

## THE LANGUAGE CONTEXT OF PACIFIC COUNTRIES : A SUMMARY<sup>15</sup>

### Fiji

#### Profile

Population 846,085: 54% Fijian, 37% Indian, 8% Chinese, European, other Pacific Islanders.\* 712 primary schools, 157 secondary schools, 9,062 teachers, 210959 students (2003)

#### Languages

Fijian; Hindi; English; and minority languages including Rotuman; Chinese, Kiribati, Tuvaluan and a number of other Indian languages.

#### Language policy

Fiji 1997 Constitution recognises Fiji as a multilingual state and designates the main languages (Fijian, Hindi and English) to be equal in terms of status, use and function. In reality English dominates in the formal arena, education, the media and parliamentary proceedings.

#### Languages in education

Local languages used as medium of instruction in first 3 years of primary education and English thereafter, but use of English as the medium right from Class 1 is common in urban schools.

1. English is used as the medium of instruction from Class 4 onwards.
2. Local languages are used as medium from Class 1-3.
3. English is compulsory in all external exams but local languages are optional.
4. Need to improve teaching of vernacular languages to make it more attractive.

#### Community issues

1. Language and its links to the survival of cultural and ethnic groups.
2. Danger of language shift, particularly in the urban areas to English.
3. Dominance of English in education, media and commerce.
4. Dominance of English in selection processes for educational and job opportunities.

#### Recommendations

1. That PRIDE fund technical assistance for development of Fiji's Language policy.
2. That PRIDE finance development of curriculum materials in vernacular languages.

\*Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2005

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<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the population figures in these summaries are from <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ne.html>. The education statistics are from <http://www.spc.int/prism/social/enrolments.html> with the year in brackets. Both sites were accessed in July 2006.

## Federated States of Micronesia

### Profile

Population 111,000; 13 major languages; 33,886 students (2002)

### Languages

multiple Micronesian languages

### Language policy

English has official status and is used for legislative proceedings but indigenous languages may also be used.

### Languages in education

Language policy needs implementation plans at national and state levels.

#### Two complementary objectives

1. Implement comprehensive language and culture programs to promote the acquisition of primary language skills in local languages and the understanding and appreciation of the values and customs that make population unique as a people.
2. Develop literacy in English and other international languages using the cognitive skills developed in first languages.

### Community issues

- Language erosion - serious loss of vocabulary e.g. names of common plants, counting systems, honorific terms, and declining use of high language.
- Language shift - parents using English only in the homes and fear of language death.
- Lack of trained staff, instructional dictionaries, grammars, curriculum materials, etc. appropriate for age of grade groups.
- English mainly used for: international language; lingua franca; medium of instruction.

### Recommendations

1. That there be legislation at both state and national levels:  
*National level:* statement of purpose; findings on current uses of languages, trends and competence levels; establish English as official language; guiding principles for development and enhance of local languages; establish a national language and cultural institute; develop standards and assessment instruments; and reporting requirements to National Congress.  
*State level:* similar but include issues of: language commissions; standard spelling and representative systems; teacher training; materials development, etc.
2. That implementation plans be developed, detailing actions and benchmarks: guiding principles; National Language and Cultural Institute; Standards, Assessment and Curriculum and instruction; material development (local and English); training and technical assistance; public education; research, evaluation and reporting; workplace language development; technology for language acquisition.

## Niue

### **Profile**

Population 2,166; 480 students, 50 teachers in one pre-school, one primary and one secondary school

### **Languages**

Vagahau Niue (Niuean) and English

### **Language policy**

Constitution of Niue states Vagahau Niue (Niuean) and English are of equal legal authenticity. In practice, English dominates in nearly all aspects of life.

### **Languages in education**

Course of instruction to continue development of bilingualism. However, English dominates. It is compulsory in schools. Dept. of Education promotes Vagahau Niue Focusing on: developing materials and resources; training teachers and teaching language in schools; developing dictionaries; supporting Niue Language Commission; awareness programmes for the public; translation of materials

### **Community issues**

1. Language erosion and shift to English.
2. Lack of resources and loss of capacity due to migration.
3. Limited financial resources to support maintenance work.
4. Lack of general interest among the public but keen interest among students.

### **Recommendations**

1. That use of Vagahau Niue to support everyday literacy be maintained.
2. That the use of Vagahau Niue in everyday life be promoted and developed.
3. That standards for translation and interpreting of Vagahau Niue be developed and maintained.
4. That ethics for editing work in Vagahau Niue be developed.
5. That language resources be developed, maintained and stocktaken.
6. That all forms of written resources and artistic use of Vagahau Niue be promoted and encouraged.
7. That Niueans abroad be assisted to use Vagahau Niue and maintain links with Niue.
8. That technology be used to develop and enhance all Vagahau Niue initiatives.
9. Establish Internet links with Pacific and world language institutions.
10. That legislation for the use of Vagahau Niue be developed.

## Palau

### **Profile**

Population 20,579: Palauans, Carolinians and other Micronesians (over 70%), Filipinos (15%), Chinese (4%), other Asians and other small groups. 13055 students, 383 teachers (2003).

### **Languages**

Palauan, Sonsorolese, Tobian, Angaur; English; Japanese

### **Language policy**

Palauan, Sonrolese and Tobian are national languages; Palauan and English are official languages at the national level and in all the islands except on Sonsorol, where Sonsorolese and English are official, Tobi (Tobian and English), and Angaur (Angaur, Japanese, and English).

### **Languages in education**

In elementary schools, Palauan is the main medium of instruction, including in English language classes. In secondary schools, Palauan and English are both used as languages of instruction and taught as subjects; English is the main medium if the teacher is a non-Palauan speaker. Japanese is a high school subject.

### **Community issues**

The Ministry of Education shares with the community and the state the commitment to preserve local languages and culture and to prepare children to participate in both the local community and the global society. A small percentage of Asian migrants have difficulty with both Palauan and English, which poses a great challenge to teachers.

### **Recommendations**

1. That the present policy, which ensures the maintenance of Palauan language and culture while providing access to competence in English, be continued.
2. That support in Palauan and English for speakers of minority languages, whether they are speakers of indigenous languages of Palau or foreign immigrants, be continued.
3. That the Ministry of Education convene a meeting of students, parents, educators, and community leaders to assess current policy and practice with respect to language in education and institute any reforms needed.
4. That PRIDE assist in assessing current practices and formalising language policies in education.

## **Kiribati**

### **Profile**

Population 105,432; 27086 students, 1220 teachers (2003)

### **Languages**

Kiribati, English

### **Language policy**

Official language is English and is used in all official government business, but Kiribati is language of debate in parliament.

### **Languages in education**

Current policy emphasises English as medium of instruction from Class 3. Kiribati is used in Classes 1-3.

### **Community Issues**

Some erosion of Kiribati language

### **Recommendations**

1. That a language policy which, includes all stakeholders and is based on research and educational philosophies, be developed.
2. That PRIDE support local research, and facilitate development of a language policy.
3. That PRIDE conduct forums on language policy issues.

## **Marshall Islands**

### **Profile**

Population 59,071, nearly all Micronesians. 13,610 students in primary and secondary schools and 30 at the College of the Marshall Islands (2003).

### **Languages**

Marshallese and English.

### **Language policy**

Marshallese is considered the national language. English is mandated as the official language in government and in education.

### **Languages in education**

Marshallese is required to be taught from Grade 1 to 6 in all subject areas except English. Otherwise the official medium of instruction is English. In private schools, the policy can vary. A recent PREL study recommends a bilingual model whereby the local language should be used in 2/3 of the subjects, and English in 1/3 in grades 1-2; both languages should be used equally (50%-50%) in grades 3-5. Thereafter the medium of instruction should be English in all subject areas except for Marshallese language classes.

### **Recommendations**

That the Ministry of Education:

1. institute a single uniform language policy at the national level and in education;
2. organise a workshop to review and evaluate the language policy with technical assistance from PRIDE;
3. develop resources for Marshallese materials in Marshallese Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies;
4. provide professional development training for teachers in both English and Marshallese academic skills.

## Solomon Islands

**Profile:** Population 538,032, nearly all Melanesians, with about 5% Polynesians, Micronesians and others. 21,427 students in primary schools, 84,756 students in secondary schools (2004)

**Languages:** Over 60 indigenous languages (mostly Austronesian, a few Papuan); the lingua franca Solomons Pijin, English.

**Language policy:** Although there is no formalised language policy, English is the de facto official language, while Pijin is also used extensively in parliament debates.

**Languages in education:** While English is the only recognised medium of instruction beyond grade 3, provisions allow for the vernaculars or Pijin to be used at elementary level. Pijin is used unofficially as medium in many schools and in non-formal education and training. There are plans to introduce vernaculars as languages of instruction beyond grade 3.

**Community issues:** There is a need to raise literacy levels, particularly among disadvantaged groups, including women. Plans for vernacular literacy education are under way.

### **Recommendations:**

1. That the Ministry of Education
  - appoint a task force to formulate a language policy.
  - conduct a pilot project on the use of vernacular languages in the formal education system.
  - develop, in collaboration with PRIDE, a vernacular course to be offered at the School of Education of SICHE.
2. That the CDC, in collaboration with PRIDE, seek technical assistance to develop children's storybooks in vernaculars to be identified by the Ministry of Education.

## Tonga

**Profile:** Population 114,689; nearly 31,672 (primary and secondary) students, 1785 teachers (2002)

**Languages:** Tongan and English

**Language policy:** Official languages are Tongan and English. Both are used in government, the law, the judiciary and business. Tongan is used on an everyday basis.

**Languages in education:** Tongan is main language of instruction at primary level., and English is taught bilingually from Class 1. English is medium of instruction in secondary schools. Tongan compulsory to Form 5, English to Form 6. *Tonga Education Policy Framework 2004-2019* is currently being implemented. Policy outcomes are: students at all levels will develop proficiency in Tongan; all students will understand and speak English by end of Class 6 and be competent in oral and written English by end of secondary school. Tongan language and culture to be taught from Class 1 to Form 7. English to be taught bilingually from Class 3.

**Recommendations:** That, while the *Tonga Education Policy Framework 2004-2019* is being implemented the following are needed:

- a review of language policy and training programmes
- specific training of teachers in the area of language learning and literacy
- production of quality reading materials in both Tongan and English
- a group of specialist advisors in the area of literacy.

## Tuvalu

**Profile:** Population 11,810; nearly all Polynesians, 4% Micronesians. 1893 students in primary schools, 432 students in secondary schools (2004).

**Languages:** Tuvaluan, Kiribati on the island of Nui, English.

**Language policy:** Tuvaluan and English are official languages.

**Languages in education:** The medium of instruction is the mother tongue in the first two years and English thereafter.

**Community issues:** There is considerable pressure from parents for English to be taught exclusively. Poor performance is blamed on teachers using Tuvaluan rather than English as medium of instruction.

**Recommendations:**

1. That teachers be trained in ESL so that they understand better the students' language developmental needs;
2. That community language awareness programmes be held to inform parents that research shows that using and developing the first language in the classroom promotes students' proficiency in both their first and second language.
3. That a national Tuvaluan language curriculum be developed and implemented;
4. That a bilingual education policy be developed;
5. That a plan, involving language planners and all education stakeholders, be developed to monitor the language policy and evaluate its effectiveness. Better monitoring mechanisms are also needed.

## **Vanuatu**

### **Profile**

Population 208,869 mostly Melanesians, some Polynesians. 3,8960 students in primary school and 10591 in secondary school, 2639 teachers (2004).

### **Languages**

Over 100 indigenous languages, the lingua franca Bislama, English and French.

### **Language policy**

Bislama is the national language and co-official language with English and French. Vernacular languages are recognised and protected by the Constitution. English and French are the principal languages of education.

### **Languages in education**

There is a dual education system, with some English- and some French-medium schools. French is taught as a subject in English-medium schools and vice-versa. There are plans to use vernaculars more

### **Community issues**

Communities play a central role in assisting teachers to use the vernaculars in schools. The support of the community is also needed for the French-English bilingual model.

### **Recommendations**

At the level of the government, the language act and policies must to be made official.

1. That the Education Department:
  - revise and clarify curriculum objectives about vernacular teaching for the lower classes;
  - appoint a vernacular coordinator at the CDU;
  - assist communities to develop vernacular teaching materials;
  - assist in evaluating and monitoring the development of all vernacular classes;
  - train vernacular teachers whom have a good command of their community's culture and traditions;
  - revisit the curriculum on the French and English languages.
2. That PRIDE to assist in providing expertise and technical assistance in:
  - the development of language policies;
  - the framing of the curriculum of vernacular programs, pending requests from the communities;
  - the development of curriculum materials for vernacular teaching
3. That PRIDE also provide financial assistance in training, compilation of documents, and the like.