



Leo Moana o Aotearoa

# Te gagana Tokelau report



Ministry for  
**Pacific Peoples**

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

**Title:** Leo Moana o Aotearoa Te Gagana Tokelau Report

**Citation:** Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2026),  
Leo Moana o Aotearoa Te Gagana Tokelau Report,  
Ministry for Pacific Peoples: Wellington, New Zealand.

**Acknowledgements:** Fakafetai lahi lelei to the tagata Tokelau across New Zealand who participated in the first ever Leo Moana o Aotearoa national survey and talanoa. We appreciate the time you have taken to share your experiences with te Gagana Tokelau.

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

**Contact:** Leo Moana o Aotearoa Project team:

[leomoanaoaterrora@mpp.govt.nz](mailto:leomoanaoaterrora@mpp.govt.nz)



# Contents

<b>List of figures</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Te gagana Tokelau in and with Pacific communities</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>	Connection to Tokelau	28
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>	Language use in Tokelau	28
Te gagana Tokelau	7	Language use in community settings	28
Purpose and objectives	7	<b>Te gagana Tokelau in media and broadcasting</b>	<b>30</b>
Sample	7	Music	30
Data collection	8	Social media and telecommunications	30
Data analysis	8	Broadcast and print media	30
Overall response rate	8	Creative arts	31
Survey weighting	8	Attitudes towards Pacific language media	31
Survey analyses	8	<b>Te gagana Tokelau in the New Zealand context</b>	<b>32</b>
Limitations	9	Wider society	32
<b>Demography</b>	<b>10</b>	Language, identity, and politeness dynamics	32
Generational differences	10	Language use in recreational settings	32
<b>Findings - Survey overview</b>	<b>11</b>	Language use with service providers	33
<b>Te gagana Tokelau</b>	<b>12</b>	Language use in public settings	33
Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau	12	New Zealand Government	34
Proficiency variation	13	Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages	34
Proficiency in other Pacific languages	14	<b>Barriers and Enablers</b>	<b>35</b>
Language acquisition	15	Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau	35
Language, identity, and culture	16	Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau	35
Language loss	16	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>37</b>
Intergenerational transmission	17	Priority areas for action	37
<b>Te gagana Tokelau in the home and with family</b>	<b>18</b>	Strengthen language use in the home	37
Childhood household composition and language use	18	Expand and sustain bilingual and immersion education	37
Contemporary household composition and language use	18	Support language use in churches	38
Ethnic identity and household language use	20	Expand community-based language initiatives	38
Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home	20	Leverage media and digital platforms	38
<b>Te gagana Tokelau in church</b>	<b>21</b>	Promote language use in the workplace	38
Religious affiliations and church attendance	21	<b>Appendix 1 – Survey variables</b>	<b>40</b>
Pacific language use in church	21	<b>Appendix 2 – Survey sampling frame</b>	<b>41</b>
Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church	22	Target Tokelau Survey sample	41
Regional access to Pacific languages in church	22	Final Survey sample	41
<b>Te gagana Tokelau in education settings</b>	<b>23</b>		
Pacific language education experiences	23		
Pacific language use in schools	23		
Attitudes towards Pacific languages in education	24		
Regional access to Pacific language education	25		
Ethnic identity and engagement in Pacific language education	25		
<b>Te gagana Tokelau in the workplace</b>	<b>26</b>		
Workplace experiences	26		
Pacific language use in the workplace	26		
Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace	26		

# List of figures

<b>Figure 1</b> – Tagata Tokelau participant summary	10	<b>Figure 29</b> – Engagement in broadcast and print media	31
<b>Figure 2</b> – Te gagana Tokelau summary	12	<b>Figure 30</b> – Engagement in creative arts	31
<b>Figure 3</b> – Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau	13	<b>Figure 31</b> – Attitudes towards Pacific language media	31
<b>Figure 4</b> – Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau by age group	13	<b>Figure 32</b> – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society	32
<b>Figure 5</b> – Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau by birthplace and ethnic identity	14	<b>Figure 33</b> – Pacific language use in recreational settings	33
<b>Figure 6</b> – Multilingualism among tagata Tokelau	15	<b>Figure 34</b> – Pacific language use with health and community service providers	33
<b>Figure 7</b> – First language acquisition among tagata Tokelau	16	<b>Figure 35</b> – Pacific language use in public settings	33
<b>Figure 8</b> – Attitudes towards language loss	16	<b>Figure 36</b> – Pacific language use in official and/or government settings	34
<b>Figure 9</b> – Attitudes towards language maintenance and transmission	17	<b>Figure 37</b> – Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages	34
<b>Figure 10</b> – Childhood household composition and language use	18	<b>Figure 38</b> – Reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau	35
<b>Figure 11</b> – Language activities in the home and with family	19	<b>Figure 39</b> – Reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau	36
<b>Figure 12</b> – Language use in the home and with family	19		
<b>Figure 13</b> – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home	20		
<b>Figure 14</b> – Religious affiliations among tagata Tokelau	21		
<b>Figure 15</b> – Pacific language use during church services and activities	21		
<b>Figure 16</b> – Pacific language use at church between adults and children	22		
<b>Figure 17</b> – Tagata Tokelau participation in Pacific language education	23		
<b>Figure 18</b> – Pacific language use at primary and secondary schools	24		
<b>Figure 19</b> – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools	24		
<b>Figure 20</b> – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities	25		
<b>Figure 21</b> – Pacific language workplace experiences	26		
<b>Figure 22</b> – Work-based Pacific language activities	26		
<b>Figure 23</b> – Visiting and hosting community members from Tokelau	28		
<b>Figure 24</b> – Engagement in community events, initiatives, and activities	29		
<b>Figure 25</b> – Attitudes towards Pacific cultural events	29		
<b>Figure 26</b> – Pacific language use in community settings	29		
<b>Figure 27</b> – Engagement in Pacific music	30		
<b>Figure 28</b> – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications	30		

## Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the survey and talanoa components of the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Project from tagata Tokelau (people of Tokelau 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 Survey Report](#), 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 Tokelau community as captured through talanoa with its members across New Zealand. As part of these talanoa, community members answered questions about their attitudes towards te gagana Tokelau, language competency, and language use across multiple domains including the home, church, education, workplace, media and broadcasting, with the community, and in wider society. This report also highlights the heterogeneity of experiences and diverse voices across the Tokelau communities of New Zealand. High-level findings are as follows:

### **Language proficiency**

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

### **Te gagana Tokelau in the home and with family**

The home and family have a critical role in maintaining te gagana Tokelau. Reported use of the language in the home was high, particularly with older family members. Reported use of te gagana Tokelau with children ‘at least sometimes’ was likewise high, though this does not yet seem to be reflected in the language proficiency findings.

### **Te gagana Tokelau in church**

The church remains a stronghold of language use, maintenance, and transmission for tagata Tokelau. Significant differences in language use in church settings were reported, especially regarding the preferred language of communication between age groups. Participants were far more likely to report hearing te gagana Tokelau being used by and between adults than by and between children.

### **Te gagana Tokelau in education settings**

The role of education was identified by participants as crucial to the maintenance and revitalisation of te gagana Tokelau. Nearly all reported they would send their children to early childhood education (ECE), primary, and secondary schools where they could be taught in te gagana Tokelau if given the opportunity though, as of 2024, only one ECE and one primary school offer bilingual and/or immersion provision. This finding reflects a mismatch in the demand and supply of Pacific language provision.

### **Te gagana Tokelau in the workplace**

Pacific languages and cultures are becoming increasingly visible in workplaces. Many participants reported experiencing ethnicity-based discrimination, however, and the perception that English is the language of professional success remains prevalent.

### **Te gagana Tokelau in and with Pacific communities**

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

### **Te gagana Tokelau in media and broadcasting**

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

### **Te gagana Tokelau in the New Zealand context**

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

# Introduction

---

*Ko te gagana e ia fakamakekea te tatou hōkotaga ki na fenua o ō tatou tupuna ma a tatou nofononofoga. E ia fakatamāokāigagia a tatou tu ma te aganuku vēnā ma te hōkotaga o kitatou ki o tatou mātua ma o tatou tupuna kua gagalo atu.*

*“Language strengthens our link to our ancestral lands and traditional ways. It enriches our cultural experience and our connection to our ancestor’s past”.*

---

## Te gagana Tokelau

Through the constitutional status of Tokelau, tagata Tokelau (people of Tokelau heritage) are New Zealand citizens and te gagana Tokelau (the language of Tokelau) is considered indigenous to the Realm of New Zealand.

There are nearly four times more tagata Tokelau in New Zealand (9,822) than in Tokelau (2,678) based on 2023 Census and United Nations estimates. The education system in Tokelau uses some level of te gagana Tokelau, though a significant proportion of instruction is provided in English from a young age. Data on the number of speakers in Tokelau is limited, but what is available suggests the proportion of speakers is declining, albeit at a slower rate than among the tagata Tokelau population in New Zealand.

The future of te gagana Tokelau therefore depends on how well it is revitalised and maintained in New Zealand. The language is classified as severely endangered by UNESCO, and there are few opportunities to learn te gagana Tokelau in the community or through formal education in New Zealand, though it has recently been approved as an NCEA-accredited subject.

## Purpose and objectives

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

In conjunction with the initial Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report, this report focuses on te gagana Tokelau and the specific experiences of tagata Tokelau and Tokelau communities across New Zealand. This report presents the views of the tagata Tokelau who took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey (n = 337) and talanoa (n = 21) and focuses on their use of and attitudes towards te gagana Tokelau across the different domains in which it is spoken.

It is intended that what is raised by respondents in this report will support current and future approaches to strengthening the vitality of te gagana Tokelau and the wellbeing of tagata

Tokelau in New Zealand. We also hope the report will be a helpful reference document for communities, researchers, and agencies that will support the development of responsive policy and practice that better meet the needs of tagata Tokelau.

This report presents the findings from the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Project related to the Tokelau community 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 methods in detail and explains how the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey was conducted, who was included, and how to interpret the results. This section focuses specifically on the methods that differed from those employed in the original report.

## Sample

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

## Data analysis

### Overall response rate

A total of 3,039 people completed the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey, 337 of whom were tagata Tokelau. 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 Tokelau participant survey (n = 337) have been weighted against the total tagata Tokelau population in New Zealand as at the 2018 Census. They are therefore representative of the total domestic tagata Tokelau population. These are different from the total Leo Moana participant survey (n = 3,039) as mentioned above, which applies ethnicity prioritisation to weight the nine Pacific ethnic groups within the overall Pacific population as at the 2018 Census.

### **Survey analyses**

While most of this report focuses on descriptive statistics (providing percentages and counts), additional analyses have been run to examine differences within the tagata Tokelau participant cohort (n = 337). 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 Tokelau only vs. Multi-Pacific vs. Multi-ethnic)  
Region (Wellington vs. Auckland vs. Elsewhere)
- Birthplace (New Zealand-born vs. Overseas-born)

Only significant differences within the tagata Tokelau 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 Tokelau 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 Tokelau 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.

## Demography

A total of 337 tagata Tokelau participants took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey. As at the 2018 Census, there were 8,676 tagata Tokelau residing in New Zealand. This means that at the time of the Survey, around 4% of the tagata Tokelau population aged 15+ participated in the survey.

**337** Tokelauan participants

Youth (15–24) made up the largest age group, representing 32% of participants

**65%** New Zealand born

**56%** Multiple ethnicities

Identified as:

**53%** Female

**46.5%** Male

**0.5%** Other

**26%**  
Auckland

**51%**  
Wellington

**Figure 1 – Tagata Tokelau participant summary**

Under one-third (32%) of participants were 15-24 years old, 52% were 25-54 years old, and 17% were 55 years or older. A slightly higher proportion identified as female (53.0%) compared to male (46.5%), and 0.5% identified as a gender beyond the binary.

Unlike most Pacific communities in New Zealand that predominantly live in Auckland, the majority of tagata Tokelau reside in the greater Wellington region. This was borne out in the survey, with 51% of participants reporting they live in the Wellington region, 26% in Auckland, 18% elsewhere in the North Island, and 5% in the South Island.

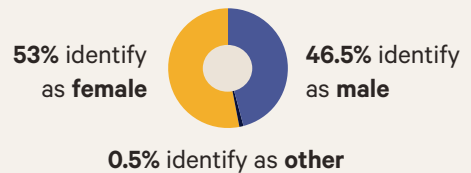
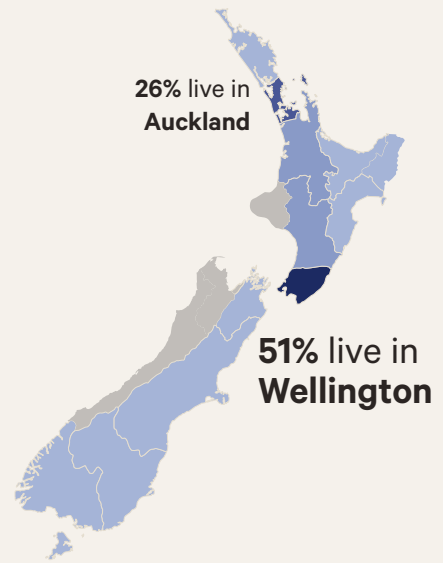
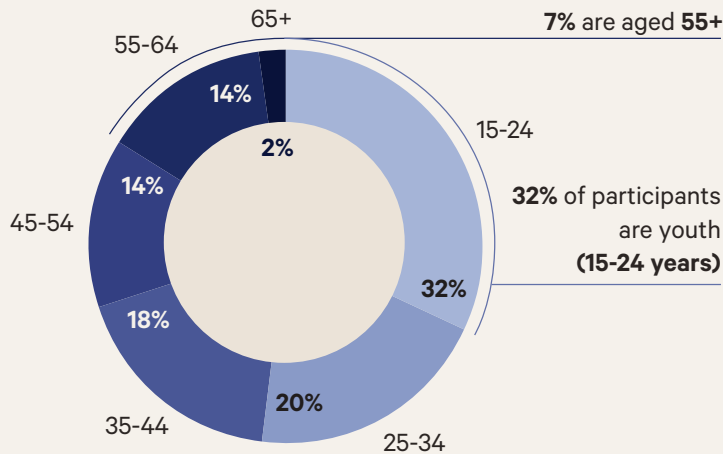
Around two-thirds (65%) of participants were born in New Zealand, while 35% were born overseas. Nearly half (44%) identified solely as tagata Tokelau, 44% reported being both tagata Tokelau and another Pacific ethnicity (multi-Pacific), and 13% reported having both tagata Tokelau and non-Pacific heritage (multi-ethnic). The most common additional ethnicities of participants were Samoan (32%), Tuvaluan (13%), New Zealand European (8%), Cook Island Māori (7%), and Māori.

### **Generational differences**

The demography of participants points to distinct generational trends in the wider Tokelau community. One of the most striking of these was between the ethnic composition of older and younger tagata Tokelau participants: while 65% of elders (aged 55+) identified as solely tagata Tokelau, this percentage fell to 46% for adults (25-54), and 30% for youth (15-24). There was variation between age groups and birthplace also: most (94%) participants aged 55+ were born overseas, while most (91%) 15-24-year-olds were born in New Zealand.

# Survey overview

**337** Tokelauan participants took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey

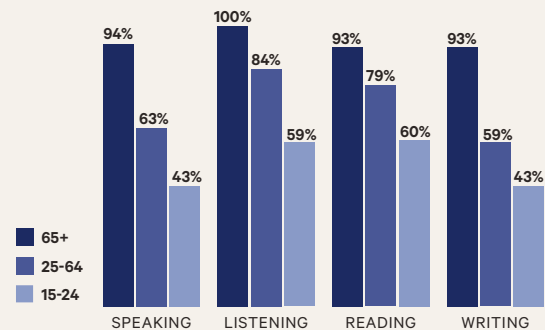


**65%** were born in New Zealand

**56%** are multi-ethnic

## Overview of Pacific language use in Aotearoa New Zealand

**73%** report being proficient in at least one Pacific language.



**50%** learned Te Gagana Tokelau as a first language

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

**96%** say using their heritage language is important to their wellbeing

**90%** are concerned Te Gagana Tokelau is in danger of being lost in Aotearoa

**99%** believe it is important for our children and future generations to speak our Pacific languages

**53%** are concerned Te Gagana Tokelau is in danger of being lost in Tokelau

**59%** speak to children in their households using Pacific languages

# Te Gagana Tokelau use in Aotearoa New Zealand, in depth

## Home & Family

Participants reported mostly using Te Gagana Tokelau with elders more than with peers, parents & children



**41%** live in **multigenerational households**

**68%** discuss **Pacific genealogies and family histories** at home.

**81%** agree that Pacific languages are safe as long as they are **spoken in the home**

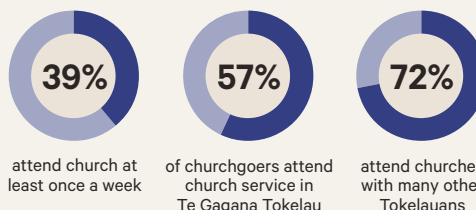
## Religion

Top religious affiliations

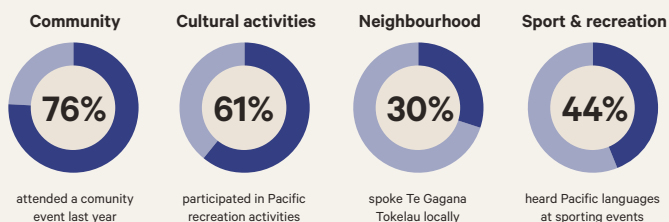
**41%** **Christian** (no specific denomination)

**25%** **Catholicism**

**31%** **Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed**



## Communities



**34%** have never visited Tokelau

**90%** have hosted Tokelauans in NZ

## Media

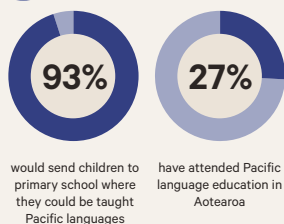
**85%** digital technology, media and the Internet help **connect** to Pacific languages

**36%** digital technology, media and the Internet are **threatening** Pacific languages

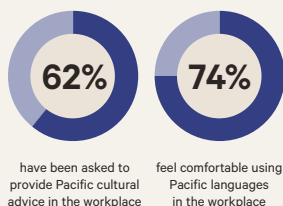
**79%** **listen to music in Pacific languages** every week

**55%** **send text messages and emails** in Pacific languages weekly

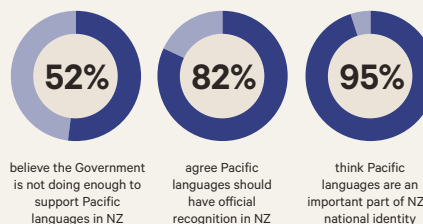
## School



## Work



## Government



**Enablers** What activities are most helpful for Tokelauans to engage with Te Gagana Tokelau?

**81%** listening and speaking with family & friends

**54%** listening to music in Pacific languages

**49%** visiting heritage Pacific islands

**46%** engaging with Pacific language weeks

**Barriers** What gets in the way of engaging with Te Gagana Tokelau?

**42%** not having consistent funding or resources to provide Pacific language programmes

**37%** not feeling connected to your Pacific culture or identity

**34%** living in a household with people who do not speak the language

**33%** not being able to visit your heritage Pacific Islands

# Te gagana Tokelau

*“My Pacific language is part of my identity. It is one of many connections to my tupuna. I hope to one day be fluent in te gagana Tokelau and pass this treasure on to my children.”*



Figure 2 - Te gagana Tokelau summary

**988** people Pacific languages are important for future generations

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

Older generations report having better language proficiency than younger generations

**73** % report being proficient in at least one Pacific language

**80** % use Pacific languages when speaking to children at home

**50** % learned Te gagana Tokelau as a first language

**90** % fear Te gagana Tokelau is at risk in Aotearoa

**533** % fear Te gagana Tokelau is at risk in Tokelau

# Te gagana Tokelau

## Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau

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

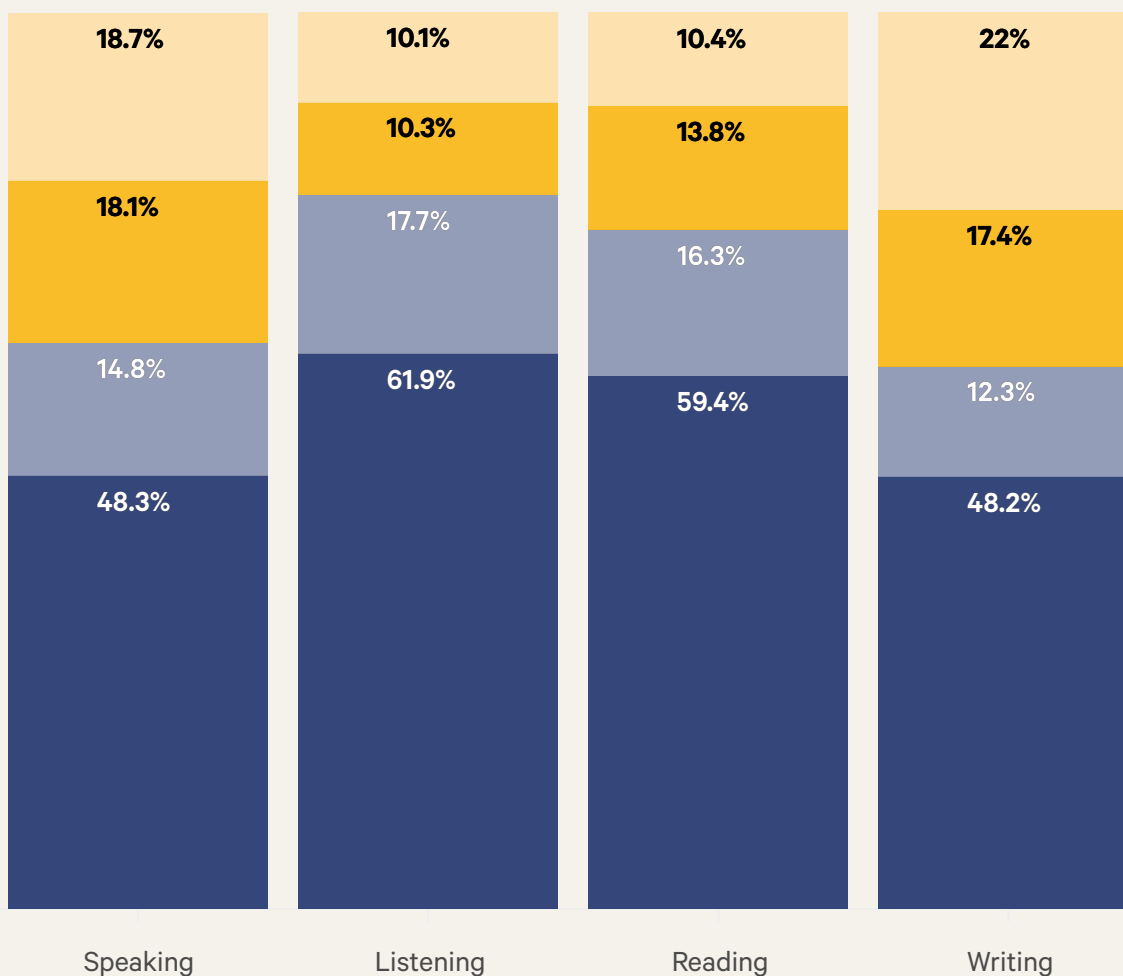
Participants reported being more proficient in the receptive language skill categories of listening and reading than the productive language skills of speaking and writing.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of participants reported being able to speak te gagana Tokelau proficiently, and 48% could do so well or very well. An even higher proportion (80%) reported being able to understand it when spoken to them. Three-quarters (76%) reported being able to read the language, and 61% said they could write it at least fairly well. In fact, 8% of participants even chose to take the entire survey in te gagana Tokelau!

**Figure 3 – Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau**

### Te Gagana Tokelau Proficiency

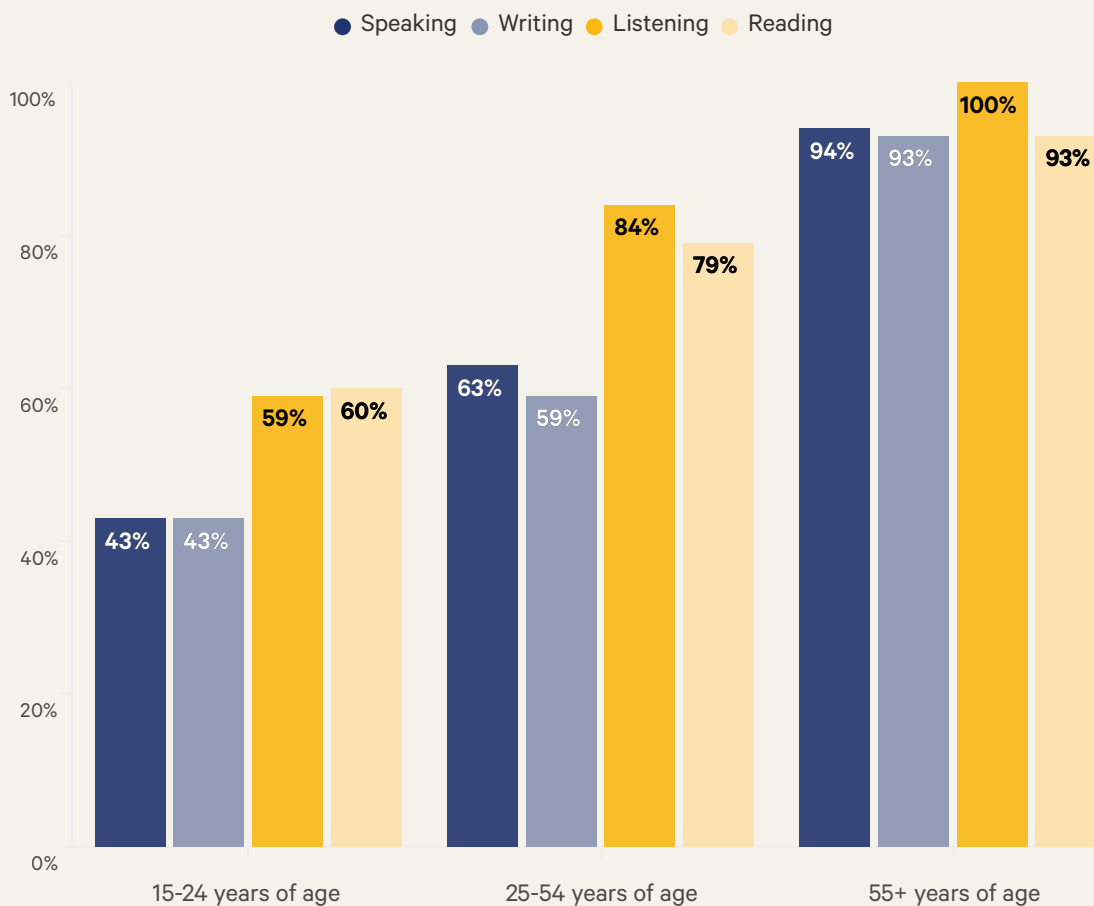
● Very well/well ● Fairly well ● Not so well ● Only a few words or phrases



## Proficiency variation

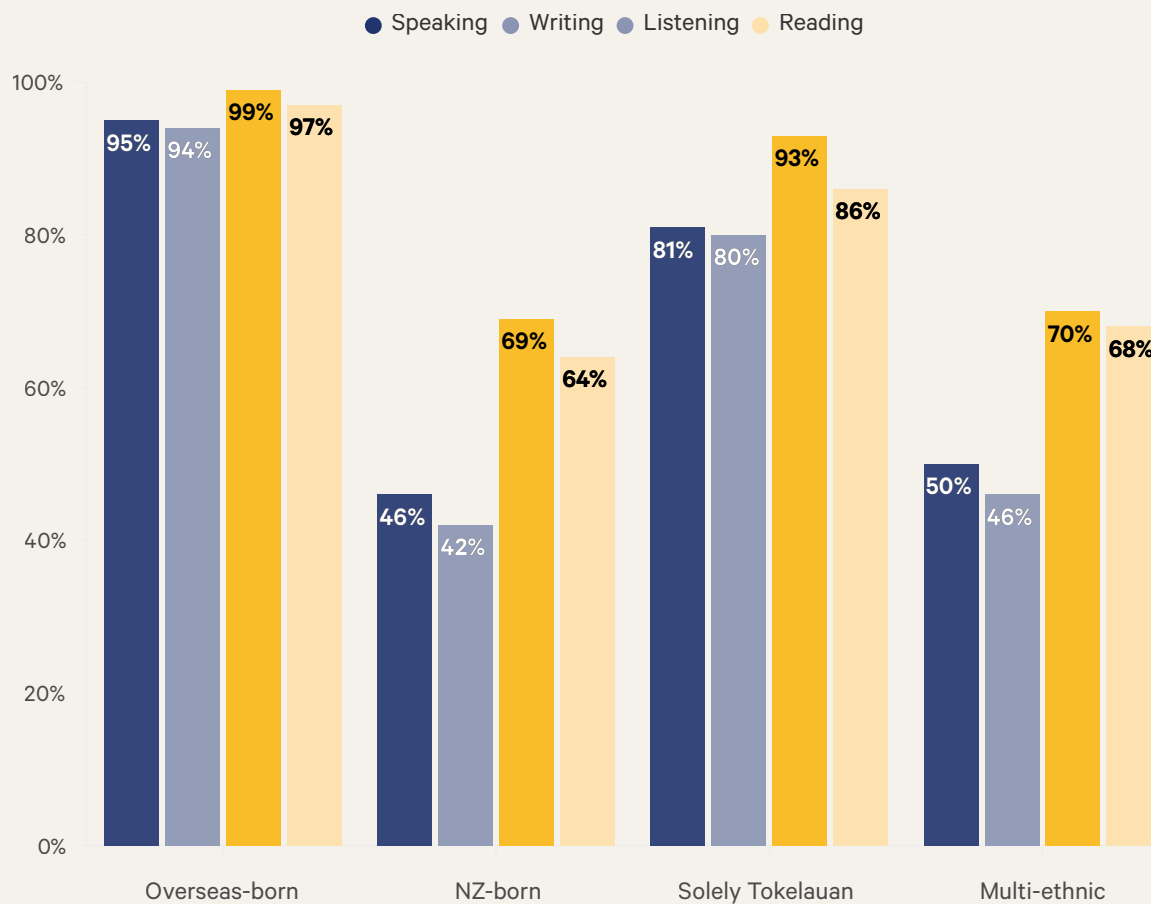
Self-reported proficiency in te gagana Tokelau varied significantly depending on participants' age, ethnic identity, and birthplace across all four skill categories. Overall trends showed that older participants reported higher levels of language proficiency than younger participants.

**Figure 4 – Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau by age group**



Reported proficiency also corresponded with birthplace and ethnic identity. Participants who were born overseas and identified solely as tagata Tokelau reported higher levels of proficiency in te gagana Tokelau than those who were New Zealand-born and multi-ethnic.

**Figure 5 – Proficiency in te gagana Tokelau by birthplace and ethnic identity**

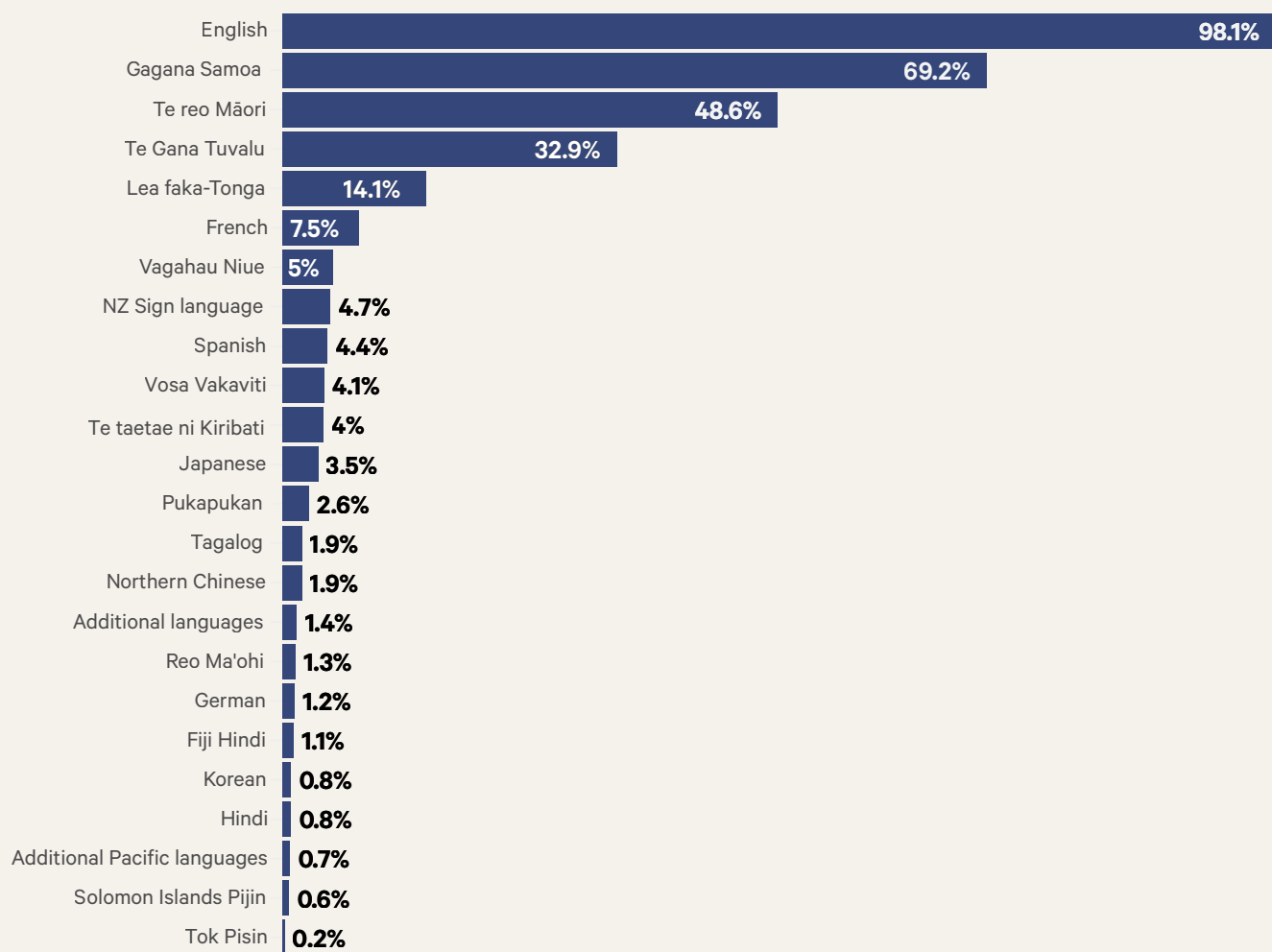


As illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, self-rated proficiency in productive language skills (speaking and writing) is lower than in receptive language skills (listening and reading) for younger, New Zealand-born, multi-ethnic participants.

## Proficiency in other Pacific languages

Survey responses indicated high levels of multilingualism among te gagana Tokelau participants. Nearly half (49%) reported being familiar with te reo Māori, and 5% reported the same for New Zealand Sign Language. The Pacific languages tagata Tokelau most reported being familiar with other than te gagana Tokelau were gagana Sāmoa (69%), te 'gana Tuvalu (33%), and lea faka-Tonga (14%).

**Figure 6 – Multilingualism among tagata Tokelau**

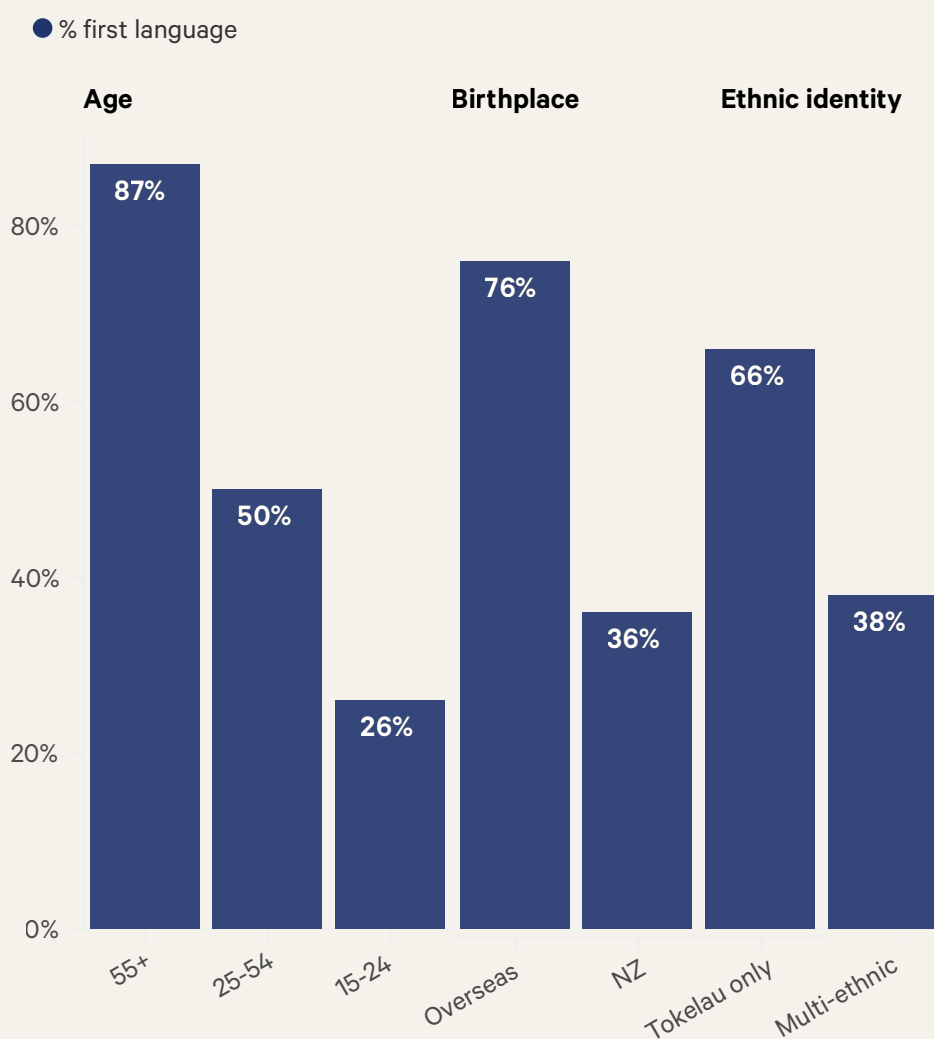


## Language acquisition

Almost two thirds (65%) of participants reported learning te gagana Tokelau as a first language. Over three-quarters (76%) learned at least one Pacific language as a first language, while 24% learned English or another non-Pacific language.

Learning te gagana Tokelau as a first language corresponded with self-rated proficiency by age group, birthplace, and ethnic identity. That is, participants were significantly more likely to have learned te gagana Tokelau in infancy if they were aged 55+ years (87%), born overseas (76%), and/or identified solely as tagata Tokelau (66%). Comparatively, participants were significantly less likely to have learned te gagana Tokelau in infancy if they were aged 15-24 years (26%), born in New Zealand (36%), and/or multi-ethnic (38%).

**Figure 7 – First language acquisition among tagata Tokelau**



---

*“My language is a big part of my identity. It connects me to my motherland, to my ancestors, to all those who came before me. Because I know my language, I know exactly who I am, I feel deeply connected to my roots and home – especially being a part of the diaspora in New Zealand.”*

---

## Language, identity, and culture

Te gagana Tokelau was viewed extremely positively by participants and widely considered to be a significant part of Tokelau identity and culture. Nearly all agreed that: te gagana Tokelau is an important language (98%); they are proud to be Pacific (99%); the language that best connects them to their culture is te gagana Tokelau (95%); and te gagana Tokelau is important for their wellbeing (96%).

## Language loss

Nearly all (96%) participants agreed it would matter to them if te gagana Tokelau were lost altogether. A similar proportion (90%) believed such loss is in danger of happening in New Zealand, and 53% felt the same in relation to Tokelau.

**Figure 8 – Attitudes towards language loss**




---

*“It is my identity, my history, my oral tradition that connects me to a lineage of warriors and explorers. My language is my map home.”*

---

## Intergenerational transmission

Nearly all (98%) participants agreed that it is important for their children and future generations to speak te gagana Tokelau. A similar proportion (97%) agreed it is important for them to master their parents’ language and that it is their responsibility to pass this on to the next generation.

**Figure 9 – Attitudes towards language maintenance and transmission**

Attitudes to heritage language maintenance    ● Agree    ● Not agree

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



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



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




---

*“My Pacific language is part of my identity. It is one of many connections to my tupuna. I hope to one day be fluent in te gagana Tokelau and pass this treasure on to my children.”*

---



## Te gagana Tokelau in the home and with family

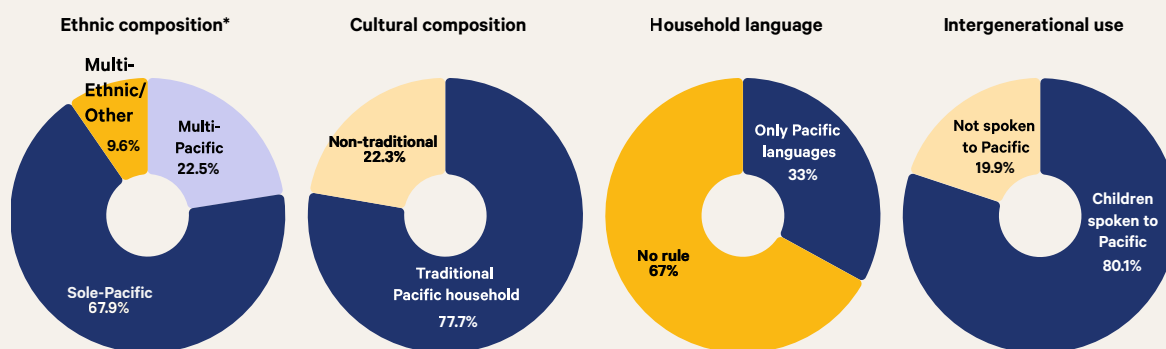
*“Being a parent, when it comes to te gagana Tokelau, it feels like something is missing. I really enjoy listening and learning little bits of the language, and I’m slowly picking up sentences and words and that sort of thing, but I’m not confident enough to fully speak it yet.”*

### Childhood household composition and language use

Over two-thirds (69%) of participants reported growing up in a household where everyone was tagata Tokelau. Under a quarter (23%) reported growing up in a multi-Pacific household and 10% did so in a multi-ethnic household

Most (78%) participants reported their childhood home was traditionally Pacific, and a similar proportion (80%) said that children were mostly spoken to in te gagana Tokelau growing up. One-third (33%) reported their household had a rule where only te gagana Tokelau could be spoken.

**Figure 10 – Childhood household composition and language use**



*“My Tokelauan language is not so good. I’m not able to speak it for a number of reasons, but I guess the biggest challenge was growing in a house where my parents spoke English because that’s what they were learning and wanted us to learn.”*

\* Multi-ethnic/other includes responses of ‘Pacific/other’, ‘not sure’, ‘none Pacific’, and ‘something else’.

## Contemporary household composition and language use

In the current day, 49% of participants reported living in household with at least two generations. A slightly smaller proportion (41%) reported living in household with three or more generations. The most common household size was 2-4 other people (37%), followed by 5-6 other people (35%), and 7-8 other people (15%).

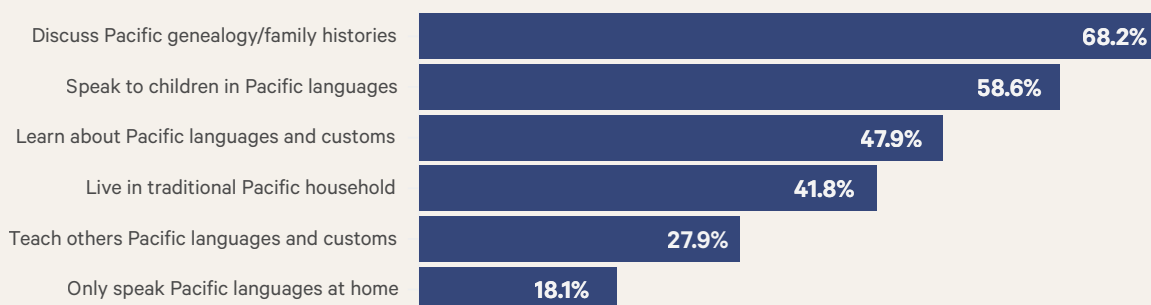
Over half (59%) of participants reported that speaking to children in te gagana Tokelau is common in their household, and 68% reported they had spent time discussing Pacific genealogies and/or family histories in the past year.

---

*“Te gagana Tokelau is important in terms of identity, but in more practical terms it helps us understand our elders and connect to our history. It binds families and gafa, and brings about a real sense of belonging.”*

---

**Figure 11 – Language activities in the home and with family**



Many participants discussed the home in relation to language maintenance and transmission, emphasising its importance as a space where te gagana Tokelau, and indeed other Pacific languages as families become increasingly diverse, can be spoken, heard, taught, and learned.

---

*“[Te gagana Tokelau] is not a language we use 24/7 at home because it’s a mixed household with Tokelau, Samoan, English, and now Tongan because my grandchildren’s mother is Tongan... She encourages Tongan while I try to teach Tokelauan because I know our language is endangered”*

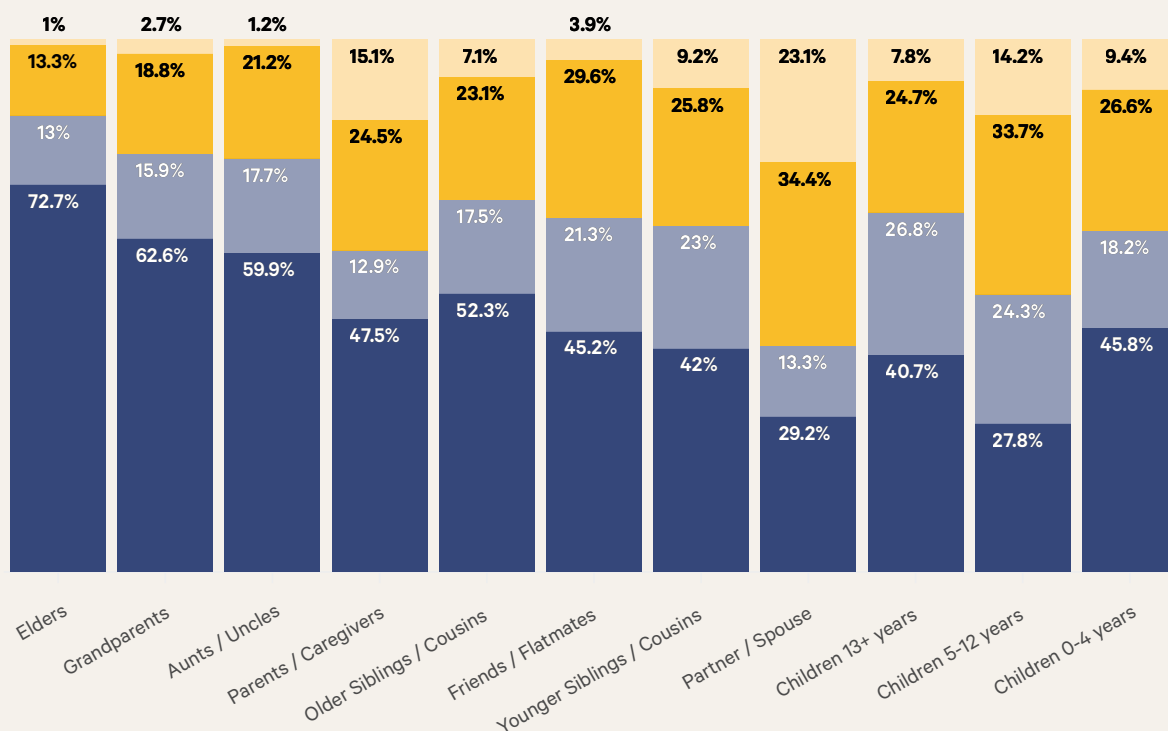
---

When asked how much communication in the home was conducted in their Pacific language compared with English, almost all participants reported using te gagana Tokelau at least sometimes with elders (99%), grandparents (98%), aunts/uncles (99%), and older siblings/cousins (93%). Participants were most likely to report never using te gagana Tokelau with their partner/spouse (23%).

**Figure 12 – Language use in the home and with family**

Household Pacific language use compared to English

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



*“Te gagana Tokelau means a lot to me as it was the first language. I was taught by my grandparents. Sadly I lost it when I moved away from [them] and attended an English-speaking preschool, though I still try my best to use it where I can and where I feel comfortable.”*

**Ethnic identity and household language use**

Participants who identified solely as tagata Tokelau were more likely to report using te gagana Tokelau at least sometimes with their parents (98%), compared to those who were multi-Pacific (78%), or multi-ethnic (69%). There was a similar trend for the use of te gagana Tokelau with aunts/uncles.

Participants who were multi-Pacific or multi-ethnic commented on the challenge of feeling comfortable in their cultural identity. For many, learning a Pacific language helps to address this, building confidence and contributing towards a sense of belonging both in oneself and external cultural contexts.

*“Being of mixed ethnicity has been challenging... You feel like you aren’t enough of one ethnicity to fully belong, but learning to speak a Pacific language is a step towards overcoming that.”*

## Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home

When asked about the condition of te gagana Tokelau, 81% agreed the language is safe, as long as it is spoken in the home. A significantly lower proportion (14%) believed te gagana Tokelau is only important in the home.

Figure 13 – 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**





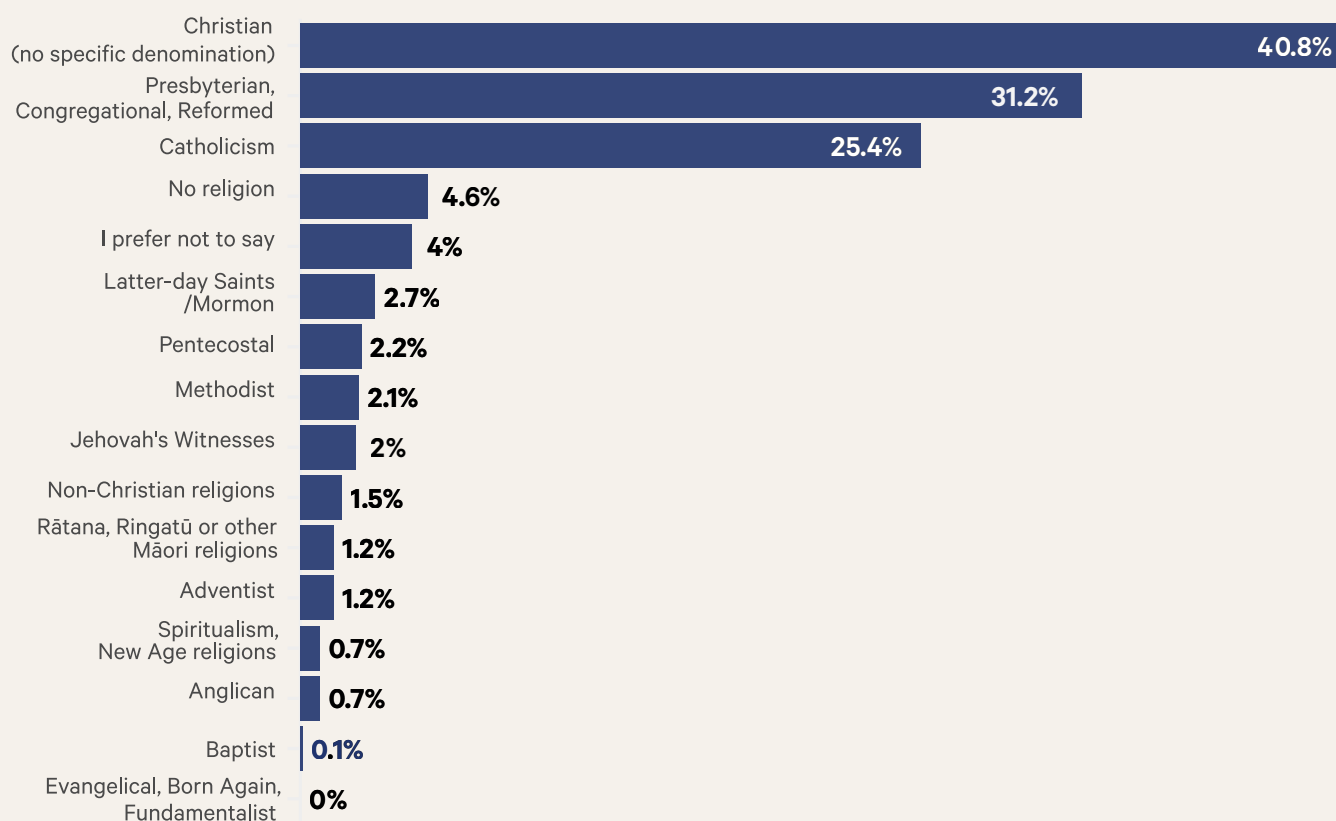
## Te gagana Tokelau in church

*“I believe Pacific churches have and will continue to have an important role in maintaining Pacific languages in Aotearoa. They have become second homes, new villages for communities here.”*

### Religious affiliations and church attendance

Participants were asked to report their religious affiliation(s) and could select as many options as were relevant to them. The most common religion was non-denominational Christianity (41%), followed by Presbyterian/Congregational/Reformed Christianity (31%), and Catholicism (25%).

**Figure 14 – Religious affiliations among tagata Tokelau**

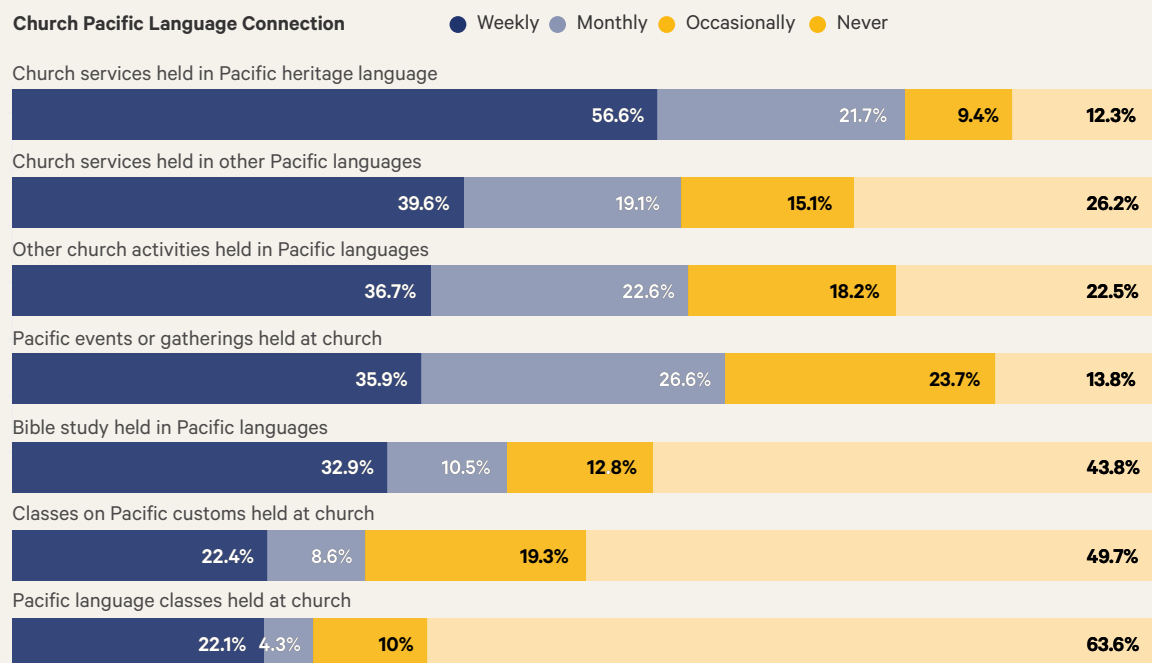


Most participants reported having at least one religious affiliation, while only 7% reported none. Just over a half (57%) of participants reported they attended church at least occasionally, while 39% said they did so on a weekly basis.

### Pacific language use in church

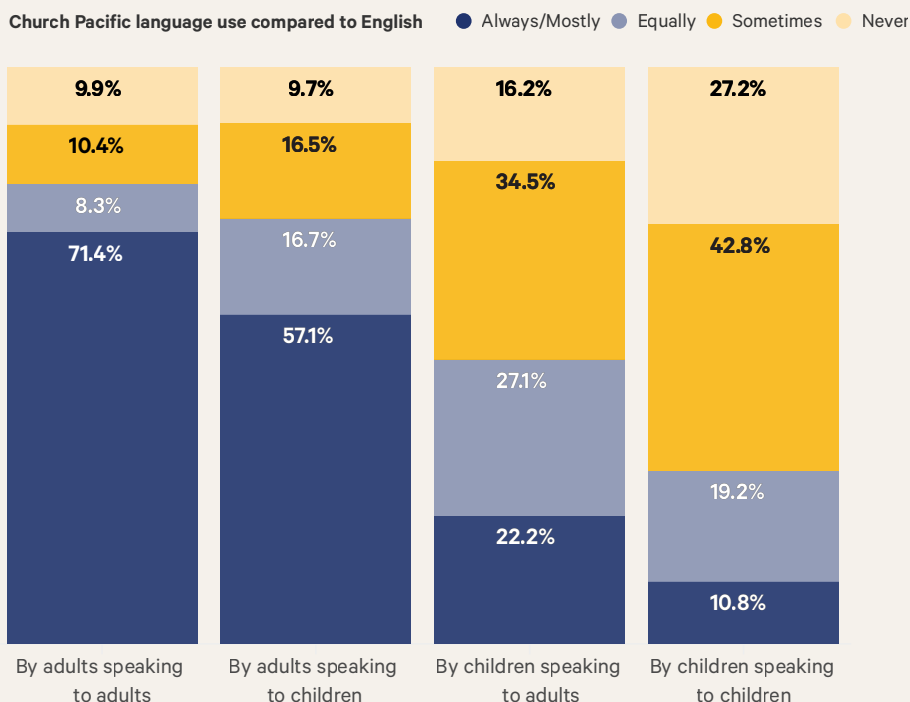
Over half (57%) of participants who attended church weekly reported that services were held in te gagana Tokelau, and smaller proportions reported that other church activities (37%) – e.g., choir practices and youth groups – and bible study (33%) were conducted in the language as well. Some (40%) reported their church services were held in a Pacific language(s) other than te gagana Tokelau.

**Figure 15 – Pacific language use during church services and activities**



There were significant differences between how people communicated with adults compared to children in church. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of participants reported hearing adults use te gagana Tokelau with other adults most of the time, while 22% reported hearing children do the same with adults. Over half (57%) of participants reported hearing adults use te gagana Tokelau with children most of the time, while 11% reported hearing children use it with each other as frequently.

**Figure 16 – Pacific language use at church between adults and children**



Church was highlighted by participants as a crucial setting and safe space for language maintenance and transmission, with many expressing they feel a deeper connection to God when praying in te gagana Tokelau:

---

*“Language is the medium I use with my God.  
I praise and worship Him in my Tokelau language – God who is seen and reflected in the culture – and can forever describe him in my language.”*

---

### **Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church**

Most participants agreed te gagana Tokelau is a gift from God (87%), and 72% reported that their church is attended by many tagata Tokelau. Nearly two-thirds (65%) feel comfortable using te gagana Tokelau at church, though only 10% agreed the language is only important in that setting.

### **Regional access to Pacific languages in church**

Living outside of Wellington and Auckland was viewed by participants as a significant impediment to learning and using te gagana Tokelau. Participants who did not live in these urban hubs were less likely to report Pacific events or gatherings being held at their churches (70%) than those who did (90%).

This trend was also reflected in the proportions of participants who reported their bible classes being held in te gagana Tokelau at least sometimes – 39% living in the regions compared to 60% living in Wellington and Auckland. Where other church activities were concerned, nearly two-thirds (62%) of participants in the regions reported them being held in Pacific languages, compared with nearly 87% and 72% of participants in Wellington and Auckland respectively.



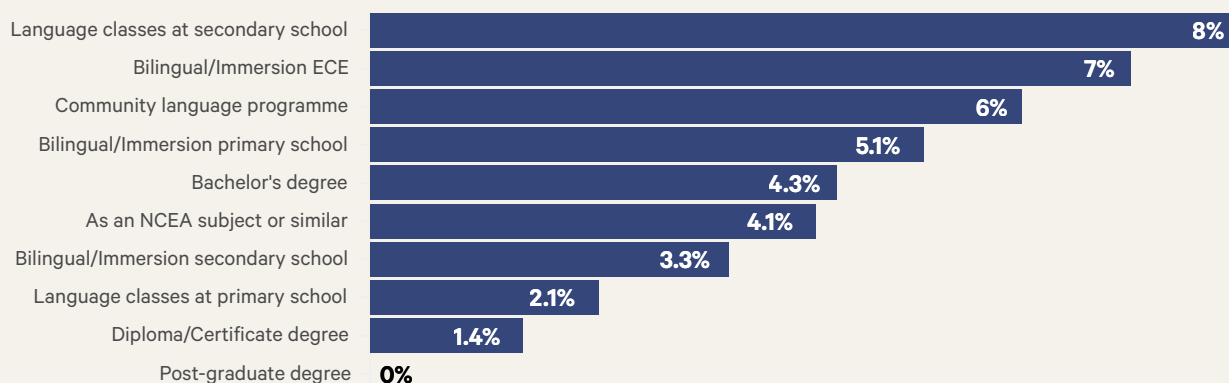
## Te gagana Tokelau in education settings

*“My language is one of many gateways to my identity. Reviving my language is my vocation and I aspire to teach te gagana Tokelau at secondary schools once I have graduated from university.”*

### Pacific language education experiences

Almost half (44%) of participants reported having engaged in some form of Pacific language education in New Zealand. Of this proportion, the most common form was language classes at secondary school (8%), followed by bilingual or immersion ECE (7%), community language programmes (6%), and bilingual or immersion primary education (5%).

**Figure 17 – Tagata Tokelau participation in Pacific language education**



### Pacific language use in schools

*“I am very comfortable speaking in Tokelauan, and have done so lately at my job as a teacher aide at my children’s primary school. I have no shame calling across the field in Tokelauan if I see some Tokelau kids.”*

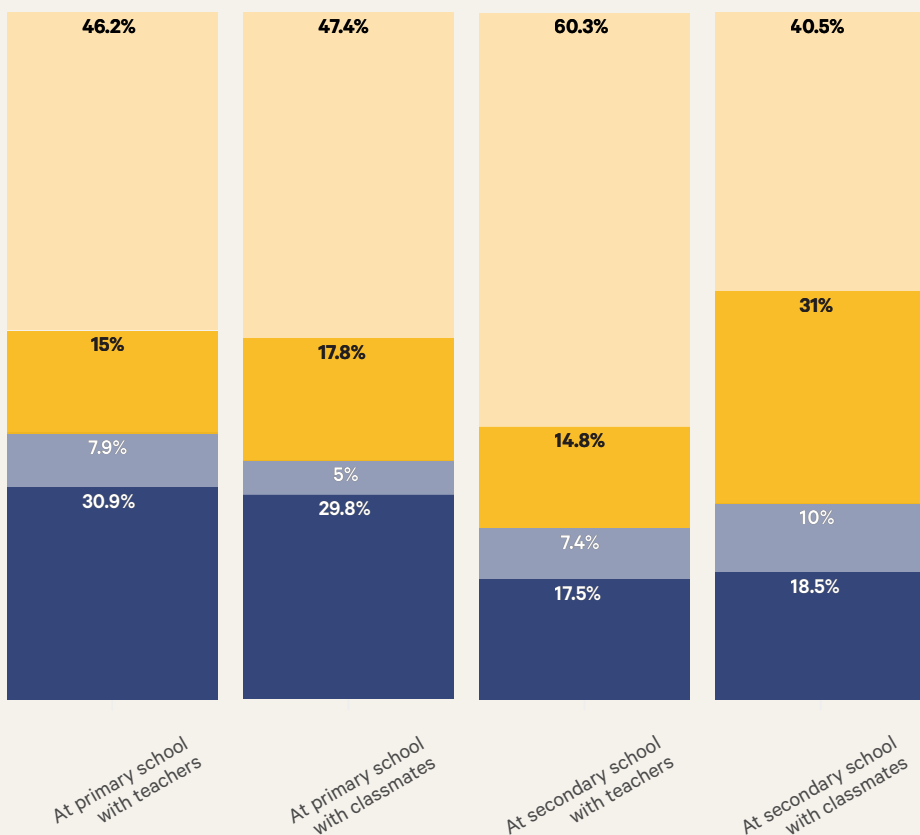
Participants’ use of te gagana Tokelau in education was low compared to other settings. This could be attributed to the language only becoming an NCEA-accredited subject in 2023 and that there are limited opportunities to learn it, whether through formal or community education, in New Zealand.

When asked how often conversations were conducted in the language at primary school, over half of participants reported they used the language at least sometimes with teachers (54%) and classmates (53%). The results were varied in relation to secondary school, with a smaller proportion of participants reporting use of the language at least sometimes with teachers (40%) compared to classmates (60%).

**Figure 18 – Pacific language use at primary and secondary schools**

Pacific language use at NZ schools compared to English

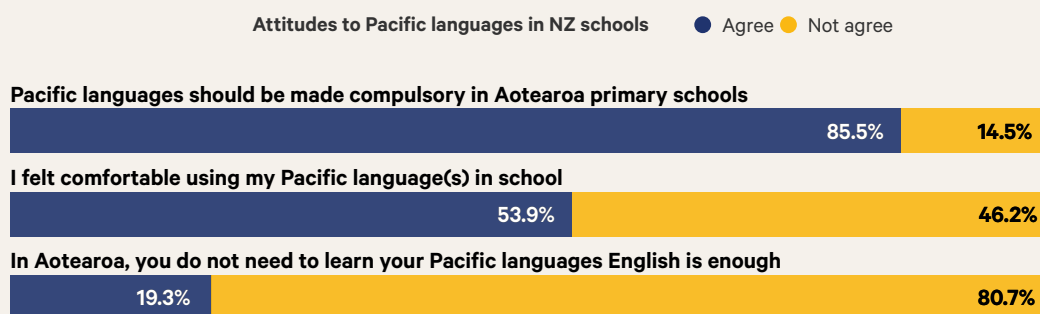
● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



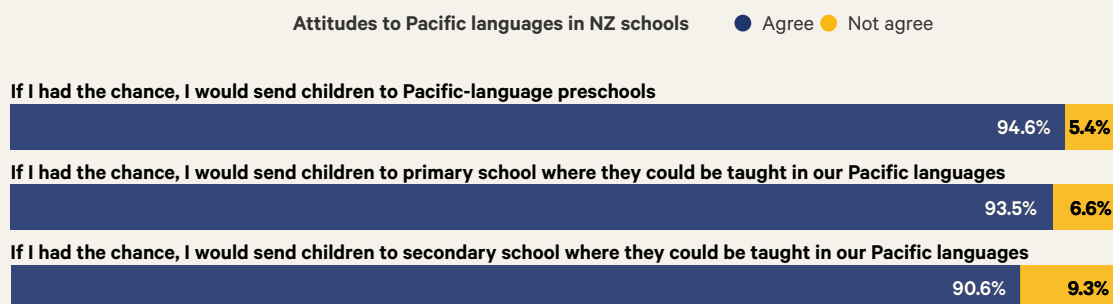
### Attitudes towards Pacific languages in education

*“Having had [te gagana Tokelau] stripped from me to ‘better’ my life, I’m saddened that I’m not familiar with it as a part of my culture. If only our languages were offered at school, I could have had the opportunity to learn for myself.”*

Most (86%) participants agreed that Pacific languages should be made compulsory in New Zealand primary schools, and 54% felt comfortable using their language in school. Almost one-fifth (19%) agreed with the statement ‘in Aotearoa, you don’t need to learn your Pacific languages: English is enough’.

**Figure 19 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools**

Nearly all participants reported they would send their child(ren) to ECE (95%), primary (94%), and secondary schools (91%) where they could be taught in te gagana Tokelau if given the opportunity.

**Figure 20 – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities**

## Regional access to Pacific language education

There were regional barriers to accessing Pacific language education, with 50% of participants living in Wellington and Auckland reporting having done so compared to only one-third (33%) of those elsewhere. Participants in the regions were also more likely to report being negatively affected by a lack of other Pacific people at school, with 32% reporting it as a barrier to engaging with their language compared to only 18% in Wellington and Auckland.

Participants in the regions were significantly more likely to report household members engaging in Pacific language education as an enabler of te gagana Tokelau (23%) than those living in Wellington (14%) and Auckland (6%). This likely speaks to there being so few opportunities for language use in the regions that having even a single household member attending language classes, for example, can make a significant positive impact.

### **Ethnic identity and engagement in Pacific language education**

Participants who reported having multi-Pacific or multi-ethnic identities were more likely to have engaged in Pacific language education than participants who identified solely as tagata Tokelau. A quarter (25%) of multi-ethnic participants reported that not having access to bilingual or immersion programmes was a barrier to learning te gagana Tokelau, compared to only 11% of multi-Pacific or solely tagata Tokelau participants.

---

*“I have no qualms about using te gagana Tokelau in my classroom if I have Tokelauan students. I give simple tasks or requests like those their parents use at home.”*

---



## Te gagana Tokelau in the workplace

*“Other international languages are encouraged at schools to help with international relations [...] careers and [...] working level utilization. However, in my place of work, we struggle to find Pacific interpreters because there are hardly any, and we know it’s important to have them available for our clients.”*

When asked about their current status in the labour market, 73% of participants reported they were currently engaged in paid work, while 14% were involved in some form of unpaid work.

Some (19%) participants reported they had experienced ethnicity-based discrimination in the workplace. A slightly lower proportion (11%) reported they had conducted their work in te gagana Tokelau in the past.

### Workplace experiences

Less than a third (30%) of participants reported they have worked for a Pacific-focused organisation, and the same proportion (30%) said that Pacific languages and cultures are visible at their workplace. Similarly, 32% reported they currently or have previously helped, worked, or volunteered without pay for a Pacific-focused organisation(s), and 23% reported their workplace has dedicated Pacific cultural advisors on staff.

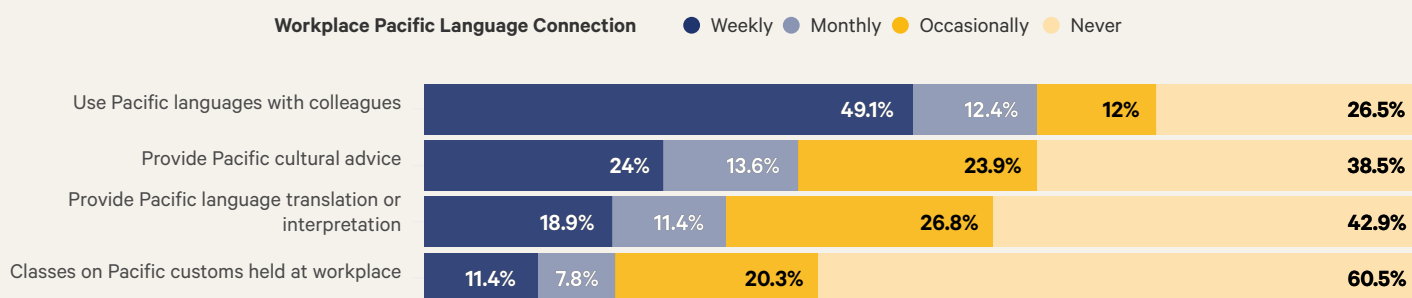
**Figure 21 – Pacific language workplace experiences**



## Pacific language use in the workplace

Just under half (49%) of participants reported they use te gagana Tokelau with colleagues at least once a week, while 24% said they do so monthly or occasionally. A majority (62%) reported they have provided Pacific cultural advice in the workplace previously (even if not part of their job description). Just over a half (57%) of participants reported they have provided Pacific language support in the form of translation and/or interpretation in the past.

Figure 22 – Work-based Pacific language activities



## Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace

Nearly three-quarters (72%) 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 participants shared regarding the prevailing perception in New Zealand that English is the language of professional success.

---

*“Although my Pacific parent is fluent in te gagana Tokelau, they found it difficult to teach us... I suspect this is because, back in the day, the language was seen as a disadvantage or hindrance to our future success.”*

---



## Te gagana Tokelau in and with Pacific communities

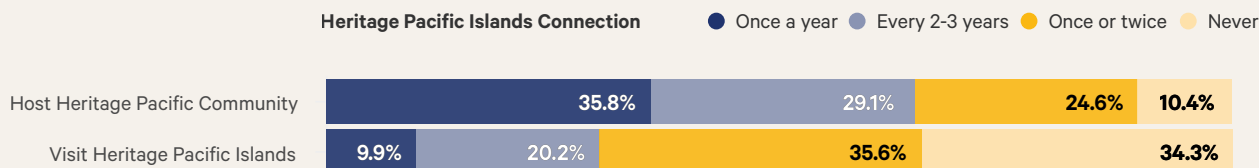
*“My Pacific language is me. It’s my parents, my ancestors. It’s the anchor that holds me to my island in Tokelau.”*

### Connection to Tokelau

Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they visited Tokelau and/or hosted community members from Tokelau prior to COVID-19. The majority (90%) of participants reported they had hosted community members at least once before, and 36% reported doing so at least once a year. Only 10% reported never having hosted community members from Tokelau before.

Trends in how often participants visited Tokelau were disparate, with 10% reporting they visited at least once a year, and 56% reporting they visited every 2-3 years. The remaining proportion (34%) reported they had visited Tokelau one or twice or not at all.

**Figure 23 – Visiting and hosting community members from Tokelau**



Participants expressed how moving away from Tokelau makes it harder to maintain te gagana Tokelau, and that there can be shame associated with making mistakes and/or having lost some of the language while in New Zealand.

*“Not being fluent is a huge hole in my identity. I feel shame in not knowing or understanding my own culture as I would if I knew the language and customs better.”*

### Language use in Tokelau

Almost half of participants indicated they always or mostly use te gagana Tokelau when visiting (46%) and talking (49%) to people in Tokelau. Only 15% reported they never use the language in these contexts.

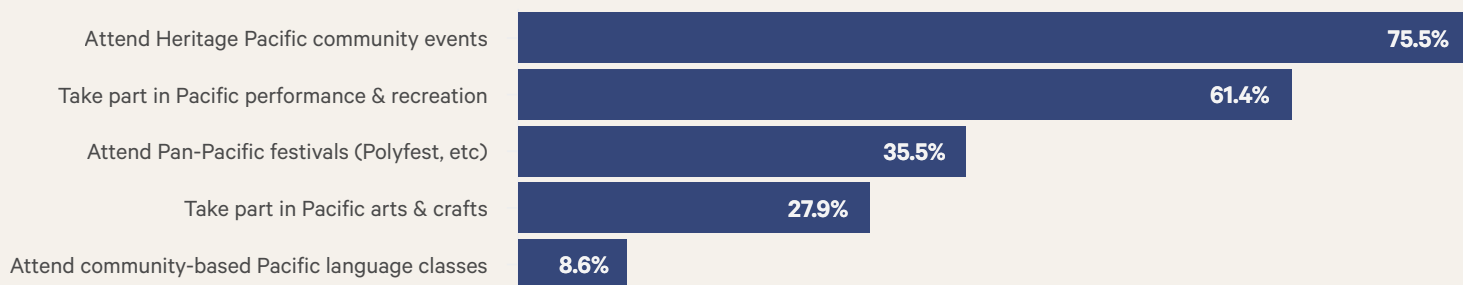
A recurring theme participants highlighted was that visiting Tokelau is incredibly important in terms of providing opportunities to practice and reconnect with their language and culture.

*“When going back to Tokelau – I like to use the te gagana Tokelau as often as I can. But to get the message out around what I want to say I sometimes play it safe and speak English.”*

### Language use in community settings

Participants were asked if they had engaged in any community events, initiatives, or activities in New Zealand in the past 12 months. The most common activities reported were Tokelau community events (76%) and Pacific performance or recreation activities (61%). Lower proportions of participants reported engaging in Polyfest or other pan-Pacific events (36%), taking part in arts and crafts activities (28%), and attending community-based language classes (9%).

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



Participants were also asked about their attitudes towards Pacific cultural events. A large proportion reported they find such events easy to access (85%), with those most likely to agree living in Wellington (91%), followed by Auckland (83%), and elsewhere (73%).

The same proportion (85%) reported they enjoy participating in these cultural events, with residents of Auckland (97%) and Wellington (97%) once gain returning higher levels of agreement than those of the regions (87%).

**Figure 25 – Attitudes towards Pacific cultural events**



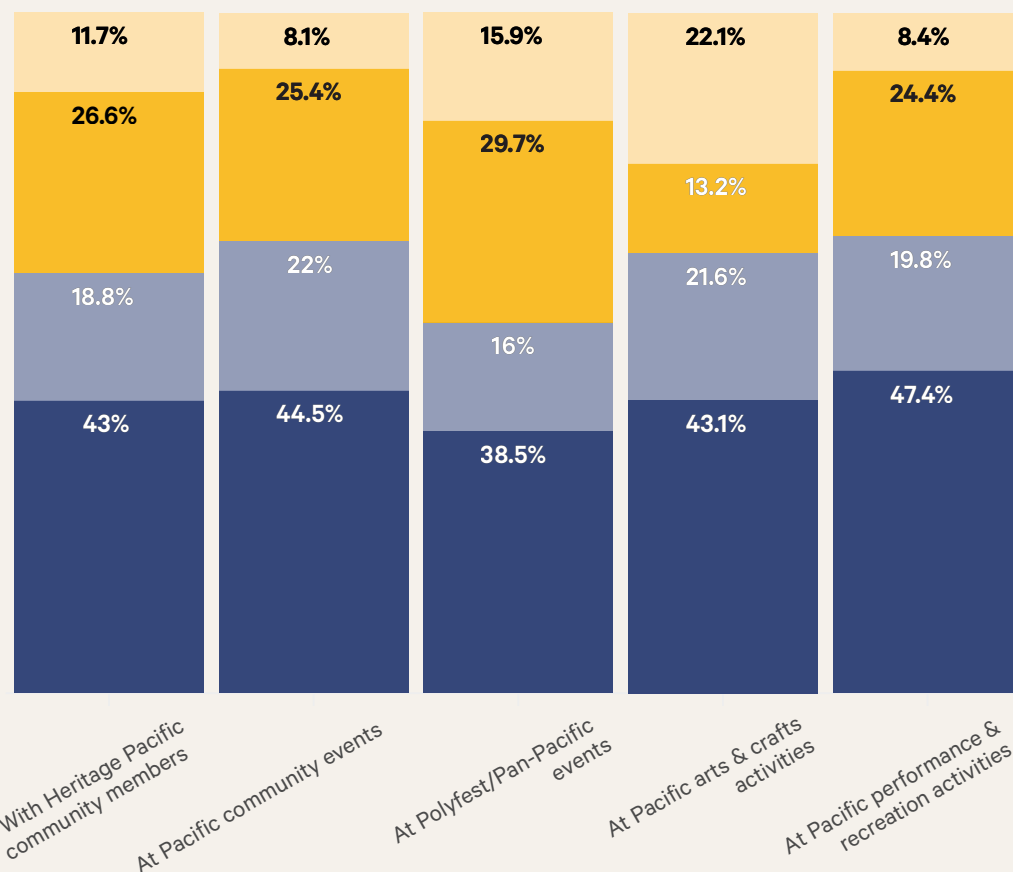
*“We have a small community down in Dunedin for all the Tokelauans, and I think the important thing is having people my age around me who can speak the language”*

In terms of the frequency at which participants used te gagana Tokelau in community settings, nearly all participants reported using the language at least sometimes when taking part in Pacific performance and recreation activities (92%), community events (92%), Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (84%), and arts and crafts activities (78%). A large proportion (88%) reported using the language in conversation with Tokelau community members more broadly.

**Figure 26 – Pacific language use in community settings**

**Pacific community language use compared to English**

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never





# Te gagana Tokelau in media and broadcasting

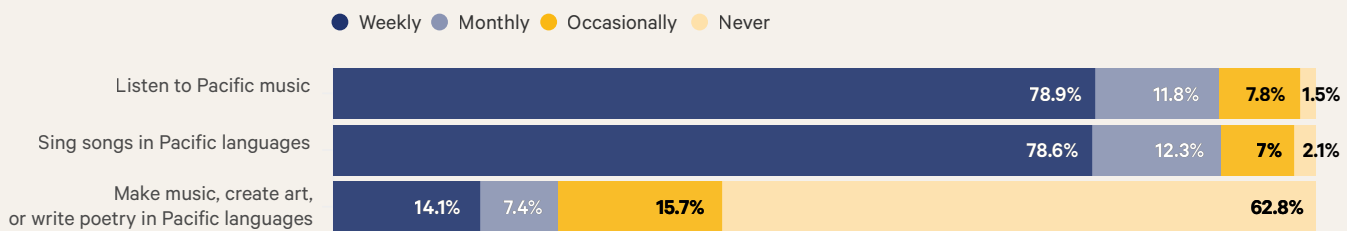
*“Hearing [te gagana Tokelau] more on TV and radio and seeing it on signs at supermarkets – I’d love to learn Tokelauan because it’s in my blood as my parents are from there.”*

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

## Music

Music was the type of media most often reported by participants in relation to Pacific language use, with almost all responding they listen to Pacific language music (99%) and sing songs in Pacific languages (98%) at least occasionally. Most participants (79%) reported engaging in both activities at least once a week.

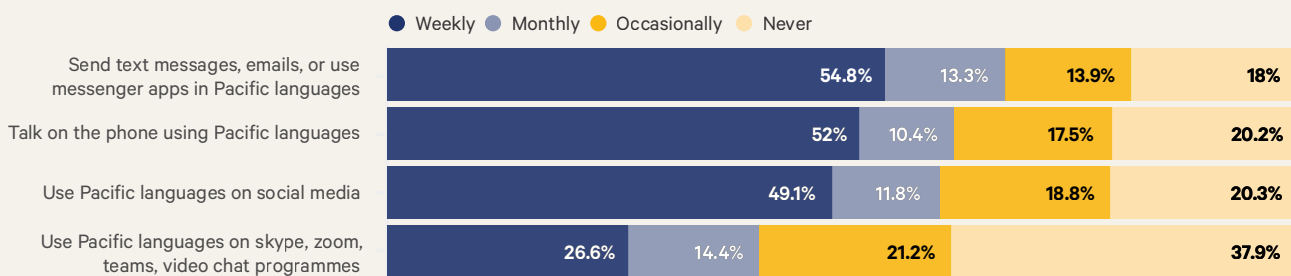
**Figure 27 – Engagement in Pacific music**



## Social media and telecommunications

Over three-quarters of participants reported using te gagana Tokelau at least occasionally while on the phone (80%), social media (80%), or when sending texts, emails, or messages (82%). Smaller proportions reported using it at least weekly in the same contexts.

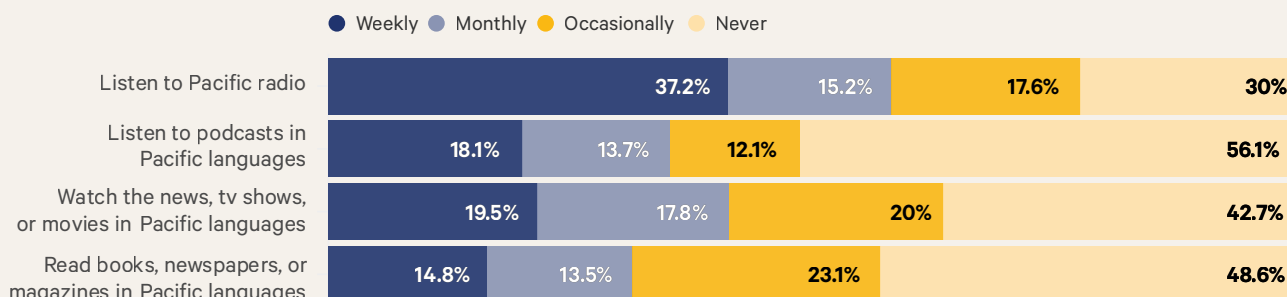
**Figure 28 – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications**



## Broadcast and print media

Radio was the most popular form of broadcast media for participants, with 70% listening to content in te gagana Tokelau at least occasionally. This was followed by: watching the news, TV shows, or movies (57%); reading books, newspapers, or magazines (51%); listening to podcasts (44%); and creating digital content or media (39%).

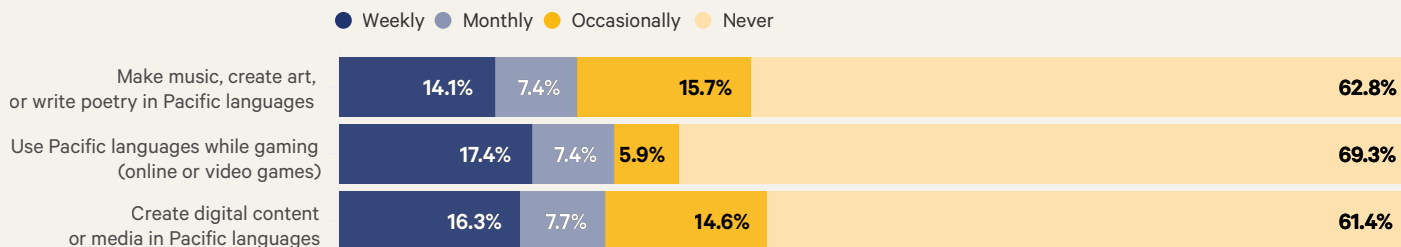
Figure 29 – Engagement in broadcast and print media



## Creative arts

Just over one-third (37%) of participants reported making music, creating art, or writing poetry in Pacific languages, and 39% reported creating digital media content such as blogs or vlogs. Less than one-third (31%) said they used Pacific languages while gaming.

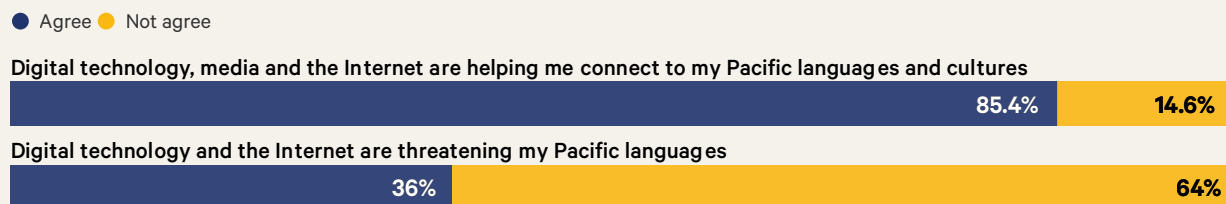
Figure 30 – Engagement in creative arts



## Attitudes towards Pacific language media

Most participants (85%) agreed that digital technology, media, and the internet help them connect to their language(s) and culture(s). Around one-third (36%) thought that digital technology and the internet are threatening te gagana Tokelau.

Figure 31 – Attitudes towards Pacific language media



# Te gagana Tokelau in the New Zealand context

*“New Zealand will be all the richer not just financially but also culturally, socially, morally, and spiritually for investing now in the maintenance and transmission of Pacific languages.”*

## Wider society

Nearly all participants (92%) agreed that bilingualism is beneficial in New Zealand and that Pacific languages are an important part of New Zealand’s national identity (95%). Over three-quarters (80%) agreed they feel comfortable using te gagana Tokelau around non-Pacific people, and 69% believe it is important to learn foreign languages beyond English, demonstrating the value placed on multilingualism by the Tokelau community in New Zealand.

**Figure 32 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society**



## Language, identity, and politeness dynamics

Most participants (90%) agreed it is important to speak your Pacific language(s) as a Pacific person. One-third (33%) agreed it is impolite to use Pacific languages around people who do not understand them. Very few participants (13%) thought that if a person is not fluent in their Pacific language, they should not speak it at all.

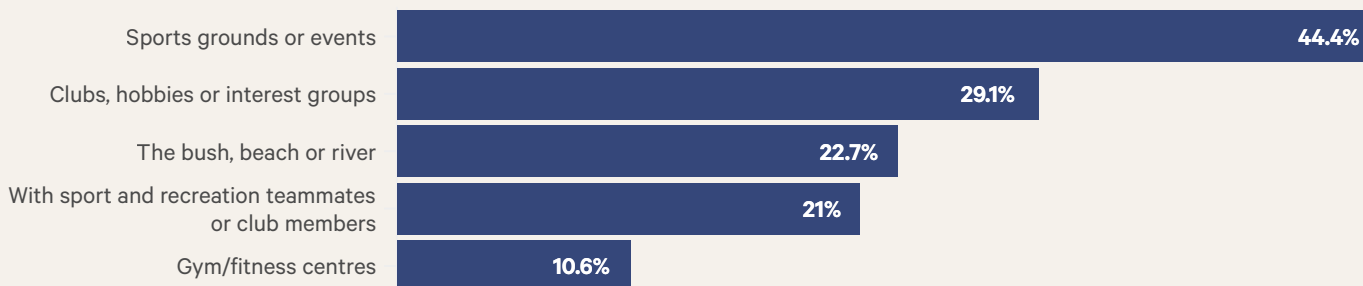
The low rate of participants who agreed that one should not speak their Pacific language if they are not fluent contrasted with the observed and lived experiences of participants. Specifically, many spoke of how New Zealand-born children can be shy and reluctant to speak te gagana Tokelau, though they may understand it, for fear of being judged for making mistakes.

*“The New Zealand-born kids are too shy to speak in Tokelauan because they might make a mistake. I am basing this on how my kids are. They understand when they hear it but when asked to respond back in Tokelauan, they’re too shy.”*

### Language use in recreational settings

When asked where they had used te gagana Tokelau in the past 12 months, many participants highlighted recreational settings. Under half (44%) reported using the language at sporting events, while 29% reported the same in relation to clubs, hobbies or interest groups.

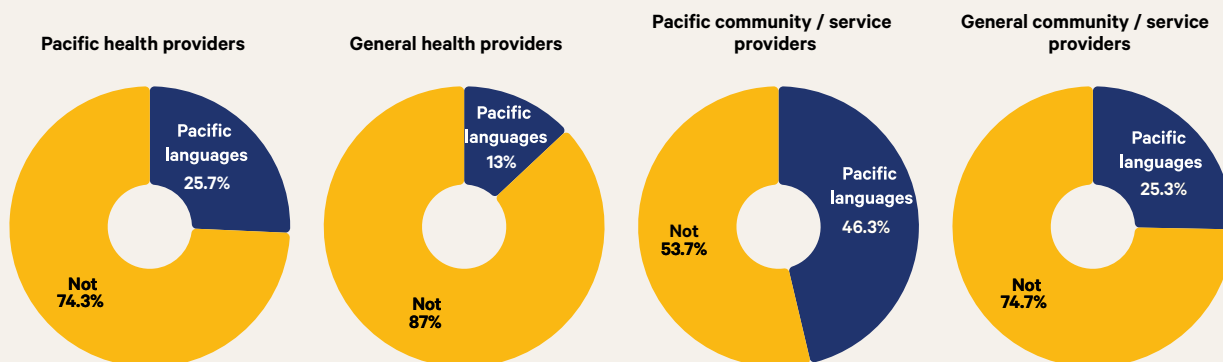
Figure 33 – Pacific language use in recreational settings



### Language use with service providers

Tagata Tokelau were asked whether they had used te gagana Tokelau when engaging with health and community service providers in the last year. More people reported they had used the language when engaging with Pacific health providers (26%) compared to general health providers (13%). Similarly, more participants reported they had used it with Pacific community services providers (46%) compared to general community service providers (25%).

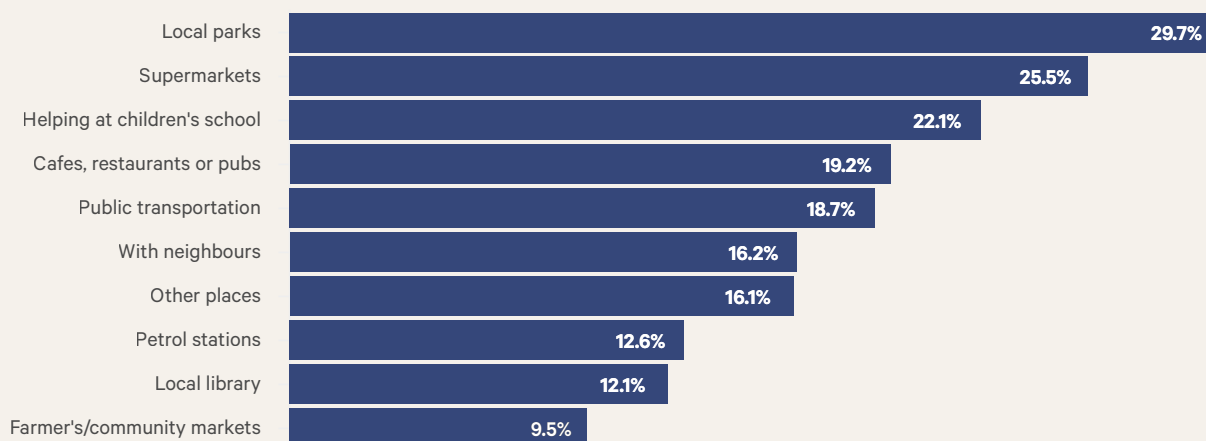
Figure 34 – Pacific language use with health and community service providers



## Language use in public settings

In terms of language use in public settings, 30% of participants reported using te gagana Tokelau at local parks. More than a quarter (26%) reported the same at supermarkets, and response rates continued to decrease in relation to other settings such as at children's schools (22%), in dining establishments (19%), and on public transportation (19%). The least likely place for participants to report using te gagana Tokelau were farmers/community markets (10%).

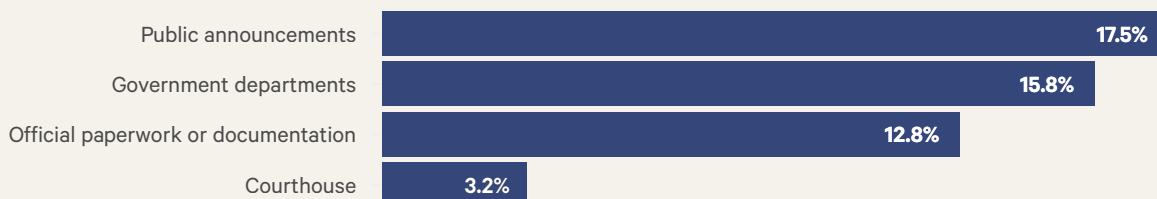
**Figure 35 – Pacific language use in public settings**



## New Zealand Government

Participants were unlikely to use their language while engaging with the New Zealand Government, with 16% reporting doing so. A smaller proportion (13%) reported using te gagana Tokelau when completing official paperwork or documentation, and only 3% reported the same in courthouse settings.

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

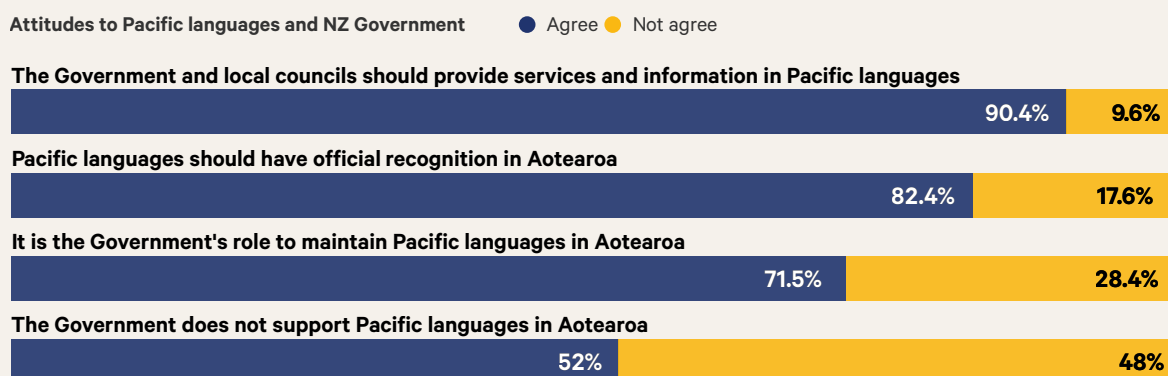


## Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

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 (90%) felt that Government and local councils should provide services and information in Pacific languages, and 82% agreed that Pacific languages should have official recognition in New Zealand. Nearly three-quarters (72%) agreed it is the Government's role to maintain Pacific languages in New Zealand, and 52% thought the Government does not support them.

**Figure 37 – Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages**




---

*“My language is my birthright. As a minority nation, a lot of focus is on the bigger Pacific nations like Samoa and Tonga, but I would like to see more content and resources for Tokelau, more effort put into helping the realm countries of NZ – Tokelau, Niue, and the Cook Islands.”*

---

Some participants commented on the constitutional relationship between New Zealand, Tokelau, Niue, and the Cook Islands. They emphasised that New Zealand has a responsibility to support the languages and cultures of these Realm countries, if not to honour its constitutional ties, then to reconcile the ramifications of its colonial administration throughout the earlier part of the 20th century.

---

*“I think New Zealand has a huge responsibility to its free association countries like Tokelau and the Cook Islands. Especially as they are [home to] some of the most threatened languages in the Pacific. New Zealand actively sought after these nations and so [...] owes them this in reconciliation for the debilitating repercussions of colonisation.”*

---

## Barriers and Enablers

*“He pele taku gagana. Tokelau kia te au. Ko te gagana ko te hokotaga ia ki oku matua, ma oku tupuna (My Tokelau language is precious to me. It is my connection to my parents and ancestry)”*

### Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau

Participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the main barriers to using, learning, and/or maintaining te gagana Tokelau. 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 38 – Reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau**



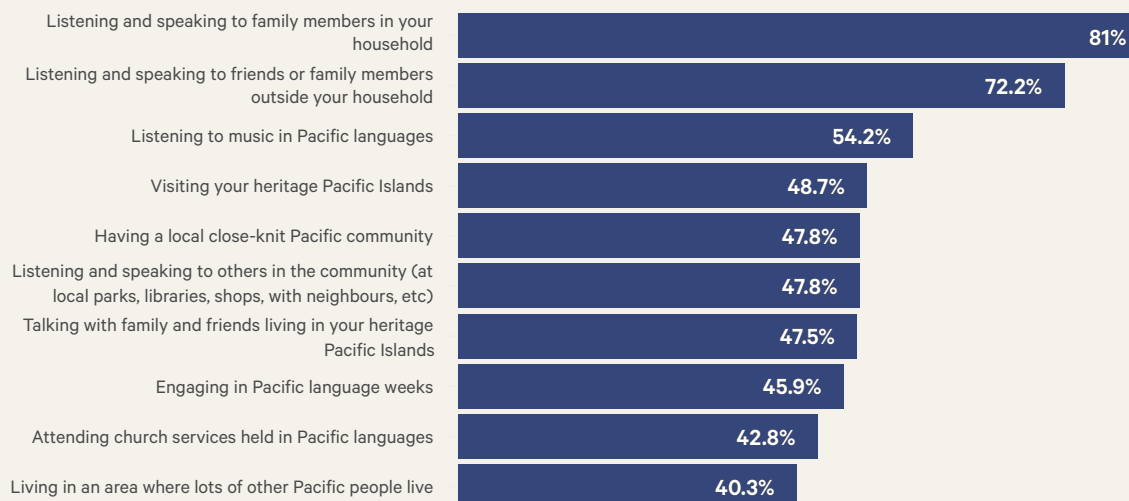
The most reported barriers for tagata Tokelau were inconsistent funding and resourcing to provide Pacific language programmes (42%) and not feeling connected to their Pacific culture and identity (37%). Similar proportions of participants reported other barriers such as: living in a household with people who do not speak te gagana Tokelau (34%); not being able to visit Tokelau (33%); and not having access to Pacific language or culture classes in the workplace (32%).

*“It’s a treasure but also a source of shame – I don’t have the tools or confidence to learn because I am disconnected from the community due to being adopted out to a family of another culture. I would like to see more opportunities to learn the language that are aimed at people with literally zero knowledge.”*

## Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau

Participants were also asked to identify what they considered to be the main enablers of them using, learning, and/or maintaining te gagana Tokelau. 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 39 – Reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining te gagana Tokelau**



The most reported enabler for participants was listening and speaking to family members in their household (81%). Other notable enablers were: listening to and speaking the language with friends or family members outside the household (72%); listening to music in te gagana Tokelau (54%); and visiting Tokelau (49%).

---

*“I am thankful to the New Zealand government [for] providing funding for Pacific languages that are in decline. I am also grateful to those working hard to create opportunities for people to connect with their Pacific identities with cultural events and learning. Fakafetai lahi lele.”*

---

# Conclusion

---

*“I hope the younger generation maintains their mother-tongue language. I hope it is promoted and advocated for in the future to help those who don’t have access to any resources. I hope the Pacific languages of Aotearoa become more alive than they are today.”*

---

Te gagana Tokelau faces significant challenges in New Zealand. In response, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, in collaboration with Pacific communities across the motu, developed the [Pacific Languages Strategy](#) to chart a course through these uncertain times. 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 Te Gagana Tokelau Report was developed. Alongside the overarching [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Report](#), it provides a snapshot of the state of te gagana Tokelau, 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 Tokelau 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 te gagana Tokelau and tagata Tokelau. These priorities are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; rather, a diverse mix of interventions will be required to meaningfully address language decline.

## Priority areas for action

### Strengthen language use in the home

The home is the foundation of language acquisition and intergenerational transmission. While 80% of participants reported being spoken to in te gagana Tokelau as children, and 99% believe it’s important for future generations to speak the language, proficiency – especially in speaking and writing – is declining. Revitalising home-based language use is essential to reversing this trend.

#### Recommendations:

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

## Expand and sustain bilingual and immersion education

Education is a powerful tool for language revitalisation. It can also work against it, however, as the shift away from heritage languages often accelerates when children enter mainstream education<sup>1</sup>. Starting bilingual and immersion education in early childhood – when language acquisition is most effective – lays a strong foundation for language fluency. Sustaining this through primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, as well as strong use of te gagana Tokelau at home, ensures continuity and strengthens language proficiency. Although nearly all participants (93%) would enrol their children in te gagana Tokelau programmes if given the opportunity, access remains limited. Expanding educational opportunities would remedy this, and in doing so enhance language revitalisation efforts.

### Recommendations:

- Expand bilingual and immersion programmes across all levels.
- Increase teacher training and resource development for Pacific language provision.
- Improve regional access to Pacific language education.

## Support language use in churches

Churches remain strongholds of te gagana Tokelau, with 71% of participants reporting they hear the language being used between adults during services. Use among children, however, is significantly lower. Te gagana Tokelau in church services and activities, especially those involving youth who may otherwise speak English, strengthens cultural identity and provides opportunities for exposure to and learning in the language. Strengthening this domain supports both spiritual and linguistic wellbeing, and contributes towards church being a trusted setting for intergenerational transmission.

### Recommendations:

- Partner with churches to deliver language programmes.
- Encourage youth participation in church-based language activities.
- Provide resources for scripture reading and religious education in te gagana Tokelau.

## Expand community-based language initiatives

Community events play a vital role in fostering language use and cultural confidence, with 92% of participants speaking te gagana Tokelau in these settings. Such gatherings provide a relaxed environment in which individuals can practice and enhance their language skills, complementing more formal learning contexts.

### Recommendations:

- Fund and support community language classes and cultural events.
- Facilitate intergenerational learning through community gatherings.
- Promote inclusive initiatives like arts-based language activities and youth-led events.

<sup>1</sup> Howard (2008). [Language socialization and language shift among school-aged children.](#)

## 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 te gagana Tokelau daily. Nearly all (99%) participants listen to music in te gagana Tokelau, and 80% use it over social media. High-quality, culturally-grounded media content increases visibility and normalises the use of te gagana Tokelau, particularly for the younger generations who are most active online.

### Recommendations:

- Invest in te gagana Tokelau media and digital content (e.g., music, podcasts, videos etc).
- Support digital literacy in te gagana Tokelau.
- Collaborate with broadcasters to expand te gagana Tokelau programming.

## Promote language use in the workplace

Almost half (49%) of participants reported using te gagana Tokelau at least weekly with their colleagues, and many offered cultural and/or language support at work. English is still perceived as the language of success, however, and 19% of participants reported having experienced ethnicity-based discrimination. Promoting Pacific languages in professional settings affirms cultural identity, challenging these harmful norms.

### Recommendations:

- Encourage employers to support Pacific language use.
- Develop workplace language champions and cultural advisors.
- Address ethnicity-based discrimination and promote multilingualism in the workplace.

## 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 Tokelau can learn and use te gagana Tokelau:

**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 Tokelau Survey sample

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

<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	
<b>Northern Regions</b>		
<b>NZ-BORN</b>	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>
15-24 years	8	7
25-44 years	9	9
45-64 years	6	5
65+ years	2	2
<b>OVERSEAS-BORN</b>	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>
15-24 years	2	2
25-44 years	2	3
45-64 years	2	2
65+ years	0	1
<b>Central Regions</b>		
<b>NZ-BORN</b>	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>
15-24 years	15	13
25-44 years	16	17
45-64 years	10	10
65+ years	3	4
<b>OVERSEAS-BORN</b>	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>
15-24 years	4	4
25-44 years	4	5
45-64 years	3	3
65+ years	1	1
<b>Southern Regions</b>		
<b>NZ-BORN</b>	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>
15-24 years	1	1
25-44 years	1	1
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	0	0
<b>OVERSEAS-BORN</b>	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>
15-24 years	0	0
25-44 years	1	0
45-64 years	0	0
65+ years	0	0

### Final Survey sample

The following table reflects the final Survey sample

<b>Total</b>	<b>337</b>		
	<b>MALE (#)</b>	<b>FEMALE (#)</b>	<b>ANOTHER GENDER (#)</b>
	157	178	2
<b>NZ-BORN</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>OVERSEAS-BORN</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	
15-24 years	52	54	1
25-44 years	60	66	
45-64 years	41	55	1
65+ years	4	4	
<b>Northern regions</b>	52	63	
<b>Central regions</b>	95	107	2
<b>Southern regions</b>	9	9	



Ministry for  
**Pacific Peoples**

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

