

# From Colonial Schooling to Decolonial Futures: Transforming Education in the Pacific

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## ABSTRACT

Colonial education systems in the Pacific were designed to reshape Indigenous identities, restructure social systems, and replace local epistemologies with Western worldviews. These legacies continue to influence contemporary schooling, where Eurocentric curricula, English-dominant language policies, and non-relational pedagogies often marginalise Indigenous knowledge, culture, and authority. This paper examines the shift from colonial schooling to decolonial futures in Pacific Island nations, arguing that meaningful transformation requires dismantling entrenched colonial logics embedded in curriculum, governance, assessment, and teacher preparation. Drawing on decolonial theory, Indigenous Pacific epistemologies, and contemporary regional research, the paper explores how movements for language revitalisation, cultural resurgence, and Indigenous-led education governance are reshaping possibilities for future generations. It highlights emerging practices, including vanua- and vā-centred pedagogies, immersion language programs, land-based learning, and Indigenous community co-governance, that offer pathways toward epistemic justice and culturally grounded education systems. By tracing both historical impacts and contemporary innovations, this study proposes a decolonial education framework that positions Pacific knowledge systems, linguistic diversity, and relational ontologies at the centre of educational transformation. The findings argue that decolonial education is essential not only for restoring cultural continuity and Indigenous sovereignty but also for building resilient, future-ready education systems capable of supporting Pacific nations in the 21st century and beyond.

**Keywords:** Decolonial education; colonial schooling; Pacific Islands; Indigenous knowledge systems; cultural resurgence; language revitalisation; epistemic justice; Pacific epistemologies; decolonisation; Indigenous sovereignty.

## INTRODUCTION

Education in the Pacific has been profoundly shaped by the enduring legacies of colonisation, which reconfigured Indigenous societies through the imposition of Western knowledge systems, languages, and governance structures. Colonial schooling was not merely an educational project; it functioned as an instrument of cultural transformation, designed to dismantle Indigenous epistemologies and replace them with European worldviews, values, and systems of authority (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Thaman, 2003). Missionary institutions, followed by formal colonial administrations, intentionally used schooling to reshape identities, social hierarchies, and labour systems to align with colonial political and economic interests (Walker, 2020). As a result, Pacific nations inherited education systems that prioritised Western-derived curricula, English-medium instruction, and Eurocentric epistemological frameworks long after political independence (Sanga, 2000).

These colonial structures continue to shape contemporary educational landscapes, creating tensions between inherited Western models and the cultural, social, and linguistic realities of Pacific communities. Scholars argue that the persistence of coloniality, defined as the ongoing reproduction of colonial power relations in knowledge, culture, and institutions—remains embedded in schooling across the region (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000). This coloniality manifests in epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western scientific knowledge over Indigenous ways of knowing, often rendering Indigenous knowledge “supplementary” rather than foundational (Battiste, 2013; Nakata, 2007). Furthermore, English-dominant language policies have contributed to the erosion of traditional languages, disrupting intergenerational transmission and weakening cultural continuity (Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Mühlhäusler, 1996).

Amid these challenges, Pacific scholarship has increasingly emphasized the urgent need to reclaim and revitalise

Indigenous knowledge systems, pedagogies, and linguistic heritage. Decolonial education in the Pacific entails more than adding Indigenous content to existing curricula; it involves restructuring epistemological foundations, pedagogical practices, and institutional governance to centre Indigenous worldviews, relational ontologies, and community authority (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999, 2012). Scholars such as Thaman (2003), Helu-Thaman (2010), and Nabobo-Baba (2006) argue that Pacific cultures possess deeply holistic, relational, and place-based philosophical traditions—such as *vanua*, *talanoa*, *vā*, *fa'asamoa*, and *tok stori*—that offer rich pedagogical foundations for culturally grounded learning.

Growing movements across the Pacific demonstrate that Indigenous communities are reclaiming agency in educational transformation through culturally sustaining pedagogies, language immersion programs, community-based governance models, and resurgence-centred curriculum initiatives (McCarty & Brayboy, 2023; Johansson-Fua, 2016). These contemporary efforts reflect a broader global shift toward epistemic justice—recognising the right of Indigenous peoples to define, protect, and transmit their own knowledge systems (Fricker, 2007). Such approaches not only strengthen cultural identity but also contribute to more relevant, equitable, and future-resilient education systems capable of addressing 21st-century challenges, including climate change, digital transformation, and socio-economic inequality (Lingam & Lingam, 2019).

This paper examines the historical trajectory from colonial schooling to emerging decolonial futures in Pacific education. It situates Pacific educational systems within wider debates on coloniality, Indigenous knowledge, and decolonisation, exploring how language revitalisation, cultural resurgence, and Indigenous governance provide pathways toward educational sovereignty. By integrating archival, theoretical, and contemporary research, the study provides a critical analysis of the structural, cultural, and epistemic shifts needed to build education systems that honour Indigenous identities and support the aspirations of Pacific nations in the decades ahead.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Colonial Foundations of Education in the Pacific

#### Missionary and Imperial Schooling

Colonial education in the Pacific was introduced primarily by missionary organisations whose aim was not only conversion but cultural transformation. Mission schools enforced Western moral codes, literacy practices, and social hierarchies, displacing Indigenous educational systems rooted in relationality, land-based knowledge, and collective learning (Thaman, 2003; Walker, 2020). As formal colonial

administrations expanded, education shifted toward preparing Indigenous peoples for subordinate economic roles, particularly within plantation labour, clerical work, and colonial governance structures (Sanga, 2000). These early schooling systems worked systematically to reshape local identities and embed Western worldviews in the daily lives of Pacific communities (Nabobo-Baba, 2006).

#### Language Suppression and Cultural Dislocation

Language policy became a central mechanism of colonial control. English, French, and other colonial languages were positioned as superior, modern, and necessary for economic advancement, while Indigenous languages were often prohibited or relegated to informal family spaces (Mühlhäuser, 1996). The erosion of Indigenous languages disrupted intergenerational knowledge transmission, contributed to cultural dislocation, and undermined Indigenous authority structures (Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Smith, 1999). Scholars emphasise that the loss of language has long-term effects on cultural continuity and epistemological integrity, making language revitalisation central to decolonial educational efforts (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

#### Colonial Knowledge Hierarchies

Colonial regimes established knowledge hierarchies that privileged Western science, Christianity, and rationalist epistemologies while dismissing Indigenous knowledge as inferior or unscientific (Battiste, 2013; Nakata, 2007). School curricula emphasised Western history, literature, and scientific paradigms, institutionalising a worldview that framed Indigenous knowledge as supplementary or obsolete. This epistemic dominance was reinforced through assessments, teacher training, and inspection systems that favoured Western pedagogical norms (Sanga, 2004). The consequence is a lasting structural imbalance in which Western epistemologies remain the default reference point in Pacific education systems.

#### Postcolonial Education and the Persistence of Coloniality

#### Structural Continuities After Independence

Although Pacific nations gained political independence in the mid-20th century, their education systems retained colonial-era structures, including Western-derived school calendars, discipline systems, curriculum models, and examination regimes (Helu-Thaman, 2010; Sanga, 2000). These structural continuities reflect what decolonial theorists describe as the “coloniality of power” and “coloniality of knowledge,” wherein colonial systems

persist even after the formal end of colonial rule (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

### **Epistemic Injustice and Cultural Misalignment**

Epistemic injustice—where certain knowledge systems are devalued or dismissed—remains prevalent in Pacific education (Fricker, 2007; Smith, 2012). Western pedagogies often emphasise individualism, competition, and standardised assessment, which conflicts with Indigenous values such as relationality, communal responsibility, and collective learning (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Johansson-Fua, 2016). The misalignment between school structures and cultural expectations contributes to disengagement and limits the cultural relevance of formal education.

### **Pressures of Globalisation, Modernisation, and Neoliberal Reform**

Global pressures have further entrenched Western educational models. Neoliberal reforms introduced performance-driven frameworks, marketisation of schooling, and employment-focused curricula (Lingam & Lingam, 2013). These reforms often intensified the marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge by linking educational success to external examinations, English proficiency, and global labour market demands (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). The tension between globalisation and cultural preservation remains one of the central dilemmas in Pacific education reform.

### **Decolonial Theory and Indigenous Resurgence in Education**

#### **Decolonial Thought and Epistemic Delinking**

Decolonial theory argues that dismantling the coloniality of knowledge requires “epistemic delinking”—the intentional shift away from Eurocentric epistemologies toward pluralistic, locally grounded forms of knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Quijano’s (2000) analysis of the “colonial matrix of power” underscores how deeply colonial logic is embedded in institutions, making decolonisation an ongoing, multidimensional process. These frameworks help explain why postcolonial Pacific education still reproduces colonial patterns despite local reforms.

### **Indigenous Research Paradigms**

Indigenous scholars have developed research paradigms grounded in local ontologies, relational accountability, and cultural protocols. Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999, 2012) and Chilisa’s (2012) *Indigenous Research Methodologies* emphasise ethical, relational approaches that respect community authority and epistemic sovereignty. In the Pacific,

Nabobo-Baba (2006) articulates *vanua*-based epistemology, which situates knowledge within land, kinship, spirituality, and community relations. Wilson (2008) similarly argues that Indigenous knowledge must be embedded within its cultural and relational context rather than extracted into Western frameworks.

### **Cultural Resurgence and Indigenous Education Movements**

Cultural resurgence movements emphasize the revitalisation of Indigenous identity, language, history, and cultural practices as a foundation for decolonial education (Hau’ofa, 1994; Ka’ili, 2005). In education, this resurgence takes the form of language immersion schools, community-led curriculum development, place-based learning, and partnerships with elders. McCarty and Brayboy (2023) highlight how Indigenous education globally are shifting from inclusion toward resurgence and sovereignty, a trend reflected increasingly in the Pacific.

### **Pacific Indigenous Epistemologies as Foundations for Education**

#### **Vanua, Vā, Talanoa, Tok Stori, and Relational Philosophies**

Pacific epistemologies are holistic and relational, integrating land, spirituality, kinship, and communal ethics (Thaman, 2003; Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Frameworks such as *talanoa* (Vaiolaleti, 2006), *tok stori* (Otunuku, 2011), and *vā* (Johansson-Fua, 2016) offer pedagogical approaches rooted in dialogue, empathy, and relationality. These approaches contrast with Western pedagogies that emphasise linearity and individualism, making them essential for culturally grounded education reform.

#### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

Culturally sustaining pedagogies embrace Indigenous languages, arts, protocols, environmental knowledge, and storytelling traditions (Sanga, 2004; Thaman, 2003). These pedagogies anchor learning in cultural identity while preparing learners to navigate contemporary challenges. Research suggests that culturally aligned teaching fosters higher engagement, stronger identity development, and deeper learning connections (Helu-Thaman, 2010).

#### **Language Revitalisation and Education**

Language revitalisation is a core component of Indigenous resurgence. Immersion programs, bilingual education, intergenerational learning, and digital language tools all

support linguistic recovery in the Pacific (Galla, 2016; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Reviving Indigenous languages strengthens cultural identity, epistemic integrity, and community cohesion.

### Emerging Decolonial Practices in Pacific Education

#### Indigenous Curriculum Reform

Curriculum reforms in several Pacific nations have sought to integrate Indigenous knowledge, local history, and cultural practices into national syllabi (Lingam & Lingam, 2019). These reforms aim to reposition Indigenous knowledge from "supplementary" to "core," although implementation remains uneven.

#### Community-Led Educational Governance

Increasingly, communities are reclaiming authority in educational decision-making. Studies highlight the importance of Indigenous leadership in governance, curriculum development, and teacher education (Sanga & Chu, 2009). Community governance models align education with local cultural values and aspirations.

#### Digital Decolonisation

Digital technologies offer opportunities for language documentation, cultural archiving, and Indigenous-controlled knowledge systems when implemented ethically. Community-led digital initiatives help restore epistemic sovereignty and counter digital forms of coloniality (Schwartz et al., 2021).

#### LITERATURE GAPS

Despite growing scholarship, the literature reveals several critical gaps:

#### Limited Longitudinal Research on Decolonial Education in the Pacific

Most studies examine short-term initiatives or local case studies. There is a lack of long-term, multi-country research tracking the sustained impact of decolonial reforms (Lingam & Lingam, 2019).

#### Insufficient Analysis of Indigenous Governance Models

While community leadership is widely endorsed, few empirical studies examine successful governance structures or their scalability across diverse Pacific contexts (Sanga & Chu, 2009).

#### Underrepresentation of Minority and Small-Island Language Revitalisation

Much of the literature focuses on dominant Indigenous languages, with little attention to smaller linguistic groups, dialects, and endangered languages (Mühlhäusler, 1996).

#### Limited Research on Digital Sovereignty in Pacific Education

Digital decolonisation is an emerging field, and few studies explore data sovereignty, digital ethics, or community-controlled digital learning platforms (Schwartz et al., 2021).

#### Gaps in Teacher Education Research

There is limited scholarship on how teacher training programs can build capacity in Indigenous pedagogies, culturally sustaining practices, and decolonial methods (Thaman, 2003).

#### Need for Comparative Pacific Studies

Comparative research across Pacific Island nations remains scarce; most studies focus on single-country contexts, limiting regional synthesis.

**Table 1: Colonial → Decolonial Shifts in Pacific Education**

Dimension	Colonial Education (Past & Residual Present)	Decolonial Education (Emerging Futures)
Knowledge Systems	Prioritised Western epistemologies; Indigenous knowledge viewed as inferior or "mythical" (Battiste, 2013; Nakata, 2007).	Indigenous knowledge systems centred as legitimate and foundational (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Smith, 2012).
Language Policy	English/French imposed; Indigenous languages suppressed (Mühlhäusler, 1996).	Language revitalisation through bilingual/immersion programs (McCarty & Brayboy, 2023).

<b>Pedagogy</b>	Individualistic, exam-driven, hierarchical (Thaman, 2003).	Relational, holistic, community-based (talanoa, vā, vanua) (Vaiioleti, 2006; Johansson-Fua, 2016).
<b>Governance</b>	Centralised control by colonial or state systems.	Community-led governance; Indigenous leadership in decision-making (Sanga & Chu, 2009).
<b>Purpose of Schooling</b>	Preparation for colonial economy; assimilation.	Cultural resurgence, sovereignty, identity restoration.
<b>Teacher Education</b>	Training based on Western pedagogical norms.	Preparation in culturally sustaining pedagogies and Indigenous philosophies.
<b>Curriculum</b>	Eurocentric content; minimal Indigenous representation.	Contextualised, land-based, culturally grounded curriculum.
<b>Assessment</b>	Standardised exams privileging Western literacy.	Flexible, culturally relevant, relational assessments.
<b>Digital Knowledge</b>	Digital tools reinforce global/Western dominance.	Focus on digital sovereignty and Indigenous-controlled knowledge hubs.



## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The literature reveals that Pacific education remains deeply influenced by colonial structures, yet there is simultaneously a growing momentum toward decolonial transformation. This section analyses these dynamics by exploring five interrelated

themes: (1) the persistence of coloniality in contemporary schooling; (2) the political and cultural nature of decolonial education; (3) the role of Indigenous epistemologies and language in cultural resurgence; (4) the structural and pedagogical challenges of educational reform; and (5) pathways toward sustainable decolonial

futures.

### Enduring Coloniality in Pacific Education Systems

Although Pacific nations achieved political independence decades ago, the coloniality of knowledge and power persists within educational structures. Colonial schooling introduced hierarchical, exam-oriented pedagogies and Eurocentric value systems that continue to shape curricula, assessment regimes, and governance processes (Helu-Thaman, 2010; Sanga, 2000). These structures privilege English-medium instruction, rote learning, and Western epistemologies, reinforcing what Mignolo and Walsh (2018) describe as the “colonial matrix of power,” where Western knowledge remains dominant.

This persistence of coloniality is not accidental; it is an outcome of institutional inertia and the global pressures toward standardisation, modernisation, and neoliberal policy reform (Lingam & Lingam, 2013). As a result, Pacific schooling often reproduces colonial hierarchies despite contemporary aspirations for cultural revival. This contradiction reflects Quijano’s (2000) argument that colonial power structures survive through knowledge systems, not only administrative control.

### Decolonial Education as a Political and Cultural Project

Decolonial education in the Pacific is fundamentally political, it challenges historical injustices, asserts Indigenous sovereignty, and redefines who has authority over knowledge production (Smith, 1999; Battiste, 2013). Unlike reformist approaches that merely add Indigenous content to Western frameworks, decolonial education involves epistemic delinking: the intentional shift away from Eurocentric paradigms toward culturally grounded systems of meaning (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

This involves reclaiming Indigenous worldviews, language use, and cultural protocols, which are central to educational self-determination. Scholars argue that decolonial education must transform not only curriculum but also governance structures, community participation, and the philosophical foundations of schooling (Chilisa, 2012; Nabobo-Baba, 2006). Thus, decolonisation is an ongoing, relational, and community-led process rather than a single policy initiative.

### Reclaiming Indigenous Epistemologies and Language

A key insight across the literature is that Indigenous knowledge systems, *vanua*, *talanoa*, *tok stori*, *vā*, *fa'asamoa*, offer holistic, relational approaches to learning that reflect Pacific worldviews (Vaioli, 2006; Johansson-Fua, 2016). These frameworks emphasise interdependence, land-based learning, spirituality, and collective responsibility, providing a stark contrast to individualistic Western pedagogies.

Language revitalisation emerges as a particularly powerful site of cultural resurgence. Indigenous languages encode ecological knowledge, kinship systems, social protocols, and ethical values that cannot be fully translated into English (Huffer & Qalo, 2004; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Thus, bilingual and immersion programs are not simply linguistic interventions—they are political acts of identity reclamation and epistemic recovery.

Furthermore, digital technologies offer new avenues for language documentation, storytelling, and curriculum development, although digital sovereignty remains a concern (Schwartz et al., 2021). When communities control their digital content and platforms, technology becomes an enabler of resurgence rather than another tool of epistemic extraction.

### Structural and Pedagogical Challenges in Educational Transformation

While decolonial aspirations are strong, the transformation of Pacific education faces significant structural constraints. Teacher preparation remains one of the most persistent barriers, as most teacher education programs continue to be grounded in Western pedagogical models (Thaman, 2003). Many teachers lack training in Indigenous languages, culturally sustaining pedagogies, or community-engaged methodologies (Sanga & Chu, 2009). Additionally, national education systems often prioritise external examinations, international benchmarks, and global labour market skills over cultural learning and Indigenous knowledge (Lingam & Lingam, 2013). These pressures create tensions between culturally grounded education and economic competitiveness, reflecting broader postcolonial struggles between modernity and tradition (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001).

Governance structures also pose challenges. While community-led decision-making is widely endorsed, many ministries of education remain centralised and bureaucratic, limiting Indigenous leadership in curriculum design or school governance (Helu-Thaman, 2010).

Finally, resource constraints—limited funding, teacher shortages, and inadequate teaching materials—hamper sustained implementation of decolonial reforms. These challenges highlight the need for systemic change rather than isolated intervention.

### Pathways Toward Decolonial Education Futures

The literature suggests that sustainable decolonial futures depend on several critical shifts:

#### Repositioning Indigenous Knowledge as Foundational

Indigenous knowledge must move from the margins of curriculum to the centre, informing philosophy, pedagogy, assessment, and community engagement (Nabobo-Baba, 2006).

### **Strengthening Community-Led Governance**

Research shows that Indigenous leadership in educational governance results in more culturally relevant, equitable, and effective educational outcomes (Sanga & Chu, 2009). This includes involvement of elders, chiefs, language custodians, and cultural authorities.

### **Expanding Teacher Education and Professional Learning**

Teacher preparation programs must build capacity in Indigenous pedagogies, language immersion, land-based learning, and culturally sustaining teaching practices (Thaman, 2003).

### **Embedding Language Revitalisation Across Schooling**

Language revitalisation must be integrated across all levels of schooling—from early childhood to higher education—to restore cultural continuity and identity (Galla, 2016; McCarty & Brayboy, 2023).

### **Promoting Digital Sovereignty and Community-Controlled Technology**

Digital platforms should support Indigenous control over cultural content, narratives, and data, ensuring ethical use and knowledge sovereignty (Schwartz et al., 2021).

### **Adopting Pluri-versal Frameworks**

Pacific futures require pluriversality, the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems rather than the dominance of a single Western epistemology (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

## **SYNTHESIS**

The analysis demonstrates that Pacific education stands at a crossroads: one path continues to reinforce the colonial legacies embedded in existing systems, while the other leads toward Indigenous sovereignty, epistemic justice, and culturally grounded educational futures. The shift toward decolonial education is not merely pedagogical but civilisational—reconnecting people to land, identity, language, culture, and intergenerational authority.

For Pacific nations, decolonial education is not optional; it is essential for creating education systems that are culturally relevant, socially just, and resilient in the face of global pressures and climate challenges.

## **CONCLUSION**

The evolution of Pacific education from colonial schooling toward decolonial futures represents one of the most significant intellectual and cultural transformations of the 21st century. The literature shows that colonial education systems were deliberately designed to disrupt Indigenous knowledge, languages, and social structures, embedding Western epistemologies as normative and superior (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Smith, 1999; Walker, 2020). Despite political independence, many Pacific nations continue to operate within these inherited structures, reflecting what Quijano (2000) identifies as the ongoing “coloniality of power” that permeates knowledge, governance, and identity.

Yet the region is also experiencing a resurgence of Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies, languages, and governance models, movements that signify a deliberate and collective reclaiming of educational sovereignty (Johansson-Fua, 2016; McCarty & Brayboy, 2023). These resurgence-led approaches challenge the epistemic hierarchies of colonial schooling and reposition Indigenous knowledge as foundational rather than supplementary (Battiste, 2013; Thaman, 2003). The shift toward decolonial education therefore constitutes not merely a reform agenda, but a transformative reimaging of what education is, whose knowledge is valued, and how futures are shaped.

Decolonial education in the Pacific carries profound cultural, political, and ecological implications. It restores relationships between people, land, language, and community, relationships central to Pacific worldviews and survival in an era marked by climate change, globalisation, and rapid technological change (Hau'ofa, 1994; Helu-Thaman, 2010). It enables learners to develop strong cultural identities while gaining the competencies needed to navigate global challenges. Ultimately, the movement toward decolonial futures reasserts the right of Pacific peoples to determine their own educational paths, reclaim their intellectual sovereignty, and build futures aligned with their values, histories, and aspirations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Drawing from the analysis, the following recommendations outline actionable pathways for Pacific governments, educators, researchers, and communities seeking to advance decolonial education.

### **1. Centre Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Indigenous epistemologies—*vanua*, *vā*, *talanoa*, *fa'asamoa*, *tok stori*—must form the philosophical

foundation of Pacific education. Curricula should integrate Indigenous ecological knowledge, cultural protocols, histories, and relational ethics, not as add-ons but as core components (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Thaman, 2003). This requires revising curriculum frameworks, designing culturally sustaining learning materials, and embedding community-validated knowledge across subjects.

## 2. Prioritise Language Revitalisation Across All Levels of Schooling

Indigenous language revitalisation must be a central pillar of decolonial education. Governments should support bilingual and immersion programs, community language nests, and intergenerational teaching initiatives (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Galla, 2016). Teacher training should include Indigenous language proficiency and methods for culturally grounded language instruction. Language policy reform must position Indigenous languages as legitimate academic and intellectual mediums.

## 3. Strengthen Teacher Education in Indigenous Pedagogies and Cultural Competence

Decolonial education cannot succeed without teachers equipped to deliver it. Teacher preparation programs must be reoriented to include Indigenous pedagogies, relational learning, land-based education, and cultural competence (Sanga & Chu, 2009; Thaman, 2003). Ongoing professional development should be co-led by cultural experts, language custodians, and local communities to ensure authenticity and alignment with Indigenous epistemologies.

## 4. Promote Community-Led Educational Governance

Decolonial education requires governance structures that reflect Indigenous authority and decision-making. Ministries of education should adopt co-governance models that formally include elders, chiefs, cultural organisations, and community leaders in curriculum development, school leadership, and policy evaluation (Johansson-Fua, 2016; Sanga, 2004). Community ownership strengthens relevance, sustainability, and cultural legitimacy.

## 5. Foster Digital Sovereignty and Ethical Technological

## Integration

Digital transformation should be harnessed to support Indigenous resurgence rather than reinforce new forms of coloniality. Pacific nations must prioritise community-controlled digital archives, language apps, cultural repositories, and data sovereignty frameworks (Schwartz et al., 2021). Technology should be used to amplify Indigenous voices, preserve language, and create learning tools that reflect Pacific epistemologies.

## 6. Develop Research Agendas Grounded in Indigenous Methodologies

Pacific research institutions should prioritise Indigenous methodologies, *talanoa*, *vanua*, *vā*, relational accountability, ethical reciprocity—as foundational approaches to educational research (Smith, 2012; Chilisa, 2012). Longitudinal and comparative research is needed to evaluate the impact of decolonial initiatives, analyse teacher preparation models, and document outcomes for learners and communities.

## 7. Align Education Policy with Self-Determination and Cultural Resurgence

Education policies must explicitly support decolonial goals, including Indigenous language rights, community governance, cultural revitalisation, and holistic models of learner wellbeing. Policies should reference and operationalise international frameworks such as **UNDIP (2007)** and **SDG 4.7**, which emphasise cultural diversity, sustainability, and Indigenous rights in education (United Nations, 2007).

## 8. Invest in Sustainable Resourcing for Decolonial Programs

Successful decolonial reform requires sustained investment. Governments and regional organisations should allocate long-term funding for Indigenous curriculum development, teacher training, community language centres, cultural experts, and local research networks (Lingam & Lingam, 2019). Without adequate resources, decolonial initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.



## FINAL REFLECTION

The future of Pacific education depends on the ability of nations to navigate the tensions between globalisation and cultural survival, modernisation and ancestral continuity, and inherited colonial systems and the aspirations of Indigenous communities. Decolonial education is not simply a corrective to historical injustices—it is a visionary project that empowers Pacific peoples to shape educational futures grounded in identity, dignity, and sovereignty.

By centring Indigenous knowledge systems, revitalising languages, restructuring governance, and embracing community-led pedagogies, Pacific nations can build education systems that are culturally grounded, intellectually expansive, and resilient in the face of global change. In doing so, they chart pathways not only toward educational transformation but toward fuller expressions of Indigenous futures and collective self-determination.

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