

TE HONONGA AKORANGA

COMET



Submission on the Ministry of Pacific Peoples

Pacific Languages Strategy – draft for targeted consultation

Submission 110/21
Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, November 2021

Whakatauāki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi ki te raranga i te whāriki kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.

Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu, mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga, ka oti tēnei whāriki.

I te otinga me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.

Ā tana wā, me titiro hoki ki ngā raranga i makere nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

nā Kūkupa Tirikatene, ONZM, 1934 - 2018

The tapestry of understanding cannot be woven by one strand alone.

Only by the working together of strands and the working together of weavers will such a tapestry be completed.

With its completion let us look at the good that comes from it.

And, in time we should also look at those stitches which have been dropped, because they also have a message.

About COMET Auckland

[Te Hononga Akoranga COMET](#) is an independent charitable trust and Auckland Council's CCO focused on education, skills and lifelong learning across Auckland and, increasingly, other parts of the country.

Briefly, our work involves:

Sector leadership – mapping data and evidence, working with sector leaders to identify and prioritise the most pressing areas of focus, and connecting people around that common agenda, to plan collaborative action.

That can then lead to advocacy or changes to partners' business as usual, or sometimes to planning and trialling new ways of working (incubation projects).

These incubation projects generally develop through scoping and planning to trialling, and then implementation and evaluation, with the goal of handing them on once they are fully developed so we can move on to focus on another part of the system.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Pacific Languages Strategy.

This submission has been assembled based on our own collective knowledge and experience, and our ongoing engagement with our stakeholders, including educators, community leaders, employers, parents and learners of all ages.

In particular, this submission is informed by three areas of COMET's work, and by the project partners, communities and other experts we work with through those areas of work.

Vaka Leo Voices Consortium (VLVC): a partnership with John and Judy McCaffery of Waka Aotearoa Education Ltd, and with a group of Bilingual/Immersion units/Schools, ECE and Pacific & Research Educational Organisations, Pacific Whānau and Church groups that work together to support, develop and enhance Pasifika Bilingual Education. During 2021 we have jointly provided professional development for teachers and school leaders and information of parents and communities at 14 early learning centres and 9 schools in south, west and central Auckland.

Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group (ALSWG): an unaffiliated working group drawing on expertise and interest in the status and use of languages in New Zealand, and in Auckland in particular. The ALSWG works towards its vision of a multilingual Auckland that benefits socially, culturally and economically from an increasing number of Aucklanders knowing, respecting and speaking more than one language. The group is convened by COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga and includes members from a wide range of language-related organisations.

Talking Matters: partnering with whānau, communities, practitioners, iwi and government to build and support language-rich environments for children, including encouraging and supporting rich use of first and heritage languages in the home and in early learning settings.

General comments on the strategy

We welcome the publication of this draft strategy. Pacific languages have been under-supported for too long, as evidenced by the declining numbers of speakers and the endangered status of several languages. This strategy, if fully implemented and if enhanced in the ways we suggest, has potential to slow and eventually turn around the decline in Pacific languages in Aotearoa, with significant benefits for identity, wellbeing, community connections, educational achievement, economic prosperity and more.

We support the vision of thriving Pacific languages in Pacific Aotearoa; and the 10-year span of the strategy, which is what is needed. It will require consistent action over time to achieve the strategy's goals because many of the systems that are required for the strategy (e.g. Pacific-focused teacher training to expand the Pasifika Bilingual Education workforce) will take time to establish and to generate the capacities required.

Need for a cross-government approach

It is good to see such strong recognition of the role of government, alongside the other domains listed, in supporting Pacific languages to thrive in Aotearoa. Communities have an important role in language maintenance, but this is never sufficient on its own. They need to see official recognition from government, through things like this strategy, official use of Pacific languages in

communications, support for language weeks etc. The list of key benefits government giving clear messages about the importance of Pacific languages.

Communities also need government to prioritise Pacific language support through the way it delivers its core services – health, education, social welfare, etc. and it is good to see many of those things recognised in the strategy. However, we would like to see these messages strengthened as it would be easy to read the strategy as an MPP document rather than a whole-of-government commitment. There needs to be more detail on what other government agencies are already doing and what they need to do more of, in order to contribute to the strategy.

There also needs to be more focus on coordinating the efforts of the various relevant agencies. One of the issues with language policy in Aotearoa is that it is piecemeal. Most branches of government have some role in supporting languages but policies and practices can be disjointed and even contradictory. One stark example was a publication from DIA in 2014, *Language and Integration in New Zealand*, which misinterpreted data on migrant settlement and therefore publicly advised that migrant families should speak only English to their children at home. This advice is not only contrary to the evidence of effective language development, but it also completely contradicted official MOE advice at the time.

In particular, we would like to see the role of the Ministry of Education, and the other education agencies that lead formal and informal learning, much more prominent in the strategy. Over the past year there have been significant changes to education policy, with much greater support for Pasifika Bilingual Education, for greater recognition of the Realm languages, and for the role of Pacific languages in ensuring educational success for Pacific learners. The strategy needs to recognise these changes and build from them to ensure the potential of the education system to support Pacific languages is realised.

In the section below, we have included some specific suggestions of actions in the area of education that would strengthen the strategy and contribute significantly towards achieving its vision.

Priority actions for education

1. The single most important thing that the education system can do to support thriving Pacific languages is to expand and properly support Pasifika Bilingual Education. Even children who learn their heritage language at home need to have the opportunity to learn in and through their language at early learning and school, in order to build high-level concepts and vocabulary and in order to maximise the benefits of their language to contribute to their academic success. This requires a shift from teaching languages as subjects to using children's first or heritage languages as mediums of instruction. There is very strong local and international evidence for this change in approach because it achieves several goals more effectively – for students to be strong in both languages (i.e. bilingual), for students to be successful in their schooling across the curriculum, raising student attendance and engagement and contributing to identity and wellbeing.
2. The Education Act only recognises English and te reo Māori as mediums of instruction. It needs to be expanded to enable other languages to be supported and used in education, in order to facilitate more consistent and robust support for Pasifika Bilingual Education. Including this in the Act will ensure that such support can be

sustained across changes in government, in order to give time to build the systems, workforce capacity and resources needed to fulfil the goals of the strategy.

3. Teacher supply for Pasifika Bilingual Education at all levels needs to be addressed urgently. In the past few years, a number of Pacific language early learning centres have closed or have shifted from full immersion in the Pacific language to very partial bilingual teaching, because they are unable to find enough staff who are fluent in the language and who also have the teaching qualifications required. This is also an issue for schools at all levels, with bilingual units sometimes having to close or reduce the number of classes because they cannot find enough teachers able to deliver in a bilingual setting. Four things need to change in order to improve teacher supply for Pasifika Bilingual Education:
 - a. Re-establish the dedicated Pacific teacher training pathways that had been in place for teachers in both early learning and schooling, so Pacific people who want to teach in Pacific settings can be trained in a way that is consistent with Pacific world-views, cultures and values, with Pacific languages recognised, valued and supported.
 - b. Actively attract fluent speakers of Pacific language into the teaching profession, including offering incentives, scholarships etc. and removing barriers as described below.
 - c. Change the English language requirement for aspiring teachers (often referred to as the IELTS requirements). The IELTS requirement has been the main reason why the Pacific teacher training course were abandoned (due to a lack of qualifying students) and a key limiting factor in teacher supply for Pasifika Bilingual Education. The requirements are discriminatory in that they only apply to people who speak a language other than English as their main home language. They are also unnecessarily stringent, requiring a very high academic level of English language that most New Zealand-born, English language-raised teachers would struggle to meet. For teachers who will be teaching in Pacific bilingual settings, the IELTS requirements are also irrelevant. Rather, teachers should be recognised for the language skills they bring in their Pacific language. If an English language standard is required, we suggest reducing the requirement to a less academic level, and testing after teacher training rather than before in order to give time to build skills through the training period.
4. More deliberate planning is needed in order to provide language pathways in particular Pacific languages from early learning through primary and intermediate to secondary schools within geographic areas. Evidence shows that Pasifika Bilingual Education is most effective if students spend at least 6 to 8 years learning bilingually, but the lack of local language pathways often means students end up transitioning to English-medium schooling at the start of school or at the transition to intermediate because there is no local option in their language at the next level of schooling.
5. Existing and new Pasifika Bilingual Education settings need to be better supported to ensure they are able to deliver the highest possible quality of learning. This support needs to include:

- a. Professional development for teachers on the value of bilingualism, how language develops for bilingual learners, how to balance teaching in the two languages and pedagogical approaches in bilingual settings
 - b. Learning resources in Pacific languages that enable teaching in all curriculum subjects and at all levels of the curriculum
 - c. Information and support for parents on the benefits of bilingual education and on how to support their children's learning at home
6. Increasing the use of CLIL (Content and language integrated learning) so students who are learning a Pacific language as a subject can also use that language as a medium of instruction in one or more of their other subject. This has been shown to increase achievement in language learning because students have an authentic reason to learn and regularly use the language.
 7. High-level pathways for studying Pacific languages at university level, to provide opportunities for people to be strong in their language and to provide skilled people to move into teaching, research, translation, interpreting, the civil service and other roles where Pacific languages are needed.
 8. Better resourcing for community language classes, including professional development and accreditation for community language teachers and funding for services, to enable them to delivery quality adult learning.
 9. Enabling community language schools to offer and be funded for classes for children. This could be from ACE funding, or from Ministry of Education as a means of providing language learning in Pacific languages that are not able to be offered in the school. The learning that children undertake would then be recognized by schools and seen as a part of the school's language programme.

Comments on language profiles

It would be useful to include more information in the profiles on what is already happening for each language (e.g. number and type of media outlets for each language, number of community language classes and geographic spread, number of bilingual education settings etc.). This would show what is already in place that can be built on and would help identify what is needed to fill any gaps in provision.

Under barriers to language use, retention and maintenance, we suggest adding after "lack of formal education options": "insufficient support (PD, learning resources, assessments, funding) for quality delivery in Pacific Bilingual Education settings".

The need for a National Languages Policy

This strategy, and the strategy for languages in education that is currently being developed by the Ministry of Education, should be seen as contributing to, rather than replacing, the proposed National Languages Policy.

A National Languages Policy would provide a coherent platform to support language learning, maintenance, celebration and use across government agencies and sectors, in order to harness the benefits of a multilingual Aotearoa New Zealand.

It would specifically address and be underpinned by Te Reo Māori as our nation's indigenous language, and also encompass official recognition and support for Realm languages (Te Reo Kūki Airani, Vagahau Niue and Gagana Tokelau) and for the other major Pacific languages spoken in our nation (Gagana Samoa and Lea Faka-Tonga, Te Gana Tuvalu, Vosa Vakaviti, Fāeag Rotūam and Te taetae ni Kiribati).

It would also provide for greater access to English as a second language teaching, interpreting and translation services, language diversity in government communications and broadcasting, and maintaining heritage languages within families and communities.

Recommendation: Based on advice from Professor Lo Bianco and others, the first step towards a national languages policy would be to conduct an independent consultation on the issues a languages policy would need to address. He has previously indicated that he is available to assist Government on this matter.

Support for other submissions

We wish to also express our support for the following submissions and representations on the strategy:

- Pasifika Education Centre
- Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group
- Vaka Leo Voices Consortium