



Leo Moana o Aotearoa

Vagahau Niue report



Ministry for
Pacific Peoples

Te Manatū mō ngā Iwi o te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa

Title: Leo Moana o Aotearoa Vagahau Niue Report

Citation: Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2026),
Leo Moana o Aotearoa Vagahau Niue Report,
Ministry for Pacific Peoples: Wellington, New Zealand.

Acknowledgements: Fakaauae lahi oue tulou to the tagata Niue across New Zealand who participated in the first ever Leo Moana o Aotearoa national survey and talanoa. We appreciate the time you have taken to share your experiences with vagahau Niue.

Fakaauae lahi also to the Leo Moana o Aotearoa project team and community researchers who recruited participants and completed other important work to ensure the online survey and talanoa were a success.

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the survey and talanoa components of the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Project from tagata Niue (people of Niue heritage) in New Zealand. It is designed to be read with the [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report](#), which describes the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Project and explains how the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey was conducted, who was included, and how to interpret the results.

This report also features the voices of the Niue community, as captured through talanoa with its members across New Zealand. As part of these talanoa, Niue community members answered questions about their attitudes towards vagahau Niue (Niue language), language competency, and language use across multiple domains including the home, church, education, workplace, media and broadcasting, with the community, and in wider society. This report also highlights the heterogeneity of experiences and diverse voices across the Niue communities of New Zealand.

High-level findings are as follows:

Language proficiency

Proficiency in vagahau Niue was higher in listening and reading (receptive language skills) than in speaking and writing (productive language skills), with results across all categories declining with age. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of improving proficiency in speaking and writing, as it is these productive skills that are critical to effective transmission of a language from one generation to the next.

Vagahau Niue in the home and with family

Home and family play a critical role in maintaining vagahau Niue. There was high use of the language reported in the home, particularly with older family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Interestingly, reported use with children was likewise high, though this does not yet seem to be reflected in the language proficiency findings.

Vagahau Niue in church

The church was highlighted as a key domain of language use, maintenance, and transmission for tagata Niue. The majority of those who attend church at least weekly report services, bible studies, and other activities being held in vagahau Niue. There were significant differences in language use in church settings, especially regarding the preferred language of communication between age groups; participants were far more likely to report hearing vagahau Niue being used by and between adults than by and between children.

Vagahau Niue in education settings

The role of education was identified as crucial to the maintenance and revitalisation of vagahau Niue. Nearly all participants reported they would send their children to early childhood education (ECE), primary, and secondary schools where they could be taught in vagahau Niue, if given the opportunity.

Vagahau Niue in the workplace

Pacific languages and cultures are becoming increasingly visible in workplaces, and around one-third of participants reported using vagahau Niue with colleagues at least weekly. Ethnicity-based discrimination is a lived experience for many, however, and the perception that English is the language of professional success remains prevalent.

Vagahau Niue in and with Pacific communities

Community was identified as a key domain for using vagahau Niue. Participants highlighted the importance of having safe spaces to use and practice vagahau Niue without fear of being judged or shamed for making mistakes.

Vagahau Niue in media and broadcasting

Digital technology, media, and the internet were identified as emerging domains where tagata Niue can connect and converse in vagahau Niue. Music and social media were reported most often in relation to supporting use of the language.

Vagahau Niue in the New Zealand context

Most participants believe that bilingualism is beneficial to New Zealand, and that vagahau Niue is an important part of the national identity. Many also believe it is important to learn foreign languages beyond English, demonstrating the high value placed on multilingualism by tagata Niue in New Zealand.

Introduction

“Ko e ha mautolu a vagahau ko e mena kua mua atu e mahuiga kia mautolu ko e tau tagata, tau taofiaga ke he tau aga fakamotu, tau tala tū fakaholo mo e fakatumau ke moui anoiha”

“Our vagahau is of the utmost importance to our identity, cultural values, history, and survival as a ‘living’ culture”

Vagahau Niue

Niue is a self-governing nation that is part of the Realm of New Zealand. As such, Niue citizens retain all the rights of New Zealand citizens, and vagahau Niue is considered indigenous to the Realm of New Zealand.

The population of tagata Niue in New Zealand significantly outnumbers that in Niue, as does the population of speakers of vagahau Niue. That is, 95% of tagata Niue live in New Zealand. The education system in Niue uses some level of vagahau Niue, though a significant proportion of instruction is provided in English from a young age. Data on the number of speakers in Niue is limited, but what is available suggests the proportion of speakers is declining, albeit at a slower rate than among the tagata Niue population in New Zealand. Niue has a Language Commission, which works to identify ways to strengthen language revitalisation.

According to UNESCO, vagahau Niue is classified as severely endangered and, of all the Pacific languages, has one of the lowest rates of language retention for those under 15 years of age (1.7%)¹. According to the 2023 Census, 11.3% of tagata Niue in New Zealand can speak vagahau Niue, a drop of 7% since 2013. There are limited opportunities to learn vagahau Niue in the community or through formal education in New Zealand, though it has recently been approved as an NCEA accredited subject. The future of vagahau Niue depends on how well it is revitalised and maintained in New Zealand.

Purpose and objectives

The aim of the Leo Moana o Aotearoa project is to investigate the use of, and attitudes towards, Pacific languages in New Zealand. The overall goal of this report, therefore, is to provide contemporary information on the vitality of vagahau Niue among tagata Niue residing in New Zealand.

In conjunction with the initial [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report](#), this report focuses on vagahau Niue and the specific experiences of tagata Niue and Niue communities across New Zealand. This report presents the views of the tagata Niue who took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey (n = 396) and talanoa (n = 23) and focuses on their use of and attitudes towards vagahau Niue across the different domains in which it is spoken.

¹ Stats NZ (2023). Census 2023.

It is intended that what is raised by respondents in this report will support current and future approaches to strengthening the vitality of vagahau Niue and the wellbeing of tagata Niue in New Zealand. We also hope the report will be a helpful reference document for communities, researchers, and agencies that will support the development of responsive policy and practice that better meet the needs of tagata Niue.

Sample

The target population for the survey and talanoa is a representative sample of the tagata Niue population, according to data from the 2018 Census (see Appendix 2 for the Niue sampling frame).

Due to ongoing limitations with the quality of Pacific data from the 2018 Census, the Statistics New Zealand (StatsNZ) standard of a random sample approach using stratified, multi-stage area designs based on Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) was not considered appropriate for the Survey. Current quantitative sampling methods are often not conducive to creating equitable data for smaller or disadvantaged population groups.

In light of this, the Survey sample uses both Maximum Variation purposeful sampling and community-based participant-driven recruitment strategies to identify participants across five variables: age, gender, ethnicity, region, and birthplace (see Appendix 1 for further details). These variables are critical for measuring the extent to which tagata Niue can learn and use vagahau Niue. Combining these helped ensure a level of representation of Pacific voices that more generic random sampling methodologies cannot produce.

Data collection

Data for Leo Moana o Aotearoa was collected through an online survey and targeted talanoa with Niue community members across New Zealand. The survey questionnaire² was available primarily through a confidential link online. Participants were also able to seek support in completing the Survey via telephone or video calling services facilitated by Niue community-based researchers.

Data analysis

Overall response rate

A total of 3,039 people completed the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey, 396 of whom were tagata Niue. Respondents were adults aged 15 years and older currently residing in New Zealand who identified as Pacific peoples.

Survey weighting

After the data was collected, a post-stratification weighting was applied to balance the response groups that were over-represented (e.g., women, smaller ethnic communities, adults aged 25-44) and under-represented in the sample (e.g., men, larger ethnic communities, youth 15-24). A sampling frame based on the relevant population proportions was used to achieve this weighting and ensure that the sample was optimally representative of the latest adult (15+) Pacific population statistics.

² The full list of Survey questions is provided in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report (pp. 92 – 103)

The results for the tagata Niue participant survey (n = 396) have been weighted against the total tagata Niue population in New Zealand as at the 2018 Census. They are therefore representative of the total domestic tagata Niue population. These are different from the total Leo Moana participant survey (n = 3,039) as mentioned above, which applies ethnicity prioritisation to weight the nine Pacific ethnic groups within the overall Pacific population as at the 2018 Census.

Survey analyses

While most of this report focuses on descriptive statistics (providing percentages and counts), additional analyses have been run to examine differences within the tagata Niue participant cohort (n = 396). These analyses included a chi-square test of significance to determine if there were statistically significant differences in survey responses based on the following variables:

- Age groups (15-24 years vs. 25-54 years vs. 55+ years)
- Gender (Male vs. Female)
- Ethnicity (tagata Niue only vs. Multi-Pacific vs. Multi-ethnic)³
- Region (Wellington vs. Auckland vs. Elsewhere)
- Birthplace (New Zealand-born vs. Overseas-born)

Only significant differences within the tagata Niue population ($p < 0.05$) are presented in this report.

Pertinent insights from the talanoa component of Leo Moana o Aotearoa are also incorporated throughout the report.

Limitations

The survey findings must be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. Due to the small size of the Niue community in New Zealand, employing a randomised sample design approach was not feasible. This means the results reflect community views constrained by researchers' outreach capacity and capability. Tagata Niue who are not as involved in Pacific community activities are therefore less likely to be represented in this sample.

Information from this survey is based on participant self-reporting. Consequently, over-reporting and under-reporting cannot be excluded.

³ 'Multi-Pacific' refers to when a participant has selected Niue and any other Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Niue and Samoan.

'Multi-Ethnic' refers to when a participant has selected Niue and any non-Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Niue and New Zealand European.

Demography

A total of 396 tagata Niue participants took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey. As at the 2018 Census, there were 19,296 tagata Niue residing in Aotearoa. This means that at the time of the survey, around 2.1% of the Niue population aged 15+ participated in the survey.

Figure 1 – Tagata Niue participant summary



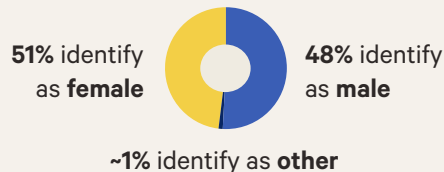
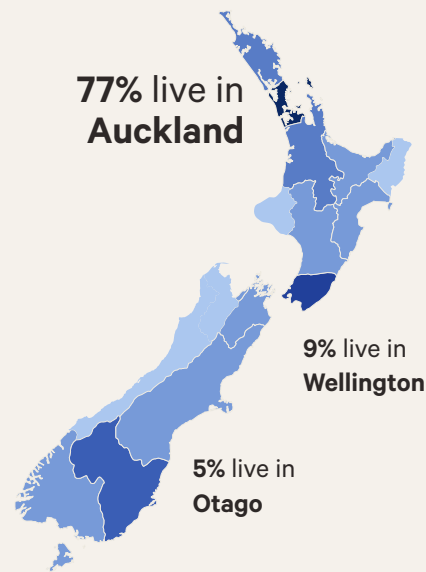
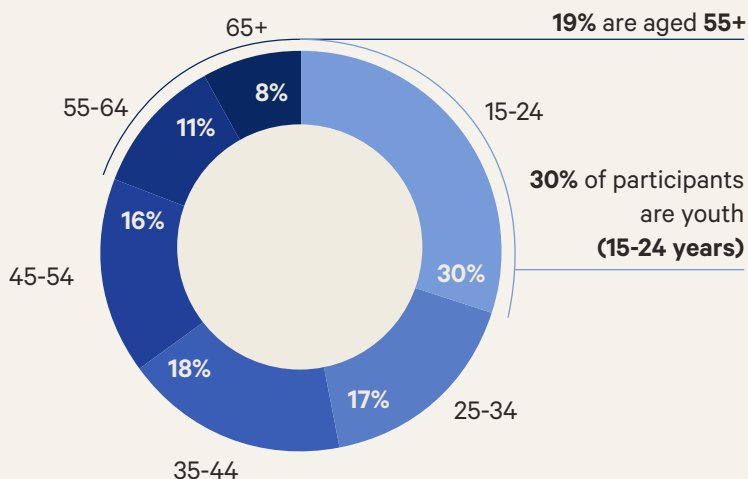
Just under one-third of participants (30%) were 15-24 years old, while just over half (51%) were 25-54 years old. The remaining proportion (19%) were 55 years old or older. Gender was evenly distributed, with 51% of participants identifying as female, 48% identifying as male, and 1% identifying as a gender beyond the binary.

Nearly three-quarters of participants (72%) were New Zealand-born, while the remaining proportion (28%) were born overseas. Over three-quarters (77%) of tagata Niue participants resided in Auckland, with much smaller proportions living in Wellington (9%), Otago (5%), and elsewhere across the country (9%).

Just under half of Niue participants (47%) identified as having multiple ethnicities, and the remaining proportion (53%) were solely tagata Niue. Within the remaining proportion, the most common additional ethnicities were Samoan (22%), Cook Islands Māori (11%), and Tongan (11%).

Survey Overview

396 Niue participants took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey



72% were born in New Zealand **47%** are multi-ethnic

Overview of Pacific language use in Aotearoa New Zealand

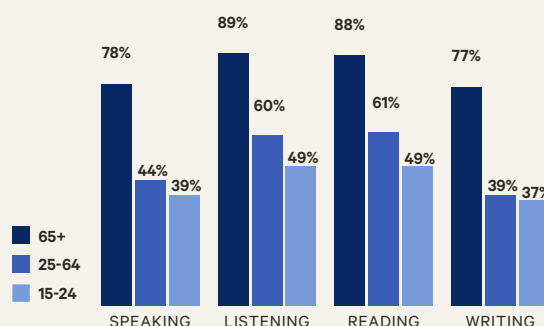
59% report being **proficient in at least one Pacific language.**

38% learned Vagahau Niue as a **first language**

96% say using Vagahau Niue is **important to their wellbeing**

84% are concerned Vagahau Niue is **in danger of being lost in Aotearoa**

55% are concerned Vagahau Niue is **in danger of being lost in Niue**



Older generations report having **better language proficiency** than younger generations

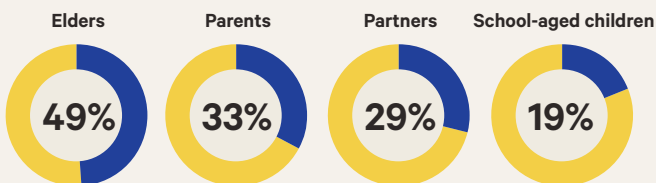
96% believe it is **important for our children and future generations** to speak our Pacific languages

48% **speak to children** in their households using **Pacific languages**

Vagahau Niue language use in Aotearoa New Zealand, in depth

Home & Family

Participants reported always using Vagahau Niue with elders more than with peers and children.



37% live in **multigenerational households**

64% learned about Pacific languages and customs in the home

84% agree that Pacific languages are safe as long as they are spoken in the home

Religion

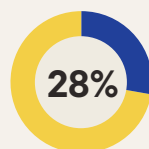
Top religious affiliations

37% Christian (no specific denomination)

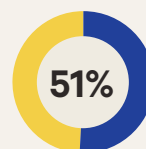
29% Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed

13% did not have any religious affiliation

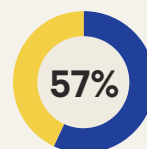
9% Latter-day Saints / Mormon



attend church at least once a week

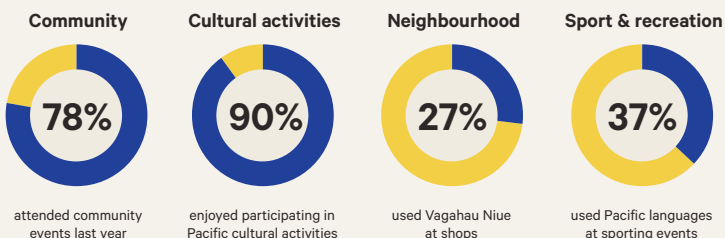


church services are always held in Vagahau Niue



attend churches with many others from Niue

Communities



attended community events last year

enjoyed participating in Pacific cultural activities

used Vagahau Niue at shops

used Pacific languages at sporting events

22% have never visited Niue

29% have hosted Niueans in NZ

Media

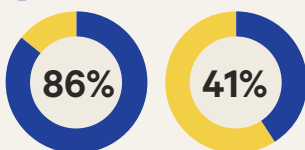
79% digital technology, media and the Internet help connect to Pacific languages

30% digital technology, media and the Internet are threatening Pacific languages

70% listen to music in Pacific languages every week

38% listen to Pacific radio at least once a week

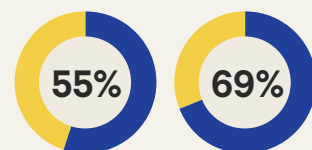
School



would send children to primary school where they could be taught Vagahau Niue

have attended Pacific language education in Aotearoa

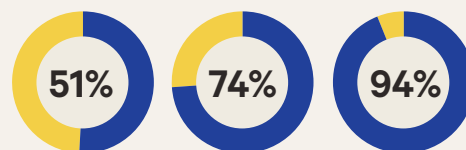
Work



have been asked to provide Pacific cultural advice in the workplace

feel comfortable using Vagahau Niue in the workplace

Government



believe the Government is not doing enough to support Pacific languages in NZ

agree Pacific languages should have official recognition in NZ

think Pacific languages are an important part of NZ's national identity

Enablers What activities are most helpful for Niueans to engage with Vagahau Niue?

73% listening and speaking with family & friends

51% listening to music in Pacific languages

47% visiting heritage Pacific islands

42% engaging with Pacific language weeks

Barriers What gets in the way of engaging with Vagahau Niue?

40% Not feeling connected to your Pacific culture or identity

33% Living in a household with people who do not speak the language

32% Not having consistent funding or resources to provide Pacific language programmes

31% Not knowing where to start

Vagahau Niue

"I really want people to know that I am Niuean, that my kids are part Niuean, that my grandchildren are part Niuean... There are four generations with me and my family, and I want that to carry on."

Figure 2 – Vagahau Niue summary

96 %
believe Pacific languages are
important for future generations

96 %
say using Vagahau Niue is
important to their wellbeing



Language proficiency is consistently higher among older adults (65+) across speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

59 %
report being proficient in
at least one Pacific language

48 %
use Pacific languages when
speaking to children at home

38 %
learned Vagahau Niue
as a first language

84 %
fear Vagahau Niue
is at risk in Aotearoa

55 %
fear Vagahau Niue
is at risk in Niue

Proficiency in vagahau Niue

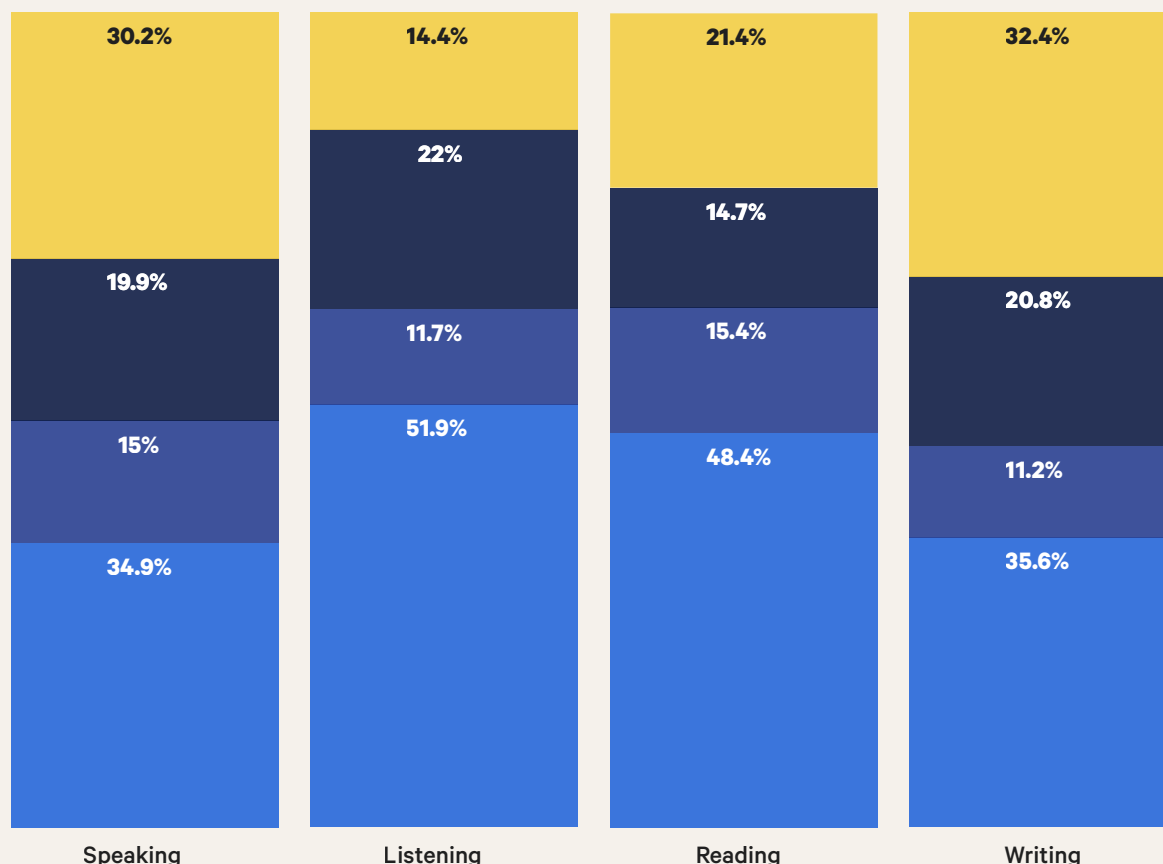
To capture language proficiency, participants were asked to self-rate their abilities to speak, listen, read, and write in vagahau Niue. A scale of ‘very well’, ‘well’, ‘fairly well’, ‘not so well’, and ‘only a few words or phrases’ was used, and participants who selected ‘very well’, ‘well’, or ‘fairly well’ were considered proficient for the purposes of the analysis in this report.

Participants reported being more proficient in receptive language skill categories (i.e., listening and reading) than productive language skill categories (i.e., speaking and writing). Overall, half of participants (50%) reported being able to speak vagahau Niue at least fairly well, and a higher proportion (64%) reported being able to understand it when spoken to them. Nearly two-thirds (64%) reported being able to read the language, and under half (47%) said they could write it at least fairly well.

Figure 3 – Proficiency in vagahau Niue

Vagahau Niue Proficiency

● Very well/well
 ● Fairly well
 ● Not so well
 ● Only a few words or phrases



Self-reported proficiency in vagahau Niue varied significantly depending on participants’ age, ethnic identity, and birthplace across all four language skill categories. That is, participants older than 55 and born overseas were significantly more likely to report higher levels of proficiency, while those younger than 55, New Zealand-born, and/or multi-Pacific/multi-ethnic were more likely to report lower levels.

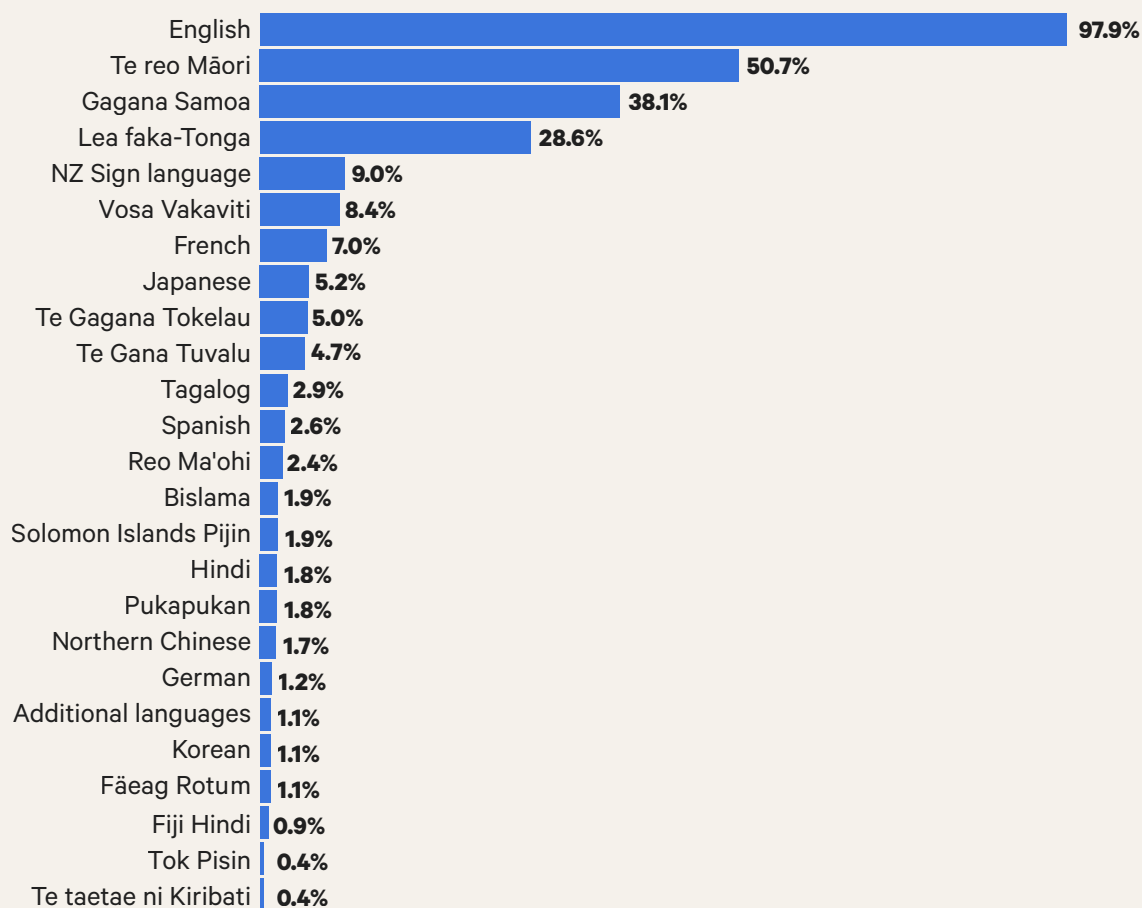
Over four-fifths (82%) of overseas-born participants reported they were proficient in vagahau Niue, compared to only half (50%) of New Zealand-born participants. There were also notable differences in proficiency levels reported by participants aged over 55 (83%), between 25-55 (57%), and 15-24 (47%).

Reported proficiency also varied by ethnic identity. Specifically, participants who identified solely as tagata Niue (66%) were more likely to be proficient in vagahau Niue than those who identified as multi-Pacific (58%) or multi-ethnic (37%).

Proficiency in other Pacific languages

Participants were asked with what languages they were familiar. Responses indicated high levels of multilingualism among tagata Niue participants. Half (50%) reported being familiar with te reo Māori, and 9% reported the same for New Zealand Sign Language. The Pacific languages tagata Niue most reported being familiar with other than vagahau Niue were gagana Samoa (38%), lea faka-Tonga (29%), and vosa vakaViti (8%).

Figure 4 – Multilingualism among tagata Niue



Language acquisition

Over one third (38%) of tagata Niue participants reported first learning vagahau Niue in infancy, while less than a quarter (23%) did so before starting school. An even smaller proportion (17%) reported learning the language as adults.

Some interesting variation was observed in relation to birthplace, age cohort, ethnic identity, and language acquisition. For example:

- nearly all (97%) participants born overseas reported learning vagahau Niue in infancy, while less than half (44%) of New Zealand-born participants reported the same;
- the majority (85%) of participants aged over 55 reported learning vagahau Niue as a first language; and
- participants who identified as multi-ethnic were less likely to have learned vagahau Niue in infancy (32%) compared to those who identified as multi-Pacific (62%).

Language, identity, and culture

“My language is the centre of my heart as a Niue person. It is so deep in my heart. My determination, my decisions, my passion is informed and expressed through the language. It comes from my heart.”

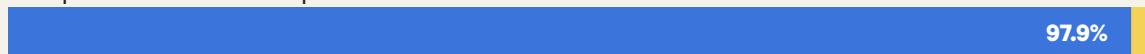
Vagahau Niue was viewed extremely positively by survey participants, and widely considered to be a significant part of Niue identity and culture. Nearly all tagata Niue agreed that: they are proud to be Pacific (98%); vagahau Niue is an important language (98%); vagahau Niue is important for their wellbeing (92%); and the language that best connects them to their culture is vagahau Niue (90%).

Figure 5 – Attitudes towards language, identity, and culture

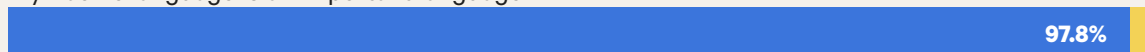
Attitudes to Pacific heritage identity

● Agree ● Not

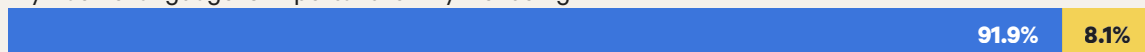
I am proud to be a Pacific person



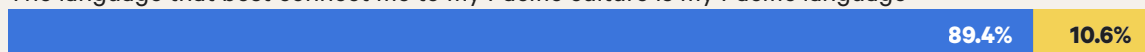
My Pacific language is an important language



My Pacific language is important for my wellbeing



The language that best connect me to my Pacific culture is my Pacific language



A recurring theme highlighted by participants was the question of whether one needs to speak vagahau Niue to be considered tagata Niue in the eyes of the community.

“It is unfair to equate language to a person’s identity because if they do not grow up in the house that speaks freely, they aren’t taught. Yes, language is important and vital for culture but there are factors beyond a person’s control that prevent the opportunity to speak the Niue language.”

Language loss

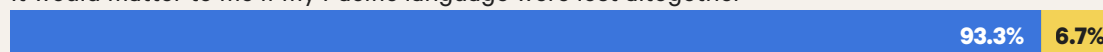
Nearly all tagata Niue (93%) participants agreed it would matter to them if vagahau Niue were lost altogether. A similar proportion (84%) believed the language is in danger of being lost in New Zealand, and over half (55%) agreed it is in danger of being lost in Niue.

Figure 6 – Attitudes towards language loss

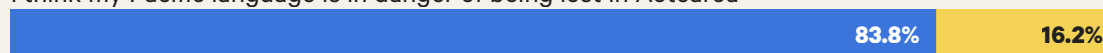
Attitudes to heritage language loss

● Agree ● Not

It would matter to me if my Pacific language were lost altogether



I think my Pacific language is in danger of being lost in Aotearoa



I think my Pacific language is in danger of being lost in the Pacific Islands



“I believe that the Niue language will not be lost. It will not be lost if we continue to use it with older people. In New Zealand there are so many things that happen in our lives [that we can convey to older people].”

Intergenerational transmission

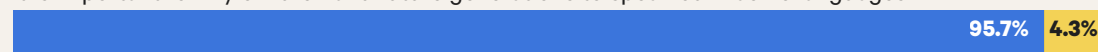
Nearly all (96%) participants agreed that it was important for their children and future generations to speak vagahau Niue. They also agreed it is their responsibility to pass on their language to the next generation (92%), and that it is important to master their parents’ language (91%).

Figure 7 – Attitudes towards language maintenance and transmission

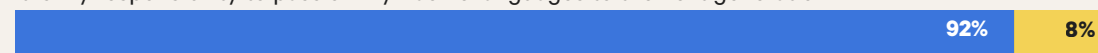
Attitudes to heritage language maintenance

● Agree ● Not

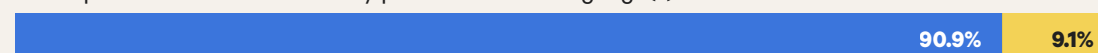
It is important for my children and future generations to speak our Pacific languages



It is my responsibility to pass on my Pacific languages to the next generation



It is important to me to master my parents’ Pacific language(s)





Vagahau Niue in the home and with family

“Vagahau Niue is especially important to me and my mokopuna. Since the passing away of Dad and his generation, we recall their avid use of our beautiful mother tongue, and how we could connect the past to the future through it. When that mother tongue is passed on to the next generation, when they hear that vagahau Niue, it brings them closer to dad.”

Childhood household composition and language use

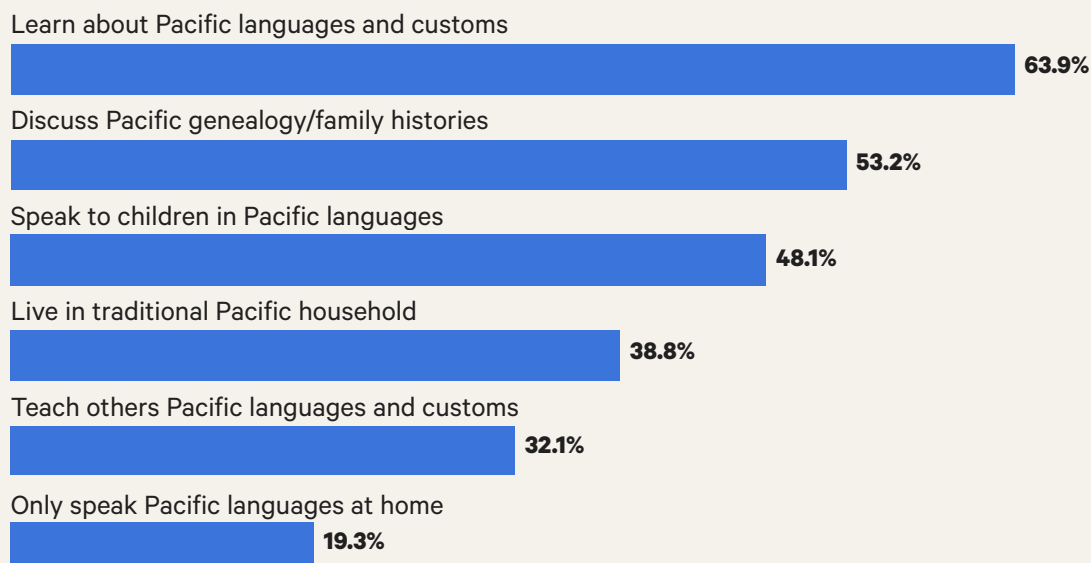
Nearly two-thirds (64%) of tagata Niue participants reported growing up in a household with people solely of Niue heritage. Of the remaining proportion, more than a quarter (28%) reported growing up in a multi-Pacific household, and less than one-tenth (8%) did so in a multi-ethnic household.

Around two-thirds (67%) of participants reported that their childhood home was traditionally Pacific, and a similar proportion (66%) said children were mostly spoken to in vagahau Niue growing up. Almost a quarter (24%) reported their household had a rule where only vagahau Niue could be spoken.

Contemporary household composition and language use

In the current day, more than one-third (37%) of tagata Niue participants reported living in a multi-generational household. A higher proportion of participants in Auckland reported living in households with three or more generations (43%) than those based elsewhere in New Zealand (20%). Nearly three-quarters (72%) reported living in a household with 2-6 other people.

Just under half (48%) of participants reported they speak to their children in vagahau Niue at home, and 38% said they currently lived in a traditional Pacific household. The most popular language activities conducted in this context were learning about Pacific languages and customs (64%) and discussing Pacific genealogies and family histories (53%).

Figure 8 – Language activities in the home and with family

Many also discussed the home in relation to language maintenance and transmission, emphasising the importance of parents facilitating language learning in ‘little’ ways in particular:

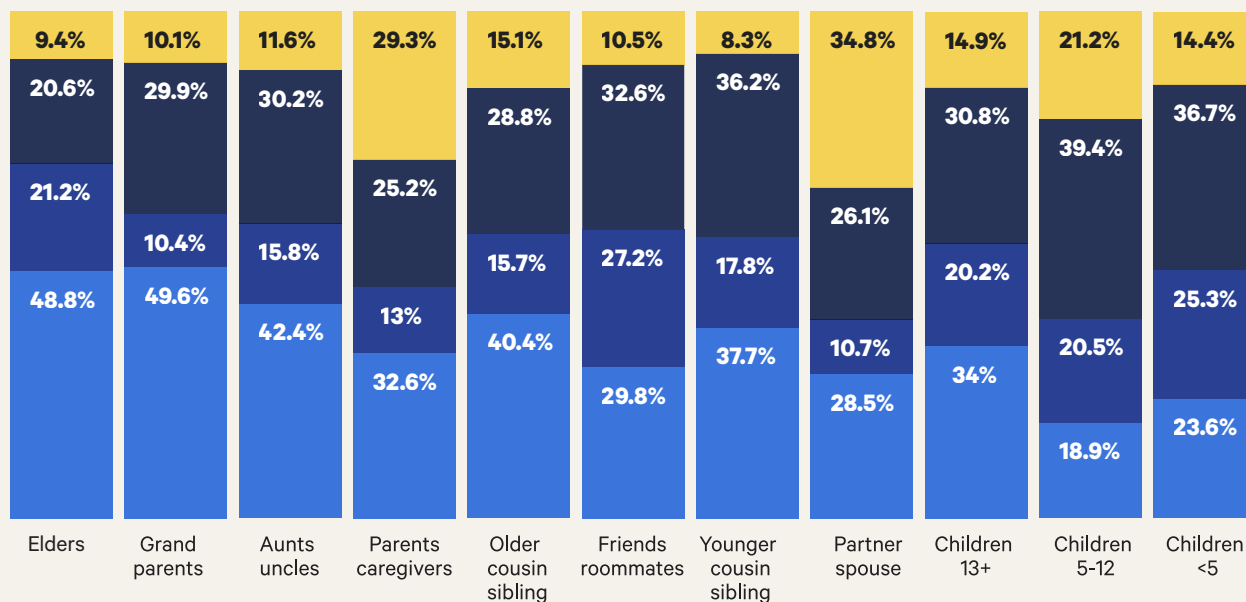
*“We should use the language in the home with our children.
Even with little things like telling them to go and get something.
Everyday use should be facilitated through parents.”*

When asked how much of their communication in the home was conducted in their Pacific language compared with English, most reported using vagahau Niue at least sometimes with elders (91%), grandparents (90%), aunts/uncles (88%), older siblings/cousins (92%), and children (83%). Participants were most likely to report never using vagahau Niue with their partner/spouse (35%).

Figure 9 – Language use in the home and with family

Household Pacific language use compared to English

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Lower rates of language transmission to school-aged children

There was a marked drop in participants’ reported use of vagahau Niue with children aged 5-12 years compared to other family members. This may reflect the impact of New Zealand’s English-medium schooling on language use in the home. Some participants spoke about the long-term impacts of this break in language transmission:

“A Niue child is born and does not yet know how to speak the Niue language. The child grows up and marries into another culture. A child is born, the cycle repeats, and the child does not know the language [...] The language is lost to that child and all their descendants.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home

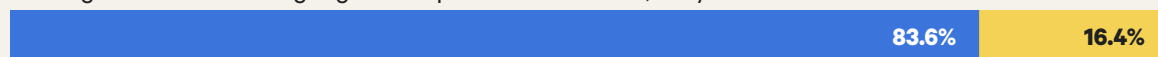
When asked about the condition of vagahau Niue, most participants (84%) agreed the language is safe if it is spoken in the home. A significantly smaller proportion (16%) believed vagahau Niue is only important in the home.

Figure 10 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home

Attitudes to Pacific languages at home

● Agree ● Not

As long as our Pacific languages are spoken in the home, they are safe



Pacific languages are only important at home



Valuing vagahau Niue

Many participants expressed concerns that it has become more difficult to get young people to value vagahau Niue over time. Many felt that people outside the community influence young people to believe their language is not important or useful to nurture and maintain. There were many references to colonisation, and the prevailing perception that English is the language of success in New Zealand, which participants felt significantly affects how young people value vagahau Niue.

“The challenge for this next generation is the importance of the language. When we migrated here from Niue, it was the only way to connect with our community and feel rooted to our culture. But now, some of our kids have never gone to Niue, some are second or third generation born in New Zealand – this is all they know.”

Some participants also spoke about the importance of having role models who speak vagahau Niue regularly. These individuals provide immersion environments for language learners, and are especially good at building confidence in those who may have faced criticism for making mistakes in other settings.

“Having close friends and family members support you [in your language learning] is important \$rather people commenting negatively like it’s a joke...that is one of the challenges.”

Many shared their experiences of feeling pressure to focus on English instead of vagahau Niue, including parents who felt they had to speak English to ensure their children had a better chance in life. Some participants expressed that this perception is a spectre of colonisation propagated by the persistent cultural messaging that English is the sole language of success in New Zealand.

“The parents are speaking in English, and it is broken English because of the two languages. I did say to them, speak in the Niuean language to your children. And they say I speak English so they can understand. So sometimes parents perceive they are doing their kids a favour but at the same time its robbing the opportunity to speak in Niuean.”



Vagahau Niue in church

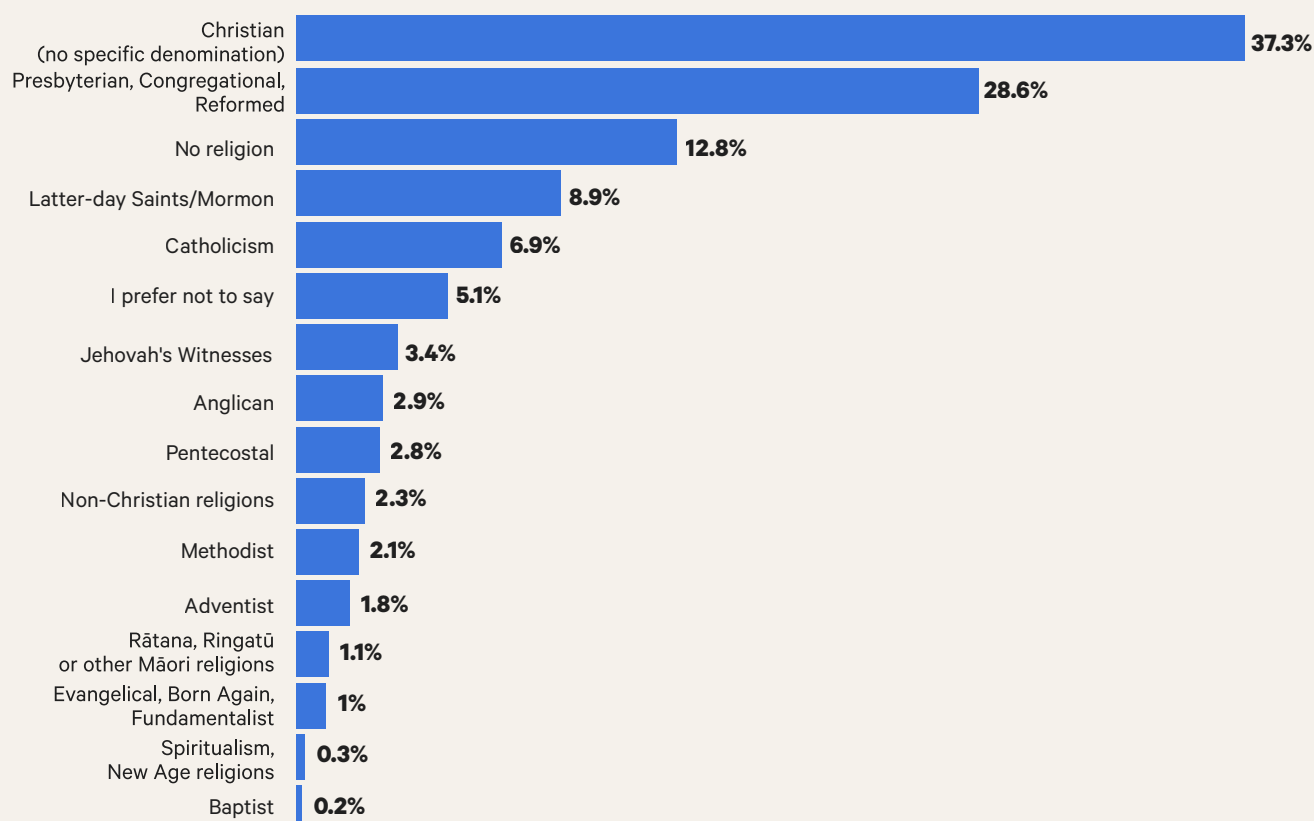
“I speak to my children who live at home with me in vagahau Niue and during church gatherings as well. And at church with other congregants, I can go all out with other fluent speakers and carry the conversation.”

Religious affiliations and church attendance

Participants were asked to report their religious affiliation(s) and could select as many options as were relevant to them. Just over one-third (37%) identified as Christian, and slightly less (29%) specified the category of Presbyterian, Congregational, and/or Reformed. Smaller proportions identified as Mormon (9%) and Catholic (7%).

Most tagata Niue participants (80%) reported having at least one religious affiliation, while only a small proportion (13%) reported no religion. Nearly two-thirds (65%) reported they attended church at least occasionally, while around a quarter (28%) did so weekly.

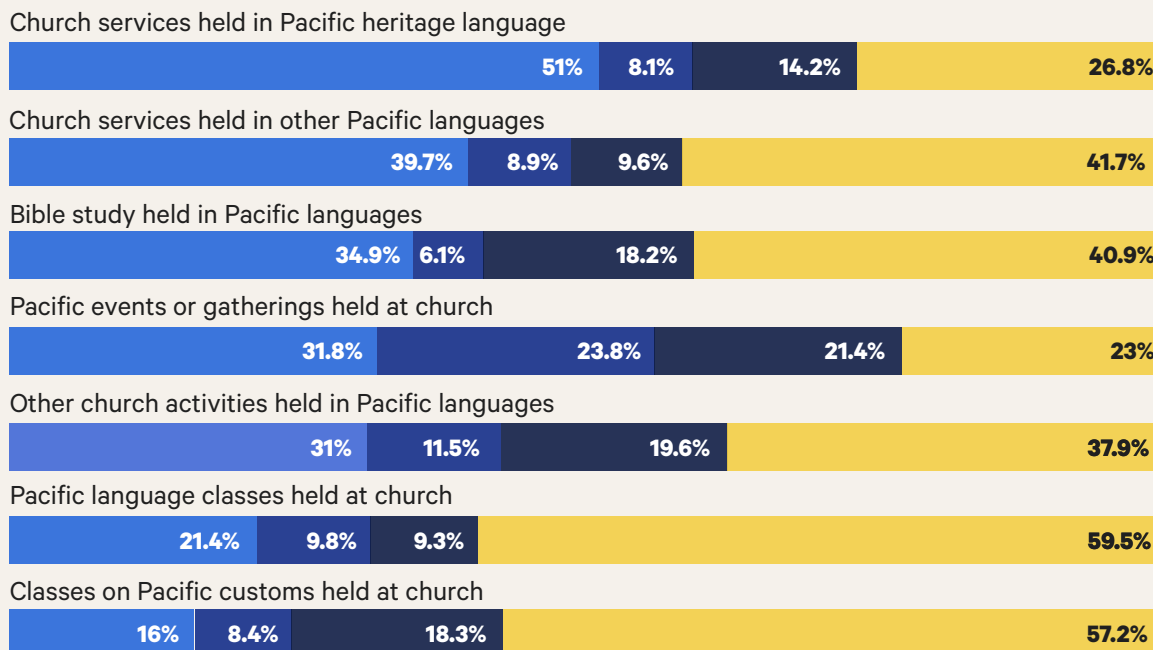
Figure 11 – Religious affiliations among tagata Niue



Pacific language use in church

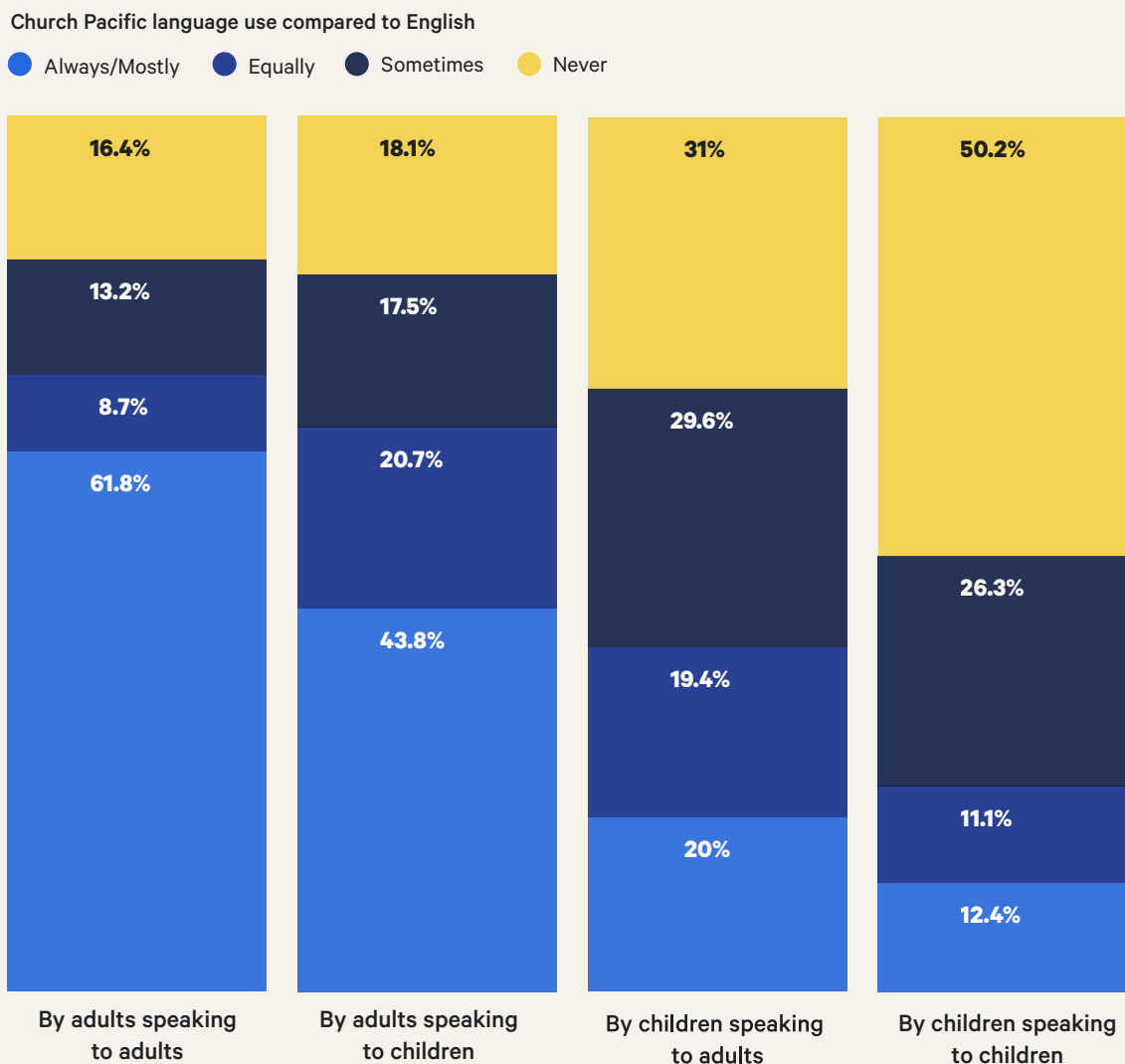
Just over half (51%) of participants who attended church weekly reported that services were conducted in vagahau Niue, and 40% reported they were conducted in another Pacific language. Over half (59%) also reported that bible studies were held in vagahau Niue at least some of the time.

Figure 12 – Pacific language use during church services and activities



There were significant differences between how people communicated with adults compared to children at church. Almost two-thirds of participants (62%) reported hearing adults use vagahau Niue with other adults most of the time, while only 20% reported hearing children do the same with adults. Less than half of participants (44%) reported hearing adults use vagahau Niue with children most of the time, while only 10% reported hearing children use it with each other as frequently.

Figure 13 – Pacific language use at church between adults and children



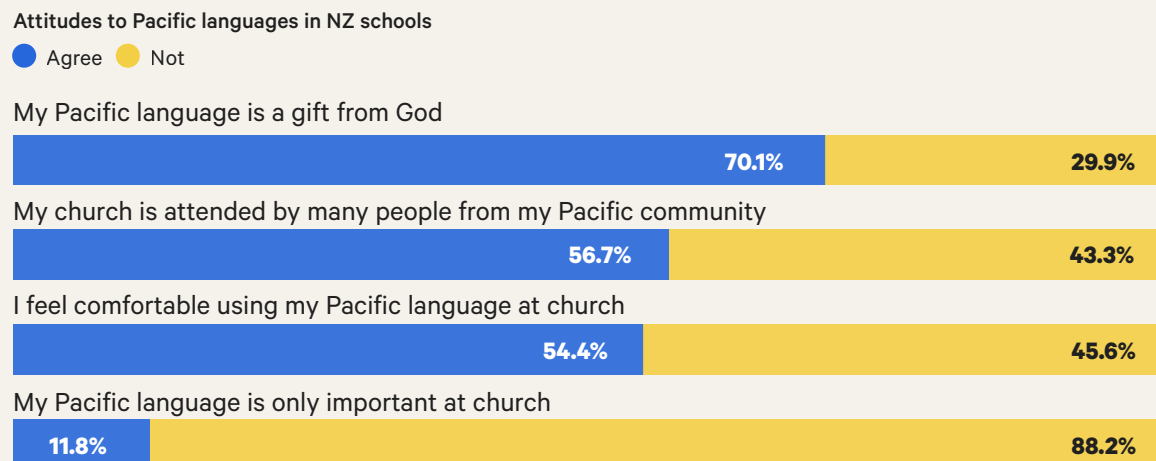
Participants shared their belief that church Ministers play an important role in championing vagahau Niue. However, they also observed that they find themselves in a difficult position when young people do not speak the language, so they resort to using English more often to Niue young people are able to understand and engage in church services and activities.

“I heard from some of the church Ministers that they use both languages because they want to draw the youth back to the church. That is how they use vagahau Niue, only sometimes. It is up to them because they are the leaders.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church

Over two-thirds (70%) of participants agreed that vagahau Niue is a gift from God, and more than half (57%) reported that their church is attended by many tagata Niue. A slightly smaller proportion (54%) reported feeling comfortable using vagahau Niue at church, but only 12% agreed that the language is only important in that setting.

Figure 14 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church



Church as an enabler of and barrier to Pacific language use

Just under a third (30%) of participants reported that attending church has helped them learn and maintain vagahau Niue. Serving as a community hub for speakers of all proficiency levels, many highlighted the church as a critical domain of language use and transmission outside the home.

However, other participants reported attending multicultural churches where English is the default language of communication between congregants. Such churches, it was observed, limit one's ability to worship and engage in church activities in vagahau Niue. Furthermore, this trend seemed to run along regional lines, with over half (58%) of participants in the South Island reporting church services not being held in vagahau Niue as a barrier to their language learning and use, compared to only 15% of participants in the North Island.

“In New Zealand I attend a church with many cultures and so the common language is the English language. You can use [vagahau] Niue in your own personal prayers to God but, of course, when speaking to other people in the church – English is used so there is mutual understanding.”



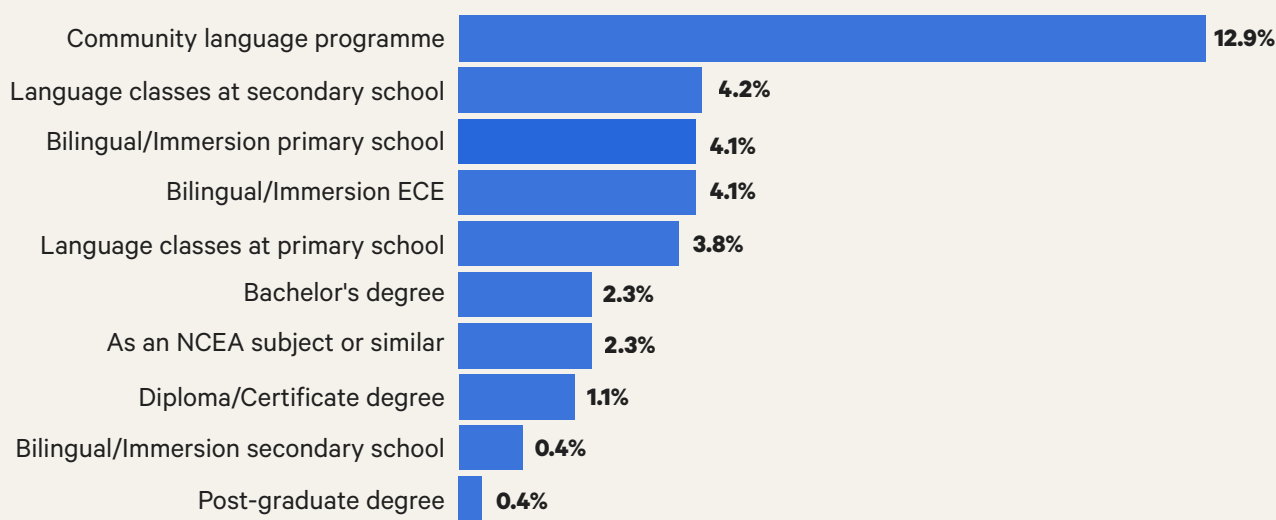
Vagahau Niue in education settings

“We need vagahau Niue to feature in the curriculum too. There are so many Samoan and Tongan early learning schools but not enough for us Niueans, especially here in Christchurch. I think there needs to be more opportunities for immersion across the school years because that doesn’t exist in the education system enough at the moment.”

Pacific language education experiences

Less than half (41%) of tagata Niue participants reported having engaged in some form of Pacific language education in New Zealand. Of this proportion, the most common form was community language programmes (13%), followed by language classes at secondary school, bilingual or immersion primary education, and bilingual or immersion ECE (4%).

Figure 15 – Tagata Niue participation in Pacific language education



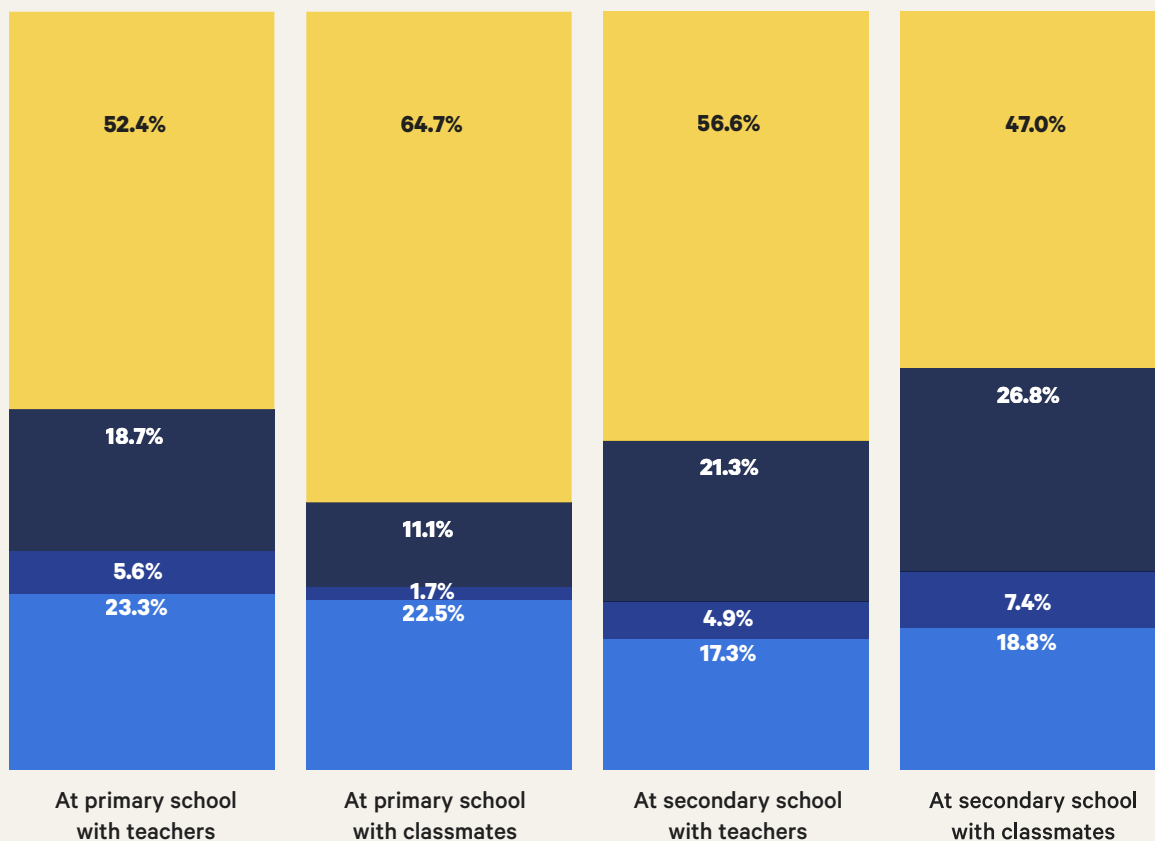
Pacific language use in schools

Participants' use of vagahau Niue in education was not common compared to other settings. When asked how often conversations were conducted in the language in primary school, over half of participants reporting never having used it with teachers (65%) and other students (56%). The results were similar regarding secondary school.

Figure 16 – Pacific language use at primary and secondary schools

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools compared to English

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Attitudes towards Pacific languages in education

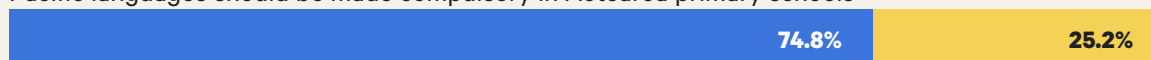
Three-quarters (75%) of participants agreed that Pacific languages should be made compulsory in New Zealand primary schools. Just over half (51%) felt comfortable using their language in school. Less than one-fifth (13%) agreed with the statement 'in Aotearoa, you don't need to learn your Pacific languages: English is enough'.

Figure 17 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools

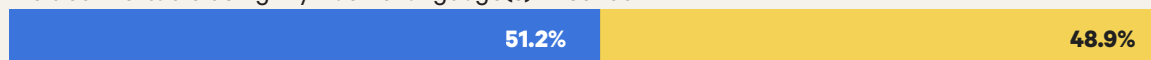
Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools

● Agree ● Not

Pacific languages should be made compulsory in Aotearoa primary schools



I felt comfortable using my Pacific language(s) in school



Nearly all participants reported they would send their child(ren) to ECE (88%), primary (86%), and secondary schools (87%) where they could be taught in vagahau Niue if given the opportunity.

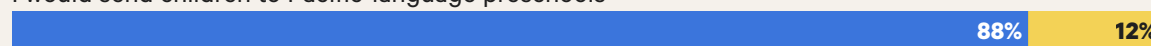
Figure 18 – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools

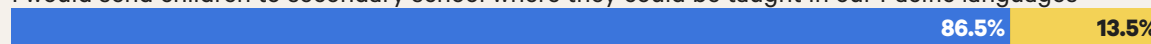
● Agree ● Not

If I had the chance...

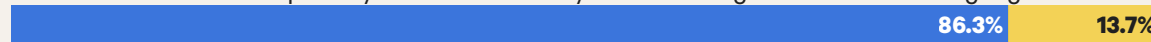
I would send children to Pacific-language preschools



I would send children to secondary school where they could be taught in our Pacific languages



I would send children to primary school where they could be taught in our Pacific languages

**Shifting prestige of vagahau Niue in education**

Many participants expressed that, although they believe vagahau Niue is important to learn, the view that English is key to a successful future remains potent. Some shared the painful history of the suppression of the language in Niue itself, and how this has contributed to the lasting devaluing in the minds of many. Younger generations, however, seeing the benefits of maintaining their mother tongue and championing it in new domains, including education, were lauded as having overcome this shame to the inspiration of all.

“Our past ways of thinking needs to change. It is true that teachers (in Niue) used to get angry at the use of vagahau Niue. But now, in this age, all the research says schools need to be bilingual and there is benefit in speaking more than one language. But when we try to embrace this, our minds go back to getting punished for speaking the language, so we need to reassociate it with being healthy and good for our education, not a hindrance.”

Incomplete language learning pathways

Many participants highlighted the need for stronger language learning pathways for vagahau Niue. While participants expressed appreciation for the bilingual and immersion opportunities available at the ECE level, however limited, they felt the benefits were minimal without further options in primary and secondary school.

“We need a pipeline for the language – it doesn’t need to be the whole curriculum, but it needs to be enough. What’s the point of immersing them in the early years if it gets lost in primary, more in intermediate, and then disappears altogether in high school? If we had it in primary and in to intermediate, it would build the confidence and knowledge of learners. By high school they would know more, in University more still – it either grows and thrives, or slows and dies.”



Vagahau Niue in the workplace

“English is good for a job, but If you know Niuean it sets you apart from everybody else because it shows your identity and shapes who you are. If you know your language, you know what is important to tagata Niue.”

When asked about their status in the labour market, 80% of participants reported they were currently engaged in paid work, while a much lower proportion (12%) were involved in some form of unpaid work. Nearly one-fifth (18%) reported they had experienced ethnicity-based discrimination in the workplace.

Workplace experiences

Just over two-fifths of participants (41%) reported they currently or had previously helped, worked, or volunteered without pay for a Pacific-focused organisation(s) and 35% reported they currently worked for a Pacific-focused organisation. A similar proportion (34%) said that Pacific languages and cultures are visible at their workplace, and 23% reported their workplace has dedicated Pacific cultural advisors on staff.

Figure 19 – Pacific language workplace experiences

I have helped, volunteered or worked without pay for an organisation focused on Pacific peoples or communities in organisation focused on Pacific peoples or communities in Aotearoa

41.1%

I have worked for an organisation focused on Pacific peoples or communities in Aotearoa

35.2%

Pacific languages and cultures are visible at my workplace

33.9%

My workplace has dedicated Pacific cultural advisor positions on staff

22.8%

Pacific languages and cultures are visible at the place I help, volunteer or work without pay

22%

Pacific language use in the workplace

Over one-third (38%) of participants reported they use vagahau Niue with colleagues at least once a week, while 26% said they do so monthly or occasionally. Over half (56%) reported they have provided Pacific cultural advice in the workplace previously (even if not part of their job description). A similar proportion (53%) reported they have provided Pacific language support in the form of translation and/or interpretation in the past.

Figure 20 – Work-based Pacific language activities

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools compared to English

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never

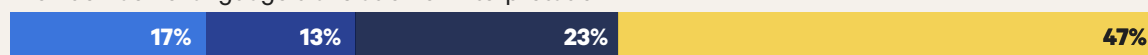
Use Pacific languages with colleagues



Provide Pacific cultural advice



Provide Pacific language translation or interpretation



Classes on Pacific customs held at workplace



Many participants noted that they use vagahau Niue in the workplace whenever they can, viewing it as a unique skill that sets them apart from their colleagues. Some used the language to better meet the needs of the people they serve, especially in healthcare, and others shared how they have actively sought out jobs at businesses/organisations where there are other speakers of vagahau Niue.

I use the language to talk with the doctors, nurses, and patients at work. And it is easy for them to understand. I talk to patients if they are scared, anxious, or they do not understand, not knowing what is going to happen to them.

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace

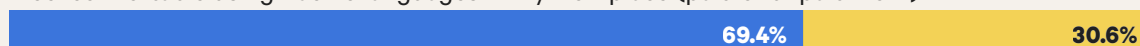
Over two-thirds of participants (69%) reported feeling comfortable using their language in the workplace. A lower proportion (58%) agreed with the statement ‘knowing English is more important for getting a job in Aotearoa than knowing Pacific languages’.

Figure 21 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace

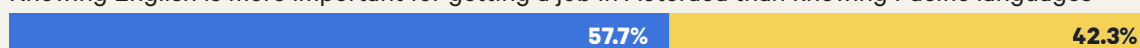
Attitudes to Pacific languages in the workplace

● Agree ● Not

I feel comfortable using Pacific languages in my workplace (paid or unpaid work)



Knowing English is more important for getting a job in Aotearoa than knowing Pacific languages



Some participants who did not feel comfortable using vagahau Niue in the workplace attributed this to the lack of value placed on the language relative to English, while also observing this climate is slowly changing over time.

“There were no opportunities to be bilingual in the workplace for our parents. It was a really racist country that wanted to wipe out our culture and language like they did with the Māori. Everywhere outside the home preferred or enforced English. But that has started to change – speaking another language, especially a Pacific language, is valuable and highly desired in the workplace now.”



Vagahau Niue in and with Pacific communities

“The Niuean language is very important to me, and the last time I went [to Niue], I was told ‘don’t come back unless you know how to speak to us’. It was comedic but also a challenge.”

Connection to Niue

Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they visited Niue and/or hosted community members from Niue prior to COVID-19. More than three-quarters (81%) reported they had hosted community members at least once before, and 35% reported doing so at least once a year. Nearly one-fifth (19%) reported never having hosted community members from Niue before.

Trends in how often participants visited Niue were varied, with less than one-fifth (16%) reporting they visited at least once a year, and 32% reporting they visited every 2-3 years. The remaining proportion (52%) reported they had visited Niue one or twice or not at all.

Figure 22 – Visiting and hosting community members from Niue

Heritage Pacific Islands Connection:

● Once a year ● Every 2-3 years ● Once or twice ● Never

Host heritage Pacific community



Visit heritage Pacific islands



Language use in Niue

Different experiences were reported regarding expectations around language use in Niue. Some participants expressed that they hear little to no English when in Niue, while others felt it was becoming more prominent over time.

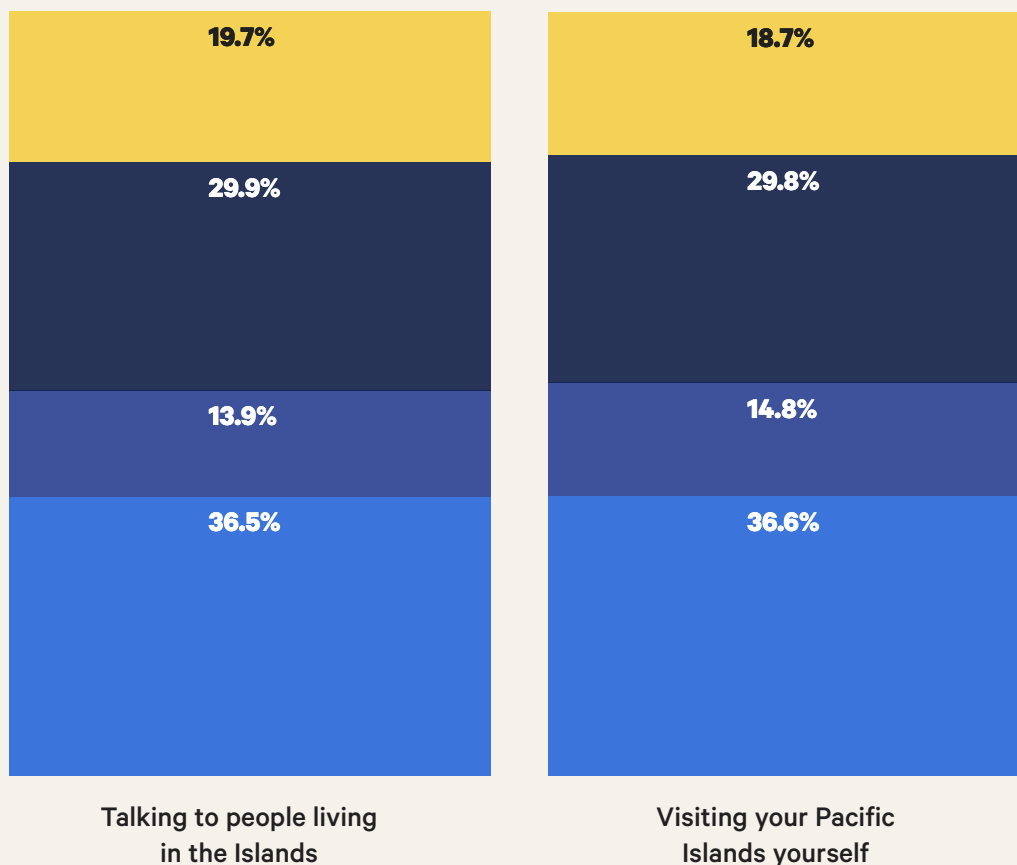
“The people in the island [Niue] are all speaking English. That is what I hear, and the languages have been mixed and the children are speaking English. They are not speaking vagahau Niue.”

Participants were asked what language they spoke when visiting Niue. Just over one-third (37%) indicated they always or mostly use vagahau Niue when visiting and talking to people in Niue. One-fifth (20%) reported never speaking the language in these settings.

Figure 23 – Pacific language use with communities in Niue

Heritage Pacific language use compared to English

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Language use in community settings

Participants were asked if they had engaged in any community events, initiatives, or activities in New Zealand in the past 12 months. The most common activities reported were Niue community gatherings (78%), Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (47%), and Pacific performance and recreation activities (47%). Lower proportions of participants reported taking part in arts and crafts activities (37%) and teaching Pacific languages, cultures or practices to others (32%).

Figure 24 – Engagement in community events, initiatives, and activities

Attend Heritage Pacific community events

78%

Attend Pan-Pacific festivals (Polyfest, etc)

47%

Take part in Pacific performance & recreation

46.9%

Take part in Pacific arts & crafts

37%

Teach Pacific languages or customs to others

32.0%

One quarter (25%) of participants reported they found attending Pacific community events to be helpful in maintaining their vagahau Niue. However, others highlighted that the use of the language at community gatherings (meetings, birthdays, weddings etc.) is driven largely by the older generation, within declining input from children and young people.

*“It is only our generation that uses vagahau Niue.
For those who are born from 1980 onwards,
the use of the language is not important to them.”*

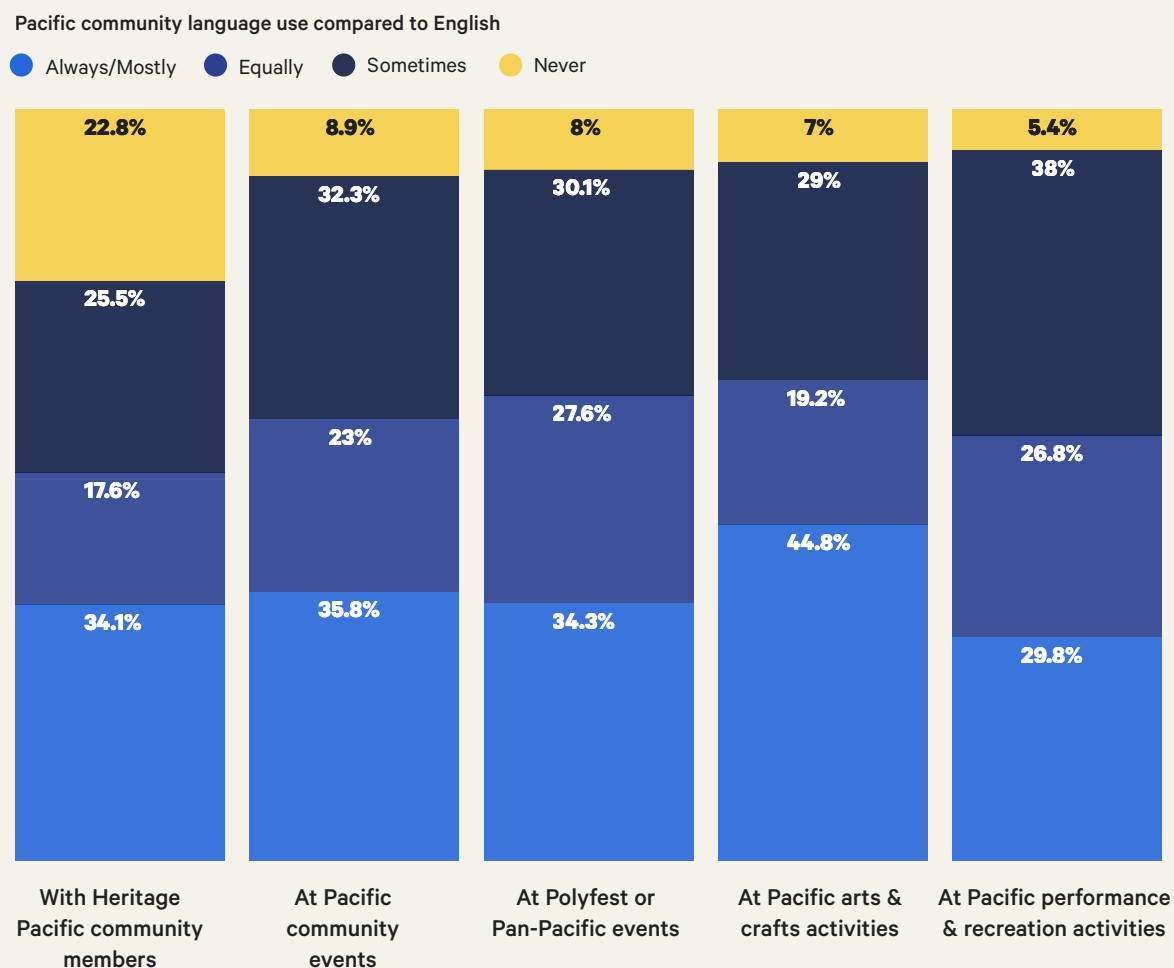
Participants were asked about their attitudes towards Pacific cultural events. A large proportion said they find such events easy to access (79%), and even more (90%) reported they enjoyed participating in them. Over three-quarters (79%) reported they felt most comfortable in Pacific communities.

Perhaps in reflection of the large proportion of participants who reported they enjoy participating in Pacific cultural events, a recurring theme was that more funding is needed to adequately support these and, in turn, strengthen the planning, maintenance, and revitalisation of vagahau Niue.

“It is incredibly sad that the only time of year we get together is the constitution celebration. As a Niuean community we should have more engagements so that we are using the language throughout the year.”

In terms of the frequency at which participants used vagahau Niue in community settings, nearly all reported using the language at least sometimes when taking part in Pacific performance and recreation activities (95%), arts and crafts activities (93%), Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (92%), and community events (91%). Over three-quarters of participants (77%) reported using vagahau Niue in conversation with Niue community members more broadly.

Figure 25 – Pacific language use in community settings



Speakers within the wider community are crucial for language learning

Participants shared how important a strong (wider) community of speakers is for those seeking to increase their proficiency in vagahau Niue who do not have the necessary support at home.

“I am wanting my daughter to learn Vagahau Niue. I was watching her liogi (pray) in Niuean and we have never taught her Niuean, but she is sharing in the language and determined to stay strong in her identity. She picked it up through our extended family, community, and the church.”

The importance of safe spaces for speaking vagahau Niue

Many participants shared how it is crucial to have safe spaces where people feel comfortable speaking and making mistakes in vagahau Niue. In the absence of these spaces, it was observed, learners become too nervous to talk aloud for fear of being corrected, or worse, shamed, for speaking imperfectly.

“A barrier for me was the fakama (shame) I felt when I pronounced words wrong and would be corrected by dad. He was nice about it, but I still felt I did not have the confidence to speak the language. When you are shamed, you do not feel fluent, and you think you are not good enough.”



Vagahau Niue in media and broadcasting

“I belong to a Niuean group in Niue, a Niuean group here, and a Niuean group in Australia. I watch livestreams online, you know, of different programmes and events in vagahau Niue.”

Media and broadcasting, including social media, have become an increasingly important domain of language use. Participants were specifically asked about media and broadcasting in Pacific languages, including which types of media they consumed and at what frequencies.

Music

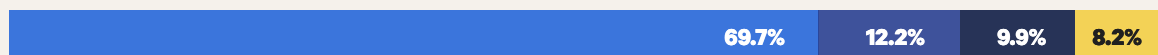
Music was the type of media most often noted by participants in relation to Pacific language use, with the vast majority (93%) reporting they listen to Pacific music, and a slightly smaller proportion (89%) reporting they sing songs in Pacific languages, at least occasionally.

Figure 26 – Engagement in Pacific music

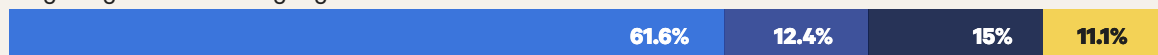
Media Pacific Language Connection

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never

Listen to Pacific music



Sing songs in Pacific languages



Social media and telecommunications

Similar proportions of participants reported using vagahau Niue at least occasionally when sending texts, emails, and/or messages (68%), talking over the phone (67%), or on social media (67%). Smaller proportions reported using it at least weekly in the same contexts.

Figure 27 – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications

Media Pacific Language Connection

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never

Send text messages, emails, or use messenger apps in Pacific languages



Talk on the phone using Pacific languages



Use Pacific languages on social media



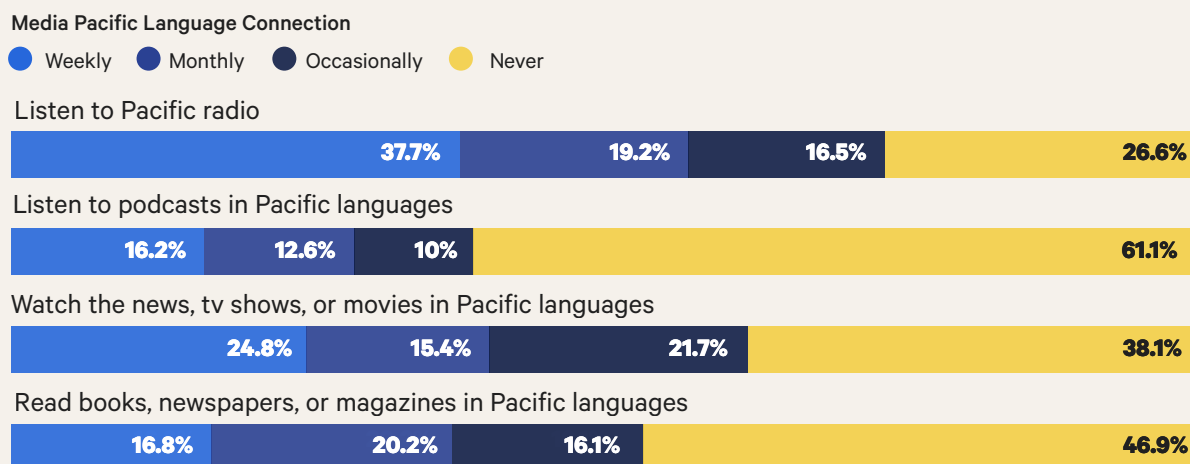
Use Pacific languages on skype, zoom, teams or other video chat programmes



Broadcast and print media

Radio was the most popular form of broadcast media for tagata Niue participants, with almost three-quarters (73%) listening to content in vagahau Niue at least occasionally. This was followed by watching the news, TV shows, and/or movies (62%), reading books, newspapers, and/or magazines (53%), and listening to podcasts (39%).

Figure 28 – Engagement in broadcast and print media



Creative arts

Over one-third of participants reported making music, creating art, and/or writing poetry (35%) or creating digital content and/or media (34%) in vagahau Niue at least occasionally. One-fifth (20%) reporting using the language while gaming.

Figure 29 – Engagement in creative arts



Attitudes towards Pacific language media

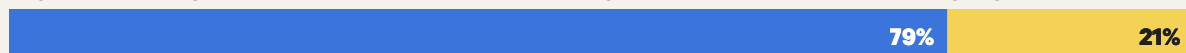
Most participants (79%) agreed that digital technology, media, and the internet help them connect to their language(s) and culture(s), while under one-third (30%) thought that digital technology and the internet are threatening vagahau Niue.

Figure 30 – Attitudes towards Pacific language media

Attitudes to Pacific languages and media

● Agree ● Not

Digital technology, media and the Internet are helping me connect to my Pacific languages and cultures



Digital technology and the Internet are threatening my Pacific languages



Some participants shared how increased use of digital technology has exposed young people to English to much a greater degree than in the past, both in New Zealand and Niue. They felt that the consequence of this is that it is even more difficult to maintain vagahau Niue.

“This increase in English is caused by the influence of movies, and they only use English on social media and other things like Netflix and YouTube as well. They do not know how to speak the language because when they are on their screens at home, in church, or out in the community – English is always there.”



Vagahau Niue in the New Zealand context

“The Niue language is slowly disappearing, there’s even a joke that says the Niue language is waving at us. We are worried about the use of the language but, living here in New Zealand, it’s just so hard to speak it.”

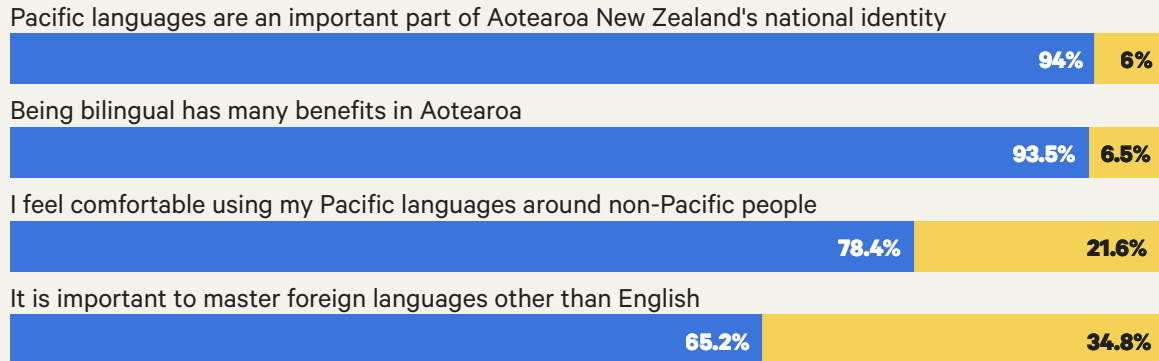
Wider society

Nearly all participants agreed that bilingualism is beneficial in New Zealand (94%) and that Pacific languages are an important part of New Zealand’s national identity (94%). More than three-quarters (78%) feel comfortable using vagahau Niue around non-Pacific people, and nearly two-thirds (65%) believe it is important to learn foreign languages beyond English, demonstrating the value placed on multilingualism by the Niue community in New Zealand.

Figure 31 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ society

● Agree ● Not



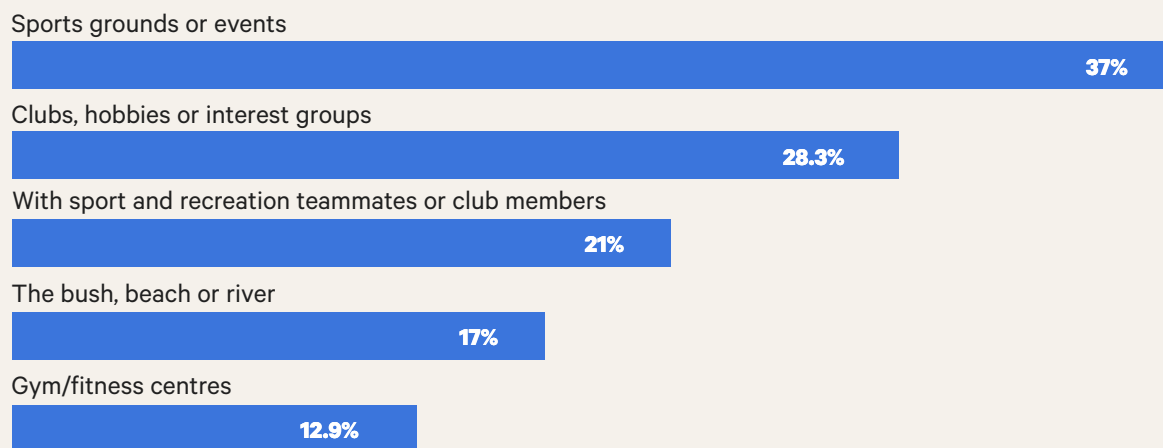
Language, identity, and politeness dynamics

Over three quarters of participants (78%) agreed it is important to speak your Pacific language(s) as a Pacific person. Under half (43%) felt it is impolite to use Pacific languages around people who do not understand them, while only 12% thought that if a person is not fluent in their Pacific language(s) they should not speak it at all.

Language use in recreational settings

Participants were asked where they had used vagahau Niue in the past 12 months. More than one-third of (37%) reported using the language at sporting events, while 28% reported the same in relation to clubs, hobbies or interest groups.

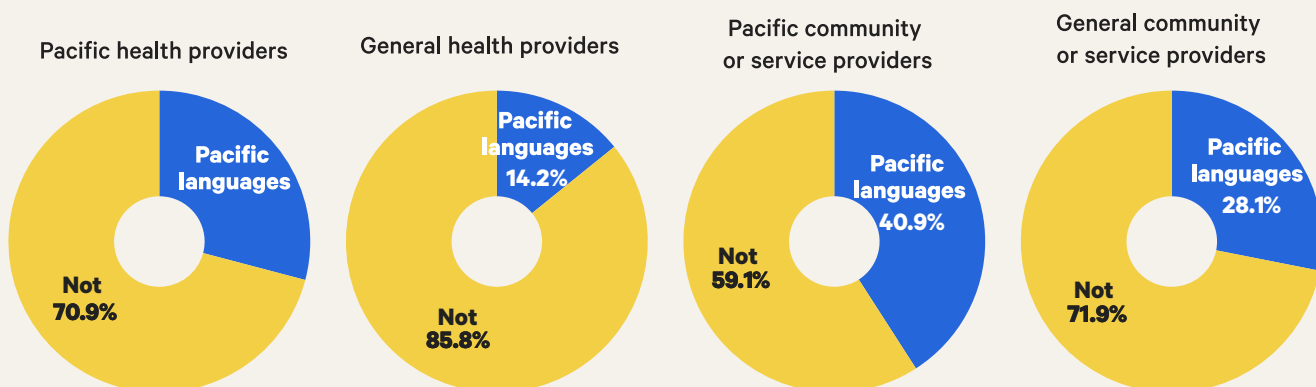
Figure 32 – Pacific language use in recreational settings



Language use with service providers

Participants were asked whether they had used vagahau Niue when engaging with health and community service providers in the last year. A greater proportion reported they had used the language when engaging with Pacific health providers (29%) than with general health providers (15%). Similarly, more participants reported they had used it with Pacific community services providers (40%) compared to general community service providers (28%).

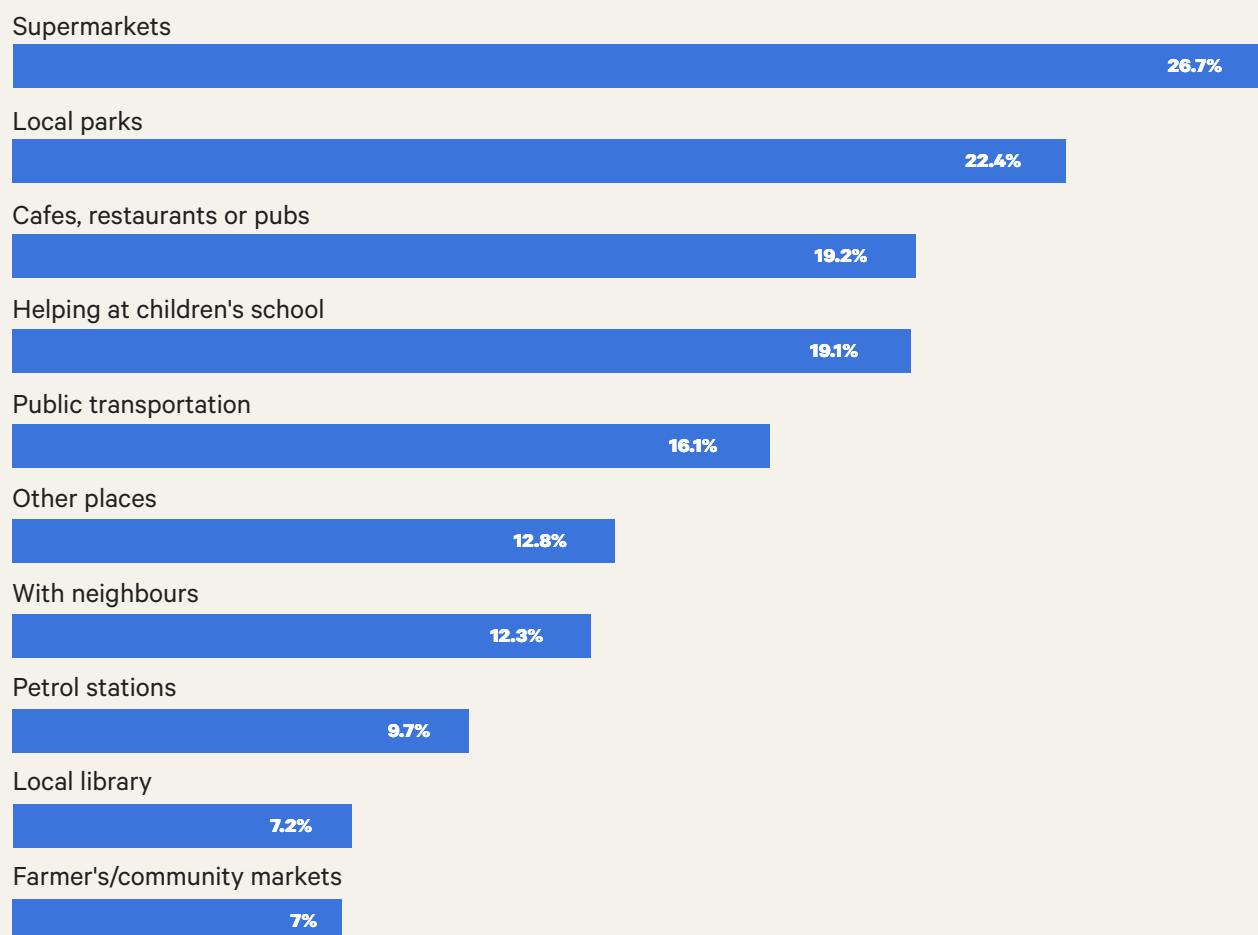
Figure 33 – Pacific language use with health and community service providers



Language use in public settings

More than a quarter of tagata Niue participants (27%) reported using vagahau Niue at supermarkets. A slightly smaller proportion (22%) reported the same at local parks, and rates continued to decrease in relation to other settings such as at children's schools (19%), in dining establishments (19%), and on public transportation (16%). The least likely places for participants to report using vagahau Niue were at local libraries and community markets (7%).

Figure 34 – Pacific language use in public settings



New Zealand Government

“It is New Zealand (government) that did this to us. We should teach our children at home, but the government should help as well, even if they are slow. They forced this English language on us and created all these barriers. It is restoration and reparation they need to deliver.”

Only 15% of participants reported using their language while engaging with the New Zealand Government. A smaller proportion (12%) reported using vagahau Niue when completing official paperwork or documentation, and fewer still (4%) reported the same in courthouse settings.

Figure 35 – Pacific language use in official and/or government settings



Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

Participants had mixed attitudes towards the role Government plays in promoting Pacific language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation across the motu.

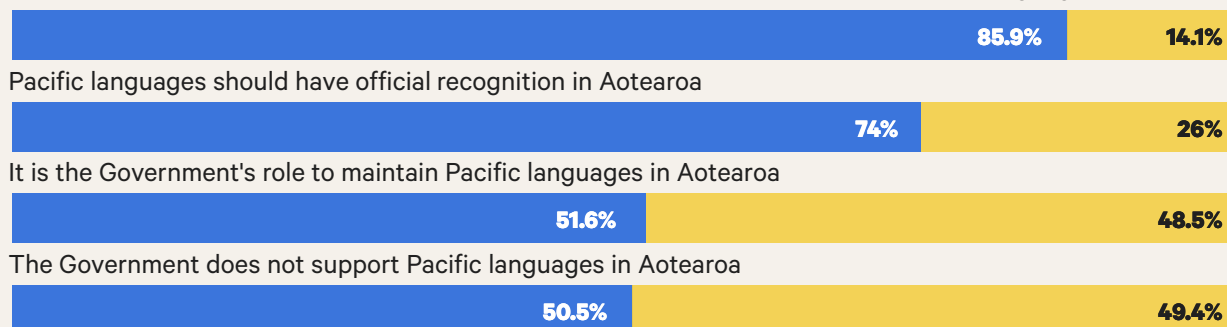
A large proportion (86%) felt that Government and local councils should provide services and information in Pacific languages, and 74% agreed that Pacific languages should have official recognition in New Zealand. Just over half (52%) agreed it is the Government’s role to maintain Pacific languages in New Zealand. A similar proportion (51%) reported this role is not being fulfilled, however, and that the Government does not support Pacific languages.

Figure 36 – Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ Government

● Agree ● Not

The Government and local councils should provide services and information in Pacific languages



Government's role in the maintenance and revitalisation of vagahau Niue

Many participants stressed that the Government needs to do more to support the planning, maintenance, and revitalisation of vagahau Niue, particularly given the historical context of educators' imposition of English-medium schooling during New Zealand's administration of Niue. They called for more investment in Pacific language education, especially to build stronger bilingual and immersion pathways beyond ECE. There were concerns that smaller Pacific groups, such as Niue, receive less support than larger groups, despite their greater need and country's stronger constitutional ties as part of the Realm of New Zealand.

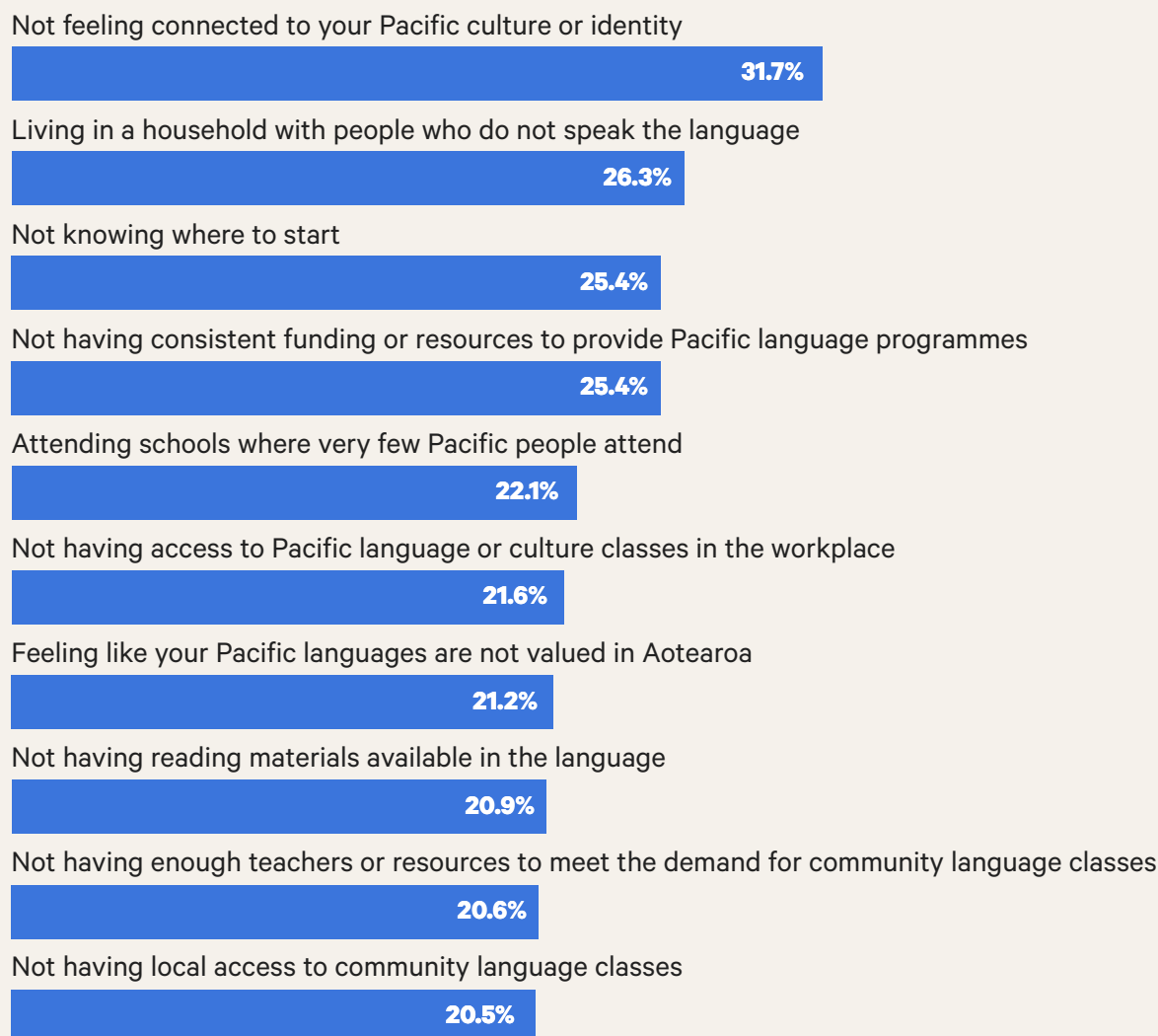
“Just because we are considered small compared to the bigger groups, it does not mean we are insignificant – we need investment. We have as much right as other Pacific nations to be recognised.”

Barriers and Enablers

Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining vagahau Niue

Tagata Niue participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the main barriers to using, learning, and/or maintaining vagahau Niue. Specifically, they were prompted with the question ‘What has made using, learning, or maintaining your Pacific language(s) in Aotearoa more difficult for you?’

Figure 37 – Reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining vagahau Niue



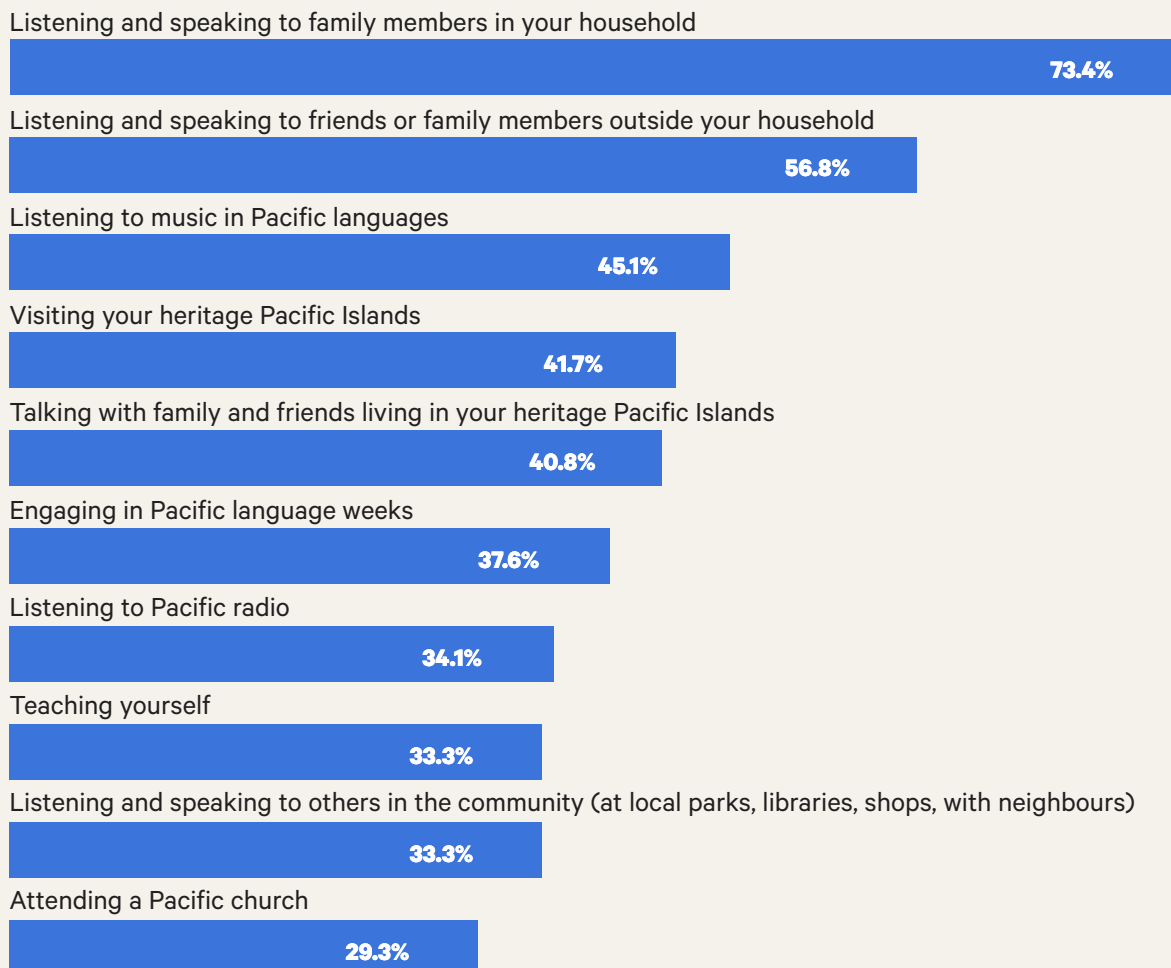
The most common barriers reported were participants not feeling connected to their Pacific culture and identity (32%) and living in a household with people who do not speak the language (26%). The latter of these barriers was reported more frequently by multi-ethnic participants (42%) than multi-Pacific participants (23%), and by those who were New Zealand-born (37%) than overseas-born (22%).

In a similar vein, 23% of participants reported that not being able to visit Niue was a barrier to them maintaining their language, with higher response rates from youth aged 15-24 (31%) and elders 55+ (28%) than adults from 25-54 (17%).

Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining vagahau Niue

Participants were also asked to identify what they considered to be the main enablers of using, learning, and/or maintaining vagahau Niue. Specifically, they were prompted with the question ‘What has been most helpful for you in using, learning, or maintaining your Pacific language(s) in Aotearoa?’

Figure 38 – Reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining vagahau Niue



The most common enabler reported was listening and speaking to family members in their household (73%), especially for youth aged 15-24 (91%), and participants living in the North Island (85%). Other notable enablers were: listening to and speaking vagahau Niue with friends or family members outside the household (57%); listening to music in the language (45%); visiting Niue (42%); and talking with family and friends living in Niue (41%). A higher proportion of participants aged 15-24 (56%) identified visiting Niue as an enabler than those aged 25+ (43%), and a similar contrast could be observed with overseas-born participants (58%) compared to New Zealand-born participants (43%).

“I am thinking the best way for my grandchildren to learn Niuean is for me to teach them, starting with basic things like pe e hala (close the door) and hau ke kai (come and eat). That is what I did with my children when they were little, and I am doing with my grandchildren now. But I want to go further, I want to have conversations with them where they can respond back to me in Niuean. I am starting with the basic and building into conversation.”

Conclusion

“My hopes are that Pacific people find the strength and courage to learn their languages and share them with world! I hope there are more classes and resources directed towards initiatives that help encourage people to learn their languages. I hope there is an attitude shift among our Pacific people towards their language and culture. I hope that workspaces allow us to utilise these at work. I hope that our people young and old are unwavering in their support of Pacific languages... I hope our Pacific languages live forever!”

As an endangered language, vagahau Niue faces significant challenges. The painful legacy of language suppression in Niue has contributed to its devaluation both within the community and broader society, and there are very few speakers in New Zealand. To respond to these issues, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, in partnership with Pacific communities across the motu, developed the [Pacific Languages Strategy](#). Aligned with current research on language policy and planning, the Strategy identifies language use and critical awareness as key drivers of successful language revitalisation.

It is within this context that the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Vagahau Niue Report was developed. Alongside the overarching [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Report](#), it provides a snapshot of the state of vagahau Niue, as seen through participants’ use of and attitudes towards the language in New Zealand.

By exploring these critical dimensions of language vitality across a range of domains, the report offers an essential evidence base to inform responsive policy and practice that meets the needs of tagata Niue both now and into the future.

To support the practical application of the report’s findings, a series of priority areas for action are outlined below. Some are relevant across all Pacific languages covered in the Leo Moana reports, while others are specific to vagahau Niue and tagata Niue. These priorities are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; rather, a diverse mix of interventions will be required to meaningfully address language decline.

Priority areas for action

Strengthen language use in the home

Despite high reported use of vagahau Niue with elders and children, proficiency remains low among younger generations. This suggests that while exposure to the language is occurring, it is not translating into fluency. The home continues to be the most influential environment for language acquisition, though without consistent, intentional use supporting intergenerational transmission, the risk of further decline is significant.

Recommendations:

- Develop and distribute practical language resources for families such as bilingual storybooks, songs, and games.
- Promote home immersion strategies and family language plans. Workshops for parents and caregivers, even those who are not fluent, can build the skills and confidence needed to use vagahau Niue frequently and proficiently, especially with children.
- Support intergenerational transmission through community-based mentorships that connect elders with youth through storytelling, games, and cultural activities.

Expand education pathways

There is strong community demand for vagahau Niue provision across all schooling levels, but current offerings are fragmented and limited, especially beyond ECE. Without a continuous learning pathway, early gains in language acquisition are lost, and learners are unable to build fluency over time.

Recommendations:

- Establish bilingual and immersion programmes in primary and secondary schools.
- Train and support vagahau Niue language teachers across all education levels.
- Provide scholarships and incentives for students to study Pacific languages.
- Improve access to language education information and resources.

Support community-based language initiatives

Community spaces offer vital opportunities for learners, particularly those without requisite support at home, to practice and develop their language skills. Normalising everyday use of vagahau Niue in these settings reinforces its value, boosts cultural confidence, and helps shift public perceptions. Fear of judgment and low self-confidence are major barriers to this normalisation, however, and creating safe spaces where learners feel comfortable making mistakes is essential for building proficiency.

Recommendations:

- Fund community-led language hubs and conversation groups.
- Establish intergenerational language spaces and groups.
- Promote positive language role models and champions within communities.

Leverage digital media and digital platforms

Media is an increasingly significant domain of language use, with digital tools offering creative, accessible, and scalable ways to engage with vagahau Niue daily. High-quality, culturally-grounded content increases visibility and normalises the use of the language, particularly for the younger generations who are most active online.

Recommendations:

- Invest in vagahau Niue media and digital content (e.g., music, podcasts, videos etc).
- Develop online language-learning platforms and applications.
- Collaborate with broadcasters to expand vagahau Niue programming.
- Continue to invest in vagahau Niue

Participants expressed a strong desire for greater government support of vagahau Niue, citing historical suppression and persistent underinvestment in language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation. They argued that, as Niue is part of the Realm of New Zealand, vagahau Niue deserves formal recognition and equitable funding to support its vitality and growth.

Recommendations:

Increase government funding for Pacific language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation initiatives.

Ensure equitable support for Pacific communities with strong constitutional ties to New Zealand.

Continue to invest in vagahau Niue

Participants expressed a strong desire for greater government support of vagahau Niue, citing historical suppression and persistent underinvestment in language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation. They argued that, as Niue is part of the Realm of New Zealand, vagahau Niue deserves formal recognition and equitable funding to support its vitality and growth.

Recommendations:

- Increase government funding for Pacific language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation initiatives.
- Ensure equitable support for Pacific communities with strong constitutional ties to New Zealand.

Appendix 1 – Survey variables

The Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey sample utilises both Maximum Variation purposeful sampling and community-based participant-driven recruitment strategies. This type of sampling used in tandem with a community-focussed research approach allows for a stratified method of identifying participants across the below variables which are key in terms of measuring the extent to which tagata Niue can learn and use vagahau Niue:

Pacific ethnicity – This variable relates to the ethnic group(s) a person identifies with or has a sense of belonging to. It measures cultural affiliation and enables analyses into language use by ethnicit(ies), which is a significant factor in language maintenance and/or attrition.

Age – Speakers are socialised to think and behave in certain ways and, consequently, language attitudes and use tend to vary based on age. When a language is learned also influences language use. This variable ensures questions can be asked around whether young people are acquiring Pacific languages and how proficient adult speakers are in them.

Gender – It is important to explore whether gender plays a role in terms of who is speaking Pacific languages, and if this influences intergenerational transmission. It is also important to explore whether there were attitudinal differences towards Pacific languages based on gender.

Region – Pacific communities are dispersed across New Zealand. Having opportunities to hear and speak their languages influences whether they can be maintained. It is therefore important to examine which people, in which regions, have access to and use their Pacific languages. Exploring language attitudes across the regions is also critical.

Birthplace – The domestic Pacific population is predominantly New Zealand-born, which undoubtedly influences Pacific language use and attitudes. This variable therefore enables the analysis of any differences between New Zealand-born and overseas-born Pacific populations' use of and attitudes towards Pacific languages.

Appendix 2 – Survey sampling frame

The sampling frame has been designed using data from the 2018 Census. While this was known to be under-representative of Pacific peoples in New Zealand, it nonetheless forms the necessary foundation of the research contained in this report until the release of the complete results for Census 2023.

Target Survey sample

This table reflects the target Niue sample for the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey.

Total	340	
Northern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	34	34
25-44 years	44	43
45-64 years	30	29
65+ years	8	11
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	7	7
25-44 years	9	9
45-64 years	6	6
65+ years	2	2
Central Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	5	5
25-44 years	6	6
45-64 years	4	4
65+ years	1	2
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	1	1
25-44 years	1	1
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	0	0
Southern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	2	2
25-44 years	3	3
45-64 years	2	2
65+ years	1	1
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	0	0
25-44 years	1	1
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	0	0

Final Survey sample

The following table reflects the final Survey sample.

Total	396		
	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)	ANOTHER GENDER (#)
	202	191	3
NZ-BORN	136	145	3
OVERSEAS-BORN	54	58	
15-24 years	57	60	
25-44 years	67	69	3
45-64 years	46	62	
65+ years	20	12	
Northern regions	155	170	2
Central regions	18	23	
Southern regions	17	9	1



Ministry for
Pacific Peoples

Te Manatū mō ngā Iwi o te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa

