



Leo Moana o Aotearoa

Te Taetae ni Kiribati report



Ministry for
Pacific Peoples

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

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Contents

List of figures	4	Te taetae ni Kiribati in media and broadcasting	36
Executive summary	5	Music	36
Introduction	7	Social media and telecommunications	36
Te Taetae ni Kiribati	7	Broadcast and print media	37
Purpose and objectives	7	Creative arts	37
Sample	7	Attitudes towards Pacific language media	37
Sampling design	8	Te taetae ni Kiribati in the	
Data collection	8	New Zealand context	39
Data analysis	8	Wider society	39
Overall response rate	8	Language, identity, and politeness dynamics	40
Survey weighting	8	Language use in recreation settings	40
Survey analyses	9	Language use with service providers	41
Limitations	9	Language use in public settings	41
Demography	10	New Zealand Government	41
Survey overview	11	Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages	42
Te taetae ni Kiribati	14	Barriers and enablers	43
Proficiency in te taetae ni Kiribati	15	Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati	43
Proficiency in other languages	15	Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati	44
Language acquisition	16	Conclusion	45
Connections to language, identity and wellbeing	16	Priority areas for action	45
Language loss	17	Appendix 1 – Survey variables	47
Revitalising te taetae ni Kiribati	18	Appendix 2 – Survey sampling frame	48
Te taetae ni Kiribati in the home and with families	19		
Childhood household composition and language use	19		
Contemporary household composition and language use	19		
Attitudes to Pacific language use at home	20		
Te taetae ni Kiribati in church	22		
Religion and church attendance	22		
Religious affiliations	22		
Pacific language use in church	23		
Attitudes to Pacific languages in church	24		
Te taetae ni Kiribati in education settings	26		
Pacific language education experiences	26		
Pacific language use in schools	27		
Attitudes to Pacific languages in education	28		
Te taetae ni Kiribati in the workplace	30		
Workplace experiences	30		
Using Pacific languages in the workplace	30		
Attitudes to Pacific languages in the workplace	31		
Te taetae ni Kiribati in and with Pacific communities	32		
Connection to Kiribati	32		
Language use in Kiribati	32		
Language use in community settings	33		
Attitudes to Pacific languages in Pacific communities	35		

List of figures

Figure 1 – I-Kiribati participant summary	10	Figure 30 – Attitudes towards Pacific language media	38
Figure 2 – Te taetae ni Kiribati summary	14	Figure 31 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society	39
Figure 3 – Proficiency in te taetae ni Kiribati	15	Figure 32 – Language, identity and politeness	40
Figure 4 – Multilingualism among i-Kiribati	16	Figure 33 – Pacific language use in recreational settings	40
Figure 5 – Attitudes towards language, identity, and culture	17	Figure 34 – Pacific language use with health and community service providers	41
Figure 6 – Attitudes towards language loss	18	Figure 35 – Pacific language use in public settings	41
Figure 7 – Language activities in the home and with family	19	Figure 36 – Pacific language use in official and/or government settings	42
Figure 8 – Language use in the home and with family	20	Figure 37 – Attitudes towards Pacific language use in official and/or government settings	42
Figure 9 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home	22	Figure 38 – Reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati	43
Figure 10 – Religious affiliations among i-Kiribati	23	Figure 39 – Reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati	44
Figure 11 – Pacific language use during church services and activities	24		
Figure 12 – Pacific language use at church between adults and children	25		
Figure 13 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church	27		
Figure 14 – I-Kiribati participation in Pacific language education	27		
Figure 15 – Pacific language use at primary and secondary schools	28		
Figure 16 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools	28		
Figure 17 – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities	30		
Figure 18 – Pacific language workplace experiences	31		
Figure 19 – Work-based Pacific language activities	31		
Figure 20 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace	32		
Figure 21 – Visiting and hosting community members from Kiribati	33		
Figure 22 – Pacific language use with communities in Kiribati	28		
Figure 23 – Engagement in community events, initiatives, and activities	34		
Figure 24 – Pacific language use in community settings	35		
Figure 25 – Attitudes towards Pacific cultural events	35		
Figure 26 – Engagement in Pacific music	36		
Figure 27 – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications	36		
Figure 28 – Engagement in broadcast and print media	37		
Figure 29 – Engagement in creative arts	37		

Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the survey and talanoa components of the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Project from the i-Kiribati (people of Kiribati heritage) community in New Zealand. It is designed to be read alongside the [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report](#), which outlines the Leo Moana o Aotearoa project methodology, participant demographics, and guidance on interpreting the results.

This report features the voices of the Kiribati community as captured through the survey and talanoa with its members across New Zealand. Community members shared their experiences, attitudes, and aspirations for te taetae ni Kiribati (the Kiribati language) - covering language proficiency, use, and transmission across domains such as home, church, education, workplace, media, community, and wider society. The report highlights the diversity of i-Kiribati experiences in New Zealand.

High-level findings are as follows:

Language proficiency

Most participants reported strong proficiency in te taetae ni Kiribati, particularly in speaking (83%) and listening (88%). Reading (87%) and writing (76%) skills were slightly lower, with younger participants reporting lower confidence. While 77% learned the language as their first language, 83% believe it is at risk of being lost in Aotearoa, and over half (52%) believe it is endangered in Kiribati itself.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in the home and with family

The home remains a vital space for language transmission. Participants reported frequent use of the language with elders, grandparents, and parents. However, use with school-aged children was significantly lower, reflecting the influence of English-dominant schooling. Families that prioritise the language create safe and nurturing environments for its use.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in church

Churches are important spaces for language use, with 78% of participants attending services conducted in te taetae ni Kiribati at least sometimes. However, language use between children and youth in church settings was lower, and the absence of Kiribati-speaking clergy was identified as a barrier to full immersion.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in education settings

Access to formal education in te taetae ni Kiribati is limited. Only 23% of participants had participated in Pacific language education in New Zealand. Despite this, there is strong demand for Kiribati language classes, with 76% of participants willing to enrol their children if such opportunities were available. The lack of qualified teachers and curriculum inclusion were major barriers.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in the workplace

Half of the participants reported using the language with colleagues at least sometimes. Many provided cultural or language support informally, but participants reported that few workplaces formally recognised these skills. Some participants felt discouraged or prohibited from using their language at work, reflecting broader societal attitudes that privilege English.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in and with Pacific communities

Community events and gatherings are powerful enablers of language use. Most participants attended Kiribati community events in the past year and described these spaces as safe and affirming. Community-led initiatives were seen as essential for intergenerational transmission and cultural pride.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in media and broadcasting

Music, phone calls, and social media were key platforms for language engagement. Most participants felt digital technology helped them connect with their language, though some expressed concern about the dominance of English-language media. There is a need for culturally grounded digital content to support language retention.

Te taetae ni Kiribati in the New Zealand context

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that te taetae ni Kiribati is part of New Zealand's national identity. However, use in public services and government settings was limited, with only 2% using the language in official documentation. Participants called for greater visibility and support from government agencies.

Introduction

*“Ara taetae bon kinakira.
Our language, our identity.”*

Te taetae ni Kiribati

The i-Kiribati community is one of the smallest Pacific ethnic groups in New Zealand, with a population of 4,659 according to Census 2023. The majority reside in Auckland and Wellington. Despite its size, the community plays a vital role in the cultural and linguistic diversity of New Zealand.

Te taetae ni Kiribati and English are both official languages of Kiribati. While English is more commonly used in the capital, South Tarawa, te taetae ni Kiribati remains widely spoken, with over 90% of the population aged three and over able to read and write it as of 2010. In Kiribati, all students are initially taught in te taetae ni Kiribati, and transition to English as the main language of instruction from Year 3, reflecting language transition patterns in other Pacific nations such as Tuvalu.

However, the long-term vitality of te taetae ni Kiribati faces challenges. Climate change poses a significant threat to the homeland, potentially accelerating migration and shifting the language’s centre of gravity to the diaspora. In this context, New Zealand plays a critical role in supporting language maintenance among i-Kiribati communities.

Aotearoa offers 75 annual places for migrants from Kiribati, and the New Zealand-born i-Kiribati population is steadily growing. Notably, Kiribati is the only small Pacific language group in New Zealand to have a dedicated bilingual education unit, established in Auckland in 2019.

Purpose and objectives

The aim of the Leo Moana o Aotearoa project is to investigate the use and attitudes towards Pacific languages in New Zealand. The overall goal of this report is to provide contemporary information on the vitality of te taetae ni Kiribati among i-Kiribati residing in New Zealand.

Complementing the initial [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report](#), this report focuses specifically on te taetae ni Kiribati and the experiences of i-Kiribati and Kiribati communities across New Zealand. It presents the perspectives of survey and talanoa participants (n = 122), exploring their use of and attitudes towards the language across a range of domains.

The findings aim to inform current and future efforts to strengthen te taetae ni Kiribati and enhance the wellbeing of i-Kiribati in New Zealand. This report also serves as a reference for communities, researchers, and agencies developing responsive policies and practices to better meet the needs of i-Kiribati.

Sample

The target population for the survey and talanoa is a representative sample of the i-Kiribati population, according to data from the 2018 Census (see Appendix 2 for the Kiribati 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.

Considering this, the Survey sample uses Maximum Variation purposeful sampling alongside 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 i-Kiribati can learn and use te taetae ni Kiribati. 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 sessions. The survey was primarily distributed via a confidential online link, with additional support provided through telephone and video calls by trained community-based researchers. This flexible, culturally responsive approach helped reduce barriers to participation and ensured that participants could engage in ways that were accessible and comfortable.

This report presents findings from both the survey and talanoa components specific to the Kiribati community. It is intended to be read alongside the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report, which outlines the full project methodology, including survey design, participant inclusion criteria, and guidance on interpreting results. This section focuses on methodological elements that are unique to the i-Kiribati component.

Data analysis

Overall response rate

A total of 3,039 people completed the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey, including 122 i-Kiribati respondents. All participants were aged 15 years or older, identified as Pacific peoples, and were residing in New Zealand at the time of the survey.

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. The sampling frame is included as Appendix 2.

The results for the i-Kiribati participant survey (n = 122) have been weighted against the total i-Kiribati population in New Zealand as at the 2018 Census. They are therefore representative of the total domestic i-Kiribati 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 focusses on descriptive statistics (providing percentages and counts), additional analyses have been run to examine differences within the i-Kiribati participant cohort. 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 (I-Kiribati only vs. Multi-Pacific vs. Multi-ethnic)¹
- Region (Wellington vs. Auckland vs. Elsewhere)
- Birthplace (New Zealand-born vs. Overseas-born)

Only statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) are reported. Qualitative insights from the talanoa are also woven throughout the report to provide depth and context to the quantitative findings.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- Due to the small size of the i-Kiribati population in New Zealand, a randomised sampling design was not feasible. I-Kiribati who are not as involved in Pacific community activities are therefore less likely to be represented in this sample.
- The data is based on self-reporting, which may be subject to over-reporting or under-reporting of language use, proficiency, or attitudes.
- While weighting was applied to improve representativeness, the findings should still be interpreted with caution, particularly when generalising to the entire i-Kiribati population in New Zealand.

¹ 'Multi-Pacific' refers to when a participant has selected Samoan and any other Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Samoan and Tongan.
'Multi-Ethnic' refers to when a participant has selected Samoan and any non-Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Samoan and New Zealand European.

Demography

Who took part in the survey?

A total of 122 i-Kiribati people living in New Zealand completed the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey. Based on the 2018 Census, this represented about 6% of the i-Kiribati population aged 15 and over living in New Zealand.

Figure 1 – I-Kiribati participant summary

122 I-Kiribati participants

Youth (15–24) made up the largest age group, representing 29% of participants, while 10% were aged 55+

Identified as:

55% Female

45% Male

42%
Auckland

17%
Waikato

23%
Wellington

19% New Zealand born

26% Multiple ethnicities



Age and gender

One-third of all participants (29%) were 15-24 years old, while 61% were 25-54 years old. The remaining 10% were 55 years old or older. A slightly higher proportion of participants who identified as female took part in the survey (55%) compared to those who identified as male (45%). There were no participants who identified as a gender outside of the binary.

Birthplace and region

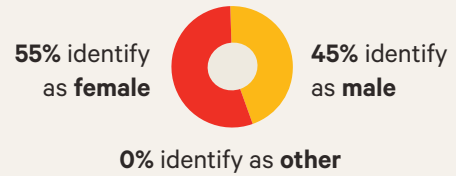
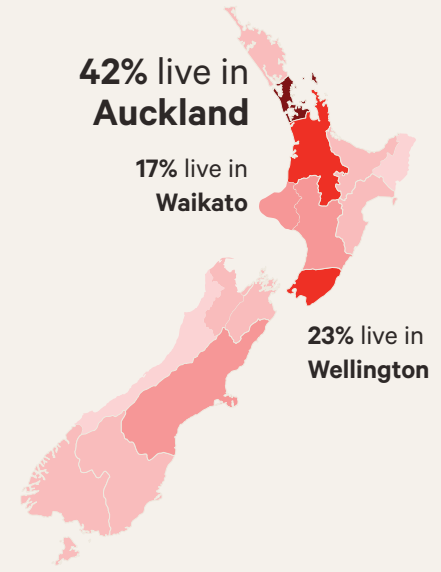
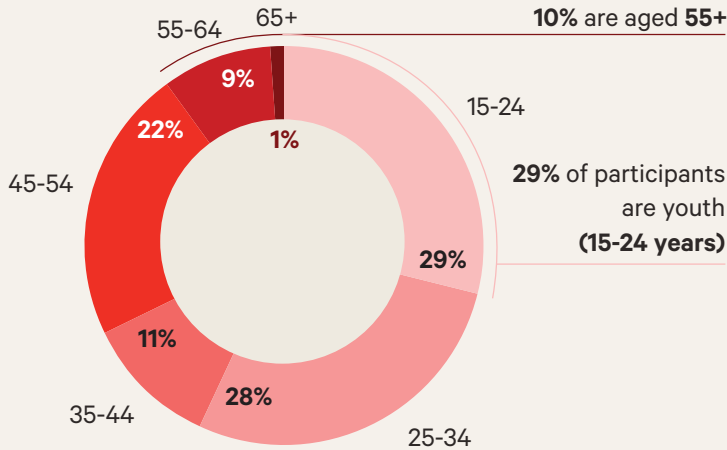
Most i-Kiribati participants reported being born overseas (81%), while only 19% said they were born in New Zealand. In terms of regional locations, 42% reported living in Auckland, while 17% lived in Waikato and 23% in Wellington. The remaining 10% lived elsewhere in the North Island while 8% lived in the South Island.

Ethnic identity

Three out of four participants reported being solely i-Kiribati ethnicity (75%), while the remaining 26% identified as having at least one other ethnic identity. The most common additional Pacific ethnicities for i-Kiribati participants were i-Kiribati-Tuvaluan (21%), i-Kiribati-Tokelauan (10%), and i-Kiribati-Samoan (8%). Two percent identified as i-Kiribati-European, while less than 1% reported being i-Kiribati-Māori.

Survey overview

122 I-Kiribati took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey



19% were born in New Zealand 26% are multi-ethnic

Overview of Pacific language use in Aotearoa New Zealand

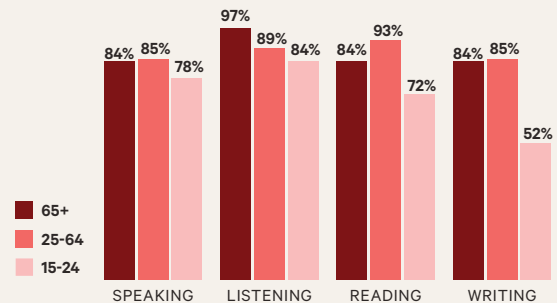
74% report being proficient in at least one Pacific language.

77% learned Te taetae ni Kiribati as a first language

99% say using Te taetae ni Kiribati is important to their wellbeing

83% are concerned Te taetae ni Kiribati is in danger of being lost in Aotearoa

52% are concerned Te taetae ni Kiribati is in danger of being lost in Kiribati



Youth rate their proficiency in Te taetae ni Kiribati as slightly lower than participants aged 25+.

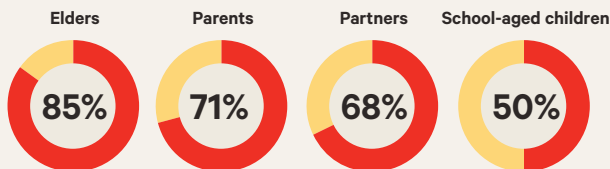
100% believe it is important for our children and future generations to speak our Pacific languages

76% speak to children in their households using Pacific languages

Te taetae ni Kiribati use in Aotearoa New Zealand, in depth

Home & Family

Participants reported always using heritage languages with elders more than with peers and children.



48% live in **multigenerational households**

72% maintain **traditional Pacific households**

91% agree that Pacific languages are safe as long as they are **spoken in the home**

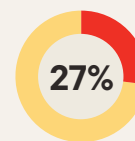
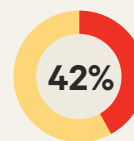
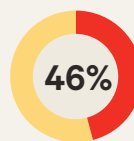
Religion

Top religious affiliations

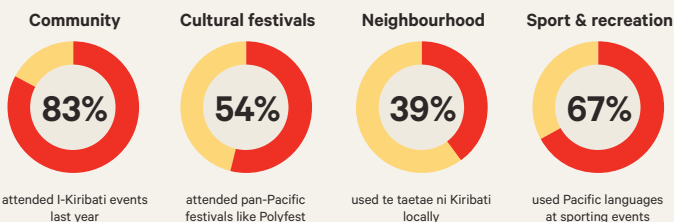
44% Catholicism

21% Christian (no specific denomination)

17% Latter-day Saints / Mormon



Communities



44% have never visited Kiribati

89% have hosted I-Kiribati in NZ

Media

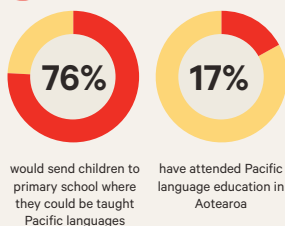
85% digital technology, media and the Internet **help connect** to Pacific languages

47% digital technology, media and the Internet **are threatening** Pacific languages

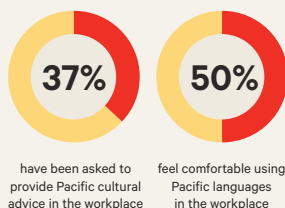
79% **listen to music in Pacific languages** every week

49% have used te taetae ni Kiribati while **playing video games**

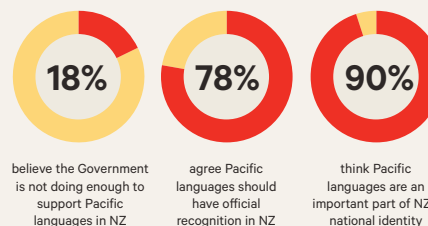
School



Work



Government



Enablers What activities are most helpful for I-Kiribati to engage with Te taetae ni Kiribati?

78% listening and speaking with family & friends at home

57% talking with friends & family in Kiribati

53% listening to music in Pacific languages

44% engaging with Pacific language weeks

Barriers What gets in the way of engaging with Te taetae ni Kiribati?

41% attending schools where very few Pacific people attend

36% not having consistent funding or resources to provide Pacific language programmes

34% not having access to Pacific language or culture classes in the workplace

32% not being able to visit Kiribati

Te taetae ni Kiribati

“Te taetae ni Kiribati is important because it is our identity as i-Kiribati. We must maintain it wherever we go.”

Figure 2 – Te taetae ni Kiribati summary

99 %
say using their heritage language is important to their wellbeing

100 %
believe Pacific languages are important for future generations

Older generations report having slightly better language proficiency than younger generations.

74 %
report being proficient in at least one Pacific language

83 %
fear Te taetae ni Kiribati is at risk in New Zealand

76 %
use Pacific languages when speaking to children at home

52 %
fear Te taetae ni Kiribati is at risk in Kiribati

77 %
learned Te taetae ni Kiribati as a first language



Proficiency in te taetae ni Kiribati

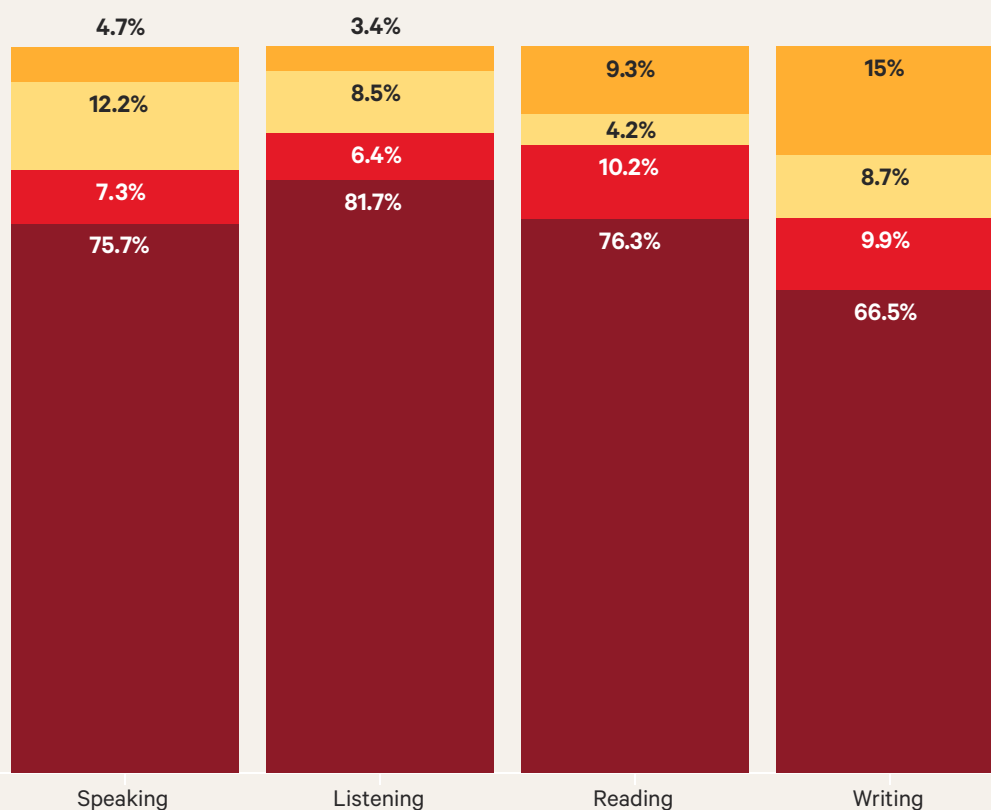
To capture language proficiency, participants were asked to self-rate their abilities to speak, listen, read, and write in te taetae ni Kiribati. Participants could choose along a scale of 'very well', 'well', 'fairly well', 'not so well', and 'only a few words or phrases'. Participants who selected 'fairly well', 'well', or 'very well' for their ability were considered proficient for the purposes of this analysis.

Overall, 83% of participants reported being able to speak te taetae ni Kiribati proficiently, while 76% reported speaking the language well or very well. A higher proportion (88%) reported being able to understand te taetae ni Kiribati when spoken to them. For reading and writing proficiency, 87% reported being able to read well and 76% reported writing well.

Figure 3 – Proficiency in te taetae ni Kiribati

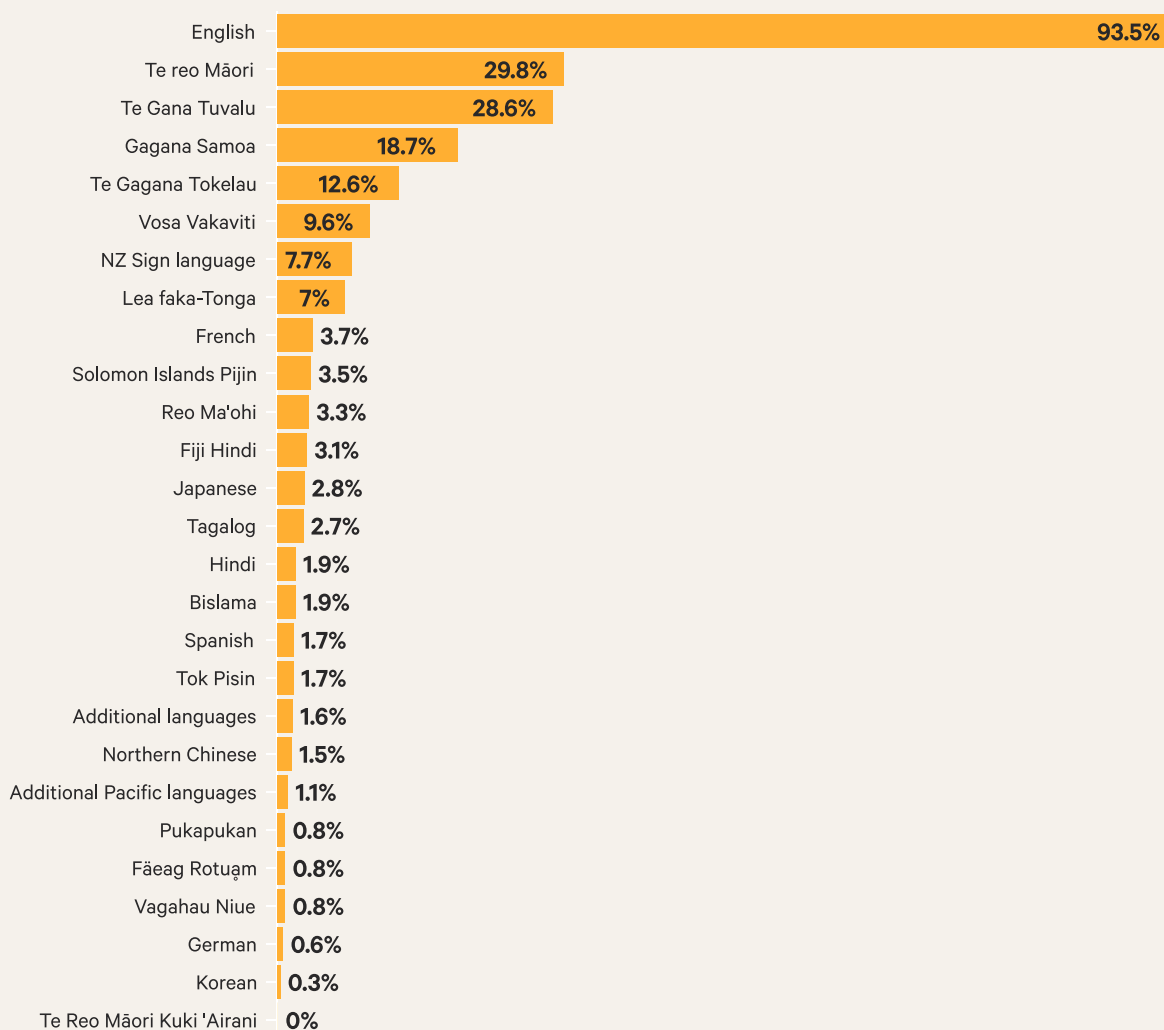
Te taetae ni Kiribati Proficiency:

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



Proficiency in other languages

The most reported Pacific languages for i-Kiribati participants other than te taetae ni Kiribati were te gana Tuvalu (29%), gagana Sāmoa (19%), te gagana Tokelau (13%), and vosa vakaViti (10%). Nearly one-third of i-Kiribati participants reported being familiar with te reo Māori (30%), while eight percent were familiar with NZ Sign Language.

Figure 4 – Multilingualism among i-Kiribati

Language acquisition

More than 77% of i-Kiribati participants reported learning te taetae ni Kiribati as a first language, while another 7% learned the language before starting school.

Connections to language, identity and wellbeing

Te taetae ni Kiribati is deeply woven into the identity of i-Kiribati people. All survey participants (100%) expressed pride in being Pacific and affirmed that their language is important to them. Many shared that speaking te taetae ni Kiribati contributes to their emotional wellbeing and gives them a strong sense of belonging.

“You feel a sense of belonging... you know what to do when you are amongst your tribe.”

Figure 5 - Attitudes towards language, identity, and culture**Attitudes to Pacific heritage identity:**

● Agree ● Not agree

I am proud to be a Pacific person

100%

My Pacific language is an important language

100%

My Pacific language is important for my wellbeing

98.9%

1.1%

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

98.3%

1.7%

The language was seen not only as a means of communication but as a vital link to Pacific culture, with 98% of participants agreeing that te taetae ni Kiribati is the best way to connect with their heritage. This highlights the role of language in maintaining cultural continuity, resilience, and identity, especially for those living in diaspora communities.

“It means I can connect with family, friends and my culture through the use of my language. Being half-caste it’s easy to feel somewhat left out from those in your cultural group but because I speak my language I’ve never had that problem because I feel like I’m one of them, even if I may not look it. My language connects me to my culture which is a huge part of who I am.”

Language loss

“If we don’t maintain the language in New Zealand, it will be lost by the young generation.”

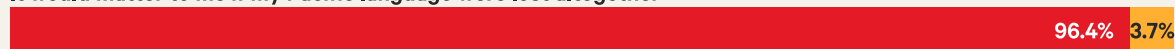
There was widespread concern among i-Kiribati communities in New Zealand about the potential loss of te taetae ni Kiribati, particularly within diaspora contexts. A significant majority of survey participants (83%) believed the Kiribati language is at risk of being lost in New Zealand, while over half (52%) also perceived it to be endangered in the Pacific Islands themselves.

Figure 6 – Attitudes towards language loss

Attitudes to heritage language loss:

● Agree ● Not agree

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



Nearly all respondents (96%) said that losing their Pacific language would matter deeply to them. Many participants linked this concern to the growing impact of climate change and migration, noting that language plays a critical role in preserving cultural identity when physical ties to the homeland are disrupted.

“Language has become our new land... where our culture lives and resides when Kiribati is under the sea.”

Revitalising te taetae ni Kiribati

Passing the language on to future generations was a clear priority for participants. Every respondent (100%) agreed that it is important for their children and grandchildren to speak te taetae ni Kiribati. Nearly all (98%) also felt it was important to learn their parents’ language and saw it as their personal responsibility to ensure it is passed on.

“The language is passed from our ancestors to our grandparents, parents, and me. I will pass it on to my children and grandchildren.”



Te taetae ni Kiribati in the home and with families

*“My Pacific language means more as a feeling than a thought.
Whenever I speak it, I feel safe and at home.
It reminds me of my parents.”*

For i-Kiribati families living in New Zealand, the home is a vital space for keeping the Kiribati language alive. The survey and talanoa revealed both the challenges and strengths of families working to pass the language on to younger generations, despite the dominance of English and the pressures of migration.

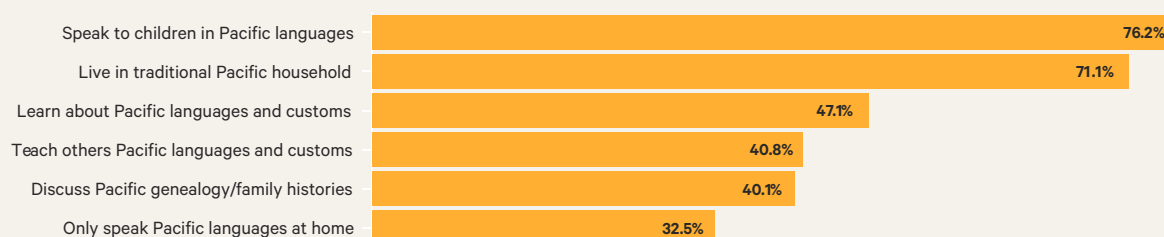
Childhood household composition and language use

I-Kiribati participants were asked to describe their childhood experiences with Pacific languages in their households. Most participants reported being raised by i-Kiribati caregivers (84%), while 13% reported being raised in a multi-Pacific household and 3% reported having both Pacific and non-Pacific caregivers in their childhood homes. Most participants also reported growing up in a traditional Pacific household (85%) and over three-quarters remembered adults addressing children in Pacific languages in their households (76%). There were 55% who reported growing up in a household that had a rule where only Pacific languages could be spoken at home.

Contemporary household composition and language use

Today, nearly half of participants (48%) live in multi-generational households. Most live with between 2–6 other people.

Figure 7 – Language activities in the home and with family

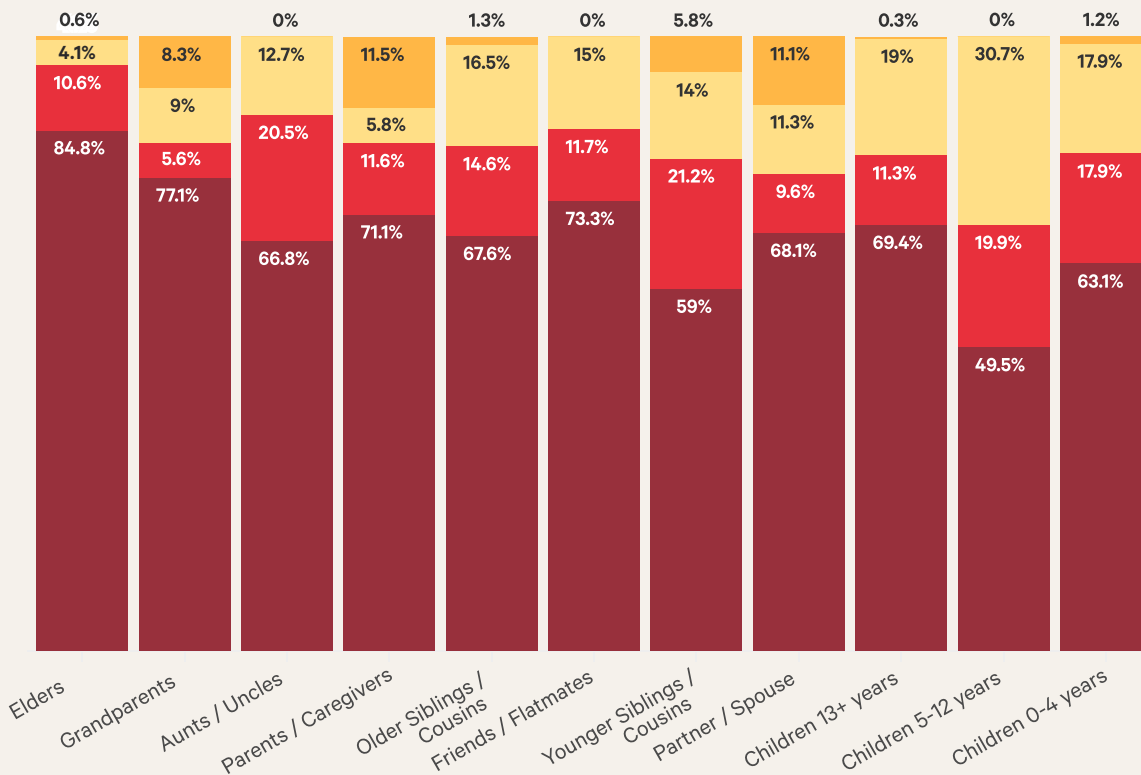


The most popular Pacific language and culture activities conducted in i-Kiribati households were speaking to children in Pacific languages (76%) and keeping a traditional Pacific household (72%). Almost half of participants also took part in activities that helped them learn and share their culture at home. About 47% learned about Pacific languages and customs in their households, while similar numbers taught others about these traditions (41%) or talked with family members about their Pacific genealogy and family history (40%).

Figure 8 – Language use in the home and with family

Household Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



When asked how often participants spoke in Pacific languages with family and household members, there was a distinct generational difference in responses. More than three in four participants reported using Pacific languages most or all the time when speaking with elders (85%) and with grandparents, (77%) compared to less than 50% who did so with children aged 5-12 years. This distinct drop in reported use of Pacific languages with children aged 5-12 years may reflect the impact of NZ schooling on Pacific language use in the home. Around one in ten i-Kiribati participants reported never using Pacific languages with their partners and/or parents.

Attitudes to Pacific language use at home

Participants strongly agreed that the home is the foundation for language preservation. The role of parents and grandparents was seen as key in transmitting the Kiribati language.

“My parents and grandparents sang and told stories to me since a child... From those stories, I learned new words and used them for the rest of your life.”

Figure 9 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home

Attitudes to Pacific languages at home:

● Agree ● Not agree

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



Pacific languages are only important at home



Most participants agreed that, as long as Pacific languages are spoken in the home, they are safe (91%), while 60% disagreed that Pacific languages are only important at home.

“For me I think it is very important to continue the tradition and the culture in our households as well as in our Kiribati community because it helps the young generation to learn the culture/tradition but more importantly the Kiribati language as some of the young generation nowadays are barely understand the Kiribati language.”

Many participants also said that community programmes can support families in using the language at home:

“The community will complement this vital work by implementing a collaborative programme... significantly impact the parents in encouraging the use of language in the home.”



Te taetae ni Kiribati in church

“My language is my birthright from God and needs to be passed on to my children and grandchildren now and in the future.”

Church is a central space for many i-Kiribati to use and hear te taetae ni Kiribati. It is not only a place of worship but also a cultural hub where language, song, prayer, and storytelling are shared. The survey and talanoa show that churches help strengthen identity, support language learning, and connect generations. However, there are also challenges, especially the dominance of English and the lack of Kiribati-speaking clergy.

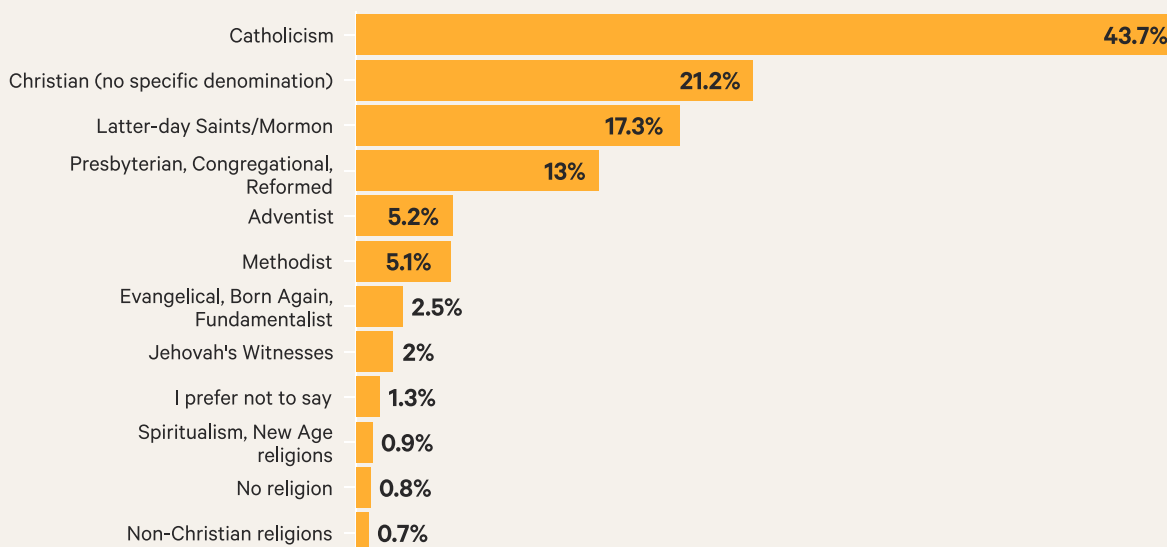
Religion and church attendance

Nearly all i-Kiribati participants reported having at least one religious affiliation (98%). Forty-six percent of i-Kiribati participants reported attending church at least once a week and, overall, 85% reported attending church at least sometimes.

Religious affiliations

Participants were asked to identify their religious affiliations and could select as many as were relevant to their personal spiritual identities. Forty-four percent reported being Catholic, while 21% identified as Christian of no specified denomination and 17% identified as Mormon. Thirteen percent identified as Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed, while five percent each reported being Adventist or Methodist.

Figure 10 – Religious affiliations among i-Kiribati



Pacific language use in church

“In church, we learn to read and speak Kiribati.”

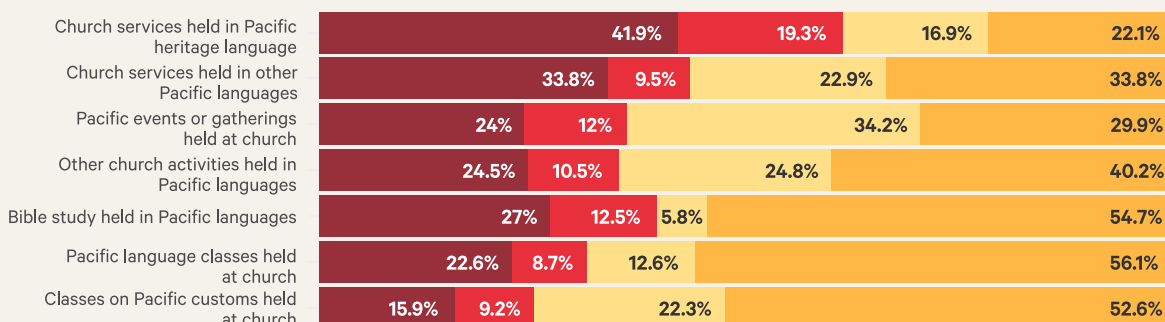
There were 42% who attended church that stated services were held in te taetae ni Kiribati every week, while bible study (27%) and other church activities (25%) were held in Pacific languages at least once a week. Most i-Kiribati participants who attended church reported that Pacific events and gatherings were held at their church at least occasionally (70%). Language and cultural classes were less reported compared to other church-based activities.

“The prayer was in Kiribati, including reading, singing, and preaching. The use of the language was 100 per cent.”

Figure 11 – Pacific language use during church services and activities

Church Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Participants also shared some challenges to language use in church. For example, the absence of Kiribati-speaking priests limited the use of the language in Catholic services.

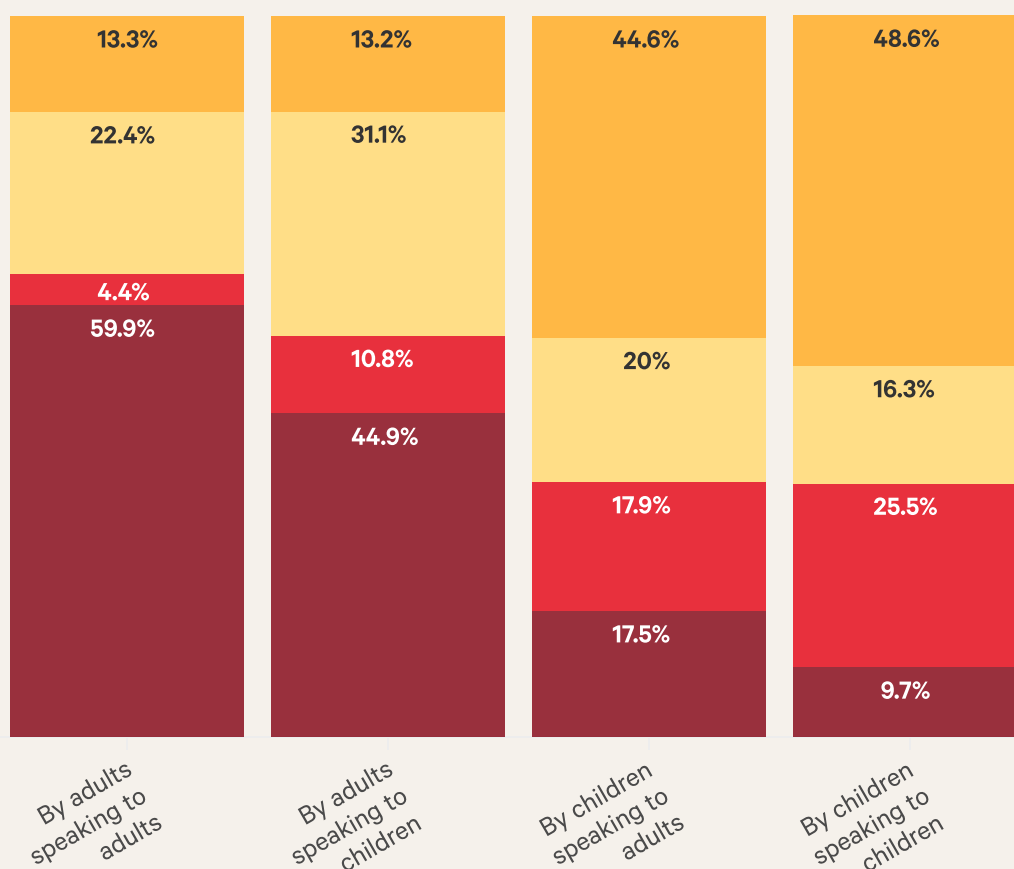
“We do not have our local priests – Kiribati so we could have our mass in Kiribati. You go to church; it is in English.”

When asked about differences in hearing church members speaking to one another at church, there were significant differences between how people communicated with adults compared to children. More than half of participants reported hearing adults use Pacific languages most of the time with other adults (60%), and just under half (45%) reporting hearing adults use Pacific languages when talking to children. However, only 18% reported hearing children always use Pacific languages with adults, and only 10% reported hearing children use Pacific languages with other children most the time.

Figure 12 – Pacific language use at church between adults and children

Church Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Attitudes to Pacific languages in church

Most i-Kiribati participants agreed that te taetae ni Kiribati is a gift from God (87%). There were 53% who reported their church was attended by many i-Kiribati, while 75% reported feeling comfortable using their Pacific language at church.

Figure 13 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church

Attitudes to Pacific languages at church:

● Agree ● Not agree

My Pacific language is a gift from God



I feel comfortable using my Pacific language at church



My church is attended by many people from my Pacific community



My Pacific language is only important at church



While many felt empowered by using their language in church, others - especially youth - felt anxious or judged when their fluency was limited.

“When your Kiribati is poor, they mock you. For example, you do not say the correct words, children at church tease you.”



Te taetae ni Kiribati in education settings

“I hope that we stop discriminating against our own people. I didn’t learn how to speak Kiribati during high school because I was told that I sounded “plastic” and therefore I was too ashamed to relearn it despite having grown up in Kiribati and being fluent for my childhood. I hope we create a safe space for people to learn or relearn their language without feeling ashamed.”

Education is a key space for language transmission, especially for younger generations. However, for i-Kiribati in New Zealand, schools present both opportunities and challenges. While English dominates the curriculum, there is growing awareness of the importance of Pacific languages, including te taetae ni Kiribati.

Pacific language education experiences

“There is no Kiribati language in the curriculum offered as an option for children to learn.”

Compared to other Pacific communities in New Zealand most i-Kiribati were born and raised overseas. Many participants reflected on how migration and English-speaking schools contributed to a decline in Kiribati language use among children. Without formal teaching in schools, children often lose fluency unless the language is reinforced at home.

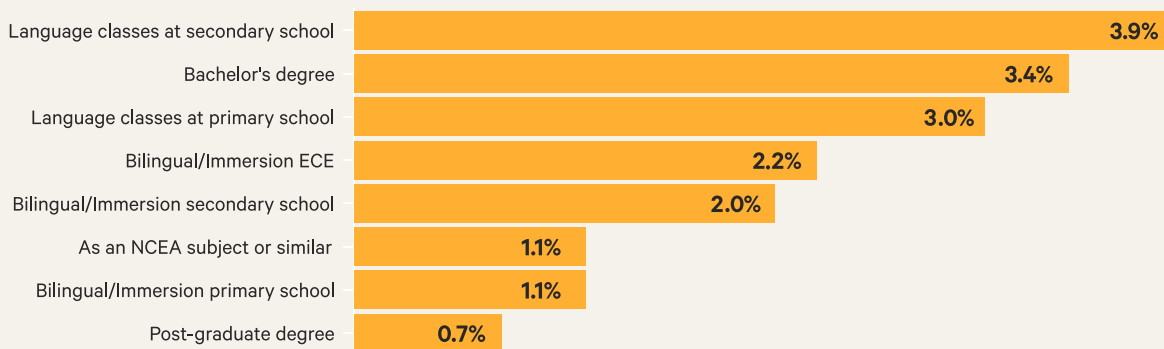
“When we came here, our children attended school... the use of te taetae ni Kiribati started to decline.”

Participants also reflected on the absence of trained Kiribati-speaking educators, which limits the ability to deliver consistent and culturally relevant language instruction in schools.

“Personally, it is critical to have Kiribati teachers... but we do not have enough Kiribati people who are qualified teachers.”

It is not surprising that there were fewer i-Kiribati who reported attending Pacific language education in New Zealand. The most common forms of language education for i-Kiribati participants were secondary school language classes (4%), bachelor’s degrees (3%), and language classes in primary school (3%).

Figure 14 – I-Kiribati participation in Pacific language education



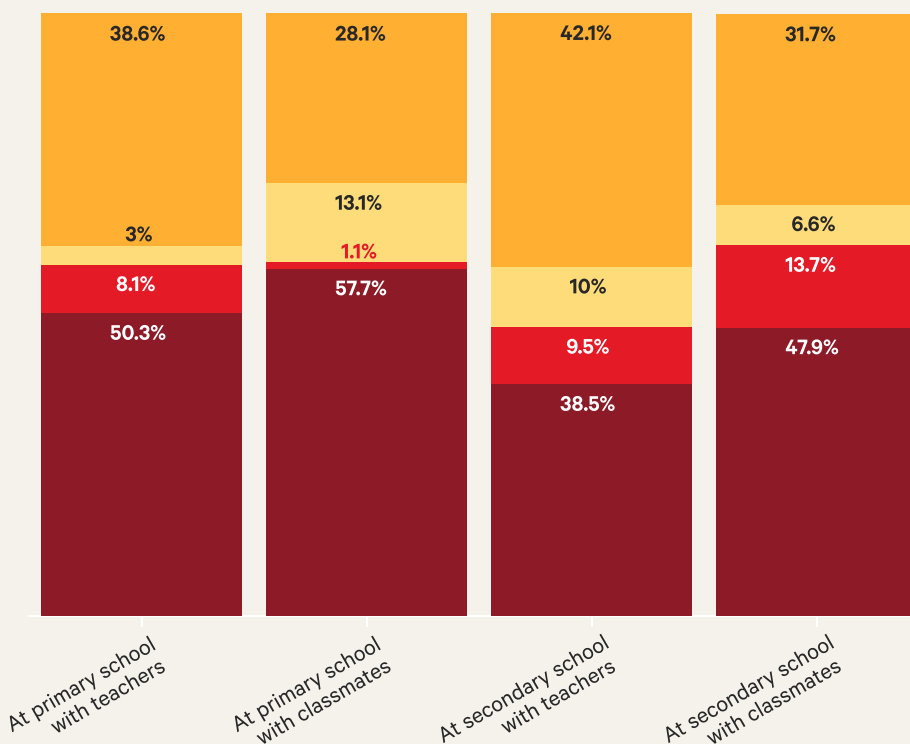
Pacific language use in schools

When asked how much of their conversations with teachers and other students occurred in Pacific languages, more than half of participants indicated they had never used Pacific languages when in primary school. Participants were least likely to report using Pacific languages with teachers in secondary school. However, two-thirds of participants reported using Pacific languages when speaking with classmates in secondary school (68%).

Figure 15 – Pacific language use at primary and secondary schools

Pacific language use at NZ schools compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Attitudes to Pacific languages in education

Most participants agreed that Pacific languages should be made compulsory in New Zealand primary schools (72%), while 29% agreed that you do not need to learn your Pacific languages – English is enough. Just over half of i-Kiribati participants felt comfortable using their Pacific languages in school (54%).

Figure 16 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools:

● Agree ● Not agree

Pacific languages should be made compulsory in Aotearoa primary schools



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



In Aotearoa, you do not need to learn your Pacific languages: English is enough



Although Kiribati language provision in education is limited in New Zealand, there was a strong desire from participants for their children to be educated in the language. Many participants were aware of the benefits of being bilingual.

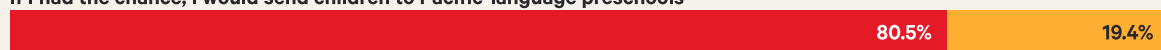
“If they can read and write [in Kiribati], they will do well at school.”

Figure 17 – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools:

● Agree ● Not agree

If I had the chance, I would send children to Pacific-language preschools



If I had the chance, I would send children to primary school where they could be taught in our Pacific languages



If I had the chance, I would send children to secondary school where they could be taught in our Pacific languages



Most participants agreed that they would send their children to Pacific language-based schools for early childhood education (ECE), primary and secondary school education if given the opportunity.

“I hope that all the educations in New Zealand established a Kiribati class as one of the subjects in schools, as most high schools has Samoan classes as one of the subjects and so I’m hoping for Kiribati well. Not only that but for other Pacific Islands as well in New Zealand.”



Te taetae ni Kiribati in the workplace

“To be more accepted in society. To enable all cultures to have classes where people from all walks of life can learn. Just like the Japanese, French or Portuguese classes that are available.”

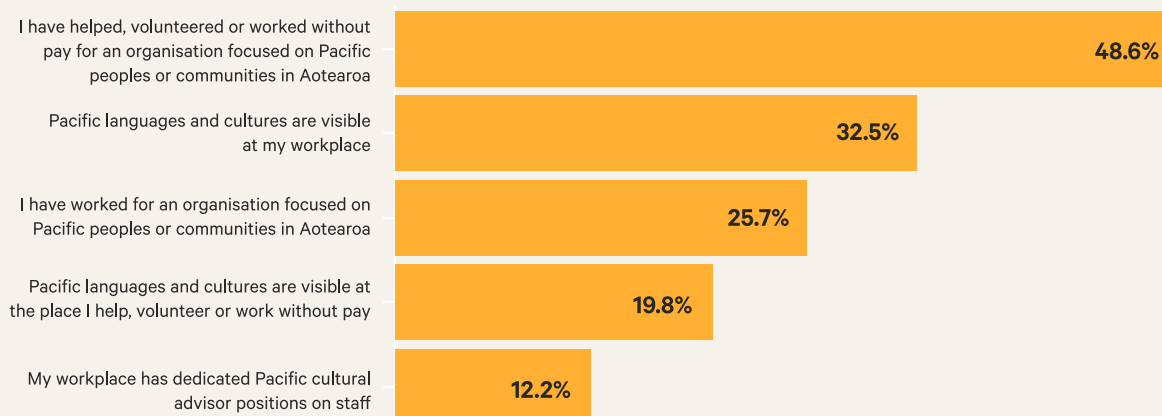
The workplace offers both opportunities and challenges for using te taetae ni Kiribati. While multilingualism is increasingly valued in New Zealand, many i-Kiribati still face barriers to using their language at work.

When asked about their current labour market status, 69% of i-Kiribati participants reported being currently engaged in paid work, while 19% were involved in some form of unpaid work. Around one in three (29%) reported experiencing ethnicity-based discrimination in the workplace, while (12%) reported that they conducted their work using Pacific languages.

Workplace experiences

There were 33% of participants who reported that Pacific languages and cultures were visible at their workplace compared to only 20% of participants who claimed Pacific languages and cultures were visible at places they volunteered. Almost half of participants reported that they had worked (with or without pay) for organisations focused on Pacific peoples or communities. Twelve percent reported that they had Pacific cultural advisors on staff in their workplace.

Figure 18 – Pacific language workplace experiences



Using Pacific languages in the workplace

Around one in three participants reported using Pacific languages with colleagues in the workplace at least weekly (32%), while half reported using Pacific languages at least some of the time. However, some participants felt discouraged or even prohibited from using their language at work:

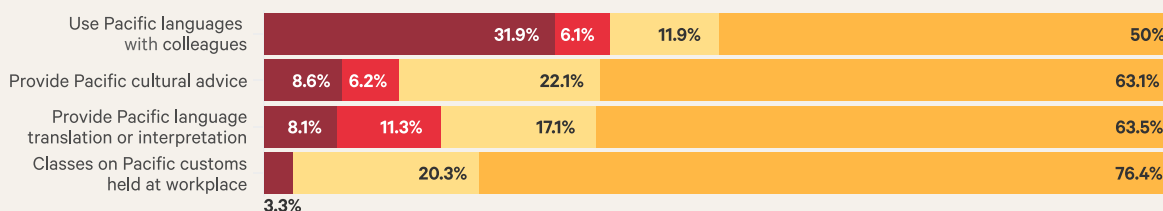
“Only in church—but at work, I hardly hear my language. I’m comfortable speaking it, but it’s not allowed in the workplace.”

Just over one-third (37%) of participants reported having to provide Pacific cultural advice in the workplace previously (whether part of their job description or not) or Pacific language support. Classes on Pacific customs were rarely reported in the workplace, with over 76% indicating they had never had them held in a workplace.

Figure 19 – Work-based Pacific language activities

Workplace Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Attitudes to Pacific languages in the workplace

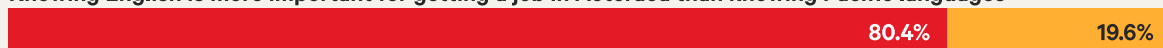
Over 80% of participants agreed that knowing English was more important for getting a job in New Zealand than knowing Pacific languages, while 50% reported feeling comfortable using Pacific languages in their workplace.

Figure 20 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace

Attitudes to Pacific languages in the workplace:

● Agree ● Not agree

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



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



Despite this, many participants also highlighted that being bilingual or multilingual is increasingly recognised as a strength in the workplace, contributing to cultural competence and broader thinking.

“When you apply for work, sometimes the employer is looking for someone who speaks another Pacific language.”



Te taetae ni Kiribati in and with Pacific communities

“It is a part of my identity and everyday life. It’s a way to connect me with my elders and ancestors who still have very strong Pacific worldviews and way of life.”

For i-Kiribati living in New Zealand, Pacific communities are essential spaces for language connection, cultural pride, and intergenerational learning. Whether through community events, festivals, or informal gatherings, te taetae ni Kiribati is spoken, shared, and celebrated. These spaces help reinforce identity and provide safe environments for language use, especially for younger generations growing up away from their homeland.

Connection to Kiribati

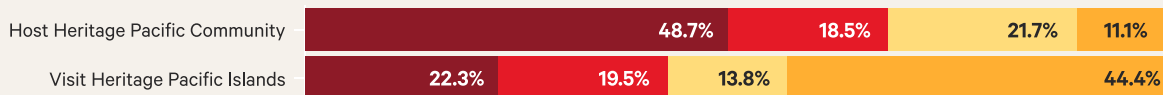
“[My language] connects me with my land, sea and people in Kiribati.”

Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they visited their heritage Pacific Islands and/or hosted members of their heritage Pacific communities here in New Zealand prior to COVID-19. Nearly half of participants reported hosting i-Kiribati community members in New Zealand at least once every year (49%), while 22% reported visiting Kiribati annually or more often. There were 44% who reported never visiting Kiribati.

Figure 21 – Visiting and hosting community members from Kiribati

Heritage Pacific Islands Connection:

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



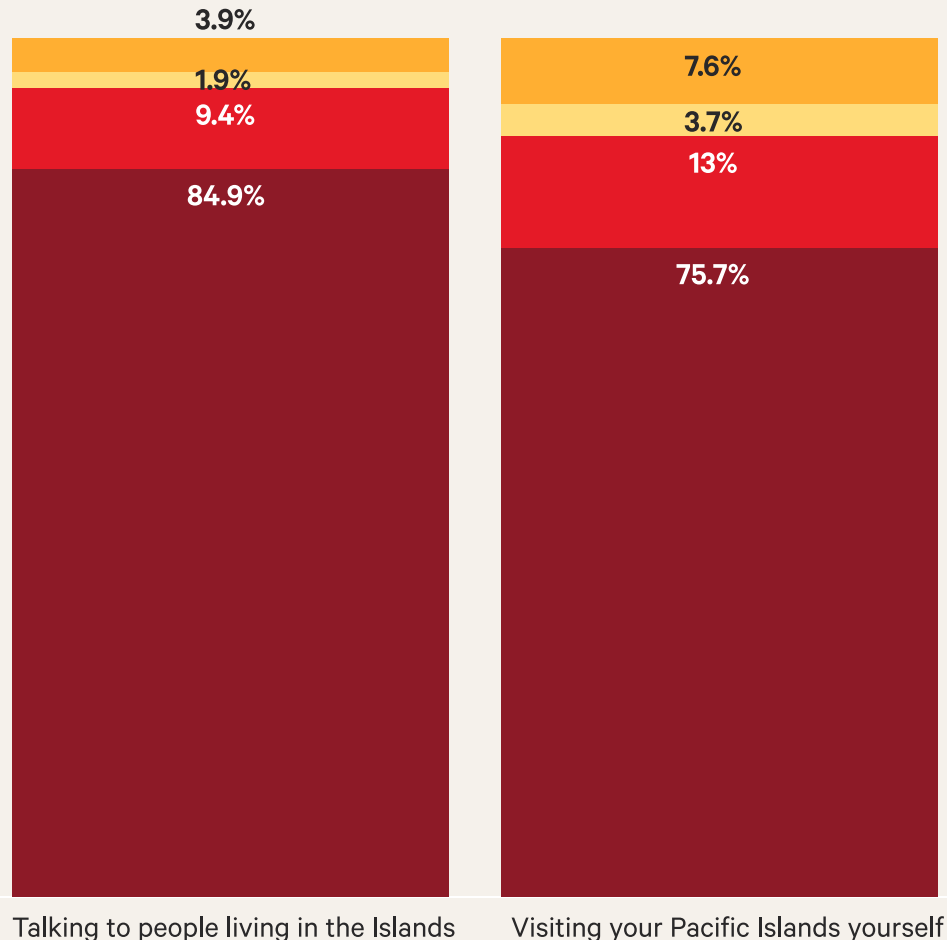
Language use in Kiribati

Most participants indicated that they always or mostly used Pacific languages while hosting community from Kiribati (85%) and 76% while visiting Kiribati themselves. There were 96% who reported using Pacific languages at least some of the time when speaking with i-Kiribati visiting them in New Zealand, while 92% reported using Pacific languages at least sometimes while visiting Kiribati.

Figure 22 – Pacific language use with communities in Kiribati

Heritage Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Language use in community settings

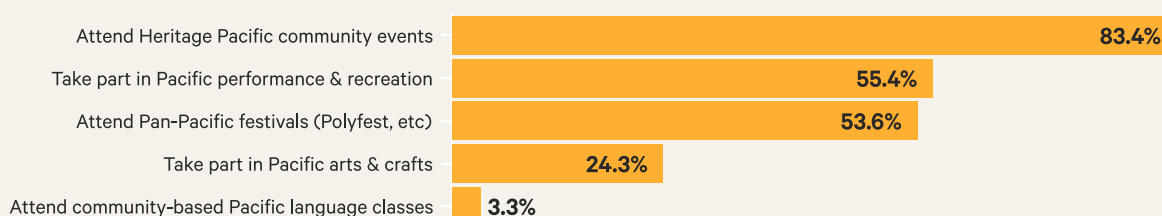
“It is a part of my identity and everyday life. It’s a way to connect me with my elders and ancestors who still have very strong pacific worldviews and way of life. Knowing the language well gives me the confidence to live as an i-Kiribati in a country that doesn’t speak the language. It allows me the confidence to interact with other i-Kiribati, learn from them and pass on knowledge to others who wish to learn more, such as younger siblings or my children. In doing so it also helps me build and sustain relationships with my family and wider community.”

Participants were asked if they had participated in any Pacific community events or activities during the past year. Most participants reported attending Kiribati community events in New Zealand (83%). Many participants reflected on how community events are intentionally structured to prioritise Kiribati language use, reinforcing cultural identity and creating safe spaces for practice.

“During events and gatherings, we spoke in Kiribati. Sometimes, we set up rules to forbid members from speaking in English.”

Over half of participants reported taking part in Pacific performance and recreation activities (55%) or attending Pan-Pacific festivals such as Polyfest (54%). Almost one quarter of participants reported taking part in Pacific arts and crafts activities (24%).

Figure 23 – Engagement in community events, initiatives, and activities



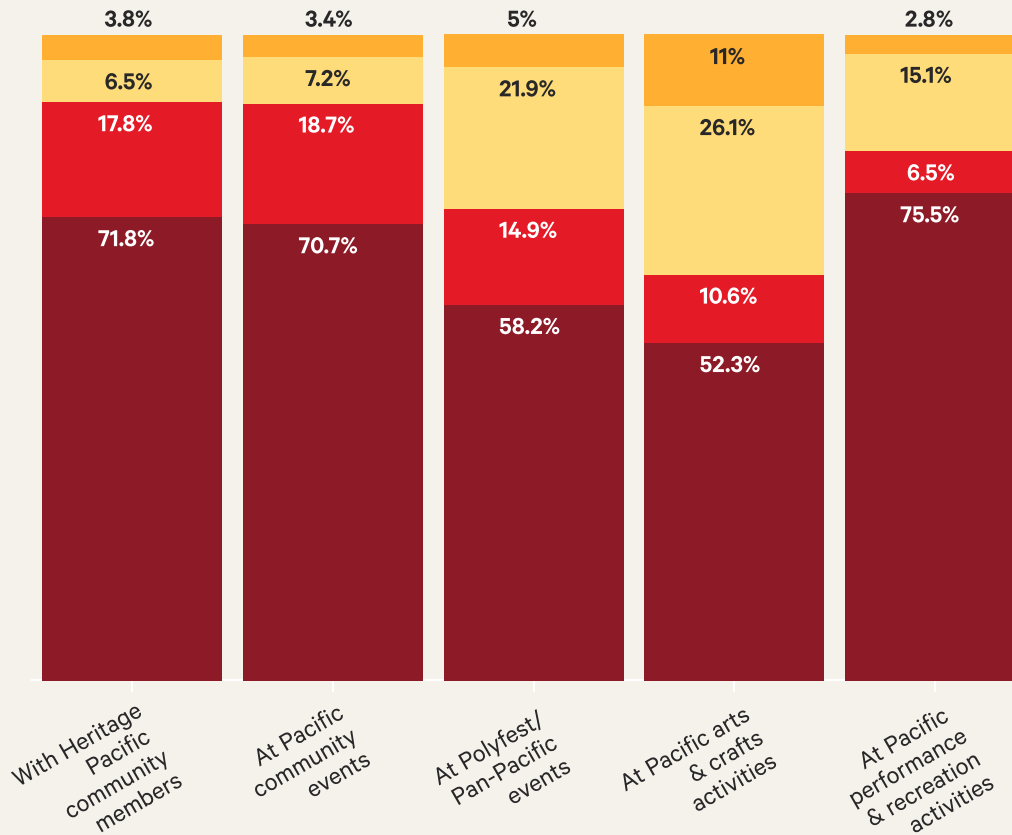
Participants were asked how much of their conversations were held in Pacific languages when engaging in community-based activities compared to other languages. Over 90% of participants reported using Pacific languages at least some of the time when speaking with other i-Kiribati (96%) and at Pacific community events (97%).

I have been encouraged and empowered to promote and teach non-Kiribati people about Kiribati greetings and key words in other Pasifika events.

Figure 24 – Pacific language use in community settings

Pacific community language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Attitudes to Pacific languages in Pacific communities

Around 90% of participants reported enjoying Pacific cultural events and finding it easy to participate in Pacific cultural events. There were also 90% who reported feeling most comfortable when in Pacific communities.

Figure 25 – Attitudes towards Pacific cultural events

Attitudes to Pacific languages with Pacific communities:

● Agree ● Not agree

I find it easy to participate in Pacific cultural events



I enjoy participating in Pacific cultural events



I feel most comfortable in Pacific communities





Te taetae ni Kiribati in media and broadcasting

Media and digital technologies are increasingly shaping how te taetae ni Kiribati is used, learned, and maintained in New Zealand. While these platforms offer new ways to connect and communicate, they also present challenges, especially the dominance of English-language content.

Music

Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they engaged in different forms of Pacific language media.

Music emerged as one of the most common ways participants engaged with their language, with nearly all reporting that they listened to Pacific music or sang songs in Pacific languages at least occasionally. More than 70% reported doing so on a weekly basis.

Figure 26 – Engagement in Pacific music

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



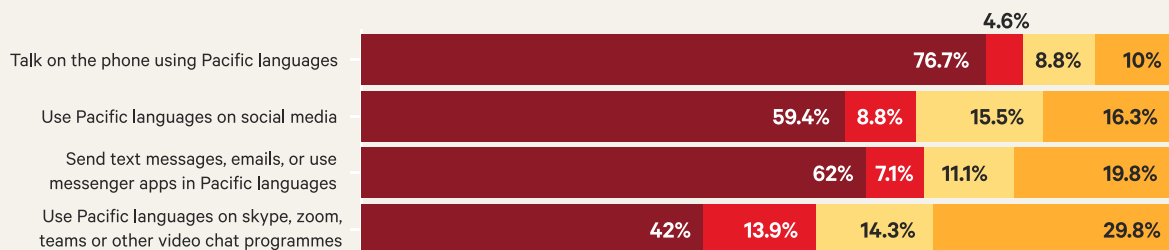
Social media and telecommunications

Nine out of ten participants reported talking on the phone at least occasionally in te taetae ni Kiribati, while 77% reported talking on the phone weekly in the language. Use of Pacific languages on video chat programmes such as Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams was less frequently reported, with 30% reporting they had never used Pacific languages in that medium.

Figure 27 – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



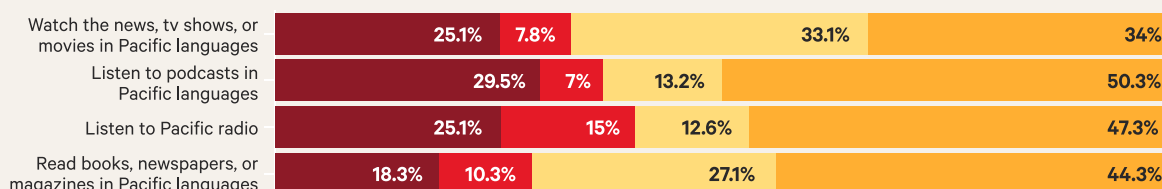
Broadcast and print media

Watching the news, television, or movies in Pacific languages was the most common form of broadcast media engagement, followed by reading books, newspapers or magazines.

Figure 28 – Engagement in broadcast and print media

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



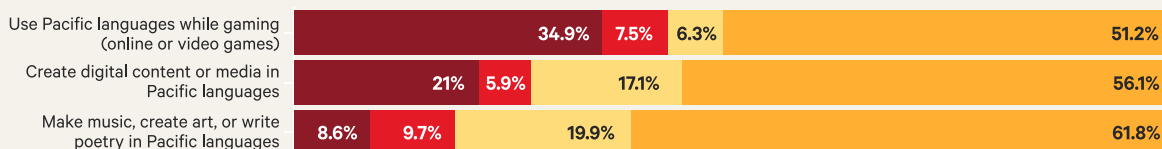
Creative arts

Around half of participants reported using te taetae ni Kiribati at least occasionally while playing video games, while 44% reported creating digital content in the language at least sometimes.

Figure 29 – Engagement in creative arts

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Attitudes towards Pacific language media

Technology was viewed highly as a tool for connection and preservation. Most participants (85%) reported that they found digital technology, media, and the internet were helping them connect to their Pacific languages and cultures.

Digital platforms like messaging apps and video calls help maintain language use across borders, especially for those separated from family or homeland.

“With the availability of the internet, we have opportunities to communicate in Kiribati to those outside New Zealand.”

Figure 30 – Attitudes towards Pacific language media**Attitudes to Pacific languages and media:**

● Agree ● Not agree

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**

However, participants also expressed concerns about the impact of digital technology. Around half believed that digital platforms and the internet pose a threat to te taetae ni Kiribati, particularly through the dominance of English-language media, which can reduce everyday exposure to Kiribati for younger generations.

“Technologies such as phones and movies influence young people in speaking the language. It is much easier for them to understand because it is in English.”

Participants emphasised that language retention depends on consistent use and cultural reinforcement, rather than geography or access alone:

“Other people might have returned home and could not speak Kiribati or were not fluent... they admired that I have been away for many years, and my Kiribati language remains pure.”

Te taetae ni Kiribati in the New Zealand context

“New Zealand is a multi-cultural society, and many jobs now are looking for someone who speaks more than one language.”

In New Zealand, the use of te taetae ni Kiribati extends beyond homes and communities into wider society. This includes recreation, public services, and government institutions. While there are opportunities for cultural affirmation, the visibility of the language remains limited, and systemic support is needed to ensure its survival and growth.

Wider society

Multilingualism was viewed as a valued asset in New Zealand society. Participants recognised that speaking te taetae ni Kiribati, alongside other languages, is increasingly seen as an asset in New Zealand’s diverse workforce and society. It enhances cultural sensitivity and broadens perspectives.

Participants saw multilingualism as a strength that enhances cultural sensitivity and broadens perspectives. Most participants agreed that bilingualism was beneficial in New Zealand (95%) and that Pacific languages are an important part of New Zealand’s national identity (90%).

Most participants agreed they felt comfortable using their Pacific languages around non-Pacific people (71%) and that it is important to master foreign languages beyond English (62%).

Figure 31 - Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ society:

● Agree ● Not agree



Language, identity, and politeness dynamics

Most participants (86%) agreed it is important to speak your Pacific language(s) as a Pacific person. Just over a half (55%) felt it is impolite to use Pacific languages around people who do not understand them, while 19% thought that if a person is not fluent in their Pacific language(s) they should not speak it at all. These findings reflect the tension between cultural pride and social norms in public spaces.

Figure 32 – Language, identity and politeness

Attitudes to Pacific language use:

● Agree ● Not agree



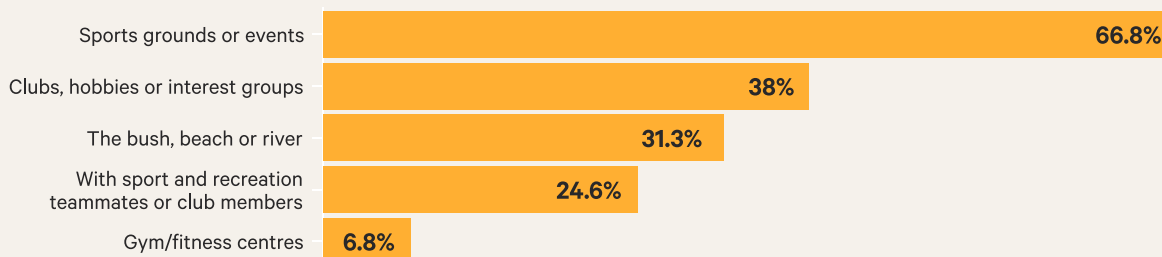
Language use in recreation settings

Recreational spaces were important for informal language use. Recreational activities like traditional games and sports are informal but powerful avenues for language use and learning, especially among youth.

“Sport is also essential in maintaining the language, for example, explaining the rules of oreano (traditional game).”

Participants were asked where they had used Pacific languages in the past 12 months. Recreational settings emerged as a key space for language use among i-Kiribati in wider New Zealand. Two-thirds of participants (67%) reported using Pacific languages at sporting events, while 38% reported using them when engaging with clubs, hobbies, or interest groups.

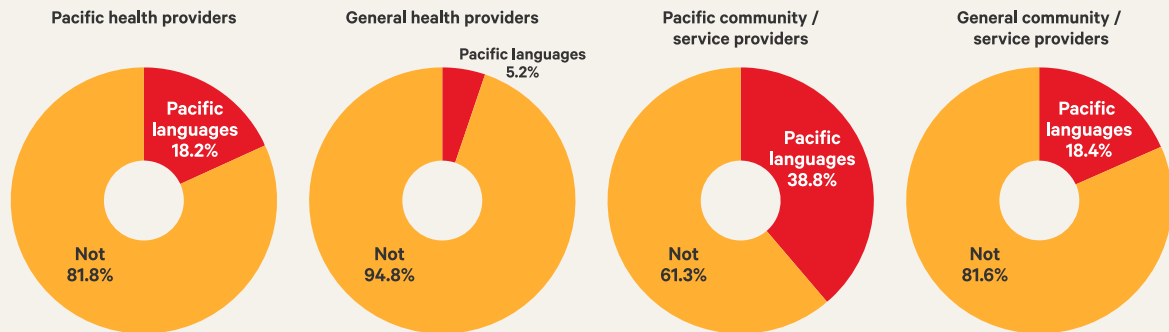
Figure 33 – Pacific language use in recreational settings



Language use with service providers

Participants were more likely to use Pacific languages with Pacific service providers (39%) than with general ones (18%). Using Pacific languages was more commonly reported with social or community service providers compared to health service providers.

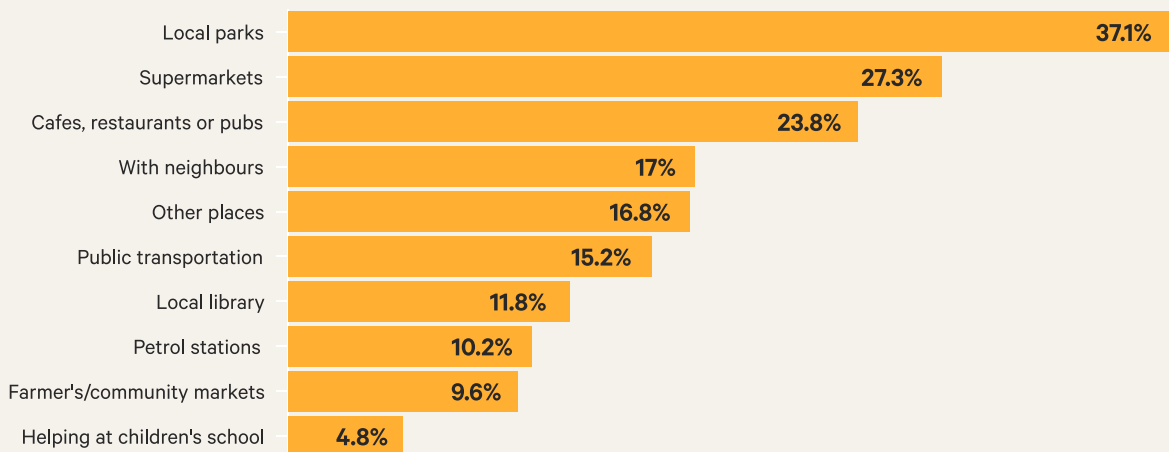
Figure 34 – Pacific language use with health and community service providers



Language use in public settings

Use of Pacific languages in everyday public spaces was limited. In terms of local community locations, 37% of participants reported using Pacific languages at local parks, while 27% used them at supermarkets and 24% at cafes, restaurants and pubs.

Figure 35 – Pacific language use in public settings



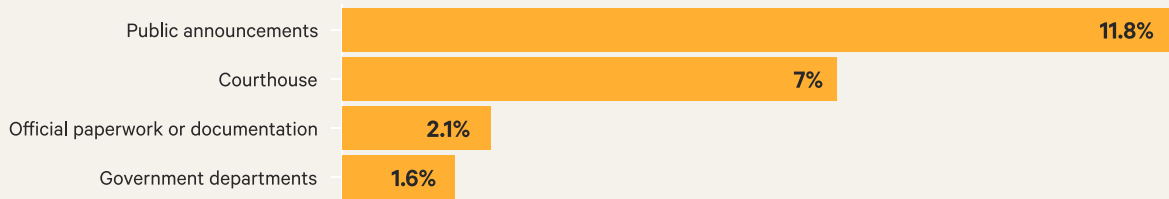
New Zealand Government

Engagement with the New Zealand Government was the domain in which i-Kiribati participants were least likely to use Pacific languages. Participants attributed this to the limited visibility of te taetae ni Kiribati in government forms and services, especially when compared with the greater presence of languages such as Samoan and Tongan.

Only 7% reported using Pacific languages in a courthouse setting, while 2% used them while completing official documentation or when engaging with government departments.

Figure 36 – Pacific language use in official and/or government settings

Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

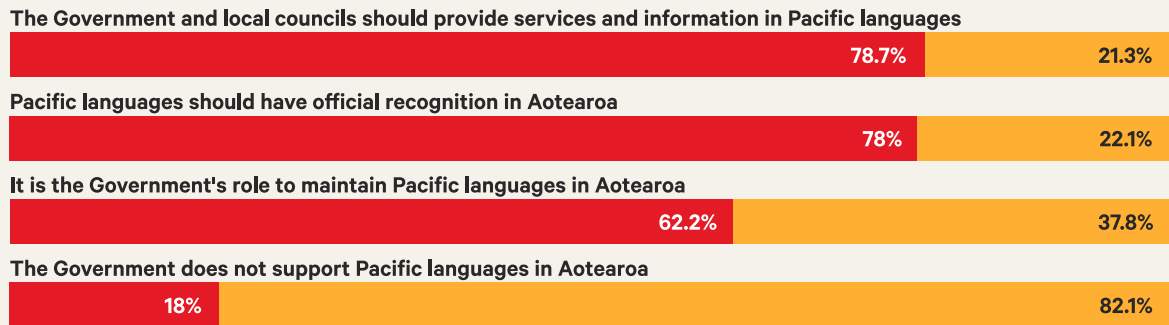


I-Kiribati participants agreed that Government and local councils should provide services and information in Pacific languages (79%). More than three-quarters (78%) felt that Pacific languages should have official recognition in New Zealand. Nearly two-thirds agreed that the Government had a role to maintain Pacific languages in (62%), while 18% believed the Government does not support Pacific languages in New Zealand.

Figure 37 – Attitudes towards Pacific language use in official and/or government settings

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ Government:

● Agree ● Not agree



Barriers and enablers

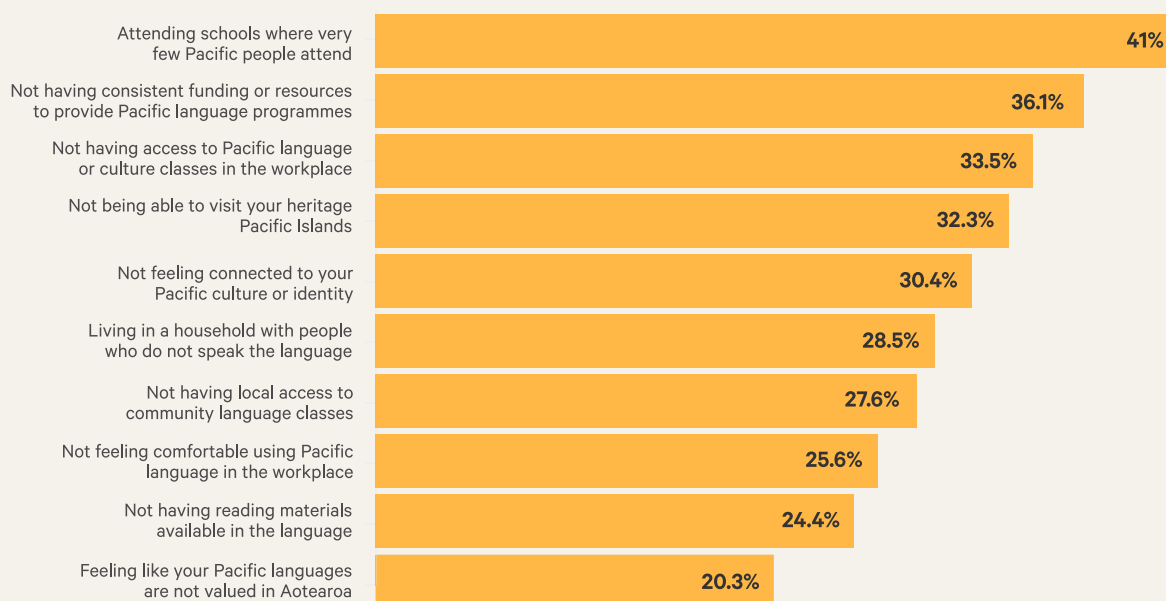
This section explores the challenges and supports that influence the vitality of te taetae ni Kiribati in New Zealand. It highlights the lived realities of i-Kiribati communities navigating language retention in diaspora settings.

Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati

“I want to speak Kiribati, but I feel embarrassed because I don’t speak it well.”

Participants identified a range of barriers that make it difficult to use, learn, and maintain te taetae ni Kiribati.

Figure 38 – Reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati

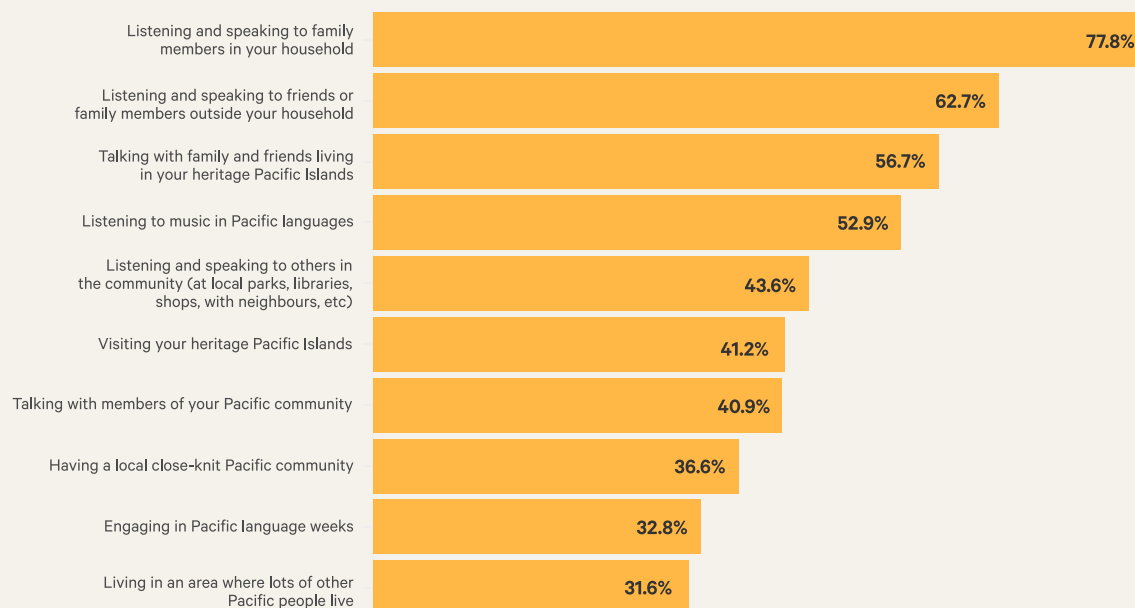


Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati

“When I hear my language spoken, I feel like I belong.”

Despite these challenges, participants also identified powerful enablers that support language use and learning. Figure 39 highlights the top 10 reported enablers.

Figure 39 – Reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te taetae ni Kiribati



These enablers foster a sense of belonging and pride and help reinforce intergenerational transmission.

Conclusion

Te taetae ni Kiribati, like other Pacific languages in New Zealand, is at a pivotal moment in its preservation and revitalisation journey. The language remains a deep source of pride, identity, and emotional wellbeing for i-Kiribati communities. Yet, its long-term survival is under threat, particularly among younger generations born in New Zealand.

It is within this context that this report was developed. Alongside the overarching Leo Moana o Aotearoa Report, it provides a snapshot of the current state of te taetae ni Kiribati, as reflected in participants' use of and attitudes toward the language in New Zealand.

Drawing on findings from the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey and talanoa, the report highlights both the resilience and vulnerability of te taetae ni Kiribati across key domains, including the home, church, education, workplace, media, community, and wider society. While strong emotional and cultural ties to the language remain, its everyday use continues to be challenged by barriers such as limited access to formal education, a lack of qualified teachers, minimal visibility in government services, and the dominance of English in public life. At the same time, the findings point to important enablers, including intergenerational transmission in the home, community-led events, digital platforms, and a strong desire among i-Kiribati to pass the language on to future generations.

By exploring these critical dimensions of language vitality, the report offers an essential evidence base to inform responsive policy and practice that meets the needs of i-Kiribati both now and into the future. To support the practical application of the 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 te taetae ni Kiribati and i-Kiribati. 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

Promote and celebrate te taetae ni Kiribati in schools and workplaces

While 76% of participants would send their children to Kiribati language-based schools, only 23% had access to Pacific language education. In workplaces, 50% used the language with colleagues, but many felt discouraged from doing so.

Recommendations:

- Integrate Kiribati language into ECE, primary, and secondary school curricula.
- Promote Kiribati Language Week in schools and workplaces.
- Encourage employers to recognise Pacific languages as professional assets.
- Provide cultural competency training that includes Kiribati language and values.

Identify and promote employment opportunities for language speakers

Many i-Kiribati provide cultural advice or translation in their workplaces, yet few roles formally recognise these skills.

Recommendations:

- Create pathways for Kiribati speakers in education, health, and public service roles.
- Recognise bilingualism as a qualification in job applications.
- Fund internships and scholarships for Kiribati-speaking professionals.

Make language learning resources accessible online and in libraries

Participants expressed a strong desire for accessible resources, especially for those disconnected from community networks.

Recommendations:

- Develop and distribute bilingual storybooks, dictionaries, and learning apps.
- Ensure libraries stock Kiribati language materials.
- Create online platforms for self-paced learning and community engagement.

Provide opportunities to teach te taetae ni Kiribati

While 83% of participants were proficient speakers, writing and reading skills were lower, especially among youth.

Recommendations:

- Establish community-led language classes across regions.
- Support peer-to-peer learning and mentorship programmes.
- Fund training for Kiribati language teachers and tutors.

Ensure public documents are culturally responsive

Participants noted the lack of Kiribati language visibility in government services and official documents.

Recommendations:

- Translate key public documents into te taetae ni Kiribati.
- Establish a peer review panel of Kiribati language experts.
- Collaborate with government agencies to ensure cultural accuracy and relevance.

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 i-Kiribati can learn and use te taetae ni Kiribati:

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 Kiribati Survey sample

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

Total	86	
Northern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	4	3
25-44 years	5	6
45-64 years	2	2
65+ years	0	0
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	5	4
25-44 years	7	8
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	0	1
Central Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	2	1
25-44 years	2	3
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	0	0
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	2	2
25-44 years	3	4
45-64 years	2	1
65+ years	0	0
Southern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	0	0
25-44 years	1	1
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	0	0
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	1	1
25-44 years	1	1
45-64 years	1	0
65+ years	0	0

Final Kiribati Survey sample

The following table reflects the actual Survey sample.

Total	122	
	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
	55	67
NZ-BORN	9	14
OVERSEAS-BORN	47	52
15-24 years	18	17
25-44 years	15	33
45-64 years	22	16
65+ years	0	1
Northern Regions	34	40
Central Regions	17	21
Southern Regions	5	5



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

