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**‘Ilo**

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Without Abstract

Introduction

The term *‘ilo* is present in a number of Polynesian languages with a general translation as seeing or knowing. The terminology *‘ilo* in the Tongan language refers to a body of knowledge, as in knowledge about agriculture, fishing, and weather systems. The term ‘ *ilo* also refers to the process of finding, recognizing, and knowing. Thaman ( *[1999](#CR7)*) refers to *‘ilo* as both the “process of knowing and to the knowledge itself.”

In the process of knowing, *‘ilo* is taken to be part of a learning process, *ako*, with the desired outcome of a person having mastered a body of knowledge and become *poto* or *tangata poto,* a learned person (Kavaliku [*1966*](#CR3)). In the Tongan context, there is a marked difference between *‘ilo* as knowledge and *poto*, being the use or application of *‘ilo* to a particular situation – in other words, it is applied knowledge. *‘Ilo and poto* and *ako* are three main concepts generally used to describe education in the Tongan context (Thaman [*1988*](#CR6)). Thaman ( *[1999](#CR7)*) further defines *‘ilo* in an educational context to include:

To find – *Na’a ne sio ki a Mele ‘i kolo*. (She saw Mele in town)

To recognize someone or something – *Na’e ‘ilo koe e Atu?* (Did Atu recognize you?)

To find out – *Na’a ke ‘ilo ‘a e ola e sivi?* (Did you find out the results of the examination?)

To discover – *Na’e ‘ilo ‘e Sela ha koloa mahu’inga.* (Sela discovered a treasure)

To know – *‘Oku ‘ilo ‘e Tevita ‘a e ngaahi me’a lahi.* (Tevita knows a lot)

To be well-informed or knowledgeable – *Ko e faiako ‘ilo lahi ‘a Seini* (Seini is a well-informed teacher)

Knowledge or information – *‘ilo fakatufunga*. (knowledge of carpentry). (p. 728)

In brief, *‘ilo* refers to the process of discovering new knowledge as it is also about the knowledge itself.

*‘Ilo* Is in the Discovery Process

The process of finding, recognizing, and discovering, *‘ilo*, is a process that is intricately linked to the sociopolitical context. All *‘ilo* in Tonga is ranked and classified and to some extent is structured along similar lines to the traditional political structure of the country. For example, particular knowledge system about the sacred kava ceremony ( *taumafa kava*) is guarded by certain clans of *matāpule* or talking chiefs. The language, protocol, and traditions associated with the knowledge system of the sacred kava ceremony are specific, rich with tradition, and practiced by a selected number of *matāpule*. The process of discovering, finding out, and knowing about this sacred ritual is accessible at two key platforms. As this knowledge is taught in the formal school curriculum, every student in Tonga should be able to recognize features and follow through the protocol of the kava ceremony. However, to know and to become knowledgeable and well informed about the *taumafa* kava ceremony, this knowing is only accessible to a few people within defined clans.

The process of discovering, of finding out, and of knowing is to some extent defined by the knowledge itself and the person seeking that knowledge. For example, there are knowledge systems associated with traditional medicine that are often guarded by a clan or family group. There are beliefs often associated with this kind of knowledge that relates to how the clan acquired or come to know of the medicine. Further to this, there are often beliefs about usage of the knowledge and about protection and precautions regarding the use of the knowledge. Seeking of this type of knowledge then is only accessible to defined persons within a clan and remains closed to general public.

However, when knowledge is clearly accessible to all the process of discovering, finding out, and knowing is again linked to Tongan way of thinking. Taufe’ulungaki ( *[2009](#CR4)*) describes Pacific people’s ways of thinking to be “creative, holistic and spatial; divergent instead of linear logical; interpersonal, which favours groups activities, spoken over written language, and demonstration and doing rather than verbal direction; and kinesthetic, which lends itself to physical activities.” (p. 15). Further to this, Taufe’ulungaki ( *[2009](#CR4)*) argues that the “common learning strategies that emerge from this specific cultural context are: observation, imitation, listening, participation, and asking. The questions are of the information seeking-type and to obtain technical advice” (p. 15). What this highlights is that the act of *‘ilo* in the process of discovering is about observation, listening, modeling, and joining in the processes. The *‘ilo* process of discovering also involves seeking technical advice, practical to do type of skills and with practical participation in the learning. When carefully examined, this process of ‘ilo or discovering new information is closely associated with technical and vocational programs offered as an alternative pathway to often heavy academic curriculum in Pacific schools. The *‘ilo* process of discovery is practiced in the informal learning sphere as people continue to learn and gain *‘ilo* about fishing, agriculture, farming, weaving, carving, and other traditional crafts.

*‘Ilo* Is in the Knowledge System

There is an intrinsic value placed on *‘ilo* as a knowledge system. *‘Ilo* is worthwhile and valued particularly when it is considered as being useful for the nation and for others. Education is seen as a place where parents invest time and money for their children to acquire *‘ilo,* so that they may earn a livelihood and meet cultural obligations. For Tongans, *‘ilo* has to be worthwhile and useful for their families and their communities.

In Tongan context, what is considered knowledge and *‘ilo* is a body of knowledge that has been tested over time, critiqued and validated through collaboration and consensus. *‘Ilo* as a body of knowledge is also recognized to be susceptible to changes over time.

There is a range of knowledge system present within contemporary Tongan culture. Like many other Polynesian cultures, Tongan culture through Christianity, education, and “development” has evolved and lost a number of traditional knowledge systems. The loss of some traditional knowledge systems has been due to decline in usage of the knowledge, changes in environment limiting access to natural products needed in the preservation of some knowledge systems, and change in beliefs regarding certain practices and *‘ilo*.

Tonga has a number of traditional knowledge systems (Fua et al. [*2011*](#CR2)) that include:

Time – traditional time is based on reading signs of nature (sun, moon, stars) and behaviors of animals such as birds and insects.

Beliefs and psychic knowledge – beliefs about dreams, signs, and natural phenomena still play a strong influence in Tonga’s psyche.

Music – traditional knowledge about the use of metaphors and imagery in music and composition are still in use, but also evident are influences of new forms and knowledge of music.

Dance – there is a range of dances that are still being practiced with some dances inherited from other Pacific countries that were under the Tongan Empire prior to European contact (eighteenth century).

Agriculture – knowledge systems surrounding planting, harvesting, and conservation methods are still practiced with agriculture being one of the main sources of income for the country.

Fishing – although there are some signs of decline in the knowledge system associated with fishing, there still remain strong practices of traditional knowledge and contemporary knowledge added to fishing in both reef and ocean waters.

Navigation – despite a rich navigation history, existing traditional knowledge system on navigation is on the decline, with limited usage of the skills and few people still practicing this knowledge.

Medicine – knowledge on traditional medicine is still practiced together with associated beliefs and the use of medicinal plants.

Rituals and customs – the changes in the knowledge associated with rituals and customs are most evident in all of the knowledge systems. Changes in beliefs, practices, and influences of economics impact on the practices and consequently on the changes in the knowledge systems associated with rituals and customs.

Taufe’ulungaki, Fua, and colleagues ( *[2008](#CR5)*) highlighted that *‘ilo* when used wisely, people can live sustainable livelihoods in Tonga. Tongan people who live a life of mo’ui *fakapotopoto* demonstrate not only the range of *‘ilo* and knowledge systems, but are able to use these knowledge systems wisely to sustain life in Tonga. Further to this, Taufe’ulungaki and colleagues also point out that when people practice *mo’ui fakapotopoto*, there are also behaviors, values, philosophies, and beliefs that are lived and are clearly part of the *‘ilo*, of the knowledge system. Taufe’ulungaki and colleagues add another dimension to the understanding of *‘ilo*, in that it is not only about knowing and a knowledge system, but being able to live out and practice the philosophies and beliefs that are associated with the knowledge systems.

The Use of ‘Ilo in Educational Frameworks

In an effort to translate the philosophy of *‘ilo* into practice, two educational frameworks have emerged to date.

*Langafale ako* framework was developed by Fua ( *[2008](#CR1)*) as a response to a need from the Tonga Ministry of Education for a framework to guide the professional learning and development of teachers. The *Langafale ako* framework was later used by the Tonga Institute of Education to guide the redesign of the institute’s Diploma in Education for primary and secondary teachers.

At the core of the *Langafale ako* framework is the aspiration of a Tongan teacher to be of service to the country, and this is espoused in the phrase *Faiako ma’a Tonga*. In the Tongan context, teachers, teacher educators, and administrators use the phrase *Faiako ma’a Tonga* when referring to the *Langafale ako* framework. When the phrase *Faiako ma’a Tonga* is used, it evokes a sense of duty, honor, and responsibility among teachers.

The *Langafale ako* framework is based on the building of a traditional Tongan fale. In this framework, it recognizes *‘Ilo* as one of four pillars of a professional learning and development framework for teachers. Within this framework, teachers are required to master a range of knowledge pertaining to teaching that fit the local context as well as respond to a changing global context. The pillar of *‘Ilo* also encourages teachers to not only share knowledge but also to be knowledge builders themselves. The use of *‘Ilo* in this framework recognizes that teachers are creators of knowledge and are responsible for ensuring that this *‘Ilo* is grounded on Tongan context, value systems, and beliefs.

The *Founga ako* framework put forward by Vaioleti ( *[2001](#CR8)*) is based on Tongan theories of education, and he presents this for Pasifika context in New Zealand. The *Founga ako* framework is more detailed in its presentation and exploration of *‘Ilo* through a number of educational dimensions. The *Founga ako* framework is presented as a guide for both teachers and students to engage in a learning that preserves the knowledge, values, and language of Pacific and Maori people as well as maintain their well-being. In the *Founga ako* framework, it weaves *‘Ilo* through a number of educational dimensions that considers diversity, identity, social interaction, culturally safe classroom, language, culturally inclusive content, and assessment. An example is the use of *‘Ilo* expressed within the dimension of culturally safe classroom. In a culturally safe classroom, a teacher’s pedagogical behavior recognizes the “knowledge of cultures of community; political and spiritual concerns have key community contacts.” In response the students’ cultural display shows a search “to understand social, spiritual and academic matters for others readily. Treat classroom as a place to recharge, a home where friends are” (pp. 256–258).

The *Langafale ako* framework (Fua [*2008*](#CR1)) and the *Founga ako* framework (Vaioleti [*2001*](#CR8)) are both frameworks build on Tongan education philosophy of *ako*, *‘ilo*, and *poto*, demonstrating the link between all three concepts. The two frameworks also demonstrate attempts by academics to further explore the *‘ilo* as a process of discovering and *‘ilo* as knowledge itself as applied to teaching and learning processes. While the *Langafale ako* framework firmly situates itself in the Tongan context with its people and culture and designed specifically for Tongan teachers, the *Founga ako* framework is more daring in that it takes traditional Tongan education philosophy out of Tonga to a New Zealand context. Further to this, the *Founga ako* framework goes even further to argue for the consideration of this distinctively Tongan education philosophy to be applied for other Pasifika, including Maori, communities in another context. While the *Langafale ako* framework focuses on the professional learning and development of the teacher and traces the teachers’ development from preservice stage to in-service training, the *Founga ako* framework gives consideration to both the teacher and the student. The *Founga ako* framework can be seen as an extension of the *Langafale ako* framework.

Conclusion

*‘Ilo* in a Tongan context is about the process of searching, finding, seeking, and discovering new understandings. *‘Ilo* is also about the knowledge itself; in fact it is a knowledge system with its associated beliefs, structures, language, skills, and context. *‘Ilo* in the Tongan context is always situated within a space and purpose but it also remains open to dialogue and critique. *‘Ilo* is also highly valued when it is purposeful, useful, and worthwhile. Traditional knowledge systems where *‘Ilo* is grounded are a vast system of knowledge that spans time and space. Tongan traditional knowledge systems range from ocean-based *‘ilo* to astronomy, to agriculture, to music and dance, and to protocol and customs. While traditional knowledge systems remain strong in some areas, there are also evidence of changes, decline, and new knowledge systems growing.

In an effort to rethink the inherited education systems of the missionaries and colonial administrators, Tongans have been trying to incorporate *‘Ilo* into the education system. The work of Vaioleti ( *[2001](#CR8)*) and Fua ( [*2008*](#CR1)) demonstrates the journey thus far in this effort to incorporate Tongan philosophy of education and specifically of *‘Ilo* into the education of Tongan people.

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