**Positioning Indigenous Women as Agents of Decolonisation in Technology-Enhanced Higher Education: A Case Study of Western Pacific University, Papua New Guinea**

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**Abstract**

This study examines how Indigenous women at Western Pacific University—a Technology-Enhanced University in Ialibu, Southern Highlands, Papua New Guinea—is reshaping academic leadership through culturally rooted and decolonial practices. As the university adopts digital strategies such as Open Flexible Learning, the research investigates how traditional knowledge, values, gender roles, and community-based knowledge systems influence women's engagement in leadership across governance, curriculum development, and educational innovation.

Despite persistent barriers including infrastructural limitations, socio-cultural constraints, and systemic underrepresentation, Indigenous women are emerging as agile, adaptive, and transformative leaders. Their leadership is not only responsive to local realities but actively deconstructs colonial models of academic authority by asserting cultural identity, embedding relational ethics, and promoting inclusive policy frameworks for greater leadership collaborations.

Using a culturally responsive and decolonizing lens, the study integrates qualitative interviews, policy analysis, and case study methodology to explore how Indigenous pedagogies and digital technologies intersect to expand equity, digital inclusion, and culturally safe learning environments. By amplifying localized solutions and lived narratives, this research offers actionable insights for institutions and policymakers committed to fostering culturally grounded, gender-inclusive, and decolonized futures and sustainable leadership in higher education.

**Keywords:** Indigenous women, decolonization, culturally responsive leadership, Open Flexible Learning in higher education, adaptive leadership, digital inclusion, cultural identity, academic governance, PNG epistemologies

*"WE THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA, pledge ourselves -united in one nation pay homage to the memory of our ancestors - the source of our strength and origin of our combined heritage, acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional wisdom of our people – which have come down to us from generation to generation, pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us, our noble tradition, and the Christian principles that are ours now."*

*Source: Constitution of Papua New Guinea*

## Introduction

As we celebrate Papua New Guinea's 50th anniversary in 2025, a question is asked -where do we go from now? This question emerges from a sense-making stance- with an insider's cultured connotation from an educated indigenous woman's space of university leadership, from a matrilineal citizen of a PNG society belonging to a tribe, a clan, and vouches for the need of transacting the co-existence of indigenous framework that fosters women leadership in a digital academic ecology university with reference to the Western Pacific University (WPU). PNG-educated women at WPU are thriving in a modern university setting with opportunities as well as threats from the global to local realities within a newly established university in a rural PNG context where patriarchal or leadership by menfolk is herald and ingrained in the society. The focus in this paper is inclusive, sustainable, collaborative leadership for universities in PNG with a critical lens of 'decolonization' on PNG women leadership in HE for sustainability whilst being grounded amidst the 21st century nuances of ***existential threats*** that are upon us inclusive of climate change, geo-political presence, deeply-rooted cultural practices, a struggling economy for Papua New Guinea and positively the integration of the 4th industrial revolution of AI enhanced Technology learning. Hence, the question remains- where do we go from here and what opportunities can we harness, stories told and how do we continue to contribute towards the positive ideals for common good, at Western Pacific University for God and Country, from a decolonized lens.

In the context of the Western Pacific University- a greenfield university, situated in a patriarchal society of Ialibu/Pangia district of Southern Highlands Province in Papua New Guinea, our PNG educated Indigenous women leaders are not merely participants in academic governance—they are cultural architects actively reshaping policy, norms, pedagogy, and institutional vision. By grounding their leadership in relational ethics, community engagement, and culturally attuned digital practices, they enact decolonization as both a process and outcome in leadership for the sake of education, as agents of decolonization. Through adaptive and transformative approaches to educational program/curriculum design and policy influences these educated PNG women are leaders who positively challenge the colonial and traditional hierarchies from their origin and integrate positive Melanesian values (Narakobi, 2010) into the heart of a university life through their interaction with PNG learners and professional male colleagues. Their leadership is a

redefinition of—where academic excellence and cultural authenticity converge towards a possible 21st century project of decolonization of integrating traditional and contextual knowledge from within PNG and in the global southern hemisphere.

This paper begins by positing itself in a background literature, highlights - story telling, to capture the lived narratives of indigenous educated PNG women, shares the findings of this research from the narratives of educated PNG women who are currently serving WPU in different roles from being in the governance, leadership and administration and young emerging academics who are currently championing the delivery of academic programs. The paper concludes with some recommendations and propositions that WPU must consider embracing the indigenous wealth that the co-creators of this 21st century educators and learners bring into its digital ecology and knowledge hub in a rural PNG context.

## Background literature

This paper is informed through a lens of understanding what matters at WPU and how does decolonization and universities, Relational Ethics, Indigenous Leadership, Decolonial Pedagogy at WPU, Indigenous Leadership and Melanesian Epistemologies, Technology-Enhanced Learning and Cultural Inclusion and Gender Equity and Digital Inclusion in PNG Universities inter-play in the transformative nurturing of PNG indigenous women leaders.

### *Decolonization and Universities*

As one explores decolonization in the context of a university and in trying to make sense of how it is related to PNG educated indigenous women, its definition is vital. Decolonisation (Dickson-Waiko, 2013, Wheeldon, A. L., & Sahay, D. (2025, Tight, M. (2024) refers to a transformative, liberating process aimed at dismantling colonial structures, ideologies, and practices embedded in higher education systems and in universities. It is a process of transformation that involves reimagining and reshaping the university's *governance, curriculum, pedagogy, research, and institutional culture* to include or integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, values, and ways of being. This process is not merely symbolic but requires structural change and epistemic justice (Enslin & Hedge, 2024). It challenges the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms and promotes a plurality of worldviews, especially those historically marginalized in academic spaces (Tight, 2022). As Sefa Dei and Cacciavillani (2024) argue, decolonization is a spiritual, intellectual, and political act rooted in Indigenous resistance and futurity, demanding relational ethics, community accountability, and the reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing.

The concept of *decolonization* in higher education has gained global traction, yet its application remains uneven and often symbolic and can be distant to us if we are not conscious of it. It involves indigenous consciousness to positive cultural protocols and sensitivity with respect to what matters, where and how to respectfully transact collaborative academic leadership in

university spaces. Tight (2024) further argues that while decolonization is widely discussed, its operationalization within university systems is still contested and underdeveloped. In the context of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) universities, decolonization must move beyond curriculum reform to include leadership, governance, and institutional culture. Wheeldon and Sahay (2025) emphasize that decolonization requires dismantling entrenched power structures and reimagining academic authority through Indigenous epistemologies and relational ethics. At Western Pacific University (WPU), this process is not abstract—it is embodied by Indigenous women who challenge colonial hierarchies and assert culturally grounded leadership. Their work reflects a shift from passive participation to active cultural authorship/emersion to transform digital learning, where decolonisation is both a process and an outcome.

### *Relational Ethics, Indigenous Leadership, and Decolonial Pedagogy at WPU*

At WPU, relational ethics is not an abstract concept—it is embodied in the lived leadership of Indigenous women who challenge colonial hierarchies and assert culturally grounded authority. Their leadership reflects a shift from passive participation to active cultural authorship, where decolonisation is both a process and an outcome. This transformation is rooted in relational ethics, which emphasizes the importance of relationships, context, and mutual responsibility in ethical decision-making (Pollard, 2015; Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In the Melanesian contexts, relational ethics aligns with Indigenous values of *custodianship, reciprocity, and interconnectedness* (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020). Leadership is not defined by individual power but by the ability to *sustain relationships—with land, ancestors, community, and knowledge systems.* At WPU, Indigenous women leaders enact this ethical stance by fostering *inclusive spaces, honoring cultural protocols, and mentoring younger academics in ways that affirm identity and belonging*.

Decolonial pedagogy at WPU is therefore ***relational*** in nature. It resists the imposition of Western epistemologies and instead centers Indigenous ways of knowing—*through storytelling, land-based learning, and community-led curriculum design*. This approach echoes Bawden and Rangou's (2024) call for a moral and intellectual transformation in higher education, where collaborative leadership and epistemic pluralism are essential to addressing existential threats. By embedding relational ethics into institutional practice, WPU is not only reimagining leadership—it is cultivating a pedagogy of care, resilience, collaboration and renewal.

### *Indigenous Leadership and Melanesian Epistemologies*

Leadership in PNG is deeply contextual, political, shaped by tribal affiliations, communal values, matriarchal, patriarchal and oral traditions. Prideaux (2006) highlights that Western leadership models often fail to resonate with PNG realities, necessitating a redefinition of leadership that is inclusive of Indigenous knowledge systems. At WPU, Indigenous women are not only navigating

these complexities are also redefining leadership through community engagement, relational ethics, and cultural resilience.

Baird, Nasale, and Gibbs (2021) further argue that Melanesian academics often experience tension between Western academic norms and their cultural identities. This tension, however, becomes a site of transformation when Indigenous women use it to inform curriculum design, policy development, and digital innovation. The opportunity to rise above the mentioned tension is an opportunity for educated women leaders in academic roles to rise up as agents of transformation in universities.

### *Technology-Enhanced Learning and Cultural Inclusion*

Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) offers both opportunities and challenges for Indigenous education. *Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)* refers to the strategic use of digital technologies to improve the quality, accessibility, and flexibility of learning and teaching (Sankey. et al. 2024). It encompasses practices such as e-learning, online learning, blended learning, and flexible open learning, and is guided by institutional policies, governance, and ethical standards. While TEL can democratize access and foster innovation, it risks reproducing colonial dynamics if not grounded in local contexts. At WPU, TEL is being reimagined through Open Flexible Learning models that must integrate traditional knowledge and community-based learning systems. Ignited to TEL, a question surfaces as it how can WPU extends its TEL efforts to community-based learning with cultural protocols to ensure that our mission for education transforms, transcends and empowers learners so that they can also be agents of decolonization in their respective societies in PNG and contexts outside PNG.

Indigenous women are emerging as champions in this space, using TEL to expand equity and inclusion through digital transformation. Their leadership is adaptive, leveraging digital tools to create culturally safe learning environments while harnessing global education technologies.

### *Gender Equity and Digital Inclusion in PNG Universities*

Despite progress and as we celebrate our 50$^{th}$ anniversary of independence, *gender disparities* persist in PNG higher education, particularly in *STEM fields and leadership roles*. A recent report from Study in PNG (2023) notes that universities like Unitech and UPNG are implementing GEDSI (Gender Equity, Disability, and Social Inclusion) policies to address these gaps. However, structural barriers remain, including limited access to *safe learning spaces, under-representation in decision-making, and socio-cultural constraints*. At WPU, the active advocacy for safer, more inclusive environments is of paramount importance in alignment to its institutional motto that calls its citizens to be servicing FOR GOD & COUNTRY. Such efforts reflect a broader movement toward gender-responsive leadership that aligns with decolonial goals, spiritual and patriotic consciousness and digital inclusion.

## Research Methodology

Vallance (2008) advocates for cultural protocols in research and education through a deeply contextualized and ethically grounded approach to Melanesian research. His work emphasizes the importance of *respecting Indigenous worldviews, relational ethics, and culturally appropriate methodologies* when conducting research in Papua New Guinea and broader Melanesia. Guided by Vallance, this research was conducted at WPU and garnered qualitative data from selected WPU indigenous women in various roles from governance, institutional leadership and administration and academic leadership roles. *Story telling or Tok Stori* was the main methodology that was harnessed to gauge insights, reflections and critical discourse from seven (7) WPU educated professionals. *Tok Stori* is a culturally grounded, dialogical approach to research that reflects Melanesian ways of knowing, being, and relating (Vallance, 2008). It is not merely a method of data collection but a relational and processual methodology that values conversation, shared experiences, and mutual understanding over rigid structures and hierarchical inquiry.

| Subjects Interviewed | Role | University Experience |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Orchid | Academic- Lecturer | 5 years at WPU |
| 2. Flower | Academic -Lecturer | 2 years at WPU |
| 3. Rose | Academic Tutor | 1 ½ year at WPU |
| 4. Carnation | Academic Lecturer | Over 10 years of university experience and two years at WPU |
| 5. Sunflower | Academic Lecturer | Two years of university experience at WPU with over five (5) years of educational experience |
| 6. Bougainvillea | Academic Leader | Very Experienced University leader |
| 7. Frangipani | Governance/administration | Well educated PNG with extensive |

*Table 1: WPU Interview Participants coded for confidentiality*

The case study approach was selected in making WPU as the case study, focusing on the topic of *positioning indigenous women as agents of decolonisation. WPU being one of PNG's post-independence projects* by the Department of Higher Education Research Science, Technology and Sports (DHERST)- makes a compelling case study for research on decolonisation in higher education for several reasons that align with both the themes in Baird, Nasale, and Gibbs (2021) and broader global critical discourses on Indigenous academic identity and transformation.

The following topics were explored through the story telling interviews which were inclusive of;

*1. Postcolonial and Indigenous Context*: WPU is in Papua New Guinea, a country with deep colonial legacies and rich Indigenous cultural diversity. This context provides fertile ground for examining how universities can navigate and resist neo-colonial academic structures while affirming Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural values.

*2. Emerging Institutional Identity*: As a relatively new university, WPU is not bound by entrenched colonial academic traditions to the same extent as older universities in PNG. This gives it a unique opportunity to *reimagine its governance, curriculum, and pedagogy* from the ground up, embedding decolonial principles from the outset and from a transformational lens.

*3. Leadership Committed to Decolonisation:* Under an indigenous woman's leadership, WPU is can actively engage with Indigenous education, flexible open distance learning, and digital transformation through Technology Enhanced Learning. This commitment aligns with the *critical reflections and aspirations* expressed by PNG academics in the Baird et al. study, making WPU a living example of a decolonial hub.

*4. Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) as a Decolonial Tool:* WPU's focus on TEL for digital access and transformation offers a strategic pathway to *expand educational equity* for rural and Indigenous learners. This aligns with the theme of *pragmatic engagement with global knowledge* while ensuring that digital platforms are culturally and linguistically rich and inclusive.

*5. Gender and Cultural Consciousness:* This initial research with Indigenous women leaders and young academics reflects a *gender-aware and culturally grounded approach* to academic leadership. This directly responds to the challenges identified in the Baird et al. study around preparing the next generation to navigate both Melanesian and Western expectations.

*6. Potential for Regional Influence:* WPU's collaborations with institutions across the Pacific (e.g., through ACODE's Leadership in Technologies Leaderships Institute (LTLI) program) position it as a *regional thought leader* in decolonising higher education in PNG. Its experiences can inform policy, curriculum, and leadership development across similar postcolonial contexts.

## Findings

The findings of this study reveal how Indigenous women at Western Pacific University (WPU) are actively reshaping academic leadership, institutional culture, and digital learning environments through culturally grounded and decolonial practices. The analysis is organized into five interrelated themes:

### *Indigenous Women as Champions of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL)*

Indigenous women at WPU are emerging as key advocates and implementers of AI enhanced TEL in a digital ecology and knowledge hub, particularly in the context of Open Flexible Learning. Despite limited infrastructure and digital literacy challenges, these women demonstrate adaptive leadership by integrating indigenous community-based knowledge systems with digital tools. Their engagement in TEL is not merely technical—it is relational and culturally attuned, reflecting a commitment to inclusive and context-sensitive learning. This means that they are able to foster positive values such mutual respect whilst facilitating learning for young adult male students who hail from patriarchal communities to being inclusive participants of learning with young women

adult students as well as young women academics. This liberal strategy encourages digital learning as an equal playing field irrespective of gender.

Participants described TEL as a space where they could "amplify local voices," "connect with remote learners," and "embed cultural values into digital pedagogy." This positions TEL as a transformative platform for Indigenous leadership rather or more than a neutral technological solution. In PNG's context where over 80% of the population live in rural PNG -TEL at WPU, Ialibu-SHP- through flexible open learning opportunities provides the opportunities for accessible, inclusive education to be promoted

### *Gendered Dynamics in Academic and Institutional Spaces*

The study found persistent gender imbalances across management and both staff and student populations:

- Senior Management Team: There is still an imbalance in the leadership space of Vice Presidents whereby, out of four positions- only 1 position is held by a woman whilst the other three are occupied by males. The President of the University is occupied by an indigenous PNG woman which makes two (2) women PNG women leaders at the helm of the leadership roles alongside their male counter parts.
- Information Technology (IT) and International Business Management (IBM) departments are male-dominated, with over 70% male representation.
- Certificate in Higher Education Foundation Studies (CHEFS) department shows more gender balance among staff but remains skewed toward male students in the student population. This indicates that WPU strategizes to dissolve the gender disparity during the enrollment stages by offering alternative pathways such as online learning to attract more female students and/or good scholarship packages to students to pursue WPU programs.

Despite these disparities, PNG Indigenous women are asserting their presence through leadership roles, advocacy for gender equity, and mentoring initiatives. The female staff are also noted for their heightened awareness of safety and accessibility, often leading efforts to create more inclusive learning environments.

### *Creating Inclusive and Culturally Safe Learning Environments*

Participants emphasized the importance of learning spaces that are not only physically safe but culturally affirming and allows for voices to heard. A response from a female academic staff highlighted the need for:

- Precautionary safety measures, especially in response to tribal conflicts, high incidence of violence against women in PNG societies and safeguards for women in a university that is situated in the upper, rural highlands region of the country.

- Accessible infrastructure for students and staff with disabilities, were rated low (3–4 out of 10) by the academic participants of this research.
- Culturally responsive pedagogy that reflects Melanesian values and relational ethics and storytelling.

These efforts and rethinking, reimaging on inclusivity reflect a broader commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and gender-inclusive policy frameworks, aligning with national GEDSI goals.

### *Indigenous Women as Agents of Decolonization*

The Indigenous women at WPU who were interviewed described themselves as being brave, empowered, proactive, resilient, trailblazers, bold and assertive in their various roles in this new university. Their leadership challenges colonial hierarchies by rethinking about embedding Indigenous values into curriculum design, governance, and institutional vision. Participants shared narratives of past suppression that exist in PNG universities, where PNG nationals were denied promotions and recognition in favor of expatriates. In such light, it reminds WPU to be vigilant to offer a more equitable environment where PNG women can thrive and lead but at the same time create spaces and opportunities for mentoring women to attain global competencies in academia and to be marketable in the global academic spaces through research pursing global standards.

These women enact decolonization not only through policy influence but through everyday practices—storytelling, community engagement, and cultural mentorship.

### *Institutional Shifts Toward Decolonized Governance*

WPU's status as a greenfield university allows for the reimagining of academic governance. The majority of staff are Papua New Guineans, and leadership structures are increasingly inclusive. However, critical questions were raised about the cultural competence of building a WPU community of international education and how WPU can positively engage in the promotion of PNG's wealth in indigenous ways of learning, cultural protocols and enhancing diversity as a decolonized educational hub.

There is a growing call for an Indigenous Framework that guides institutional development, ensuring that international collaboration does not replicate colonial dynamics but supports culturally grounded voices, spaces, leadership and at the same time cultivates open-minded worldview mindsets to be globally competent but grounded in indigenous identities.

## Discussions

This study reveals how Indigenous women at WPU are not only participating in academic leadership but actively reshaping it through culturally grounded and decolonial practices. Their

leadership is situated at the intersection of Melanesian epistemologies, adaptive digital innovation, and gender-responsive governance, offering a compelling model for decolonised higher education in Papua New Guinea.

For Melanesian women in Papua New Guinea and the broader Pacific, decolonization is deeply personal and political. It's about reclaiming space, voice, and agency in institutions that have long been shaped by colonial and patriarchal norms ingrained in current modern societies. In a decolonised WPU, that envision and is enacting tech-enhanced teaching and learning, it also *means harnessing digital tools to support Indigenous innovation, storytelling, and leadership in a digital educational eco-system*.

### *Decolonization as Process and Practice*

The findings affirm Tight's (2024) assertion that decolonization must move beyond symbolic gestures to structural transformation. At WPU, Indigenous women enact decolonization through everyday leadership practices—mentoring, curriculum design, policy advocacy, and community engagement. These actions challenge colonial hierarchies and reassert cultural identity within academic spaces. Wheeldon and Sahay (2025) argue that decolonization requires systemic shifts, and WPU's greenfield status provides a unique opportunity to embed Indigenous frameworks from the ground up.

The narratives of suppression in other universities—where PNG nationals were denied promotions and expatriates dominated decision-making—highlight the urgency of this work. WPU's inclusive governance structures and the fact that, majority of the staff are Papua New Guineans, staff composition marks a significant departure from these colonial legacies. Simultaneously it remains welcoming to building an international hub and community of international staff who can be also be accepting to the grounded PNG's values, epistemologies (ways of learning) and the wealth of our languages.

### *Indigenous Leadership and Relational Ethics*

Leadership at WPU reflects Prideaux's (2006) critique of Western leadership models in PNG. Indigenous women lead through relational ethics, tribal affiliations, and communal values, rather than hierarchical authority. Their leadership is deeply contextual, responsive to local realities, and grounded in Melanesian ways of knowing. Baird, Nasale, and Gibbs (2021) emphasize the tension between Western academic norms and Indigenous identity, yet at WPU, this tension becomes a site of transformation and an opportunity to be developed.

The traits identified—bravery, resilience, proactivity, assertiveness—are not merely personal attributes but expressions of cultural agency. These women are trailblazers who redefine leadership as a collective, collaborative, culturally embedded practice.

### *Technology-Enhanced Learning as a Site of Inclusion*

TEL at WPU is not a neutral tool but a culturally negotiated space. Indigenous women use TEL to amplify local voices, connect with remote learners, and embed traditional knowledge into digital pedagogy. This aligns with global calls for culturally responsive TEL, where technology serves equity and inclusion rather than reproducing colonial dynamics.

The gendered disparities in Management, IT and IBM departments underscore the need for targeted interventions. Yet, the presence of women champions in TEL suggests a shift toward more inclusive digital futures. Their leadership in TEL reflects adaptive capacity and innovation, positioning them as key actors in PNG's digital transformation through WPU.

### *Institutional Shifts and the Role of Expatriates*

The question raised by participants— "Are expatriate academics competent to embrace PNG ways?"—points to a critical tension in decolonized governance. While international collaboration is welcomed, it must be grounded in cultural competence and respect for Indigenous frameworks. WPU's Indigenous Framework initiative seeks to ensure that expatriate staff contribute to, rather than dominate, institutional development through a process of relational ethics with mutual respect, collaborations and general consensus in decision making.

This reflects a broader decolonial imperative: to center Indigenous voices in decision-making and ensure that leadership reflects the cultural realities of the communities it serves.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of Indigenous women as agents of decolonisation and to advance inclusive, culturally responsive leadership in higher education:

**1. Institutionalise Indigenous Frameworks in Governance and Policy**

- Develop an Indigenous Leadership Framework that guides decision-making, curriculum design, and staff development.
- Ensure that expatriate staff undergo cultural competence training to align with Melanesian values and relational ethics.
- Promote tribal and clan-based representation in governance structures to reflect PNG's diverse cultural landscape.

**2. Strengthen Gender Equity and Inclusion in STEM and Leadership**

- Implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies for leadership, students' recruitment, senior management and administration, Indigenous women in IT, IBM, and other male-dominated disciplines.
- Establish mentorship programs led by Indigenous women to support emerging female leaders and students.
- Expand GEDSI policies to include measurable outcomes and accountability mechanisms across departments through an institutional GEDSI initiatives.

**3. Enhance Accessibility and Safety in Learning Environments**

- Invest in inclusive infrastructure that supports students with disabilities, aiming to raise accessibility from the current 3–4/10 rating to 10/10.
- Prioritize safety protocols in response to tribal conflicts and socio-cultural risks, with leadership from all staff whilst engaging with the indigenous societies.
- Design *culturally safe learning spaces* that affirm identity, belonging, equal spaces and community engagement.

**4. Reimagine Technology-Enhanced Learning through Indigenous Pedagogies**

- Integrate community-based knowledge systems into TEL platforms and Open Flexible Learning models.
- Support Indigenous women as TEL champions, providing mentorship, training, resources, and leadership opportunities.
- Develop digital content that reflects local languages, stories, and cultural practices to enhance relevance and engagement.

**5. Foster Collaborative and Decolonized Academic Cultures**

- Encourage co-leadership models that value Indigenous and Western knowledge systems equally.
- Promote storytelling, oral traditions, and relational ethics as valid academic practices.
- Create platforms for dialogue and reflection on decolonization, gender, and cultural identity within the university community.

**Western Pacific University could:**

- Create safe spaces for cultural dialogue where staff and students can openly discuss tensions between Indigenous and Western academic norms.

- Support bilingual or multilingual education, integrating Tok Pisin, sign language and local languages alongside English to foster inclusive learning.
- Develop culturally responsive pedagogy that values relational learning, storytelling, and community-based knowledge.
- Empower Indigenous academic identity through mentorship, leadership development, and recognition of Indigenous scholarship.
- Critically examine institutional structures to identify and dismantle neo-colonial practices in governance, curriculum, and assessment.
- Promote professional development that equips staff to navigate and reconcile cross-cultural tensions in teaching and research.

## Conclusion

This study has illuminated the transformative role of Indigenous women at Western Pacific University (WPU) as agents of decolonization in a technology-enhanced higher education context. Positioned within a greenfield institution, these women are not merely adapting to existing academic structures—they are actively reshaping them through culturally grounded leadership, relational ethics, and digital innovation. The findings demonstrate that Indigenous women at WPU are:

- Challenging colonial hierarchies by embedding Melanesian values into curriculum, governance, and institutional culture.
- Leveraging Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) to expand access, amplify local knowledge, and foster inclusive learning environments.
- Advocating for gender equity and cultural safety, particularly in male-dominated disciplines and under-resourced learning spaces.
- Redefining leadership as a collective, community-driven practice rooted in Indigenous epistemologies.

WPU's unique context—its majority PNG staff, openness to Indigenous frameworks, and commitment to inclusive governance—offers a fertile ground for reimagining higher education in Papua New Guinea. The leadership of Indigenous women in this space is not only a response to historical exclusion but a proactive vision for a decolonized academic future.

As PNG celebrates its 50th anniversary, the question of "Where do we go from here?" finds a hopeful answer in the work of these PNG women hailing from indigenous patrilineal and matrilineal identities, languages and societies. Their leadership signals a shift toward culturally

authentic, digitally inclusive, and socially just higher education—where academic excellence and Indigenous identity converge.

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