

## **Mother Tongue Use in Education and UPE in the Pacific.**

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Despite the formulation of language policies in recent years which promise a greater use of vernacular languages, mother tongues and local lingua franca, minority language education in the Pacific Islands region is not a given right. In the last few years, the support of national governments for the use of the language of greater prestige continues to emerge as a strong force. In Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Kiribati language instruction plays differing roles in schools and the language of choice often depends on the popular thinking of the respective minister of education and their perceptions of the use of language in education and links with economic development.

This paper explores ways in which the choice of language of education is driven in four Pacific Island countries which are classified as LDC's. This paper also examines the protection and support for the use of minority languages offered by the MOE's; by language policies; and by informal actors in education who may not have any overt leverage, but can play a role in advocacy. The nature of advocacy needed by these latter players is especially important in order to recommend evidence-based change to influence national education plans, the formulation of language in education policies and the practical choice and use of languages in the classroom. This is particularly important where popular belief does not support the use of local languages in education. Comparisons will be made with the policy and planning for language-in-education in another Pacific Island country, Samoa, which has a language policy in place and is now working on a draft primary curriculum which is responsive to bilingual needs.

Since the goal for LDC's in the Pacific is universal primary education, the choice and use of the languages in schooling becomes even more important. Children who are not familiar with the language used in education, especially those who are the most marginalized in the remote islands will not be motivated to enrol or stay in school. The use of the L1, especially in the early years of schooling needs a strong focus and advocacy from education institutions, development partners and civil society in order to be most effective.