Abstract

The Double-Edged Sword of Pacific Nursing and Trade Students

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Abstract for a Master of Professional Practice research thesis

This thesis examines the lived experiences of Pacific students enrolled in trades and nursing programmes at Whitireia and WelTec. The study focuses on how Pacific students balance the demands of academic study with their cultural, family, and community responsibilities. While institutional support structures exist, Pacific learners continue to face systemic challenges, including financial pressures, limited culturally relevant support, and the need to uphold family obligations, which shape their academic engagement and outcomes.

A qualitative research design was adopted, incorporating the Talanoa methodology to ensure cultural safety and authenticity. Four Talanoa sessions were conducted: one with Pacific nursing students (n = 4), one with Pacific trades students (n = 7), and two with Pacific tutors (nursing, n = 3; trades, n = 11). Each Talanoa session lasted 40–60 minutes in culturally respectful settings. The data were analysed thematically, guided by the Pacific relational philosophy of Teu le Vā – which emphasises nurturing and maintaining respectful relationships throughout the research process.

Five interrelated themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

1. Family and Cultural Expectations, which serves as both a motivating force, and a source of pressure. Students' academic efforts are tied to collective pride, but the weight of expectation often creates emotional and financial strain.
2. Balancing Commitments and Financial Pressures, as students frequently juggle study, work, and family responsibilities, leaving them stretched and fatigued.
3. Institutional Support and Flexibility, which highlights the pivotal role of empathetic, culturally responsive tutors who create safe spaces for learning, in contrast to rigid institutional frameworks, which often leave students feeling marginalised.
4. Identity, Belonging, and Representation, which reveals how cultural visibility within the institution sustains motivation, while its absence deepens feelings of isolation.
5. Personal Growth and Resilience, which illustrates how Pacific students turn challenges into strengths, developing adaptability, perseverance, and leadership, even at a personal cost.

This research contributes to the growing body of work on Pacific education by amplifying the voices of students and tutors, and demonstrating how success is shaped not only by individual effort, but also by cultural values, family ties, and institutional responsiveness. These findings support more flexible, relational, and culturally sustaining approaches in higher education that honour the holistic realities of Pacific learners. By recognising and valuing students' identities, educational institutions can move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward genuine equity and belonging.

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CITE THIS ABSTRACT: Sione-Tuisila, F. W. A. (2026). The double-edged sword of Pacific nursing and trade students. *Whitireia Journal of Nursing, Health & Social Services*, 33, 43–44. https://doi.org/10.34074/whit.3305