

Culture of Testing

Kingdom of Tonga

REPORT

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by UNESCO to examine the ‘culture of testing’ in the Kingdom of Tonga and carried out by the Institute of Education of The University of the South Pacific (USP). Tonga has a formal education system that is examination oriented and driven and society has traditionally placed excessive value on the results of examinations, especially high stake ones.

The study examines the social and cultural factors that create a “culture of testing” and its relationship to education policies, education reform, curriculum, and/or teacher pedagogy. It will also examine how this “culture of testing” affect learners and learning outcomes. All of these will be examined in light of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 targets.

The study draws attention to the fact that while the emphasis on exams results maybe justified in the eyes of parents and the public, there are other non-examined skills and knowledges that students acquire while at schools which may be of importance to them later in life. In other words, this focus purely on high exam results may also be undermining other essential aspects of learning that are often not captured in tests and examinations, at least in the way that these are traditionally conceived.

The research has revealed that the Tongan parents’ perceptions about examinations appears to be consistent with a culture dominated by high-stakes public examinations, in which high student performance in examinations is publicly applauded in society and social institutions like the church, and in which such performance brings about significant social consequences (i.e., access to scholarships to study abroad).

Parents and teachers do not agree that there are too many examinations, however students do agree that there are too many examinations. However, all participants rated examinations highly in terms of their importance in maintaining a ‘good education’. Furthermore, because examinations have such powerful positive inducements, they act as a significant lever for motivating students to improve their performance.

Participants believed that school administrators should consider students’ voices in making school policies about assessment and examinations. School administrators themselves raised the issue of language in examinations. Specifically, they are concerned by the fact that the language of the examination is predominantly not the students’ first language, arguing that any such test is to some degree a test of language proficiency – in this case, English as a second language. Questions raised include those relating to what percentage of students’ low scores on national assessments can or

should be attributed to language proficiency? Will students improve their scores if assessed in their first language? This raises a number of important issues that require further in-depth analysis.

Desk study revealed the need for the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to be empowered and strengthened to give it the capability to undertake its vital purposes. The Unit has remained vulnerable to political, management and administration changes. Urgently, the Unit needs strong leadership and good relationships with other divisions of the Ministry, education systems, and schools to enable it to perform its primary function of coordinating the collection of quality data, compilation, analysis, and reporting of educational information to all stake holders.

The Ministry of Education and Training (MET) and private school authorities in the Kingdom of Tonga place high emphasis on good exams results and this has negative implications and consequences for education as a whole. Tonga needs an education system that caters for the diverse characteristics and abilities of its student population. It needs an education system that offers students a wide variety of options and career pathways to choose from. The SDG4 commits to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is believed that the emphasis on exam results has many students missing out on opportunities they may have been capable of accessing, if the education system had been truly inclusive.

1 Introduction

The Kingdom of Tonga has a total land area of 691 square kilometres and consists of 169 small islands widely scattered within 700,000 square kilometres of Pacific Ocean. Its nearest neighbours are Fiji to the west and the Samoas to the north. A hereditary constitutional monarchy governs Tonga under a constitution promulgated in 1875. It is the oldest and the only remaining Polynesian monarchy. The Head of State is King Tupou the VI, the great, great, grandson of Tupou I who orchestrated the unification of the country under one centralised political system.

Formal education was introduced by London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries via New South Wales, Australia, in 1828. Since then, testing has become a regular component of the education system, and passing high stakes examinations is fundamental to a pathway of traditional academic success. The purpose of the examinations has varied between selection, accountability, promotion, and certification, among others. Students who achieve excellence in these exams are given scholarships to study overseas. Schools, parents, and the communities have developed a ‘culture of testing’, and this study looks into the nature, causes and consequences of that culture.

This study proposes to better understand the socio-cultural drivers behind the ‘culture of testing’ in the Kingdom of Tonga and their effects on the education system generally, and its relationship to education policies, education reform, curriculum, and/or teacher pedagogy. It will also examines how this “culture of testing” affect learners and learning outcomes. This focus on ‘testing’ more specifically refers to the reliance and focus on examinations utilized for transition and selection purposes, so called ‘high-stakes exams’; however, the impact of low-stakes assessments and exams will also be explored. All these will be examined, particularly in light of the SDG 4 targets.

2 Methodology

It was anticipated that a mixed method approach would provide the most means of exploring the study’s three main research questions. The mixed method approach utilises both quantifiable tools such as the questionnaire (for parents, students, and teachers), and more descriptive qualitative approaches which are carefully tailored to the cultural context of Tonga. For example, in establishing the perceptual viewpoints of the Tongan students, parents, and teachers regarding the ‘culture of testing’, an exploratory qualitative approach involving the combination of focus group and *Talanoa* (a widely used Polynesian research method, well documented by Halapua, 2002; Vaioleti, 2003) plus interpretive analysis was employed.

The *Talanoa* method was used by the researcher to collect data from teachers and parents. The *Talanoa* method allows the participants to interact and communicate in the Tongan language, and is an effective and ethical means by which a Tongan researcher may collect valid data from Tongan participants in a culturally appropriate manner.

A survey questionnaire was administered for all three groups of participants, with the intention that the complementary use of both approaches would lead to more valid, generalisable, and powerful understandings of what the three groups of participants understood about the 'culture of testing' and how those beliefs shaped their intentions, actions, and academic outcomes in the context of the Kingdom of Tonga. The primary data collection was further supplemented with a desk study and literature review.

The Asia-Pacific UNESCO regional office in Bangkok, Thailand invited ten countries from the region to participate in this study. The ten participating countries were also invited in November 2016 for a 2 day meeting in Bangkok to develop research questions, methodology, and tools. The three main research questions driving this study are:

- i. What are the social and cultural factors that create a "culture of testing"?
- ii. What is the relationship between the "culture of testing" and education policies, education reform, curriculum, and/or teacher pedagogy?
- iii. How does this "culture of testing" affect learners and learning outcomes?

Three questionnaires (one each for parents, teachers, and students) were developed during that initial meeting. The questionnaires were reviewed both by the participating researchers and by the UNESCO team in Bangkok. At the beginning of this year (2017), the questionnaires were sent to each participating country to be further contextualised if necessary. In the context of Tonga, some of the terminology was reviewed to reflect the local education system and levels. For example, the word 'semester' is not used locally in the secondary and primary school context, hence the change to 'term' in the questionnaire tool. The word 'grade' was replaced by 'class' or 'form' as is commonly used in primary and secondary schools respectively in Tonga.

The questionnaires for students and parents were translated into the Tongan language by a former Tongan language lecturer of the Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE), the government teacher training institute. However, the English questions were retained alongside the Tongan translation for those who may only speak one of the two languages, and to ensure a stronger understanding of the questions by participants. The teachers' questionnaire was not translated into Tongan language, as it was assumed that teachers would have no problem with understanding the questions in English.

An invitation letter was sent to selected Education Authorities to invite them to participate in the study. Criteria for selection was that the participating schools should represent a combination of rural/urban and private/state schools. The USP Institute of Education secured permission to conduct the study in six secondary schools; two were government high schools and the remaining four were faith-based schools. Three schools were situated in rural communities while the other three schools were located in an urban centre.

2.1 Studies and Participants

Table 1. Studies, participants & sample size

	Studies						
	(1) Survey			(2) Talanoa			(3) Focus Group
Participants	Students 2 states 4 privates 3/3- rural/urban	Teacher (from the 6 schools)	Parents	Teacher	Parents	School Admin	Teachers
Sample (<i>n</i>)	112 m=40 f=72	74 m=23 f=51	50 m=16 f=34	6 m=2 f=4	10 m=7 f=3	5 m=3 f=2	7 m=3 f=4
Data collection	Self-administered questionnaires (3)			Discussion with talanoa approach			Semi-structure with talanoa approach
Analysis Technique	Basic EXCEL & Frequencies & Percentage			Thematic analysis			Thematic analysis

2.2 Data collection

2.2.1 The Focus Group

The Focus Group was carried out as an exploratory qualitative investigation to gain some insight into the participants' perceptions and beliefs systems relating to the 'culture of testing' in the Kingdom of Tonga. For this purpose a particular secondary school was selected as a case study context, designed to provide the researcher insight into the teacher perceptions from within a single institution. Thus, the teacher Focus Group comprised staff of the same school, who shared some common characteristics including workplace, general demographics, socioeconomic status, church affinity, and general attitudes. There were 7 focus group teacher participants, 3 male and 4 female. Their years of teaching experiences ranged from two to seventeen, two were Heads of Departments (Geography and Science). Project time constraints only allowed the research team to conduct this one focus group.

The selected case study school is known for taking students from primary schools who were not successful in the compulsory and high stakes Secondary Entrance Exam (SEE) and are therefore seeking to transit to secondary schooling with very low scores in their SEE. Most of its students are those acknowledged to have been 'left behind' by the competitive SEE 'culture of testing' and the drive to attain high exams scores to get into a small number of high status schools. Because of this, the public perception is that this school will produce lowest achievers compared to other schools such as the government administered schools. Perceptions from these teachers will help in understanding teachers' pedagogy and school policies on students failing 'high stake' examinations.

In the Focus Group session, the researcher filled the role of the discussion moderator. Utilising personal knowledge and insights into the Tongan community and cultural protocols, the researcher was able to introduce the topics of interest and ensure that the discussion ran smoothly, every participant contributed, and no one dominated the interactions. The focus group discussions regularly provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask the participants to clarify their input or elaborate on their ideas during the interactions. It took into account the respondents' feelings and provided a natural setting where the teachers were encouraged to voice their experiences, understandings, and perceptions freely. Two research assistants were also present, and helped in the recording of the discussions.

The use of the participants' own language built relationships not only among participants but also with the research assistants. Following cultural protocols and values, the research team put effort into ensuring the participants felt a personal connection to the Focus Group participants and facilitators. This brings about trust and confidence among the group participants, and creates an environment for accurate and authentic data collection in the Tongan context. The data captured from the interactions between the participants related to the 'culture of testing' and its relation to their school's policies, teachers' pedagogy, and students' learning.

2.2.2 Talanoa

The flexibility of the *Talanoa* method and approach enabled a series of ongoing data gathering interactions to occur between the researcher and the teacher and parent participants. The *talanoa* with teachers occurred mostly at the University of the South Pacific (USP) Tonga Campus, where the researcher is stationed at the Institute of Education. A number of secondary school teachers are enrolled in USP degree courses at the campus, enabling the researcher to talk to them during their free time. There were six teachers involved in this *talanoa*, four were female and three were male, reflecting the attempt to strike a gender balance in the *talanoa* participants as much as possible.

The *talanoa* with parents happened primarily in participants' own homes. Three parents agreed to undertake the *talanoa*. They had known the researcher either as family friend or former colleague. The researcher also engaged in *talanoa* with four fathers during *faikava*, the Tongan *kava* ceremony involving a social gathering of Tongan males to drink *kava* in the afternoons and evenings. The *talanoa* with five school administrators (two female and three males) was arranged and occurred at the premises of the schools involved.

The *talanoa* with teachers, parents, and school administrators were recorded, with participant permission. The *talanoa* with parents was mainly to explore their perceptions on social and cultural factors that create the "culture of testing" and the effects of these on their children's learning. Their contribution were specifically to answer research questions 1 and 3. The *talanoa* with teachers and school administrators were to explore their perceptions in relations to research questions 2 and 3. Field notes were also used to record some of the *talanoa*. The *talanoa* with the four males during the *faikava* was not recorded, as the context also involved other people's talking and singing. In this situation, field notes were taken during this *talanoa* and expanded on immediately after the *faikava* session.

2.2.3 The Questionnaires

As previously described, the study involved the administration of three sets of questionnaires, one for students, one for teachers, and one for parents. The teachers' and students' questionnaires were administered in participating schools. The problem of low return rates for questionnaires was factored in during the planning stage of the survey. Low response rates are a well documented challenge in survey research, particularly in the Pacific context, and can strongly impact survey efforts – hence the importance of the use of more culturally attuned research methods and approaches such as *Talanoa*.

To best counter anticipated response rate issues, participating schools were asked to arrange a suitable place and time in which all the student and teacher participants could complete the questionnaires, which would be collected straight away. All participating schools were happy to accommodate that request, which meant that there was a 100% return rate from all schools.

The research team distributed the parents' questionnaires and collected them. Again, being aware of low return rate, the research team distributed more questionnaires than the sample size needed. In this way they were able to attain their desired sample size.

The three questionnaires were set out to collect data from participants on these five domains; background information, importance of exams and testing, expectations, motivations and influences

of exams and testing, private tutoring and lastly, the perceptions of exams and its impacts on learning.

2.2.4 Desk study and Literature Review

Data from the desk study and literature review were collected from multiple sources, including books, theses, technical reports, government and ministries' documents, data available online via ministries' websites, and other reputable online sources.

The sources were reviewed for their relevance to the 'culture of testing' in Tonga as well as to the main three research questions. The desk study was to provide an overview of the nature of the 'high-stakes examinations' and the educational policy situation in the country, and to enable a brief overview of current literature on the socio-cultural influences on education.

2.3 Data preparation and analysis

Data from both the Focus Group and *Talanoa* sessions were recorded and transcribed by research assistants. Reliability checks were conducted by the researcher using the transcriptions and voice recordings to ensure that data were accurate and complete. Data generated were specifically related to Research Questions 1 and 2. Thematic coding was carried out on the Focus Group data, and the *Talanoa* data, drawing out themes of significance amongst the responses.

Data from the teacher and student questionnaires were checked for incomplete responses, missing data, and other issues. For example, in each questionnaire, participants who provided more than one response per item in the Likert scale questions had the lower of the two responses taken if the two responses were adjacent ratings. If multiple responses were further apart, then the response was struck off and classified as 'missing data'. Questionnaires with less than 90% valid responses were dropped from further activities. The data from the teacher, student, and parent questionnaires were entered into spreadsheets (each with their own code book) and frequencies, basic statistics, graphs, and patterns were explored to observe patterning in responses relating to the research topic. Data generated were specifically related to Research Question 3.

Data collected from the desk study and literature review, such as that pertaining to educational policies and practices relating to testing and the role of private tutoring, were re-examined for relevance to an understanding of the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the 'culture of testing' in the Kingdom of Tonga. In particular, the desk study was to provide an overview of 'high stakes examinations' in Tonga, including background information, educational policies about those exams,

and the role of private tutoring as a result of these exams. The literature review provided the theoretical basis for understanding the socio-cultural influences on education in relation to this 'culture of testing'. Data generated from the desk study and literature review contributed to the exploration of the first two research questions.

All data were then scrutinized together to find connections, contradictions, and to provide a many faceted consideration of the research questions. The data were also examined for possible recommendations and implications for how education systems can improve learning and aspirations for youth, how education systems can lessen the negative impact of the 'culture of testing', as well as what implications there are for policymakers, education providers, and parents. The data also revealed areas warranting further study within the Tonga context.

3 Findings

3.1 The social and cultural factors that create and shape the 'culture of testing' in Tonga

3.1.1 The historical context of education in the Kingdom of Tonga

There were three attempts made by the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the British Methodist Conference via New South Wales to bring Christianity and formal education to Tonga before it was successful. The first attempt was made by the LMS missionaries who arrived at Tongatapu on the 12 of April 1797 but "were ill-equipped for the tremendous task and the Tongan themselves were not ready for the new religion" (Latukefu, 1974, p.25).

The second attempt arrived in August 1822, this time it was the British Methodist Conference in New South Wales. Again this was unsuccessful and the missionaries left in October 1823 (Kavaliku, 1966). The third attempt was made in 1826 and this time it was successful. The political situation at the time contributed as Aleamotu'a the *Tui Kanokupolu* (then king) was converted. Schools were established in Nuku'alofa and soon more people enrolled. The instruction comprised how to read and write in Tongan language (Kavaliku, 1966), and uptake of the opportunity was swift. Greater participation in schooling led to the need for teachers. As a result, a teacher training school was established in 1841. Other demoninations, such as the Roman Catholics, established their own school system.

As the ruling monarch at the time, King Tupou 1 united the islands as one kingdom and embraced Western education for his people. The Methodist missionaries established the first secondary school, Tupou College, in 1866. The Tongan government passed its first Education Act in 1882, nationalizing the primary school system. At that time the first government secondary school, Tonga

College was established. The intention was to educate young Tongan males that would eventually become the civil servants within Tonga's government ('Otunuku, 2002). According to Kavaliku (1966), the act was an explicit move towards the fulfilment of Tupou 1's wish, voiced as early as 1874, for a government controlled system of education which he believed was essential for the development of Tonga.

Since then, the education system has been under the control of the government. This evolved into a department, and a ministry of education was created in 1912 ('Otunuku, 2002). The Minister of Education now has the authority over all school systems in the country, which include a combination of government and private/church education providers interdependent with one another. The first Director of Education was recruited from New Zealand and the Education Ordinance of 1913 became the first comprehensive Education Act in Tonga. In 1943, Crown Prince Tupoutoa-Tungi (who later became King George Tupou IV after the death of his mother Queen Salote Tupou III) was appointed Minister of Education, having been the first Tongan to graduate from a university (Sydney University) with an university degree (BA LLB). He established the government Teacher's Training College, upgraded the national curriculum and put in place a system of scholarships to overseas institutions for Tongan students ('Otunuku, 2002).

However, his most influential education innovation of all was the establishment of Tonga High School in 1947. The most academically able students from primary schools throughout Tonga were selected and offered secondary schooling of a similar standard to that in New Zealand's school system. These students were expected to become future leaders in the country. Since its establishment, parents and students throughout the country have aspired to secure a place of study at Tonga High School. Kavaliku reflected that:

The official aim of education is often obscured and forgotten by the drive for success in the entrance tests at the end of primary school year. Indeed it can be said with a substantial degree of certainty that for many teachers and certainly for many pupils and members of the public, the aim of primary education is to prepare one for success in the entrance tests (Kavaliku, 1966, p. 168).

After the establishment of Tonga High School, each island group (5 island groups; Vava'u, Niuafu'ou, Niuatoputapu, Ha'apai and 'Eua) had its own government high school established. These government high schools were seen as having the best resources for learning, and the school fees were less expensive than those of the schools administered by the churches. For these reasons, pressure to attain scores to enable access to the government schools has been a strong driving factor in the development of Tonga's current culture of high stakes testing.

Historically, personal academic achievement has been positively and publicly rewarded. Photographs of the first mission-established secondary school in Tonga in 1866 indicate that staff wore academic

regalia like many British secondary schools of the time. The college in-school examination at the end of the final year of secondary schooling was very important to students because the best students were awarded with status and prestige, and their names were inscribed into the honour boards that decorated the walls of the school hall. Students of the boys' college whose fathers' and grandfathers' names were on these honour boards were motivated to achieve the same. Occasionally, students who had successfully passed the government/regional assessment and should have left school would elect to remain behind another year so they could achieve honoured status and have their names inscribed on those honour boards.

3.1.2 The current school system

There are 4 levels of Education in Tonga;

- Early childhood Education (ECE), from ages 3 to 4/5;
- Primary Education from Class 1 to 6, from ages 5/6 to 11/12;
- Secondary Education from Form 1 to Form 7, from ages 12/13 to 18/19; and,
- Post-secondary Education, which offers a variety of programmes from non-certificate to degree level.

According to the Ministry of Education and Training's (MET) *Tonga Education Lakalaka Policy Framework* (TELPF) (2012 – 2017), education in Tonga is compulsory from age 6 to 13 (1988 Education Act, Revised Edition). Schools are provided in all inhabited islands and within walking distance of every school age child, as required by law. Physical access to primary education, therefore, is not a major issue in Tonga. However, access and participation are affected by parents' commitment to education and their financial circumstances. Government operates 193 primary schools (85.4%) and private authorities operate 24 schools (14.6%). Primary education covers Classes 1 to Class 6. The majority of secondary schools (Form 1 – Form 7) are managed by churches. There are nine education authorities delivering secondary education in Tonga. In 2010, they operated 53 schools, enrolled 14,848 students, and employed 993 teachers (TELPF). In 2014 there were 17,093 students, 782 teachers with a teacher/student ratio of 21:1.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector is operated mostly by communities. ECE is not yet included in the mandate of the Ministry and financial assistance had not been provided to such centres until the 2011/12 financial year. Assistance is a modest \$50 per student to assist centres with teaching and learning resources. The Tonga Education Management Information System (EMIS, 2014) recorded 73 centres registered by the Ministry, which enrolled 1,418 students and employed 165 teachers. ECE centres are found in all the main island groups but the quality is variable depending on the financial resources of the centres, the quality of the teachers they are able to recruit and pay, and the quality of the teaching and learning resources they have.

The Tongan language is the mother tongue and is spoken by the majority of the population. The Tongan language is the only language used at Primary school during the first two years of instruction. English is introduced at Class 3. Both Tongan and English are used as modes of communication in the upper primary and secondary schools.

The Government also funds and operates post-secondary institutions. It provides funding, administrative and management support, policy and planning directions and guidance, legislative and policy frameworks, curriculum and assessment programmes, facilities, resources, and equipment, and manpower to its own institutions, and grants to non-government institutions. Inclusive Education, which provides access for children with disabilities, is being piloted with the aim of having it mainstreamed.

3.1.3 High-stakes examinations

Tonga has two main points in the education process where high stakes examinations are administered. The first is the Secondary Entrance Examination (SEE) administered at Class 6 of Primary School. This is the transit point from primary to secondary schooling. The second point is the last three years of secondary schooling where three high stakes examinations are administered at Forms 5, 6 and 7 in the form of annual national examinations.

The SEE examinations are administered by the MET at the end of each year for all Class 6 students. They are assessed in four subjects: English, Tongan Language, Mathematics, and Science. The students are also taught other subjects, including Movement and Fitness, Creative Technology, and Tongan Society and Culture throughout the year, however these subjects are not part of the SEE assessment. Because these subjects are not assessed, there is some public concern that this provides room for negligence and slackness in teachers' delivery of these un-assessed subjects. Thus, the secondary entrance examination system drives the almost complete neglect of the "non-academic" non-subject-based learning domains. Even 'proper subjects' such as Tongan Studies are marginalised in favour of a focus on English, Maths, and Science.

The main purpose of the SEE assessment is the selection of secondary schools for the students. From each students' choice of three secondary schools, MET then ranks the results according to the students' choices and provides lists of names to secondary school authorities, and each school authority is then responsible for selecting their own intake. The MET is responsible for selection of students for government secondary schools only. In order to enhance a students' chance of securing

grades sufficient to enable entrance to certain desired schools, it is common practice for students to repeat Class 6 if they were not successful in their previous attempt.

Schools are also impacted by the SEE grades of their students, with accountability perceptions shaped by the number of students passing the SEE examination from each primary school. 'Good schools' are those which have high numbers of students passing to the government high schools. Additionally, teachers who have had consistently high numbers of successful passes in their classes have sometimes been rewarded by the Ministry of Education, either through promotion or by other means.

The second set of 'high stakes examinations' are administered by the MET in the last three years of secondary school. These are annual external national examinations, namely: the Tonga School Certificate Examination (TSC) at the end of Form 5 (Year 11), the Tonga Form 6 Examination at the end of Form 6 (Year 12), and the Tonga Form Seven Examination at Form seven (Year 13). The main purpose of the examination is certification for secondary school leavers, however they also function as selection mechanisms for further study opportunities, such as through the award of scholarships for overseas study. Failing to pass Year 11 or 12 forces a student to find other pathways to tertiary education and may limit employment opportunities.

3.1.4 National assessments

There are also national and regional testing especially at the primary level going on at the same time as SEE. The Tonga Pacific Early Age Readiness and Learning (PEARL) is a reading intervention to support development of basic reading skills in Class 1 and 2. It started in 2015 and covers 71 schools. The Pacific Islands Literacy & Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) was implemented in 2014/15 to collect data on literacy and numeracy achievement of Class 4 and 6 students. The Tongan language early grade reading assessment (TEGRA) which was conducted in November 2009 to measure how well children were learning to read in the early grades of primary education. The aim of TEGRA was to help educators develop local knowledge about the specific skills students are struggling with and the factors that appear to contribute to reading development in the country. The Standardized Test of student Achievement for Tonga (STAT) was started in October 2011 and focussed on the minimum learning requirements in Class 4 and 6 of primary education. The test was to show how well students have performed against a set of essential learning outcomes as stipulated in the reformed syllabi implemented at the beginning of 2011. The Pacific Literacy and School Leadership Programme (PLSLP) is a research-practice intervention delivered through a partnership of the University of

Auckland and the University of the South Pacific. It takes a design-based research (DBR) approach to working collaboratively with Ministries of Education and schools across three Pacific Island countries to improve early years' literacy learning and language development. These testing and assessment all ran parallel with SEE and sometimes provided MET and schools with conflicting results.

3.1.5 Societal attitudes towards academic achievement and ranking

The Tongan traditional social structure reflects a pyramid of three social classes. At the apex is the Tongan king and the royal household, in the middle are the nobles and their households, and at the base are the commoners which comprise the majority of the population. Success in formal education is a widely recognised means of social mobility within the strictly stratified social structure of the Tongan community, especially for the majority of the people born as commoners. It is seen to offer opportunities to enhance families, power, and material wealth, and has resulted in the emergence of a class of educated commoners who are influential in their communities.

Thus, getting a good formal education has become very highly valued by most Tongans. Christian religion and academic success in the education system have become significant goals for Tongan families. Kavaliku (2007) reaffirmed the high importance placed by Tongans' on education, by stating that Tongans "value education not only for itself – producing an educated person – but also for two other reasons: means for employment and a means for upward mobility. An educated person has status in the Tongan society and the more educated (i.e., measured in terms of diplomas and degrees) the higher the status" (p. 11).

As a result of the historical approaches to the public rewarding of academic performance, a similar culture persists today. This is most clearly evidenced in the school prize giving ceremony, the last important engagement for schools before the end of the school year. Each class is ranked according to their marks in the internal mid- year and final examinations. For each level, the marks are also ranked. Top students' names and villages are called out for each class and level. The highlight of these celebrations is the awarding of the school Dux and Proxime Accessit awards. These ceremonies are frequently broadcast live on state television, bringing schools and the communities together to celebrate academic achievement.

The achievement of students in the SEE tests is also announced publicly by MET or private school authorities. The SEE results are announced towards the end of the school year and the high stake examinations in secondary schools are announced at the beginning of the following academic year. These announcements are made via state owned radio stations. Using these results, the public

annually 'rank' schools according to the number of students that pass these high stakes examinations. Very recently, MET gave school authorities their own sets of results and each was responsible for dissemination of these results to their school communities. However this caused public outcry, as people still wanted the results announced via the state-owned radio.

Social institutions such as the church play a vital role in perpetuating the 'culture of testing' among the Tongan communities in Tonga and abroad by valuing and marking education. Churches assign the third Sunday of January every year to celebrate formal education. Members of the church who have graduated from universities are asked to wear their academic regalia to church in order to inspire the students and those planning to take up tertiary education. The churches prepare food to be shared by students after the service.

This public demonstration of the importance of academic study extends to schools' ex-student associations, who are strong supporters of education in Tonga. Most secondary schools have their own associations in Tonga and branches all over the world. In 2016, Tupou College, celebrated its 150th anniversary. Its ex-students association and its branches collected TOP\$5 million pa'anga as their gift for the school and current students. Other schools' ex-student associations also raise funds overseas to help finance their schools in Tonga.

3.1.6 Private tutoring

The high emphasis on national examination outcomes has a number of flow on effects, including the practice of private tutoring, where money determines access to provision. Students who cannot afford the tuition fees for these services are disadvantaged, while those students whose parents can afford private tutoring benefit from it.

While private tutoring is not a common practice at the SEE level, the provision of extra classes in the morning or evening for Class 6 students is now prevalent. This is offered at the primary schools and by the students' own teachers.

For secondary schools, private tutoring is now a very common means of preparing students for the three national examinations at the end of secondary schooling. Most of these private tutorials are sponsored by the communities and the parents and are offered at community halls or facilities. These programmes are frequently funded through the fundraising activities of Tongan during 'kava gatherings'

A group of secondary school teachers on the main island of Tongatapu offer paid private tutoring for the senior secondary school students towards the end of the year before the national examinations for F5, 6, and 7. Students pay a fee to participate, and it is a popular option for families.

3.2 The relationships between the 'culture of testing' and education policy, reform, curriculum, pedagogy and Tongan society

3.2.1 The 'culture of testing' and Tongan society

Population demographics for the Kingdom of Tonga over the past 70 years indicate that migration and urban drift are likely to have resulted largely from society's drive towards access to formal education and attainment of better outcomes on high stakes testing.

In the 1930s, the Tongan population was about 32,000 distributed across three island groups. The capital city of Nuku'alofa was home to only about one in 10 Tongans. After World War II, this distribution began to shift. With the ever increasing pull of formal education and work opportunities on the main island, young Tongans began to move.

The first moves were internal, from outer to main islands, and from smaller to larger towns. The next journeys were overseas, to New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, beginning slowly in the 1950s and 1960s but at an increasingly rapid rate in the next three decades. In the 2013 New Zealand Census indicated that 60,336 Tongans – more than half the population of Tonga (103,252 - 2011 Census) – were living in New Zealand alone (New Zealand Census). Considering Tongan populations in Australia and the United States of America, it is likely that there are more Tongans living outside Tonga now than within. Lee (2003) reported that one of the main reasons for Tongan migration overseas was the belief that the education system will give their children a better education and better outcomes.

This migration has had numerous effects on Tongan societies in Tonga and abroad. Today, Tonga has become a so-called MIRAB economy, that is, an economy highly dependent on migration, remittances, foreign aid, and government bureaucracy as its major sources of revenue. It is migration, along with the remittances of cash and goods from migrants who live and work overseas, that keep the Tongan economy afloat (Brown, 1995).

3.2.2 The 'culture of testing' and current education policies and practices (particularly relating to examinations and assessments)

Tonga's MET has developed policies with the aim of improving education and its outcomes in the Kingdom. According to MET- TLEPF the quality continues to be the most important concern at the primary school level. The Tonga Early Grade Reading Assessment (TEGRA) tests, for example, indicated that more than 70% of primary school children did not know the Tongan alphabet at the end of Class 3, which would make it extremely difficult for them to master reading and writing satisfactorily. Similar figures were indicated by the Standard Test of Achievement for Tonga (STAT) tests administered at Class 4 in 2008. The SEE exams of 2011 also indicated that only 25% of the students achieved 200 marks or above out of a possible 400 marks. Standardised testing of literacy and numeracy strongly suggests that there is an urgent need to improve the quality of outcomes at the primary level in these assessed areas.

MET has carried out a revision of the primary curriculum from Class 1 to Form 2, developing and implementing a new curriculum nationally in the four core areas of Tongan, English, Mathematics, and Science. The government has also affirmed its commitment to the development of other competencies through the completion and the piloting of the Tongan Society and Culture, Movement and Fitness, and Creative Technology syllabi. MET has also completed the upgrading of the training of teachers, curriculum developers, examiners, Tonga Institute of Education staff, and field officers, to prepare them for the trial and implementation of the curricula, and other development programmes at the primary level.

MET also established an Educational Management Information System (EMIS) to collect, compile, analyse, and report on educational data, to help in its decision-making, policy development, setting of strategic directions and planning. The EMIS Unit was strengthened to give it the capability to undertake this task. However, the Unit has remained vulnerable and its linkages with other divisions of the Ministry and with external agencies continue to be weakened. It must have strong leadership and more effective and better communications and relationships with other divisions of the Ministry, education systems, and schools to enable it to function more efficiently in coordinating the collection, compilation, analysis, and reporting of educational information, especially in respect of educational performance and students' outcomes to ensure that the information collection and dissemination processes do not waste resources by duplicating efforts, or in conflict. As with primary education, the inadequacy and quality of the data and information on secondary education

and its performance continues to be a constraint and hampers policy development, setting of strategic directions, planning, and implementation.

According to the MET 2013 School Assessment Policy draft, “the fundamental purpose of assessment and reporting is to enhance the quality of student learning and improve the status of student achievement”. It also states that

the Ministry has, since 2009, led major reforms in the education sector in Tonga. An essential component of this reform is the revision of its school curriculum and the shift from summative to more formative assessments undertaken in schools. The transition to formative assessment dictates an increase in the internal continuous “assessment for learning” of students throughout the school year, which are concluded by annual external national examinations for students in Forms 5, 6 and 7. (p.7)

This School Assessment Policy aims to establish a national standard for Internal Assessment and ensure a consistent and systematic procedure for the design, its conduct, marking and the reporting of all forms of assessment in secondary schools in Tonga. The Policy integrates both formative and summative tools of assessment, recognizing professional judgment as a significant and valid tool in assessment, and directing teachers’ expectations for managing assessment and for the reporting of student achievements. A strict observation of such an assessment policy will enhance learning and improve quality of education, something that the current education system still fails to offer the public.

This School Assessment Policy will apply to all secondary schools from Forms 1 to 7 in Tonga, and is committed to:

- Improving teaching and learning strategies and practices.
- Helping students achieve the highest standards within their own capabilities
- Providing meaningful reports on students’ achievements to key stakeholders (i.e. parents, guardians, students, etc.) within and outside of Tonga
- Utilizing assessment-friendly practices and tools that culturally and socially contextualize individual student’s learning styles and potential.
- Addressing issues that arise in the course of undertaking any assessment activities and processes.

According to a former senior officer from MET, this assessment policy was submitted by the former MET CEO to the Law Committee to be endorsed in 2014. While it was in the pipeline for endorsement, the change in government occurred, and the assessment policy, along with other policies of the Ministry that were also in the pipeline for endorsement, were withdrawn. If this is the

case, then MET needs to endorse the policy as soon as possible and distribute to schools for implementation. This will help improve consistency and reliability of schools' assessment.

3.2.3 The 'culture of testing' and the recent national debate on raw marks

Data from the study's *talanoa* showed that parents were very disappointed and concerned with the MET 2016 policy of using raw marks only for Form 5, 6, and 7, instead of the usual practice of standardization of high stakes secondary examination scores. Changing from standardisation to raw marks was a direction from the Minister of Education of the day (and current Prime Minister), in response to increasing dissatisfaction amongst parents and system administrators relating to the results of previous years' senior secondary examinations. The PM claimed that an analysis of previous years' result found that the Atlas program used by the Exam Unit for the standardization of students marks was unreliable and results were getting worse. Upon this evidence the Minister made the decision, which did not have full support from the MET. The move also received opposition from the Public who were opposed the idea of going back to raw marks. This was a clear example of how emphasis on examination results dictated education policies and practices.

Participants also pointed to another of the set backs of this policy which was faced by students who wanted to continue their education in universities overseas, many of whom do not recognise raw marks. These students found that they had to prove themselves by doing extra bridging courses before enrolment. Instead of the smooth transition to tertiary education provided by the previous standardization of marks, students were now required to spend additional time and money to prove they are qualified to continue their education.

Talanoa with secondary school teachers showed that they were very concerned about the Internal Assessment (IA) component of the three national examinations at the end of secondary school. These IA components for Forms 5, 6, and 7 are pre-decided by the Curriculum Division Unit (CDU) and are stipulated in the syllabus. The IA component usually consists of a common assessment task (CAT) designed by the Exam Unit, or which has been prescribed in the subject syllabus. In some subjects, teachers were given the privilege of design their assessment tasks, however the teacher designed tasks had to be approved by the Exam Unit before they could be executed in schools.

However, in the meantime, the privilege teachers once had in the past to design their own assessment tasks is no longer available to them. All IA components are either prescribed in the subject's syllabus, or take the form of a CAT designed by the Examinations Unit and which are distributed to schools to be executed. This indicated that this 'culture of testing' has removed from teachers their expectation that practice will be evidence-based and associated accountability to make professional judgement of their own. Teaching practice is now becoming a series of technist

activities where 'testing scripts' is the de factor curriculum and teaching pedagogy is no longer an innovative exercise but a strict prescribed activity.

Accompanying the Ministry of Education and Training's (MET) dismissal of the standardisation process in 2016, was general concern about inconsistencies in the marking of IA tasks across schools. Hence, a moderator was selected by the Examinations Unit to do the job for all schools. This is with regards to the assessment tasks that cannot be captured via pen and paper, including the marking of Speaking Tasks, Handicrafts, and so forth. Schools are informed of visits from the Examinations Unit moderator at scheduled times, and teachers are instructed to have their students conduct these assessment tasks before the moderator - who will co-mark the task with the teacher and will agree upon the allocated mark/skill score. Tasks that can be captured via pen and paper (such as projects and tests) are submitted to the Examinations Unit for the moderation process.

The first concern from the teachers participating in this study is that the moderator's schedule is not communicated to them in advance. They are not aware of the point at which the chain of communication breaks down, but in some cases the moderator has arrived and the work has not yet been ready for the moderation process. Participants believe that the schools, Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), and the Examinations Unit of the MET should be very clear in communicating the nature and timing of these visits. The other concern from teachers is that the IA component causes a lot of classtime disruption due to some students missing classes to complete the IA for other subjects. Teachers also reported problems with the timeliness of student submission of their IA tasks, describing the need for them to often chase after students with unsubmitted IA.

3.2.4 The 'culture of testing' and the language of assessment

Data from the *talanoa* also highlighted a concern held by school administrators about the language of examinations. A fundamental notion of test validity is that students' scores should not be unduly influenced by factors that are irrelevant to the construct which an instrument intends to measure (Messick, 1989). Yet, assessments often confuse the language skills of examinees with their academic abilities. The major concern among educators is that any test is, to some degree, a test of language proficiency. In Tonga's case, this becomes a test of English as a second language ability. As the normal practice in Tonga is that exams are written in English, except for the Tongan language studies papers. It is highly likely that the students with higher English language proficiency are advantaged while others are discriminated against by their skills in a language that is not their own.

The teachers in the focus group were all from the same private school administered by a church. The school has an open door policy on new entrants, and consequently, accepts students who have very low scores on the SEE and/or who have failed multiple times on the transit exam. Data from the focus group confirmed that the school has policies in place as a result of the nature of their new intakes. The school has an English reading program built into the school’s daily program. Students bring their own reading materials to read during this time and they are encouraged to share their reading materials. This is an attempt to improve students’ English literacy and comprehension.

At the beginning of this year (2017), the school decided, based on a request from the English Department, to stream the new entrants based on their SEE marks. Some teachers believed that this helped them because they had to prepare only one lesson plan, whereas in a mixed class, they may have had to prepare more than one plan to cater for the range of different abilities in the class. The teachers expressed that they are waiting to see what the effects of this new school policy will be. The students’ end of year achievement and grades will give teachers ideas whether this policy is successful or not.

3.3 The effect of the ‘culture of testing’ on learners and learning outcomes in Tonga

3.3.1 Examinations

The questionnaires revealed a range of findings of note with regard to the effect of the culture of testing on learners and learning in Tongan classrooms from the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students themselves.

Table 2. Teachers’ time in exam preparation & content delivery

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
16. I have enough time to teach/cover all the content of the exam	81%	3%	17%
17. Preparation for the exam takes away class time for other activities	36%	25%	39%

Teachers are predominantly happy with the delivery time of their courses, with 81% agreeing that they had enough time to teach and to cover the content of the exam, while 17% disagreed. However there are more mixed perceptions relating to the impact of examination preparation time on day to day classwork, with 36% agreeing that preparation for exams takes away class time from other activities, while 39% disagreed, and 25% neither disagreed or agreed.

Table 3. Teachers' perceptions of exams and impact on learning

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
47. I think there are too many exams and tests	27%	30%	42%
48. I feel students learn more because of exams	76%	18%	7%
49. I feel the exams are relevant to the content I have taught in class	84%	12%	4%
50. I feel the exams are effective at measuring what students have learnt	75%	12%	13%
51. I feel the exams are necessary to achieve success	73%	14%	13%

A little under half the teachers disagreed that there are too many exams and tests (42%), while 27% agreed that there are too many exams and tests, whilst the remaining 30% were undecided on this issue. Teachers have very positive perceptions about exams and their subsequent impact on students' learning. 76% agreed that students learn more because of the exam, and 84% agreed that exams are relevant to the content they teach in class. Teachers also agreed (75%) that exams are effective at measuring what students have learnt, and 73% agreed that exams are necessary to achieve success.

Table 4. Parents' perceptions of exams and impact on learning

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
49. I think my child(ren) takes too many exams and tests	36%	6%	58%
50. I feel my child(ren) learns more because of exams	93%	2%	4%
51. I feel the exams are relevant to the content students have studied in class	82%	13%	4%
52. I feel the exams are effective at measuring what students have learnt	80%	7%	4%
53. I feel the exams are necessary to achieve success	93%	4%	2%

More than half of the parents disagreed (58%) that there are too many exams and tests, while 36% agreed. Like teachers, parents have highly positive perceptions about examinations and their impact on students' learning. A very high percentage (93%) agreed that students learn more because of the exam system, and that exams are relevant to the content they taught in class (82%). In terms of

whether the examination is effective in measuring what they learn, 80% agreed, and 93% agreed that exams are necessary to achieve success.

Table 5. Students' perceptions of exams and impact on learning

	Strongly Agree /agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
57. I think there are too many exams and tests	36%	29%	34%
58. I enjoy taking exams	81%	14%	4%
59. I feel I learn more because of exams	91%	8%	2%
60. I feel the exams are effective at measuring what I have learnt	82%	15%	4%
61. I feel the exams are necessary to achieve success	88%	6%	4%

Unlike teachers' and parents' perceptions about the number of exams they sit, 36% of students agreed that there are too many exams, while 34% disagreed. Apart from that, students feel positive about exams, enjoy taking exams (81%), and believe they learn more because of exams (91%). Most students (82%) see examinations as effective ins measuring what they learnt, believe that exams are necessary for academic success (88%).

3.3.2 Motivations

Table 6. Teachers' expectations, motivations, and influences

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
22. I want my students to receive top grades in my course	88%	8%	4%
23. I want my students to have the best options available to them	93%	4%	3%
24. I worry that my students will do poorly on the exam	70%	19%	11%
25. My school expects all students to pass the exam	70%	18%	12%
26. Exams motivate me to prepare students better	90%	4%	6%
27. Exams motivate me to be a better teacher	87%	7%	5%
28. Exams motivate me to compete with other teachers/school	55%	19%	25%
29. Student results on exams impact my reputation as a teacher	69%	19%	12%
30. Student results on exams impact my performance appraisals	68%	14%	18%

It is very apparent that Tongan teachers have very high expectations of their students and wish for them to receive top grades in their subjects (88%). Likewise, teachers wanted students to have the best option available to them (93%). A significant number of teachers (70%) worried that their students may do poorly in the exams, whilst the same percentage (70%) expected all students in their school to pass the exam. Exams maybe the biggest motivator for teachers to prepare students better (90%) and to be better teachers (87%), but only half the surveyed teachers were motivated by competition with other teachers/schools (55%). A significant number of teachers (69%) agreed that students' results on exams impacted on their reputation and 68% agreed that it impacted their performance appraisals.

Table 7. Students' expectation, motivation and influences

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
26. I want top grades in all my classes	83%	13%	3%
27. I want to be able to select from among the best options available when I graduate	95%	4%	1%
28. I worry that I will do poorly on the exam	89%	7%	4%
29. I worry that I will get poor grades at school	72%	11%	12%
30. I get nervous when I don't know how to solve a task/answer a question	76%	8%	17%
31. I often worry that taking a test will be difficult for me	73%	13%	15%
32. I get very tense when I study for a test	62%	17%	20%
33. Even if I am well prepared for a test, I feel very anxious	61%	18%	21%
34. Exam motivate me to study more	92%	6%	2%
35. Exams motivate me to compete with my peers	70%	14%	15%
36. Exams help me to choose my interests and career path	94%	4%	2%

Student responses to the questionnaire indicated clearly that examinations are a very significant source of motivation for students to study (92%), to choose their career path (94%), and to some extent, to compete with their peers (70%). It is also a source of considerable stress for students, with 89% reporting that they worry that they may do poorly in exams, or get poor grades at school (72%). A significant percentage of students get nervous when they do not know how to answer a question (76%) and worry about the exam being difficult for them (73%). Even if they are well

prepared, some still feel very anxious (61%) and a similar number report getting very tense when they study for exams (62%).

3.3.3 Competitiveness

Table 8. Students' exam results compared to peers

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
40. I am satisfied/pleased with my academic achievement	64%	21%	15%
41. I feel discouraged when my peers' scores are higher than me	43%	22%	34%
42. I feel happy when my peers' scores are lower than me	41%	19%	30%
43. I feel I let my parents/family down if I get low scores	83%	6%	10%
44. I feel I let my teacher down if I get low scores	79%	9%	12%

On the whole, students appear satisfied with their academic achievement (64%). Less than half the participants agreed that they feel discouraged when their peers' scores are higher than them (43%) or feel happy when their peers' scores are lower (41%). Interestingly, however, a strong majority of the surveyed students feel they let their parents down (83%) or their teachers (79%) if they get low scores.

3.3.4 Private tutoring

Table 9. Students' perceptions of private tutoring

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
51. My private tutoring classes prepare me for exam	83%	11%	7%
52. My private tutoring classes improve my score in a specific subject of the exam (i.e. mathematics, language, etc.)	76%	21%	3%
53. My private tutoring classes improve my overall grades (i.e. ALL subjects)	73%	20%	5%
54. My private tutoring classes improve my learning and understanding	89%	8%	1%
55. Private tutoring classes motivates me to study more	88%	9%	1%
56. Private tutoring classes is necessary to achieve academic success	86%	9%	4%

Students' perceptions of private tutoring are very positive, as they see its utility in preparing them for exams (83%), improving specific subject performance (76%), raising overall grades (73%), or assisting their learning and understanding (89%). Tutoting is felt to strongly motivate them to study (88%) and to improve academic achievement (86%).

Table 10. Teachers' perceptions of private tutoring

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
42. Private tutoring classes prepare students for exam	89%	10%	1%
43. Private tutoring classes improve students' score in a specific subject of the exam (i.e. mathematics, language, etc.)	81%	12%	1%
44. Private tutoring classes improve students' overall grades (i.e. ALL subjects)	76%	21%	3%
45. Private tutoring classes improve students' learning and understanding	84%	10%	5%
46. Private tutoring classes is necessary to achieve academic success	80%	14%	6%

Similar to the student participants, teachers' perceptions of private tutoring were very positive in relation to tutoring preparing students for exams (89%), improving students' scores (81%), improving students' overall grades (76%), and their learning and understanding (84%). Teachers were clearly of the opinion that private tutoring is necessary for academic achievement (80%).

Table 11. Parents' perceptions of private tutoring

	Strongly Agree/ agree	Neither Agree/ disagree	Strongly disagree/ disagree
43. Private tutoring classes prepare my child(ren) for exam	97%	4%	0%
44. Private tutoring classes improve my child(ren) score in a specific subject (i.e. mathematics, language, etc.)	100%	0%	0%
45. Private tutoring classes improve my child(ren) overall grades (i.e. ALL subjects)	100%	0%	0%
46. Private tutoring classes improve my child(ren) learning and understanding of subject matter	96%	4%	0%
47. Private tutoring motivates my child(ren) to study more	93%	7%	0%
48. Private tutoring classes is necessary to achieve academic success	94%	3%	3%

The most positive responses relating to tutoring were gained from parent participants, with 97% believing that private tutoring is very positive in the preparation of students for examinations (97%), that it improves students' scores (100%), improves students' overall grades (100%) and positively affects students' learning and understanding (96%). Very nearly all parents (94%) believe that private tutoring is necessary for academic achievement. Compared to teachers' and students' perceptions on private tutoring, parents clearly have the highest approval of private tutoring.

4 Concluding thoughts and implications

Overall, Tongan parents participating in the study had extremely high expectations for their children and a high degree of confidence in the teachers and schools their children attended. However, evidence from *talanoa* with parents showed that the majority of parents are not aware of exactly what their children are studying at school. Details such as the number of subjects their children are doing, what those subjects are, the IA components of their exams, and so forth, are important aspects that parents need to know about but generally do not.

Evidence from the *talanoa* suggested that parents showed an overly high reliance on and trust in schools and teachers. They viewed schooling in traditional terms, with strong positive regard for examinations and teacher authority. Such reliance may limit parents' active participation in their children's school and impede their involvement in making informed decisions about their children's schooling. Further consideration by Tongan parents around their responsibilities in supporting their children's schooling may be necessary. At the same time, schools should encourage parents to have more ownership of their children's schooling.

This 'culture of testing' has some impacts on the quality of education in general. There is proof that rote learning and low order thinking predominates in primary school setting and in preparation for the SEE. Secondary school students also use a lot of memorization in preparation for most of their exams. Thus, the 'culture of testing' breeds cramming, and undermines the development of higher order thinking skills. The focus on a limited range of examined subjects necessarily causes the neglect of other non academic programs, like the trade skills and those likely to lead to career prospects. For example, skills in the construction industry are needed for development and the emphasis on getting good grades in examinations may undermine the ability of students who possess skill sets more relevant to these skill-based activities such as building, carving, weaving, fishing, and farming.

The government and its MET should look towards creating an education system that challenges students of all abilities in all learning areas and awards recognition for their separate skills and knowledge. This is a very complex and most likely costly undertaking, but is likely to be necessary for progress towards a more truly inclusive and quality education system.

The education system is currently clearly exam-oriented and driven. There is great emphasis from all sectors of society on doing well in examinations and education in general. High achievers are rewarded with scholarships to study overseas and wider career options. School prize giving ceremonies in recognition of academic achievers every year reinforce annually the importance of ranking in academic achievement, and schools' ability to produce high achievers in high stakes testing is a very strong criteria for the selection of schools by parents.

Recent public debates around national assessment at senior secondary levels has been heated. Policy changes have led to the establishment of new procedures for moderating students' IA, which appear to lack the organisation and transparency desired by principals, teachers, and students, which would ensure that the Examinations Unit, CDU, school administrations, teachers, students and families were all on the same page. Clear and timely communication between stakeholders clearly requires development.

The issues around the language of examination are a longstanding issue in the Kingdom, and is an issue that requires serious and informed consideration by education authorities. Many see this as an equity issue, where students with better language skills and proficiency in the language of the exams have better opportunities to pass the exams than others.

The over-emphasis on high stakes examinations, the competitive and selective nature of assessments, and the socially encouraged public displays of status and prestige associated with success in these examinations feeds and perpetuates the 'culture of testing' within the Kingdom. Formal studies have clearly documented this. 'Otunuku (2010) found that the Tongan parents' beliefs about assessment appears to be consistent with a culture dominated by high-stakes public examinations in which high student performance on examinations is publicly applauded in society and in church, and that such performance brings about significant social consequences (i.e., entry into elite government schools).

For these parents, the student accountability function of assessment is justified in part because selection examinations permit hard-working, talented students access to rewards that would otherwise be denied. Furthermore, because assessment has such powerful positive inducements, from the parental point of view, it acts as a significant lever for motivating students to improve their

learning. Doing well at examinations and assessments is highly rewarded, and perpetuates a status quo which will be difficult and time-consuming to deconstruct, should the need for systemic change and a greater focus on the skills for sustainable living in a future Pacific impacted by new threats, challenges and opportunities.

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Appendix (data tables, results, etc.)

PART II: Importance of Examinations & Testing:

Table 1: Students' Responses

In one term:	Students' responses
11. On average, how many subjects do you take per term?	5 (58%) 6 (27%)
12. On average, how often do you have an exam?	1-2 per/term (61%) 1+ a month (18%)
13. On average, how much time you spend preparing for tests outside class?	1-2hrs (43%) 3-4hrs (25%)
14. On average, how much time you spend preparing for tests inside class?	1-2hrs (35%) 3-4hrs (34%)
15. Who help you most with preparation for exams	Teachers (44%) Parents (22%) Peers (18%)
16. On average, how much free time do you have in a school day?	0-1hrs/wk(45%) 1-2hrs/wk(18%) 2-3hrs/wk(19%) 3+hrs/wk(19%)
19. Do your teachers specifically prepare you for the exam?	Yes-94% No-6%
21. In the period leading up to exam, how much time do you spend preparing for this specific exam inside class?	3-4hrs/wk(30%) 1-2hrs/wk(26%) 7+hrs/wk(26%)
22. In the period leading up to exam, how much time do you spend preparing for this specific exam inside class?	7+hrs/wk (29%) 5-6hrs/wk(25%) 3-4hrs/wk(25%)

Table 2: Teachers' Responses

	Teachers' responses
9. On average, how much time do you spend preparing for your classes?	10+hrs/wk (43%) 4-6 hrs/wk (21%)
10. In one term, how often do you administer exams or tests?	1-2 per/term (41%) 1+ a month (20%)
11. For one class, in one term, how much time do you spend inside of class preparing for tests or exams?	3-4 hrs/wk (43%) 1-2 hrs/wk (27%)
12. For one class, in one term, how much time do you spend outside of class preparing for tests or exams?	3-4 hrs/wk (40%) 7+ hrs/wk (24%)
13. For one class, in one term, how much teaching time do you spend in class for exam preparation?	3-4 hrs/wk (46%) 7+ hrs/wk (23%)
19. Does your school organize tutorial sessions in school for this exam?	Yes-54% No- 46%
21. How much extra time do you spend in tutorial sessions preparing students for exam?	1-2 hrs/wk (56%) 3-4 hrs/wk (19%)

Table 3: Parents' Responses

	Parents' responses
10. On average, how many subjects does your child(ren) take per term (average)?	5 (48%) 6 (34%)
11. In one term, on average, how often does your child(ren) have an exam/test?	1+per month (36%) 1-2 per term (28%)
12. In one term, how much time does your child(ren) spend preparing for these exam/tests outside of class?	4-6 hrs/wk (38%) 10+ hrs/wk (24%)
13. Do you encourage your child(ren) to participate in extra-curricular activities? (i.e., music, arts, sports)	Yes-88% No- 12%
14. How much time does your child(ren) spend on non-schoolwork (i.e. household chores, activities, sports, games, etc)?	1-2hrs/day(46%) 2-3hrs/day(22%) 0-1hr/day (18%)