

Leo Moana o Aotearoa

Gagana Sāmoa report



Ministry for
Pacific Peoples

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

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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 Sāmoa (people of Sāmoan 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 Sāmoan community as captured through talanoa with its members across New Zealand. As part of these talanoa, Sāmoan community members answered questions about their attitudes towards gagana Sāmoa (the Samoan 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.

High-level findings are as follows:

Language proficiency

Proficiency in gagana Sāmoa was moderate, with over half of participants reporting they could speak, understand, read, and write the language at least fairly well. This finding can be viewed with cautious optimism, as it contrasts with the sharp declines in proficiency reported across all categories in relation to other Pacific languages.

Gagana Sāmoa in the home and with family

The critical role of the home and family in maintaining gagana Sāmoa was highlighted. Reported use of the language with family members at least as often as English was moderately high, particularly with elders.

Gagana Sāmoa in church

Church remains a stronghold of language use, maintenance, and transmission for tagata Sāmoa, with around half of participants who attended weekly reporting that services, bible studies, and other activities are held in gagana Sāmoa.

Gagana Sāmoa in education settings

Education plays a crucial role in the maintenance and revitalisation of gagana Sāmoa. Nearly all participants reported they would send their children to ECE, primary, and secondary schools where they could be taught in the language if given the opportunity. Underlying this desire for more bilingual and immersion provision was, perhaps, the concerning finding that less than half of participants reported ever using gagana Sāmoa across primary and secondary school.

Gagana Sāmoa in the workplace

Pacific languages and cultures are becoming increasingly visible in workplaces. However, ethnicity-based discrimination is a lived experience for many, and the perception that English is the language of professional success remains prevalent.

Gagana Sāmoa in and with Pacific communities

Community was identified as an important domain for gagana Sāmoa, with most participants reporting they use the language at least sometimes when taking part in community events.

Gagana Sāmoa in media and broadcasting

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

Gagana Sāmoa in the New Zealand context

Most participants believe that bilingualism is beneficial to New Zealand, and that gagana Sāmoa 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 Sāmoa in New Zealand.

Introduction

*“E te iloa le tagata i lana gagana”
“You know a person through their language”*

Gagana Sāmoa

Sāmoa and New Zealand share a special relationship that is reflected through the Treaty of Friendship signed by both countries in 1962. This Treaty is a commitment to partnership, friendship, and the mutual effort to realise better opportunities for tagata Sāmoa. Language plays a critical role in this endeavour.

Tagata Sāmoa are one of the fastest growing and largest Pacific populations in New Zealand – 48% of all Pacific people in New Zealand as of the 2023 Census – such that there are now nearly as many tagata Sāmoa living in the diaspora than in the home islands. The future of gagana Sāmoa, therefore, depends on how well it is maintained in New Zealand.

Gagana Sāmoa holds a vital place in New Zealand’s cultural landscape, especially among the country’s vibrant Pacific communities. It is one of the most widely spoken Pacific languages in New Zealand, reflecting the strong presence and cultural influence of the Sāmoan community.

With deep roots in family, faith, and identity, gagana Sāmoa plays a crucial role in maintaining intergenerational connections and cultural continuity. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of its value, with initiatives such as Sāmoa Language Week, bilingual education programs, and community-led efforts aimed at revitalising and sustaining the language.

Purpose and objectives

The Leo Moana o Aotearoa project investigates the use of, and attitudes towards, Pacific languages in New Zealand. This report provides contemporary insights into the vitality of gagana Sāmoa among tagata Sāmoa residing in New Zealand.

Complementing the initial [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report](#), this document focusses specifically on gagana Sāmoa and the experiences of tagata Sāmoa and Samoan communities across New Zealand. It presents the perspectives of survey (n = 1,043) and talanoa (n = 35) participants, exploring their use of and attitudes towards the language across various domains.

The findings aim to inform current and future efforts to strengthen gagana Sāmoa and enhance the wellbeing of tagata Sāmoa 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 tagata Sāmoa.

Sample

The target population for the survey and talanoa is a representative sample of the tagata Sāmoa population, according to data from the 2018 Census (see Appendix 2 for the Sāmoan 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 Sāmoa can learn and use gagana Sāmoa. 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 Sāmoan community members across New Zealand. The survey questionnaire¹ 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 Sāmoan community-based researchers.

Data analysis

Overall response rate

A total of 3,039 people completed the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey, 1,043 of whom were tagata Sāmoa. 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.

The results for the tagata Sāmoa participant survey (n = 1,043) have been weighted against the total tagata Sāmoa population in New Zealand as at the 2018 Census. They are therefore representative of the total domestic tagata Sāmoa 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.

¹ The full list of Survey questions is provided in the *Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report* (pp. 92 – 103)

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 tagata Sāmoa participant cohort (n = 1,043). 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 Sāmoa only vs. Multi-Pacific vs. Multi-ethnic)²
- Region (Wellington vs. Auckland vs. Elsewhere)
- Birthplace (New Zealand-born vs. Overseas-born)

Only significant differences within the tagata Sāmoa 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 Sāmoan 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 Sāmoa 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.

² 'Multi-Pacific' refers to when a participant has selected Sāmoan and any other Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Sāmoan and Tongan.
'Multi-Ethnic' refers to when a participant has selected Sāmoan and any non-Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Sāmoan and New Zealand European.

Demography

This section provides a demographic overview of the tagata Sāmoa participants in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey. Understanding age, gender, birthplace, and ethnic identity helps contextualise the findings and ensures the voices represented reflect the diversity within the Samoan community.

Who took part in the survey?

A total of 1,043 tagata Sāmoa participants took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey. As at the 2018 Census, there were 182,721 tagata Sāmoa residing in New Zealand. This means that at the time of the Survey, around 0.49% of the tagata Sāmoa population aged 15+ participated in the survey.

Figure 1 – Tagata Sāmoa participant summary

1,043

Samoan participants

Youth (15–24) made up the largest age group, representing 30% of participants

Identified as:

51% Female

49% Male

0.4% Other

71% New Zealand born

43% Multiple ethnicities

63%
Auckland

19%
Wellington



Age and gender

Nearly one-third of participants (30%) were 15-24 years old, while 52% were 25-54 years old. The remaining participants (18%) were aged 55 years or older. Gender was evenly distributed, with 51% of participants identifying as female, 49% identifying as male, and an additional 0.4% identifying as a gender beyond the binary.

Birthplace and region

Almost two-thirds of participants (63%) reported residing in Auckland, and 19% reported living in Wellington. Only small proportions reported living in Northland or Waikato (7%), Canterbury (6%), or elsewhere in the North Island or South Island (5%). Nearly three-quarters of participants (71%) reported being NZ-born, while 29% were born overseas.

Ethnic identity

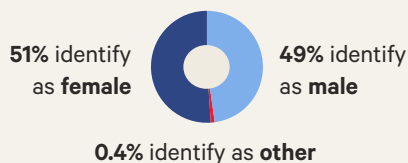
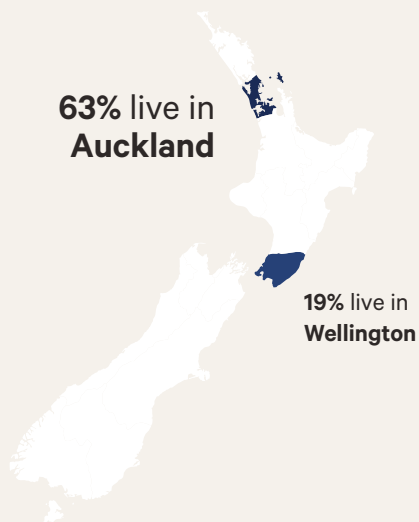
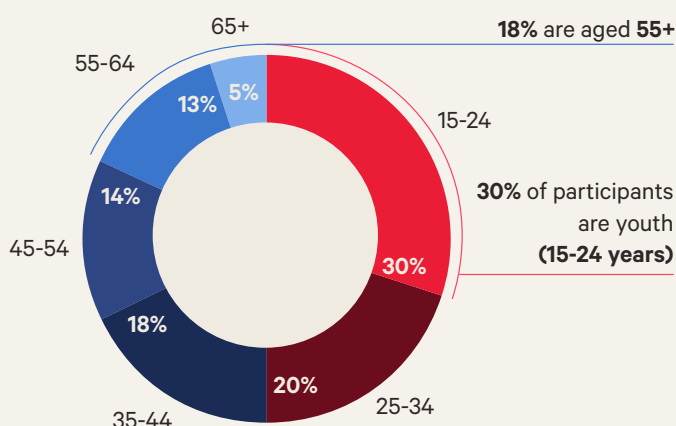
Over half of participants identified solely as tagata Sāmoa (57%), while 43% identified as having at least one other ethnicity. The most common additional ethnicities of participants were Tokelauan (12%), New Zealand European (10%), Tongan (9%), and Niuean (8%).

Survey overview

Gagana Samoa

Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey overview

1,043 Samoans took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey



71% were born in New Zealand **43%** are multi-ethnic

Overview of Pacific language use in Aotearoa New Zealand

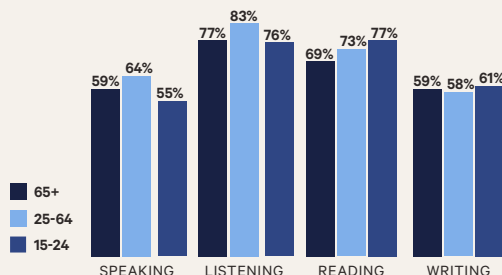
68% report being **proficient in at least one Pacific language.**

50% learned Gagana Samoa as a **first language**

94% say using their heritage language is **important to their wellbeing**

70% are concerned Gagana Samoa is **in danger of being lost in Aotearoa**

38% are concerned Gagana Samoa is **in danger of being lost in Samoa**



Unlike many other Pacific languages, **youth rate their proficiency in Gagana Samoa as high as older generations**

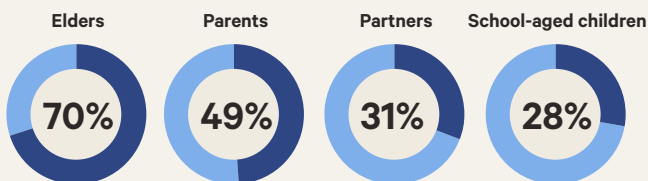
97% believe it is **important for our children and future generations** to speak our Pacific languages

51% **speak to children** in their households using **Pacific languages**

Gagana Samoa use in Aotearoa New Zealand, in depth

Home & Family

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



33% live in **multigenerational households**

64% discuss **Pacific genealogies and family histories** at home.

83% agree that Pacific languages are safe as long as they are **spoken in the home**

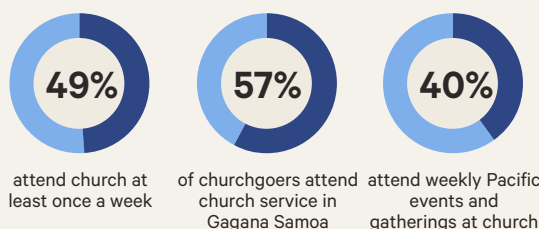
Religion

Top religious affiliations

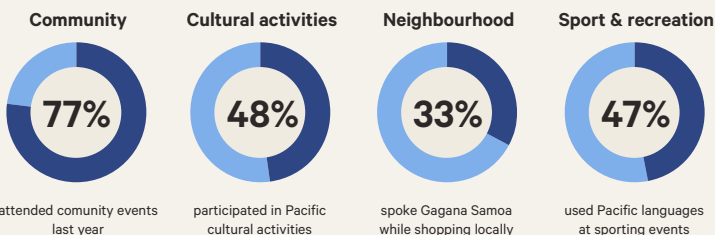
35% Christian (no specific denomination)

22% Catholicism

20% Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed



Communities



15% have never visited Samoa

86% have hosted Samoans in NZ

Media

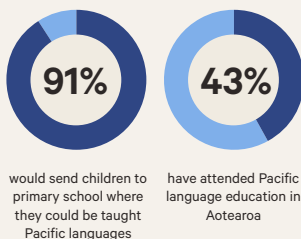
83% digital technology, media and the Internet **help connect** to Pacific languages

35% digital technology, media and the Internet **are threatening** Pacific languages

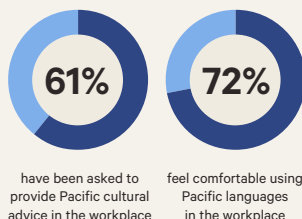
73% **listen to music in Pacific languages** every week

42% **send text messages and emails** in Gagana Samoa every week

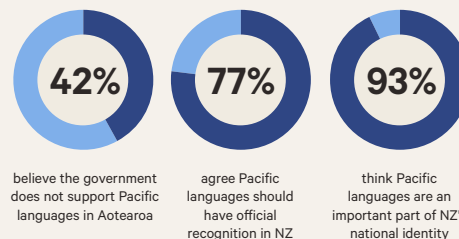
School



Work



Government



Enablers What activities are most helpful for Samoans to engage with Gagana Samoa?

84% listening and speaking with family & friends **59%** listening to music in Pacific languages **54%** visiting heritage Pacific islands **44%** engaging with language weeks

Barriers What gets in the way of engaging with Gagana Samoa?

38% not feeling connected to your Pacific culture or identity **36%** not having access to Pacific language or culture classes in the workplace **35%** not having consistent funding or resources to provide Pacific language programmes **32%** not knowing where to start

Gagana Sāmoa

“Language to me is like alofa... it encapsulates the idea of love. It’s my way of being, and my way of knowing.”

Figure 2 – Gagana Sāmoa summary

97 % believe Pacific languages are important for future generations

94 % say using their heritage language is important to their wellbeing

Unlike many other Pacific languages, youth report having a similar language proficiency as older generations



68 % report being proficient in at least one Pacific language

51 % use Pacific languages when speaking to children at home

50 % learned Gagana Sāmoa as a first language

70 % fear Gagana Sāmoa is at risk in Aotearoa

38 % fear Gagana Sāmoa is at risk in Sāmoa

Gagana Sāmoa

This section introduces the central focus of the report: gagana Sāmoa. It explores the current state of the language among tagata Sāmoa in New Zealand, including self-reported proficiency, multilingualism, and the deep cultural and emotional connections participants have with their language. It also highlights the importance of gagana Sāmoa as a marker of identity, a source of wellbeing, and a vital link to heritage and intergenerational knowledge.

Proficiency in gagana Sāmoa

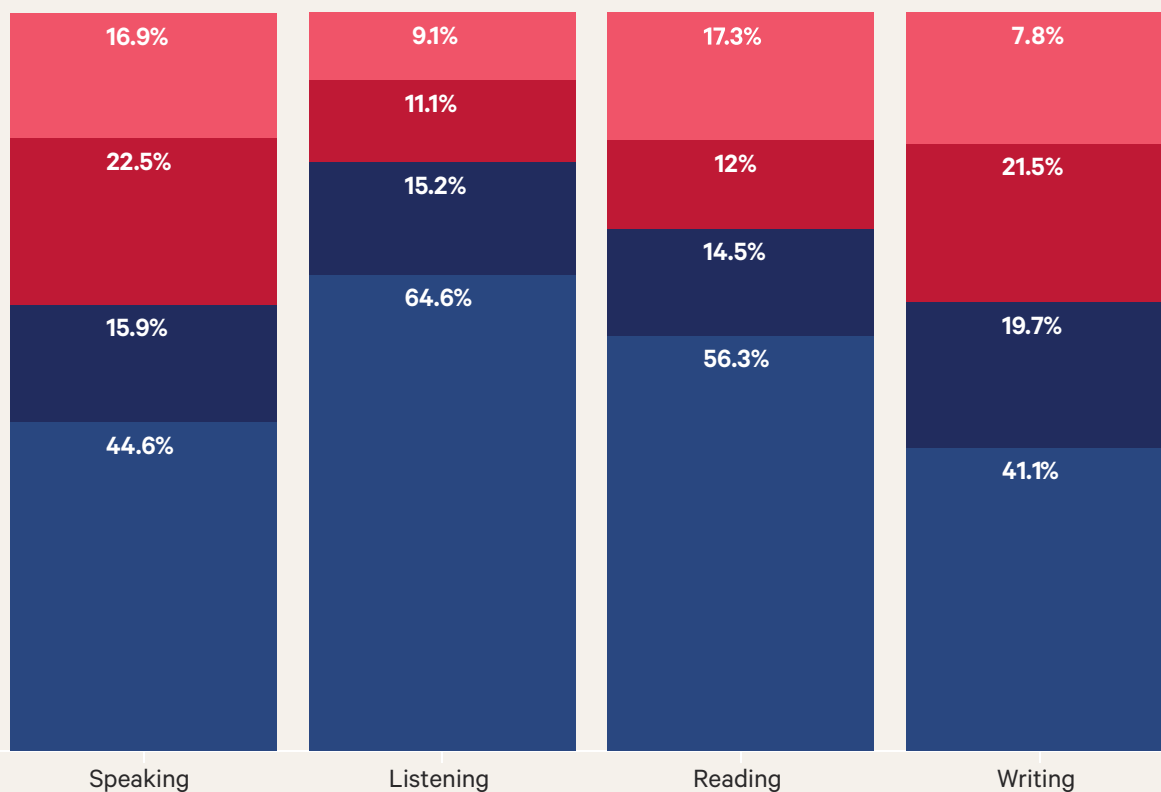
To capture language proficiency, participants were asked to self-rate their abilities to speak, listen, read, and write in gagana Sāmoa. A scale of 'very well', 'well', 'fairly well', 'not so well', and 'only a few words or phrases' was used, and participants who selected 'very well', 'well', or 'fairly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

A large proportion of participants (61%) reported being able to speak gagana Sāmoa proficiently, and 45% could do so well or very well. An even higher proportion (80%) reported being able to understand gagana Sāmoa at least fairly well when spoken to them. Nearly three-quarters (71%) reported being able to read the language, and 61% said they could write it fairly well. In fact, 6% of participants even chose to take the entire survey in gagana Sāmoa!

Figure 3 – Proficiency in gagana Sāmoa

Gagana Samoa Proficiency:

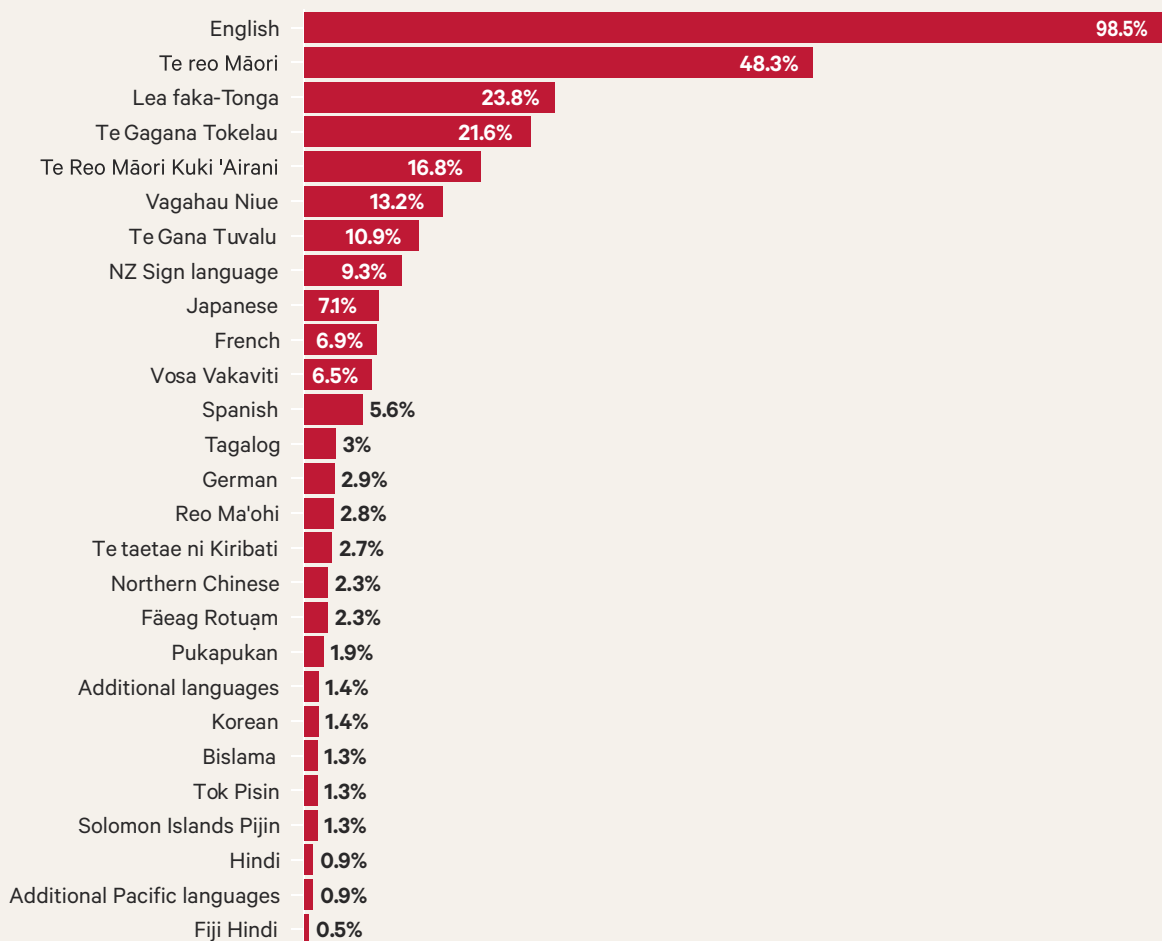
● Very well/well ● Fairly well ● Not so well ● Only a few words or phrases



Proficiency in other languages

Responses indicated high levels of multilingualism in participants. Nearly half (48%) reported being familiar with te reo Māori, and 9% reported the same for New Zealand Sign Language. The Pacific languages tagata Sāmoa most reported being familiar with other than gagana Sāmoa were lea faka-Tonga (24%), te gagana Tokelau (22%), and te reo Māori Kūki 'Airani (17%).

Figure 4 – Multilingualism among tagata Sāmoa



Language acquisition

Half (50%) of the Sāmoan participants reported learning gagana Sāmoa as a first language, and 21% did so before starting school.

Language, identity, and culture

Gagana Sāmoa was viewed extremely positively by survey participants, and widely considered to be a significant part of Sāmoan identity and culture. Nearly all tagata Sāmoa agreed that: they are proud to be Pacific (99%); gagana Sāmoa is an important language (99%); gagana Sāmoa is important for their wellbeing (94%); and the language that best connects them to their culture is gagana Sāmoa (92%).

“Understand[ing] our culture in depth, why our people are the way they are, why our lives are the way they are [...] I think language enables us to have that connection and understanding.”

Many participants highlighted the links between their language, culture, and identity. Specifically, they emphasised how their language grounds them in their identity in a fast-moving and changing world, instilling them with strength and confidence.

“Being able to speak your language makes you more confident in yourself and in your identity, which makes you more stable in your wellbeing.”

Participants also shared how the Sāmoan language expresses concepts like *fa’aaloalo* (respect), *vā* (relational space), and *alofa* (love), and described speaking Sāmoan as healing and spiritually grounding:

“Language to me is like alofa... it encapsulates the idea of love. It’s my way of being, and my way of knowing.”

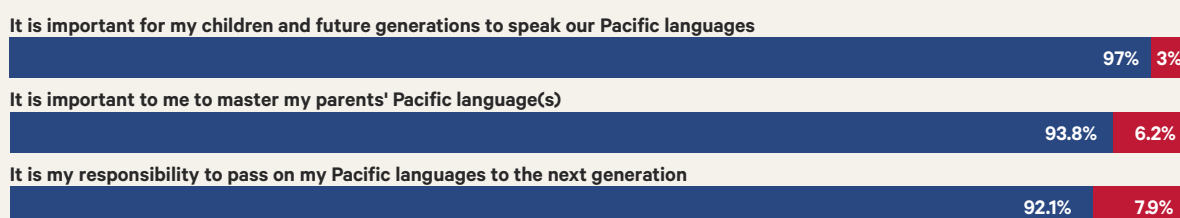
Intergenerational transmission

Gagana Sāmoa was seen as a gift from ancestors. Preserving the language was viewed as a duty to future generations. Nearly all (97%) participants agreed that it is important for their children and future generations to speak gagana Sāmoa. Similar proportions agreed it is important to master their parents’ Pacific language (94%) and that it is their responsibility to pass this on to the next generation (92%).

Figure 5 – Attitudes towards language maintenance and transmission

Attitudes to heritage language maintenance:

● Agree ● Not agree



With many elders only being able to speak limited English, participants emphasised proficiency in gagana Sāmoa as an enabling factor for maintaining intergenerational connections and ensuring that cultural knowledge is passed on.

“For me it means connection and involvement. My grandparents don’t speak English, and there would be no way to communicate with them if I didn’t know Sāmoan.”

Grandparents and parents were highlighted as key enablers of language transmission.

“My grandparents don’t speak English... there would be no way to communicate with them if I didn’t know Sāmoan.”

Language loss

Just as language knowledge can positively influence wellbeing, so too can its absence have a negative impact. Language loss, whether anticipated or realised, can have a detrimental effect on wellbeing, participants shared, with strength and confidence giving way to feelings of shame, resentment, and disconnectedness.

“My wellbeing was impacted because I didn’t know my language, and this was a lot for me growing up. I ended up hating people, hating the church my parents were at, and just developing negative emotions as a response. Now I put up a wall around myself when I am in those spaces.”

Nearly all participants (91%) agreed it would matter to them if gagana Sāmoa were lost altogether. Over two-thirds (70%) believed such loss is in danger of happening in New Zealand, though 38% felt the same in relation to the Pacific Islands.

Figure 6 – Attitudes towards language loss

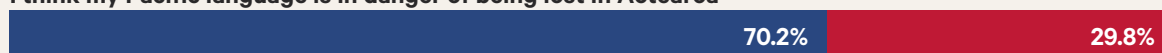
Attitudes to heritage language loss:

● 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





Gagana Sāmoa in the home and with family

“Growing up, I would listen to my grandparents and hear only the Sāmoan language. Those were the times I was beginning to speak as well. As a child, I learnt Sāmoan first, because that was the language that surrounded me.”

The home is a foundational space for language acquisition and cultural transmission. This section examines how gagana Sāmoa is used within households, both in childhood and contemporary contexts, and the attitudes that shape its use. It highlights the role of elders, family dynamics, and household composition in supporting or limiting language use, and underscores the importance of maintaining gagana Sāmoa as a living language within families.

Childhood household composition and language use

Over two-thirds (70%) of tagata Sāmoa reported growing up in solely Sāmoan homes. Of the remaining proportion, 19% reported growing up with people of mixed Pacific heritage (multi-Pacific), and 11% grew up in a household with people of Pacific and non-Pacific heritage.

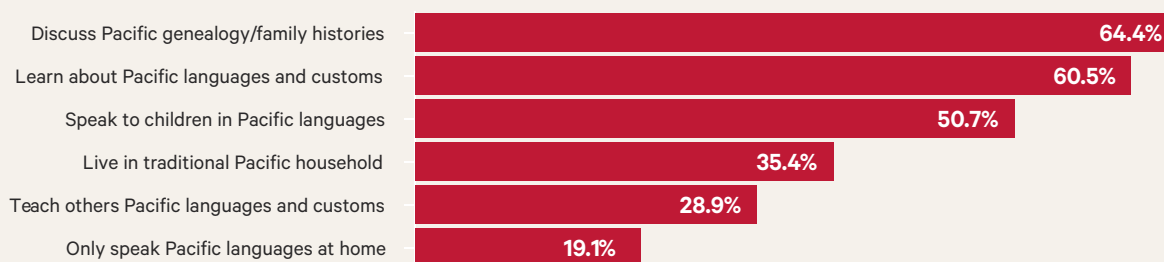
Most participants (71%) reported their childhood home was traditionally Pacific, and 76% said that children were mostly spoken to in gagana Sāmoa growing up. More than one-third (37%) reported their household had a rule where only gagana Sāmoa could be spoken.

Contemporary household composition and language use

In the current day, 33% of participants reported living in a multigenerational household. The most common household sizes were 2-5 other people (43%) and 5-6 other people (28%).

Over half of participants (51%) reported that speaking to children in gagana Sāmoa is common in their household, and 64% reported they had spent time discussing Pacific genealogies and/or family histories in the past year.

Figure 7 – Language activities in the home and with family

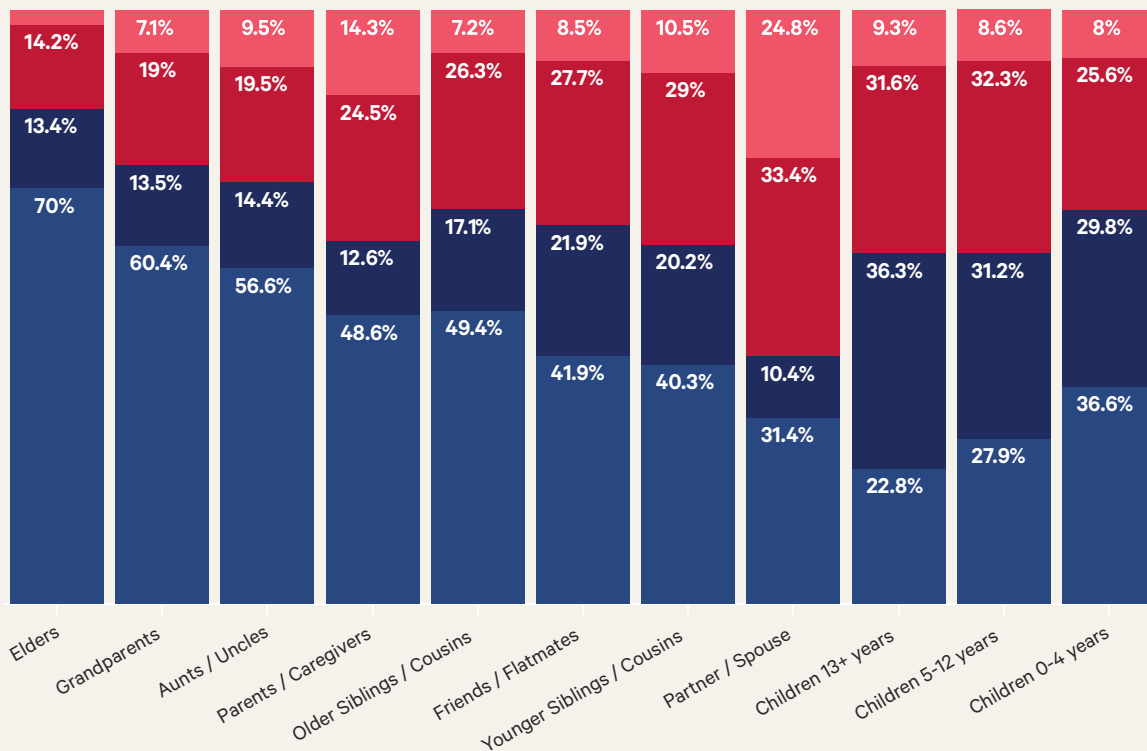


When asked how much of their communication in the home was conducted in their Pacific language compared with English, almost all reported using gagana Sāmoa at least sometimes with elders (98%), grandparents (93%), aunts/uncles (91%), and older siblings/cousins (93%). Participants were most likely to report *never* using gagana Sāmoa with their partner/spouse (25%).

Figure 8 – Language use in the home and with family

Household Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Evening prayers and the Bible as language tools

The Bible and evening prayers were identified as powerful tools for language learning and spiritual connection in homes and families, especially for children and youth.

“We even had regular family prayers, like loku at home, and my dad would make us read the Bible in Sāmoan, and pray in Sāmoan.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home

When asked about the condition of gagana Sāmoa, 83% agreed the language is safe as long as it is spoken in the home. A significantly smaller proportion (14%) believed gagana Sāmoa is only important in the home.

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



Identity and connection in the family

Gagana Sāmoa was seen as a core part of personal and cultural identity, and connecting individuals not only to their heritage, and sense of self, but also to their families.

“The value is being able to speak to my family in the language of our hearts, and that is Sāmoan.”

Intergenerational communication and understanding

The ability to speak gagana Sāmoa enables communication with elders and strengthens intergenerational bonds. Participants also highlighted how gagana Sāmoa helps them to understand the values, sacrifices, and lived experiences of their parents and elders.

“The main drive for learning Sāmoan is to be able to speak to my granddad... My relationship with language is family.”

“When I hear my parents and am able to understand them, I share the emotion behind it... I see that for them it’s life driven.”

Emotional impact of language loss

Some participants shared that not knowing gagana Sāmoa can lead to feelings of disconnection, shame, and emotional distress, especially in family and cultural spaces.

“I am someone that doesn’t use Sāmoan at all... I want to get back to my roots and honour my mum and her family.”



Gagana Sāmoa in church

“I am thankful that another pillar of Sāmoan language revitalisation [...] is the church. Truthfully [...] the reason my children can speak Sāmoan and understand Sāmoan, and the reason they are bilingual, is the church.”

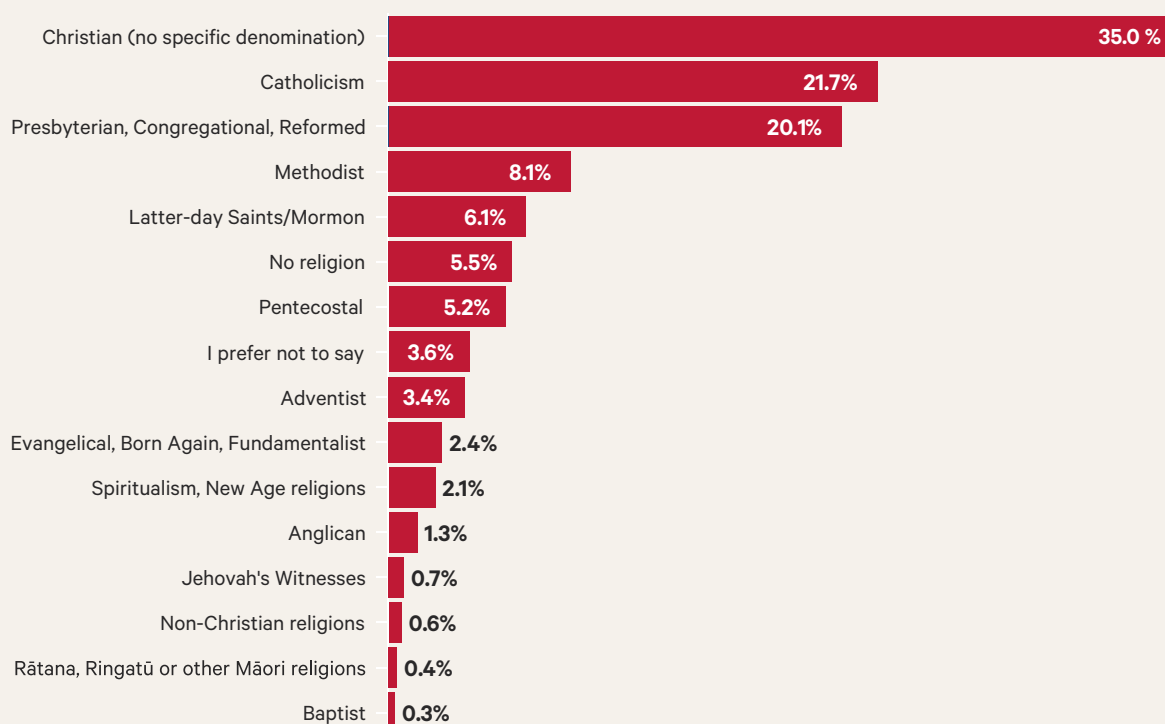
Churches continue to be a powerful domain for the preservation and revitalisation of gagana Sāmoa. This section explores the role of religious institutions in fostering language use through services, Sunday School, and community leadership. It also considers how intergenerational dynamics influence language transmission in church settings and how spiritual practices serve as meaningful avenues for language engagement.

Religion affiliations and church attendance

Participants were asked to report their religious affiliation(s), and could select as many options as were relevant to them. Over one-third (35%) identified as Christian (no denomination specified) and 22% specified Catholicism. Smaller proportions identified as Presbyterian, Congregational, or Reformed (20%), Methodist (8%), and Mormon (6%).

Most participants (90%) reported having at least one religious affiliation, while 10% reported none. Where church attendance is concerned, 80% reported they attend church at least occasionally, while 49% do so on a weekly basis.

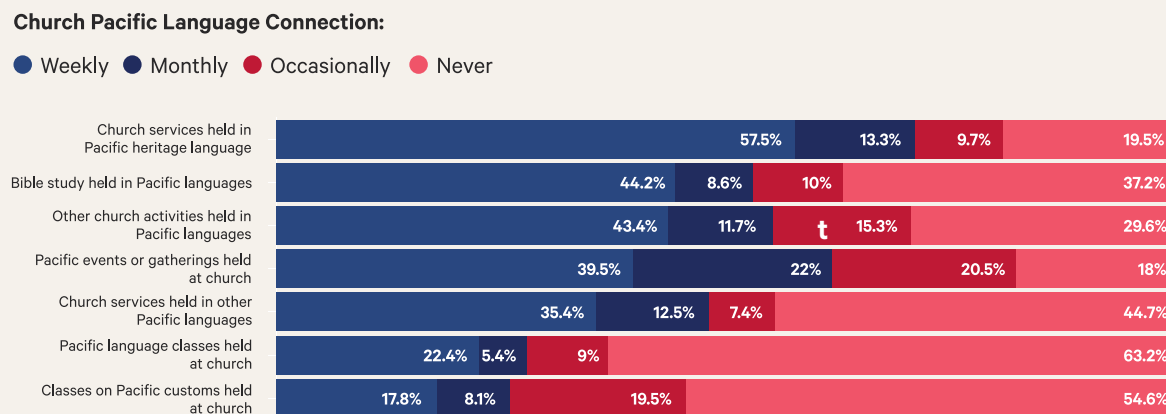
Figure 10 – Religious affiliations among tagata Sāmoa



Pacific language use in church

Over half (58%) of participants who attended church weekly reported that services were held in gagana Sāmoa, and slightly smaller proportions reported bible study (44%) and other church activities (43%) were conducted in the language as well. Just over one-third (35%) reported their church services were held in a Pacific language(s) other than gagana Sāmoa.

Figure 11 – Pacific language use during church services and activities



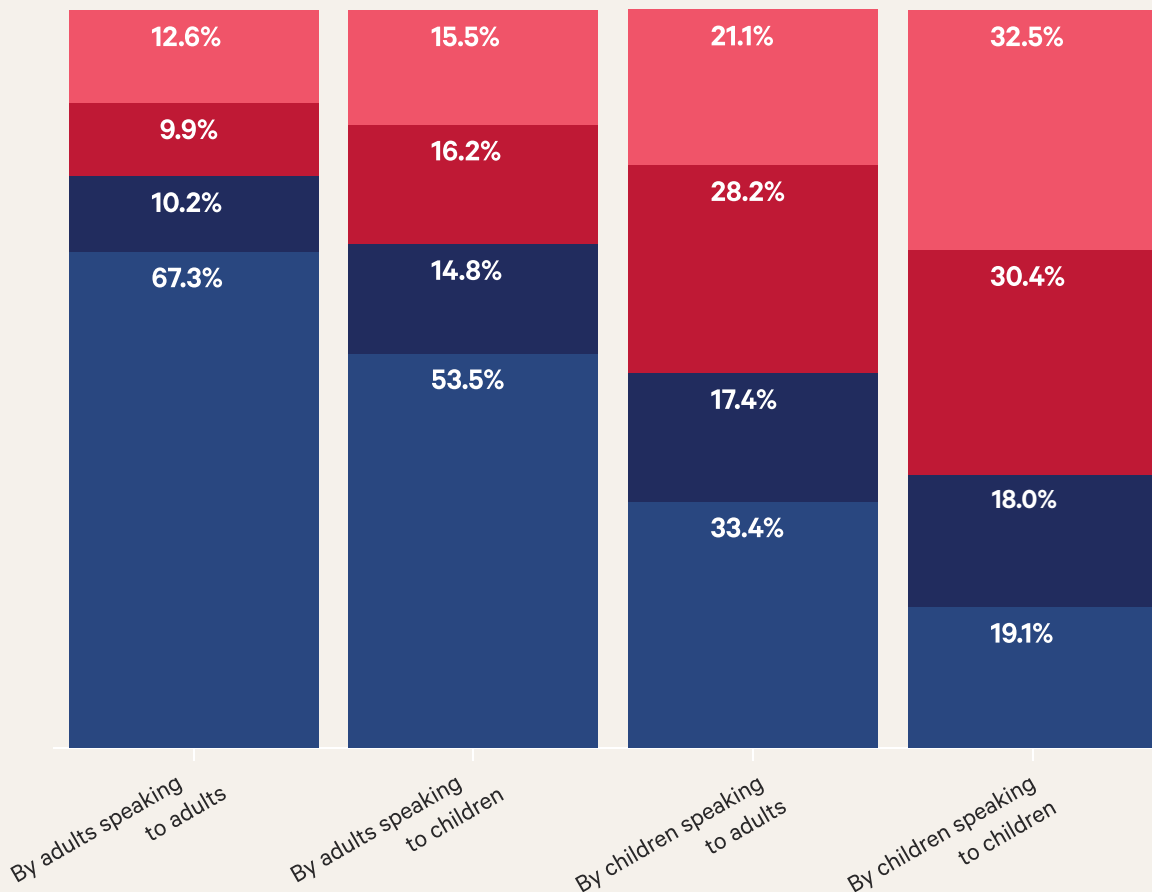
“I also think an enabler for me has been my youth leaders [...] Being able to teach, lead, and execute Sāmoan language programmes in our community [with youth leaders] has been empowering to me.”

There were significant differences between how people communicated with adults compared to children at church. Over two-thirds of participants (67%) reported hearing adults use gagana Sāmoa with other adults most of the time, while only 33% reported hearing children do the same with adults. Over half of participants (54%) reported hearing adults use gagana Sāmoa with children most of the time, while 19% reported hearing children use it with each other as frequently.

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

Church Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Intergenerational influence and role models

Elders, faifeau (ministers), and church leaders are key enablers of language use and cultural pride within church communities.

“My dad is a tulafale and church failautusi... there’s a richness that comes from his words.”

Language learning through Sunday School

Many participants highlighted the important role of Sunday School as a hub for language use, learning, and transmission:

“Growing up [...] I attended Sunday School, learning and speaking Sāmoan there. There were a lot of young leaders at church who helped us learn how to speak the language. It was certainly more Sāmoan than English.”

The Bible as a language resource

Participants also underscored the importance of the bible as a language-learning resource. Specifically, older participants stressed how the holy book was one of the few (if not the only) texts available to them in gagana Sāmoa as children. Its versatility as both a reading and listening aid was emphasised in particular:

“For me, what made it easier was reading the Bible. In Sunday School, this really helped me grow and learn the language.”

Mixed language use and challenges

While many participants highlighted how churches promote gagana Sāmoa, others reported that many Sāmoan churches use English or a mix of languages, which can affect language confidence and participation.

“At church, English is primarily used for ease of communication... but Sāmoan is still used in parts of the service.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church

Most participants (79%) agreed that gagana Sāmoa is a gift from God, and 71% reported that their church is attended by many tagata Sāmoa. Two-thirds (66%) reported feeling comfortable using gagana Sāmoa at church, though 14% agreed the language is only important in that setting.

Figure 13 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church

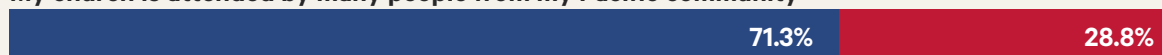
Attitudes to Pacific languages at church:

● Agree ● Not agree

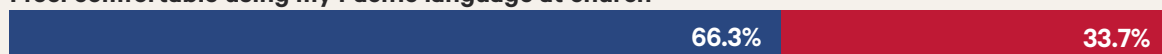
My Pacific language is a gift from God



My church is attended by many people from my Pacific community



I feel comfortable using my Pacific language at church



My Pacific language is only important at church



“When one prays in English, you can run out of words. But when you pray in Sāmoan, that is when you witness the richness and variety of Sāmoan terminology that you can use to speak to God.”

For some, church is a space to reclaim or strengthen their language skills later in life, especially when other avenues are limited.

“Church is one of the few places where I still hear and use Sāmoan regularly.”

Gagana Sāmoa in education settings

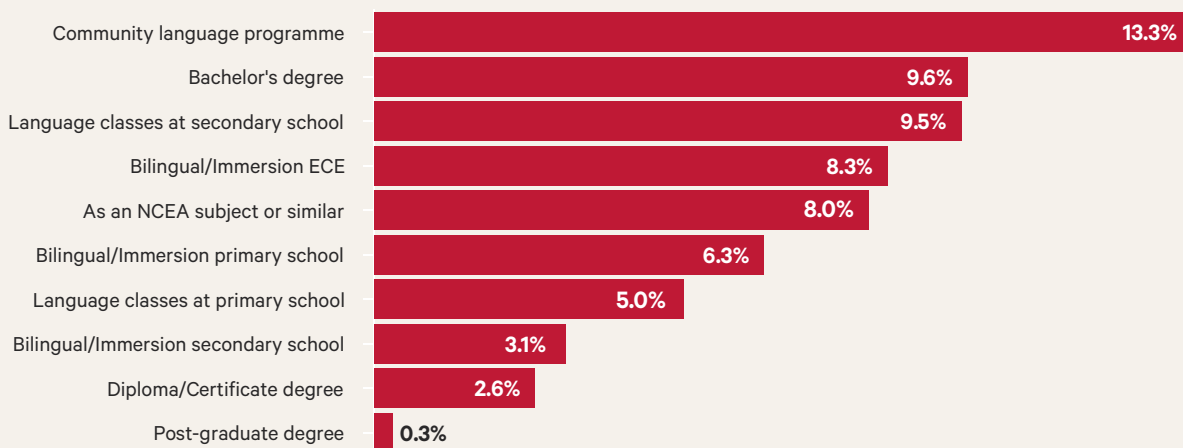
“But in intermediate [school] I felt so proud because we had a Sāmoan group, and we had a Sāmoan teacher who allowed us to speak Sāmoan [...] he would speak to us in Sāmoan, make jokes. Yeah, the intermediate years were better, a different school and a different school culture.”

Education is a critical site for language learning and revitalisation. This section explores participants’ experiences with gagana Sāmoa in early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education. It highlights both the opportunities and gaps in Pacific language education and reflects on how school environments can either support or hinder language development. Participants’ aspirations for more bilingual and immersion pathways are also discussed.

Pacific language education experiences

Almost half (42.4%) of 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 Bachelor’s degree level education (10%), language classes at secondary school (10%), and bilingual or immersion early childhood education (8%).

Figure 14 – Tagata Sāmoa participation in Pacific language education



Over one-third of participants (37%) reported that participation in Pacific language learning at school improved and increased their use of gagana Sāmoa. A higher proportion of participants who identified as multi-ethnic (47%) reported this than who identified as multi-Pacific (34%).

“My youngest daughter [...] goes to a Pasifika school. It is massive. There are so many [...] Sāmoan and Pasifika students at the school [...] and I wish, in hindsight, that I’d given my older girls that experience as well.”

Early childhood and preschool

The role of Sāmoan early childhood education was foundational for many participants, especially through Aoga Amata, in fostering gagana Sāmoa acquisition and cultural grounding.

“Sāmoan and that was because I went to a Aoga Amata before I went to primary. When I then started primary, I was actually in a bilingual class which was Sāmoan and English.”

Primary and secondary school

Exposure to gagana Sāmoa during formative years was viewed as life-changing by many participants:

“But in intermediate [school] I felt so proud because we had a Sāmoan group, and we had a Sāmoan teacher who allowed us to speak Sāmoan [...] he would speak to us in Sāmoan, make jokes. Yeah, the intermediate years were better, a different school and a different school culture.”

Conversely, other participants shared how limited promotion of gagana Sāmoa at school has lastingly impacted their language use, for the worse:

“I went from 100% bilingual to using none of it at all [...] the schools I went to, it was never promoted by teachers [...] English was key because it was inclusive and a language for everyone, and we weren’t allowed to speak Sāmoan because not everyone could understand. So, I went from 100% confident using the gagana to not using it at all.”

Tertiary education and career pathways

Although limited, opportunities to engage with gagana Sāmoa at the tertiary level was highlighted, especially its potential to be recognised as a valuable skill in professional contexts.

“At tertiary and my high school, Sāmoan was definitely celebrated so this made me comfortable.”

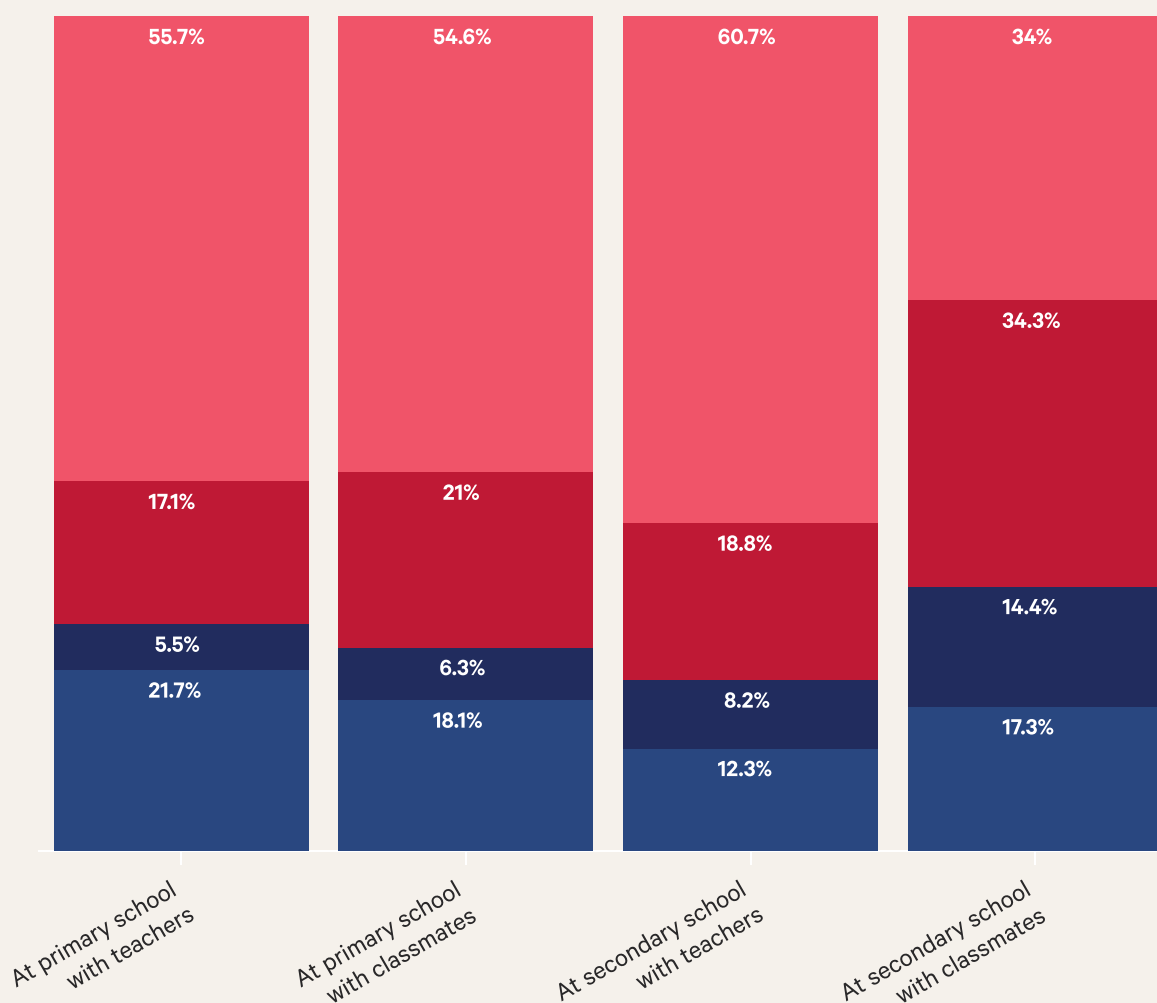
Pacific language use in schools

Participants' use of gagana Sāmoa in education was uncommon compared to other settings. When asked how often conversations were conducted in gagana Sāmoa at primary school, less than half reported they used the language at least sometimes with teachers (44%) and classmates (45%). The results were disparate in relation to secondary school, with a smaller proportion of participants reporting they used the language at least sometimes with teachers (39%) compared to classmates (66%).

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 towards Pacific languages in education

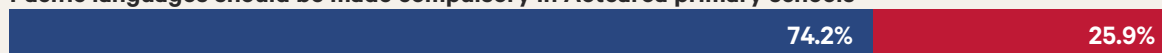
Nearly three-quarters of participants (74%) agreed that Pacific languages should be made compulsory in New Zealand primary schools, and 53% felt comfortable using their language in school. A small number (9%) agreed with the statement ‘in Aotearoa, you don’t need to learn your Pacific languages: English is enough’.

Figure 16 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools

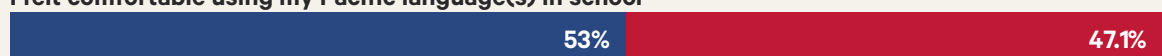
Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools:

● 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



Nearly all participants reported they would send their child(ren) to ECE (92%), primary (91%), and secondary schools (89%) where they could be taught in gagana Sāmoa if given the opportunity.

Figure 17 – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities

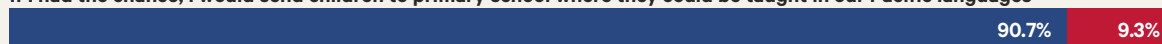
Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools:

● 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



Participants were highly praiseful of the Aoga Amata in particular, with some calling for not only an expansion of the network, but increased availability of bilingual and immersion provision at the primary and intermediate levels as well:

“There shouldn’t be a disconnect from Aoga Amata to high school. I understand there are existing schools across Auckland that have bilingual units, but I think this needs to be consistent across the primary and intermediate school levels [...] There’s a disconnect from Aoga Amata to primary and high school [...] To revitalise I would start there – that would be my focus going forward.”



Gagana Sāmoa in the workplace

“In my networks, and even though I have changed jobs and organisations, there is an appreciation for the language [...] The strengths are endless, the positives, the highs to it – it soothes people, it helps our people and others too.”

This section investigates how gagana Sāmoa is used and valued in professional settings.

It explores the visibility of Pacific languages and cultures in workplaces, the lived experiences of discrimination, and the evolving perception of bilingualism as a professional asset. It also highlights the ways in which participants contribute to cultural and language support in their roles, often beyond their formal job descriptions.

Workplace experiences

The majority (84%) of participants reported they were currently engaged in paid work, while a much lower proportion (12%) were involved in some form of unpaid work. Under one-third of participants (28%) reported they had experienced ethnicity-based discrimination in the workplace. A slightly lower proportion (23%) reported they had conducted their work in gagana Sāmoa in the past.

Many participants reported Pacific languages and cultures are visible at their workplace (42%) and that they have worked for a Pacific-focussed organisation (42%). A slightly smaller proportion (38%) reported they currently or have previously helped, worked, or volunteered without pay for a Pacific-focussed organisation(s), and 29% reported their workplace has dedicated Pacific cultural advisors on staff.

Figure 18 – Pacific language workplace experiences



Many participants identified the workplace as a strong domain of gagana Sāmoa use, highlighting the pride and confidence they feel when they express their culture and identity in that context:

“In my networks, and even though I have changed jobs and organisations, there is an appreciation for the language [...] I see the shift in the corporate space I am in [...] I see the shift in value, appreciation, and perspective too [...] People feel more at ease when they hear the language [...] The strengths are endless, the positives, the highs to it – it soothes people, it helps our people and others too.”

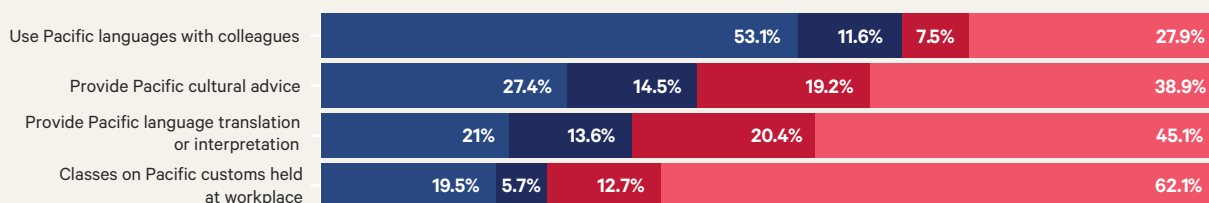
Pacific language use in the workplace

Over half (53%) of participants reported they use gagana Sāmoa with colleagues at least once a week, while 19% said they do so monthly or occasionally. A majority (61%) reported they have provided Pacific cultural advice in the workplace previously (even if not part of their job description), and 55% reported they have provided Pacific language support in the form of translation and/or interpretation.

Figure 19 – Work-based Pacific language activities

Workplace Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace

Over two-thirds of participants (69%) agreed with the statement ‘knowing English is more important for getting a job in Aotearoa than knowing Pacific languages’. This was echoed in the views shared by participants around the perception and reality that English is the language of professional success in New Zealand:

“English has been more important for getting a job. My parents had this same mindset which is why I tried to learn English in school and with friends and speak it confidently because you need English [...] to succeed here in New Zealand.”

“From the time I moved to New Zealand I started hearing and picking up English. When I started working, it was predominantly English environments because you can’t get hired if the Palagi speaks English to you and you respond in Sāmoan.”

Promisingly, however, participants also highlighted how there has been an attitude shift towards viewing language proficiency as a marketable asset:

“Being bilingual (in English and a Pacific language) has many benefits. For example [...] in terms of jobs, I think there needs to be people in some positions that understand gagana Sāmoa as well because the population is growing here in Auckland. A quarter of babies born are Pacific as well. Knowing your language is really important.”



Gagana Sāmoa in and with Pacific communities

“Our village, mafutaga, and all our functions – in those spaces one is not only immersed in the language, but also the customs [...] It feels natural being in those spaces, because you just go and you learn where to stand and know what to do.”

Community spaces offer rich opportunities for language use and cultural connection. This section explores how gagana Sāmoa is used in community events, gatherings, and cultural activities, both in New Zealand and in Sāmoa. It highlights the importance of community-led initiatives and the role of cultural events in fostering language pride, accessibility, and intergenerational learning.

Connection to Sāmoa

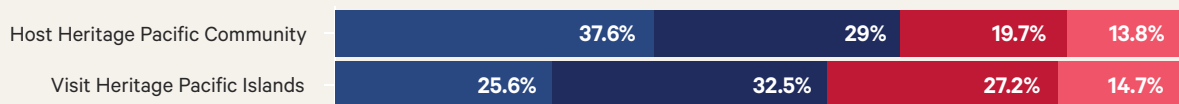
Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they visited Sāmoa and/or hosted community members from Sāmoa prior to COVID-19. Most (86%) reported they had hosted community members at least once before, and 38% reported doing so at least once a year. Some (14%) reported never having hosted community members from Sāmoa before.

Trends in how often participants visited Sāmoa were similar, with 25% reporting they visited at least once a year and 33% reporting they visited every 2-3 years. The remaining proportion (42%) reported they had visited Sāmoa one or twice or not at all.

Figure 20 – Visiting and hosting community members from Sāmoa

Heritage Pacific Islands Connection:

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



Language use in Sāmoa

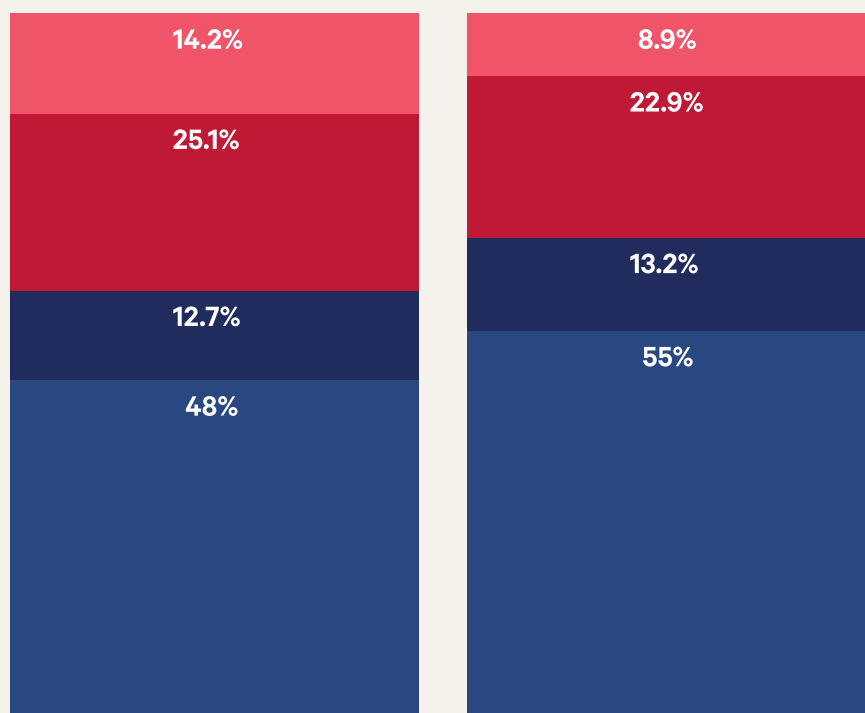
“Our village, mafutaga, and all our functions – in those spaces one is not only immersed in the language, but also the customs [...] It feels natural being in those spaces, because you just go and you learn where to stand and know what to do [...] for me those were the three big parts of my language journey – family, church, and village gatherings.”

Under half (48%) of participants indicated they always or mostly use gagana Sāmoa when visiting and talking to people in Sāmoa. A smaller proportion (14%) reported they never use gagana Sāmoa in these contexts.

Figure 21 – Pacific language use with communities in Sāmoa

Heritage Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never

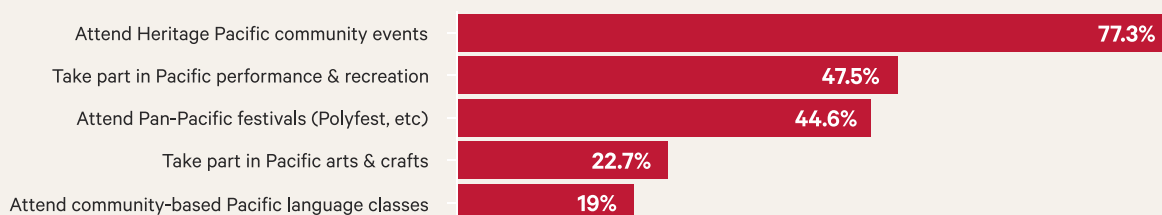


Talking to people living in the Islands Visiting your Pacific Islands yourself

Language use in community settings

“Places [...] that aren’t based in centres like churches or schools, but in the community [...] people are always saying to me how lucky I am to live fa’asamoa, to learn from my parents and have the experience.”

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 activity reported was Sāmoan community gatherings (77%). Smaller proportions of participants reported engaging in: Pacific performance and recreation activities (48%); Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (45%); arts and crafts activities (23%); and community-based language classes (19%).

Figure 22 – Engagement in community events, initiatives, and activities

A large proportion said they find such events easy to access (79%), and even more (88%) reported they enjoyed participating in them. Over three-quarters (77%) reported they felt most comfortable in Pacific communities.

Figure 23 – Attitudes towards Pacific cultural events

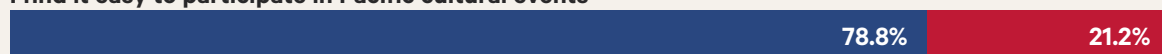
Attitudes to Pacific languages with Pacific communities:

● Agree ● Not agree

I enjoy participating in Pacific cultural events



I find it easy to participate in Pacific cultural events



I feel most comfortable in Pacific communities

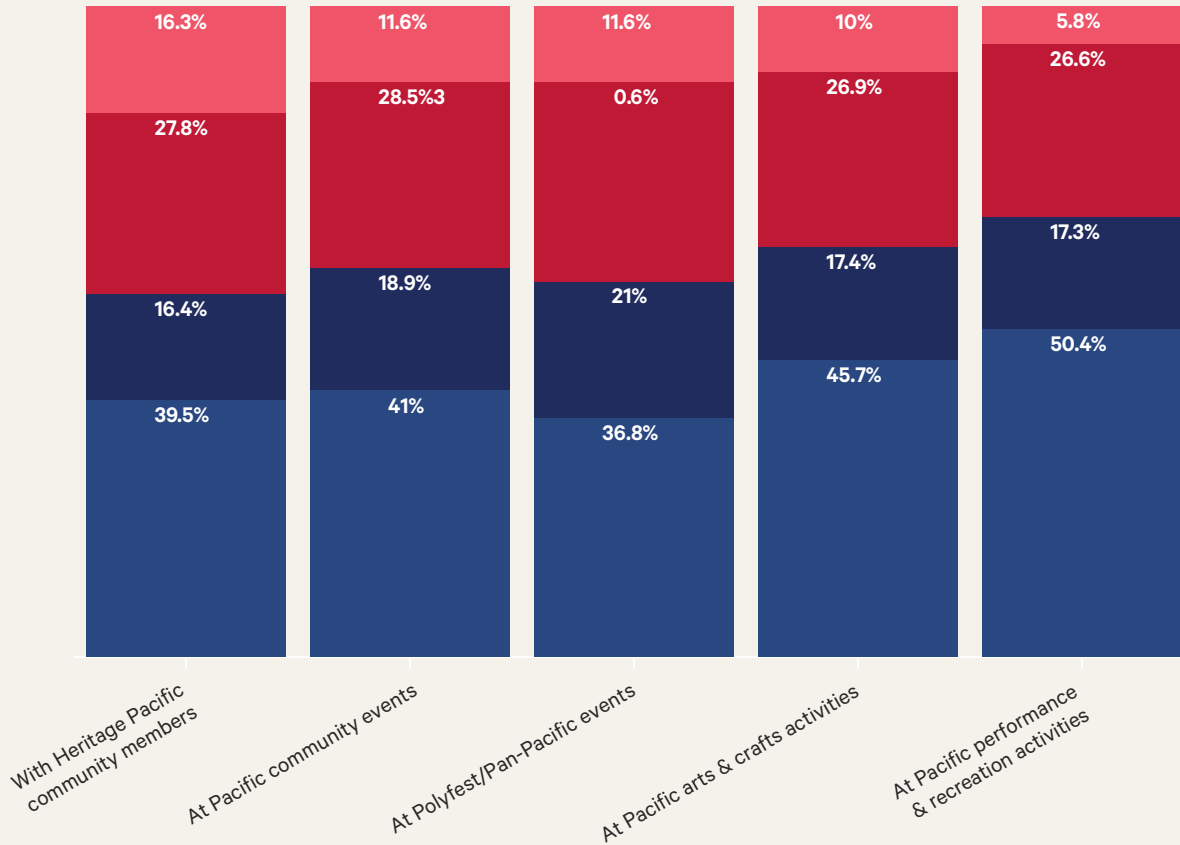


In terms of the frequency at which participants used gagana Sāmoa in community settings, nearly all reported using the language at least sometimes when taking part in Pacific performance and recreation activities (94%), arts and crafts activities (90%), community events (88%), and Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (88%). A similar proportion (84%) reported using gagana Sāmoa in conversation with Sāmoan community members more broadly.

Figure 24 – Pacific language use in community settings

Pacific community language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never





Gagana Sāmoa in media and broadcasting

“What would be really effective is more Sāmoan media. Just like Māori TV [...] there needs to be Sāmoan media. It would really support the maintenance and growth of our Gagana Sāmoa.”

Digital platforms and media are emerging as powerful tools for language engagement. This section explores how participants interact with gagana Sāmoa through music, social media, radio, television, and creative arts. It highlights the potential of media to support language maintenance and revitalisation, while also acknowledging the challenges of content creation and digital access.

Music

Music was the type of media most often noted by participants in relation to Pacific language use, with 96% reporting they listen to Pacific music at least occasionally, and similarly, 95% reporting they sing songs in Pacific languages as often.

Figure 25 – Engagement in Pacific music

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



“Every day I also access Sāmoan music... it’s one of the most accessible platforms to learn and immerse yourself in the language.”

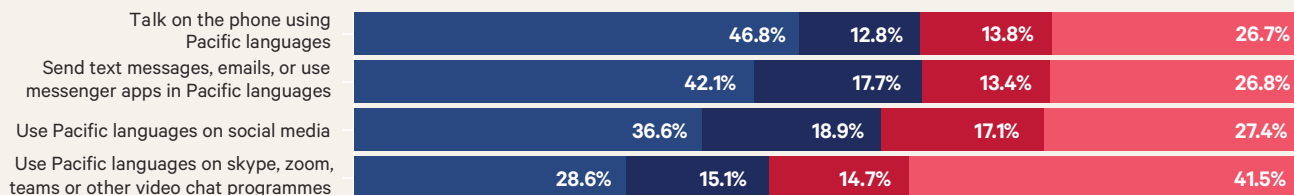
Social media and telecommunications

Social media and online platforms are emerging spaces for gagana Sāmoa use, especially among younger generations. Almost three-quarters (73%) of participants reported using gagana Sāmoa at least occasionally while on the phone or when sending texts, emails, or messages. The same proportion (73%) reported they use the language as frequently on social media.

Figure 26 – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



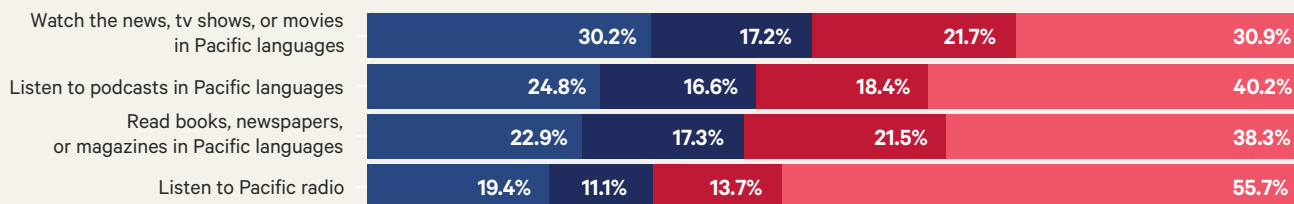
Broadcast and print media

News, TV shows, and movies were the most popular form of media for participants, with 69% watching content in gagana Sāmoa at least occasionally. Participants expressed a desire for more Sāmoan-language television and visual content, noting its potential to support language maintenance and cultural storytelling.

Figure 27 – Engagement in broadcast and print media

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



“Imagine if they had a TV – for TV Sāmoa here in New Zealand? That would be great to support gagana Sāmoa maintenance.”

Radio plays a central role in maintaining gagana Sāmoa, particularly for older generations and households where it is a constant presence. Less than half of participants (44%) reported listening to Pacific radio, though it was lauded by older participants as being excellent for exposing their household to the language.

“It’s in my environment. Like my nana’s house is always blasting it [Radio Sāmoa] on the radio [...] That’s my exposure [...] I’ve also seen some of their interviews on social media and stuff, and my mum actually watches Radio Sāmoa [and] is constantly up to date and knows more about what’s happening here than I do!”

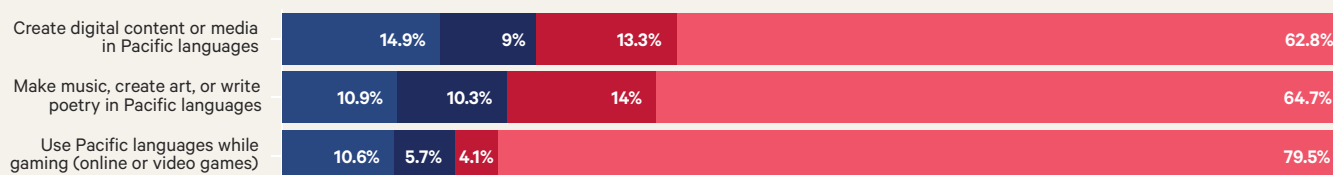
Creative arts

Gagana Sāmoa is used in creative arts—such as poetry, performance, and storytelling—to express identity, emotion, and cultural depth. However, engagement in creative arts by participants was comparatively low, with less than half reporting they: create digital content or media in gagana Sāmoa (37%); make music, create art, or write poetry in gagana Sāmoa (35%); or use the language while gaming (21%).

Figure 28 – Engagement in creative arts

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Attitudes towards Pacific language media

Most participants (83%) agreed that digital technology, media, and the internet help them connect to their language and culture. One-third (33%) thought that digital technology and the internet are threatening gagana Sāmoa.

“There are existing programmes on the radio and internet that I really like and am proud of. I am proud [...] because I can understand and hear my language on these platforms.”

Gagana Sāmoa in the New Zealand context

“These days [...] hanging out with friends who share the same purpose, are likeminded, who are Sāmoans and Islanders... We feel way more confident, we don’t feel shy or uncomfortable speaking our language. Our identity isn’t a burden because we are reclaiming who we are.”

This section situates gagana Sāmoa within the broader societal landscape of New Zealand. It explores how the language is used in public, recreational, and service settings, and how participants perceive its role in national identity and multiculturalism. It also reflects on the empowering effects of language use and the importance of normalising gagana Sāmoa in everyday life.

Wider society

Nearly all participants agreed that bilingualism was beneficial in New Zealand (96%) and that Pacific languages are an important part of New Zealand’s national identity (93%). More than three-quarters (77%) agreed they feel comfortable using gagana Sāmoa around non-Pacific people, and 70% believe it is important to learn foreign languages beyond English, demonstrating the value placed on multilingualism by the Sāmoan community in New Zealand.

Figure 29 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ society:

● Agree ● Not agree

Being bilingual has many benefits in Aotearoa



Pacific languages are an important part of Aotearoa New Zealand's national identity



I feel comfortable using my Pacific languages around non-Pacific people



It is important to master foreign languages other than English



“I think that for Sāmoan to thrive here in Aotearoa we need to think about the way we shape and teach the language. We need to show it is not only cool to learn Sāmoan, but also hugely beneficial. We need to highlight the positives more, especially for those who are reclaiming their identities and languages. I think it is empowering when I see someone who can walk in both worlds, the Sāmoan and the Palagi, and I think those stories need to be shared more.”

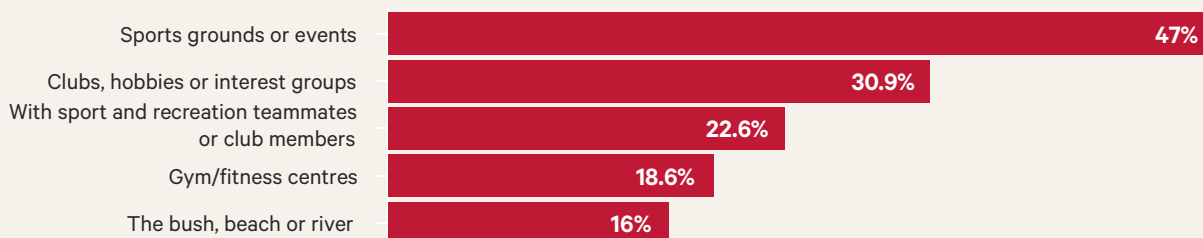
Language, identity, and politeness dynamics

Most participants (83%) agreed it is important to speak your Pacific language(s) as a Pacific person. Less than one-third (31%) felt it was impolite to use Pacific languages around people who do not understand them, while only 8% thought that if a person was not fluent in their Pacific language(s) they should not speak it at all.

Language use in recreational settings

Nearly half (47%) of participants reported using gagana Sāmoa at sporting events, while just under one-third (31%) reported the same in relation to clubs, hobbies or interest groups.

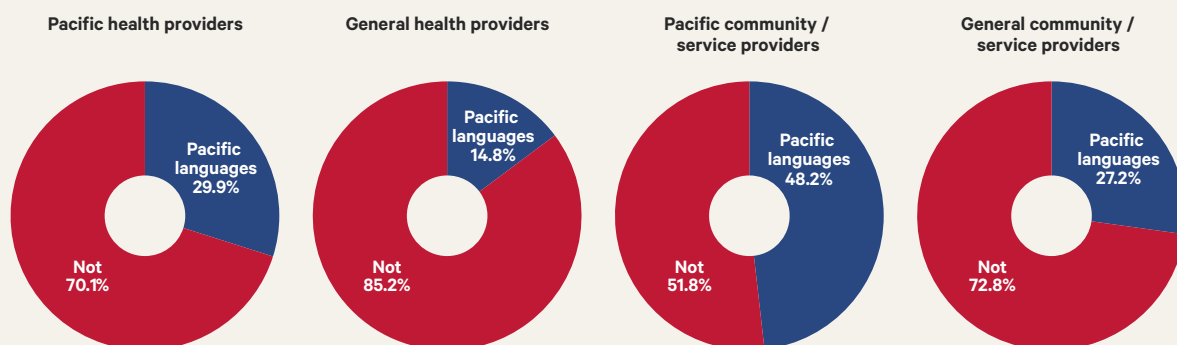
Figure 30 – Pacific language use in recreational settings



Language use with service providers

Tagata Sāmoa were asked whether they had used gagana Sāmoa 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 (30%) than general health providers (15%). Similarly, more participants reported they had used it with Pacific community services providers (48%) compared to general community service providers (27%).

Figure 31 – Pacific language use with health and community service providers

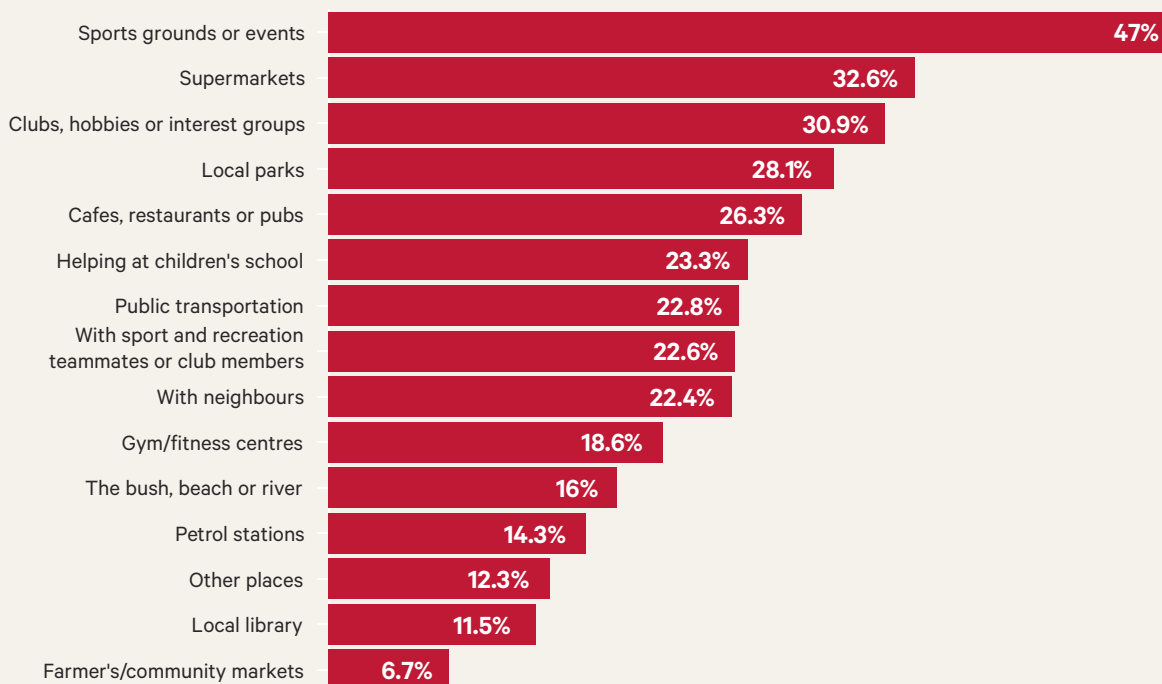


“There’s a couple of really good nurses [...] that are fluent in Sāmoan and it just makes it easier [...] especially if you have to go in with your parents [...] When they explain in Sāmoan what the process is, what the procedures are, what the diagnosis is [the impact is] massive [...] Just their health knowledge – to have someone who understands the science behind [...] I can definitely vouch that it makes a massive difference at the local practice”

Language use in public settings

In terms of language use in public settings, one-third (33%) of participants reported using gagana Sāmoa at supermarkets. A slightly smaller proportion (28%) reported using the language in local parks, and response rates continued to decrease in relation to other settings such as in cafés, restaurants, and pubs (26%), at children’s schools (23%), and on public transportation (23%). The least likely places for participants to report using gagana Sāmoa were at local libraries (12%) and community markets (7%).

Figure 32 – Pacific language use in public settings



Empowerment through language

Participants were optimistic that gagana Sāmoa can only grow stronger over time, citing the wider public's improved attitude towards Pacific peoples, cultures, and languages over the past two decades. Sentiments relating to the sense of empowerment associated with growing one's language knowledge were also shared:

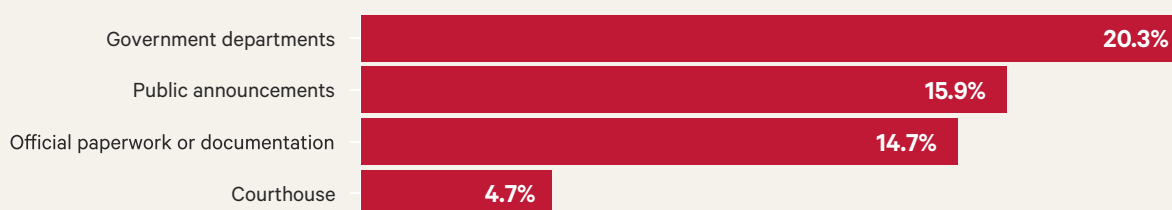
“These days [...] hanging out with friends who share the same purpose, are likeminded, who are Sāmoans and Islanders... We feel way more confident, we don't feel shy or uncomfortable speaking our language. Our identity isn't a burden because we are reclaiming who we are.”

New Zealand Government

“I also think there needs to be a systemic change from the government – they need to explicitly say that there is need for and benefit from people learning their Pasifika languages here in Aotearoa.”

Participants were unlikely to use their language while engaging with the New Zealand Government, with only 20% reporting doing so. A smaller proportion (15%) reported using gagana Sāmoa when completing official paperwork or documentation, and fewer still (5%) reported the same in courthouse settings.

Figure 33 – Pacific language use in official and/or government settings



Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

Participants were largely aligned in their attitudes towards the role Government plays in promoting Pacific language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation across the motu.

A large proportion (92%) felt that Government and local councils should provide services and information in Pacific languages, and 77% agreed that Pacific languages should have official recognition in New Zealand. Nearly two-thirds (64%) agreed it is the Government's role to maintain Pacific languages in New Zealand, and 42% thought the Government does not support them.

Figure 34 – Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ Government:

● Agree ● Not agree

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



Pacific languages should have official recognition in Aotearoa



It is the Government's role to maintain Pacific languages in Aotearoa



The Government does not support Pacific languages in Aotearoa



“It’s a shared effort between a lot of agencies, but the drive needs to come from those in power, in the Government [...] We need resources and government funding [...] We need to share the load, in a reciprocal relationship [...] so that we receive, pass on, and give back too.”

Barriers and enablers

Understanding what helps or hinders language use is essential for effective revitalisation. This section presents the key barriers and enablers identified by participants in using, learning, and maintaining gagana Sāmoa. It provides insight into the structural, social, and personal factors that shape language experiences and offers a foundation for targeted action.

Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining gagana Sāmoa

Tagata Sāmoa participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the main barriers to using, learning, and/or maintaining gagana Sāmoa. 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 35 – Top ten reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining gagana Sāmoa

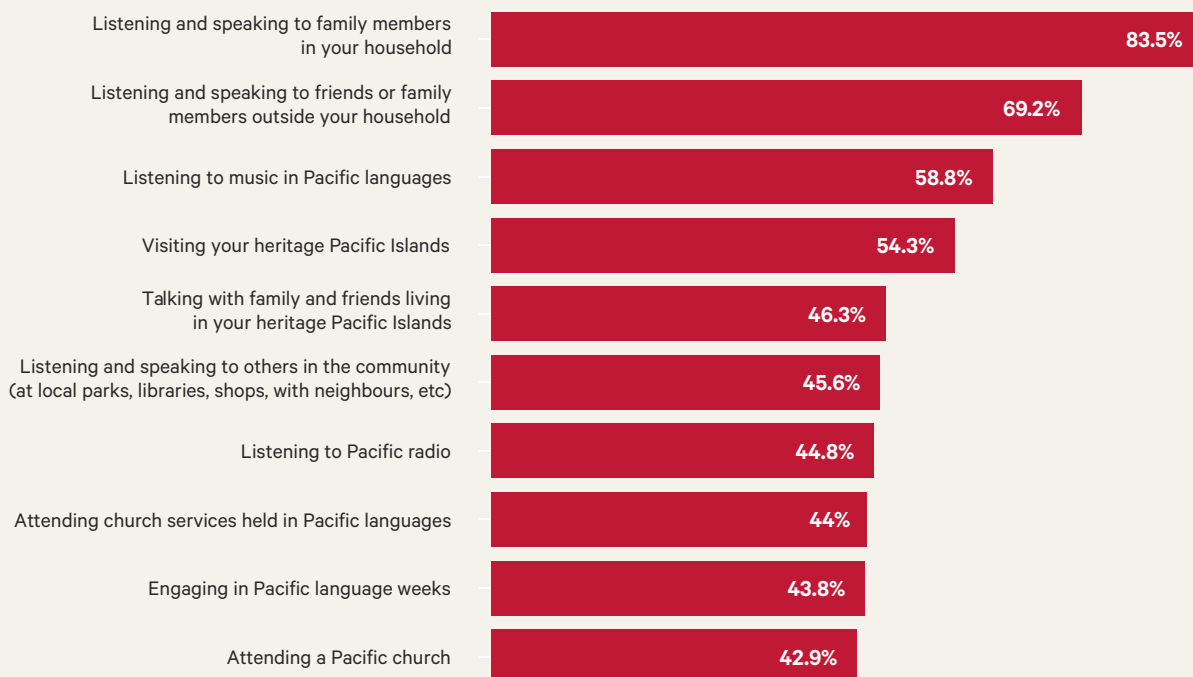


The most common barriers reported were participants not feeling connected to their Pacific culture and identity (38%) and not having access to Pacific language and culture classes in workplaces (36%). Similar proportions of participants reported other barriers such as: inconsistent funding and resourcing to provide Pacific language programmes (35%); not knowing where to start (32%); and living in households with people who do not speak gagana Sāmoa (31%).

Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining gagana Sāmoa

Participants were also asked to identify what they considered to be the main enablers of using, learning, and/or maintaining gagana Sāmoa. 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 36 – Top ten reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining gagana Sāmoa



The most common enabler reported was listening and speaking to family members in their household (84%). Other notable enablers were: listening to and speaking the language with friends or family members *outside* the household (70%); listening to music in gagana Sāmoa (59%); visiting Sāmoa (54%); and talking to friends and family living in Sāmoa (46%).

Conclusion

“My greatest hope and desire is that we find a way to keep our Pacific languages alive and flourishing in Aotearoa New Zealand. My aspirations are that they are recognised, acknowledged, and understood as an integral part of our identity here.”

Gagana Sāmoa is the third most spoken language in New Zealand, and the second most spoken in Auckland, though it still faces significant challenges. To respond to these, 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 Gagana Sāmoa Report was developed. Alongside the overarching [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Report](#), it provides a snapshot of the state of gagana Sāmoa, 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 Sāmoa 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 gagana Sāmoa and tagata Sāmoa. These priorities are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; rather, a diverse mix of interventions will be required to meaningfully address language decline.

Priority action areas

Strengthen language use in the home

The home is the foundation of language acquisition and intergenerational transmission. However, while many participants (76%) reported that gagana Sāmoa was spoken in at home when they were growing up, fewer (51%) reported it being used with children now. Strengthening the use of gagana Sāmoa within families is, therefore, essential to its long-term sustainability.

Recommendations:

- Develop and distribute home-based language resources.
- Support intergenerational language learning initiatives that connect elders to youth.
- Promote family storytelling and genealogy sharing in gagana Sāmoa.

Enhance the continuity of bilingual and immersion education

Though education is critical to effective language maintenance and revitalisation, less than half (49%) of participants reported using gagana Sāmoa at least sometimes in primary and secondary school. Early exposure is essential for fluency³, and while Aoga Amata were highly valued by survey participants, there is a clear gap in the continuity of bilingual and immersion provision through to later levels of schooling. Nevertheless, nearly all participants expressed they would enrol their children in primary (91%) and secondary (89%) schools where they could be taught in gagana Sāmoa if given the opportunity.

Recommendations:

- Increase bilingual and immersion programmes across all levels.
- Strengthen teacher training and curriculum development in gagana Sāmoa.

Support language use in churches

Churches remain a stronghold for gagana Sāmoa, especially for older generations (67%), though language use among children in such settings was significantly lower (19%). Many participants churches with building their knowledge of and confidence in gagana Sāmoa over time, making them a key domain for revitalisation efforts.

Recommendations:

- Partner with churches to deliver language programmes, such as structured learning through Sunday schools and youth ministries.
- Develop resources to teach gagana Sāmoa in churches.

Improve access to community language learning opportunities

Barriers such as cultural disconnection, limited access to language and cultural initiatives, and inconsistent funding continue to hinder the maintenance and revitalisation of gagana Sāmoa. While there is strong recognition that elders, families, and communities must lead language learning, greater support is needed for community-led language initiatives, particularly for adult learners.

Recommendations:

- Fund and support community language classes and cultural events.
- Facilitate intergenerational learning through community gatherings

Leverage 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 gagana Sāmoa daily. However, while many participants reported they use the language over social media (73%), less than half reported ever having created content (37%) in it. This rate can be improved by creating conditions that better support the development of gagana Sāmoa content online.

Recommendations:

- Invest in gagana Sāmoa media and digital content (e.g., music, podcasts, videos etc).
- Support youth-led digital storytelling and content creation.

3 Abutalebi & Clahsen (2018). *Critical periods for language acquisition: New insights with particular reference to bilingualism research*.

Normalise gagana Sāmoa in public and professional spaces

Participants envision a future where Pacific languages are integrated into everyday life beyond special events and cultural celebrations. Despite growing visibility, gagana Sāmoa is still underused in workplaces and public services, with many participants feeling there is a strong view English is the sole language of professional success in New Zealand.

Recommendations:

- Recognise bilingualism as a professional asset.
- Provide Pacific language training in workplaces.
- Encourage service providers to offer support in gagana Sāmoa.

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 Sāmoa can learn and use gagana Sāmoa:

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 are 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 in this report prior to the release of the complete results for Census 2023.

Target Sāmoa Survey sample

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

Total	796	
Northern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	56	55
25-44 years	70	70
45-64 years	46	46
65+ years	15	15
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	28	27
25-44 years	35	44
45-64 years	23	23
65+ years	7	8
Central Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	17	17
25-44 years	22	21
45-64 years	14	14
65+ years	5	5
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	9	8
25-44 years	11	11
45-64 years	7	7
65+ years	2	12
Southern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	7	6
25-44 years	8	8
45-64 years	5	5
65+ years	2	2
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	3	3
25-44 years	4	4
45-64 years	3	4
65+ years	1	1



Ministry for
Pacific Peoples

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

