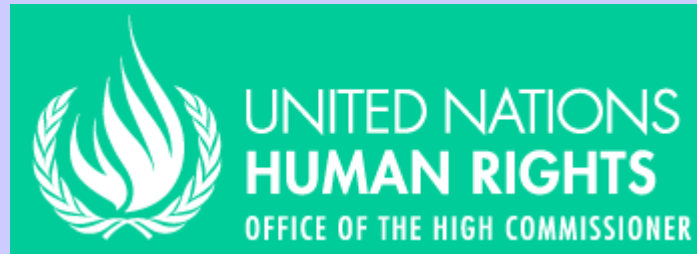


**Language as a children's right in quality  
education:  
Evidence from Vanuatu, Kiribati and Solomon  
Islands**



Hilary Smith

Australian National University, Canberra, Australia  
Systemetrics Research Associates, Papaiōeia, NZ



# Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989)

- Came into effect in 1990;
- Definition: ‘a child means every human being below the age of eighteen’;
- Most Pacific states signed up in the first decade (Farran, 2012);
- Challenges remain (geographical, socio-political factors).

# Children's rights in Pacific contexts: Challenges

(Ochs, 1982; Schoeffel & Meleisea, 1994; Morton, 1996; Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Pereira, 2010; Farran, 2012)

- Traditional views of the nature of young children – resisting control and lacking socially appropriate conduct
- Conservative Christian approach to child rearing introduced by missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – may include corporal punishment
- Reaction to universality of rights as ‘Western-centric’ – reasserting Pacific cultures and epistemologies

# CRC articles about language (1)

## Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
  - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

**“respect”**

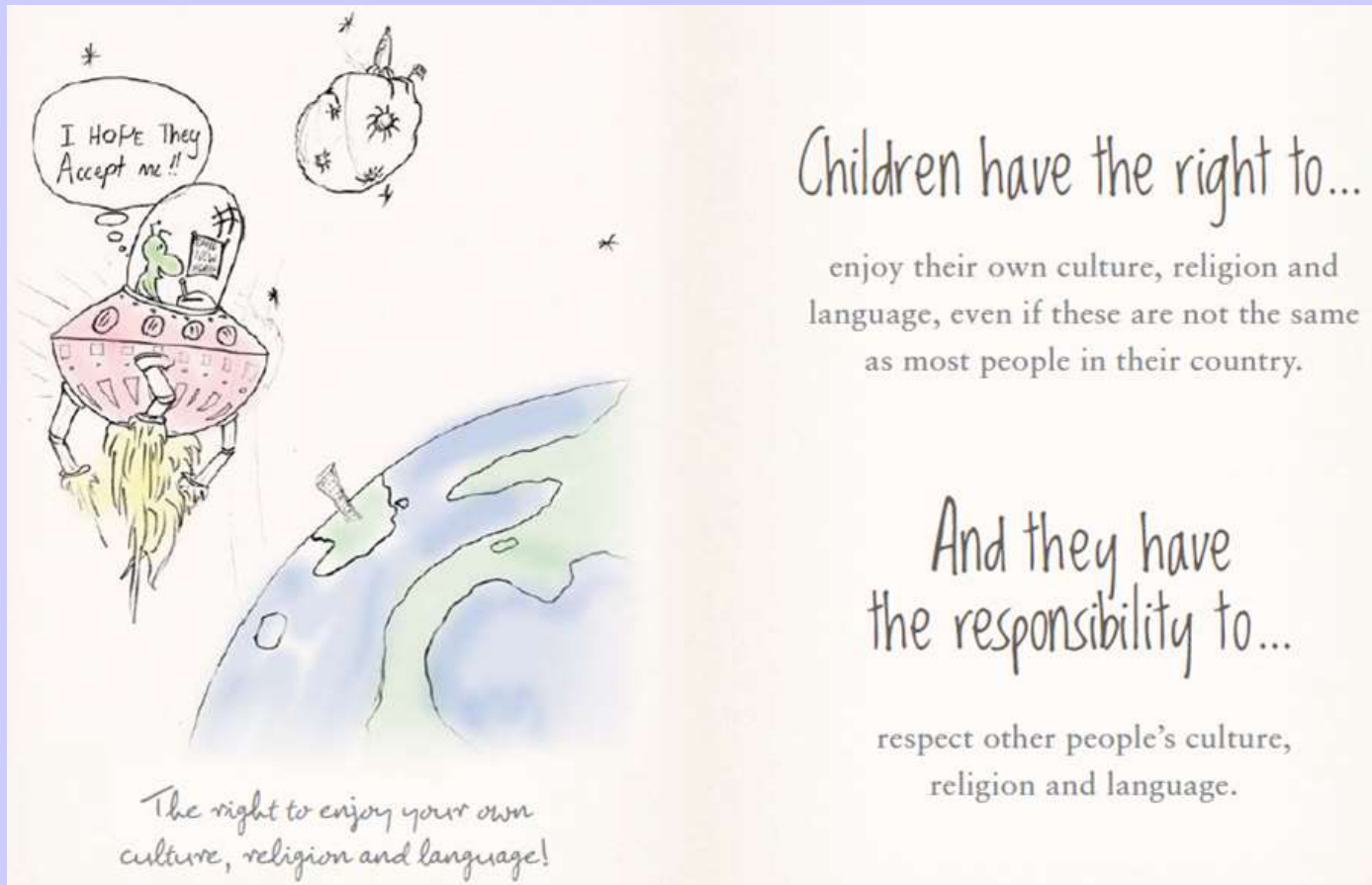
# CRC articles about language (2)

## **Article 30**

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

**“right to use”**

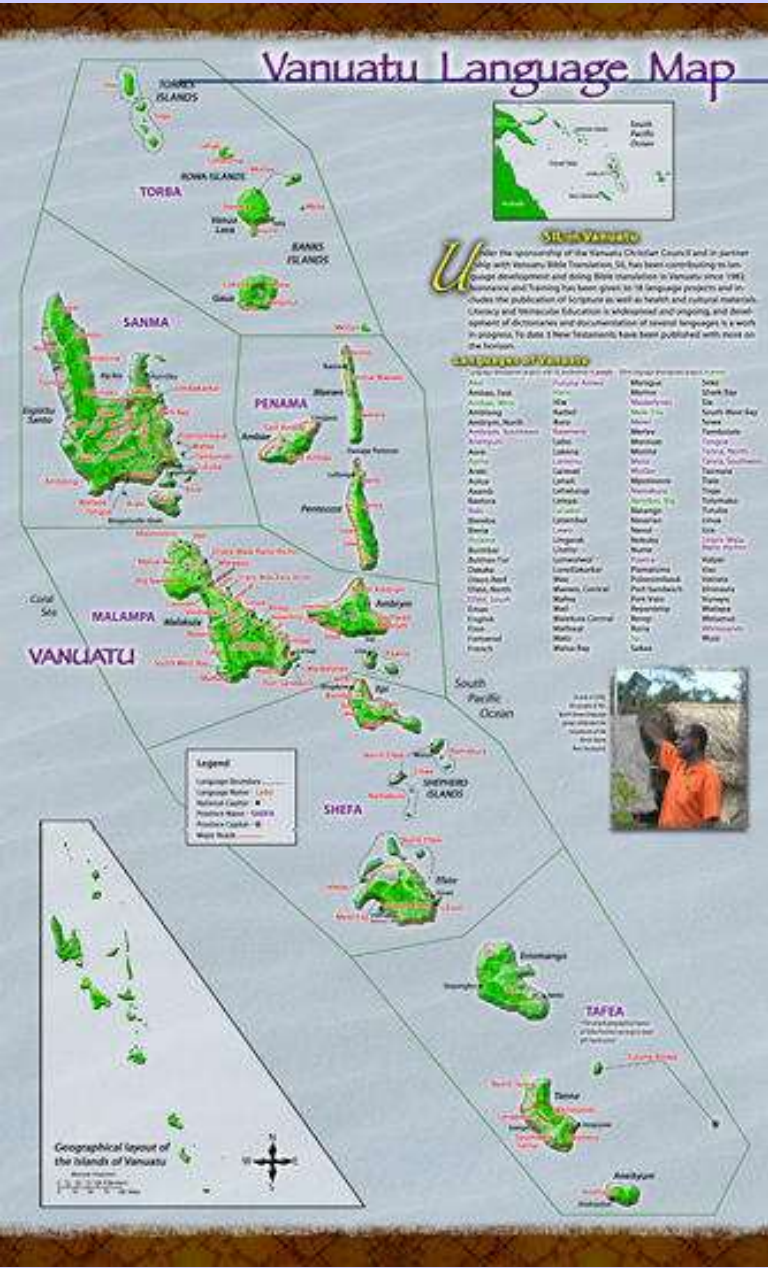
# Linking rights and responsibilities



Save the Children Australia (2009)

- Have been linked to 'new liberalism' (Such and Walker, 2005)
- Issue of conditionality

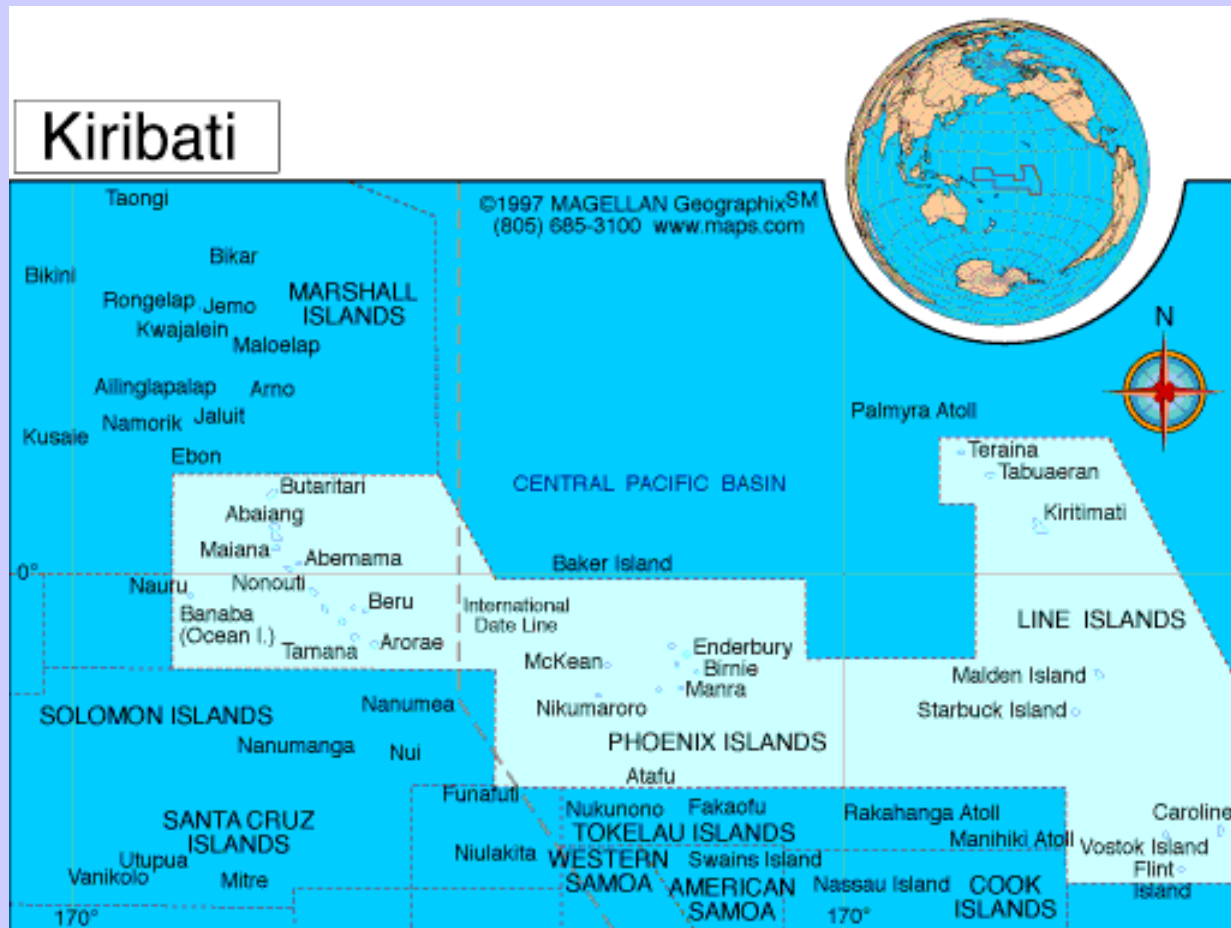
# Language in Vanuatu



- 234,023 people (2009)
  - 110 languages
- + English  
+ French  
+ Bislama

<http://silpacific.org/>

# Language in Kiribati



- 92,533 people (2005), 1 language, + English





# Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE): Benefits

(UNESCO, 2014)

- **For children:** they engage more in class, respond to teachers' questions, and participate as equals;
- **For parents:** they are able to be involved in their children's learning, support teachers and take part in other school activities;
- **For marginalised communities:** they can retain their own linguistic and cultural identities while proactively engaging with dominant wider cultures;
- **For learning:** better academic results overall, lower dropout rates, and higher fluency levels in both their first language and other official languages;
- **For the system:** better learning means more efficient use of resources, resulting in savings in time (teachers and administrators) and money over the mid/long-term;
- **For livelihoods:** real learning and better language skills means more job opportunities and more peaceful communities.

# But...

(World Bank, 2005, Pinnock et al., 2011)

- Policy makers often not aware of this research;
- Donors may wish to promote other languages;
- National languages may be promoted for unity;
- Centralised approaches to teacher education may work against small/remote/marginalised languages;
- No economies of scale in materials development;
- Lack of trust between government and some communities.

# The research

Smith & Haslett (2016a; 2016b)

Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) programme evaluation (or baseline):

- Vanuatu (Tanna, Sanma, Penama)
- Solomon Islands (Isabel)
- Kiribati (Abemama, South Tarawa)

Overall research aim to measure quality schooling.



# Methodology



# Children Years 1-3

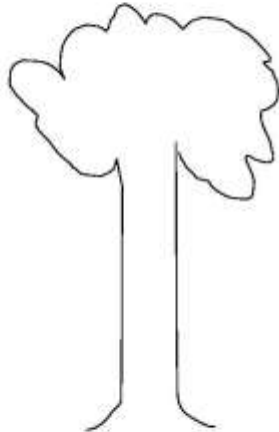
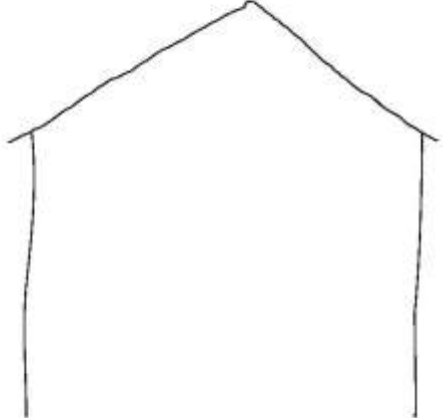
CFE KIRIBATI QUESTIONNAIRE

CHILDREN (CLASSES 1-3)

Am reirei: \_\_\_\_\_ Bongin namwakaina: \_\_\_\_\_ Aram: \_\_\_\_\_ Aine: \_\_\_\_\_ Mweane: \_\_\_\_\_  
(teacher) (date) (name) (girl) (boy)

Am tia reirei: \_\_\_\_\_ Am rinki: \_\_\_\_\_ Am koraki: \_\_\_\_\_ Tactae ake ko kamanenai n te reitaki: \_\_\_\_\_  
(teacher) (age) (classroom) (language)

😊 Taiaoka koro i tamnein bwaai ake ko **TANGIRI** ibukin am reirei, ao koro arai i rarikia. 😊



SYSTEMETRICS RESEARCH

27 JULY 2019

Year 1-3 questionnaire (Kiribati version)

# Children Years 1-3



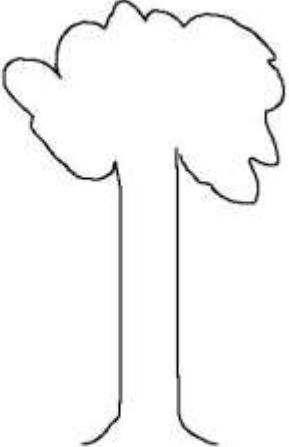
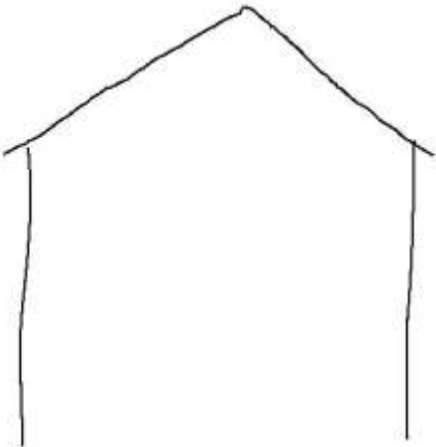
“What I like in my school” (Isabel, Solomon Is)

# Children Years 1-3

CFS KIRIATAI QUESTIONNAIRE I

CHILDREN CLASSES 1-3

☹️ Talaoka korori tamnein bwaal ake ko AKI TANGIRI Ibukin am reirei, ao korori arala i rarikia. ☹️



SYSTEMETRICS RESEARCH

27 JULY 2010



# Children Years 1-3

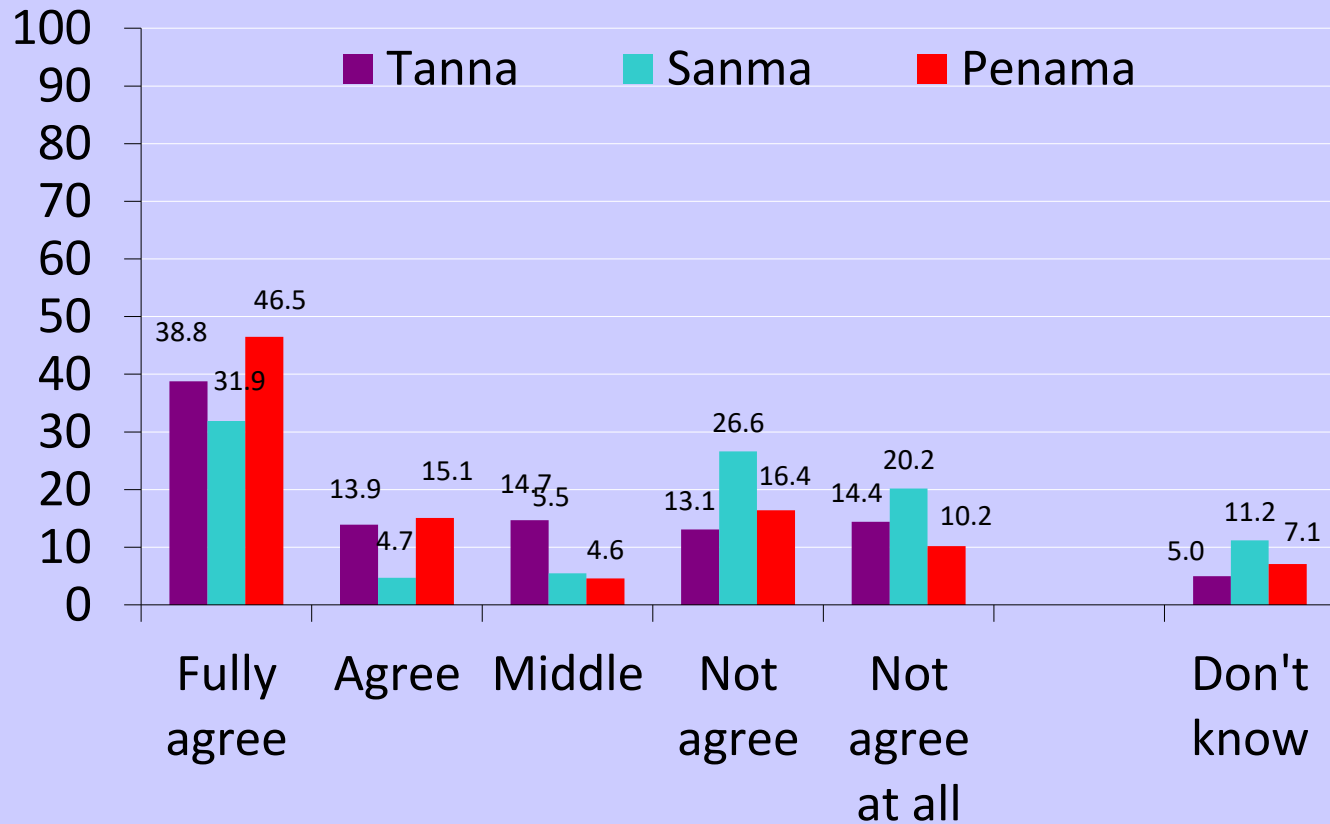


“What I don’t like in my school” (Abemama, Kiribati)

# Children Years 4-6

Vanuatu:

“I can speak my language or Bislama at school”



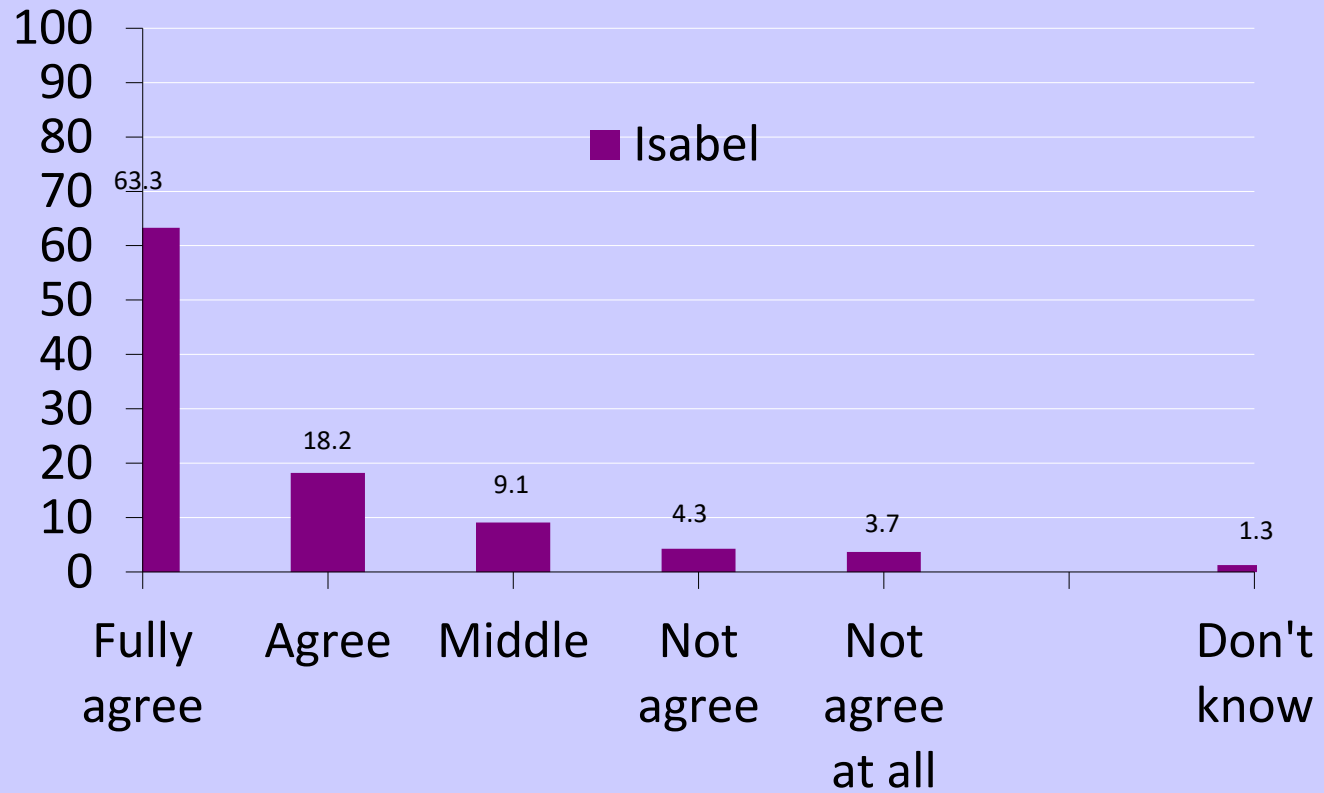


(Tanna, Vanuatu)

# Children Year 4-6

Solomon Is:

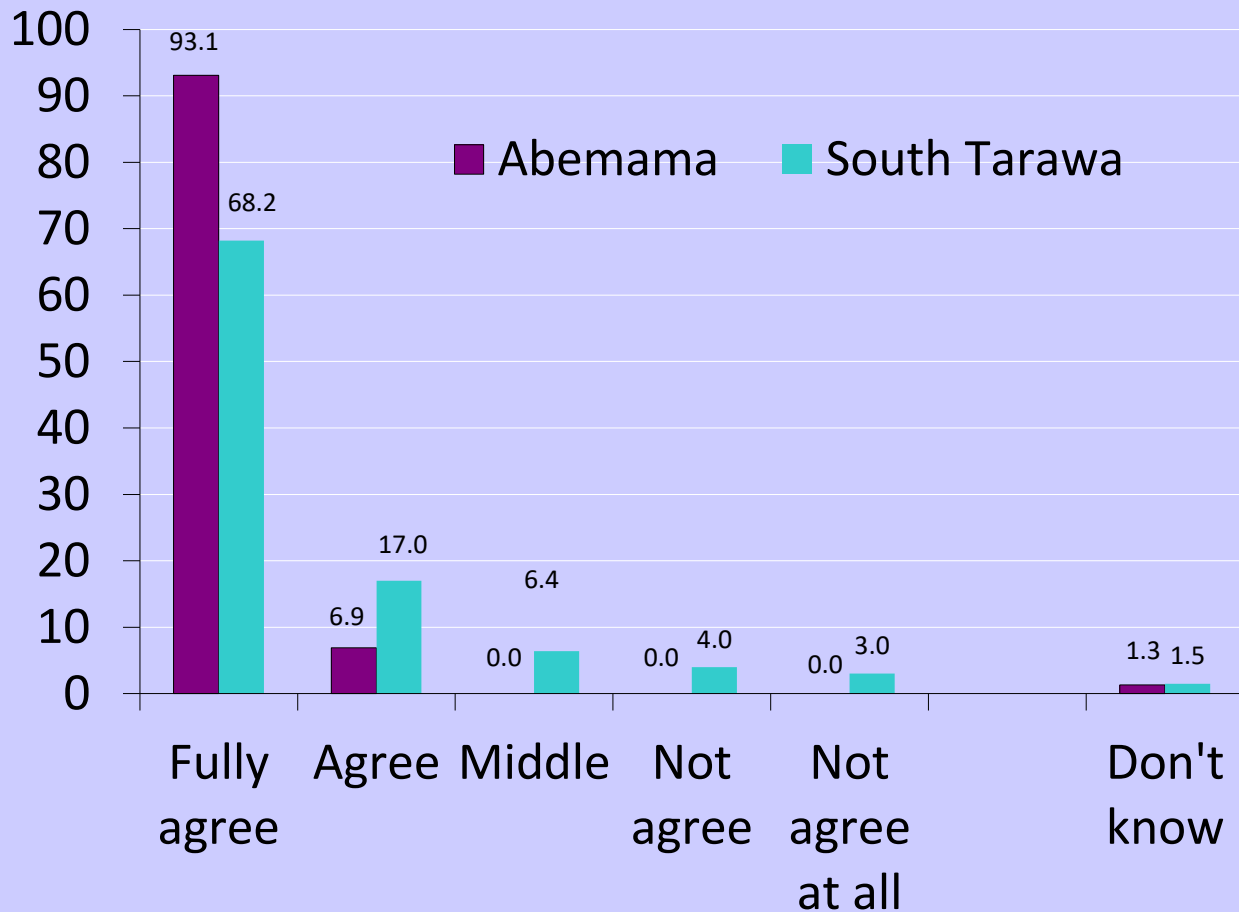
“I can speak my language or Pijin at school”



# Children Years 4-6

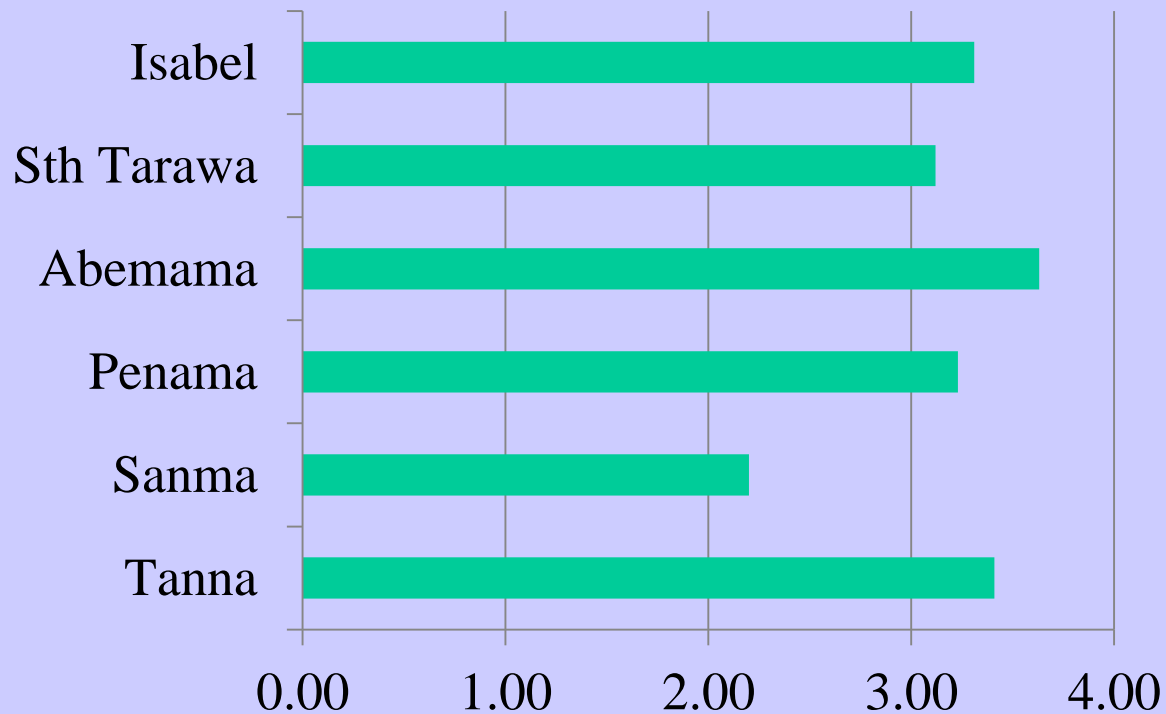
## Kiribati

“I can speak my language or Kiribati at school”



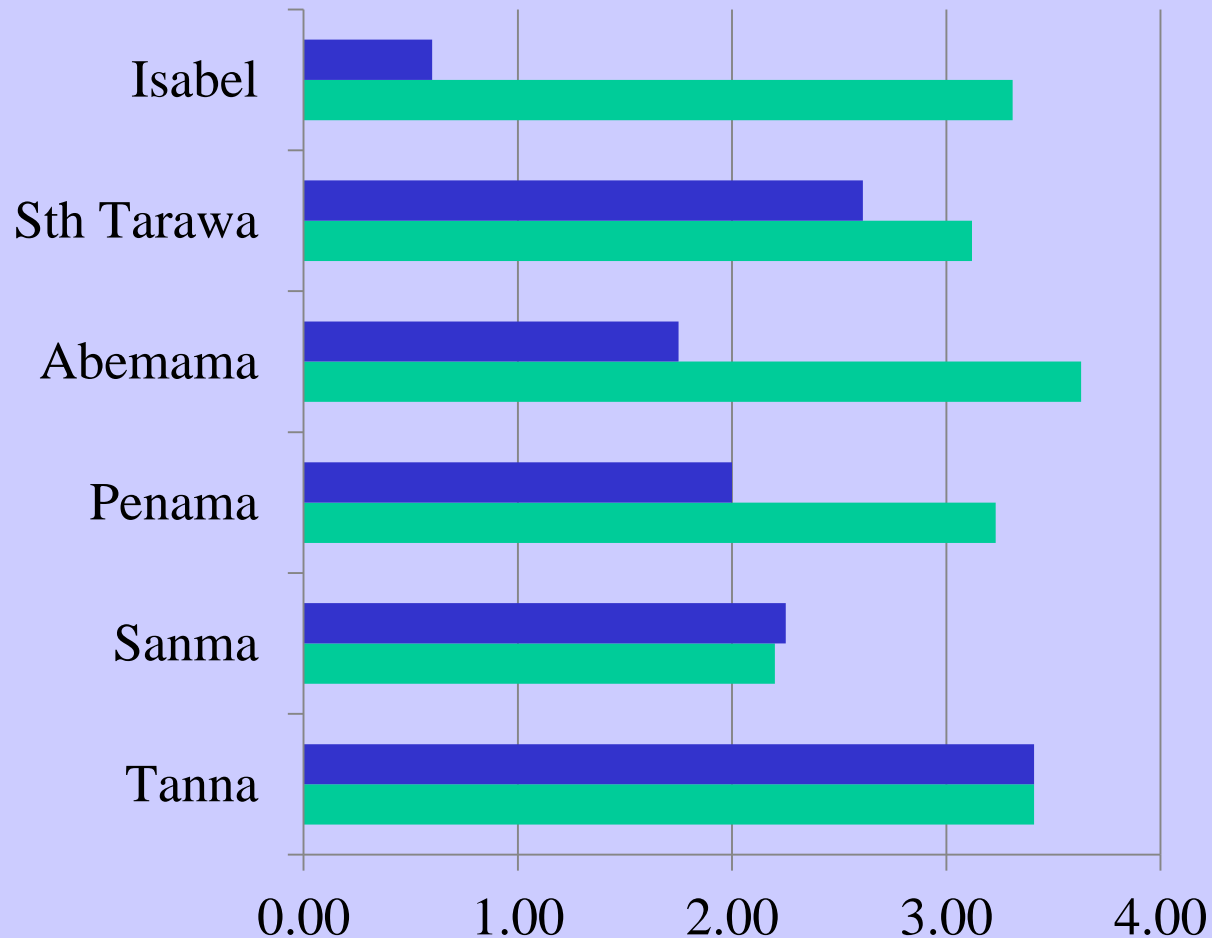
# Adults

“Teachers, parents, and community understand the importance of home languages to achieve literacy and maintain culture”



# Adults

“There is a language policy in this school to make sure that all children can understand their lessons and also learn English(French)”



# A children's rights approach to language policy?

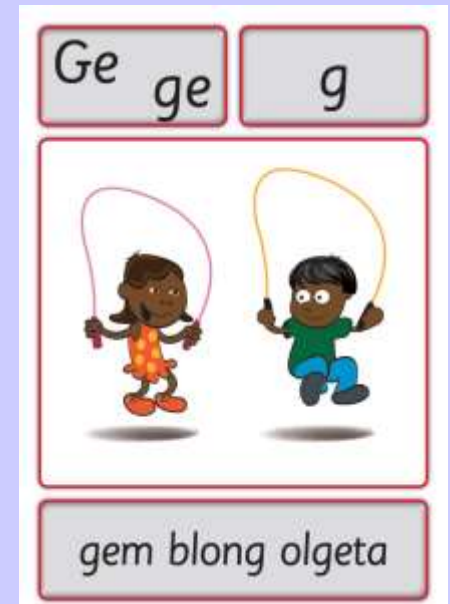
- Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo (2002, p. 323) have called for ‘a rethinking of “language” in the concept of “language policy”’
- ‘for [...] rural SI-ers, language is inseparable from culture, which is inseparable from indigenous epistemology.’ (p. 323)
- ‘Language is the medium for transformation... it is only when people think in a language—i.e. a symbol system—which they fully understand that this transformation can occur.’ (pp. 312-313)



# Finally...

(Early, 2016)

- Vanuatu – changed to MTB-MLE in 2016 (46 languages/60 language varieties, 86% of population)
  - Solomon Islands – trialling MTB-MLE
  - Kiribati – implementing MTB-MLE
- high hopes for improved educational outcomes, with support



# Tanggio, Ko rabwa, Tangkyu



We acknowledge the generous and thoughtful participation in this study by the children and their school communities from our research locations in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati.

[hilary\\_smith@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hilary_smith@xtra.co.nz)

# References

- Early, R. (2016). *A survey of educational language policies in the Pacific region*. Paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Language and Education. 19-21 October, Bangkok, Thailand.  
[http://www.lc.mahidol.ac.th/mleconf/2016/Documents/PresentedFiles/Parallel%20V/T1-7/12A-Robert\\_Early.pdf](http://www.lc.mahidol.ac.th/mleconf/2016/Documents/PresentedFiles/Parallel%20V/T1-7/12A-Robert_Early.pdf)
- Farran, S. (2012). Children of the Pacific: Giving effect to Article 3 UNCRC in small island states. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 20: 199-223. doi: 10.1163/157181812X622196
- Gegeo, D., & Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (2002). The critical villager: Transforming language and education in Solomon Islands. In J. W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Language policies in education: Critical issues*, pp. 309-325. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ochs, E. (1982). Talking to children in Western Samoa. *Language in Society*, 11(1), 17-104. doi: 10.1017/S0047404500009040
- Morton, H. (1996). *Becoming Tongan: An ethnography of childhood*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2008). Child rights and culture in the Pacific. Opening address to UNICEF Seminar.  
[https://www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=6675&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=531&cHash=46baac454cb7aaf4a59bc369415d7e71](https://www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=6675&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=531&cHash=46baac454cb7aaf4a59bc369415d7e71)
- Pereira, J. (2010). Spare the rod and spoil the child: Samoan perspectives on responsible parenting. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 5(2), 98-109. doi: 10.1080/1177083X.2010.524980
- Pinnock, H., Mackenzie, P., Pearce, E., & Young, C. (2011). *Closer to home: How to help schools in low and middle income countries respond to children's language needs*. Save the Children and CFBT.  
<http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/Closer-to-Home.pdf>

- Save the Children Australia. (2009). *The rights and responsibilities of children*. Author, illustrated by Zachariah MacPherson. <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/about-us/publications/publications/the-rights-and-responsibilities-of-children>.
- Such, E., & Walker, R. (2005). Young citizens or policy objects? Children in the 'rights and responsibilities' debate. *Journal of Social Policy*, 34, 1, 39-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047279404008256>
- Schoeffel, P., & Meleisea, M. (1994). Pacific Islands Polynesian attitudes to child training and discipline in New Zealand: Some policy implications for social welfare and education. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 6, 134-147.
- Smith, H. A., & Haslett, S. J. (2016a). Design and implementation issues in surveying the views of young children in ethnolinguistically diverse developing country contexts, *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 39(1), 131-150. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2015.1098608>
- Smith, H. A., & Haslett, S. J. (2016b). Children's rights in education research: From aims to outcomes. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1190316>
- UNESCO. (2014). *MTB-MLE: Lessons learned from a decade of research and practice*. Multilingual Education Working Group. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002318/231865E.pdf> United Nations. 1989. *Convention on the rights of the child*. <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (2001). Fantasy and reality: The dialectic of work and play in Kwara'ae children's lives. *Ethos*, 29(2), 138-158.
- World Bank. (2005). *In their own language... Education for all*. Education Notes. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/Education-Notes/EdNotes\\_Lang\\_of\\_Instruct.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/Education-Notes/EdNotes_Lang_of_Instruct.pdf)