

## **Enhancing Pasifika Students Success in Accounting Education**

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Improving educational achievement of Pasifika learners has been a key priority of the NZ government for over two decades. While progress has been made in some areas, Pasifika students' success and completion rates in accounting education continue to lag behind other ethnic groups.

To help understand why there is such a gap, we surveyed sixty-two Pasifika students enrolled in a university accounting degree programme and conducted three focus group meetings attended by twenty-three survey respondents. Our findings suggest that Pasifika students' low self-belief in their ability to succeed and weak self-regulation of behaviour towards learning are major factors contributing to poor academic achievement. Our research also highlights the invaluable role of teachers in helping Pasifika accounting students achieve academically and professionally.

We found that low self-belief stems from a combination of issues including language and cultural barriers and feelings of racial and cultural inferiority. Students with low self-belief often have negative perceptions of their ability, lack confidence and motivation to study, feel embarrassed to contact their lecturers, and avoid learning tasks or make superficial attempts when faced with difficult tasks or assessments. These students often blame themselves, shy away from seeking help, and ultimately stop attending classes.

Participants identified a number of obstacles to their academic achievement, most notably, time management issues, lack of preparation for class, and poor class attendance. Many students said they had difficulty allocating time towards study due to leisure, family, friends, and church commitments. These comments highlight the need for students to self-regulate by prioritising their learning needs, setting specific learning goals, monitoring their progress, and managing their time efficiently.

Self-regulation also requires students to become self-aware, and to self-motivate and consciously manage their behaviour towards academic success. Participants noted that support from parents, church leaders, and teachers are needed to help them self-regulate.

Many of our participants reported that their lack of prior knowledge in accounting and not having a family role model with a university qualification to provide support lowers their confidence in their ability to study accounting. In addition, the survey showed positive interactions with fellow students, teachers, and studying in groups with other Pasifika students helped build self-confidence.

Our research suggests that teachers play a crucial role in preventing Pasifika students from developing negative perceptions of their academic abilities, and in nurturing self-belief and confidence in Pasifika students.

The teacher can help students develop self-confidence and academic capabilities by building trusting relationships and providing a safe and supportive learning environment that is culturally inclusive. Student learning and success directly relate to engagement and teacher interaction. Pasifika students generally feel comfortable attending classes and engage in

learning when the teacher is friendly, approachable, culturally sensitive, and shows empathy and care for their learning needs.

Students' comments suggest that engagement and success can also be enhanced through verbal encouragement, knowing student names, and acknowledging the context of Pasifika learners. These comments highlight the unique identities, languages, and cultures that need to be reflected in how teachers teach.

Earlier studies have identified the need for culturally responsive teaching framed around core Pasifika values of respect, humour, affection, and relationships that align with student's needs, interests, and learning styles. Pasifika students in this study felt that their learning and achievement could be enhanced through greater use of practical exercises, real-life case examples, and internal assessments. Many said they need greater institutional support in the form of dedicated Pasifika support lecturers, Pasifika peer tutors, and additional workshops before exams to help achieve better results in accounting.

This research will be of significant interest and value to teachers, tertiary institution management, government, policy makers, community leaders, and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of strategies to enhance the retention and success rates of Pasifika students.

Based on our research, we posit that negative perceptions of one's ability lowers self-belief, which in turn influences behaviour, choice of activities, effort, persistence, and ultimately, performance. In contrast, students with high self-belief work harder, accomplish more, and persist longer than those with low self-belief.

Pasifika students are underrepresented in the accounting profession and improving their academic success and completion rates in tertiary accounting qualifications will help address this persistent, yet surmountable, challenge.