and so, because you know…the difficulty of they end up using direct quotes without citing the source. So all of these can be discouraging to a student.

Unfortunately the unit can only do so much with the budget constraints; however she also expressed the need to expand the space to be able to cater to the needs of the students.

"And I would like to as I suggested to our unit for an extension of that space. You know for them to have a space, for them to do their assignments. A space they call home. In universities overseas there's always a student's lounge, you know overseas, coffee and tea, I would like to see that…extend that that space over there…So you know I think we need more to create a positive experience. But we need a lot more but you know…we work within our budget."

Summary

This chapter explored the perceptions of Samoan students in relation to higher education which was organized into: *Meanings of higher education, Transitioning, Scholarships and Experiences*. Each had further sub-themes that were illustrated to give a full picture of the perceptions the students had based on their experience. For all of the participants, they referred to the foundation as their first year of experiencing higher education which was the experience they were able to share. Different responses to what higher education meant them were shared. Out of this experience formed their perception of higher education which was informed by prior knowledge from their family members and friends. *Meanings of higher*

education demonstrated the initial perceptions they had of the term as a concept and institution.

Transitioning was explored. This highlighted the different transitioning challenges students faced when they started at NUS which included comparisons to their previous high schools. They compared the subjects and how the level of difficulty had increased. They compared the teaching style and how it's now a new level with no more privileges like second chances they would get with their high school teachers. They also compared the environment and setting commenting on the freedom they were now exposed to with no involvement from the teachers and principals like that in high school. This had a huge impact on their transition to NUS, where some felt prepared and other did not. As was evident with some of the students, this also impacted their self-confidence in entering university. Eventually for most they adapted and eventually got used to the new setting which included the new found freedom that most felt was something that needed to be managed. Most felt higher education was a place to prepare one for the future.

Impacts of Scholarships was a dominant theme. All students felt that in order to pursue higher education, a scholarship was of great significance and a key requirement to pursue such an honourable privilege due to the financial constraints within the home. Key constraints included a lack of income due to family constraints, lack of awareness of the scholarships and the competition to retrieve a scholarship once applied. Despite such hardships and challenging experiences, students wanted to pursue a higher education to better themselves, their family and their wider communities.

Finally, the *Experiences* of the students explored their excitement and disappointment of being at university. The student expressed these feelings about their experience of being at NUS. The responses indicated that some students were happy to have made it to NUS and were able to reach this level of education. Some acknowledged the level of learning and teaching that they had access to, with one commenting on how this sets him apart from other young people in his village. However there was also disappointment from most of the students around the resources, course materials and the attitudes of the lecturers. Some commented on the lack of exposure and learning opportunities like internships for their

specific undergraduate program. This pointed to unmet expectations from the students as it impacted on their behaviours. Therefore there is a great need for NUS to have a positive student experience which the student support services advocates for.

The themes reflected the students' perceptions of higher education, and it must be noted that this is particular to their experience at NUS. The next chapter will be presenting further findings on themes under the heading, Sāmoan student support.

5. SECTION 2: Sāmoan student support mechanisms

"I got support from my teachers, very helpful and my friends, they always help me and my family as well."- Excerpt from student interview

Introduction

This chapter explored the different types of support that were identified by the students both within NUS as an institution as well as outside of the NUS. Under this theme are two sub-themes: institutional support and social support which will be further unpacked to illustrate the experiences of the students. The students identified the role of academic staff, the student support services unit, and their peer sand student lead initiatives which offered them the institutional support at NUS. Furthermore, they also identified their family and their faith communities which made up their social support system.

5.1 Institutional Support

Most of the students acknowledged the support from the university as an institution whereby academic and support staff were noted as helpful in their studies. The responses also pointed to the support offered by peers and friends. This revealed student lead initiatives that existed within the university which some of the students referred to as being helpful in their journey at NUS.

Academic staff

Most of the students talked about the lecturers and tutors as being very helpful when they had questions about their assignments. They are the first ones they would go to for help when they would get stuck on the assignments and/or concepts covered in the course. These students found these lecturers approachable and made time to help them. Students from one faculty mentioned their dean as very helpful. The same dean was acknowledged as very supportive for the NUSSA president in her role.

"There are some teachers [who] are really helpful. For example our senior lab technician, she always encourages us to do our work and to go to the teachers even though they don't like us."

"In my faculty, only my Dean and the teachers they supported me but the students they are not. Whenever I need the help of the teachers, I always go to my dean and he helps me at that time"

However students also noted that some staff was not as approachable and helpful. Some felt they were belittled by the staff. Others who wanted to ask more questions were put off by the lecturers' reluctance to answer their questions and expected them to find the answers themselves.

"I don't know if I should say this like teachers, they're not I can't go into detail with this but sometimes I feel belittled rather than educated sometimes. I can't really say."

Student resilience: Response to academic staff

However some students who had harsh lecturers accepted their behaviour and found that they were being taught by the best lecturers. These lecturers were well respected by the students due to their high level of achievement. For others, they keep knocking on the lecturers doors even when they are not well received.

"I know they're kind of harsh sometimes but they give the best advice for you know on how to deal with my academic life. Kids see them as you know the strict ones, but then there is something about them that helps you move up, to try and reach their level. Yeah, um yeah. But the teachers are good."

"Teachers have their own way of bringing out what they are, it's our job as students to interpret it, interpret the information and make sense of it ourselves."

This demonstrates the different perspectives the students have on what they expect from academic staff. It seemed the students who were well supported by the academic staff felt they were the getting proper help with regards to their assignments. Students who were frustrated did not feel they were getting the proper help and found the staff unapproachable. The students who were more resilient were not put off by the harsh and strict attitudes of the academic staff, instead accepted it and took on the challenges posed their lecturers. Interestingly, students who felt they were taught by the best lecturers because of their prestigious status and achievements played a role in how students perceived them. Thus was the case for those who accepted the way the lecturers taught, as they believed they were learning from the best.

Student support services unit

The Student Support Services unit was acknowledged by most of the students, as place they are aware of that they could go to for help/support. Some also recounted their use of the services for their assignments, for extra help when taking mathematics, to use the computers and resources as well as for counselling. According to the student support staff whose role includes being a counsellor and literacy officer who has been a member of the student support service since its establishment, the unit offers the following services to the students at NUS.

> *"Counselling services, academic counselling in terms of talking with students with regards to poor attendance and failure to submit assignments on time, personal counselling for students who are encountering personal problems; and then assistance with literacy skills because that was becoming very apparent in our students, especially transitioning from high schools to the foundation program. Very low literacy skills…We also have now, our employment officer who…has taken on the organization and coordination of the annual graduation workshop. It started a few years ago and is an annual event now. And the other one that hasn't really happened is the provision of spiritual counselling. We do have pastors on standby if we need anyone."*

The student responses reflected their engagement with the different services described above. Those who went for academic purposes need help with assignments, referencing and for maths.

> *"I usually go to the [Maths officer] there for help in my maths but I don't go anymore because I don't take maths anymore."*

> *"When I need proof reading and other things um like referencing I go to them and ask for help to help me most of the time."*

Students who had personal problems that required counselling were comforted and even a change in perspective with the help of the counsellor.

> *"Not only that if I have problems I can share with them so they help a lot…so it's make me feel like they…warm and that. Like being away from my parents there are some people aside me to help me to keep up, motivated and be part of being a university student."*

> *"So one time in semester 2 in my foundation year, I was referred to the counsellor because I was caught with alcohol and she counselled me helping me to think about my future…After an assignment I would drink to celebrate. So she showed me my results, compared the first semester to my second and what I was doing, so it was the counsellor who changed my mind."*

The student support staff shared other success stories of students who were referred and were able to build their confidence, complete their assignments, and were able to contribute in class. She also mentioned the challenges of those who are referred but never turn up.

Faculties refer names of students who are at risk of failing a course due to lack of attendance and/or failure to submit assignments. It seemed the unit was well known to all the students that were interviewed and almost all have had some form of interaction with their services. However, she notes the unit faces budget constraints with the need for more funding and more staff to meet the number and demands of all the students at NUS.

Student lead initiatives

Student lead initiatives or groups on campus were identified by students when asked about who they can go to for help. The students revealed in their responses that the NUS student body known at NUSSA and two initiatives set up by fellow students which were instrumental in offering support to them whilst being at university.

NUSSA

The National University of Sāmoa Student Association was identified as being supportive in providing printing facilities for students. When the interviews were conducted, the students showed frustration that the printing services were being disabled as the NUSSA office has been closed, almost all semester. However, when interviewing the NUSSA president, she noted that the service was recently resumed, as equipment needed to be sorted and maintenance for the printing office. She also commented on this being one of the challenges she faces in her role and with her executive, is that students will always complain no matter what.

Activities run by NUSSA annually included inter-faculty sports tournaments, as well as a debate competition and a ball hosted for all the students. A special project mentioned by the president during her interview was that of a study centre which development was in progress at the time to be opened before the end of that year. This study centre was intended to benefit all the students where there would be computers available for them to use for their assignments and free printing.

When asked about what students usually seek NUSSA for, she mentioned the request for resources like computers, hence the study centre project. She also mentioned field trips where

students apply for funding so they could attend field trips for their courses. She shared about budget constraints and how hard it gets sometimes to access their own student fund due to the structural processes in place for NUSSA. This hinders their support for students as well as resource student lead initiatives. This is something NUSSA is working on so that they as the student body can continue to support the students at NUS.

> "*So many student needs but there is not enough budget, and we need to avoid expenses from one year carrying over to the following year."*

P2P Initiative

A few of the students acknowledged their involvement with the P2P initiative which has supported them through their time university. The group has a Facebook page where there are updates of what's happening around the university, and any of their fun study activities. The Peer to Peer Initiative was born out of a group of students called the Soulful weavers who were committed to weaving stars for the 1 million stars to end violence project, as well as advocate against all forms of violence at NUS. These students were mainly from the Faculty of Arts, undertaking courses within the social science department. Initially called the FOA Peer Support, the group was established informally in 2017. Its main aim at the time was to encourage students to support one another in their academic journeys through fun study activities as well as to develop mentors who could assist fellow students to navigate their way through higher education.

One of the Peer mentors and also a member of the NUSSA executive shared his journey with the Peers below.

> *"I was introduced to the Peer Support, now Peer to Peer initiative in Foundation…we get to share about our studies. Whatever need I had back then I asked them for help and assistance and they help me in so many ways…the workshops and I joined and the intensive study. [Now] I am the one leading the Peers this year…I am giving back to my peers; giving them tips on how to study…we held [an] essay workshop and advocacy activities and celebration of...International Women's Day and International Youth Day."*

For the Peer mentor, the P2P initiative offered him an opportunity to not only have been helped by other fellow students but later felt the need to give back to fellow students. This initiative has also given some students the platform to come out of their comfort zone and develop personal relation and communication skills.

> *"Before the Peer the only people I communicate with are the people from back in college. Until most of them left for overseas…ever since I became part of the peer they have been like a second family for me, they gave me the platform to…approach people outside of my circle of friends…I got to talk to a lot of teachers [and] getting along with them well."*

Interestingly this initiative provided a link between the students and the teachers. This was mainly due to this initiative, being acknowledged and supported by the dean and staff of the Faculty of Arts. Resources for activities run by the Peers are usually sought from the NUSSA fund as well as self-funded by the students themselves with support from the faculty staff. Therefore students who engaged with the P2P initiative had access to support from fellow students who conducted workshops and activities. It also provided students with a link to communicate with teachers. In 2019 the students and staff of the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship joined the initiative.

Brown Girl Woke Club (BGW)

Similarly, one of the students mentioned her involvement with Brown Girl Woke (BGW) which is a newly registered student club under NUSSA. This is part of the international BGW network which focuses on empowering and equipping young people with resources building confident and independent leaders (Brown Girl Woke, 2020). There is also BGW club at the University of the South Pacific. Some of their activities include organizing service learning projects, raise awareness on issues such as domestic violence, child abuse and others and hosting speakers at their club events (Brown Girl Woke, 2020). They also run some community programs which she was involved in. She was able to receive financial support

from the founder of BGW to pay for her tuition fees as a result of her involvement. This was noted earlier under the sub-theme on local scholarships and sponsorship.

> *"So…we do workshops around not only the NUS but USP as well. It's nice to be part of this kind of organization. It's motivate me to keep on doing more what I know is better for myself…they also offer sponsor for…university fees…so I also ask them if they can sponsor our school fees and they okay with it."*

The BGW is able to offer students with opportunities to learn and be empowered at NUS, as well as offer financial support. With access to its local and international network, it can also provide further opportunities for those who get involved. Student lead initiatives like BGW and the FOA P2P are noted to have provided platforms for the students to receive and offer support to one another through advocacy work and organizing activities like workshops. For both initiatives to thrive at NUS, support from the host institution is vital. For the P2P they had the support from their faculty as well as NUSSA. For the BGW club they are a registered club under NUSSA.

5.2 Social Support

Family

Family was deemed the most important source of support, motivation, inspiration and purpose for most of the students. When asked questions around who supports you, motivates you and your inspirations, the students would refer to their families. All of the students referred to their families as their main support mostly financially ensuring they are resourced and are able to attend university. They are also their main moral support system who motivate and encourage them to complete their studies and their education. For some of the students, their parents, siblings and cousins are able to assist them academically. Students who were well supported at home indicated that their families understood the expectations of higher education on them whereby one student acknowledged the time his family gives him to complete his assignments.

"My mum is a teacher so she push me and my father who push me every day. It's me that doesn't work but they keep giving me advice. They pay my fees, give me money, books pens…"

"Sometimes I go to my dad, he is more of a science person, I just go to his office and if I ask him for help he would just get it for me."

"My parents, my mum, she usually prints my resources and my dad if I finish classes late he comes and picks me up…[he] always advised me and support me."

Ambition to provide for the Family

Students wanted to help out their families as best that they could whilst undertaking their studies. For the students who face financial constraints, their ambition to assist their family financially was one of the reasons for continuing higher education. There were also a few students who mentioned part-time work whilst studying to help out their families. One of the participants took up part-time work at university to help around the house financially, as well as for work experience. His mother encouraged him to pursue that path and he did it in his first year of study. He admitted it was hard and realized that he could not continue in his second year. However, he enjoyed the experience, and it motivated him further to ensure he completes his studies on time as his parents will be retiring, so then he can start providing for them financially.

Similarly, another student sought part-time work to inform what she wanted to pursue at university as well as assist her father financially. This experience led her to work for a phone company which exposed her to the world of marketing. She was convinced that this was something she was good at and wanted to pursue.

"That's when I knew what I wanted to be…I love being a salesperson, like I can persuade someone to get this product…I've had that passion for women

empowerment and stuff and I would like to be the first Sāmoan female CEO of [phone company]"

For all the participants, the ambition to provide for their families upon completion of their qualifications was the main motivation to complete their studies.

"I can't wait to finish. I need money, for my family needs. Especially we are kind of poor. But I will try my best."

"It always goes back to the family…there's only one person that is currently working, which is my dad…[he] really motivates me…so I can get a job to help him and provide for the family…for all the family obligations, the village, the church…"

Role model: The eldest of the family

There were a number of students who identified themselves as the eldest of the family. As the eldest in a Sāmoan family they are responsible for many family duties. This either had a negative or positive impact on their role modelling capabilities. For example, due to such heavy obligations within their respective family this put an immense pressure on them to continue at university and to graduate because they were setting an example for their younger siblings.

"I am the only one in my family that has made it here to NUS because that's what my parents wanted, to complete my education…That's my aim for coming here. Not only for me but also for my parents and my siblings as well, but if I don't achieve my goal then I fail my whole family because I'm the eldest so I have to take responsibility for everyone."

In the case of one student, being the eldest also meant being responsible for their siblings' well-being and caring for them. She talked about being responsible for her younger siblings

by waking up early to make their breakfast and lunch, prepare them for school and also being the last to go to sleep. As she *stated "that's the life of an eldest child".*

Role model: The first to attend university

Nine of the participants identified themselves as the first to attend university. For those who identified themselves as the first of the siblings to attend university, or the first who will be completing a degree, this would be an accomplishment that would make their parents very proud as well as make them a role model to all the other siblings, cousins and even the people of the village. Some students perceived their status as a university student as a privilege that gives them a status for others to look up to them as role models. And they also feel the pressure to be so as well.

> *"No one had the privilege to get a degree so they're quite happy for me to reach this level in university. So all this expectation is very heavy on my head [be]cause I don't want to let them down…so I try my best to get this degree."*

Unsupportive Families: *Nofo ā'oga*

It is a common practice amongst Sāmoan students, who come from the big island of Savai'i or the rural villages to live with families who are closer to town where the university (NUS) is located. These living arrangements are necessary to ensure the student is able to access the institution as it is close proximity. In such cases, students often live with either extended families or close friends of their parents. Ideally these living arrangements are in the best interest of the student and their families. However, there have been cases whereby some of these students are not well supported by their host families.

Two students found it difficult to live with their host families because of misunderstanding. One recounted that her aunty did not understand the expectations she had to meet as a university student and often questioned why she had to go to university every day. When she told her mother about her situation, her mother kept encouraging her to remain with her aunty until she completed her studies. Despite what she felt and was going through, she endured it throughout her foundation studies and was able to graduate. The following year when she

embarked on her undergraduate studies at NUS, her brother heard about what she went through the previous year and decided to take her in to live with him. Since then, she has been enjoying university as her brother is more supportive of the extra curricula activities she engages in and however long she has to be at university.

> *"Before I was staying with my aunty so I face difficulties being that kind of person who is a nofo ā'oga. And sometimes I almost give up coming to school and I want to go back to Savai'i to be with my parents. Now I'm staying with my brother so I feel okay now"*

Another student explained how she stayed with her cousins and was often misunderstood. She expressed how she had to help look after her cousins' children and often was not allowed to go and see her family. She now lives with her best friend whose family offered for her to stay with them. She is happier there, as they are more supportive and even drop and pick her up from university.

> *"I used to live with my cousin and her brother. Most of the time she's not happy with me because she always misunderstood me in many ways, both of us misunderstood each other. So I shared to my best friend and she told her parents and they said I can stay with them."*

The student support staff, recounts a case where one of the students she was able to help did not live with her parents. She was able to provide the space for her to do her studies before she had to go home, to ensure that before she goes home all the work was completed.

> *"I documented that success story. She came she had a problem, I asked her what problem, I have an aunty I live with – if you're not with your parents when you do what you want where you want, is this where you be very strict with your time management. Between classes you come and sit here. We used to sit in the front and so when she goes home all the work is done. So she doesn't have to stress. Small things we do in order to help them. She graduated. She now works."*

This also highlights the importance for family to understand the expectations on the students in order for them to ensure a supportive home environment as well as a supportive attitude towards their commitment and participation in higher education. The case of the *nofo ā'oga* needs to be explored more in further studies, because there are various cases as such. This has a significant impact on the students' academic performance and participation in higher education.

Student resilience: Academic support at home

Where academic support lacks at home the onus is on the student to seek for answers elsewhere.

> *"my parents do not have the capacity because none of them made it here but it is their love and giving me their best, I am the eldest of my siblings and the first to reach this level making it to university, so when there is no one that can help me in my family, I have to go find it for myself, to find that answers to my questions."*

Peer support

Friends and fellow students were viewed as significant and helpful by the participants as part of their support system. For some it was their own group of friends whom they studied the same courses together with. One of the Science students made commented on doing assignments together with her friends.

> *"My friends, working as a team doing assignments [together]. If we all get it wrong we all get it wrong together. If we get chased out of class, we get chased out of class together."*
>
> *"Our friends, so we have a group of friends and we are aiming to all graduate together."*

Faith communities

In addition to the family, belonging to a faith community was also considered another source of support for the students. As Sāmoa is a Christian country, and the participants having identified as Christians, being part of a faith community was something they were able to acknowledge. Faith communities included being part of a church, a youth group or fellowship and having access to spiritual parents. These groups are able to offer prayers, spiritual and moral support for the students especially when facing challenges. They are often a source of encouragement for the students to continue in their academic journeys.

> *"My church, they pray for us a lot. Especially our ministers…they keep on blessing us motivates us a lot to finish."*
>
> *"My foundation year and my first year of bachelor, I attended this youth…kind of like a prayer fellowship…there's time that we go and get together and we pray…*

For one student in particular, his church was able to offer financial support as well as academic support.

> *"My financial support, my church, they supported me until last semester. Some of the people at church that they did well in their previous education I went to get some help from them."*

Student resilience: faith in God

> *"Let God be the centre, let him guide you, you can never achieve…without him and never be afraid to pray…he has helped me get through the storms."*

The students acknowledged their faith in God as an important factor that not only motivates them in their studies, but also another component to their resilience. As members of a Christian country, it should come as to no surprise that the students would talk about their faith. All of the students identified themselves as Christians and would at some point in the interview refer to God, their faith in God or to praying to God.

"Put God first in everything that you do…because this is where blessings and knowledge come from it's from God. So yeah put God and family first in everything and always think about them then you won't give up."

"When I feel down and I start to give up I talk to God to help me in my weaknesses, it makes me feel that God is with me, His spirit is…around me and inspire me a lot."

The NUSSA president gave credit to God for being elected into her role. She believed it was a calling from God for her. As noted below she acknowledged God's help in helping her with her responsibilities as well as the importance of having faith in God.

"It's a calling for me, if God calls you, take it. I think it will be a blessing to my life. I know God answered my prayers. I thank God if it wasn't for him I wouldn't have the understanding to conduct this work. Have faith in God, he's the only one give me answers to all my problems"

For the participants in this study, faith although intangible, was something they could hold on to navigating their way through and overcoming challenges in higher education. As the students acknowledged God this also demonstrated the influence of Christianity and Christian values in the Sāmoan context. Having faith in God was an important component of the resilience in the Sāmoan student in higher education.

Summary

In this chapter, the student support mechanisms identified by the students was explored under the sub-themes institutional support and social support. The support that was evident within NUS included that of the academic staff which students equally talked about being helpful and unhelpful. This was due to the different expectations of the students and academic staff. The attitudes of the academic staff could be commented on as to why students found some of them unapproachable. Some students were accepting of the harsh and strict attitudes of academic staff which challenged them in their educational journey. The prestige of the lecturers had an impact on students' perception and acceptance of their harsh and strict behaviour.

Furthermore, the chapter explored the role of the student support services unit whereby most of the students were well aware of and have all had some engagement with. There were success stories shared by both the students and the staff member of the unit. There is more the unit would like to offer for the students but budget constraints and limited staff members is a hindrance and therefore they cannot cater to all the support needs and of all the students.

Student lead initiatives like NUSSA, FOA P2P and BGW were identified by the students who were involved with these groups. They were able to offer platforms for empowerment, resourcing, capacity building and support for students both academically and socially. One of the initiatives was able provide a link between students and academic staff which was helpful for the student involved. Each of the initiatives had their own focus, with constraints, mainly access to funding. These initiatives thrive because of the support offered by the institution and should be encouraged and resourced as they provide the support students need from each other.

And finally the social support that students found outside NUS which was mainly their family and faith community. Family being their main support system since the beginning of their educational journeys provided them with funding, resources, and moral support. Motivational factors like the ambition to provide for the family fulfil the role of being the eldest in the family and the firs to attend university encouraged the students. However the case of the *nofo* ā'oga demonstrated that not all families were supportive. The students' faith community offered spiritual, moral and even financial support for the students. Their personal faith in God was noted as instrumental when developing their resilience in overcoming the challenges they have had to endure in their educational journeys. Family and faith communities were important social support mechanisms for the students.

6. DISCUSSION

Introduction

The previous two chapters explored in depth themes that arose from the students stories about their experiences of higher education. The findings showed that the students' perceptions were largely shaped by their struggles in transitioning, experiences with their previous high school, the impact of scholarships, experience with lecturers, peers and their families. In this chapter I attempt to bring together the themes discussed in chapters 5 and 6 in the hope to weave together the findings and what the literature has been saying.

Existing studies (Petelo, 2003; Ng Shiu, 2011; Penn 2010; Mara 2014; Iata 2001; Tsutsumoto, 1998) have focussed on Sāmoan students in higher education; however, such studies were conducted in Aotearoa NZ and the US and not Sāmoa. In the studies (Utumapu-McBride 2008; Tuia, 2018) that involved students at NUS, the focus was on the students within the Faculty of Education. This thesis includes NUS students from the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship and the Faculty of Science. The findings indicate a number of factors that influenced students' perceptions of higher education. The rest of the chapter is organized accordingly with the following key themes that impacted on the students' perceptions of higher education: *transitioning, scholarships, institutional and personal factors, lack of resources and the role of the educator*. A key learning is the *resilience* students expressed in coping with the challenges they faced in higher education. The chapter concludes with the implications and limitations.

6.1 Transitioning

The theme of 'transitioning' was common across the students' responses. It was reflected as an aspect that largely influenced their perceptions of higher education. The term 'transitioning' in the students' responses referred to two factors: a) the transition from high school to university and b) the transition from foundation level to undergraduate level.

Transitioning from high school to university.

This was mostly associated by students as a challenge. The most evident factor identified by students that described this transition as challenging was adaptation: adapting to a new environment, to new teaching methods, and a more independent learning environment with new found freedom. Students' experience with previous high school affected their ability to transition as they constantly compared NUS to that. As noted earlier in chapter 1, the transition rate from year 13 (high school) to higher education has increased over the years meaning, more students are pursuing higher education after high school (MESC, 2013).

Challenge: Lack of self-confidence

A further challenge during transition was the lack of confidence which was linked to being intimidated by other students, their previous high school, and their ability to understand and communicate in English. The student support staff confirmed this as an issue in helping students understand their assignments which are in English, and to help them bring out their ideas, to gain the confidence they need to complete assignments and to contribute in the class.

> *"So one of the biggest issues is they struggle with English and because the comprehension is not so good…so all of these can be discouraging to a student. Hope it helps them have a positive experience feeling good about themselves and express themselves in tutorial groups and outside of that be able to communicate with friends."*

Both Tuia (2018) and Utumapu et al (2008) found that NUS students struggled with the English language, whereby written course content, assignment and teaching are in English. This is further supported by the literature as a problem shared amongst Pasifika students (Cuthill & Scull, 2011; Uehara et al, 2017; Raturi & Boultoun-Lewis, 2014; Petelo, 2003). The lack of confidence by students to ask questions in class can be linked to their *Fa'aSāmoa* way of upbringing which Utumapu et al (2008) also notes. *"Students will be reluctant to ask questions as it may be a sign of being rude or not listening to the teacher while he/she was teaching".* In the *Fa'aSāmoa* young people are taught to listen and respect their elders. Students bring this attitude with them into formal education. This is also common across

Pasifika students as found in the literature, where there is a culture of silence that persists within higher education (Theodore et al, 2018; Cuthill & Scull, 2011; Uehara et al, 2017; Raturi & Boultoun-Lewis, 2014; Utumapu-McBride et al, 2008).

It is also important to note here that students who were confident acknowledged their previous high school as instrumental to preparing them for university, as well as being able to comprehend in the English language which the student support staff confirmed, and supported by Utumapu- McBride et al (2008). Students eventually gained self-confidence through peers and as learned to adapt to their new environment. Peers support is noted throughout the literature (Petelo, 2003; Tsutsumoto, 1998).

Transitioning from foundation level to undergraduate level

This was heavily impacted by the unchanged environment and the inability to secure a scholarship to study overseas. The desire for a scholarship to study overseas affected the students' perception of higher education when returning to pursue higher education. Returning to the same physical environment did not offer any new excitement for the students. This is in stark contrast to the Sāmoan students who study outside of Samoa, who are able to experience a new setting and environment when commencing their undergraduate studies (Petelo, 2003; Penn 2010; Ng Shiu 2011).

Impact of Scholarships

The impact of *scholarships* for the students not only impacted their transition, but also their perception of higher education. The students desired a scholarship to study overseas. A scholarship was desired nevertheless and necessary in order for students to continue in higher education. Functionalism will argue scholarships are desired and beneficial (Lesley, 2016). Students who were on local scholarships or were sponsored embraced it as an achievement and privilege. It was a means of great financial help to their families. This is noted in the literature (Utumapu – Mcbride et al, 2008; Petelo, 2003; Tsutsumoto, 1998). Tuition fees were noted as expensive by the students and thus, a scholarship or sponsorship was appreciated and credited in being able to continue their education. As noted earlier, in the Education sector plan, a higher transition rate from high school education to NUS was linked to a growth in Government of Sāmoa scholarship (MESC 2013). Only three of the students were self-funded by their families.

A few points worth discussing here: firstly, the hierarchy of importance students placed on the desired scholarships with the most prestige being the overseas opportunities. As one student noted, her main ambition to study overseas was to ensure she received an internationally recognized qualification. This can be related to the credentialism theory of the desired qualifications to ensure good employment (Lesley, 2016). Secondly, the desire for a scholarship to help alleviate financial burden on families and to continue education as expressed by the students is also noted in the literature for students studying outside of Sāmoa. I would like to argue here that this has something to do with the *Fa'aSāmoa* and how the students are nurtured through the education system. When one student expressed her sorrow of not being able to secure a scholarship to help her family, she felt like she let them down and that they had to worry about her tuition. In contrast when the students who did secure scholarships talked proudly about how their families need not worry about paying for their fees – it was already an accomplishment. From my sociological lens, scholarships were offered as rewards to continue in higher education. These rewards are scarce and therefore those who win the rewards can be proud of their achievement. Functionalism will argue that this encourages competition amongst students.

Challenge: the case of the "nofo ā'oga"

The case of the nofo ā'oga is another challenge under transitioning. I would like to highlight this as one major finding because it is a legitimate struggle faced by students who are unable to live with their immediate families in order to access higher education. As noted earlier in chapter 6, the three students who were from Savai'i, have had to move to Upolu and live with their host families. Two of these students, both females struggled and had misunderstandings with their host families, especially with the times they needed to be at university. A similar case of an NUS student living with family relatives in Upolu is documented by Utumapu et al (2008) whereby he felt he did not have enough time to do his studies and was conscious of using too much electricity at night. The student support staff in my study described how she has had to help a *nofo ā'oga* student complete their assignments before going home for similar reasons. It must be noted that this is not the case for all *nofo ā'oga* students who are able to live with their own parents, close relatives and in very supportive homes. This was the case of the male student who expressed his living arrangement as a supportive one.

It is impossible not to see this case from the stratification theory. These students suffer a double struggle. They do not have the same access and support as the other students who are from Upolu and those from Savai'i who live in supportive home environments. Secondly they are faced with the general issues around transitioning. In contrast to the Samoan students in Petelo's (2003) study who also leave home (Sāmoa) to study overseas, they are well supported by a government scholarship that ensures access to a secure and supportive accommodation, and further support at the institution of higher learning. Also, the contrast of institutions is very vast, as NUS cannot be compared to a more developed University of Canterbury that offers established student accommodations. Therefore, for NUS students who come from the rural areas rely heavily on their families and family networks for accommodation to ensure access to higher education. Although both students were able to resolve their living arrangements, this begs the question of what alternatives are there for NUS students. For one of the *nofo ā'oga* students, her friend's family was her alternative. A further observation is that both students were females which can be viewed from a feminist lens, as further barriers women in higher education face (Lesley, 2016).

6.2 Institutional and Personal support mechanisms

Students' responses reflected the importance of supporting mechanisms that helped facilitate their academic journey. According to their responses, these supporting mechanisms can be discussed based on two levels: a) institutional and b) personal.

Institutional

Students identified people and groups who supported them in their different stages of being in higher education. This included academic staff, mainly lecturers and tutors, as well as lab technicians. Staff of the student support services included the counsellors and literacy and numeracy learning advisors. Peers and fellow students through student lead initiatives were also identified and acknowledged.

Personal

Family was the major personal factor that students continuous referred to as a big part of their overall perception of higher education. Similar to the literature on Pasifika students, and in

particular Sāmoan students, family was noted as the biggest support and motivation for students to participate and continue in higher education (Utumapu et al, 2008, O'Regan 2006, Theodore et al, 2018, Siope, 2011, Petelo, 2003, Tsutsumoto, 1998). This included financial support, ensuring fees were paid, lunch money and bus fares as well as resources needed for study; moral support which included prayers and words of encouragement and a supportive environment at home allowing time for studies.

This was also true for the NUS students as found by Utumapu et al (2008). Some students expressed their families could not support them due to their limited knowledge of university, as was the case of the "first in the family to attend university" students. It is seems as Utumapu et al (2008) also expressed, some of the families still do not understand the 'nature' of university study and the expectations upon the students. "University is a new institute for many parents, NUS being the first and only Sāmoan owned university, has enabled many more students access to tertiary education for the first time" (Utumapu, 2008 et al, p. 161 – 162). This is resonated by studies in the literature (Tsutsumoto, 1998;).

In the case of the students whose families struggled to support them financially, in turn was a motivation for students to keep going and do their best so they could give back to their families. This was a very strong feeling amongst the students which ties in with *the migrant dream* expressed by Siope (2011) in the literature. The promise of a good job upon the completion of one's study, so they can provide for the family, help their parents with the financial obligations and to look after their parents who have sacrificed for their pursuit of education (Mila- Schaaf & Robinson , 2010).

Reproduction theory would argue that these students' families lacked the cultural and social capital to be able to support them more effectively (Lesley, 2016). As Mila-Schaaf & Robinson (2010) argued that success for Pasifika students relied on Pasifika cultural capital. As expressed by one student in my study, who was not only the eldest but also the first of her family to attend university, her parents are unable to help her academically, only financially. In the case of the Savai'i male student who was able transition well at NUS he had the cultural and social capital from his previous high school and his cousins who had attended and succeeded at NUS.

6.3 Lack of resources

Students' disappointment due to their unmet expectations of what higher education should be like at NUS included the lack of resources, equipment for needed for their courses like the case of the Science students, and irrelevant course materials. This was a similar case in the Utumapu study and Tuia of the case of the NUS students. As noted by the Education sector plan, learning resource material and equipment, appropriate ICT support and access to library facilities and resources are necessary to ensure PSET quality (MESC 2013). "Without the necessary funding on an ongoing basis, it is extremely difficult to keep equipment up to date" (MESC 2013). The resource constraints impacted on the students' learning experience and overall perception of higher education. This reaffirms what the World Bank (2000) argued about higher education in developing countries.

Stratification theory can be applied here to what the World Bank's (2000) report points out regarding more developed countries that set the precedent for higher education institutions. Thus the question of how can institutions like NUS keep up? What are the support mechanisms in place for higher education in developing countries?

6.4 Role of the educator

Interdependent to the previous theme, students' perception of higher education was largely shaped by the students' experience and relations to their lecturer as their primary point of contact with higher education. Students commented on the personalities and attitudes of the academic staff. Those who complained and were frustrated by these behaviours found they were unfairly treated. As one student expressed, she often felt belittled. In cases where students were told off for asking too many questions, and referred to read to their course materials, some students often found the course materials hard to understand or useless. Students felt their expectations of the lecturers were not met. This was especially true for the students whose lecturers were not committed to their role which affected the students' morale about a course they were very passionate about. Similar experiences were noted by Utumapu et al (2008).

This relates back to the point discussed earlier regarding the language barrier students faced in higher education where English was the language of instruction. In Petelo's (2003) study one of the Sāmoan students from Sāmoa mentioned his reluctance to approach lecturers because of his experience with teachers in Sāmoa. Reinforcing a point made earlier, the *Fa'aSāmoa* values of respect for elders often hinders students to challenge the behaviours of the lecturers. This is confirmed by one of the students who herself was encouraged by one lecturer to lodge a complaint against the uncommitted lecturer; however the majority of her class disagreed opting instead to understand the challenges faced by the lecturer. The student support staff also confirms this when encouraging students to document their experiences with lecturers.

However, the findings also noted that academic staff was very helpful, where even the dean of one faculty was praised for always offering his time to help the students. The NUSSA president credited the same dean for advising and encouraging her in her role. In the case where the lecturers were described as harsh and strict, students who did not have an issue with this loved the subject they were learning and they respected their lecturers claiming they were learning from the best. The expertise of the lecturers was admired motivating the students to do their best so they can reach the level of achievement their lecturers have. This was also noted by Utumapu et al (2008) "Students highlighted the role of the lecturer in their learning such as someone students could relate to and who was knowledgeable of his/her field" (p.167).

It must be acknowledged that a power struggle exists between the students and the lecturers. The *Fa'aSāmoa* allows for the dominant role of the lecturer to overpower that of the student. As noted by Reproduction theory, each individual is confined to one and only one position where this position is defined by the positions he/she occupies in different fields and the distribution of powers that are active in each field (Lesley, 2016). Students have avenues in place at NUS to voice their frustrations for change, however, they are reluctant to do so and the *Fa'aSāmoa* has a role to play in this. Simultaneously in some cases, the credentials of the lecturers override their harsh and strict attitudes which the students discard and accept as challenges and motivation for them to attain the level of education of their lecturers. From a functional lens, the ways the academic staffs behave are expected of them within an

institution of higher learning as they encourage students to be independent learners. This also explains their attitude to not follow students up about their assignments and going to class as expressed by the students. Thus the expectations of the students of the lecturers may not align with lecturers' own expectations of their role in higher education.

What the findings are unable to mention are the challenges the lecturers might face, given the struggle with resources at NUS. This study does not capture the lecturers' voices so therefore their side of the story of their own struggle with higher education in Sāmoa is not expressed. As noted in the Education Sector Plan, there is a lack of budget to support programmes adequately for PSET providers which includes NUS (MESC 2013). Other constraints documented were the inadequate knowledge and skills of many PSET lecturers and trainers where in 2011, 32.9% of the 152 permanent lecturers and trainers at NUS held a higher education qualification of either a master's or PhD degree (MESC 2013).

The advocacy therefore on student voice to be heard is encouraged and perhaps can take a partnership approach between student and lecturer as suggested by Bishop (2018) with a genuine intention of listening to the student. This process should enable and empower students individually and collectively (Hall, 2017) as well as reconcile differing views and expectations of students. This fits in with my Pasifika lens, where collaboration and collective efforts are defining of who we are as Pasifika people.

6.5 Resilience

Despite the institutional and personal challenges the students faced, they were able to cope with the help of their families, their peers, and their faith which indicated the development of *resilience* amongst the students. For example, the resilience of the science students towards the lack of resources allowed them work together as a group to get the task done together. This aligns with studies that argue Pasifika students learn better in groups (Mila-Shaaf & Robinson 2010). For Samoan students this also aligns with what was traditionally laid out in the Samoan society of the *aumaga* (men's group) and *aualuma* (women's group) working together to achieve the same goal within the village (Utumapu, 2008).

The students' resilience was also noted in the student lead initiatives the students were engaged with. The NUSSA project to provide a learning centre for the students as expressed by the president; the efforts by the P2P initiative to run workshops and fun learning activities for the student in the Faculty of Arts and the BGW club which provided a platform for empowerment as well as to provide financial support for one of the students. The students were also resilient in their attitudes to soldier on even with the lack of resources whereby they accepted it as part of being at NUS that whatever NUS was able to give just accept it. This was expressed by one of the Science students where she states:

> *"Don't expect too much from the school [be]cause some that's why some students struggle because they complain too much…So I need them to work with… whatever NUS is gonna give you go through it I mean if it's gonna be challenging for you especially with teachers (laughs) don't worry their telling offs will eventually finish. But for you and your own benefit achieve what you came here to achieve."*

However this was not the case for other students who all agree that NUS can do more and better given the fees are expensive thus expressing their high expectations from the institution of higher learning. A reminder that these students initially desired to win a scholarship to study higher education overseas, however they did not. These students were asking for learning opportunities like internships, and further development of NUS to offer them the resources and facilities they believe is fitting of an institution of higher learning. Thus the students show that they have high expectations of what higher education should be like at NUS. Yet for most they do not believe they were receiving the education and exposure they should be from NUS.

The students' resilience through their faith must be noted, as the case of NUSSA president who thanked God for answering her prayers reaffirming her place at NUS and in facing the challenges she faced as a leader. This was resonated by one of the *nofo ā'oga* students who through prayer were able to endure her living situation until it changed. The students also mentioned their faith communities and families who often prayed for them which gave them the motivation to keep going.

The students' ability to be resilient despite constraints at NUS reaffirms what the NUS Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021 urges: to not be defined by campus boundaries (NUS, 2017). This also aligns with Epeli Hau'ofa's plea to Pasifika people that "we should not be defined by the smallness of our islands but in the greatness of our oceans. We are the sea, we are the ocean. Oceania is us" (Hau'ofa, 1994). This same resilience was expressed in the Sāmoan students in Tsutsumoto's (1998) study which was motivated by students' family and the *Fa'aSāmoa*. This term resilience has also been used to describe the nature of Pasifika people as they combat various social issues today. Functionalism would argue that resulting social inequality is desirable whereby it serves as a motivating force (Lesley, 2016). As one science student expressed:

> *"I envy some kids. I envy the life of other people. I want that life. They don't have to work outside. They have cars. I want to lift up what I have now if I achieve this goal. It motivates me to do well in my studies…It will help me and my family."*

Therefore the students in their resilience demonstrated their way of coping with the challenges in higher education, specifically at NUS. Students drew upon their family's motivation to seek for a better standard of living, support from their peers and their faith to withstand challenges of transitioning, lack of resources, financial barriers and struggle with academic staff.

Implications

The findings therefore in this study resonated some of the findings presented within the literature as noted in the themes above. They reaffirm most of what has been researched regarding Pasifika students, specifically Samoan students in higher education. The findings in this study can inform student support services in the issues of transitioning that the students face. It can also inform NUS academic staff of how their role is vital for the student experience as they are the primary contact between the student and the institution, thus heavily impacts students' perceptions of higher education. It can also inform NUS on how as an institution can compete with the students' preference for a scholarship to study overseas rather than a local one and to study at NUS. It can also inform future studies on social issues faced by Sāmoan students, particularly with the case of the *nofo ā'oga* which is a stark reality for some students studying at NUS. What support can be offered for these students and what

would alternatives look like? How can NUS take into account these inequities regarding students?

6.6 Limitations

This study cannot be generalized to include the perceptions of all NUS students given its sample size. The study excluded students from other Faculties, as only three faculties are represented here. The intention to interview students only and a support staff meant the lecturers' voice was also excluded. In gathering the data, I had hoped for more time with the students to talk more, and also follow up on conversations. Also conducting focus groups to check what the students said in the interviews would have been ideal to further support the findings. The methodological choices were constrained by the indigenous method of *talanoa*. Allowing for free *talanoa* and semi-structured interviews meant the students were free to talk but it also allowed for students to stray.

The reliability of this data is impacted by the inability of me as the researcher and author to member check the transcripts with the participants. It is also a burden I have to carry knowing that I am presenting their stories with the hope that I have done so with justice. Despite these limitations, the findings were still able to answer the research questions that were set out at the beginning.

Summary

This chapter aimed to weave together the themes presented in the findings with support from the literature. This emphasized how the students' perceptions of higher education were affected by their transitioning from high school to foundation and later from foundation to undergraduate level. Challenges in transitioning included lack of self-confidence linked to language barrier and previous high school. Cultural and social capital was identified as key to successful transitioning. The access to local scholarships and sponsorship allowed students to continue in higher education and to help their families financially. This was both desired and beneficial.

The case of the *nofo ā'oga* presented students who faced both the issue of transitioning and not having access to a safe and enabling home environment. These students face a double challenge, triple if gender is accounted for; given these students were both females. The discussion raised questions around how well informed families are on the expectations of students to participate in higher education, as well as what alternative accommodation options are available for NUS students.

The discussion on institutional and personal support mechanisms highlighted some very important issues that plagued students. Although NUS and their families provided the resources, facilities and support they needed to participate in higher education, there were limitations and constraints which affected the students' perception of higher education. The lack of resources and the significant role of the educator were further themes that were discussed which were interrelated and interdependent. Discussion raised questions around expectations of students and the lecturers, as well as acknowledging the issue of resources available at NUS as a higher education in a developing country.

Despite these challenges, the students proved to be resilient as illustrated in their attitudes and in their efforts to push for student lead initiatives to support one another at NUS. Students' resilience is linked to their family as motivation, the *Fa'aSāmoa* and their faith. These efforts should not be taken lightly and should be acknowledged and supported. Students also have high expectations of NUS as an institution of higher learning which they believe can be achieved.

Finally, the findings provided implications which confirmed findings from other studies in the literature as well as offer insights for NUS and MESC regarding issues around students in higher education and PSET. The findings also had limitations and therefore cannot be generalized to speak for all Sāmoan students and students at NUS.

7. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Reflection

As I come to the end of this thesis, and drawing it to a close, I can only hope this study can in some way, however small, contribute to the literature, offer insights for NUS, for the students, and for the Sāmoan society and the Samoan worldview. In the previous chapters I presented a retelling of my participant's stories, and it is my hope that I have done them justice as I wanted to honour them for their contributions.

By listening to the experiences of students and analysing their interviews, this thesis demonstrated how the students' perceptions of higher education was largely shaped by their transitioning experiences, scholarships, institutional and personal factors, their families, their lecturers, and in turn developed resilience. Students expressed their understandings and meanings of higher education. The voice of the Sāmoan student in higher education was captured. Students expressed what/who helped and hindered in their educational journeys. In this chapter, I offer a reflection of the research process as I look back on the journey. I document further issues and questions that arose as I engaged with the data and give recommendations on possible areas for further research.

A study on Samoan students in higher education in Samoa

As expressed within the literature, not many studies have focussed on Sāmoan students studying in higher education in Sāmoa. Most of the studies that involved Sāmoan students in higher education were conducted outside of Sāmoa, with the majority being in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This study was able to expand and further explore issues raised by the few studies that were specifically based on students at NUS. Its focus was uniquely targeting the experiences of students to identify their perceptions and the support that was available to them. The study was able to uncover other challenges the students faced and other factors that impacted on their experience at NUS.

My expectations versus my reality

As I reflect on this research journey, I want to note that my expectations when setting out to conduct this study was simply to talk to students about their experience and hopefully they could share about what supports them and what hinders them in their pursuit of higher education. I was anticipating that students would talk about their family as their main support, which they did. I was confident the students would talk about the ways they would have had to cope with the expectations of higher education and their families on them which would allude to the resilience that I wanted to argue was nurtured within the Sāmoan context. When I first read the literature and studies on Pasifika students in higher education and their experiences, my heart went out to the students in higher education in Sāmoa. They do not leave home, are active in their family and communities, yet at the same time pursue higher education. I wanted to see if their struggles were the same as those students in the literature. I also believed that there was something special about their experiences that set them apart from those in the literature.

The results exceeded my expectations. As a novice researcher still finding her way, I underestimated the data I received; mainly because of the short time the *talanoa* took place. Also given I was mainly relying on the interviews, I also underestimated that the data would be enough. I owe it to my participants for sharing what they shared. The rich data was because they trusted me and were comfortable to share their stories. The results speak for themselves. The students were equally excited and frustrated. Despite a few who were reluctant, the rest were not afraid to share their frustrations with NUS, especially with the academic staff. The results also highlighted issues that I never thought of. For example, issues of transitioning and the impact of the scholarships which had a huge impact on the students' perceptions and experience at NUS.

Pasifika methods

My choice of using indigenous Pasifika methods for this study together with western research ideologies was simply because I am an indigenous person researching my people yet at the same time still trying to be familiar with doing research. I took seriously the advice offered by Pasifika indigenous researchers who advocated for Pasifika indigenous methods. This proved fruitful when it came to engaging with my participants, whereby the use of *talanoa*

and the gendered paired interviews underpinned by *Fa'afaletui* allowed the students to share their stories and experiences. This would otherwise have been difficult to share through a survey, or through a very structured interview. Using indigenous methods, also gave me the confidence I needed to conduct and complete this research. I hope that this study honours them as they have worked hard to pave the way for someone like me trying to navigate my own way in the research world.

Effectiveness of the Framework

I chose to merge my Pasifika and Sociological lenses as a framework for analysis. The sociological framing which used functionalism, credentialism, reproduction theory, stratification theory and feminist theory allowed for an interconnected, interrelated and interdependent interrogation of matters arising from the data. This also allowed me a holistic approach that was not limited to one perspective.

What would I do differently?

Looking back on the necessary steps that I had to undertake to conduct this study, relationships and networking was important in gaining access to my community of participants. The study began with preparations in March 2019 and completed in the period of 12 months full-time study, with an added month to complete writing. If I were to conduct this study again, I would suggest including focus group discussions underpinned by indigenous methods to ensure more in depth views from the students are captured. I would also include other faculties for a more representative study at NUS. More importantly, I would take a partnership approach where students would be involved in the research to ensure it is student focussed and even student lead.

7.2 Recommendations

I offer the following recommendations as arising from this study:

- NUS to consider the transitioning needs of its students in order to provide a positive student experience. Some suggestions include:
    - A reorientation program for returning students ushering them into starting their degree program, with a focus on a positive student experience at NUS.

    - NUS teaching staff to be well resourced and supported in their role to provide a positive student experience. This includes being reminded of their vital role as the primary contact between the student and the institution which impacts on the student's motivation and passion for the course they are learning and overall participation and perception in higher education.
    - Resources to be made relevant, available and accessible to enhance student experience in their respective fields.
- It can also inform future studies on social issues faced by Samoan students, particularly with the case of the *nofo ā'oga* which is a stark reality for some students studying at NUS. What support can be offered for these students and what would alternatives look like? How can NUS take into account these inequities regarding students?
- NUS to acknowledge and further support existing student lead initiatives within the university as well as enable and encourage through resources and funding, more student lead initiatives by students and for students.
- Further studies on the voice of the lecturers to acknowledge their perceptions of higher education and the challenges they may face.
- It can also inform NUS on its competiveness with the students' preference for a scholarship to study overseas rather than a local one and to study at NUS. This could include:
    - More awareness and information about local scholarships at NUS could be communicated clearly in the Samoan community.
    - More learning opportunities and exposure for the students through the availability of internships, relevant learning resources as suggested by the students.
- The findings in this research can also inform some of the concerns raised by the Education sector plan 2015 – 2019 regarding PSET providers and the challenges faced by the students.

Questions Raised & Insights

This research focussed on students within three faculties FOA, FOBE, and FOS who were all in their second and third years, nearing the completion of their undergraduate studies.

Questions that arise from this are: What would the results be if the study included students from all the faculties?

I believe this study is able to offer further insights on the experiences of Samoan students in higher education, as well as Pasifika students in higher education. It also offers insights with the story of the *nofo ā'oga* which highlights issues around the unequal access to higher education and family support, the reality of those who live in rural areas and the struggles they face. This study especially highlights the importance of transitioning within NUS which occurs in two parts and stages: from high school to foundation and from foundation to undergraduate level.

Final reflection

As I end this chapter and this thesis, my final reflection and feelings can be summarized in what one of my participants said in his advice to future students of higher education:

> *"Do not give up easily. Nothing can be obtained with ease. If you don't sweat, you won't get a good future for your family. Always remember there are people waiting for you, there are people who look up to you…Put God first in everything that you do…Put God and family first in everything and always think about them then you won't give up."* – excerpt from a NUS student interview.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Afamasaga, T., Moli, F. S., & Kruse-Va'ai, E. (2005) *UNESCO/International institute for educational planning (IIEP) project. Reinforcing/incorporating skills development in the Samoan national education for all (EFA) plan. National study. Final Report.* UNESCO.

Anae, M., Anderson H., Benseman, J., & Coxon, E. (2002). *Pacific peoples and tertiary education: Issues of participation*. Final report. Auckland: Auckland Uniservices.

Bishop, D.(2018) More than just listening: the role of student voice in higher education, an academic perspective. *The University of Lincoln Journal of Higher Education*. 1 (1), 1 – 14.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3, 77 – 101.

Brown Girl Woke (2020). *About us*. https://browngirlwoke.co/about-us/

Chafetz, J. S. (2004). Bridging feminist theory and research methodology. Journal of Family Issues, 25(7), 963–977

Clark, B, R. (1973; 2007). Development of the Sociology of Higher Education. In P. J. Gumport (Ed) *Sociology of Higher Education.* Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa, Preamble retrieved from http://www.palemene.ws/new/wp-content/uploads/Document/2016-Constitution-of-Samoa-Eng.pdf

Cuthill, M., & Scull, S. (2011). Going to university: Pacific island migrant perspectives: underlying factors constraining access to higher education for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in Australia: Pacific island migrant perspectives. *Australian University Review*. 53 (1), 5 – 13.

Davidson-Toumu'a, R., & Dunbar, K. (2009). Understanding the experiences of Pacific students and facilitating socio-cultural adjustment into higher education in Aotearoa. *New Zealand Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association* No 33, 69 – 88.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dutton, H, D., Mayeda, D, T., Keil, M., & ‘Ofamo’oni, I. (2016). We’re all in it together. *Mai Journal.* Vol 5 (1), 3 – 16.

Education for All 2015 National Review Report : Samoa (2015). For further information, please contact : efa 2015 reviews @ unesco.org *(Report was prepared by the relevant national authorities in view of the World Education Forum, Republic of Korea, 19 – 22 May 2015)* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000229876/PDF/229876eng.pdf.multi

Fa’avae, D. (2018). Giving voice to the unheard in higher education. *Mai Journal.* Vol 7 (2), 127 – 138.

Fa’avae, D., Alison J., & Manu’atu, L. (2016). Talanoa’i ‘a e talanoa – Talking about Talanoa. *Alternative* Vol 12 (2), 138 – 150.

Gershon, I. (2012). *No Family Is an Island: Cultural Expertise among Samoans in Diaspora*. Cornell University Press. Retrieved March 8, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7zhnp

Gibbs, G, R. (2012). Thematic Coding and Categorizing. In *Analyzing Qualitative Data: Sage Research methods*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Gumport, P, J. (2007). Sociology of Higher Education: An Evolving Field. In P. J. Gumport (Ed) *Sociology of Higher Education.* Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Hall, V. (2017). A tale of two narratives: student voice – what lies before us? *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol 43(2), pp. 180 – 193.

Hau’ofa, E. (1994). Our Sea of Islands. *The contemporary Pacific*. 148 – 161.

Hesse-Biber, S, N., & Yaiser, M, L. (2004). *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Holloway , I., & Todres, L. (2003). The status of method: flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative Research,* Vol 3(3), 345 – 357.

Iata, L. (2001). *Meeting the challenge: Ethnic minority adults in tertiary education: the experiences of Samoan mature students at Victoria University*. (unpublished dissertation). Victoria University of Wellington.

Feagaimaali’i-Luamanu, J. (2017, June 9). Freedom of Religion not threatened: AG. *Samoa Observer*.

Lee Hang, D. (2011). Sa'a fa'aoti le utu a le faimea: Using the Samoan language in educational research: some tips for first time researchers. *The Journal of Samoan studies* Volume 4, 49 – 57 http://journal.samoanstudies.ws/2015/08/23/saa-faaoti-le-utu-a-le-faimea-using-the-samoanlanguage-in-educational-research-some-tips-for-first-time-researchers/

Lesley, A. (2006). Theories of the sociology of higher education access and participation. In *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Higher Education*. Routledge.

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: a practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J)*. Vol 8 (3), 3351 – 33514.

Map of Samoa. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20071120020749/http://www.donbosco.asn.au/Bulletins/2004/mar/overview.htm

Ma'ia'i, F. (1957). *A study of the developing pattern of education and the factors influencing that development in New Zealand's Pacific Dependencies.* Unpublished dissertation). Victoria University of Wellington.

Mara, D. (2014). Samoa women in tertiary education and ethnic identity. In Cram F, Phillips H, Sauni P, Tuagalu C (Eds) *Maori and Pasifika Higher Education Horizons*. UK: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd

Marshall, C., and Rossman, G, B. (1989). *Designing Qualitative Research*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Matautia, S, A, P. (2016). A'oa'o le tama e tusa ma ona ala, a o'o ina matua e le toe te'a ese ma ia: if we fail to construct our own realities others will do it for us. (Unpublished dissertation). Victoria University of Wellington School of Architecture and Design.

Mayeda, D, T., Keil, M., Dutton, H, D., 'Ofamo'oni, I. (2014). You've gotta set a precedent. *Alternative* Vol 10 (2), 165 – 179.

McLeod, J. (2011). Student voice and the politics of listening in higher education, *Critical Studies in Education*, 52 (2), 179-189

Meleisea, M., Meleisea, P, S., Sio, G, P, S., Tavale, T., Fitisemanu, T. (1987). The Settlement of Samoa. In Malama, M, & Meleisea, P, S. *Lagaga: A short history of Western Samoa*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.

Mila-Schaaf, K., & Robinson, E., (2010). Polycultural capital and educational achievement among NZ born Pacific peoples. *Mai Review* Issue 1 http://review.mai.ac.nz

Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. (2006). Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture *Strategic Policies and Plan July 2006 – June 2015*. MESC, Samoa.

Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, (2013). *Education Sector Plan 2013 – 2018.* MESC, Samoa. http://www.mesc.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Education-Sector-Plan-2013_2018-English-version.pdf

Mulitalo-Lauta, P, T, M, T. (2000). *Fa'aSamoa and social work within the New Zealand context*. Palmerston North: The Dunmore Printing Company Ltd.

Nakhid, C. (2006). Ethics and the obstruction of social justice for Maori and Pasifika students in tertiary institutions in Aotearoa. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 9 (3), 295 – 305.

Nakhid, C., Fa'alogo J, P., Faiva M., Halafihi, D., Pilisi, S., Senio, J., Taylor, S., & Thomas L. (2007). Aua'i ile galuega: a Pasifika Research Design ensuring ownership and autonomy. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*. Issue 32, 106 – 125.

Naples, N, A. (2004). The Outsider Phenomenon. In S. N. Hesse-Biber and M. L. Yaiser (Eds). *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

National University of Samoa. (2017). *NUS Strategic Plan (FY2017/18 – 2020/21).* Governance, Policy and Planning, NUS.

Ng Shiu, R, S, B. (2011). *It's like going to the moon: the experiences of Samoan tertiary health students at the University of Auckland*. Unpublished doctoral thesis University of Auckland, NZ.

O'Regan, B. (2006). *Ietoga: Samoa educator's educational journeys*. (Unpublished dissertation). Christchurch College of Education.

Penn, R. (2010). *Manumalo: a study of factors which facilitate success for New Zealand-born Samoan students at university*. (Unpublished master's thesis). AUT University, New Zealand.

Petelo, L, M. (2003). *Fa'alogo i leo o le fanau: A qualitative study of the ways in which students of Samoan background experience their education within the University of Canterbury*. (Unpublished dissertation). University of Canterbury.

Raturi, S., & Boulton-Lewis, G. (2014). Shaping lecturers' beliefs about teaching and learning in higher education in the Pacific. *Issues in Educational Research*. Vol 24 (1), 67 – 84.

Samoa Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Samoa Socio-Economic Atlas 2016*. Apia: SBS

Seale, J. (2010). Doing student voice work in higher education: an exploration of the value of participatory methods. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6), 995 – 1015

Siope, A. (2011). The schooling experiences of Pasifika students. *Set: Research Information for teachers*. 3, 10-16.

Smith, L, T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples.* Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

Smith, L, T. (2004). Building Research Capability in the Pacific, for the Pacific and by Pacific Peoples in Baba, T L et al (eds) *Researching the Pacific and Indigenous Peoples: Issues and Perspectives.* The University of Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies

Smith, L, T. (2005). Building a Research Agenda for Indigenous Epistemologies and Education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. Vol 36 (1), 93 – 95.

Stake, R, E. (2010). *Qualitative Research: Studying how things work*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Suaalii-Sauni, T., & Fulu-Ailupotea, S, M. (2014). Decolonizing Pacific Research, building Pacific research communities and developing Pacific research tools: The case of the talanoa and the fa'afaletui in Samoa. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*. Vol 55 (3), 332 – 344.

Tamasese, K., Peteru, C., Waldergrave, C., & Bush, A., (2005). O le taeao afua, the new morning: A qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. 39 (4), 300 – 309

Thaman, K, H. (2003). Decolonizing Pacific studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education. *The Contemporary Pacific*. Vol 15 (1), 1 – 17.

Theodore, R., Taumoepeau, M., Tustin, K., Gollop, M., Unasa, C., Kokaua, J., Taylor, N., Ramrakha, S., Hunter, J., & Poulton, R. (2018). Pacific university graduates in New Zealand: what helps and hinders completion. *Alternative*. 00(0), 1 – 9.

The World Bank (2000). *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*. Washington, USA: The World Bank.

Tsutsumoto, T, S. (1998). *Higher educational perspectives, through the narratives of Samoan college students : a thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Asian American Studies* (Unpublished dissertation). University of California Los Angeles.

Tuia, T, T. (2018). The impact of Samoan Pre-service Teacher Education on Student Learning. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives.* Vol 17 (3), 30 – 38.

Tuia, T, T. (2019). Globalization, Culture and Education in Samoa. *International Online Journal of Primary Education*. Vol 8 (1), 51 – 63.

Tuafiti, P. (2011). Multiple challenges in research within the *fa'asamoa* context. *Pacific-Asian Education*. Vol 23 (2), 33 – 42.

Uehara, D, L., Chugen, J., & Stanley Raatior, V. (2017). Perceptions of Pacific Islander Students in Higher Education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000057

Utumapu-McBride, T., Esera E., Toia S, F., Tone-Schuster, L., So'oaemalelagi, F, L. (2008). Sa'ili mo le lumana'i: Research on Samoan Students' Learning Perspectives and the Impacts on Their Achievement. *Alternative Special Edition: Special Issue.*

UNESCO. (2011). *World Data on Education*. 7th edition 2010/2011. http://www.ibe.unesco.org/

Vaioleti T, M. (2006). Talanoa Research Methodology: A developing position on Pacific Research. *Waikato Journal of Education*. 12: 2006, pp 21 – 24

Appendix 1

Talofa lava!

Are you a studying towards a Bachelor's Degree?

Would you like to participate in a research on students' experience of Higher Education?

I am looking for participants who are:

- currently studying a Bachelor's degree in the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship or the Faculty of Science;
- willing to share about their experience of Higher Education (University);
- **available** to participate in an interview and focus group from the **7th – 21st August** here at the National University of Samoa.

The study looks at identifying <u>what supports the success of the Samoan student studying in Higher Education in Samoa.</u>
Your insights will contribute to a Sociology Master's thesis.

You will be interviewed and asked to share on your educational journey in a one-on-one interview and a group discussion with other students.

If you would like to take part, email **rosa.filoi@vuw.ac.nz** or come in to the Faculty of Arts office, room 7.

A gift consisting of phone credit and money will be rewarded for your time and participation.

Fa'afetai lava.

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (0000027414) and the National University of Samoa Research and Ethics Committee (24-5-2019-5). The principal researcher is Rosa Filoi.

Appendix 2

Thank you for agreeing to fill out this questionnaire. This information would be helpful to identify key information about our participants.

Please answer all the questions in both parts.

1. Gender *(Please tick)*
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Other- please specify:_____

2. Please state which village you are from _____

3. Please state your age: _____

4. Religious affiliation *(Please tick)*
   - ☐ Atheist
   - ☐ Anglican
   - ☐ Baptist
   - ☐ Church of Latter- day Saints
   - ☐ Methodist
   - ☐ Pentecostal
   - ☐ Catholic
   - ☐ Seventh Day Adventist
   - ☐ Presbyterian, Congregational and Reform
   - ☐ Jehovah witness
   - ☐ Buddhist
   - ☐ Hindu
   - ☐ Jewish
   - ☐ Islam/Muslim
   - ☐ No Religion
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ Prefer not to say

5. What primary school did you attend?

   ---

6. What high school did you attend?

   ---

7. Amount of years you attended Higher Education (University)?
   - ☐ 1 year or less
   - ☐ 1 year or more

8. What course of study are you currently undertaking in 2019? (E.G. BA majoring in Sociology)

_____

9. Tick what year you are currently undertaking in your 2019 studies.

- ☐ 1st year
- ☐ 2nd year
- ☐ 3rd year
- ☐ 4th year

10. Are you first in your immediate family to attend university? *(Please tick)*

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

11. Do you have any other tertiary qualifications? (*If yes, please state*)

_____

12. Are you currently on scholarship that pays for your tuition fees?

- ☐ If YES, please state the name of the scholarship and its duration.

  _____

- ☐ If NO, please state how your tuition fees are being met.

  _____

13. In your household, tick which of the following applies to you:

- ☐ Mother works
- ☐ Father works
- ☐ More than one sibling works
- ☐ I work part time
- ☐ Other, please state below:

  _____

Thank you for your time and completing the questionnaire.