

Leo Moana o Aotearoa

Lea Faka-Tonga Report



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New Zealand who participated in the first ever Leo Moana o
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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 kakai Tonga (people of Tongan 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 Tongan community as captured through talanoa with its members across New Zealand. As part of these talanoa, Tongan community members answered questions about their attitudes towards lea faka-Tonga (the Tongan 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

A promising finding was that proficiency in lea faka-Tonga was consistently high, with most participants reporting they could speak, understand, read, and write the language at least fairly well. This contrasts with sharp declines in proficiency reported in relation to other Pacific languages.

Lea faka-Tonga in the home and with family

The critical role of the home and family in maintaining lea faka-Tonga was highlighted, and reported use of the language with elders, grandparents, and aunts/uncles in particular was high.

Lea faka-Tonga in church

Church remains a stronghold of language use, maintenance, and transmission for kakai Tonga, with most participants who attended at least weekly reporting services, bible studies, and other activities being held in lea faka-Tonga.

Lea faka-Tonga in education settings

The role of education was identified by participants as being crucial to the maintenance and revitalisation of lea faka-Tonga. Nearly all participants reported they would send their children to Early Childhood Education (ECE), primary, and secondary schools where they could be taught in the language if given the opportunity.

Lea faka-Tonga in the workplace

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

Lea faka-Tonga in and with Pacific communities

Community was identified as an important domain for lea faka-Tonga. Another strong theme was the importance of Tongan communities staying connected on both a national and international level.

Lea faka-Tonga in media and broadcasting

Digital technology, media, and the internet were identified as emerging domains where kakai Tonga can connect and converse in lea faka-Tonga. Music and social media were reported most often in relation to supporting use of the language.

Lea faka-Tonga in the New Zealand context

Most participants believe that bilingualism is beneficial to New Zealand, and that lea faka-Tonga 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 kakai Tonga in New Zealand.

Introduction

“Oku hoko ‘etau pukepuke ‘a e ngaahi lea fakafonua ‘o e Pasifiki ko ha me’a ke ne fakaivia kitautolu ke ‘oua te tau mo’ulaloa ki he ngaahi fakamatala ta’etotonu ‘oku tau fa’a fanongo ki ai, ‘o lava ke uesia ai ‘etau fānau mo hotau ngaahi fāмили. ‘Oku hoko ‘a e leá ko ha koloa mahu’inga ‘o hotau tukufakaholo.”

“Our Pacific language is the expression of our culture and, more importantly, it empowers Pacific peoples to challenge the dominant discourses that continue to disadvantage our children and their families”

Lea faka-Tonga

According to the 2023 Census, 97,824 people identified as being of Tongan ethnicity, meaning that approximately two in five kakai Tonga globally are now resident in Aotearoa New Zealand. Kakai Tonga remain the second-largest Pacific ethnic group, accounting for about 22% of New Zealand’s Pacific population. Despite this, kakai Tonga continue to experience one of the steepest declines in language retention of all Pacific languages in New Zealand.

While there is no formal constitutional relationship between New Zealand and Tonga, there are friendly international ties between the two sovereign states. These have borne strong waves of immigration over the past century, such that half of the total kakai Tonga population now resides in New Zealand.

In Tonga, the preference for English-medium instruction before the end of primary school compromises opportunities for young people to learn and master lea faka-Tonga, resulting in low-quality language learning. Similarly, the growing prevalence of families pushing for children to learn only in English because of its prestige as an international language further undermines the status and value of lea faka-Tonga in the home islands.

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 lea faka-Tonga among kakai Tonga residing in New Zealand.

Complementing the initial [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey Report](#), this document focusses specifically on lea faka-Tonga and the experiences of kakai Tonga and Tongan communities across Aotearoa. It presents the perspectives of survey (n = 545) and talanoa (n = 25) participants, exploring their use of and attitudes towards the language across various domains.

The findings aim to inform current and future efforts to strengthen lea faka-Tonga and enhance the wellbeing of kakai Tonga in Aotearoa. This report also serves as a reference for communities, researchers, and agencies developing responsive policies and practices to better meet the needs of kakai Tonga.

Sample

The target population for the survey and talanoa is a representative sample of the kakai Tonga population, according to data from the 2018 Census (see Appendix 2 for the Tongan 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 kakai Tonga can learn and use lea faka-Tonga. 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 Tongan 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 Tongan community-based researchers.

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

Data analysis

Overall response rate

A total of 3,039 people completed the Leo Moana o Aotearoa Survey, 545 of whom were kakai Tonga. 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.

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

The results for the kakai Tonga participant survey (n = 545) have been weighted against the total kakai Tonga population in New Zealand as at the 2018 Census. They are therefore representative of the total domestic kakai Tonga population. These are different from the total Leo Moana participant survey (n = 3,039) as mentioned above, which applies ethnicity prioritisation to weight the nine Pacific ethnic groups within the overall Pacific population as at the 2018 Census.

Survey analyses

While most of this report focusses on descriptive statistics (providing percentages and counts), additional analyses have been run to examine differences within the kakai Tonga participant cohort (n = 545). 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 (kakai Tonga 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 kakai Tonga population ($p < 0.05$) are presented in this report.

Qualitative insights from the talanoa are also woven throughout the report to provide depth and context to the quantitative findings.

Limitations

The survey findings must be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. Due to the small size of the Tongan 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. Kakai Tonga who are not as involved in Pacific community activities are therefore less likely to be represented in this sample.

Additionally, the data are based on self-reporting, which may be subject to over- or under-reporting.

² 'Multi-Pacific' refers to when a participant has selected Tongan and any other Pacific ethnicit(ies) e.g., Tongan and Samoan.

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

Demography

This section provides a demographic overview of the kakai Tonga 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 Tongan community.

Who took part in the survey?

A total of 545 kakai Tonga participants took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey. As at the 2018 Census, there were 50,853 kakai Tonga residing in New Zealand. This means that at the time of the survey, around 1% of the kakai Tonga population aged 15+ participated in the survey.

Figure 1 – Kakai Tonga participant summary

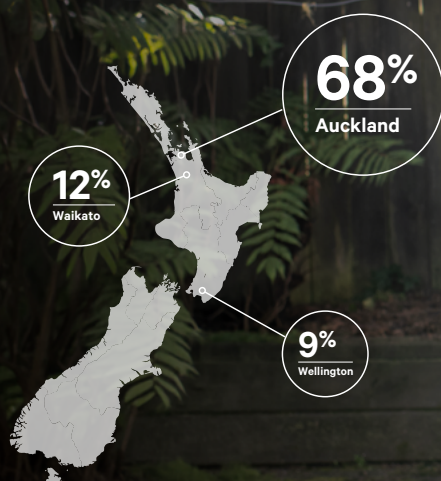
545 Tongan participants

Youth (15–24) made up the largest age group, representing 31% of participants

Identified as:

49% Female

51% Male



51% New Zealand born

30% Multiple ethnicities



Age and gender

Nearly one-third of kakai Tonga participants (31%) were 15-24 years old, while 53% were 25-54 years old. The remaining participants (16%) were aged 55 years or older. Gender was evenly distributed, with 49% of participants identifying as female and 51% identifying as male.

Birthplace and region

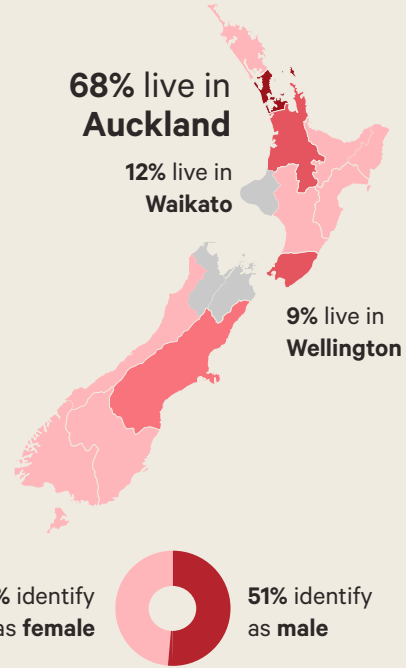
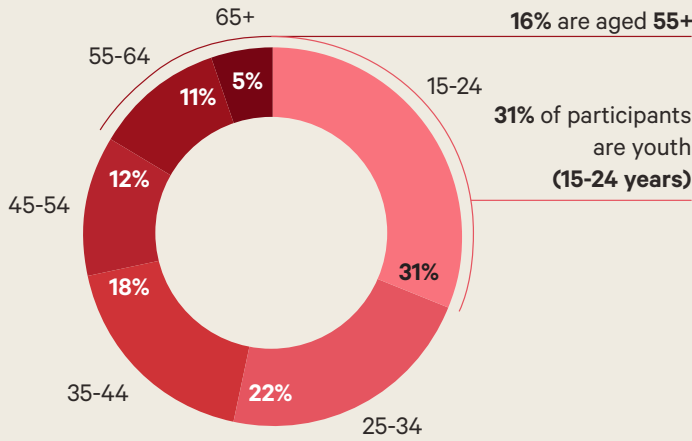
Over two-thirds of participants (68%) reported residing in Auckland, and 12% lived in Waikato. Less than one-tenth (9%) reported living in Wellington, while only 2% resided elsewhere in the North Island. The remaining participants (8%) reported living in the South Island. Just over half of the participants (51%) reported being NZ-born and 49% were born overseas.

Ethnicity

Over two-thirds (70%) of participants identified solely as kakai Tonga, while 30% identified as having at least one other ethnicity. The most common additional ethnicities of participants were Samoan (14%), Niuean (7%), and Fijian (5%).

Survey overview

545 Tongans took part in the Leo Moana o Aotearoa survey



51% were born in New Zealand **30%** are multi-ethnic

Overview of Pacific language use in Aotearoa New Zealand

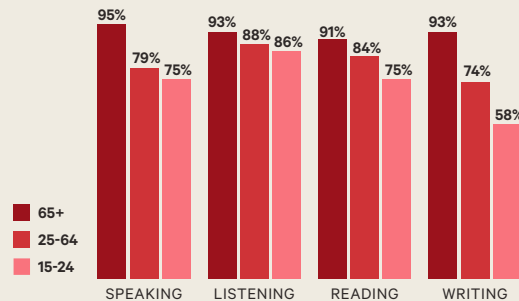
74% report being **proficient in at least one Pacific language.**

57% learned Lea faka-Tonga as a **first language**

93% say using their heritage language is **important to their wellbeing**

70% are concerned Lea faka-Tonga is **in danger of being lost in Aotearoa**

41% are concerned Lea faka-Tonga is **in danger of being lost in Tonga**



Older generations rate their proficiency in Lea faka-Tonga as **slightly higher** than younger participants.

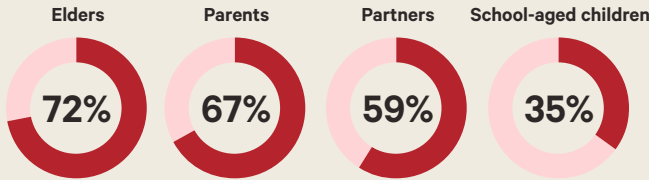
96% believe it is **important for our children and future generations** to speak our Pacific languages

71% **speak to children** in their households using **Pacific languages**

Lea faka-Tonga use in Aotearoa New Zealand, in depth

Home & Family

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



39% live in **multigenerational households**

60% maintain **traditional Pacific households**

82% agree that Pacific languages are safe as long as they are **spoken in the home**

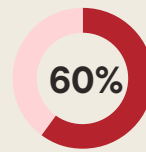
Religion

Top religious affiliations

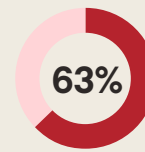
37% Methodist

18% Catholicism

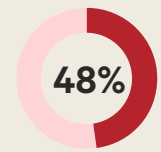
34% Christian (no specific denomination)



attend church at least once a week

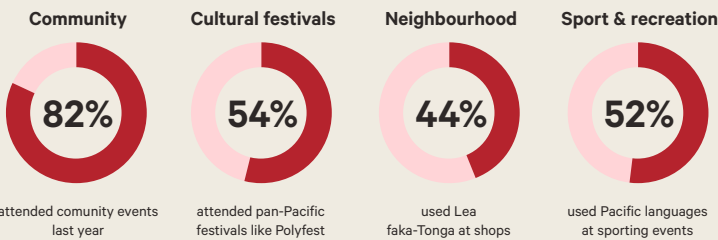


of churchgoers attend weekly church service in Lea faka-Tonga



have weekly Pacific events held through their church.

Communities



attended community events last year

attended pan-Pacific festivals like Polyfest

used Lea faka-Tonga at shops

used Pacific languages at sporting events

12% have never visited Tonga

92% have hosted Tongans in NZ

Media

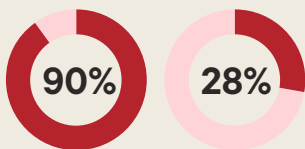
86% digital technology, media and the Internet **help connect** to Pacific languages

45% digital technology, media and the Internet **are threatening** Pacific languages

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

57% **send text messages and emails** using Lea faka-Tonga every week

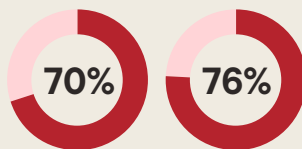
School



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

have attended Pacific language education in Aotearoa

Work



have been asked to provide Pacific cultural advice in the workplace

feel comfortable using Pacific languages in the workplace

Government



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

agree Pacific languages should have official recognition in NZ

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

Enablers What activities are most helpful for Tongans to engage with Lea faka-Tonga?

84% listening and speaking with family

56% visiting heritage Pacific islands

45% attending a Pacific church

44% engaging with Pacific language weeks

Barriers What gets in the way of engaging with Lea faka-Tonga?

35% not having consistent funding or resources to provide Pacific language programmes

33% Not having access to Pacific language or culture classes in the workplace

33% not feeling connected to your Pacific culture or identity

32% Not having reading materials available in the language

Lea faka-Tonga

Figure 2 - Lea faka-Tonga summary

96 % believe Pacific languages are important for future generations

93 % say using their heritage language is important to their wellbeing

Older generations rate their proficiency in Lea faka as slightly higher than younger participants

74 % report being proficient in at least one Pacific language

71 % use Pacific languages when speaking to children at home

57 % learned Lea faka-Tonga as a first language

70 % fear Lea faka-Tonga is at risk in Aotearoa

41 % fear Lea faka-Tonga is at risk in Tonga

Lea faka-Tonga

This section explores participants' proficiency in lea faka-Tonga, their experiences with language acquisition, and the role of language in shaping identity and culture. It also highlights concerns around language loss and the importance of intergenerational transmission.

Proficiency in lea faka-Tonga

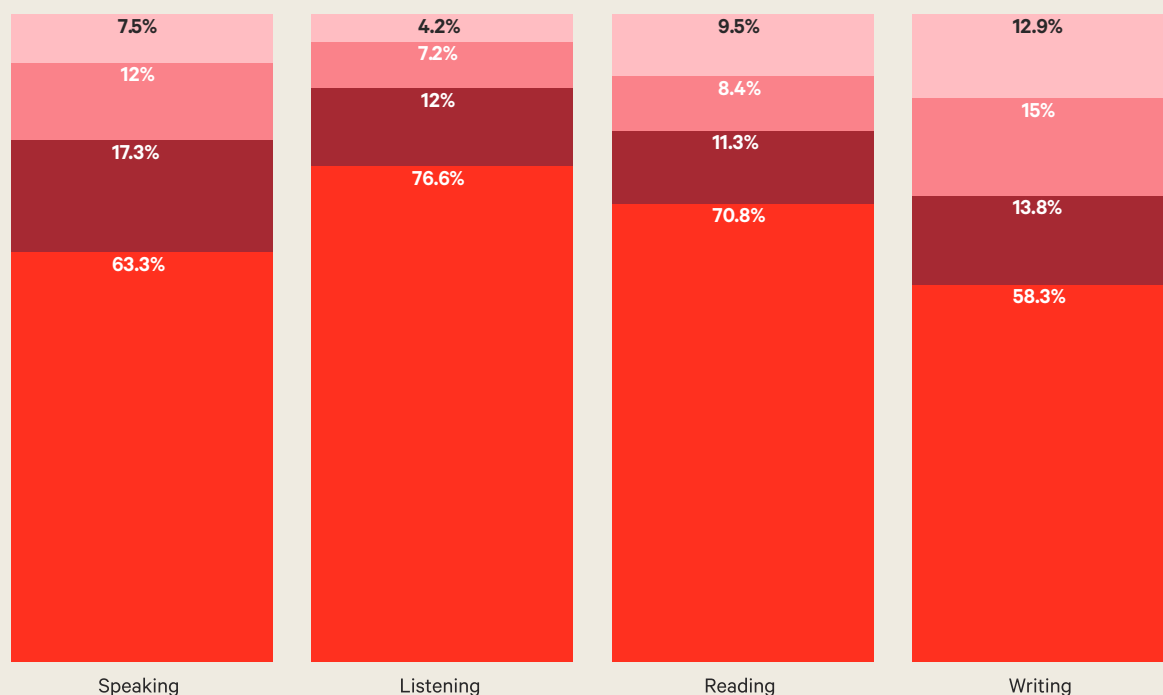
To capture language proficiency, participants were asked to self-rate their ability to speak, listen, read, and write in lea faka-Tonga. A scale of 'very well', 'well', 'fairly well', 'not so well', and 'only a few words or phrases' was used, and participants who selected 'very well', 'well', or 'fairly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

A large proportion of participants (81%) reported being able to speak lea faka-Tonga proficiently, of which 63% could do so well or very well. An even higher proportion (89%) reported being able to understand lea faka-Tonga when spoken to them. Most (82%) reported being able to read the language and 72% said they could write it at least fairly well. In fact, 12% of participants even chose to take the entire survey in lea faka-Tonga.

Figure 3 – Proficiency in lea faka-Tonga

Lea faka-Tonga Proficiency:

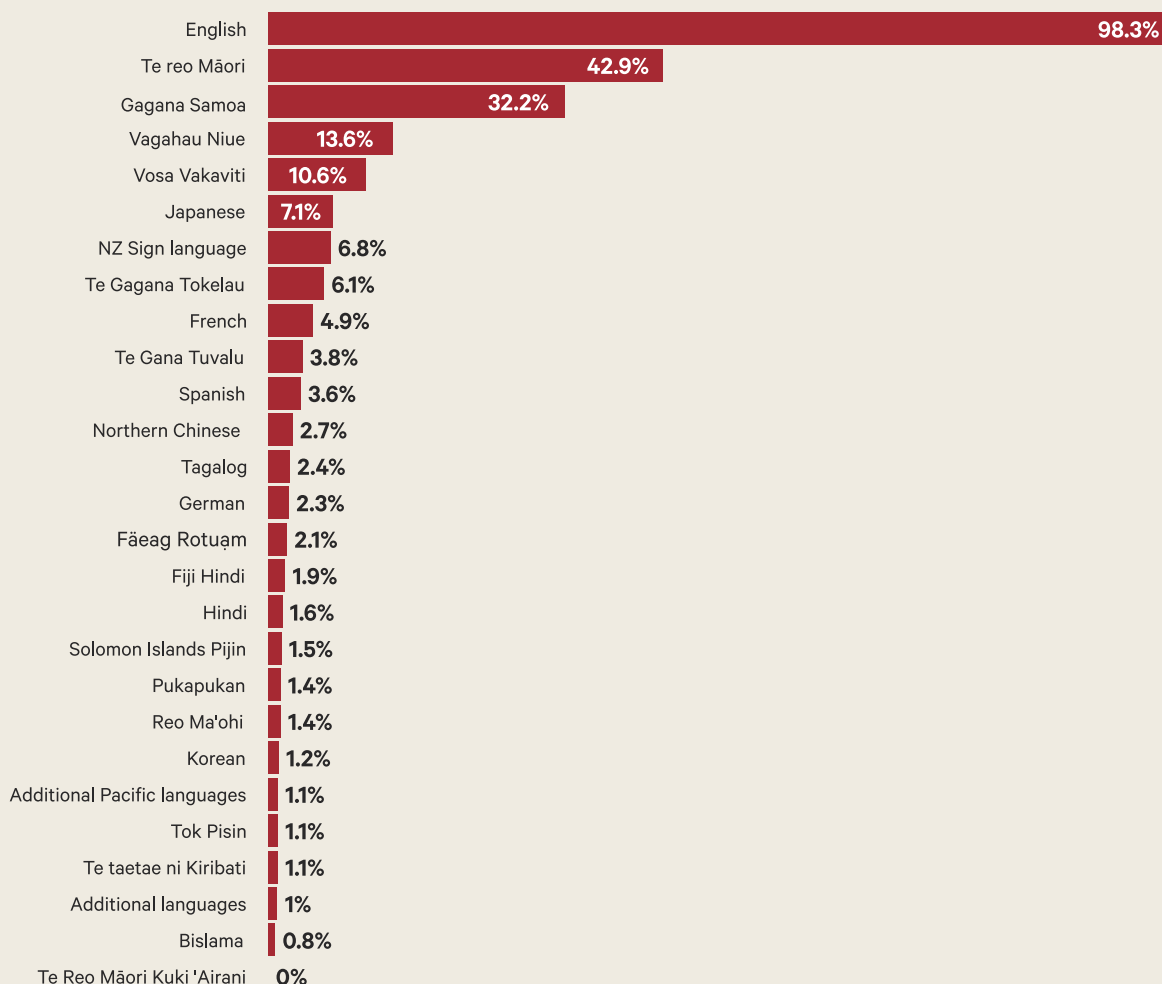
● Very well/well ● Fairly well ● Not so well ● Only a few words or phrases



Proficiency in other languages

Survey responses indicated high levels of multilingualism among participants. Many (43%) reported being familiar with te reo Māori, and 7% reported the same for New Zealand Sign Language. The Pacific languages participants most reported being familiar with other than lea faka-Tonga were gagana Samoa (32%), vagahau Niue (14%), and vosa vakaViti (11%).

Figure 4 – Multilingualism among kakai Tonga



Language acquisition

More than half (57%) of participants learned lea faka-Tonga as their first language, with 21% acquiring it before starting school—highlighting the importance of early exposure in language retention.

“One of the main challenges is that it’s a lot harder, I think, to learn [lea faka-Tonga] when you’re older, as opposed to when you’re a kid. I think some of the limitations for me would be trying to find out where you can learn it... I mean I have family I could probably ask, but for some people who aren’t that familiar with it, they might not have those networks to find out where they can learn more.”

Language as cultural depth and connection

Participants described lea faka-Tonga as rich, layered, and deeply embedded in cultural knowledge. A single word can carry metaphor, history, and emotion - connecting speakers to Tongan values and ways of thinking.

“Tongan language has a more depth meaning... when I think about it using a Tongan approach, it makes more sense and connects really well with our Tongan values.”

Language as identity and belonging

Speaking lea faka-Tonga was widely seen as a marker of identity and belonging. While fluency varied, nearly all participants expressed pride in their Pacific heritage (98%) and affirmed the language’s importance to their wellbeing (93%).

“The value of the Tongan language is that it’s the glue that holds our identity and culture together.”

Some participants commented on how community events enabled them to better experience and embrace their language and identity, positively impacting their wellbeing in several ways:

“We did not realise how spread out our community was around the world until Mate ma’a Tonga. People in the Middle East standing with a Tongan flag, and in France, all proud of their Tongan heritage... That was an event that really highlighted how far our people have spread and how much pride we have in our community. People would so do that – put everything on the line for Tonga.”

Language loss

Language loss was a significant concern. Nearly all participants (86%) said it would matter deeply if lea faka-Tonga were lost, and 70% believed this risk is real in New Zealand. Alarming, 41% felt the same about Tonga itself.

Figure 5 – Attitudes towards language loss

Attitudes to heritage language loss:

● Agree ● Not agree



Intergenerational transmission

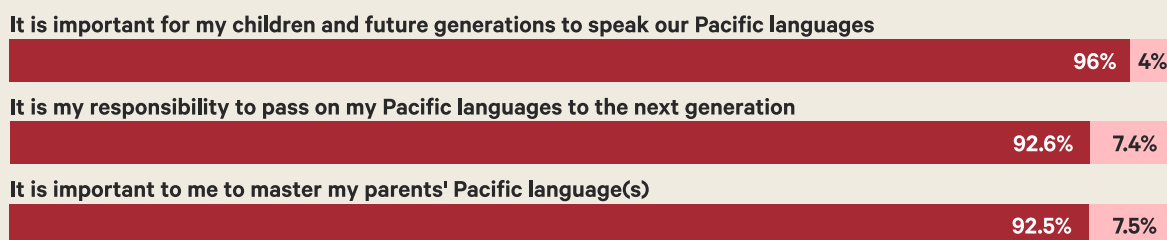
“Through learning the language again... that’s almost kind of revitalizing or reinvigorating the whole Tongan culture.”

Intergenerational transmission was seen as vital to cultural survival. Participants viewed language learning as a pathway to revitalising Tongan culture, especially in diaspora communities. Nearly all (96%) agreed it is important for their children to speak lea faka-Tonga, and 93% felt personally responsible for passing it on.

Figure 6 – Attitudes towards language maintenance and transmission

Attitudes to heritage language maintenance:

● Agree ● Not agree





Lea faka-Tonga in the home and with family

“The saying ‘home is the first school’ is true – everything has to start from home. If we want our children to speak our language, it has to start from home.”

The home is the heart of language learning. This section explores how lea faka-Tonga is used within households, the influence of family structure, and the role of daily routines and family gatherings in language transmission.

Childhood household composition and language use

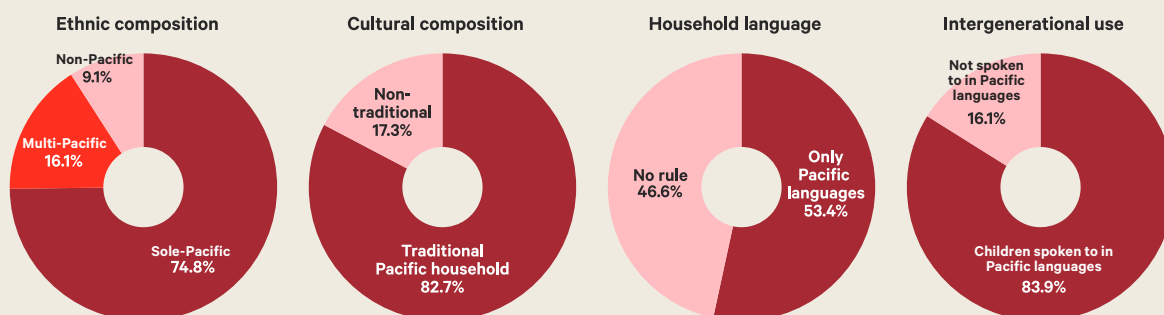
Three-quarters (75%) of kakai Tonga participants reported growing up in Tongan-only homes. Of the remaining proportion, 16% reported growing up with people of mixed Pacific heritage (multi-Pacific) and 7% with people of Pacific and non-Pacific heritage (multi-ethnic).

Growing up in a Tongan-speaking household was seen as empowering, helping children embrace their identity and cultural uniqueness.

“I was born and raised in Tonga... we all speak Tongan throughout my whole childhood days.”

Most participants (83%) reported their childhood home was traditionally Pacific, and 84% said that children were mostly spoken to in lea faka-Tonga growing up. Over half (53%) reported their household had a rule where only lea faka-Tonga could be spoken.

Figure 7 – Childhood household composition and language use



Contemporary household composition and language use

In the current day, 39% of participants reported living in a multigenerational household. The most common household size was 5-6 people (33%), followed by 2-4 people (28%), and 7-8 people (16%).

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of participants reported that speaking to children in lea faka-Tonga is common in their household, and 60% reported they had spent time discussing Pacific genealogies and/or family histories in the past year.

Figure 8 – Language activities in the home and with family



Home as the site of language transmission

Many participants discussed the importance of the home in relation to language maintenance and transmission, emphasising the value of family gatherings as safe spaces where lea faka-Tonga can be spoken, heard, taught, and learned between generations.

“Family gatherings foster deeper connections between different generations like grandparents, parents, aunties, and uncles. Being able to connect through lea faka-Tonga is a big thing, and with family there is a space to teach and learn.”

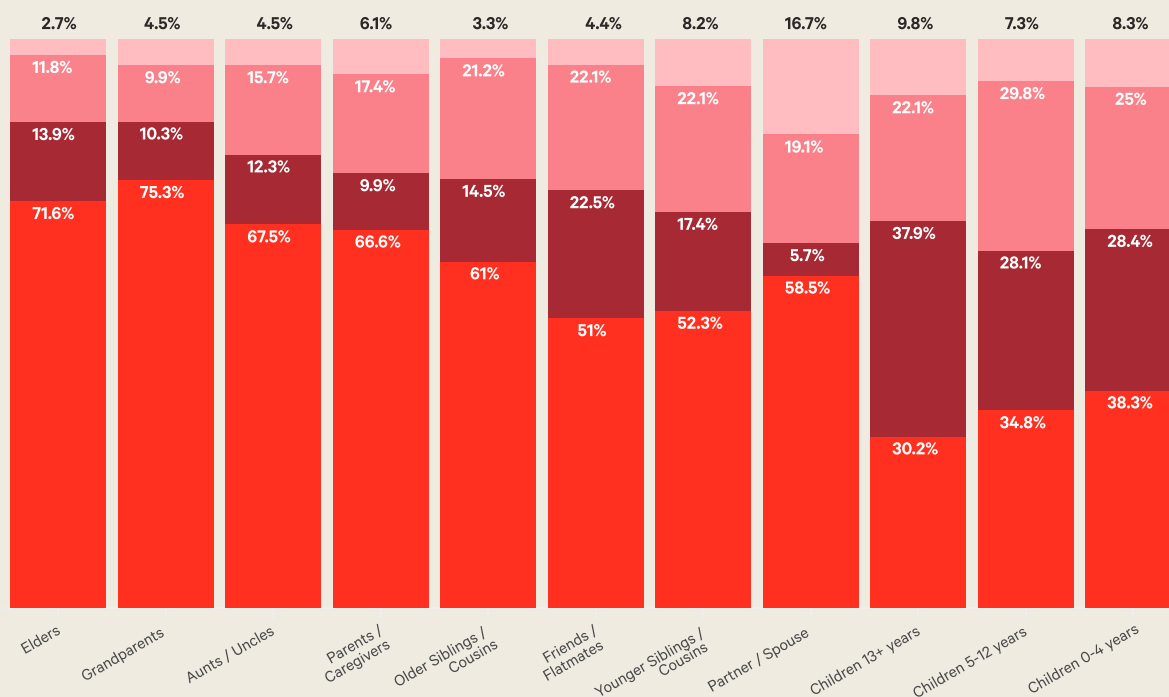
Patterns of language use across generations

When asked how much of their communication in the home was conducted in their Pacific language compared with English, almost all reported using lea faka-Tonga at least sometimes with elders (97%), grandparents (96%), aunts/uncles (96%), and older siblings/cousins (97%). Participants were most likely to report never using lea faka-Tonga with their partner/spouse (17%).

Figure 9 – Language use in the home and with family

Household Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Daily routines, especially those involving prayer and church, reinforced Tongan language use and spiritual connection.

“My grandma always woke up in the morning to do her silent prayers... I listened to her words in prayer.”

Language decline among children

There was a distinct drop in participants’ reported use of lea faka-Tonga with children (categorised as aged 0-4 years, 5-12 years, or 13+ years) compared to other family members. This may reflect the impact of New Zealand’s English-medium schooling on the language’s use in the home. Some participants spoke about their experiences of this:

“When we came from Tonga in 2015, our family spoke Tongan perfectly. Our youngest at the time was 7 years old. She did not know a lot of English except for her name, how old she was, her father’s name, and her mother’s name. Now, in 2021, she can still understand someone speaking Tongan, but she no longer can respond fluently.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the home

When asked about the condition of lea faka-Tonga, 82% agreed the language is safe as long as it is spoken in the home. Less than one-third (31%), however, believed lea faka-Tonga is *only* important in the home.

Figure 10 – 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

82.1%

17.9%

Pacific languages are only important at home

30.8%

69.2%

Intergenerational knowledge and language loss

Participants described the transitory nature of the deep cultural and linguistic knowledge held by elders, and the sense that what is passed on to the next generation seems to lessen over time:

“Each generation has their wealth of knowledge, and when they are gone, it goes with them. When the next generation comes, they lack part of that knowledge, and it loosens further from one generation to the next. There are no elders in my village now, though the family (home) remains the best foundation for the revitalisation of our language.”

Cultural pride and language maintenance

Participants who maintained Tongan language at home expressed pride in their heritage and saw it as a way to celebrate being different.

“We spoke Tongan a lot... I’m very grateful that my parents raised me in a home where Tongan was the central part of our life.”



Lea faka-Tonga in church

“I feel more confident in Tongan because I feel like I have a better connection spiritually. When I talk to my God, I feel ‘oku hange ‘oku toe ki’i loloto ange ‘eku fakakakau – I have deeper thoughts when I embrace and use my language.”

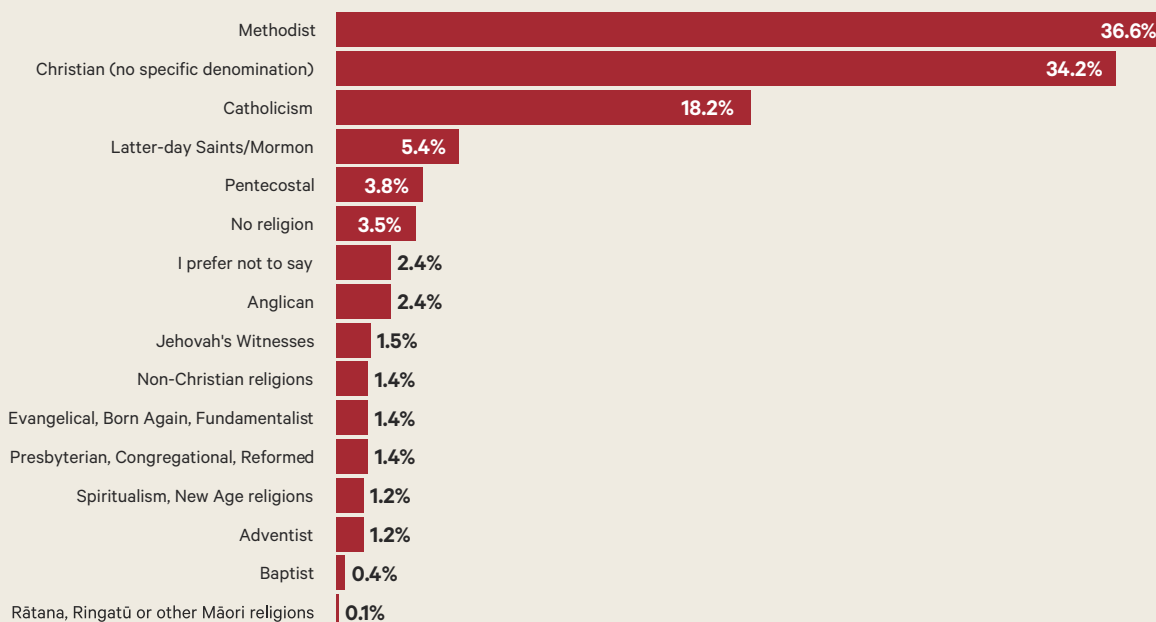
Churches are powerful spaces for language use and spiritual connection. This section examines how religious settings support the use of lea faka-Tonga through services, Sunday school, scripture reading, and community engagement.

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. Most participants (94%) reported having at least one religious affiliation, while only a very small proportion (4%) reported none. Over one-third (37%) identified as Methodist, 34% did not specify a denomination by selecting Christian. Smaller proportions identified as Catholic (18%), Mormon (5%), and Pentecostal (4%).

Where church attendance is concerned, 87% reported they attend church at least occasionally, while 60% do so on a weekly basis.

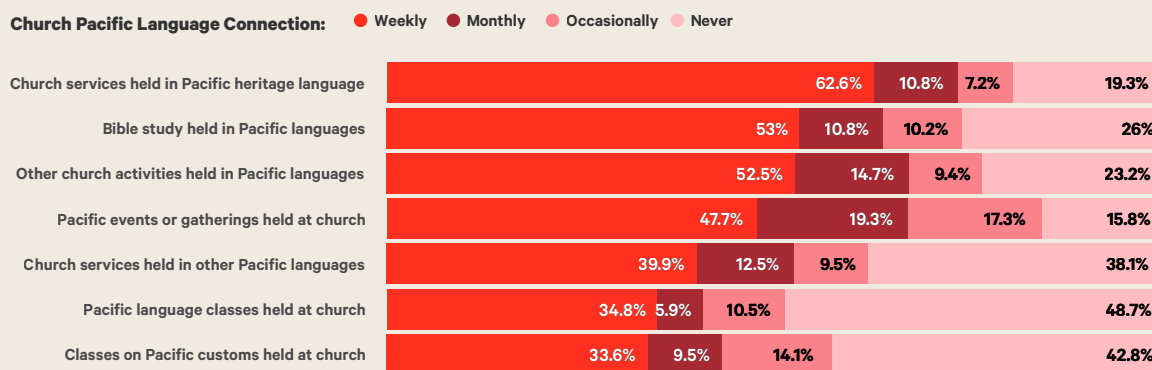
Figure 11 – Religious affiliations among kakai Tonga



Pacific language use in church

Over half (63%) of participants who attended church weekly reported that services were held in lea faka-Tonga, and 53% reported bible study and other church activities were conducted in the language as well. Many (40%) reported their church services were held in a Pacific language(s) other than lea faka-Tonga.

Figure 12 – Pacific language use during church services and activities



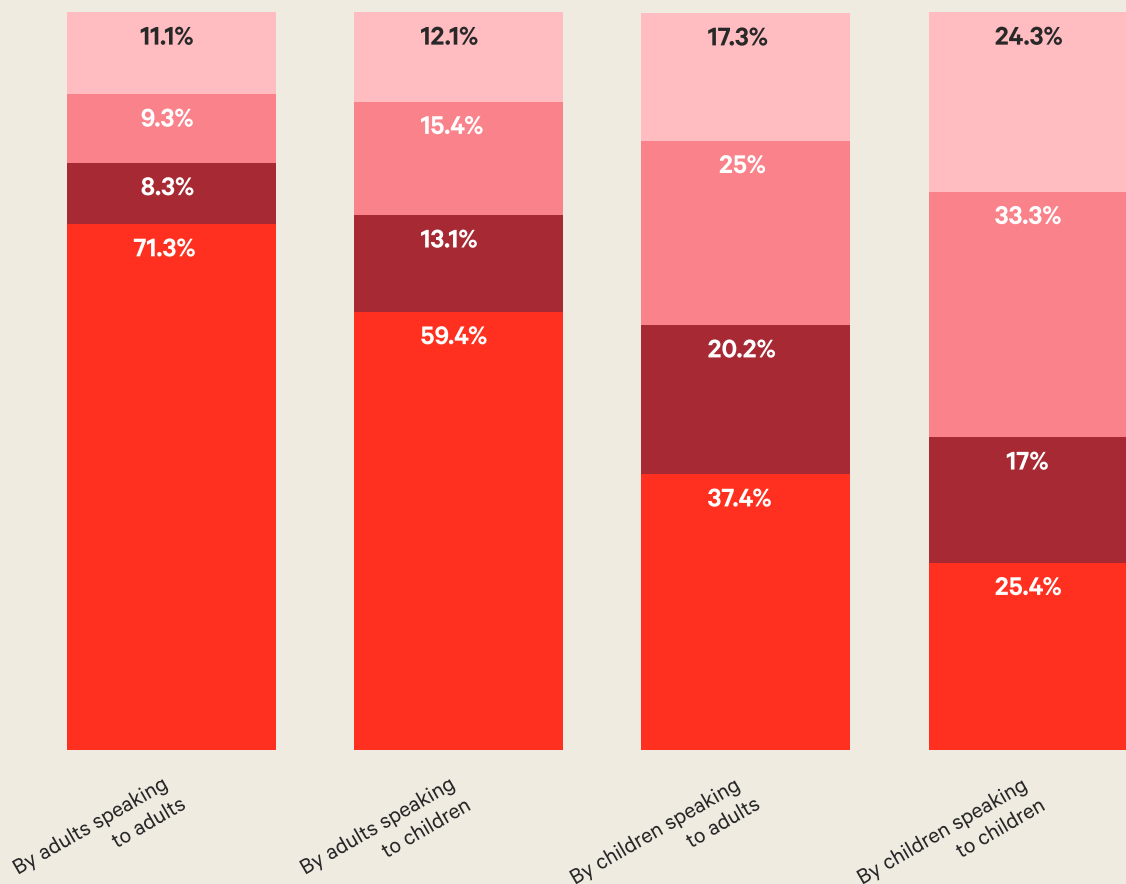
Patterns of language use

There were significant differences between how people communicated with adults compared to children at church. Almost three-quarters of participants (71%) reported hearing adults use lea faka-Tonga with other adults most of the time, while only 37% reported hearing children do the same with adults. Over half (59%) reported hearing adults use lea faka-Tonga with children most of the time, while only 25% reported hearing children use it with each other as frequently.

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

Church Pacific language use compared to English:

● Always/Mostly ● Equally ● Sometimes ● Never



Bilingual accommodation for younger generations

Church leaders noted the impact of migration and English-speaking environments on language retention, especially among children. While services were often in Tongan, bilingual approaches were used to support children born and raised in New Zealand who may not fully understand traditional terms.

“Most of them are born and raised here... speaking English causes them to lose our language. I don’t think this is a weakness, but it’s the reality.”

Taking part in church-based activities

Many participants reported that taking part in church-based activities such as choir, youth group, and Sunday school classes better helped them engage with lea faka-Tonga. One participant reflected on the foundational role that Sunday school played in strengthening their proficiency in lea faka-Tonga:

“The strength of the language was the church – it was the place, (tautefito e lautohi) where I learnt a lot of Tongan at Sunday school (‘i he lautohi). And it was fun (so ko e ngaahi founa ko e ne ako’i ‘aki) and the teaching methods were effective for the kids – I still remember (‘a e founa ne ngaue’aki e he kau fai lautohi) the approaches of the Sunday school teachers... It was such an enjoyable time, and I learned a lot of Tongan.”

Reading scripture

Reading scripture was highlighted by some as being key to their language learning. The bible was viewed as an important resource, both for individual and group learning, and many drew confidence from being able to read and understand it:

“Another way [I learn the language] is when I read the bible and the hymns at church. When I read it, it strengthens my knowledge. Along the way I have picked up a little more each time and as a result am more independent now.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church

Most participants (84%) agreed that lea faka-Tonga is a gift from God, and 74% reported that their church is attended by many kakai Tonga. Over three-quarters (77%) reported feeling comfortable using lea faka-Tonga at church, though 23% agreed the language is only important in that setting.

Figure 14 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in church

Attitudes to Pacific languages at church:

● Agree ● Not agree



Church as a platform for language maintenance

Church was highlighted as a crucial setting and safe space for language transmission and maintenance; with many participants expressing they feel a deeper connection to God when speaking and/or hearing sermons in lea faka-Tonga:

“The church is an important platform to maintain our language as it helps our children speak the language in New Zealand.”



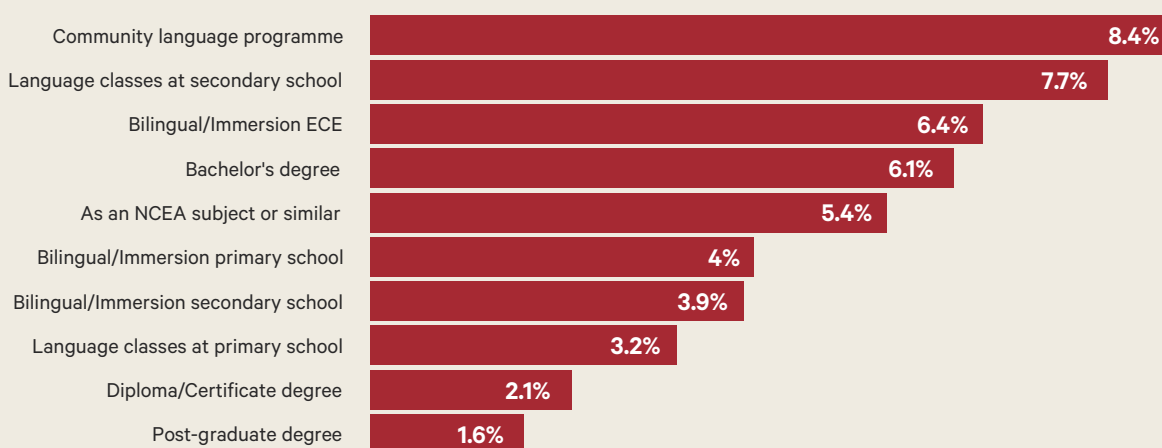
Lea faka-Tonga in education settings

Education plays a critical role in language revitalisation. This section explores participants' experiences with Pacific language education, the impact of English-medium schooling, and the community's aspirations for bilingual and immersion learning.

Pacific language education experiences

Less than a third (28%) 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 (8%). This was followed by secondary school language classes (7%), bilingual or immersion early childhood education (6%), and Bachelor's degree level education (6%).

Figure 15 – Kakai Tonga participation in Pacific language education



Many participants shared the incredible impact immersion schooling has had on their children's proficiency in lea faka-Tonga:

"I am so proud of my 5-year-old and 3-year-old for their capacity to speak Tongan. They learn and memorise songs and, when we go to church, they already know how to read their verses. That is the impact of their full immersion kindergarten."

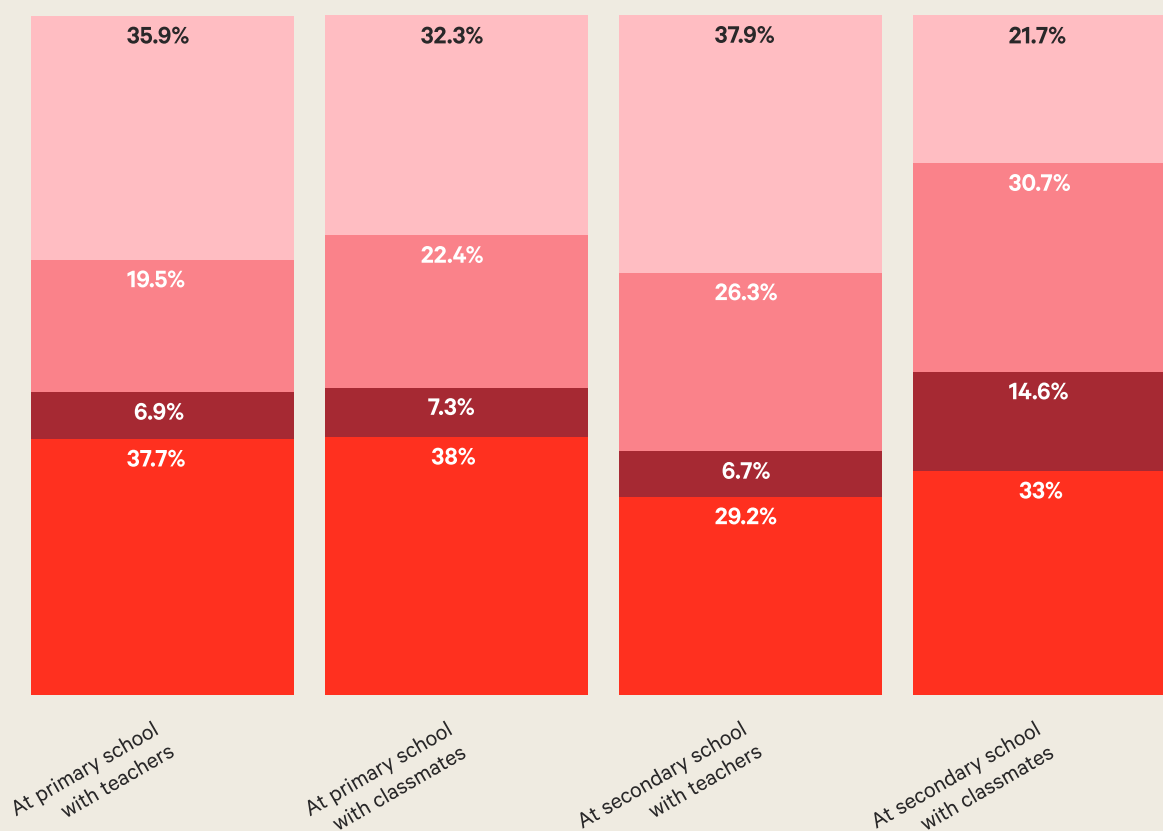
Pacific language use in schools

Participants’ use of lea faka-Tonga in education was moderate compared to other settings. When asked how often conversations were conducted in lea faka-Tonga at primary school, around two-thirds reported they used the language at least sometimes with teachers (64%) and classmates (68%). The results were less similar in relation to secondary school, with a smaller proportion of participants reporting using of the language at least sometimes with teachers (62%) compared to classmates (78%).

Figure 16 – 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

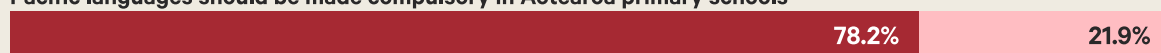
Over three-quarters of participants (78%) agreed that Pacific languages should be made compulsory in New Zealand primary schools, and 65% felt comfortable using their language in school. Less than one-fifth (18%) agreed with the statement ‘in Aotearoa, you don’t need to learn your Pacific languages: English is enough’.

Figure 17 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in schools

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools:

● Agree ● Not agree

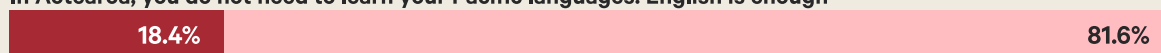
Pacific languages should be made compulsory in Aotearoa primary schools



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



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



Language loss due to English-medium schooling

Participants shared personal experiences of losing fluency after attending English-speaking schools, especially when surrounded by non-Tongan peers

“A family came from Tonga last year, and when one of the children came to our school as a new entrant, she was fluent in Tongan. This year at Christmas, we visited them, and her mother said she no longer speaks Tongan because she does not want to get laughed at by her friends.”

Some also expressed concern around how the dominance of English in the Tongan school system is contributing towards the decline of lea faka-Tonga, even in the home islands. Many identified this as a significant barrier to learning the language:

“Here we are in New Zealand trying to maintain our language, while over in Tonga, they hardly use it and commonly practice English instead. Even at secondary schools [in Tonga], English is the language of teaching.”

Cultural identity and peer pressure

Some participants felt discouraged from speaking Tongan at school due to fear of being judged or feeling like a minority, and the pressure to conform to English-speaking norms:

“Everyone was speaking palangi. It was almost like we were too scared to speak our own language because we were surrounded by English speakers... When you’re already in such a small group, the minority, you kind of want to conform.”

Benefits of bilingualism

Conversely, others described their very different experiences attending secondary schools with strong Pacific cohorts. Such schools that offer language classes, promote the benefits of bilingualism, and celebrate Tonga Language Week empower young people to embrace their language(s) and thrive:

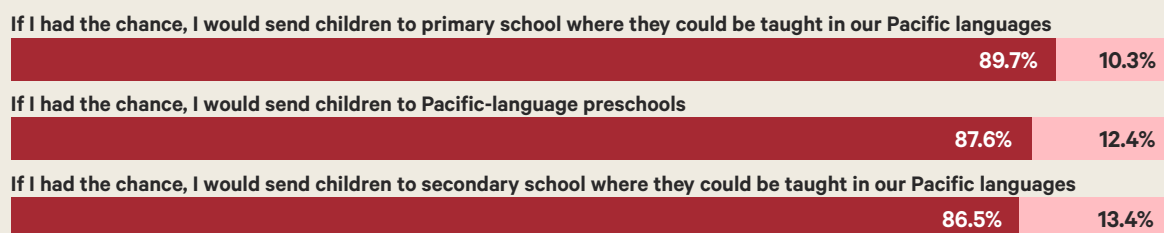
“Secondary school was great. After intermediate, I went to [a school where] there were a lot of Tongans and other Pacific people and that was very helpful – it always allowed us to be our full Tongan selves.”

Nearly all participants reported they would send their child(ren) to ECE (88%), primary (90%), and secondary schools (87%) where they could be taught in lea faka-Tonga, if given the opportunity.

Figure 18 – Attitudes towards Pacific language schooling opportunities

Attitudes to Pacific languages in NZ schools:

● Agree ● Not agree



While survey responses clearly highlighted education as key to raising the value of lea faka-Tonga, participants identified that the lack of opportunities to learn the language in New Zealand schools, as well as the lack of resources to facilitate such learning, detracts from this potential.

“The school’s role needs to be more than just teaching English. It should also be to teach more about different cultures and inclusiveness and different communities and stuff like that, including other languages.”



Lea faka-Tonga in the workplace

“As time went by, I noticed the mindset of those who came to New Zealand was to speak in English all the time.”

The workplace is an emerging domain for language use. This section discusses how lea faka-Tonga is used professionally, the value of bilingualism, and the challenges posed by perceptions of English as the language of success.

Workplace experiences

When asked about their current status in the labour market, 80% of participants reported they were currently engaged in paid work, while 15% were involved in some form of unpaid work. Around one-quarter of participants (24%) reported they had experienced ethnicity-based discrimination in the workplace.

Many participants (41%) reported they have worked for a Pacific-focussed organisation, and 40% said that Pacific languages and cultures are visible at their workplace. Slightly fewer participants (39%) reported they currently or have previously helped, worked, or volunteered without pay for a Pacific-focussed organisation(s), and 28% reported their workplace has dedicated Pacific cultural advisors on staff.

Figure 19 – Pacific language workplace experiences



Pacific language use in the workplace

There is growing awareness of the importance of language in the workplace, with some organisations supporting bilingual staff and translation services.

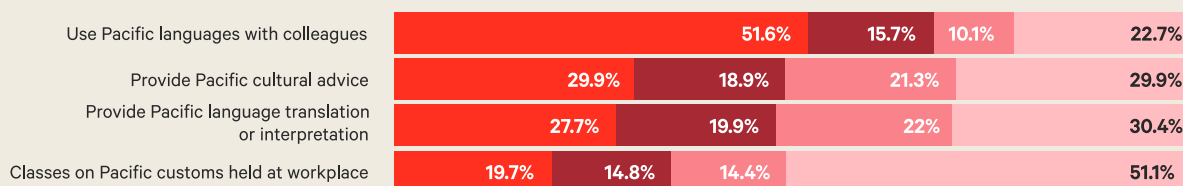
There is growing awareness of the importance of language in the workplace, with some organisations supporting bilingual staff and translation services.

Over half (52%) of participants reported they use lea faka-Tonga with colleagues at least once a week, while 26% said they do so monthly or occasionally. A large proportion (70%) reported they have provided Pacific cultural advice in the workplace previously (even if not part of their job description). Similarly, 70% reported they have provided Pacific language support in the form of translation and/or interpretation in the past.

Figure 20 – Work-based Pacific language activities

Workplace Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Attitudes towards Pacific languages in the workplace

English as the language of professional success

Over half of participants (60%) 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.

“When some of the Tongan parents moved to New Zealand, they wanted their kids to learn English with the mindset of ‘if they know English more than Tongan, they will pass their education, they will do well in their studies, and there will be opportunities for them to get better jobs’”.

Bilingualism as a valuable skill

However, many participants highlighted that being able to speak lea faka-Tonga was seen as an asset in professional environments, especially when working with Tongan clients or communities. It enhances communication, builds trust, and affirms cultural identity.

“You can always have the special connection there and the flow of the conversation, knowing that there is someone over there to translate and help at work.”

Benefits for community engagement

Participants also highlighted how speaking Tongan helps them give back to their communities, especially in roles that involve cultural protocols or traditional knowledge.

*“It’s always better to know another language...
when you’re wanting to give back to the community, you’re aware
of what to say and how to do things in the traditional sense.”*



Lea faka-Tonga in and with Pacific communities

“It is common here, especially at the youth... most just only understand the basics. If someone took a long speech, they would get lost along the way, because they don’t really understand the meaning behind that.”

Community events and networks are essential for sustaining language use. This section highlights how gatherings, cultural activities, and intergenerational exchanges foster the use of lea faka-Tonga and strengthen cultural identity.

Connection to Tonga

Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they visited Tonga and/or hosted community members from Tonga prior to COVID-19. Almost all (93%) reported they had hosted community members at least once before, and 52% reported doing so at least once a year. Only 8% reported never having hosted community members from Tonga before.

Trends in how often participants visited Tonga were similar, with 29% reporting they visited at least once a year, and 38% reporting they visited every 2-3 years. The remaining proportion (33%) reported they had visited Tonga once or twice or not at all.

Figure 21 – Visiting and hosting community members from Tonga

Heritage Pacific Islands Connection:

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

Host Heritage Pacific Community	Once a year	Every 2-3 years	Once or twice	Never
Host Heritage Pacific Community	51.6%	25.5%	15.3%	7.5%
Visit Heritage Pacific Islands	28.6%	38.4%	21.1%	11.9%

Language use in Tonga

Over two-thirds (68%) of participants indicated they always or mostly use lea faka-Tonga when visiting and talking to people in Tonga. Very few (3%) reported they never use the language in these contexts.

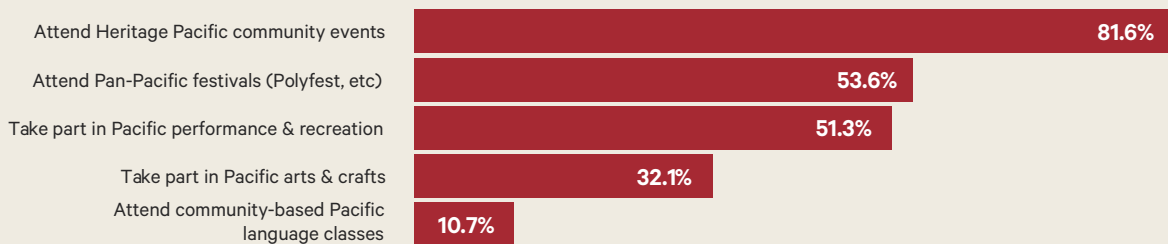
A recurring theme was the importance of Tongan communities staying connected on both a national and international level:

“For me, keeping in contact with the people there helps me maintain that cultural fluency, I guess... When I hear them talk (he ‘oku nau lea faka-Tonga pe) they speak Tongan, it’s really good. Looking for those key connections really does help with the maintenance of the language – the social connections, the social networks they do help.”

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 Tongan community gatherings (82%) and Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (54%). Fewer participants reported taking part in Pacific performance and recreation activities (51%), arts and crafts activities (32%), and community-based language classes (11%).

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

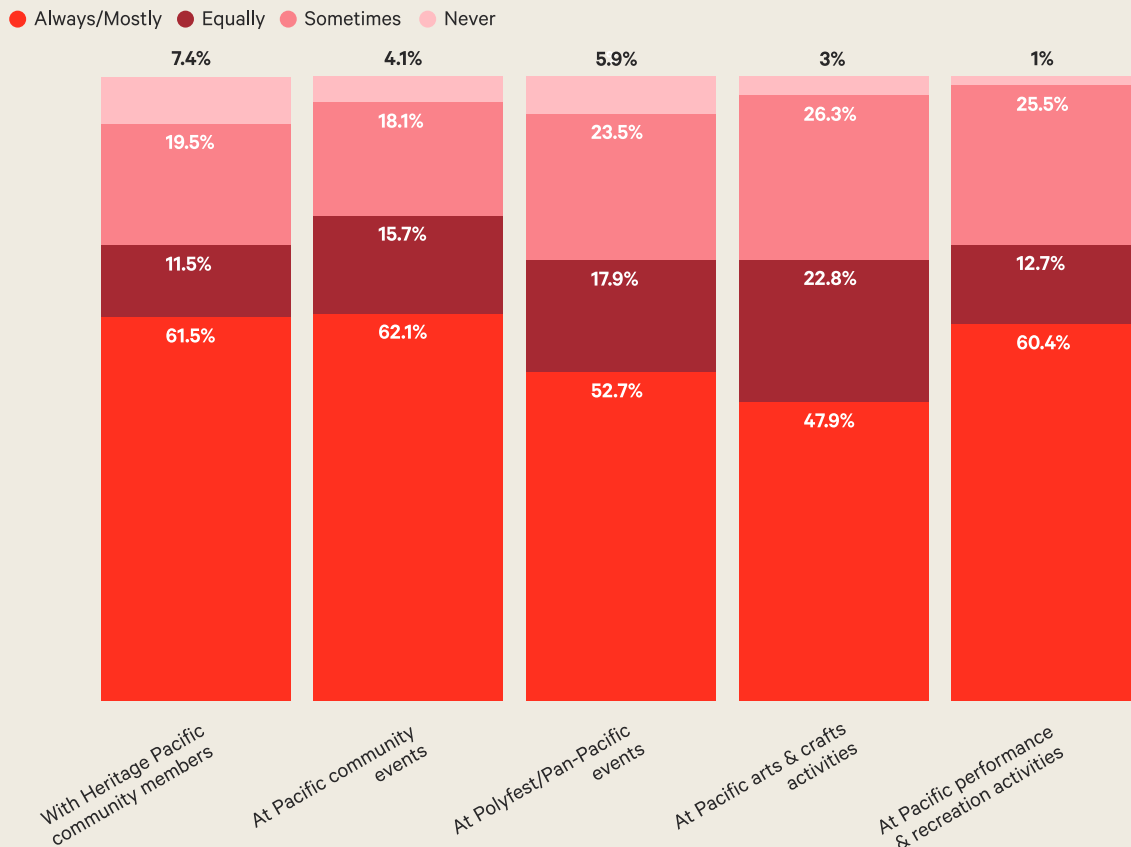


Patterns of language use

In terms of the frequency at which participants used lea faka-Tonga in community settings, nearly all reported using the language at least sometimes when taking part in Pacific performance and recreation activities (99%), arts and crafts activities (97%), community events (96%), and Polyfest/other pan-Pacific events (94%). The vast majority (92%) also reported using lea faka-Tonga in conversation with Tongan community members more broadly.

Figure 23 – Pacific language use in community settings

Pacific community language use compared to English:



Community spaces as language platforms

Parents highlighted how community initiatives and events play a critical role in the maintenance of lea faka-Tonga by providing opportunities for children to engage with elders outside their family who are, in turn, able to share their deep cultural and linguistic wisdom with the younger generation.

“My son used to go to the kava club, and they did pakipaki (breaking into pieces – sharing). I asked him what is pakipaki and he said that it’s the sharing of beautiful stories and experiences with older people and faifekau. I thought to myself that my son is at the right place with the right people who are helping him to understand our traditions and language.”

Attitudes towards Pacific languages in community events

Participants were also asked about their attitudes towards Pacific cultural events. Most said they find such events easy to access (82%) and that they enjoyed participating in them (88%). A similar proportion (81%) reported they felt most comfortable in Pacific communities.

Figure 24 – Attitudes towards Pacific cultural events

Attitudes to Pacific languages with Pacific communities:

● Agree ● Not agree

I enjoy participating in Pacific cultural events

87.7% 12.3%

I find it easy to participate in Pacific cultural events

81.7% 18.3%

I feel most comfortable in Pacific communities

81% 19%



Lea faka-Tonga in media and broadcasting

“It’s great that [kakai Tonga] are making more music in Tongan, making more resources for our kids... There are even cartoons and animations in Tongan now.”

Media and digital platforms offer new opportunities for language engagement. This section explores how music, social media, and creative arts are being used to promote lea faka-Tonga, especially among younger generations.

Music

Participants were specifically asked about media and broadcasting in Pacific languages, including which types of media they consumed and at what frequencies.

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, and 93% reporting they sing songs in Pacific languages, at least occasionally.

Figure 25 – Engagement in Pacific music

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



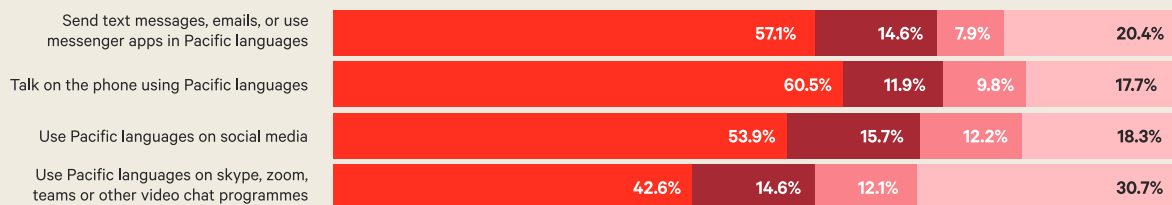
Social media and telecommunications

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

Figure 26 – Pacific language use over social media and telecommunications

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



“I send a lot of messages in Tongan, but some of our words are a little bit longer to spell so my hands take time to get it. But you know the other thing, I’ve used the macron, the toloi, and stuff in mālō or fēfē hake...I save it to ensure my words are correctly written... I am a bit careful with the Tongan spelling and grammar.”

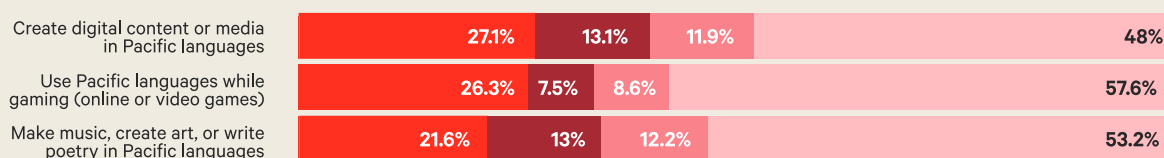
Broadcast and print media

Radio was the most popular form of broadcast media for participants, with 77% listening to content in lea faka-Tonga at least occasionally. This was followed by: reading books, newspapers, or magazines (72%); watching the news, TV shows, or movies (70%); and listening to podcasts (56%).

Figure 27 – Engagement in broadcast and print media

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Participants highlighted the critical role online radio played in keeping elderly community members informed of public health developments during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“The number of listeners went up during lockdown because the elderly in particular tune into the 531pi Tongan language programme. So many people tuned in and there were so many questions about the lockdown, the virus, and how concerning it is.”

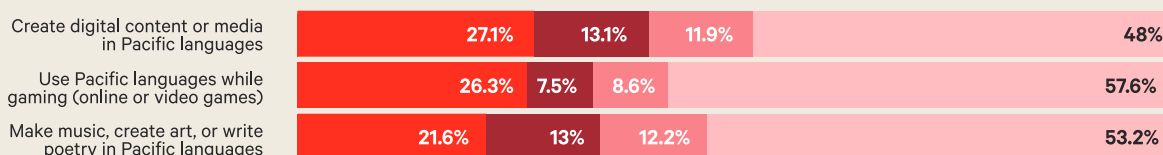
Creative arts

Just over half of participants (52%) reported creating digital content or media in lea faka-Tonga at least occasionally, and 47% made music, created art, or wrote poetry as frequently. Fewer still (42%) reported using lea faka-Tonga while gaming.

Figure 28 – Engagement in creative arts

Media Pacific Language Connection:

● Weekly ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Never



Attitudes towards Pacific language media

Digital media as a tool for language revitalisation

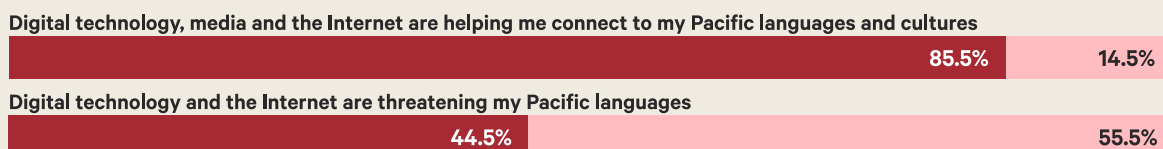
Most participants (86%) agreed that digital technology, media, and the internet help them connect to their language(s) and culture(s). Participants recognised the potential of digital platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, to engage younger generations and promote lea faka-Tonga in accessible, entertaining ways.

“A Tongan woman posted her own TikTok about her Tongan culture... she uses bilingual, but you will see lots and lots of people follow her. It’s those kinds of things that need to be utilised.”

Figure 29 – Attitudes towards Pacific language media

Attitudes to Pacific languages and media:

● Agree ● Not agree



Many participants emphasised the important role the media and broadcasting domain plays in enabling the community, both domestically and internationally, to connect with their language and culture in innovative ways:

“If digital is a problem, make it a solution because nowadays hardly anyone sits down and reads a book or listens to music on the radio other than the older generation. The approach of continuous exposure [through technology] will spark interest in the children.”

Technology as a double-edged sword

While digital tools offer opportunities, they also contribute to language loss when content is predominantly in English or when Tongan is shortened or simplified in texting and social media.

“Even with texting, I am a bit careful with the Tongan spellings and grammar... if not, it will change in a few years’ time.”

Just under half (45%) of survey participants thought that digital technology and the internet are threatening lea faka-Tonga.

Lea faka-Tonga in the New Zealand context

“When I migrated here to New Zealand... English is their first or second language, so when I moved here, the majority of New Zealanders speak English.”

This section situates lea faka-Tonga within the broader New Zealand society. It examines attitudes toward bilingualism, language use in public and official settings, and the influence of te reo Māori and multiculturalism on language revitalisation.

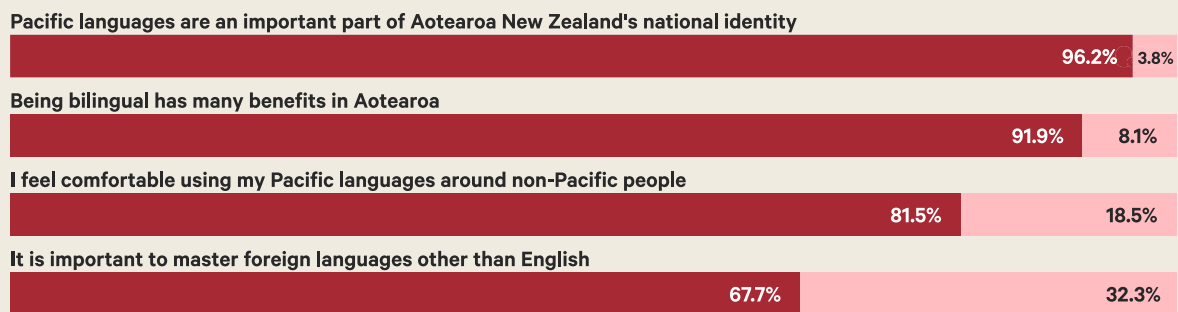
Wider society

Nearly participants agreed that bilingualism is beneficial in New Zealand (92%) and that Pacific languages are an important part of New Zealand’s national identity (96%). More than three-quarters (82%) agreed they feel comfortable using lea faka-Tonga around non-Pacific people, and 68% believe it is important to learn foreign languages beyond English, demonstrating the value placed on multilingualism by the Tongan community in New Zealand.

Figure 30 – Attitudes towards Pacific languages in wider society

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ society:

● Agree ● Not agree



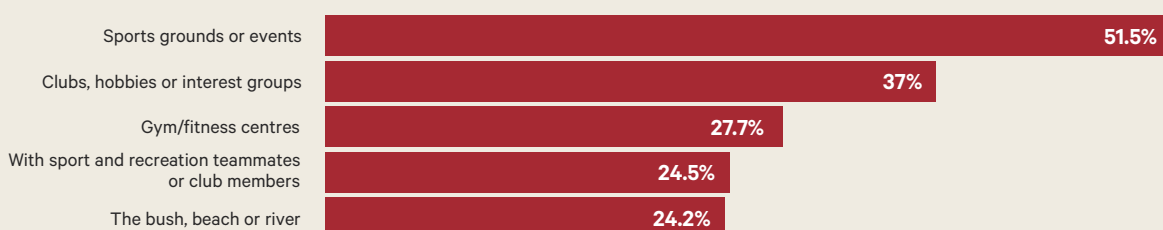
Language, identity, and politeness dynamics

Most participants (87%) agreed it is important to speak your Pacific language(s) as a Pacific person. Under half (43%) felt it is impolite to use Pacific languages around people who do not understand them, while only 20% thought that if a person is not fluent in their Pacific language(s) they should not speak it at all.

Language use in recreational settings

When asked where they had used lea faka-Tonga in the past 12 months, many participants highlighted recreational settings. Specifically, 52% reported using the language at sporting events, while 37% reported the same in relation to clubs, hobbies or interest groups.

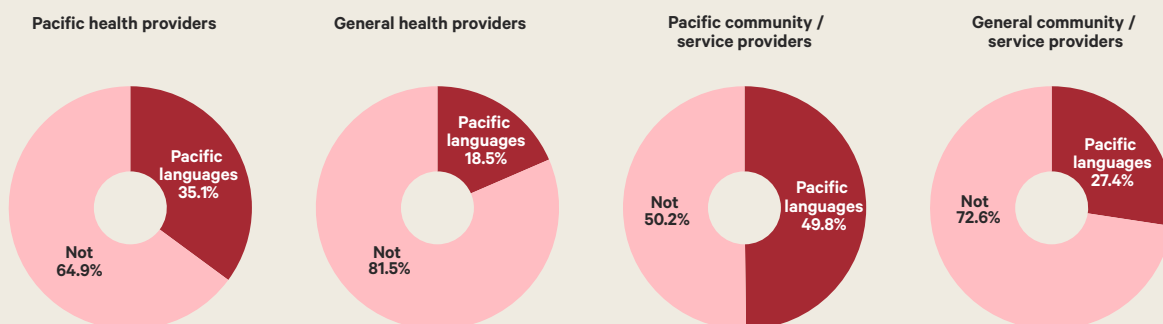
Figure 31 – Pacific language use in recreational settings



Language use with service providers

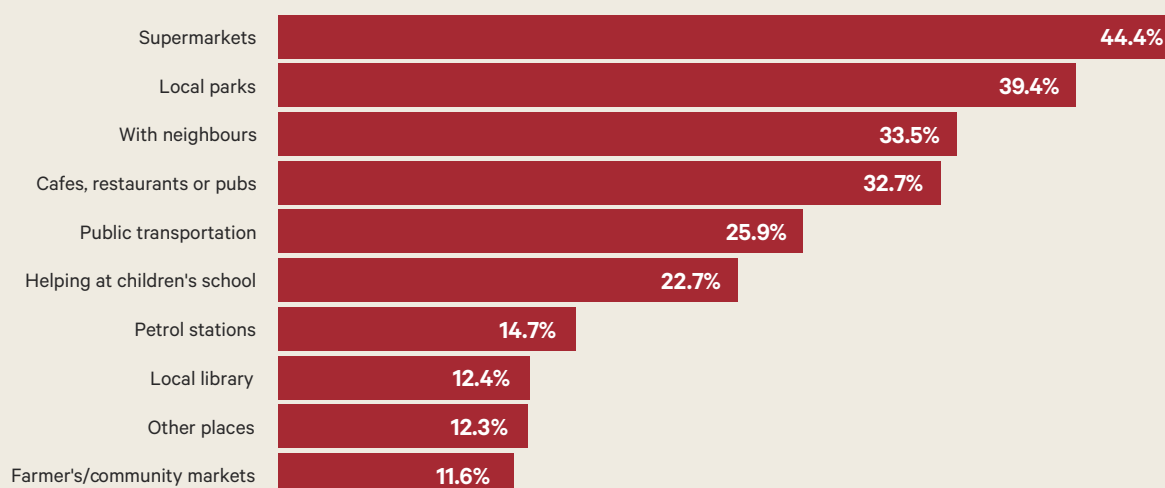
Kakai Tonga were asked whether they had used lea faka-Tonga when engaging with health and community service providers in the last year. A greater proportion reported they had used the language when engaging with Pacific health providers (35%) than general health providers (19%). Similarly, more participants reported they had used it with Pacific community service providers (50%) compared to general community service providers (27%).

Figure 32 – Pacific language use with health and community service providers



Language use in public settings

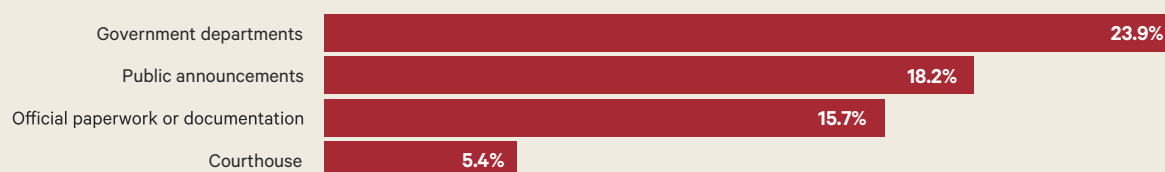
In terms of language use in public settings, 44% of participants reported using lea faka-Tonga at supermarkets. A slightly smaller proportion (39%) reported the same at local parks, and response rates continued to decrease in relation to other settings such as with neighbours (34%), at dining establishments (33%), and on public transportation (26%). The least likely places for participants to report using lea faka-Tonga were at local libraries and community markets (12%).

Figure 33 – Pacific language use in public settings

New Zealand Government

“To me, there is not enough being done in the public domain to support our young people to have accessibility to their languages.”

Participants were unlikely to use their language while engaging with the New Zealand Government, with 24% reporting doing so. A smaller proportion (16%) reported using lea faka-Tonga when completing official paperwork or documentation, and 5% reported the same in courthouse settings.

Figure 34 – Pacific language use in official and/or government settings

Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

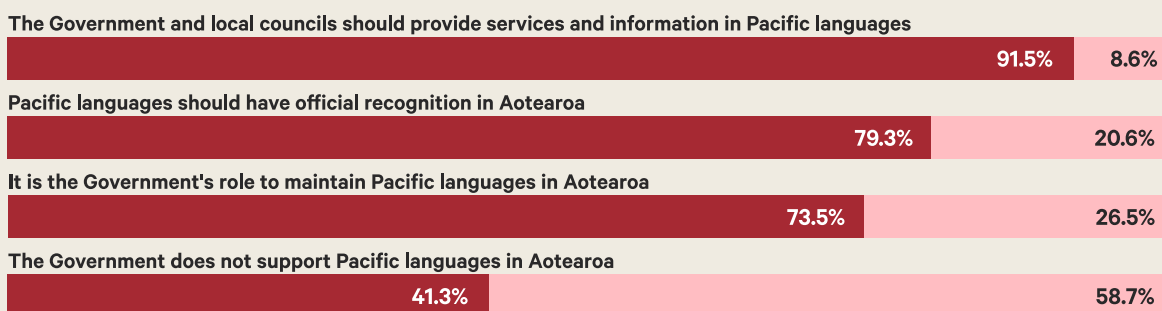
Participants were largely aligned in their attitudes towards the role Government plays in promoting Pacific language planning, maintenance, and revitalisation across the motu.

A large proportion (92%) felt that Government and local councils should provide services and information in Pacific languages, and 80% agreed that Pacific languages should have official recognition in New Zealand. Nearly three-quarters (74%) agreed it is the Government’s role to maintain Pacific languages in New Zealand, while 41% thought the Government does not support them.

Figure 35 – Attitudes towards Government support of Pacific languages

Attitudes to Pacific languages and NZ Government:

● Agree ● Not agree



Attitudes towards language use in the wider society

Hope for revitalisation in a multicultural society

Despite challenges, participants expressed optimism that New Zealand's multicultural environment can support language revitalisation - if communities and institutions work together.

“People would like to know more and more about different cultures, different languages, but also their own... I don't think now we are in danger of losing it.”

Influence of te reo Māori and biculturalism

The growing visibility and recognition of te reo Māori has inspired some participants to reflect on the importance of their own Pacific languages and advocate for similar revitalisation efforts.

“New Zealand is looking at Te Reo Māori as being more and more key for Aotearoa... I really want to do the same with my indigenous heritage, so wanting to learn more of the Tongan language.”

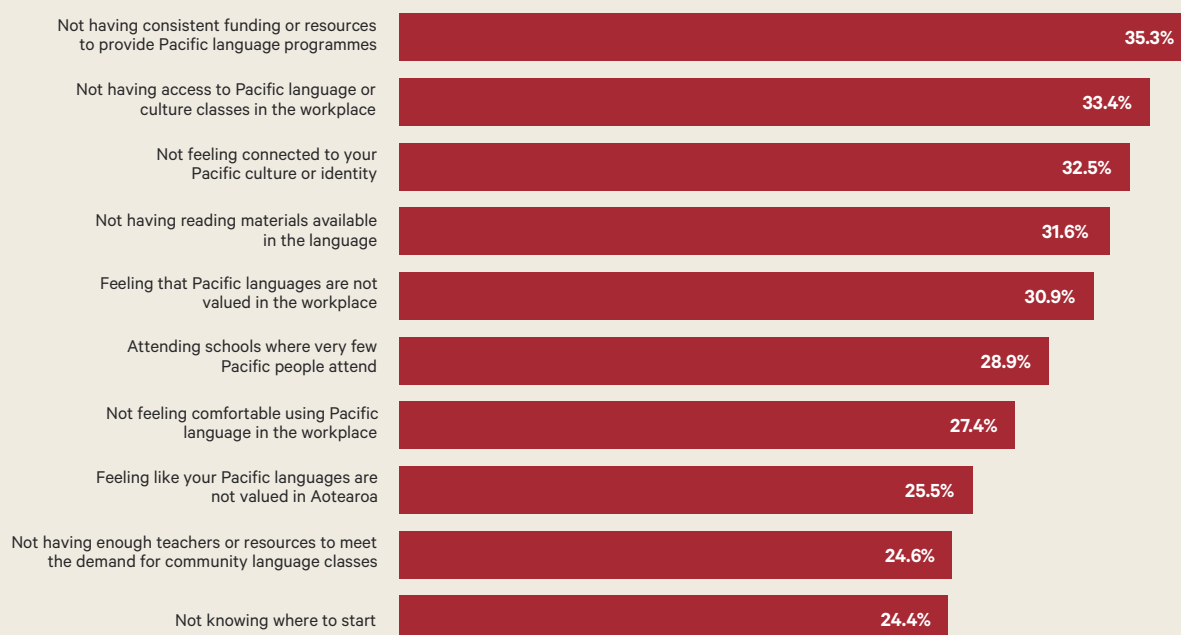
Barriers and Enablers

What helps or hinders the use of lea faka-Tonga? This section presents the key challenges and supports identified by participants, offering insight into what is needed to sustain the language in everyday life.

Barriers to using, learning, and maintaining lea faka-Tonga

Kakai Tonga participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the main barriers to using, learning, and/or maintaining lea faka-Tonga. 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 36 – Reported barriers to using, learning, and maintaining lea faka-Tonga

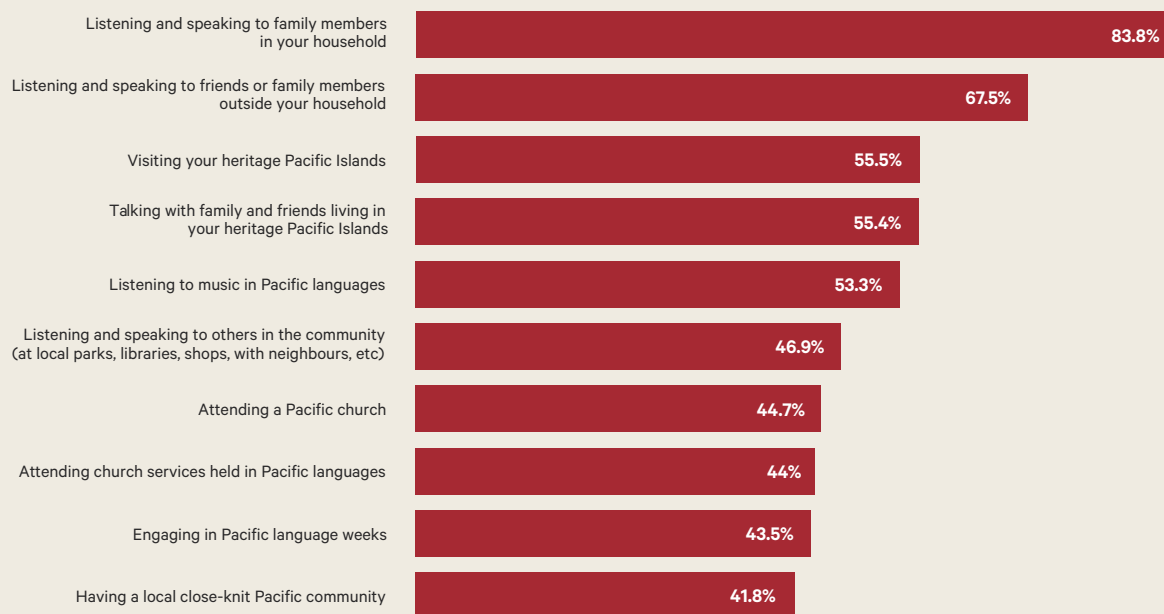


The most common barriers reported were inconsistent funding and resourcing to provide Pacific language programmes (35%) and not having access to Pacific language and culture classes in workplaces (33%). Similar proportions of participants reported other barriers such as not feeling connected to their Pacific culture and identity (33%); not having reading materials available in lea faka-Tonga (32%); and feeling that Pacific languages are not valued in the workplace (31%).

Enablers of using, learning, and maintaining lea faka-Tonga

Participants were also asked to identify what they considered to be the main enablers of using, learning, and/or maintaining lea faka-Tonga. 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 37 – Reported enablers of using, learning, and maintaining lea faka-Tonga



The most common enabler reported was participants 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 (68%); visiting Tonga (56%); talking with family and friends living in Tonga; and listening to music in lea faka-Tonga (53%).

Conclusion

“My hopes and aspirations is that those born in New Zealand are proud and strong in speaking the Tongan language. We must encourage the young ones to practice speaking the language so that it becomes natural and they’re confident using it in their daily lives, regardless of where they may be, so that they are able to pass it on to the next generation”

Lea faka-Tonga in New Zealand is widely embraced, yet its use among kakai Tonga is declining at a rapid rate. The language relies on ongoing support to ensure it is passed on from generation to generation and remains a key part of daily life in New Zealand. To respond to these challenges, 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 Lea Faka-Tonga Report was developed. Alongside the overarching [Leo Moana o Aotearoa Report](#), it provides a snapshot of the state of lea faka-Tonga, 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 kakai Tonga 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 lea faka-Tonga and kakai Tonga. 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 (84%) reported that lea faka-Tonga was spoken in the home when they were growing up, fewer (71%) reported it being used with children today. Participants cited barriers such as cultural disconnection, lack of confidence, and English-medium education. Strengthening the use of lea faka-Tonga within the home is, therefore, essential to reversing this trend and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Recommendations:

- Develop and distribute home-based language resources.
- Promote home immersion strategies and family language plans.
- Support intergenerational transmission through community-based mentorships that connect elders with youth through storytelling, games, and cultural activities.

Enhance the continuity of bilingual and immersion education

Education is a powerful tool for language revitalisation. Participants were cognisant of this, with 88% reporting they would send their children to ECE, primary, and secondary schools where they could be taught in lea faka-Tonga if given the opportunity. Only 14% reported having engaged in such education, however, highlighting a stark mismatch in the supply and demand of Pacific language provision stemming from limited resources, teachers, and institutional support. Strengthening Pacific language education across all levels of schooling would go a long way towards addressing this issue.

Recommendations:

- Increase bilingual and immersion programmes across all levels.
- Strengthen teacher training and curriculum development in lea faka-Tonga.

Support language use in churches

Churches remain strongholds of lea faka-Tonga use, with the majority of weekly attendees reporting services (63%), bible studies (53%), and other church activities such as choir and Sunday school classes (53%) being held in the language. Strengthening this domain would support both spiritual and linguistic wellbeing.

Recommendations:

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

Expand community-based language initiatives

Community events foster language use and cultural pride, with 96% of participants reporting they use lea faka-Tonga in such settings. They provide a relaxed environment in which individuals can practice and enhance their language skills, including through intergenerational transmission, 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.

Leverage media and digital platforms

Media is an increasingly significant domain of language use, with digital tools offering creative, accessible, and scalable ways for kakai Tonga to engage with their language daily. However, while many participants reported they use the language over social media (82%), a much smaller proportion reported ever having created content (52%) in it. This rate can be improved by creating conditions that better support the development of lea faka-Tonga content online.

Recommendations:

- Invest in lea faka-Tonga media and digital content (e.g., music, podcasts, videos etc).
- Collaborate with broadcasters to expand Tongan-language programming.

Promote language use in the workplace

Just over half (52%) of participants reported using lea faka-Tonga at least weekly with their colleagues, and many (70%) offered cultural and/or language support at work. English is still perceived as the language of success, however, and 24% 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 kakai Tonga can learn and use lea faka-Tonga:

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.

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.

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 Tonga Survey sample

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

Total	505	
Northern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	50	49
25-44 years	61	60
45-64 years	35	35
65+ years	11	12
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	16	16
25-44 years	19	19
45-64 years	11	11
65+ years	3	4
Central Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	7	7
25-44 years	8	8
45-64 years	5	5
65+ years	1	2
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	4	4
25-44 years	5	5
45-64 years	3	3
65+ years	1	1
Southern Regions		
NZ-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	4	4
25-44 years	5	5
45-64 years	3	3
65+ years	1	1
OVERSEAS-BORN	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)
15-24 years	1	1
25-44 years	2	2
45-64 years	1	1
65+ years	1	0

Final Tonga Survey sample

The following table reflects the actual Survey sample.

Total	545		
	MALE (#)	FEMALE (#)	ANOTHER GENDER (#)
NZ-BORN	277	268	0
OVERSEAS-BORN	128	127	2
15-24 years	139	141	
15-24 years	86	84	1
25-44 years	104	116	
45-64 years	76	51	1
65+ years	11	17	
Northern regions	222	224	
Central regions	32	27	
Southern regions	23	17	

