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*Vernacular language use in schools: Teachers' perspectives on
implementing the Vanuatu national language policy*

Michael Franjieh

Surrey Morphology Group, University of Surrey

Emily Clark

University of Surrey

Greville G. Corbett

Surrey Morphology Group, University of Surrey

Alexandra Grandison

University of Surrey

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Vernacular language use in schools: Teachers' perspectives on implementing the Vanuatu national language policy

MICHAEL FRANJIEH*

Surrey Morphology Group, University of Surrey

EMILY CLARK

University of Surrey

GREVILLE G. CORBETT

Surrey Morphology Group, University of Surrey

ALEXANDRA GRANDISON

University of Surrey

Abstract

We report on a vernacular literacy education survey conducted in 2023 with teachers from three language communities in Vanuatu – Merei (Santo island), Rral and Vatlongos (both Ambrym island). We aimed for a broad understanding of how vernacular language is currently being used in schools, how many children speak the vernacular language, and what training or resources teachers require to teach the vernacular effectively. A version of this report was submitted to the Curriculum Development Unit in the Ministry of Education and Training in April 2024. We make several recommendations to strengthen the provision of vernacular language education throughout Vanuatu.

Summary in Bislama

Hemia hem i wan ripot we i kamaot long ol kwestin long saed blong tijim ol lokol lanwis long skul. Mifala i bin askem fulap tija long trifala difren lanwis komuniti long Vanuatu – long Merei (long Santo aelan), Rral mo Vatlongos (tufala long Ambrym aelan). Mifala i bin wantem faenemaot hao nao ol tija ol i stap yusum ol lokol lanwis long skul, hamas pikinini i stap toktok ol lokol lanwis, mo wanem kaen trening mo ol risos ol tija ol i nidim blong tijim gud ol lokol lanwis. Mifala i bin givim ripot ia long Kurikulum Developmen Unit long Ministri blong

* We wish to dedicate this article to the memory of John Lynch, who always enthusiastically supported our vernacular literacy development efforts in Vanuatu.

Edukesen mo Trening long April 2024. Mifala i givim sam tingting blong impruvum edukeisen long ol lanwis long Vanuatu.

Keywords

vernacular education, Vanuatu language policy, education survey, primary schools

1 Introduction

We undertook a vernacular literacy education survey with teachers from three language communities in Vanuatu¹. Our main objective was to understand more about the experiences of using the local vernacular languages as the Medium of Instruction (MOI). While this is a small-scale study, including teachers from only three language communities, the results are intended to inform the implementation of the current education policy. In particular the study's main aims are to understand:

1. Teachers' perspectives on speaking and using the vernacular language in the classroom and what training they require.
2. How many children speak the vernacular language in each community and their enjoyment of using the language in the classroom.
3. What further teaching resources are essential for effectively using the vernacular language as the MOI.

A version of this report was submitted to the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) in April 2024 to help shape any future production of vernacular language materials for different language communities in Vanuatu (Franjieh et al., 2024a). This research was funded by the University of Surrey's Economic and Social Research Council's Impact Acceleration Account. The research was part of a wider programme which saw the creation of vernacular literacy materials for the three language communities included in this report²: Vatlongos (also known as Southeast Ambrym, ISO 639-3: tvk; Glottolog: sout2859), Rral (also known as North Ambrym, ISO 639-3: mmg; Glottolog: nort2839) and Merei (spoken on Santo Island, ISO 639-3: lmb; Glottolog mere1242). The aim was to create a baseline survey to understand current usage of vernacular literacy materials and then conduct a further study to see how the new materials we had developed and distributed to these communities were being used. Here we report the findings of the baseline survey.

2 Background

The Vanuatu National Language Policy supports the use of vernacular languages in education (Ministry of Education, 2012). Vanuatu is the most linguistically dense country in the world, with over 130 indigenous vernacular languages (François et al., 2012). Therefore efforts to

¹ Author Roles. Franjieh: Conceptualisation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft; Clark: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft; Corbett: Conceptualisation, Funding Acquisition, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft; Grandison: Conceptualisation, Funding Acquisition, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft.

² Copies of the vernacular literacy materials can be found on our project website: <https://nominal-categorisation.surrey.ac.uk/projects/optimal-categorisation/outreach/> and on Zenodo: <https://zenodo.org/communities/optimalcategorisation/>.

implement vernacular languages in education require immense resources. One of the aims of the Vanuatu Education Support Program (VESP) was to support a move towards a model of using either local vernacular languages or Bislama in primary schools. In practice this means a gradual transition from the vernacular or Bislama to either English or French over the course of primary education. A full transition to English or French is expected to occur at the start of high school from year 7 onwards (Curriculum Development Unit, 2017). One of the main outcomes of VESP in this regard was the production and translation of literacy materials into 46 languages aimed at the first two years of primary education. Languages with over 1000 speakers were identified as being the optimal choice for the rollout of vernacular language materials, representing 86% of the population (Early and Tamtam, 2015).

It is now more than a decade since the introduction of the Vanuatu National Language Policy in 2012. However, there is limited information on what vernacular literacy materials are currently in circulation in the primary school system or how well-equipped teachers are in using the vernacular as the MOI. This survey was designed to understand how to build on the earlier successes of VESP and continue the momentum of implementing a vernacular language policy in such a linguistically diverse country.

There is a lack of research addressing how schools in Vanuatu are implementing the education policy. However, Tarihehe and Willans (2025, this issue) cross-sectional research on Ambae found that children's English proficiency was still low by year 4, with much higher rates of proficiency in the vernacular, Nduindui. They argue that the vernacular should continue to be used for teaching content subjects in year 4 as children are not yet ready to switch to English. Reading and writing was predominantly in English in the classroom, but Nduindui was used to discuss the content, inhibiting students' development of proficiency in English. We note that VESP is currently working with the CDU to develop a longitudinal study to research the extent to which schools adopt the use of vernacular languages in six communities and how this impacts student engagement and the learning of English and French (VESP, 2023). Proposed studies such as this will give more in-depth findings than those we present here. However, we believe that our findings, along with Tarihehe and Willans' (2025, this issue) research will provide a base for longer-term studies such as these.

3 Methodology

3.1 Design

The Vanuatu Literacy, Language and Teacher Training Survey (Franjeh et al., 2024b) was designed in English and Bislama to cover the main objectives listed in the introduction. We collaborated with representatives from the University of the South Pacific and the Curriculum Development Unit to ensure the questions and findings would be relevant.

We used a mixed methods approach, collecting and analysing quantitative data and presenting a summary of the qualitative data. The language communities chosen for the study were known by the lead author who has been conducting linguistic research and creating vernacular literacy materials in these areas for several years, with the support of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. The three communities surveyed included two communities that had vernacular literacy materials developed during the original VESP project: Vatlongos and Rral. We also surveyed the Merei language community, which was not included in the original VESP project, as a point of comparison.

The lead researcher visited schools in the Vatlongos, Rral, and Merei language communities and conducted the survey with principals and teachers of primary schools and

kindergartens. Data was collected over three days in July 2023. The lead researcher read out the questionnaire to the teachers, and filled in their responses. Teachers were able to ask for clarifications if they did not understand the question.

The survey collected data of different types:

- Numerical data, such as: ‘Number of students in the school or kindergarten’.
- Likert-scale data, such as: ‘Please rate to what extent you like teaching using the main community language’.
- Qualitative data, for example, freeform responses to open ended questions such as: ‘Please list any resources you have to teach language’, or for further information on the Likert-scale response, such as: ‘Please explain your rating’.

We used a modified three-point Likert-scale with five points and qualitative labels on three points. Every time a Likert-scale question occurred, an explanation of the rating was also asked for, providing an opportunity for qualitative commentary. For example, question 16 asks (Franjieh et al., 2024b, p. 7):

Please rate to what extent you think teaching lessons using the main community language helps achieve good educational outcomes for students, 1 being ‘not at all’ and 5 being ‘a lot’. Please circle/highlight the number and we ask you to expand on why you chose this rating.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		A little		A lot

An anonymous reviewer asked if the use of a Likert-scale gives valid responses as respondents may not be familiar with such a rating scale. As shown above, only three points on the Likert-scale were labelled, this meant that points 2 and 4 were used if the respondent felt that more nuance was required for the answer. These three points were easily translated into Bislama. The scale given above was translated as, 1: *no givhan nating*, 3: *givhan smol*, 5: *givhan fulap*. Across all Likert-scale responses, the majority of respondents used the points 1, 3 and 5. Just under 10% of responses were either a 2 or a 4. These responses were given from 10 respondents (30%) and found in all three language communities. We found that a modified three-point scale allowed both simplicity and the potential for added nuance.

3.2. Research Questions

We had three main research questions related to our major aims. Each research question has a related sub-question:

1. How confident are the teachers in using the vernacular language as the MOI?
 - What training is required to improve teachers’ confidence?
2. Do children enjoy being taught in the vernacular language?
 - What aspects of the vernacular language do children find hard?
3. What vernacular literacy materials are available to teachers?
 - What future resources are required to use the vernacular language effectively in schools?

3.3. *Sample*

We aimed to interview the principals and the teachers of class one and two for each primary school in each language community. However, it was not always possible to meet this target (see limitations below) and we interviewed teachers who were present on the day of the survey.

Table 1. List of schools surveyed and number of surveys

Rral (North Ambrym)		Vatlongos (Southeast Ambrym)		Merei (Big Bay, Santo)	
School	Surveys	School	Surveys	School	Surveys
Lonmelfarran	3	Senai	3	Malores	3
Ranon	2	Roromai	2	Vusvogo	4
Linbul	3	Pamal	1		
Fanla	2	Leleut	3		
Magam	2	Mbossung	2		
Tobol	3				

In total we interviewed 33 teachers across 13 schools in the three language communities. Overall, the teachers surveyed taught 614 students. Both the Rral and Vatlongos communities had been included in the MoET's Vanuatu Education Sector Programme (VESP) and had literacy materials developed for them. Furthermore, the Rral community has had a dictionary and over 40 different literacy books developed and distributed by lead author, Michael Franjeh, and further resources have been developed by Laura Thuleson from SIL. The Merei community was not included in the VESP programme and had no literacy materials developed prior to this survey. Table 1 lists the names of the schools included in the research and the number of teachers surveyed per school. Figure 1 gives an overview of the sample languages.

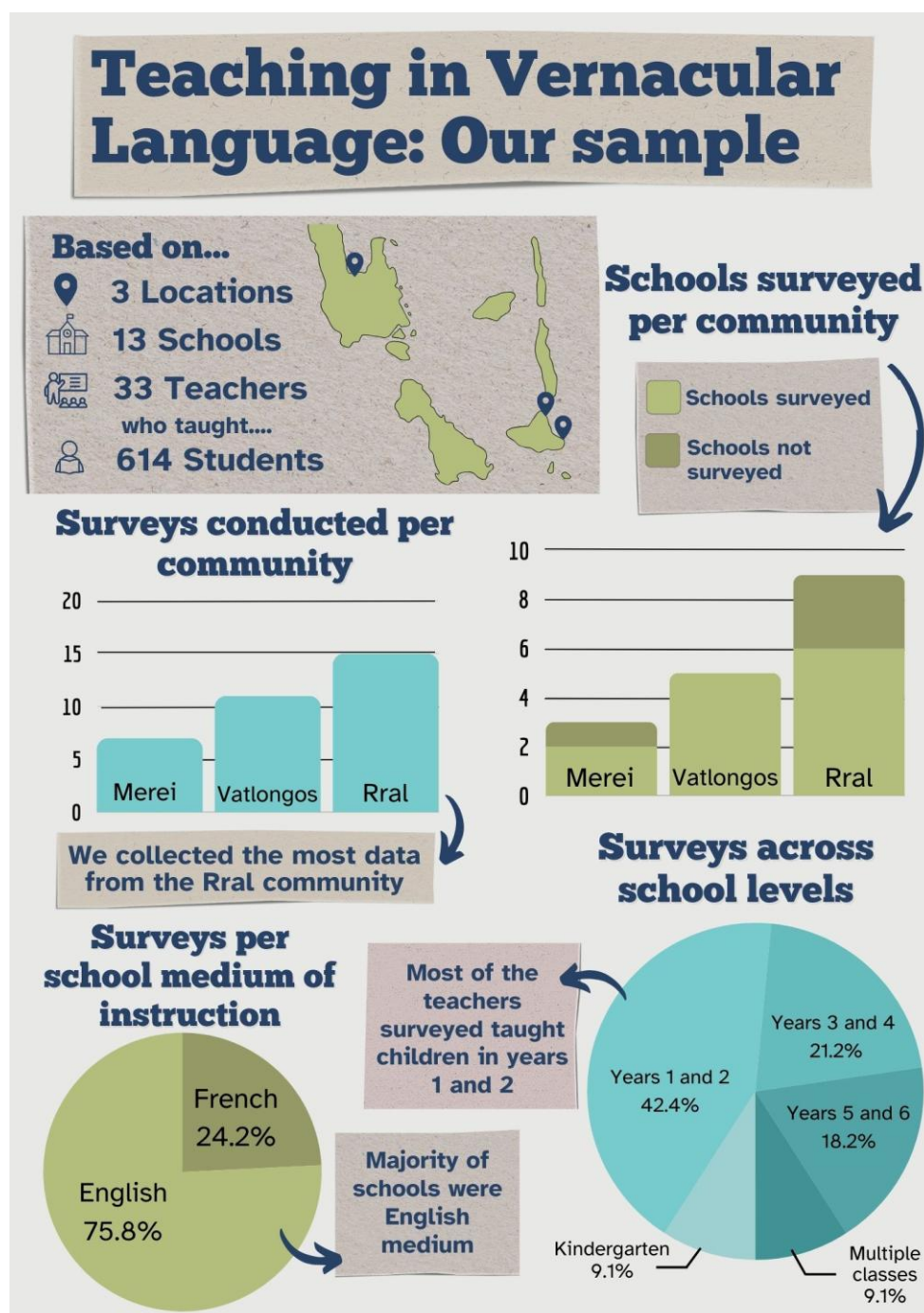


Figure 1. Information on languages, schools and surveys

3.2 Limitations

The main limitations of the study were:

- There was insufficient time to visit every school in each community. In the Rral (North Ambrym) community we visited six out of nine schools. In the Merei community we visited two out of the three schools. Limited time in the rural communities was due to flight scheduling and other commitments during the research visit. We had also planned to include the Lewo community (Epi Island), however flight cancellations prevented this.

- Sometimes the target teachers (principal, class one and class two teachers) were unavailable on the day of the survey. We interviewed those teachers who were available.
- We would have liked to survey all teachers in early years education, from kindergarten to class six. However, this would have taken much more time than we had available.
- We did not ask whether a teacher had been formally trained by the Ministry of Education and Training, or was a community teacher, with little to no formal training. Future surveys should include this question, as lack of training may make answering surveys of this type more difficult, which could potentially skew results.

4 Key Findings and Results

Bearing in mind the limitations just described, we now set out our key findings; Figure 2 provides an overview. Then the following sections summarise quantitative and qualitative results for our three main research questions. Section 4.1 looks at teachers' confidence in using the vernacular language and their training needs. Section 4.2 investigates the number of children who can speak the vernacular language and their enjoyment of using the language in schools. Finally, section 4.3 looks at the available language resources in schools and what materials teachers said they need to teach effectively.

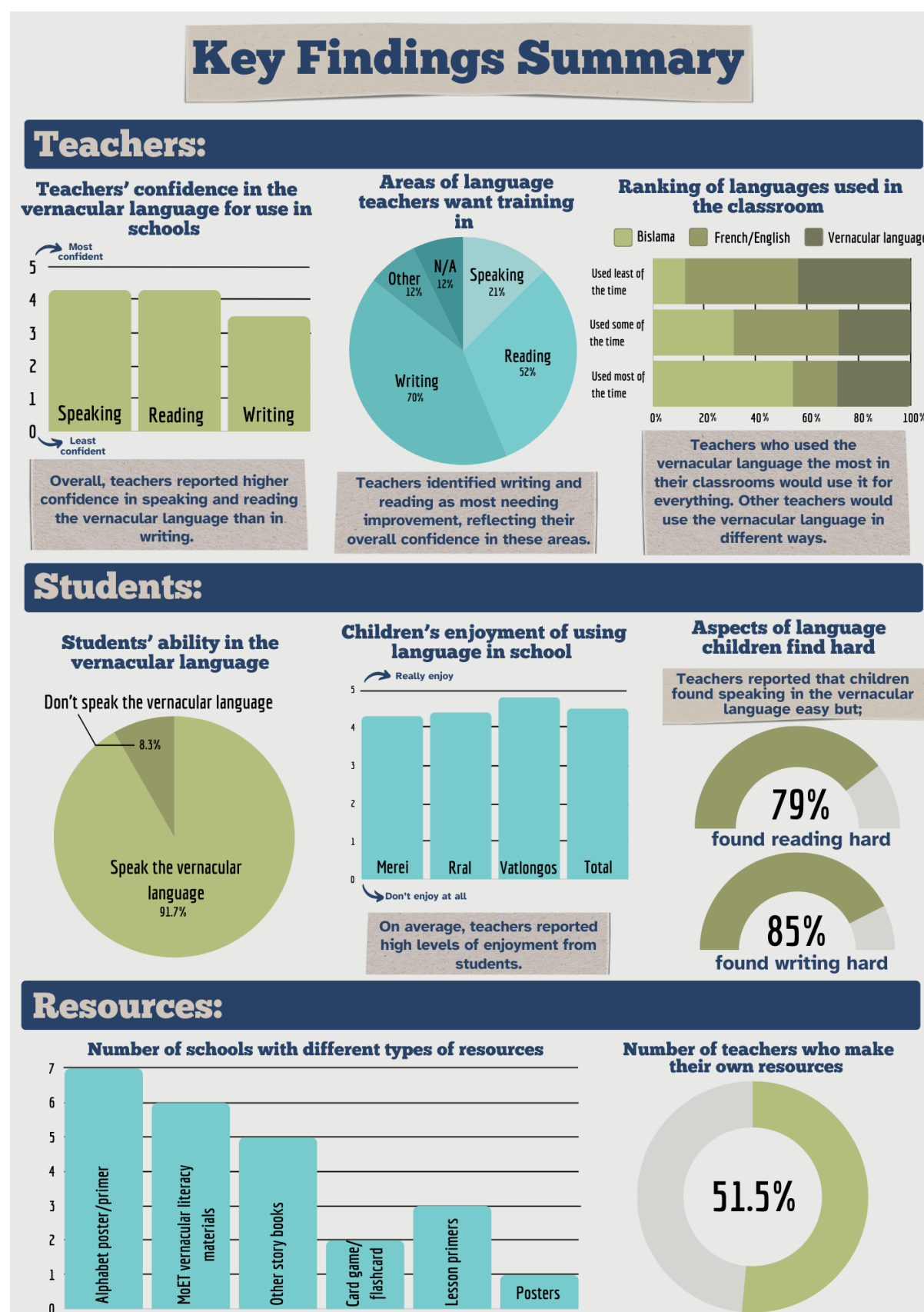


Figure 2. Key findings summary

4.1 Teachers' use of the vernacular language, their confidence and training needs

The 33 surveys covered teachers who taught from kindergarten level through to class six. Table 2 shows that some teachers taught just one level, others taught combined classes (e.g., class one and two) and others taught larger mixed groups (e.g., classes three to six) depending on the number of children in each year. Overall, the largest proportion of teachers surveyed taught in classes one and two.

Table 2. Classes taught by the teachers surveyed

	Rral (North Ambrym)	Vatlongos (Southeast Ambrym)	Merei (Big Bay, Santo)	Total
Kindergarten	2	-	-	2
1-2	8	5	2	15
3-4	2	3	2	7
5-6	1	2	3	6
Mixed groups	2 (3-6; 2-3)	1 (1-6)	-	3

Overall, teachers' fluency in the vernacular language was high (79%). Figure 3 shows that teachers from the Vatlongos community reported the highest rates of fluency in the language (91%). Teachers from the Rral community reported the second highest rates of fluency (80%). Teachers from the Merei community reported the lowest rates of fluency (57%).

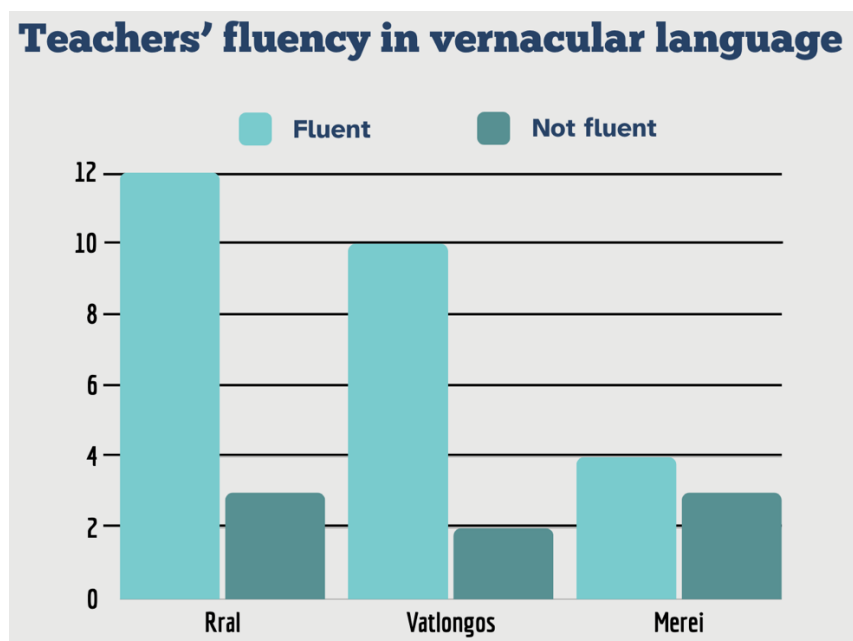


Figure 3. Teacher fluency

4.1.1 Teacher confidence in the vernacular language

We asked teachers to rate their confidence in speaking, reading and writing in the vernacular language in the classroom (with 1 being the least confident and 5 being the most confident). Overall, teachers reported higher confidence in speaking the vernacular language than in reading and writing. Figure 4 shows that teachers from the Rral language community had higher overall confidence in all areas of the vernacular language than Merei and Vatlongos.

Teachers from the Merei community had the lowest overall confidence across these three areas of language.

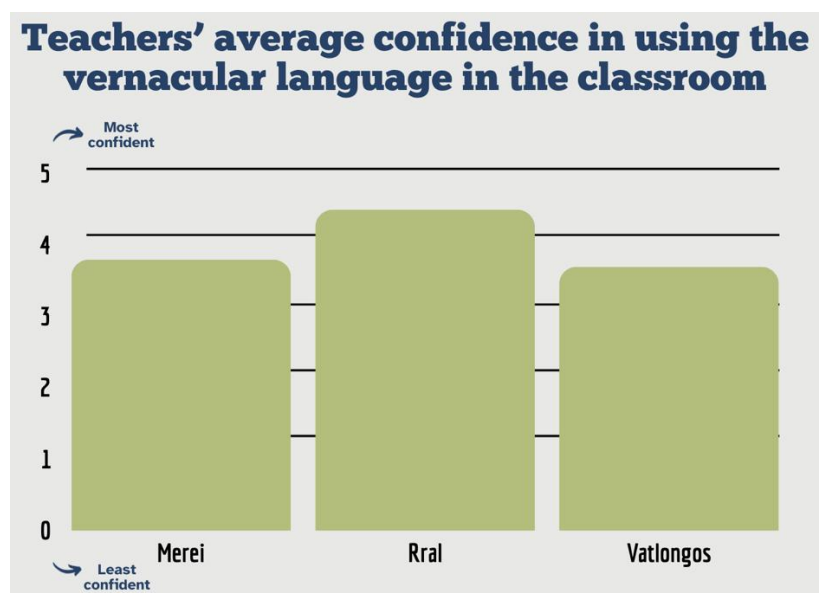


Figure 4. Teachers' confidence

Table 3 shows the results for teachers' confidence for speaking, reading and writing. Overall, there was slightly lower confidence for writing, but higher for reading and speaking when using the language in the classroom. Some teachers from the Vatlongos and Rral community had not tried to read or write in the language before, and these were not included in the averages below.

Table 3. Teachers' average confidence in using the vernacular language in the classroom (1 being least confident and 5 being most confident)

	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Merei	3.1	4.4	3.7
Rral	4.5	4.8	4.1
Vatlongos	4.6	3.4	2.3

Vatlongos teachers also reported the lowest reading and writing skills, despite having already had literacy materials in their language provided by the Ministry of Education and Training.

Teachers working in the Merei language community had the lowest confidence in speaking the language as a higher proportion of teachers surveyed were not fluent in the language. In other language communities there were also teachers from outside of the language community. However, after a number of years these teachers became fluent in the vernacular language, resulting in higher confidence scores. Teachers from outside the community are not necessarily a barrier to teaching the vernacular language. Teachers in the Merei community who did not speak the vernacular also reported that they would be able to speak the language after a few years of staying in the community. Table 4 reports a qualitative summary of factors influencing teachers' confidence in the vernacular language

Table 4. Qualitative summary of factors influencing teacher confidence in the vernacular language

What influenced confidence in the vernacular language?	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of vernacular language resources. • Some teachers commented that they had not even tried to read in the language. • Lots of teachers struggle with pronunciation of the language when reading. • Teachers struggled with the spelling system when reading and writing. • Training increases confidence. 	<p>“At first was hard, then after going through alphabet it is easy.” Rral teacher</p> <p>“It will be easy if there were books.” Merei teacher</p> <p>“I have to check the alphabet when I’m writing.” Vatlongos teacher</p>

4.1.2 Further training requirements

We asked teachers to identify which aspects of their competence in the vernacular language they felt needed to be improved for them to use it effectively in teaching. Teachers identified writing and reading in the language as most needing improvement, reflecting their overall confidence in these areas. Speaking was not a major concern overall, except for those teachers who were not yet fluent in the vernacular language. However, in order to boost confidence and use the vernacular language effectively as the MOI, teachers require support in all aspects of the language.

Figure 5 shows the aspects of language that teachers in each community highlighted they wanted further support in. The Merei teachers had the highest need for improving their speaking and reading across all languages, though they reported the lowest need for improvement in writing. Vatlongos had the highest need for training writing and a high need for reading. Both Rral and Vatlongos had low needs for training in speaking. Table 5 gives a summary of training needs identified by the teachers.

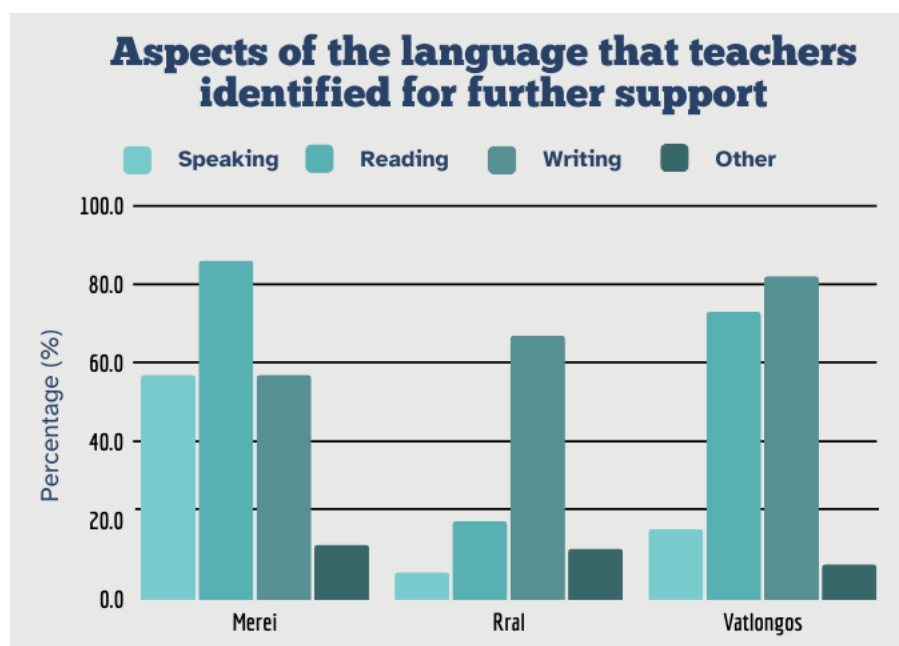


Figure 5. Aspects of language for further training

Table 5. Qualitative summary of further training identified by teachers

Further training identified by teachers:	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vernacular language workshops. • Phonics and spelling training. • Classroom resources. • Curriculum in the vernacular language. 	<p>“If there was a training session it would be helpful. Pronunciation of letters and reading practice.”</p> <p>Rral teacher</p> <p>“It would be good to have training in all aspects of the language.”</p> <p>Merei teacher</p> <p>“We need phonics training. Writing and translating practice.”</p> <p>Vatlongos teacher</p>

It seems counter-intuitive that teachers in the Merei community reported high confidence in reading the vernacular language (c.f., table 3), and yet also report that reading is the aspect of language that the majority of teachers have identified as requiring more training (c.f., figure 5). To get a deeper understanding of this potential contradiction, we can look further into the comments made by four teachers in Merei:

- Doesn’t need to know the language to read it, as it is close to his language.
- If there was something to read, it would be easy.
- It will be easy if there were books.
- Easy to explain his understanding through reading.

There is a lack of vernacular language materials in the Merei language, but the teachers perceive reading would be easy if there were materials. There is also a perceived similarity

between the languages which teachers speak and Merei. Some non-Merei speaking teachers commented that they can understand the vernacular, but can't speak it, or that after some more time here they would be able to understand. Figure 5, shows that teachers of Merei want training in all aspects of language to be able to use it successfully as the MOI, underscoring the lack of training and resources they have had to date.

4.1.3 Languages used in the classroom

We asked teachers to identify which languages they used the most and the least in their classroom. Overall, the most used language was Bislama, with the vernacular language second, and English/French used the least. English/French being used the least may reflect two factors. First, the Vanuatu curriculum has a gradual approach to teaching English/French, where they are slowly introduced over time, after using either Bislama or the vernacular language. Second, the teaching level with most teachers surveyed was class 1-2, where typically English/French are used minimally in the gradual approach.

Figure 6 shows that each community varied. The Merei community was not included in the VESP program of introducing vernacular literacy. They used Bislama the most and Merei the least. The Rral community used the vernacular language the most, and English/French the least. The Vatlongos community used Bislama the most, and the vernacular language and English/French the least.

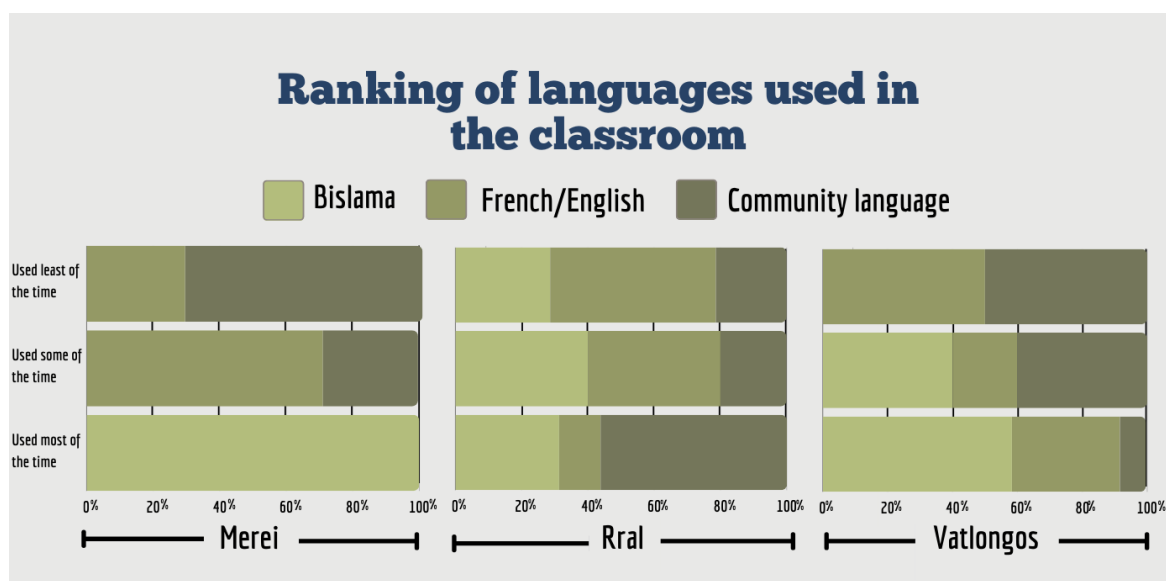


Figure 6. Language use per language community

We also asked teachers what they use the vernacular language for in the classroom. Teachers who used the vernacular language the most in their classrooms would use it for all aspects of teaching. Other teachers would use the vernacular language in different ways, listed below. The main theme to emerge was the use of the vernacular language to translate explanations or instructions given in another language. Table 6 summarises how teachers use the vernacular language in the classroom.

Table 6. Qualitative summary of how vernacular is used in the classroom

Use of vernacular in the classroom:	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translations of explanations and instructions. • Playing and joking. • Naming objects. • Telling stories. • Practicing phonics and literacy. 	<p>Merei teacher</p> <p>“I only use Merei a little. Talk to individual children, not for whole group.”</p> <p>Rral teacher</p> <p>“I use Rral to explain everything, write instructions, reading books.”</p> <p>Vatlongos teacher</p> <p>“I explain in Bislama, but if they don’t understand I explain in Vatlongos.”</p>

4.1.4 Teachers’ enjoyment of the vernacular language and its impact on educational outcomes

We asked if the teachers enjoyed teaching using the vernacular language and if they thought it would benefit children’s educational outcomes. Teachers answered on a 5-point scale, from 1 being ‘don’t enjoy at all’, to 5 being ‘really enjoy’.

Overall, there was a high average level of enjoyment of teaching using the vernacular language. Figure 7 shows that teachers from the Vatlongos community had the highest average level of enjoyment, followed by Merei and then Rral. Table 7 gives a summary of teachers’ thoughts around using the vernacular language in the classroom.

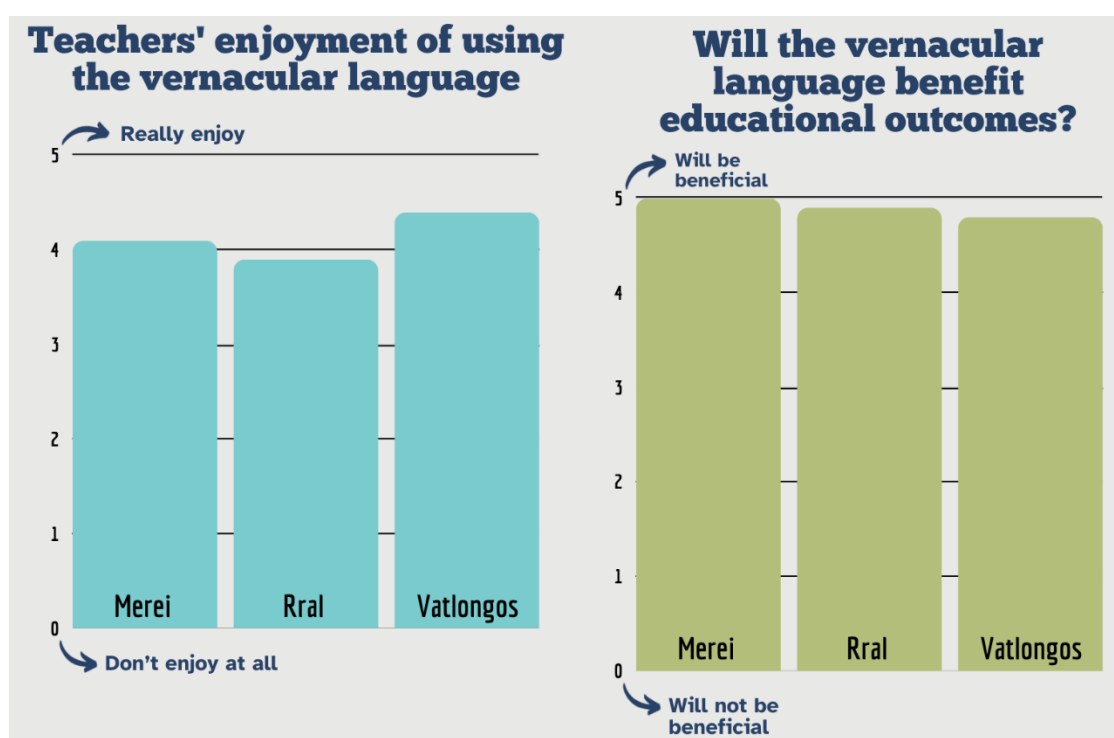
**Figure 7.** Teachers' average enjoyment and educational outcomes

Table 7. Qualitative summary of teachers' pros and cons of using vernacular language in the classroom

Teachers enjoyed using language as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's the children's mother tongue. • it's their mother tongue. • it's easier for the children to understand. 	Teachers say: "If I knew the language then it would be good. I would be happy to learn." Rral teacher
Some teachers worried because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They lack resources and training to teach properly. • Children can't write well in the language, so may impact their enjoyment. • Other languages may be better for teaching. 	"I don't like teaching the language as there are no resources." Merei teacher "I think we waste time using Bislama. It would be better to do Vatlongos to English transition and not use Bislama as most children do not understand it." Vatlongos teacher

Teachers' enjoyment of teaching using the vernacular language would be improved if they had more resources and training. Teachers from outside the community showed a willingness to learn, but they will also need community support to learn the vernacular language.

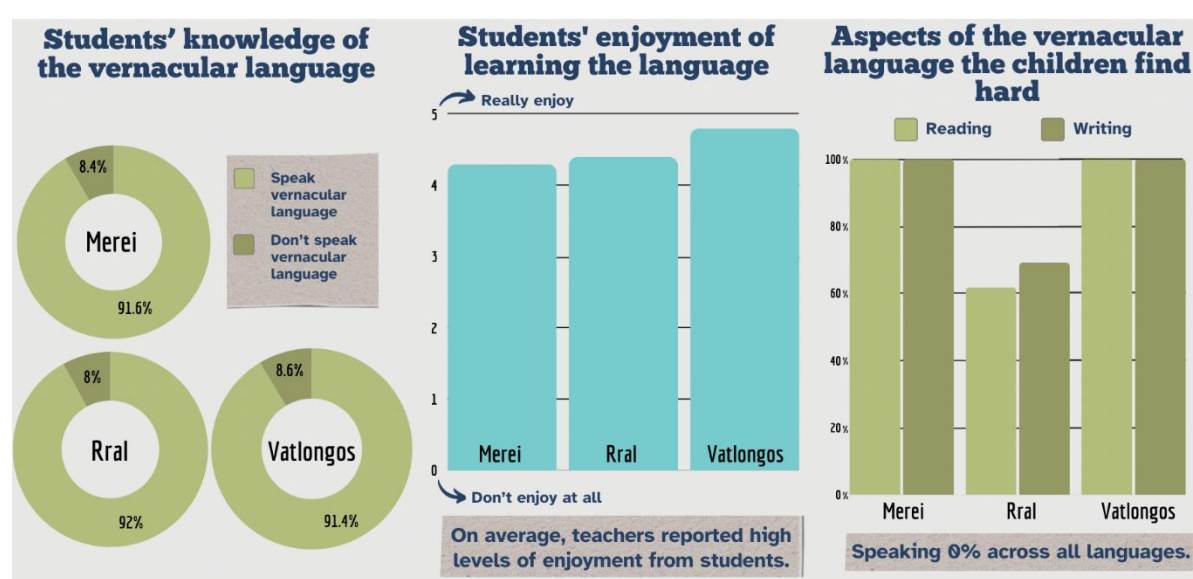
Figure 7 also shows that there is a very high belief that children will benefit from being taught in the vernacular language. Teachers already use the vernacular languages to explain what is being taught, but they want more resources to teach effectively in the language. However, some teachers think that too much use of language will make the transition to English and French harder. Table 8 summarises the teachers' beliefs in the effects of using vernacular on educational outcomes, mirroring some of the points raised in table 7.

Table 8. Qualitative summary of teachers' beliefs in the effects of using vernacular language on educational outcomes

Teachers believe that using the vernacular language will benefit children's educational outcomes because:	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It allows children to understand, explain and learn faster. • It's their mother tongue. • It's easier for the children to understand. 	<p>"It's their own language, so it's easy for them."</p>
Some teachers worried because:	Rral teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They lack resources and training to teach properly. • It could influence children's ability to learn other languages. • The children don't have a high level in reading and writing in the vernacular languages. 	<p>"100% it will help the children."</p>
	Vatlongos teacher
	<p>"It's good for their understanding. But if they use Vatlongos, then they may use it too much and not use English. This happens in Bislama already."</p>
	Vatlongos teacher
	<p>"Children can learn Merei well, but there are no books in Merei. Everything is in English."</p>
	Merei teacher

4.2 Students' knowledge and enjoyment of the vernacular

This section shows how many students in each community speak the main language, if they enjoy using the language in the classroom, and their abilities with different aspects of the language. Figure 8 shows the combined results, with the discussion of the data in the sections below.

**Figure 8.** Student metrics

4.2.1 How many students speak the vernacular

The number of students that were taught by the surveyed teachers varied across each language community (Merei = 131, Rral = 262, Vatlongos = 221). However, Figure 8 shows that there were similar ratios of students who could speak or couldn't speak the vernacular language in the classes taught by the teachers surveyed. Overall, 91.7% of the children in the teachers' classes could speak the vernacular language.

Due to time constraints we were unable to interview all teachers at every school in each of the three language communities. However, we believe that the figures for children not speaking the Rral language in the remaining schools in that community would be similar. However, the remaining school in the Merei community would have a much more mixed ability with higher amounts of students from different language communities, due to its location between different language communities.

4.2.2 Students' enjoyment of the vernacular

We asked the teachers if the students enjoy learning in the vernacular language, and where the language is not used, if they think children would enjoy it. Combining these two different framings of the question, we can get a broad view of student's acceptance of learning in the vernacular through whether students do enjoy or would enjoy learning in the vernacular. Teachers answered on a 5-point scale, from 1 being don't enjoy at all to 5 being really enjoy. On average, teachers reported high levels of enjoyment from students across all vernacular languages (see Figure 8 above). Table 9 reports a summary of teachers' perceptions of the students' enjoyment of using the vernacular in the classroom

Table 9. Qualitative summary of teachers' perceptions of children's enjoyment of using the vernacular language

Teachers believe that children enjoy using the vernacular language because:	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps them understand information better. • It helps them read and write better. • It's their mother tongue. 	“They will own their education.”
Some teachers report:	Vatlongos teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They want more training to give the students an enjoyable experience. • There can be mixed levels of enjoyment as not all students speak the language. • Some students prefer other languages. 	“They will like it, to take Merei and translate into French. They will understand quickly. It's a long process from Merei-Bislama-French. They should learn Bislama when older.”
	Merei teacher
	“It's their language. Communication is easier in Rral.”
	Rral teacher
	“Children want to learn English. They know language already, so they want to know English.”
	Rral teacher

4.2.3 Children's abilities with aspects of the vernacular language

Teachers reported that children found speaking in the vernacular language easy. However, most teachers highlighted that children found reading and writing to be difficult. Figure 8 (above) shows that teachers from the Rral language community reported lower levels of student need to improve reading and writing. This is supported by teachers using the Rral language the most in the classroom (c.f., Figure 6). Table 10 summarises teachers' perceptions of the children's abilities in the vernacular language.

Table 10. Qualitative summary of teachers' perceptions of children's abilities in the vernacular language

Teachers report:	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many haven't started to teach reading and writing in the vernacular language due to lack of resources and training. Children struggle with the spelling and phonics of the vernacular language. Children with access to language resources and trained teachers find most aspects of the language easier. 	<p>"There are no resources; it's hard to read and write."</p> <p>Merei teacher</p> <p>"I'm not teaching in language yet. I've not introduced reading and writing yet."</p> <p>Merei teacher</p> <p>"Children are just starting to learn (reading and writing), but they are good for their level."</p> <p>Rral teacher</p> <p>"The curriculum is in Bislama and French: no chance to use language for reading and writing."</p> <p>Rral teacher</p> <p>"It will be hard (reading and writing), but with proper training we can do it."</p> <p>Vatlongos teacher</p> <p>"If I teach in vernacular it will be easy to write and read. In kindergarten they use vernacular."</p> <p>Vatlongos teacher</p>

4.3 Vernacular language resources

4.3.1 Current vernacular language resources in schools

The majority of the Merei teachers had no resources for teaching the language in schools. Only one teacher reported having access to an alphabet poster. The schools in the Rral community had the greatest variety of resources. However, these were not available in every school. VESP MoET literacy materials had been produced for the Rral and Vatlongos communities, however not every school in these communities still had copies. Figure 9 shows the type of resources per school and Table 11 summarises the teachers' thoughts around the current curriculum resources.

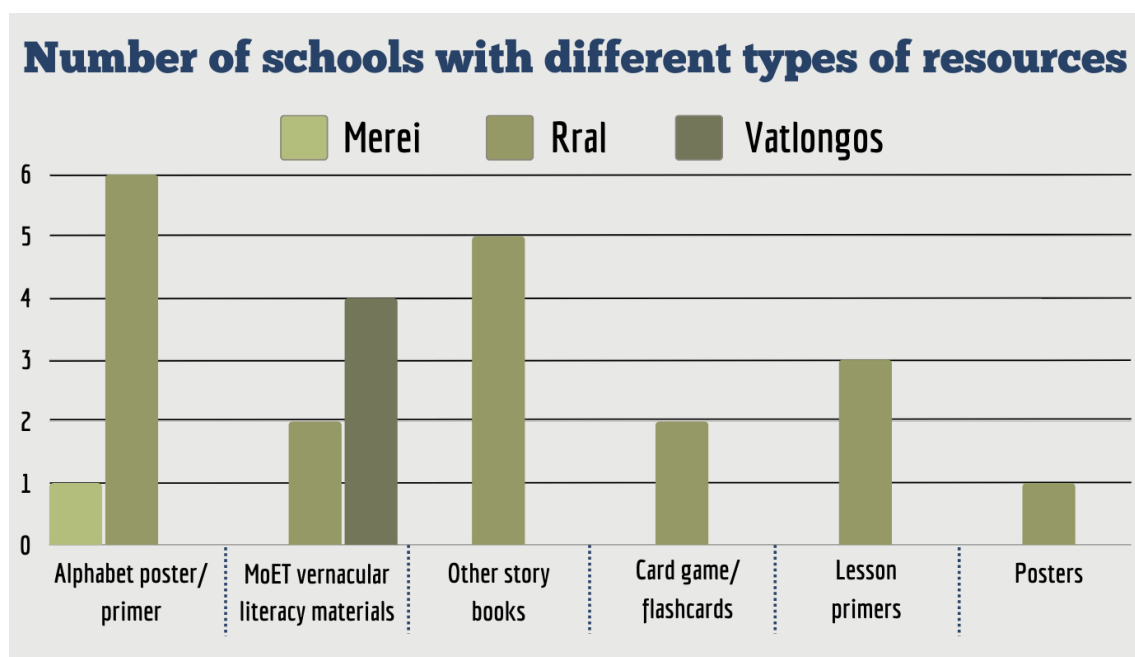


Figure 9. Language resource type per language community

Table 11. Qualitative summary of teachers' thoughts on current vernacular curriculum resources

Teacher's report:	Teachers say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current resources are not good as they are only in English or Bislama. • More reading materials are needed • Current resources should be translated into local languages and dialects. • Phonics resources are needed to support children. • More copies of the current resources are needed. 	<p>Teachers say:</p> <p>"We need materials in the Endu dialect as children don't know all the words in the other dialect."</p> <p>Vatlongos teacher</p> <p>"A hurricane destroyed lots of literacy materials."</p> <p>Rral teacher</p> <p>"There aren't many copies [of the VESP materials] – we could do with some more!"</p> <p>Vatlongos teacher</p>

4.3.2 Self-made resources

Just over half the teachers surveyed make their own vernacular literacy resources. Figure shows that the Merei community made the least resources, whereas the Rral community made the most. We note that the Rral community has received prior training and support in this area from the lead author, Michael Franjieh, and Bible translators, Laura Thuleson and Houghton Richards.

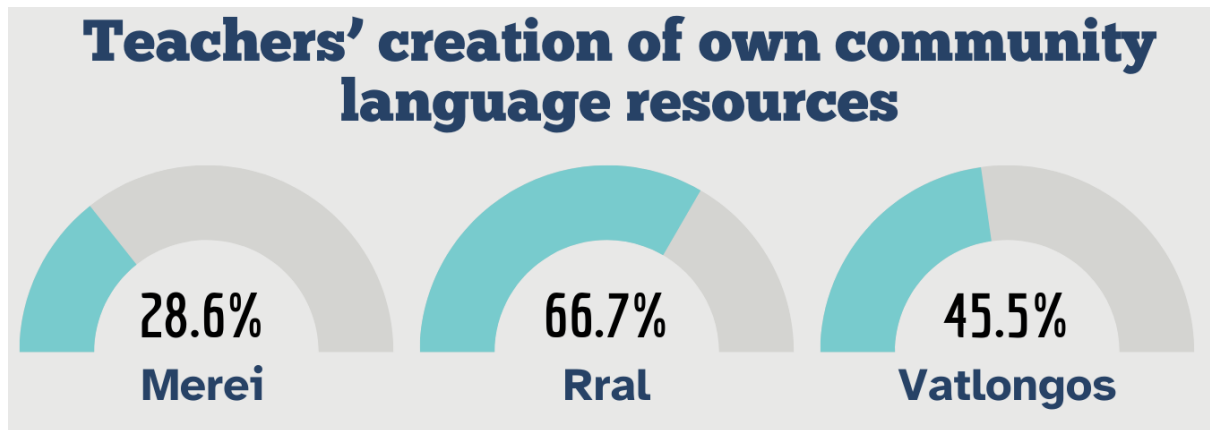


Figure 10. Self-made resources

The following are a list of some of the key resources teachers have made and Figure 11 shows examples:

- Use natural resources for naming/counting
- Draw pictures with vernacular names
- Matching game – words to pictures
- Draw letters which are cut out so children can spell words
- Create big/class story books
- Flashcards



Figure 11. Examples of self-made resources

4.3.3 Resources teachers need

The majority of teachers require more literacy materials to effectively teach in the vernacular language. The following is a list of the main requirements from teachers:

- Alphabet resources: phonics, posters, flashcards
- Books: big/class story books
- Dictionaries
- Teachers' resources: teachers' guides, syllabus, curriculum and lesson plans
- Resources on traditional and ecological knowledge: local names of animals and plants
- Traditional stories
- Maths and numeracy materials
- Different text types: recount, procedure, descriptive, narrative, information and explanation
- Multi-media resources in the language: videos, audio
- Health
- Science
- Resources on grammar (e.g., verbs, adjectives etc.)

5 Conclusions

This report set out to understand:

1. Teachers' confidence in using the vernacular language as the medium of instruction and their further training needs.
2. Children's enjoyment of using the vernacular language in class and what aspects they find hard.
3. What resources are available and what needs to be developed.

Teachers

We found that teachers were most confident in speaking the vernacular language, but their confidence in reading and writing the language was much lower.

Teachers reported high levels of enjoyment when using the vernacular language. They felt that children benefit from a greater understanding of the subjects being taught when using the vernacular language.

Overall, the language used most in the classrooms was Bislama, though each community varied in its use of the vernacular language, showing that implementation of vernacular literacy is currently patchy.

All teachers would benefit from further training in phonics and the vernacular language alphabets, to increase their confidence and to enable them to teach using the language more effectively.

Children

Across the schools surveyed in the three communities more than 90% of children speak the vernacular language. However, not all schools and all teachers were interviewed in these three communities. However, based on discussions with community members, we believe that similar rates of fluency would be found throughout the rest of the Rral and Vatlongos communities. For the Merei community, there may be more mixed levels of fluency.

The teachers reported that students showed high levels of enjoyment when using the vernacular language. Even teachers who were not using the vernacular language reported that the children would be eager to learn in their own language.

Teachers reported that students found reading and writing in the vernacular language hard, which are the same aspects the teachers also found hard themselves.

Resources

Current vernacular literacy materials varied widely across communities and across schools within each community. For the Vatlongos and Rral communities, some schools reported that the MoET VESP materials developed had not arrived, or that they had been lost due to natural disasters. Teachers saw the need for further resource development. Some teachers had created their own resources for teaching using the vernacular language; this too varied widely.

Summary

Teachers and students show great levels of support for using the vernacular language as the MOI. Their enjoyment of using the vernacular languages shows support for current education policies around using these languages in kindergarten and the early years of primary education before gradually transitioning to either English or French.

However, teachers require much more support from the Ministry of Education and Training in order to teach effectively. We highlight several recommendations for moving forward.

6 Recommendations

The findings from our survey are specific to the three language communities involved in the study. However, we believe the results would be replicated across other language communities in Vanuatu. Our recommendations will be useful for other language communities in rural areas outside of the main urban centres of Port Vila and Luganville.

1. Teacher Training:

- a. Further support for teachers in phonics of the vernacular languages.
- b. Teachers from outside the community require support in acquiring the vernacular language.

2. Resources:

- a. A fuller understanding of what vernacular resources are currently available in each school and reprinting of VESP materials where necessary.
- b. Teachers require further support in developing their own literacy resources.

To improve teachers' confidence, training workshops need to be tailored for each community. One way to achieve this would be to strengthen local and international networks. This could be achieved, for example, by working closely with external linguists who work with different language communities through the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, and with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Port Vila. Identifying and training vernacular language champions would embed sustainable practice across the different communities.

Teachers often move to new schools, so training should not be one-off, but at regular intervals for continued support. Teachers from outside the language community would greatly benefit from continued community support in learning the vernacular language. We note that trained teachers are often posted to schools in communities where they do not speak the vernacular. We found instances where teachers from outside the community learnt the

vernacular and taught it in schools. Teachers from outside the community are not necessarily a barrier to using the vernacular as the MOI but they do require more support. Teachers who speak a particular vernacular should be preferentially selected to teach in their language community. An alternative strategy would see that teachers who do not speak the local vernacular could be reserved to teach children in years 4-6, where increased amounts of English and French occur until they learn the vernacular language themselves. These teachers should only teach early years classes (classes one to three) once they become fluent in the local language.

Furthermore, teachers from within a language community require continued support to improve reading and writing skills. A teacher-led initiative in one school in the Rral community (North Ambrym) was implemented, where both teachers external to the community and local teachers meet on a weekly basis to improve their speaking, reading and writing skills. MoET should investigate these local initiatives and support further roll-out of similar grass-roots strategies across other communities.

Teachers cannot teach without resources. What is available varies across each school and community. The Curriculum Development Unit should obtain reports from principals of each school to get a fuller picture of what is currently available and reprint resources where necessary. We note that when the original class one VESP materials were printed, they were accompanied by a vernacular language sticker sheet for teachers to attach themselves. In some instances, these stickers did not arrive with the books, but at a later date – in the case of the Rral community, over a year later. In some schools, we found VESP materials still had not had their stickers attached. If these materials need to be reprinted, we recommend careful reconsideration; either having the vernacular translations included, rather than as separate sheets, or having the vernacular translation stickers attached before being shipped to the schools.

Additional vernacular language resources can be found in repositories in Port Vila, such as the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, National Library, or SIL. Requiring schools to research what resources are already available in these repositories would help increase the amount of resources they have.

Implementing the full list of resources that teachers have identified above would be costly, but providing training for teachers to create their own materials would provide a cost-effective solution. Teachers should be trained through workshops in resource development to create big/class books, traditional stories, posters, flashcards, alphabet and numeracy resources, and lesson plans. We note that this type of training has been delivered in the Rral community before, which has led to the highest amount of self-made resources compared to the other communities surveyed here. Other materials such as dictionaries, language curriculum, and for different subjects such as health and science could be developed at a later stage once teachers' confidence in reading and writing have improved.

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