



# **Nofoilo i Leo Samoa - Samoan Phonological Awareness**

A study of Samoan early literacy development and  
implications for effective teaching strategies

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Teacher Education**

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*DEDICATION*

To my parents, the late Salā Lemalu Falealupo Aukuso & Vaifale Anamalia Aukuso

My brothers, the late Reverend Uili Aukuso & Tevaga Vinimoa Aukuso

My eldest sister, the late Luaono Faaope (nee Lemalu Aukuso)



*O le manu saili mafua o lea ua tulafoga*  
*The bird that sought for choice food has returned*

## Abstract

The higher aim of any school system is to ensure that children under its watch are successful in reading and writing. Parents too are committed to their children's education, doing their part to support their children's literacy learning while putting their faith in teachers' ability to help realise the educational aspirations they have for their children. Samoan parents place a strong emphasis on the importance of education in the wellbeing of their children and supporting intergenerational change in improving life outcomes. Yet literacy outcomes for Samoan children is an area of concern. The reported gaps in Samoan children's early reading development (SEGRA, 2017; Pacific Community (SPC), 2021) have served to underscore the broader aim of this thesis, which is to explore facilitators of early reading success for Samoan children.

Early reading and writing success are fundamental to children's educational achievement. (McNaughton, 2020; Law, 2015; Gillon & McNeill, 2015) with phonological awareness a critically important cognitive skill to support children's early literacy success through efficient word decoding and spelling ability (Gillon, 2017; Swaffield, 2011). Phonological Awareness, particularly in frameworks where children's languages and cultures are celebrated, is important to reading in English and in languages other than English (Sadeghi & Everatt, 2017; Bruck & Genesee, 1995; Aukuso, 2005). Relatively little is known about the development of phonological awareness in Samoan.

This thesis investigates the development and usefulness of a Samoan phonological awareness assessment measure to ensure children are developing an underlying cognitive skill proven critical for early reading and spelling success in alphabetic languages. The research described in this thesis explored the phonological awareness skill development of Samoan children educated within the Samoan educational context in Apia Samoa who are aged between 5 to 7 years.

A mixed methods research methodology was used to collect data from 100 student participants and 5 principal participants. An assessment measure called the Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness (SEPA) was developed for this purpose, with additional criteria to supplement where oral comprehension was examined. A mix of indigenous and universal empirical methods were employed to facilitate data collection. The Saliemanu

framework was adopted as my incorporated conceptual approach to interpreting the data results. The literature was selected on the basis of their essence and relevance to the topic and overall discussion.

The findings affirmed the thesis assertion that Phonological Awareness has a place in the task of promoting and developing Samoan literacy in all its domains. With the overwhelming evidence in support of its usefulness, phonological awareness can enhance teaching and learning for the Samoan learners. While the phonics system served Samoan literacy in the past, and continues to do so, it has certain limitations, particularly the fact of the primacy of sound which phonological awareness gives first priority (Gillon, 2017); and given the impact of transnational and fast-paced changes on Samoan literacy development, the need to upgrade in terms of skills and awareness is urgent and a matter of priority. The thesis supports the argument that an integration of the two - phonemic awareness and phonics - has far more potential for reading and comprehension than teaching each of them in isolation (*ibid.*).

The research also reaffirmed the reality of the learning environment for the Samoan learner in terms of challenges, and on the other hand, opportunities to promote best practices, approaches, and frameworks, by which such literacy skills can be utilized much more effectively, on their behalf.

Finally, this research wishes to contribute to the body of knowledge in the task of promoting and maintaining the Samoan sounds, understanding their situation in multiple contexts, and acknowledging new measures and skills for their upkeep and retention.

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*The Samoan proverbs were quoted from Schultz Alaga'upu faaSamoa, Samoan Proverbial Expressions (Pasifika Press). English translations by the OLA Puletini A'oga team – copyrights reserved.*

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Ia faamanuia tele atu le Atua i le agalelei.

Salā Sali Aukuso

2021

## Glossary

Afio, Lau ~	God; salutation of
Afioga	salutation of a ceremonial chief; God's word
aga fa'aaloalo	polite customs; etiquette
aga'ifanua	customs which are particular to a village or subgroup
aganu'u	customs or traditions by which a country is known by; culture macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner)
'āiga	general term for family, blood kins
'alefapeta	alphabet
ali'i	chiefly matai as opposed to orator
ali'i ma faipule	village chiefs and orators
alofa	love, compassion; the offering for the pastor
'anava	policy
a'oga a le faife'au	the pastor's school; short form A'oga Faifeau
a'oga tulagalua	full primary school
atunu'u	general term for a nation, country
'auala	right of access to a funeral (custom)
aualuma	association of mature untitled females of a village
'auga o 'aute	choice flowers
'aulotu	church parish, the congregation
'aumaga	the association of mature untitled males of a village
'autafafale	mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner)
'autalavou	youth group
ava	respect, honour
ava fatafata	relational principle of mutual deference between people or among groups, used to resolve issues, reciprocal respect
ekalesia	church, congregation, parishioners
fa'aaloalo	respect, politeness
fa'afaletui	a private conversation or discussion; study method
fa'afatāmanu	scaffolding
fa'afeagaiga	village pastor (salutation)
fa'alagiga	cultural salutations
fa'alavelave	a cultural occasion/event to which all kins contribute e.g. funeral
fa'alelotu	relating to the church, religious
fa'alogo	listening
fa'alupega	ceremonial salutations; honorifics of a country, place, people
fa'amama avega	easing the burden; a social strategy
fa'amatai	Samoa's traditional system of government; ethos and ethics of the matai system or ways of doing
fa'asamasamanoa	casually
fa'aSamoa	the social, cultural, political customs and traditions of Samoa
fa'asinomaga	collective identity, cultural identification
fa'atalanoaga	interview
fa'ataualofa	principle/practice of reciprocating a kind act
fa'ataulele'a	band of untitled men in a traditional Samoan village
fa'autaga loloto	deep view of the orator(s)
fa'autauta	prudence, tact

fafine	woman, female
fāiā	relation by kinship or affinity; right of access to a family
faiavā	a man married into the family; brother in law
faife'au	the village pastor, church minister
faigalotu	church politics/governance
faigamalo	government as run by a certain party/group or person
faiganuu	village business/politics
failotu	clergy, pastor
faletua	salutation for wife of a high chief or pastor
faleupolu	orator or group of; aka tulafale
fanua	land
fau	name of tree (hibiscus sp.), strainer made from its bark
fausaga	model, structure
fautua	to advise, counsel, guide, counsellor
feagaiga	title given to a girl in a covenantal pact between sister and brother in relation; in this symbolic pact the sister is accorded sacred status
fonime	phoneme
fono	meeting, council, forum
fono a matai	matai/village council
gagana aso uma	everyday language ; aka gagana masani
gagana faaaloalo	polite language
gagana faamatai	matai language system
gagana tautala	oral language
inafo	shoal of bonitoes
lafo	reward for making the official (ceremonial) speech; customary gift
lauamanu	band of fishing birds
lāuga	ceremonial speech usually by an orator
leo	sound
literasi	literacy
lotoinuu	exosystem (Bronfenbrenner)
lotonuu	patriotic, love of country
lotu	religion, church, church service, church denomination
mafua	school of whitebaits
mālō	the conquering party, government; the state
malosi o le nuu	cohort of young men of a village, also called 'aumaga/taulele'a
mana	a supernatural power or quality
manu	bird
matai	general term for traditional leaders who hold a title. Two types (1) chiefly or ceremonial (ali'i) and (2) orator matai (tulafale)
mata'itusi	letter
matua	parents
measina	cultural treasures of symbolic significance
moe	the orator's insight; sleep

mofime	morpheme
nofoilo i leo	phonological awareness
nu'u	village polity, country
nu'u Samoa	traditional Samoan village
paepae	raised stone platform of a house
palagi	European; white person; <i>l.f.</i> papālagi
Pasifika	Pacific people in Aotearoa
Pi Tautau	Alphabet Chart
poutū	main post of a Samoan house
pule	power, authority, governance, consensus
pulea'oga	school principal
pule a alii ma faipule	collective authority of matai (ceremonial chiefs and orators)
pulega	government – secular or religious, authority
pulega a matai	matai authority/government
sailiemanu	sought by the birds
sa'o	the principal matai of a Samoan family
sa'o'aumaga	son of leading chief and his party of untitled men
sa'otama'ita'i	daughter of a leading chief
silapela	syllable
sipela	spelling
soālaupule	to rule by consensus, to deliberate as equals
so'otaga	kin-based relations, genealogical ties
suafa	matai title, name (polite)
su'ega	test, assessment
talanoa	chat, converse
talanoa taualoa	formal discourse
tama'āiga	sons and daughters of noble bloodlines, or specifically from Samoa's traditional clans having claims to royal lineage
tamafafine	matrilineal line; the female siblings
tama'ita'i	the sisters and daughters of a village; general reference to all women; polite term for fafine
tamālii	the chiefly matai; ceremonial chief(s)
tapa'au	leading or titular chief(s) of a village/district
tautai	master fisherman
tautala	speaking
tautala leaga	speak in the k register
tautala lelei	speak in the t register
tulafono faavae sipela	orthography
tusitusi	writing
vaueli	vowel
kalama	grammar
karafime	graphemes
konesane	consonant

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## Abbreviations

AfL	Assessment for Learning
BP	Basic Proficiency (criteria)
CTOPP	Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing
EGRA	Early Grade reading and Assessment
EP	Early Proficiency (criteria)
ERO	Education Review Office
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
LMS	London Missionary Society
L1	a child's first language
L2	a child's second language
MESC	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture
OTJ	Overall Teacher Judgement
PA	Phonological Awareness
PIPA	Preschool and Primary Inventory of Phonological Awareness
SEGRA	Samoa Early Grade Reading and Assessment
SEN	Special Education Need
SEPA	Samoa Emergent Phonological Awareness
SP	Standard Proficiency (criteria)
SVR	Simple View of Reading
TOPA	Test of Phonological Awareness
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

Ua fa'aususeu le manu o le tuasivi -  
The bird of the heights is about to begin its day

### 1.0 Introduction

Phonological awareness is the ability to manipulate the sound structure of spoken language and is an important foundational ability for literacy development across languages (Gillon, 2017). Relatively little is known, however, about the phonological awareness ability of Samoan children and how this may influence their development of reading and writing skills. The research described in this thesis explored the phonological awareness skills of Samoan children aged between 5 to 7 years.

The latest international research reported that Samoan students, even after 3 full years of schooling, are not yet able to read with fluency and accuracy (World Bank, 2017). This impacts on their ability to understand what they read. The key findings of one international research confirmed the critical state of reading at this level. According to a report by the Samoan government's Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (2017) in relation to, the basic skills required for students to read and comprehend are not being developed, thus students are not reading to read or read for understanding.

The findings agreed with the low early reading achievement displayed in the Samoan results or invariably other developing countries for that matter (p.8). The overall results of the research mentioned identified a lack of decoding skills among them. For example, results of the letter sound subtest indicated that 15 percent of all students could not correctly identify a single letter sound. This included 20 percent from Year 1, 12 percent from Year 2 and 3 students. Similar results were observed for reading comprehension, with only 6 percent of students tested scored 80 percent and above (the international benchmark of 80 percent).

From reliable reports this was the first national assessment done since Samoa began directing their own education system (Communication with source1). Of much note was the fact that the assessment was prepared in Samoan. More importantly, it provided for the first time some measured indicators of the state of Samoa's early literacy. Due to the circumstances surrounding it, there has been some concerns raised among the parents and even the education

regime on the poor state of the results, as also reported by the media at the time (Personal communication with source1). Equally concerning were the issues of validity and reliability raised by several sources, which will be discussed later. On the other hand, the assessment seemed to affirm international findings, even local perception, that on average, the overall literacy for second language learners is low by world's standards (UNESCO Report 2020-2025, Meaola-Amituana'i, 2005).

Using assessment tools developed on a global scale is an international trend (Gillon, 2017). As the world focuses more towards assessment for learning (AfL), it is anticipated that the task of designing assessments must be relevant to the linguistic context and needs of learners (Black et al., 2004). The need for culturally responsive assessments (rather than translations of assessments) to support teaching and learning of Samoan children is real and urgent (Aukuso, 2002; Tuafuti, 2016; Amituana'i-Tolua, 2005; Galuvao, 2014; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017). Hence it is important that specific Samoan assessment tools are developed that reflect the children's prior knowledge and own literacy/literary environment (Tuafuti, 2016, Siilata, 2014). In this context, there is a need to feedforward the performance of the children through such measures to improve their future learning. One of the objectives of this research is to examine how its own proposed measures can be utilized effectively, so that they can be able facilitators in this task of improving early literacy learning for Samoan children.

To achieve this purpose, a new tool was prepared called the Samoan Emergent Phonological Assessment (SEPA for short), prepared specifically for the purpose; that is, to find out how well the Samoan Year 2 students performed in terms of their phonological awareness of Samoan sounds. The SEPA tool focused on multiple aspects of the phonological awareness construct. The children's performance was linked to their classroom curriculum which enables the identification of enablers of success in comparison to a sole focus on needs within this area. The data and results from the SEPA assessment formed the basis of the research analysis and findings. My first objective in this thesis is to describe the performance of Samoan children in different aspects of phonological awareness development.

Secondly, I will examine the enablers and barriers to the children's growth in phonological awareness and other literacy-related skills such as oral language. This includes focusing on the most obvious influencing variable, which is the environment. As a bilingual teacher for many years, I have met different types of children with various oral competencies and drew on a number of assumptions. One involved the question whether there is a correlation between the children's quality of environment and oral competency (oral

language, phonological awareness). While there has been evidence in support of such observation, I have not taken this for granted (Fletcher et al., 2006; Tuafuti, 2016). For that reason, I wanted to find out more about the existing practices in the home and in school which may promote or deter the children's oracy development. These can be *tapu* (traditional sanctions) enforced by the school, family, or the community. For example, some parents apply strict use of time at home for children's schoolwork; other parents hardly talk to their children other than delivering commands (Tuafuti, 2016). A culture of silence is then reinforced, first through the family narrative, secondly, school practice and systems (Lee Hang, 2011). As a former resident, my knowledge of the place and connection with the locals have reinforced many of these findings or general observations.

Thirdly, in setting out to collect my reading I was unable to identify any published research on oracy development in Samoa, conducted in Samoa, particularly in the context of Phonological Awareness. This motivated a group of researchers to devise a tool in Samoan for the purpose of assessment. After construction, the SEPA tool was then used to assess 100 Year 2 students, age 5 to 7 years in four Samoa primary schools. Having done the analysis, and reflected on the findings, I am satisfied that the SEPA tool has served the purpose it was designed for; as well, confident of its potential to promote teaching and learning in Samoan sounds. Some of the issues raised in the findings, in relation to the tool, are considered important for future research in the use of a child's first language in teaching and assessment.

Fourthly, as a proponent of bilingual education, I wish to reaffirm the findings of my previous study on the transferability of skills between languages. The assumption is that bilingual children with a solid grounding in phonological awareness skills, turn out to become good speakers, readers, and writers in both languages. This thesis therefore will provide important information regarding biliteracy development for children in Samoa, compared with their peers in New Zealand.

Finally, observing all the above, I am interested to know if a child's early start with sounds can lead to a lifelong interest in reading. Many Pacific children, including Samoan, are not keen readers for reasons that research ascribed mainly to socio-cultural factors (Meaola-Amituana'i, 2005, Pouono-Alexander, 2010). That is another research. I am only interested in forming an assumption or making a prediction based on the findings of this study. Research have agreed on the long-term benefits of strong early literacy development for all children in their first language. This study is keen to provide important information regarding robust assessment practices in phonological awareness in the Samoan language. To this end,

enablers of strong phonological awareness and oral language development can be identified within the Samoan context, that will provide important information to enhance the literacy development of Samoan children in Samoa.

### **1.1 Aim of study**

The aim of the study is to gather normative data regarding the phonological awareness and oral narratives of 5-, 6- and 7-year-old children who have Samoan as a first language, first, in order to understand more about the development of foundational literacy knowledge in Samoan and secondly, to identify implications for improving early literacy instructions in Samoa and overseas learning contexts. The data will be collected from 100 participants who will be assessed using the SEPA Tool. Additional data were collected from five principals to substantiate the evidence pertaining to the children's performance.

### **1.2 My research questions**

This thesis will address the following research questions in turn:

1. What are the phonological awareness skills of Samoan children in Samoa in their second year of schooling?
2. What are the oral language skills of Samoan children in Samoa in their second year of schooling?
3. Are there any school specific factors that may influence phonological awareness and oral language for Samoan children in Samoa?
4. What is the role of leadership in the promotion of early literacy as an important foundation in the teaching pedagogy, classroom practice and school-related environment in Samoa?

### **1.3 The rationale**

There is little knowledge of the state of Samoan children's phonological awareness skills and oral narrative ability in their first language. Part of the problem is to do with the lack of research done on the subject. As far as this researcher is aware, only a few studies referred to early literacy in general particularly in transnational settings (Tanielu, 2004; Utumapu, 1998; Tuafuti, 2016; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017; Aiiloilo-Maka, 2018; Kolone-Collins, 2010; Sauvao, 1999; Aukuso, 2002). In the studies quoted, oracy was discussed in the context of the literacy development strategy.

For Samoa, the initiative came from outside in the form of a global strategy, called EGRA; adapted and introduced to Samoan schools in 2017 under the name SEGRA. Prior to that, a few New Zealand based research (Hamilton & Gillon, 2006; Ballard & Farao, 2008; Westerveld, 2014; Tavita & Aukuso, 2019), presented themselves as independent studies. Such a new undertaking in Samoan lea (reo) development has been the focus of current interest and activity among Samoan schools and the Samoan education system for that matter (Personal communications with sources 1, 2 and 3). This research is included in this mutual sharing of interest, where phonological awareness is the target of observation.

Since the missionaries established Western-based education in the Samoan islands, phonics has been the predominant method of teaching sounds. Its primary focus has been to help beginning readers better their skills at identifying the link between a letter and its sound to form letter sound correspondences and spelling patterns; such knowledge can be applied to advancing their reading skills (Bowers, 2020).

The argument was that there was a strong form of phonological awareness involved in the children's learning even unconsciously since then (Ehri, 2014). International research made note of a reciprocal relationship between phonics and phonological awareness (ibid.). The problem was, there were not any formal assessments available to measure this phenomenon. This agrees with local research that there has been little development noted on this aspect of literacy learning since Samoa became independent (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019; Ballard & Farao, 2008).

As the Samoan language becomes transnational, the demand for its presentation by means of original approaches and ways of doing has become more obvious, for example, adopting new skills to align with the goals of bilingual education that promotes the merits of additive bilingualism (Tuafuti, 2016; Aukuso, 2002). The fact that linguistic skills are transferable from one language to the other, is linked to the goals of this research.

Hence the consensus that phonics method and phonological awareness complement each other (Ehri, 2014). While phonics provides a young learner with mapping skills in letter-sound relationship, phonological and phonemic awareness on the other hand provide a stronger and better foundation for young learners to know and experience sounds holistically (Bowers, 2020). Creating an awareness of sounds in words is the foundation for good spelling and reading (Gillon & McNeill, 2007). Children who master such skills in their first language have proven to be successful also in the acquisition of a second language (ibid.).

Another important part of my interest in this research is to do with the shift in the pronunciation of the Samoan vowel sound that seems to have been more prominent in New Zealand and the diasporic community than in the mother country (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). An argument by the writers of the article, ‘The Samoan vowel shift: a phenomenon in phonetics and phonological awareness,’ alluded to the lack of awareness in Samoan sounds due to several factors or circumstances. For example, teaching practice is crucial because its impact on teaching and learning correct sounds can be huge in terms of the difference it makes for a minority language in an English-speaking environment (Taumoefolau, et al., 2002; Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). So far, there is relatively little knowledge shared on how these shifts and changes impact language development for the Samoan *leo*.

#### **1.4 Significance of study**

As Samoan families become more mobile, with more than half of its population residing overseas, learning the language or through the language is now done in bilingual/multilingual learning spaces. This demands new strategies in terms of new skills, new tools, and new practices. The same can be said for Samoa as a contemporary society. The introduction of the SEGRA, and the SEPA Tool are some of the first initiatives to do so for Samoa. Their impact and significance in the development of Samoa’s early literacy are yet to be realized. For the latter, the feedback from the findings has impacted this study in terms of the knowledge gaps I wish to examine.

This research will attempt to provide own response to the research questions hoping to contribute to the body of knowledge on this foundational aspect of literacy development. It also has direct implications for biliteracy development in Samoa and overseas as well.

## 1.5 My context of study

Samoa's modern education system is a product of the past in terms of its politics, economics and social forces involved. The outside forces had been instrumental in its development as the reader will find out in this part of the discussion.

### 1.5.1 The legacy of the missionaries

The mission period is marked from 1830 when the LMS (London Missionary Society) arrived in Samoa. This period is crucial in the history of the nation. Samoan tradition referred to a prophecy of a new era by a woman prophetess called Nafanua. When the missionaries arrived in Samoa, they committed to learning the indigenous language so that they could speak, write, and communicate with the respective society they worked with. The type of education that the missionaries had introduced was new to the indigenous people, quite different from what they've been used to, oral-oriented versus a print literacy system (Tanielu, 2004).

In 1834 the first simple readers in the Samoan language were carried out for reading and writing. As a new initiative made by the missionaries, the church began to consolidate its presence sufficiently to open village schools (Tuia & Schoeffel, 2016). When the translation of the Bible was completed in 1855 the mission started to endorse mass literacy in the indigenous language along with early numeracy skills, so that the population would confidently read the Bible (Tanielu 2004; Tupolo-Tauaanae, 2014; Tuia & Schoeffel 2016). Some of the early strategies that these schools used in their programmes were memorisation by observation, copying, chanting, and rote-learning. Some of these strategies are still maintained since the missionaries who introduced them (Tanielu, 2004).

Formal education was introduced in 1840s by the English missionaries. First, they set up schools to train young men to become clergymen. The London Missionary Society (LMS) established Malua in 1844, the Wesleyan mission established own in 1857 at Savaii. Similar institutions for young unmarried women were also set up by the same missions. The graduates of these schools became the first ex-officio teachers of Samoan literacy in the villages. Not only were they spiritual mentors but soon became language tutors of literacy and numeracy at the national level. Soon the practice became institutionalised in what has become known as A'oga Faifeau (The Pastor's School) (Tanielu, 2004). Research in church history noted that many of the Malua graduates were sent as missionaries to Papua New Guinea and other Melanesian, Micronesian and some Polynesian neighbours too.

These early local missionaries became literacy teachers of their new church communities too, apart from their roles as spiritual mentors.

Overall, the legacy of the missionaries in relation to the Samoan language is well documented. Samoan as a written language is their most notable contribution, with the Samoan Bible as lasting evidence. Before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the adult population of Samoa have become literate, this is due largely to the village pastor's schools (Tanielu, 2004; Tui'ai, 2012). Such empowerment of the adult population no doubt has had a lasting impact on Samoa's language development, particularly for the younger population that followed. Even during the German administration in Samoa (1900-1914), the churches had continued to deliver own educational services in all parts of the country.

### **1.5.2 The Pastor's school (A'oga Faife'au)**

The development of early literacy skills has been the focus of many studies as literature affirmed. Every country has its unique experience, as in the case of the Pastor's school for Samoa itself. The early missionaries of the London Missionaries Society (LMS) were pioneers in the development of early literacy using the Samoan language. Their goal to spread the Christian message on the population motivated them to become educators, resource makers and promoters of the language. Soon literacy teaching became part of the LMS work through the *faife'au* (pastor) in villages. The Wesleyan mission joined in the work, and established own schools, in the same way as the LMS. So the missionaries took up the task of training a selected group of young Samoan men to become village pastors, who in turn taught literacy to the population. Their legacy was the Pastor's school (A'oga Faife'au) (Tanielu, 2004).

The curriculum involved a basic introduction into the Samoan Alphabet; teaching the phonemes and letter sounds to the new entrants was basic instructions. Phonics was the popular method of teaching at this early stage (Tanielu, 2004; Leauanae Tupolo, 2014; Aiiloilo-Maka, 2018). Following on this induction to sounds was reading. The only resource for this purpose was the Bible. Simple texts in the Bible were selected. I recalled that there was not much decoding to be had in terms of breaking a word into blends or components; for example, where a child got stuck with a word, the tutor will model the pronunciation, which the child emulated and then moved on to the next word. Also, while spelling was modelled, it was not part of the literacy norm. Noted earlier, the glottal stop was not even part of the spelling. Rather, the focus had been solely on words and their pronunciations.

The children's oracy was reinforced by rote learning. Reciting biblical verses became the norm, along with singing using church hymns. The development of oracy was boosted by White Sunday; a yearly event in which children lead a church service that involves the recital of verses, singing hymns and re-enacting bible stories as their parents watch on (Tanielu, 2004; Fouvaa, 2013; Dickie & Macdonald; 2011). The White Sunday is still very much part of a young Samoan's initiation into a world of literature and learning in their own language. It was also through the Pastor's school that many Samoan children were introduced to assessment. Children were assessed at the year's end based on the knowledge and skills they had acquired. The assessment system became quite organised in which the denomination's headquarters were involved. For the LMS or EFKS as known today, assessments for senior classes involved a cluster of villages within a district (matagaluega). In total, these assessments were an integral part of their learning alongside the government's own. Many young children had a first experience of assessments in the Pastor's School, Sunday School, before they enter government schooling.

Research have attested to the valuable contribution of the Pastor's School to promoting literacy in the Samoan language (Tanielu, 2004; Dickie & McDonald, 2011; Fouvaa, 2011; Vague, 2014). Not to mention the pastoral role of a village pastor in their spiritual development. From this point on begins the socialization in terms of value systems - Christian values, along with Samoan's own. From the Pastor's school, the young children are immersed in their language, their culture and religion. The Pastor's School has gradually lost its influence as the government has taken on the responsibility of education. Instead, many pastors and their wives have taken on A'oga Amata (Early Childhood Education), which is a blessing to the language. The legacy of the Pastor's school is still carried on by several village pastors, in the rural villages mostly.

### **1.5.3 The colonial legacy**

Under the German Administration, Malifa was established in 1908 as a government school for the native children. A boarding school was added in the same compound the following year for sons of matai. A Samoan pastor was assigned by Governor Solf to be the headmaster. The school was conducted in Samoan. Dr Solf adopted a very liberal approach to language learning, even allowing German children to attend the Samoan school (Tanielu, 2004). Such an approach was reflective of Dr Solf, and his successor Dr Shultz attitude towards the Samoan language, both were competent speakers of Samoan, and drive to

preserve the native culture also. In other terms, the promotion of the Samoan language could only be reinforced during the German Administration. This soon changed when New Zealand took over the administration of Samoa.

New Zealand took over from the Germans in 1914 (Field, 1987). They soon stamped their own authority in terms of new institutions and systems including education. Malifa was again the focus of education activity. In contrast to the German language policy, the New Zealand authority obviously favoured English. Even during the Mau resistance, the development of Samoa's infrastructure still went on, particularly when a new Labour government found favour with Samoa's grievances (Field, 1987). By then Samoa has come under trusteeship of the League of Nations, and 27 years later a mandate of the United Nations, under New Zealand jurisdiction. Since then, the focus on education development had become more intense, as the new goal was to prepare Samoa for self-autonomy. The wish for formal education that includes the whole country was strongly conveyed to the New Zealand authority (Afamasaga (2002)). The intention was not so much as to change but rather to continue with the existing system.

Education under New Zealand followed the New Zealand curriculum. The leadership was composed of the New Zealand personnel. Both the Samoan and English were used for instructions from Primary up to college, though emphasis was given to English (Ma'ia'i, 1957). At colleges in Apia, the Samoan language was banned from the classrooms. A number of internal reviews raised the issue, some questioning the rationale of this policy (Ibid.). As a result, most of the generation who were taught under New Zealand were more knowledgeable of the New Zealand geography than their own backyard (Ibid). Tanielu (2004) maintained that the goal of the New Zealand government was to provide the locals with basic life skills education for them to become able members of their community (Tanielu, 2004). Later, a few were selected for public service roles when Samoa's aspiration for political independence soon became a reality; many of them were sent to New Zealand for training for this particular purpose. With political independence as the goal, the first college for training teachers, the Samoa Teacher's Training College, was established in 1938. Its main purpose was to train new teachers to meet the demand in rural villages. The New Zealand Curriculum was used for this training (ibid.). The first crop of pioneering teachers was sent to New Zealand for further training. Government-funded schools started with A'oga Tulaga Lua (Grade 2 Schools) across the country in 1939 (ibid.).

Samoa became an independent nation in 1962 (Roebeck-Tuala et.al., 2010). Even then Samoa's school system continued with the New Zealand curriculum. This was the most relevant choice at the time, as Samoa sought to find a system of its own. While the goal of education for most students was related to finding a clerical job in Apia or overseas, there were others who aspired to better paid jobs such as lawyers, doctors, and so forth. The New Zealand curriculum and institutions can only facilitate these. Samoa needs a workforce and staying with the New Zealand system was perhaps the only choice. Fanaafi Ma'ia'i was the first Samoan scholar to study overseas at a prestigious university and returned home with an advanced Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Her topic of study was bilingual education. Later on, she became the first Samoan Director of Education. In this position, she introduced changes to the system, for example, designing an integrated curriculum that comprised the first language and the culture (Aiono-Le Tagaloa, 1996). Her legacy in terms of these early initiatives is still felt in today's classroom. For example, the introduction of a free 'accent marks' writing to literacy development. Under her leadership the Samoan language thrived, leading to the development of a curriculum and guidelines to teach Samoan both in Primary and Secondary schools.

Basically, primary education consisted of 10 years of schooling, with four in Primers (equivalency of Junior classes in New Zealand system), four years in the Standard Classes (equivalency of Middle classes in New Zealand system) and two years in the Form Classes (equivalency of Upper Primary Year 7 & 8 in New Zealand System). It was clear from the start the need for better resources, especially manpower in terms of qualified teachers in all taught subjects, which provided legitimacy for continuous partnership with New Zealand. Hence the Overseas Development Aid was important in the early years after independence, as Samoa, like many of its South Pacific neighbours, was not able to provide fully for its own educational needs (Afamasaga, 2007).

From New Zealand to the present, its education policy has been influenced largely from outside, including international agencies and NGOs (Afamasaga, 2002; Coxon & Baba, 2003; Jourdan & Salaun, 2013; Sanga, 2005b; Taufe'ulungaki, 2002; Thaman, 2002). The conditional financing led to what Jourdan & Salaun (2003) called 'a homogenisation of reforms in these Pacific nations, and dependency of the independent' (Jourdan & Salaun, 2013). Tooley (2008) highlighted this process of dependency and a lack of discretion in relation to the provision of aid finance for basic education (cited in Tu'i, 2015, p.38).

Samoa's first Curriculum Development unit of the Department of Education was established in 1971, disassembled in 1978 and then reinstalled in 1985. The importance of Samoan language and culture was strongly acknowledged and supported by the government at the time. The local resources were in high demand in terms of cultural materials produced to support teaching and learning.

## **1.6 The Education System in Samoa**

Like other Pacific nations who went through colonization, Samoa has adopted and adapted its education system from that of New Zealand. Since then, many changes have taken place. Acknowledging many of the gaps had been the focus of the Samoan leadership, from Dr Fanaafi Ma'ia'i to recent developments in Samoa's education system. The latest guidelines have put stress on bilingual education and a pedagogy that aspires to put the child at centre stage (Afamasaga, et al., 2012).

Today Samoa's education system follows a dual medium bilingual strategy in the delivery of its curriculum. Students are taught in Samoan in the first six years, English is introduced orally during the third year. Then followed with a 50-50 Samoan/English split strategy in the fifth and sixth year. In the seventh and eighth years, English is the language of instruction. Students will take a national examination after eight years of education. The purpose of the exam is to rank students for selection into secondary schools. At secondary level, English is the medium of instruction. Samoan can be taken as a separate course. A student will spend five years in the secondary programme; the first three years as junior, the last two as senior. Students at this stage can progress by means of three examinations, two locally administered in collaboration with the South Pacific Board of Education Assessment authority. Year 13 students sit the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate Exam. Success at this point will boost their chances to enter university preparatory year. Samoa established its national university in 1984. The first degree, a bachelor's in Education, was offered in 1987. Since then, degrees in Samoan studies, English, commerce, geography, science, sociology have also been offered.

The Ministry of Education organisation follows the New Zealand design. There is the Director of Education supported by four assistant directors. There are 22 educational districts and 23 field administrators who oversee staff performance and other such administrative roles. There are 139 primary schools, 21 junior secondary schools, 4 senior secondary schools. In addition to, 38 non-governmental schools are run by churches mainly

with own boards of trustees and governing systems. In village and district schools, there are school committees, and traditional authority who act as custodians. Together with government, they share the responsibility of financing their developments. The government however is liable for the teachers' salaries as well as support workers (Samoa Development Strategy, 2016).

The development of Early Childhood Education started late, in 1972 as a local initiative (Communication with the late Iole Tagoilelagi, 2013). Early proponents were church ministers and their spouses mainly, who nurtured it without much say from the government. This was not a big ask given the fact that churches have been the traditional centres of learning for generations. The first ECE nests then were established within the church's own structures and using own resources. Perhaps the lack of enthusiasm from the community in its early days was due to the fact that there was the pastor's school established already (Ibid.). The strong presence of the EFKS also became a hindrance for other churches to join in (ibid.). The initiative took another step further, when contacts were made with Niue, American Samoa, Fiji, and New Zealand for a regional collaboration (ibid.).

Almost 50 years on, a World Bank initiative released its findings on the state of Early Education in Samoa. Under its program PEARL (Pacific Early Age Readiness and Learning), a census of children ages 3 to 5 was conducted. Using the measure SEHCI (Samoa's version of the Human Capability Index), the children were assessed in terms of their physical, verbal, cultural/spiritual, social/emotional perseverance, approaches to learning, numeracy/concepts, and literacy (reading and writing). The report affirmed that preschool attendance did not make much of a difference in the outcome of a child's learning success. This is further affirmed in a latest report, titled Samoa's Second Voluntary National Review, which highlighted a number of pressing issues such as low enrolment due to low prioritisation, limited access and costs. Samoa's rate is among the lowest in the region. The report said that while they seem to develop well in terms of their physical development, verbal communication, and approaches to learning, they are not doing as well in reading, writing skills, perseverance, and cultural/spiritual knowledge (Samoa Observer, 22/3/2021). The report noted the negative impact of non-attendance for many children later on in their education. Nonetheless, the positive impact of the role of many caregivers and the home in laying the foundation for success in the classroom, could not be more commended. A law was passed in 2019 making it mandatory for all children to attend an early childhood education centre at the age of four.

## **1.7 Thesis Overview**

### **Chapter 1 Introduction**

Introduces the topic, goal of study and rationale behind its pursuing as a study of importance in the area of Pacific research. As well, my context of study which is Samoa.

### **Chapter 2 Theoretical framework**

Introduces my theoretical framework called Sailiemanu in the context of selected approaches both indigenous and global. I emphasised a holistic perspective which attempt to bring together the best of what is relevant for children of bicultural and bilingual backgrounds.

### **Chapter 3 Literature review**

The literature that underpins the conceptual framework is discussed herewith, addressing the basic features and concerns relating to early literacy development affecting Pacific children. Special focus is on a few studies on the introduction of Phonological Awareness using the Samoan language.

### **Chapter 4 Research methodology**

The reader is introduced to the research methodology. A mixed methods approach is selected to align with my conceptual framework. The participants and schools are introduced.

### **Chapter 5 Samoan phonology & Orthographic system**

This chapter provides the reader with a comprehensive description of the Samoan phonological and orthographic systems.

### **Chapter 6 The SEPA Tool and Retell Task: development & implementation**

The SEPA Tool is introduced in terms of its rationale, development and implementation. The analysis results are presented herewith.

## **Chapter 7 The school principals' interviews**

Herewith is a collective feedback from the principals of four schools involved in the research. The data from the interviews were assessed based on a list of priorities or concerns, which helped inform an overall understanding of literacy in Samoan schools.

## **Chapter 8 Findings, Discussion & Implications**

Presented herewith is a list of discussion points drawn from the results of the analysis and findings. It is closed off with suggestions of their implications for the improvement of early literacy, using effective strategies.

### **1.8 Summary**

In this chapter I attempted to provide a general overview of my intention for this thesis. I have pointed out some of the gaps in the literature on emergent literacy, which has become the focus of my study, particularly for Year Two level. Due to the lack of research or assessment tools, the SEPA Tool was created for the purpose, 100 students were assessed from a cohort of three state schools and one private. My aim of study was to get more understanding about their development at this level, and hopefully identify issues that may improve their learning in their home language. Four research questions have been selected as the basis for the thesis analysis. The interview questions were prepared for the collection of additional data from the principals.

## Chapter 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

O le manu o le tuasivi e fagota i tai e lua –  
The bird of the heights fishes in both tides

#### 2.0 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical framework, Saliemanu, that has been selected to explore the phonological awareness and oral language skills of Samoan children in this thesis. Vinz (2015) asserted that the role of theories is a key component for any research. “Theories are developed by researchers to explain phenomena, draw connections and make predictions. They are based on existing knowledge, observations and ideas” (p.2). I follow this set of criteria closely in describing the procedures utilised in this study; firstly, with emphasis on a theory’s explanation, secondly, the way it draws connections with the problem and finally its usefulness in predicting the outcomes. Before I introduce my theoretical concept, Saliemanu, I wish to provide a backdrop by means of an overview of some of the most relevant theoretical models of the relationship between foundational literacy and the two components mentioned, phonological awareness and oral language, in early literacy development. The selected models are representative and by no means definitive either.

Later on in this discussion, approaches or theories of development are briefly introduced as well as aligned with my Saliemanu framework, in terms of their relevance and priority. They are representative of many traditional strong ecological models on children’s development globally.

#### 2.1 Simple View of Reading Model

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) (Hoover & Gough, 1990) is a theoretical model that describes the cognitive skills underpinning reading comprehension. The SVR suggests that efficient reading comprehension involves two cognitive skills: decoding and listening comprehension. Decoding is the process involved in recognising letters and words and then comprehension involves linking the decoded words with their underlying meaning.

Individuals who experience difficulty in either of these areas will likely experience difficulty in learning to read efficiently (Stah & Yaden, 2004). The latter revealed, “children who do not have this phonological insight do not make sense of decoding instruction or of the relation between written and spoken words and thus fail to learn to read” (p.153). As such, this thesis focuses on two key components from the SVR in Samoan children in Samoa. Phonological awareness (awareness of individual sounds and ability to manipulate those sounds) is a key factor underpinning decoding development (Gillon, 2017). Oral language is the primary factor underpinning the language comprehension side of the model. Having tools that can identify Samoan children’s strengths in these two key areas will be very useful for ensuring that their early literacy growth is robust.

## 2.2 Reading Comprehension

To be consistent with the SVR, children need to integrate many skills and knowledge in order to establish a strong reading comprehension. This includes their ability to speak (oracy), master vocabulary and grammar knowledge, as well as the capacity to make inferences, display efficient memory skills, as well as the ability to monitor their understanding of what they read (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). A common skill that is highlighted across the various strong models of reading development is phonological awareness (Milankov et al, 2021; McBride-Chang, 2004).

## 2.3 Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the knowledge of, and skills related to how spoken words are made up of individual sounds (Gillon, 2017; Gillon & McNeill, 2010). Primarily, it is an auditory cognitive skill that involves understanding the system of speech sounds that combine to create words and underpin spoken and written language (ibid.). A child who has acquired phonological awareness skills can identify, think about and manipulate sounds within words with not much difficulty. By contrast, a child who hasn’t acquired or mastered these skills will have problems in reading and writing, literature testified. Phonological awareness includes the ability to identify syllables, rimes, and phonemes. For examples: one syllable word *dog*, two syllable word (*ta-ble*), three syllable word (*ex-pen-sive*). rimes examples: *b-all*, *c-all* *f-all*, and phonemes examples: sun (*/s/ /u/ /n/*), mat (*/m/ /a/ / t /*), *bed* (*/b/ /e/ /d/*) (Gillon, 2017). Fundamentally, it is a skill identified with the acquisition of early literacy skills successfully (McLachlan et al.; 2013) as children with strong phonological

awareness become skilful at using a ‘sounding out’ strategy in their reading and spelling. Phonological awareness skills emerge in a developmental sequence from awareness of larger units, such as syllables, through to the ability to segment words into phonemes together to form words (Gillon, 2017; Westerveld, 2014, Sutherland, 2006; McBride-Chang, 2004).

Within English, the most critical element of phonological awareness, is at the phoneme level (i.e., awareness of single sounds in words) particularly for school-aged children (Gillon, 2017). This level of awareness is also the most complex aspect of phonological awareness that children acquire and is the most predictive of their developing decoding skills in English. It follows that phonological awareness assessments for school aged (English speaking) children should include multiple elements of phoneme awareness to provide a full picture of a child’s skills and to be able to track a child’s growth over time. Assessment tools that include more basic phoneme awareness tasks such as initial phoneme identity tasks (e.g., finding a picture that starts with a target sound) alongside more complex phoneme awareness tasks such a phoneme segmentation and blending are recommended. Given the nature of the syllable structure of the Samoan language, it is likely to be necessary to track both phoneme awareness ability at the basic and complex levels and syllable segmentation ability to gain a full understanding of children’s development in this area.

It is critical that Samoan phonological awareness assessments are designed with the nature of the linguistic features of the Samoan language in mind (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019) Further, it is important that the phonological awareness skills of Samoan children are examined across the construct of phonological awareness (rather than relying on an isolated measure). Chapter 5 in this thesis presents a summary of the linguistic features of Samoan as a context to understanding the development of the SEPA tool which is at the heart of the research project. To understand that individual speech sounds can be represented by written symbols is part and parcel of phonics method or letter-sound knowledge (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, 1998). This is also an important area to track in children’s early literacy development for educational purposes (Milankov et al, 2021).

## **2.4 The role of oral language and importance in literacy development**

Oral language is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings (Snow et al., 1998); the basis of most human interactions in life (ibid.). We use oral language to convey information to other people, develop mutual

understanding, express ideas, and identify and define our belonging to our particular social group. As highlighted earlier in the chapter, the Samoan culture is steeped in oral language tradition. The ERO report (2017) stated, “Oral language interactions build children’s understanding of the meaning of a larger number of words, and of the world around them. This understanding is crucial to their later reading comprehension and literacy in general. Early language skills also predict later academic achievement and access in adult life.” (p.7). Hill (2010) defined “oral language as one mode of meaning making alongside visual, auditory, gestural and spatial forms of communication” (p. 4). It is closely related to thinking and understanding. Vygotsky (1978) for example, attested to the importance of learning through interactions with others using a spoken language. At its most basic level, oral language is about communicating, and it involves a process of utilizing, thinking, knowledge and skills to speak and listen effectively (Rogoff, 1990). As such, it is central to living and human well-being to say the least.

Oral language encompasses two components, identified as Expressive and Receptive (McIntyre et al (2017). Expressive language (speaking) refers to the use of words and nonverbal processes to share meaning with others. Receptive language (listening) is the process of understanding of what has been expressed. McIntyre explained that listening can occur even when no sounds are heard, that is by taking note of pitch, tone, stress, and use of gesture to understand a speaker’s meaning. It is important to note the relationship between a speaker and a listener and how it influences the spoken words, for example, when speaking with an adult, a student is expected to make eye contact and to speak in sentences, but when talking with their friends they would use more colloquial language and non-verbals (ibid.) Resnick and Snow (2009) commented that “Speaking and listening are academic, social, and life skills that are valued in school and the world, (and) academically, children are judged in part, by what they say, and how they say it” (p. 2).

Many researchers have argued on the importance of oral language in early literacy development. They agreed that oral language can assure a solid foundation for the reading and writing skills that children will develop further on as they enter and progress through school (Bradfield et al., 2014; Hill, 2012; Hougén & Smartt, 2012; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Resnick & Snow, 2009). Children will utilise knowledge and skills of oral language in all aspects of their education in the classroom setting as they connect with other children and teachers, and throughout their lives as they grow up to become adults.

Roskos, Tabors and Lenhart (2009) proposed that children's proficiency in speaking and listening will guide the pathway for their reading and writing skills, and a combination of these language skills are the primary tool of the minds for all future learning. Oral language abilities are not only closely related to the development of early reading skills but there are also substantial long-term correlations with reading in the middle years of primary school (Dickinson & Tabors, 1991). Having a solid foundation in oral language will help children become successful readers and strong communicators as well as build their confidence and overall sense of wellbeing (ibid.). In such position, oral language becomes the underpinning foundation to strong reading comprehension development as also highlighted in the Simple View of Reading strategy that was introduced earlier in this chapter (ibid.).

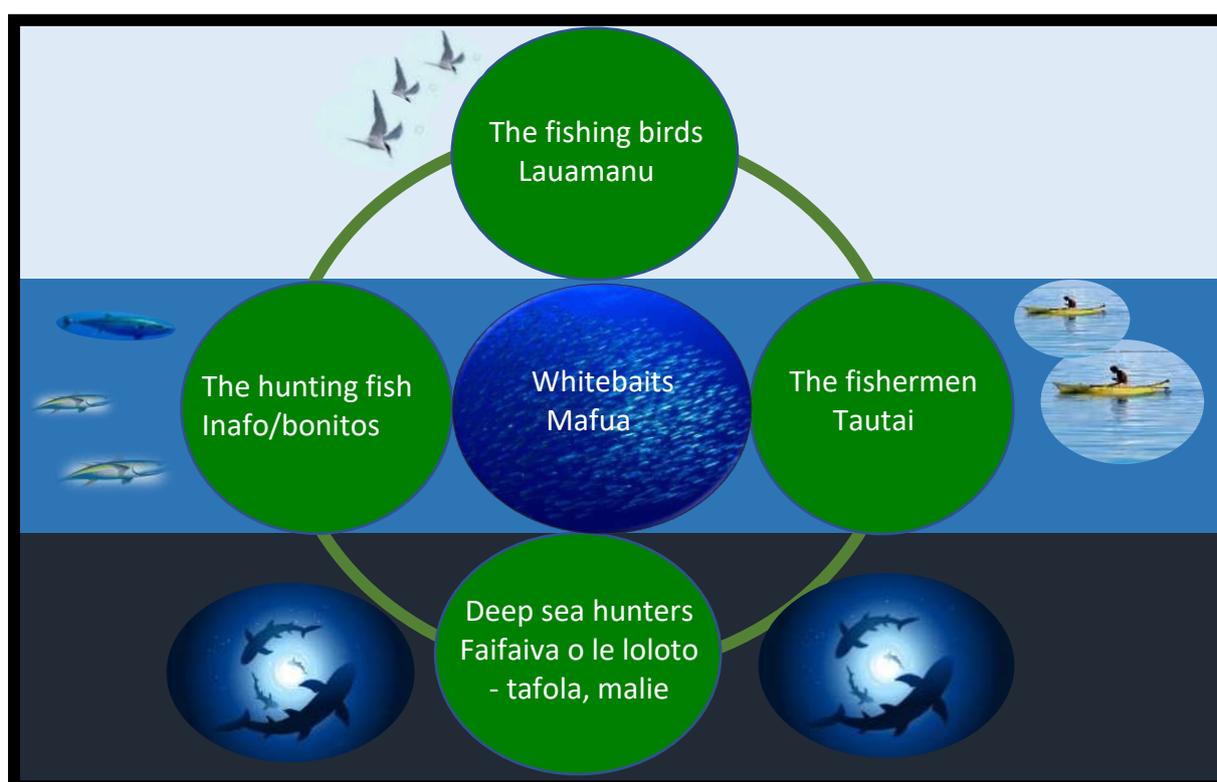
Oral language is also needed to negotiate social situations and create meaning of the world around children and more importantly accessing the curriculum. The importance of oral language for students of different cultural background should always be taken seriously into account; the Pacific languages for example are mostly oral oriented and anchored in their cultures. As of now, meaning is accessed mostly in reading and writing and from the perspective of a dominant culture which has more influence on the curriculum design. As implied in Resnick and Snow (2009) assertion, "All students should learn the rules of standard English but not in ways that tread on their heritage" (p.3).

## **2.5 Saliemanu Theoretical Framework**

Saliemanu is a theoretical approach which I will use along with other approaches to interpret the literature. Central to Saliemanu is the notion of making human connections by means of responsive pedagogy that addresses the underlying causes of the children's problems (Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber, 2015; Berryman et al., 2018). As a framework, it incorporates ideas from other models/approaches which look at the child's world holistically. Thus, the works of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Vygotsky (1978, 1962), Bialystok (2001) Gibbons, (2002, 2009) and Gillon (2017) are featured heavily in my interpretation. Saliemanu stresses the importance of a balanced power relations and their impact on a child's development. As demonstrated in Nature's own power relations, the ecosystem was made to be interdependent, like the fisherman in search of food (fish) whose search depends on the bird's own search, and so forth. Like a child's social environment, s/he is empowered through parents whose own empowerment depends on other factors

(Cummins, 2000). Imbalance occurs when this system of interdependence can no longer be sustained. For example, when parents make choices for their children which may not be fair to them, or governments imposing policies that affect children's rights to learning their languages. The need to maintain balance and equilibrium is important (Hunter & Hunter, 2018; Tui Atua, 2018).

**Figure 1. Saliemanu: A Dynamic Relational Approach**



Source @sailiaukuso

### 2.5.1 A Description of Saliemanu

We learnt from history that humans have had an intimate relationship with nature, depending on it in many ways for their survival including cognitive and educational growth. As an example, Samoan oral literature draws directly from its natural environment. Nature is a provider of life's lessons and teaching exemplars we still rely upon, a rich source of material for teaching and learning literally and symbolically. Physical observation of the natural habitat together with human interaction resulted in a vast collection of words that inform or reinforce their ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, truths and values, manners and etiquette (Maffi, 2005). Samoans have been great observers of nature which

subtle interpretation of the natural world make meanings of their human habitat. This information was stored as a collective wisdom of a people and used to enhance their arts and oratory for example (Tui Atua, 2003). Similarly, knowledge has always been viewed as a dynamic relation of biocultural diversity by the older generation. Maffi (2005) summed up the diversity of living as closely interconnected; that the biological, cultural and linguistic are key components by which such diversity is manifested.

Sailiemanu (*saili – e – manu*) means sought by the birds and a reference to a habit of the fishing birds. For example, birds such as the tern (*gogo*) went out looking for food in the deep sea. Their typical diet is whitebaits, or any of the various small fish such as sardines, that travel together in schools (Science Learning Hub; Herdrich, 2008). Predatory species such as the bonitos and other members of the Scombridae family share the same delicacy. They were out pursuing the same. The fishermen (usually a fishing party of men in groups) also went out hunting for bonito. The fishing birds hovering from above, provided the fishermen with information about the likely position of bonitos in the open sea, and made their move accordingly (Herdrich, 2008; Communication with Source 4). Below the surface, other sea-hunters, having sensed the commotion above, made their way to the surface; they needed the same feed too. All the four groups (birds, fishermen, bonitos, and other predatory fish) will converge on this particular spot, with the food (whitebaits) in the middle. Whichever group takes the initiative will immediately affect the other groups. For example, the birds will take advantage of their clearer aerial view, swooping down when the whitebaits come to the surface. This may force the whitebaits downward to the benefit of other sea predators. This in turn may disadvantage the bonitos and fishermen (Communication with Source 4).

Conversely, if the deep-sea predators attack first, the whitebaits may be forced to the top, to benefit the birds. Or if a fisherman has difficulty pulling in the first catch properly and the fish falls back to the sea; this will scare away the shoal. This human error is likely to impact all parties, especially the fishermen whose families and villages' daily sustenance depend on them. So, for all parties to experience success, there has to be a natural unforced collaboration in terms of good timing for nature to work harmoniously. This might involve whitebaits being blocked from all sides, and each party takes their share, leaving some whitebaits to further reproduce (Ibid.). While the bonitos may lose some of its members to the fishermen, many of them will have their fill to live another day. The fishermen and the birds will take their catch home to share with their families. This activity involving the

spontaneous interaction of humans and nature is something I relate to through Samoan sayings about fishing activity. From the beach I have watched the birds in action and knowing the story about the fishermen and the fish congregating in this act of interdependence daily, is a fine example of a holistic approach at work.

Nowadays the fishermen use bigger and faster boats but how they fish still follow the traditions of their ancestors. As a metaphor Saliemanu describes a phenomenon that both teachers and children can relate to anywhere in the world. Where flocks of birds are dipping in the ocean it is about human and nature interacting dynamically.

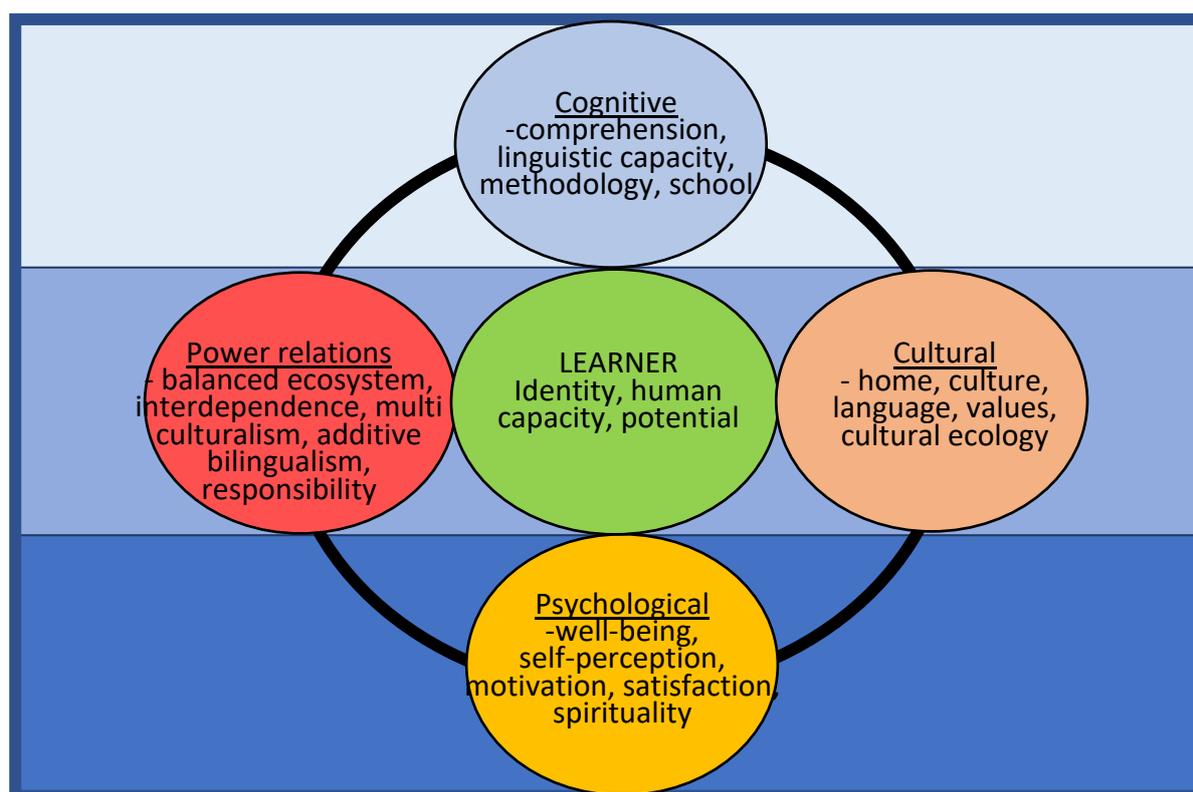
### **2.5.2 Interpretation of Saliemanu Approach**

The Saliemanu approach stands to represent the Samoan worldview that is holistic and child centred. The figure shows five dimensions representing five groups of players interacting in a real-life scenario. The analogy of a child to the whitebaits in the centre of the activity may not be consistent with the various motives involved in the natural world; rather the essence is about focus of attention. First, the learner in the centre is the focus of attention in this cycle of literacy development. Here the image of fish encased is central to the interpretation that stands to represent the learner as someone getting caught in the middle of an interdependent environment. Like the small fish, his or her survival and continuous nurturing depends as much on the dynamic interaction with the other four systems/players. The relationship is meant to be reciprocal and free. The learner will strive to build their own identity and fulfil their human capacity as best as they can – which is the goal of any good dynamic education system. Vygotsky strongly argued that while children are active in their own development, they also rely on adults and others around them. While a child is the centre of attention, he cannot develop independently of his social cultural environment (Berk, 1997). Like others, Vygotsky supported the role of both nature and nurture in mediating a child's overall upbringing. In other terms, child development cannot be separated from its social and cultural contexts (Vialle et al., 2000).

In this research, I support the importance of prior knowledge in devising theory hence the critical question is, which knowledge and whose knowledge? I believe that many theories are developed on borrowed knowledge that do not quite serve the intended purpose of their construction (Macfarlane, et al 2015; Manning, 2009). I have mentioned the problem of children whose second language is English, who come from minority cultures and whose own knowledge systems are denied to them when they enter state schools. The same can be

said about observations. Observations in terms of mainstream approaches and strategies, particularly where English is used, may not be the best choices to make connections with and to support learning for children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This is also true of ideas. Most of the ideas found in educational pedagogy serve mainstream knowledge and are foreign to a child (Manning, 2017). The outcome is obvious, many children will find learning much more challenging than they should be (Tuafuti, 2016). Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Webber (2015) referred to the importance of using culturally responsive approaches that are relevant to children's own cultural background. These include ideas, concepts that are meaningful to them in whatever learning contexts they engage with. For example, any psychological impact must consider a child's interests and motivation to read as well as their capacity for learning (Bialystok, 2001).

**Figure 2. Sailiemanu Interpretation.**



Source @sailiaukuso

The psychological dimension also focuses on the overall well-being of the child. How they perceive themselves, motivate themselves, be satisfied individuals as well as

building self-approval is crucial to survival (Gillon, 2017). I have mentioned spirituality as an integral part of the children's makeup. This is often ignored in learning models (Tuafuti, 2016). The concept of spirituality is succinctly described as 'the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things' (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2000). Spirituality is an important component in the Samoan worldview of human development (Tanielu, 2004; Amituana'i-Toloa, 2005; Tuafuti, 2016; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017; Tui Atua, 2007; 2009). Spirituality is viewed as crucial in a Pacific child's overall human development. Tui Atua (2009b) among others asserted the role of spirituality as central in a child's identity and sense of belonging. To him the concept of self is only meaningful when discussed or acted out between individuals and others. All social and cultural activities embody a spiritual dimension that also needs to be nurtured. Bone (2008) described an everyday spirituality in research of young early childhood learners, which she identified as spiritual witness, spiritual in betweenness, and spiritual elsewhere. Her argument is everyday spirituality permeates early childhood contexts and the curriculum must be approached on that understanding.

The cultural dimension depicts the ecological socio-cultural worldview, which is the key to successful nurturing, particularly in the early stage of development. Proponents of constructivism agree mainly that the home is the primary space in which children are first immersed in their cultural artifacts through languages (Dewey, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Milankov et al, 2021). The constructivist approach favours a child's exposure to real life experiences and opportunities to develop reading skills. These include home and family literacy practices (e.g., joint book reading experiences and access to a rich array of reading material) as well as the provision of early childhood education and school based – literacy learning opportunities and instruction (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). Additional skills that are important for reading include vocabulary knowledge, development of inferencing skills and self-monitoring of reading activities (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme & Snowling, 2010). These skills are influenced by the cognitive, psychological, and ecological domains specified in the Component Model of Reading (CMR).

The cognitive dimension gives particular emphasis on the pivotal role of cognition and its development in children's learning. Cognition is the term used to describe a range of neurophysiological processes that link with learning languages and literacy development (Gillon, 2017). For example, attention, memory, sensory perception, and thinking. It is central to their linguistic development and understanding of the world around them

(Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2001; Gillon, 2017). Such capacity can be improved in terms of skills that require the accommodation of the environment or the ecosystem for that matter (ibid.). The analogy of the birds as representing the cognitive dimension is symbolic; birds have the vantage point of perspective compared with others; cognitive development is key to language acquisition and skills associated with comprehension, linguistic capacity building and developing methodology (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2001; Gillon, 2017).

The ecological power relations dimension is represented by the hunting fish, a competitor in nature's daily struggle for survival. Power relations is an integral part of any educational landscape, especially where the issues of minority languages and their usefulness are considered (Cummins, 2000; Manning, 2017). Just like the natural world itself, the strive for power and control in the human world is decisive in any sphere of human activity, including education (ibid.). Politics has played a large part in the employment of minority languages in multicultural contexts for better or for worse (Cummins, 2001). Countries which education policies support bilingualism and such culturally responsive approaches are much better off than those which do not (ibid.). The same countries which policies emphasised inclusion of all students regardless of ability or handicap (UNESCO, 2008). Globalisation also has a tremendous impact on the education systems of small developing democracies, and therefore must be considered as a critical factor in power relations or the task of choosing effective strategies and resources (ibid; Smith, 1999).

Being inclusive means having an open mind to indigenous approaches (Smith, 1999). Smith (1999) argued about the needs for Pacific indigenous people to tell their own stories and using them as frameworks of own investigation and interpretation (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Martin (2016) also asserted that an indigenous approach to narrative research is culturally relevant and responsive (Lee, 2009; Bishop, 1996). Such a dimension also promotes a holistic outlook that is the basis of several indigenous approaches, for example, the Braided Rivers (Macfarlane et.al., 2015) from the Maori worldview, and others.

Finally, as an ecological approach of human and the natural world interdependence, the Saliemanu framework is meant to accommodate a wide variety of contemporary issues/concerns such as climate change, pollution and so forth in language development, even from its early stages. Young children need to be exposed early to such issues to be able to relate better to their physical environment because their survival depends on it (Gillon & Macfarlane, 2017; Tui Atua, 2007).

## 2.6 Summary

This chapter presented the Saliemanu, my conceptual framework. I have explained in detail its rationale and intention as an inclusive array of many theoretical positions from the literature that align with my own perspective. The Saliemanu stands to represent a holistic-ecological perspective that puts the children in the centre of any educational activity. Among the five spheres (dimensions), they are meant to be nurtured through a dynamic interaction of the five stakeholders. The interpretation of each dimension was presented in detail in the perspectives of other ecological models and theories. In sum, the Saliemanu framework is representative of the highly favoured ecological models/ approaches, or in this study, from a Samoan perspective. It acknowledges the broad array of cultural, linguistic, ecological, political, cognitive factors in the backdrop of children's learning in foundational skills such as phonological awareness. Although the focus of this thesis is on the cognitive features of phonological awareness and oral language, the interwoven nature and impact of these other domains cannot be ignored. This is particularly pertinent when drawing implications regarding the question of how the children's learning can be enhanced in their own learning space and context genuinely

## Chapter 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

O lupe sa vao eseese ua fuifui faatasi –  
The pigeons from their own woods have come together

#### 3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the theoretical backdrop for this thesis. In this chapter, the literature underpinning this research is reviewed and the rationale for the research questions is provided. The chapter begins with a review of the Samoan context, followed by the literature on phonological awareness of which pioneering work emerged in New Zealand. In addition, several research studies about Pasifika early literacy are sought for their perspectives.

One of the main features of the review is the SEGRA assessment, which findings have been published and which provided another lens into the subject as well as employed as a comparative tool for my purpose. In saying that, I have been selective in my choice due to the limited scope of my study. Finally, I will present my rationale and point out the significance of my study to the body of research.

First, literacy is a vital part of a child's overall development. It is the key to a successful life at every step of human growth, even survival, in a modern world (McLachlan et al., 2013). It involves laying the foundation or its building blocks upon which a child can enable speaking, listening, understanding, watching, and drawing (Hattie, 2013; Falconer, 2017; Keefe & Kopeland, 2011; Martello, 2007). This gives them a good head-start with exploring texts, establishing reading skills and writing later in their development. Early literacy is focused primarily on foundation laying, though researchers have argued that literacy development is much more dynamic, due to diverse abilities of children and the many environmental influences on a child's learning (ibid.). The concepts of *fa'alogo* (listening), *tautala* (speaking), *faitau* (reading) and *tusitusi* (writing) have been the mainstay of Samoan literacy since the language was encoded by the missionaries for reading and writing purposes (Mara et al., 1994; Tagoilelagi, 1995; Tui Atua, 2004). Before that, oracy and a language of cultural symbols and signs have been the media by which literacy

development was conducted as far as teaching and learning was concerned (Tui Atua, 2006 cited in Aiiliilo-Maka, 2018). Hence the reference that “literacy is the ability to converse, understand and make meaning of the environment that elicit emotional, social, and cognitive thinking” (Ibid., p.4; Le Tagaloa, 1996).

### **3.1 Development of Phonological Awareness in Samoan**

Only a few studies have focused on phonological awareness aspects of Samoan. For the past 30 years the focus has been mostly on lexical, prosody, semantic, syntax and orthographic aspects of the Samoan language. During this time, phonological awareness has received minimal focus (Ballard & Farao, 2008; Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). Since Pawley’s 1960 study, the research was few and far between. More recent studies of phonological aspects of Samoan still refer to early observations (Pratt, 1893; Milner, 1996; Churchward, 1951). Mosel and Hovdhaugen (1992) provided a referential summary of the Samoan phonemic structure and phonology; with emphasis on good articulation, stress assignment, intonation, phonotactics, and common errors associated with (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019).

#### **3.1.1 The first studies (New Zealand-based)**

The first studies on Samoan phonological awareness were by Hamilton and Gillon (2006), followed by Ballard and Farao (2008), both of whom were interested in assessing the phonological skills of young bilingual Samoans in New Zealand. First, the Hamilton and Gillon study sought out to investigate the relationship between phonological skills in English and in Samoan for children who were bilingual in both languages. It was aimed also to describe the participants’ phonological awareness skills in comparison to a normative database of English-speaking children (ibid.).

A group of ten Samoan bilingual children who speak both languages, aged between 5:06 and 7:03 were chosen as participants of the study. A descriptive group design was utilised which was divided into two phases. The first phase investigated the participant’s phonological awareness skills in English and Samoan. The second phase explored the relationship between participants’ phonological awareness skills in English as compared to a normative database. This study employed the following procedures.

The first phase assessment was required to be completed within two sessions of 50 minutes. Two assessors administered the test, one was an English speaker who administered the test in English. The second assessor was a trained Samoan teacher, who spoke Samoan

and administered the test in Samoan. Children were assessed using the phonological awareness measures such as English phonemes such as phoneme awareness tasks, the English onset rime tasks, the Samoan onset-rime tasks, and syllable segmentation in both languages (Hamilton & Gillon, 2006). The second session was administered in small groups using these phonological measures - Preschool and Primary inventory of Phonological awareness (PIPA), TEST of Phonological Awareness (TOPA), Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP) and Burt word recognition. The assessment tasks were also administered by an English – speaking researcher with an assistance of a trained senior student of speech therapy (Hamilton & Gillon, 2006).

The results of the study suggested that ‘children who are bilingual in Samoan and English demonstrate comparable phoneme awareness skills in both languages.’ (p. 24). The study itself acknowledged the ‘paucity of research’ regarding affirming a positive transfer between the two codes, to be able to draw some solid conclusions. There is an appeal for further evidence, particularly in Samoan, that this thesis hopes to address in more detail.

The Ballard and Farao study (2008) was based on 20 Samoan-speaking 4-years-old who were growing up in an English dominant speaking environment in an Auckland suburb, New Zealand. The focus of this research was to establish the developmental norms for children’s production of the target Samoan phonemes from the appearance of their first words to language proficiency. The study also investigated the phonological development similarities and differences between Samoan and other languages. Twenty participants aged 4.0 to 4.11 were recruited from two full-immersion Samoan preschools. Participants consisted of 13 females and 7 males with children divided into a younger group (n = 9) aged 4.0 – 4.6 an older group (n = 11) from 4.7 – 4.11. The study involved phonetic analysis of children’s speech productions based on picture – naming tasks. The findings highlighted the similarities and differences between Samoan phonology and other languages.

The results in terms of error patterns and sporadic errors were discussed in the context of the home environment, particularly the ambient nature of the two registers which Samoan families use at home, which is the colloquial, against the formal ‘t’ which is used in the church and schools. The study noted the strong awareness among the Samoan community of the difference between the two and their functions in particular situations.

On the positive, this study highlighted the critical issue of how Samoan sounds can be maintained (2008). This is particularly relevant in modern bilingual contexts and the communal aspirations of Samoans to retain their language in both colloquial and formal

registers. This is important for the fact that while colloquial is the preferred medium of communication, the formal 't' register is used in schools, churches, and formal occasions.

A more recent study by Westerveld (2014) also investigated the emergent literacy skills of a group of bilingual Samoan – English speaking children. The aim of the study was to compare participants' literacy skills with those of their monolingual peers who attended kindergarten in the same geographical area. Participants included 18 children selected from 3 Samoan language immersion schools (A'oga Amata) in which the Samoan language is the main medium of communication/instruction. A control group of 15 monolingual English-speaking children was recruited from the public kindergarten that were located within the same geographical area as the A'oga Amata. The children were assessed in English by the monolingual speaker while the Samoan children were assessed on two occasions, once in Samoan, and once in English by a Samoan fluent speaker (Westerveld,2014).

All sessions lasted 45 minutes and were digitally recorded. Children were assessed on a story retelling and comprehension, phonological awareness, letter name knowledge and vocabulary. This was a descriptive study that consists of two main parts. The first part was a focus on investigation of bilingual children's emergent literacy skills in Samoan and English. Then the second part was a comparison between the bilingual children's emergent literacy skills and the control group of monolingual English-speaking children.

The findings indicated an overall positive correlation between two languages by analysis of each language, and across languages using composite scoring, and showed that the bilingual children's performance (either Samoan or English) significantly underestimated their composite language performance (Westerveld, 2014). There was an indication of L1 support and L2 for the six measures involved. Therefore, a positive transfer across languages. On measures of receptive vocabulary and letter name knowledge, the bilingual group showed superior skills in their first language, but the monolingual group scored better in the expressive vocabulary. The researcher speculated that this may be due to the children having limited opportunity to practise their L2 language skills enough.

Hemsley et al. (2010) pointed out that considering an English only performance on receptive vocabulary significantly underestimates the bilingual children's language capacity. It is important to consider both languages equally. To understand this better, Westerveld expressed the need for relevant assessment tasks for this group of learners to obtain more accurate information about their skills and prevent them from being misdiagnosed as having a language impairment. Again, the focus of this thesis on

developing a Samoan specific assessment tool for phonological awareness and exploring the capabilities of native speaking Samoan students on the tool will provide a valuable resource to fill this gap. On the positive, Westerveld (2014) confirms the finding of other international studies which are promising for learners of bilingual backgrounds in New Zealand. For example, the link between phonological awareness skills and bilingual education research; the latter of which is overwhelmingly in favour of the significant additive value of bilingualism to children's development (Bialystok, 2001; Garcia, 2008; Tuafuti, 2016; May, 2020).

A latest article on Samoan sound and phonology by Tavita and Aukuso (2019) suggested a new phenomenon in phonetics whereby a shift in the vowel pronunciation is noted. The glottalization of the vowel, particularly at the onset of an utterance, is due to several factors. The authors argued that this development can be defining and may well be equated with the first shift from the t-register to the k-register. This must be considered seriously by any future research, given the crucial role of sounds in the initial phase of early Samoan literacy (further discussion as follows – 3.1.2).

### **3.1.2 The dilemma of the vowel sound**

The review of the literature presented above highlighted some limitations with previous methods to evaluate the phonological awareness ability of Samoan children. It is pertinent that future study considers key phonological features of the Samoan language. One of the aspects that must be taken into consideration is the vowel shift. Raised in an article by Tavita and Aukuso (2019), to draw awareness on its development is viewed as timely by this researcher, when the Samoan language has become transnational.

I quote from the abstract: “It involves a shift in the utterance of vowels in the past thirty years or so. And it comes to this. A gradual blurring in the articulation of the vowel sound has been noted. It appears that the glottal stop had rubbed off on the vowel for reasons that are linguistic, sociological, and even pedagogical. This ‘emerging reality’ is yet to be addressed in literature even though evidence of its first appearance can be traced back to the early eighties. Time moves on and there has not been a question raised for reasons not clear to the writers, hence the purpose of this response. In this writing we hope to raise the issue, as we believe it is crucial to any type of research that delves into both Samoan phonetics and phonology, and the extent of both in language and learning application” (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019).

In this article, an argument was presented as to why this shift came about or in other terms, allowed to happen. The point is the Samoan sound is not represented by their phonemic representations in the continental sounds. As a result, they are misrepresented or mistaken for the English vowel sound. To describe, I quote again from the article “A Samoan vowel is described as having a smooth tonal sound when uttered.” (p. 61) (Le Tagaloa, 1996; Pratt, 1893). When pronounced the sound negotiates a register as the vocal tract partially opens, wide enough not to be blocking the air flow; nor too wide to be slipping into the consonantal h mode. The mouth (vocal organs) and nose (nasal function) operate simultaneously which end result is quite distinct from the English sounds or the h consonant for that matter.

“Considering the fact that the IPA register cannot subscribe adequately in some cases, including the Samoan vowels (Le Tagaloa, 1996, Churchill, 1908, Pratt, 1893), we can only approximate the locus of their processing at this point. The close vowels are I and U. The I resembles the English E /i:/ and is described as a close front unrounded vowel; U /u/ is described as a close back rounded vowel. E and O are mid vowels, E /e/ is described as mid front unrounded while O /o/ as mid back rounded. The closest sound on the IPA is e and o with a small capital T underscore. The A /æ/ is a near open central vowel which on the registered IPA sound is a rotated lower-case a. These are close approximations, phonemically and phonetically, as the acceptable sound must adhere to the manner of good articulation as described” (p.61). From the writers’ viewpoint, this shift is critical for research as far as transfer of sound from one language to the other is concerned. I believe that this issue will come out strongly in further studies where Samoan phonology is discussed and provide further evidence of its influence more so its impact on Samoan pronunciation and orthography.

### **3.1.3 Limitations of the New Zealand based studies**

Some of the limitations raised in the above studies are similar. For the first two studies, the first limitation was the comparison of two cohorts of bilingual and monolingual children using the same assessments, on a linguistic playing field that is complex and most of all favour English. Research has confirmed that time is a factor for these children to attain nativelike proficiency in English academic literacy (Thomas & Collier 2002; Aukuso, 2002).

Literacy in a Pasifika home environment may not translate to the vocabulary that is taught in a normal mainstream classroom. Undoubtedly this has an impact on children's performance on assessment tasks. Further, the traditional means of teaching Samoan phonology, via phonics-based activities, has not been addressed in research. The English PA practice of phoneme segmentation is unfamiliar to many Samoan children.

In addition, administering a test in Samoan is always done in the formal register. This is the standard rule. The 't' register is reserved for the teaching and learning using the native language. This includes assessment and their administration. The test that was prepared in the Samoan formal register did not correlate with the instructions of the assessor who used the colloquial register. This means, the phones as spoken (consonant phonemes) contradict with their written equivalents on paper (i.e., k as uttered is presented as t on paper). In other terms, the task of preparing assessment would have needed some careful preparation. Some communities like the Samoans, take their language seriously.

In any event, such discrepancy is evidence of some of the issues that need to be addressed, which both studies have in some way contributed on behalf of the Samoan language. Hence it is important that future research focus on exploring the phonological awareness and oral language skills of Samoan children in Samoa in the first instance (rather than the comparisons presented in the study above). Further, it is critical that a Samoan researcher with strong knowledge of the language (grammar and register functions) be part of the assessment task who can do the final check on reliability and validity. These key features are incorporated in the design of the SEPA (Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness) trial which is described later in this thesis.

Limitations in relation to studies mentioned shared similar issues from the viewpoint of this study. First, a comparison of two groups of children of very different backgrounds linguistically, socially, and economically can be problematic (Hyun Min, 2019; Bialystok et al, 2004; Goldstein & Fabiano, 2007). These researchers argued against testing bilingual children using mainstream norms because of the many linguistic and psychological factors involved. For example, translations of materials from one language to another for assessment purposes may give one group an advantage. A word in one language may not be as familiar to children in another or may have multiple meanings. In additive bilingualism, there is a strong belief that children should not be tested in a language they have not been taught in or used as the children's medium of instruction (Cummins, 2000; Tuafuti, 2016).

Additive bilingualism emphasised the importance of nurturing a child in the early years in their first language enough in order for a successful acquisition of the second language to happen (Cummins, 2000). Evidence in support of immersion in the early years also pointed to later success in literacy in reading and writing (Thomas & Collier, 2002; Tuafuti, 2016). Anecdotal evidence tends to support some of these issues, for example, the question of which language is used as a medium of instruction, and what the immersion strategy is adopted by a target school's learning or language programmes.

On the positive, these preliminary investigations of the oral language and phonological awareness development of Samoan speaking children in New Zealand provided some useful information no doubt; though further research is needed to better understand how the development of the first language evolved for Samoan bilingual children to draw a balanced evaluation. Also, while the current studies focused on the phonological awareness and oral language skills of Samoan children outside of Samoa, their findings may have relevance to the study of children in Samoa who are learning in dual language contexts also.

### **3.2 Phonological Awareness of children in Samoa**

A recent study (World Bank, 2018) has provided an initial description of the phonological awareness, listening comprehension and reading skills of Samoan children in Samoa. The Samoa Early Grade Reading Assessment (SEGRA) was adapted from EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) which is an English language measurement of the foundational reading skills of early primary school students in grade/years 1 - 3 (World Bank, 2018). EGRA was developed by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) through funding provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. Samoa was one of the developing countries in the world that was eligible to attain funds to support children's early literacy development.

#### **3.2.1 The EGRA Tool**

Noted, the main aim of SEGRA was to provide an initial measurement of how well children are learning to read and write in their local language in the first three years of schooling (World Bank, 2018). The assessment was implemented in association with other counter parts such as the South Pacific Community (SPC) and the Samoa Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESCC). The SEGRA development and implementation was

adapted in June 2017 by language and education experts. A series of workshops were presented and MESC staff and the chosen early grade teachers took part in those workshops.

Before the instrument was developed, a language analysis was conducted so that the group members could have a better understanding of orthography and language issues that needed to be considered when developing the SEGRA tool. Some of the aspects of the Samoan language that needed to be addressed were diacritic marks- glottal stop and macron.

The following were included in the tool: letter name knowledge fluency, letter-sound knowledge fluency, initial sound identification (ability to identify the first sound in a spoken word), word reading, non-word reading, passage reading (accuracy, fluency), reading comprehension, listening comprehension and dictation. The tool was administered to nationally representative samples of students enrolled in Years 1, 2 and 3 in Samoa. A total number of 1,196 students (600 girls and 596 boys) participated in the assessment. The age range was not identified in the report (ages of children in each year group can vary widely due to children starting school at various times).

The findings reported indicated that Samoan students had challenges in their early reading achievement. For example, many children at the end of Year 3 had challenges with their reading fluency and accuracy which negatively impacting their reading comprehension, which was significantly below the international benchmark. Examination of the phonological awareness skills of children indicated that this may be a key area in which to support learners to uplift performance.

In the initial sound's identification sub-test, children had to identify the first sound in the word that an assessor read aloud twice. The test comprised 10 words. Examination of the Year 2 results showed that they averaged 4 out of 10 correct on this task compared to Year 1 students who averaged 2 correct and Year 3 students who averaged 5 out of 10 correct. The report concluded that the teaching of letter-sounds may not be taking place in all classes.

The administration of the tool also identified gender differences in outcomes with girls outperforming boys in reading fluency and comprehension. There were also regional differences detected with students in the Savai'i region performing better than other regions in 9 out of 10 subtests. Apia urban students scored the lowest in all subtests. Although the wide-scale implementation of the SEGRA is notable in that it has shed light on the early literacy achievement of Samoan children, some key limitations must be kept in mind when interpreting this data.

### **3.2.2 Implications of EGRA results for this thesis**

The aspects of the EGRA that are most relevant to this thesis include the automatic letter name recognition, initial sounds identification, letter-sounds and listening comprehension subtests. These subtests are thus described in detail in this section before outlining some of the limitations of the SEGRA tool.

#### **Sub - test 1 – Automatic Letter Name Recognition/Symbols**

This test measures students' ability to identify the names of letters accurately and automatically. During the test, students were given a page of randomly distributed upper- and lowercase letters and were asked to say the names of as many letters as possible within one minute. The test was scored by the number of letters that students correctly named in one minute. Overall results show that students were able to correctly identify 37 correct letters per minute, with or without the diacritic marks. Year 1 students identified 27 correct letters per minute, 39 correct letters per minute for Year 2 and 46 correct letters per minute for Year 3 students. The greatest improvement in letter name recognition was in Year 2 students, where students correctly named an additional 12 letters on average. Compared to Year 2 students, those in Year 3 correctly named an average of 7 additional letters. Out of 429 students assessed in Year 1, 11% could not name a single letter.

#### **Sub - test 2- Initial Sounds Identification**

This test is for students to identify the first sound in the word. The assessor read aloud a word twice and then asked to identify the first sound. The test was comprised of 10 words and was not a time exercise. The students' scores were based on the number of initial sounds they could correctly identified out of 10 items. Data shows that a considerable proportion of students could not identify a single phoneme more than half of Year 1 students (58%) and at least a quarter of Year 2 (29%) and Year 3(21%). Year 1 students correctly identified an average of 2 initial sounds. Year 2 students with an average of 4 (an increase of 2 correct initial sounds, from Year 1) and Year 3 students with an average of 5 correct initial sounds out of 10. Results show development of this skill, through the three-Year levels. The data appears that the teaching of letter sounds is not taking place in all classes, and this may account for some students still mixing the name and the sound of letters and for the large share of zero scores in this subtest.

**Sub – test 3 – Letter Sounds**

The letter sound knowledge test was administered similarly to the letter name knowledge subtest. Students were provided with a page of 100 randomly distributed upper- and lower-case letters of the Samoan alphabet and asked to provide the sounds (not the names) of as many letters as they could identify within a one-minute period. Diacritic marks were also used randomly on some of the vowels to test students' knowledge of short and long vowel sounds. The test was scored by the number of letters sounds that students correctly identified within one minute out of a total of 100 items provided.

On average, students were able to correctly identify 23 correct letter sounds per minute (clspm). Year 1 student correctly identified 18clspm. Students in Year 2 could accurately sound an additional 6clspm, for a total average score of 24 clspm. Scores increased by 5 clspm in Year 3, from 24 in Year 2 to 29clspm in Year 3. The data indicates that the average scores for each year and overall, for all students tested were lower than the letter name subtask.

**Sub-test 6 – Oral Passage Reading**

Speed and accuracy are measurable elements of Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) and these can be measured as correct words per minute (cwpm). It encompasses all the previous reading skills plus the skills needed for comprehension, the ability to translate letters into sounds, unify sounds into words, process connections, relate text to meaning, and make inferences. For students to understand a simple passage, they must be able to read it fast enough to retain the words in short-term memory. In this subtest for SEGRA, students were asked to read a short story comprised of 69 words in one minute. After one minute, the assessor stopped students and recorded the number of words read correctly. If the child could not read any words correctly in the first line, the assessor stopped the test early and the child received a score of zero. The overall mean score for this subtest was 17cwpm which is well below the 45 – 60 cwpm fluency standard. The bulk of the low scores were in Year 1, where students read an average of only 4cwpm and more than half (66%) could not read a single word correctly.

Year 2 students read an average of 18cwpm and 32% scored zero. Year 3 students could read an average of 31 cwpm and one fifth of them scored zero which is a high proportion given that they have spent three years in school. Overall, all the three levels scored well below the expected international fluency standard.

**Sub- test 7 – Reading Comprehension**

The reading comprehension subtask measures the ability to answer comprehension questions based on the passage read. A total of five questions were provided for this subtest, consisting of direct, fact-based questions and at least one question requiring from the passage read. The data shows significant proportions of students scored zero in this subtest across all three years with all students in Year 1(96%), more than half of year 2 students (72%) and half of those in Year 3(50%). Given that all of Year 1 students scored zero, their overall average score was 1.2% which means they could not correctly answer a single comprehension question. Students in Year 2 and Year 3 were only able to correctly respond to one comprehension question (raw means of 0.5 (11%) and 1.3 (26%) respectively.

The international reading comprehension benchmark is 80% (4 or more correct responses out of 5) and so students in Samoa were performing well below the desirable level of comprehension at 0% for Year 1 (no correct response) and only 20% for those in Year 2 and Year 3 (1 correct response).

**Sub-test 8- Listening Comprehension**

The main goal of the listening comprehension assessment was to measure whether the student can listen to a short passage being read aloud and then answer several questions correctly with a word or a simple statement. In this sub test the assessor read a short story to students and then asked five comprehension questions. Students had 15 seconds to respond to each question. The overall mean score for listening comprehension was 30% or 2 correct responses. By the end of Year 1, student achieved 18% on average which means they could correctly answer 1 comprehension and an average of 2 correct responses for Year 2 and Year 3 students, respectively. Half of Year 1 students (43%), less than a third of Year 2 students (25%), and 13% of Year 3 students could not answer 1 listening comprehension correctly.

### 3.2.3 Key Findings of SEGRA sub-tests

Findings of this study indicate that overall, students in Samoa even after 3 full years of schooling are not yet able to read with fluency and accuracy which is preventing them from reading with comprehension. The basic skills required for students to read and comprehend are not being developed, thus students are not reading to read. So, the early reading achievement in Samoa is low basically. The SEGRA (Samoa Early Grade Reading Assessment) showed that there was measurable progress between Years 1 – 3 on the oral reading fluency and familiar word sub-tests. The overall results strongly indicated the students' lack of decoding skills. Data for the letter sounds subtest showed that 15% of all the students could not correctly identify a single letter sound, with 20% from Year 1 and 12% from Year 2 and 3.

The overall result of reading comprehension is well below the international benchmark as affirmed by the report. Most of the students who were involved in the study across the three years achieved well below the internationally accepted reading comprehension benchmark of 80%. Only 6% of all students tested met the benchmark (80%) and above. Overall, the findings demonstrated that the enhancement of teaching of foundational skills for literacy success (such as phonological awareness and oral language) is a key aspect to target within the Samoan educational system.

One of the key positives of the SEGRA is in the timing or giving attention to the early years of learning. From an intervention viewpoint, to start early gives the teachers the opportunity to know the children's need much better and strategize accordingly. From the data they can draw early monitoring systems to support them at this stage. Hence the SEGRA can be used as a model for National Reading diagnostic testing. From the results, intervention measures can be applied through the processes of planning, implementation and using results to inform effective practice. Effective assessment is part of such practice where assessment is catered to improving learning (Black & William, 1998).

Also, the SEGRA data will have impacted the effectiveness of the ministry's own early literacy planning and implementation. From the evaluations received from teachers and children, the ministry will have a wealth of data and supplementary information to work on in the future. Thus, the SEGRA can be a means for continuous assessment for learning in order to improve performance.

### 3.2.4 Limitations of the EGRA & SEGRA

One of the limitations of the EGRA is to do with authentication. While it can be adapted to suit a local context, its global appeal as a standard model is biased against other models of early literacy development. Lack of authenticity also affects a test's validity. For me, some of the limitations in the SEGRA includes the volume of the assessment and the duration of its administration. There were nine subtests, that took 14 school days to sit. This must have taken a toll on the children mentally, the fact of being aware that they are assessed (Communication with Source 1 & 2).

But the most problematic aspect was the lack of a familiarisation phase. While phonics is taught in many Samoan classrooms, skills in phonemic awareness is a phenomenon for many Pacific languages including Samoan (Ibid.). The key question is, how familiar were the teachers with the administering of the assessment? What about the children, how familiar were they with the assessment design and content? Should they be tested on a set of skills or techniques they have never been introduced to in the classrooms, or so abruptly according to reliable sources? Also, the intense nature of testing the children by means of a wide range of literacy/reading skills would not have been expected by many of them, especially the strict timing involved. I can only suspect that there were many factors to account for as reflected in the children's average results.

There are significant limitations with using overseas assessment tools which are not specific to the Samoan context, and this must raise a concern (Gillon, 2017). As the world's focus moves more towards assessment for learning (AfL), it is obvious that the task of designing assessment must be relevant to the linguistic needs of local learners. The need for relevant assessments to support teaching and learning of bilingual Samoans overseas and in Samoa is real and urgent (Aukuso, 2002; Amituanai-Toloa, 2005; Galuvao, 2014; Tuafuti, 2016; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017).

The key limitations of SEGRA were derived from its source, the EGRA from which its adaptation was based. In a briefing paper by Educational International (2015), it was pointed out that EGRA was based on the premise that reading acquisition takes place in linear stages; that there is a beginning in print awareness moving on to decoding skills then to reading fluency. There is an underlying assumption in EGRA that comprehension and fluency must be taught separately from decoding skills (p.2). This is disputed by experts (Gillon, 2017; Gillon & MacFarlane, 2017; Gillon & McNeill, 2015; McNeill & Kirk, 2014) who believed that learning literacy is interrelated and integrated across stages.

Given the SEGRA's broader focus on several areas across early literacy development (phonological awareness, listening comprehension), it does not provide a comprehensive assessment of phonological awareness development. The initial phoneme identity task is the only measure of phonological awareness included. This is the earliest aspect of phoneme awareness to develop (Gillon, 2017). It is also important to gain understanding of a child's ability to identify and blend sounds right through a word (i.e., phoneme segmentation and blending) given these more complex abilities are needed for children to encode or decode right through a word. The lack of exploration of children's syllable awareness ability in the SEGRA is also surprising given the syllabic structure of the Samoan language.

Comprehensive phonological awareness assessments in other languages consist of multiple sub-tests of phonological awareness to build a stronger picture of children's developing skills in this area whilst also providing the capacity to track change in more complex skills over time (ibid.). Finally, although the SEGRA had a listening comprehension component, it did not provide an adequate measure of children's expressive language ability. Future studies of early literacy skills of Samoan children should build a more comprehensive picture of children's phonological awareness skills and include a focus on expressive oral language skills.

### **3.2.5 Implications of SEGRA**

Notwithstanding, the wealth of baseline data collection nationwide for literacy in Year 1 through Year 3 from this study no doubt has provided adequate evidence for the MESC to determine the rates of fluency, comprehension and word skills that were necessary at each level. It also helped to define early grade reading and fluency benchmarks to provide teachers and policymakers with a means to track early grade reading performance. It is the role of the government through its ministry to facilitate the ongoing development of the SEGRA, along with the EGRA and other relevant tools, to inform policy and planning, so that the new skills and techniques of learning can be incorporated into the curriculum. But more importantly, the positives that could be gained from on behalf of children who need urgent support more than others.

Part of my research involves a closer look at the implications of the SEGRA Tool in relation to the phonological awareness tool developed for this research. The general aim is to find out how the SEGRA has helped interpret the outcomes of the SEPA Tool explored

in this thesis in terms of strengths and weaknesses. I have pointed out some of the advantages as well as limitations of the SEGRA, all of which contribute to this understanding.

Although there are limitations for this assessment tool as outlined above, the results suggest that it is important to strengthen the teaching of important foundational knowledge for early literacy success in Samoan children. Before such work is conducted, it is important to have a more comprehensive description of children's phonological awareness skills in the first years at primary school, also an understanding of how the development of this knowledge is associated with the local school curriculum (which the EGRA study did not explore). This thesis aims to explore the phonological awareness ability of Samoan children across the construct of phonological awareness and look to understand the influence of school factors in enhancing the development of foundational skills. The argument is that it is through this type of investigation that clear direction for strengthening the teaching of such key foundational skills can be fostered efficiently.

### **3.3 Pasifika Research on early literacy**

This section provides a summary overview of a selection of Pasifika research that looked at the use of the Samoan language in the early stage of teaching and learning. The selected studies are meant to provide a valuable backdrop in interpreting the findings and implications of this study. As individual studies, each has something to offer in terms of the five dimensions of the Saliemanu framework.

First, Utumapu (1992,1988) focused on the how the relationship between Samoan language nests and family systems have developed, and how these relationships may have affected developmental roles within Samoan families, especially women's roles. Favouring Bronfenbrenner's approach, it traced the unique contribution of women to language development at all levels of society. Mothers are portrayed as pillars 'Poutu' of the community and therefore the best facilitators of the language across the ecological systems. The Utumapu-McBride, et al (2008) study reinforced the role of the microsystem as a shared experience between the motherland and its diasporic community.

Tanielu (2004) also looked at the same theme of mothers and grandparents and their contribution to child development. Her research model of paepae alludes to the structural foundation of Samoan houses; boulders are bedrocks upon which a solid foundation is built. A merge of Western and indigenous references is her approach to building such a

foundation. Tanielu's contribution is through her closeup presentation of the role of A'oga a le Faifeau (pastor's school) in the formative years of literacy development for Samoa. (See also Auva'a, 2003; Tupolo-Tauaanae, 2014). Luafutu-Simpson (2006) approached the conversation from the viewpoint of a New Zealand born Samoan researcher, highlighted a dilemma due to an intergenerational shift from migrant parents to their children and grandchildren, and the role of the culture and language in terms of accessing services and resources. Government policy and power came out strongly in her argument.

Tagoilelagi-Leota (2017) looked at the transition from A'oga Amata (ECE) to Primary, in the metaphor of the fau (mulberry bark). The fau denotes the transition period and the intricacies involved in terms of knowledge, skills, and aspirations of parents of their children. The fact that only a small percent of the children can make the transition for real, through a few bilingual units concentrated mostly in the Auckland region, is this researcher's concern. Identity security came out strongly as part of successful transition.

The Tuafuti doctoral study (2016) entitled, *Pululima Faifai Pea (Ongoing Collaboration)*, focused on the role of parents and families in bilingual settings, where additive bilingualism was promoted. Her findings affirmed her hypothesis that the voice of the parents and children were vital to the success of their children at school. Hence, a collaborative model in favour of the child and parents was considered the best approach. A collaboration with McCaffery & McCaffery-McFall (2020) stressed the importance of Additive Bilingualism and its impact as a strategy for Pasifika learning. In addition, two studies, Esera (2001), and Aukuso (2002, 2005) first provided quantifiable evidence in support of Additive Bilingualism. Both collected data from children's assessed works from two cohorts of children; one educated bilingually, the other monolingually (English) to compare. Their findings aligned with international research such as Collier and Thomas (2002), that proved the merits of bilingual education for modern schooling. Both studies affirmed the solid ecological functions of a language as promoted in Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner's works for example.

Siilata (2014) study posed the question of what constitutes Pasifika success. Her emphasis on teaching pedagogy and effective practice were considered vital in that constitution. In the va'atele analogy is an appeal for an effective and inclusive practice for Pasifika learning which can accommodate the best of both worlds. Tongati'o (2010), also agreeing with the above on the importance of Pasifika leadership, and values in devising methodologies and effective strategies in government plans.

The focus of Toloa-Amituana'i (2005) thesis was on the problem posed by the question, why are our children not achieving as well as other children? Which leads to another question, who are the stakeholders in such a problem? The researcher's concern has been on the poor state of Pasifika children's reading comprehension in both languages. More so the lack of any answers on the part of the system to address it. It was noted in the study the low level of achievement in comprehension for bilingual children. Several factors were involved. For example, the quality of teaching instructions, which implications are political basically. Galuvao (2016) shared the same concern. Adopting a Foucaultian critical methodology in her approach, the argument is, power determines the success or failure of a student. Power or political influence is very much part of the assessment regime historically and politically and must not be taken for granted (Tavita, 2021).

Most of the studies quoted shared the concern of the lack of standardized assessment tools to measure bilingual children's achievements. Even the lack of input from other worldviews and narratives in assessment designs were issues that impact on children whose worldviews are not included (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017; Suaalii, 2013; Lee Hang, 2011). In some of these studies, there are evidence of a correlation between achievement and the constraints of the system that work against the Pasifika learners, including the role of political power and leadership in the assessment system as either barriers or enablers of learning (Galuvao, 2016, Tavita, 2021).

### **3.4 Ecological Approaches**

In the New Zealand context, the idea of braiding Western and indigenous methodologies or the metaphor of "*he awa whiria*" is identified by Macfarlane (2015) and proponents of this framework. It is an integrated approach that draws upon both Western science and mātāuranga Māori, which aim is to find the best practices applicable to the local environment. "It is based on the analogy of two streams of knowledge (Western science and Indigenous Māori) becoming interconnected streams by reaching a point of convergence" (Macfarlane, et al., 2015, p. 64). Obviously, this merging will have acknowledged each other's distinction, informed and evaluated programmes and methodologies and accepted the efficacy of the consensus results based on the evidence (ibid). The Braided Rivers Framework (BRF) is relevant to this thesis based on its approach to find balance between the introduced 'clinical' methods and indigenous strategies. As mentioned earlier, the question of the type of knowledge and language by which a programme is delivered cannot

be taken for granted. Thus, the need for this approach at braiding or reinforcing of one upon the strength of the other. I then agree with the argument of its proponents of the need for a shift in mindset when the idea of a dominant culture or the 'one size fits all' has proven to be a hindrance to other children's literacy development. In relation to the Saliemanu, the Braided Rivers Framework tends to provide specific focus on the fact of the diffused nature of knowledge as information, experience, and practice; the need for balance in the merging of western-based models and indigenous ideas.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed an ecological model of children's development that highlighted a system of relationships that make up their environment. The four main systems that he claimed in his model are self-explanatory. For example: the microsystem is influenced by family, school, neighbourhood, church, friends, peers, work, and healthcare providers. The mesosystem interacts directly with the microsystem and the exosystem impacting directly on the individual and means of communication and relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is within the mesosystem that the relationship between the parents and school can surely influence a child's school achievement for better or otherwise. The macrosystem for example is the overall cultural environment that the child is involved in. It includes sets of beliefs, value systems, customs, rituals that affect the child subconsciously through socialisation. In this context, the macrosystem impacts strongly on a child's overall development.

In tandem with the Saliemanu conceptual framework, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model acknowledges the importance of the home environment, in the context of multiple interrelated ecological systems, with the child at the centre of this network of collective nurturing. On the other hand, the macrosystem for many children of today is far more dynamic and complicated (Olson & Torrance, 2009). For example, literacy acquisition for many Pasifika children born and raised in New Zealand, whose first experience of reading is done in English (Wilson, 2017; Elley, 2001). As Elley (2001) stated with regards to their African and Asian peers, "they are expected to become literate in a language to which they have little exposure, which they have only fragile incentives to learn, and for which many of their teachers provide only indifferent models (cited in McBride-Chang, p. 8).

Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) Social Cultural Theory emphasises his belief that social interactions enhance and support children's cognitive, linguistic, and social developments. According to Vygotsky, children learn best when they work collaboratively with their teachers and peers. In the home context, a child is surrounded always by adults and other

children in a familiar routine of interactions that is ongoing. These interactions are crucial for better development from the very beginning of a child's life. For example, a close bond between the mother and her infant child lay the foundations for future health and learning. The acquisition of language begins to formulate at this early stage of mother-child bonding from early pregnancy to social interactions in the early years (Ewing, Callow & Rushton, 2016). Vygotsky (1978) observed, language development is social from the beginning of life. Language can be recognised first in its communicative function between the mother and the child and in its central role in learning. Dialogue between mother and child is highlighted in this early stage as it supports the development of thinking. It followed that the external functions, such as social communication are integrated into the personal, cognitive capacity of a child (ibid.). Vygotsky (1978) called this process internalisation which he considered as one of the main principles of psychological development.

Vygotsky's Social Cultural theory aligns directly with the Saliemanu framework particularly on the aspect of close interaction through mother and a child linguistically, psychologically, and cognitively at the early stage of a child's development. As argued in this study, the relationship of mother and child in the early years is crucial. Research stressed the importance of relationships in a cultural context (Ewin et al, 2016). As an oral culture, knowledge and skills are transmitted intergenerationally by word of mouth (Maiai, 1957; Tofaeono, 2000). Children acquired knowledge by observing, listening and practising the customary rituals and artifacts as a collective or individual in relation to others. They have been exposed to a variety of learning opportunities in the village context formally and spontaneously (Tagoilelagi – Leota, 2016). In sum, the Samoan language has long been oral oriented rather than written.

Vygotsky (1962, 1998) examined the acquisition of the culture by the child. A culture has a major influence in a child's development through its artefacts. An artefact is any resource designed and manufactured by people in the culture. For example, tangible things such as language, traditions, beliefs, arts and science are also exemplars of cultural artefacts. Obviously, the functions of artefacts are not easily seen or understood from outside, or even for the young ones inside the circle. Therefore, children require adults or capable peers to assist them in their learning of the artefact. For example, the child needs to use a home language more often with somebody in a shared activity and continually practise it individually to develop his/her knowledge of its use in daily transactions. Hence collaboration helps learners to reflect and review their learning, enabling them to pick up

strategies and methods from their peers. Stobart (2008) talked about learners as active meaning-makers who participated in authentic problem-based learning. With the teacher's guidance, students can contribute individually to a task at hand, bringing in prior knowledge of yesterday to inform today's learning. Assessment for learning (AfL) support this approach, where learners collaborate with their peers and learn from them also. The constructivist approach views assessment as an ongoing and continuous process (ibid.).

One of the most important concepts of Vygotskian theory is that of the zone of proximal or potential development (ZPD). The idea that there is an imaginary zone that can be bridged between what a child can do independently and what he can achieve with the support of the teacher or another person, is widely accepted. The idea of teaching within the zone (ZPD) has brought scaffolding to the centre of teacher-student interaction. It shows that when learners and teachers interact in the ZPD, scaffolding can help enhance their potential to accomplish their learning goals (Kim & White, 2008). The constructivist theory promotes the idea that interaction between learners and teachers are fundamental to the goals of quality learning (ibid.). For example, the encouragement of interactive learning among teachers and their peers to support learners in the proximal development zone, will enable the students to learn to move forward (ibid.). It is common knowledge that children learn better through observation and collaboration with teachers, peers, and parents and wider community. Skills and knowledge occur in the context of a community, not isolated. For example, a second language has always been a barrier for many Pacific children who have own home languages; therefore, 'scaffolding' is very important in the task of developing their learning abilities in an introduced language such as English. For instance, teachers can connect new information to prior experiences in authentic language settings to help the children improve (Stobart, 2008).

### **3.5 Assessment for Learning**

The question about the role of assessment in the task of quality teaching is one of the most discussed over the years (Sadler, 1989). Traditionally, such role revolved around the common purposes such as evaluating student progress, planning future work, but mostly to assign students grades and comparing performance (ibid.). Thus, most schools are familiar with the three types: formative, summative and ipsative. Each has own purpose in the delivery of the objectives mentioned. Cooper (2007) noted that over the past few years, assessment for learning (AfL), as a teaching strategy, has become part of a global

normalization; successfully applied by many schools in their pedagogy and classroom practice (Cooper, 2007). Proponents of AfL agreed that its primary purpose is to engage students in their own assessment. As a result, improvement is noted, as children are empowered to support their own learning (Stiggins, 2007).

Black & William (1998) described such empowerment in terms of upgrading formative assessment, which they argued is misunderstood and weak in practice (p.20). Stiggins (2002) argued that AfL is assessment for improvement not assessment for accountability as in the case of summative assessment. Cooper (2007) defines assessment for learning as assessment designed primarily to promote learning. For example, a draft of a retelling is an assessment for learning. Cooper (2007) introduced eight principles (big ideas) about assessment for learning to elaborate further:

**Big Idea 1** Assessment serves different purposes at different times: it may be used to find out what students already know and can do; it may be used to help students improve their learning; or it may be used to let students and their parents know how much they have learned in a prescribed period of time.

**Big Idea 2** Assessment must be planned and purposeful.

**Big Idea 3** Assessments must be balanced, including oral, performance, and written tasks, and be flexible in order to improve learning for all students.

**Big Idea 4** Assessment and instruction are inseparable because effective assessment informs learning.

**Big Idea 5** For assessment to be helpful to students, it must inform them in words, not numerical scores or letter grades, what they have done well, what they have done poorly, and what they need to do next in order to improve.

**Big Idea 6** Assessment is a collaborative process that is most effective when it involves self-, peer, and teacher assessment.

**Big Idea 7** Performance standards are an essential component of effective assessment.

**Big Idea 8** Grading and reporting student achievement is a caring, sensitive process that requires teachers' professional judgement.

(Cooper, D. (2007). *Talk about Assessment. Strategies and tools to improve learning, Nelson Education*).

Black and William (1998) proposed five performance strategies, that have been readapted by Kaser and Halbert (cited in Koehn, 2008, p.2) to form six altogether:

1. Providing learners with clarity about and understanding of the learning *intentions* of the work being done (learners are presented the learning intentions at the beginning of the lesson, throughout the lesson, and refer to the learning intentions in their reflections and responses so teachers can see that connections between tasks and what is supposed to be learned are made)
2. Providing *to* and co-developing *with* learners the *criteria* for success (what will the finished task look like, how will you share your understandings with others?)
3. Providing ongoing *descriptive feedback* that moves learning forward for each learner (using feed forward in language the students understand; how can the next task improve upon the previous?)
4. Designing and using thoughtful classroom *questions* to lead discussions that generate evidence of learning (allowing the students to participate and interact amongst each other in meaningful oral discussion – talk is student to student(s), not a dialogue between teacher and one student)
5. Putting learners to work as learning/teaching resources for each other using *self and peer assessment* (student coaching, students understanding learning intentions so well that they can teach a younger student or peer)
6. Doing everything we can think of to make sure that learners have *ownership* of their own learning (empowering each student to succeed).

Florez & Sammons (2013) pointed out some of the positive effects of Assessment for Learning (AfL). These are – 1. AfL is part of effective planning 2. AfL is central to classroom practice 3. AfL promotes understanding of goals and criteria 4. It is sensitive and constructive 4. It fosters motivation 5. AfL recognises all educational achievement 6. AfL focuses on how pupils learn 7. It helps learners know how to improve 8. It develops the capacity for peer and self-assessment 9. AfL is a key professional skill.

From these principles/strategies, effective assessment tools and responsive practices can be developed. For example, the idea of including children in the process of doing assessment, especially those with special educational needs (SEN), will benefit them enormously as well as teachers and schools' own self-evaluation (ibid.). Feedback is crucial

(Black et al., 2004). For successful outcomes, Swaffield (2011) considered the “sitting beside” model as essential to provide guidance and listen to what the learners say and do will motivate them to work and improve their learning. AfL is not about testing learners, she insisted, rather it is about teaching and improving learning. In total, assessment for learning fully agrees with the Saliemanu approach, that children need be in the centre of this important activity. Research have proved that success occurred where assessment is treated as central to classroom practice, particularly in environments where both evidence of effective teaching and leadership go together (ibid.).

### 3.6 Summary

In this chapter, the selected literature was reviewed in the light of the Saliemanu framework. First, a comprehensive evaluation of the first studies on Samoan phonological awareness was presented, all shared similar concerns about the lack of understanding on the Samoan phonological development and the need for measures in terms of the children’s oral competency. Most of the studies shared consensus findings that Samoan New Zealand born children, both bilingual and monolingual, still have a sound grasp of their language and foundational skills relatively speaking. Limitations however of these studies have been discussed and noted. Secondly, a number of Pasifika research were also presented and critiqued against the Saliemanu framework. Again, they shared consensus findings which reflected the viewpoint of researcher both from within and outside the space. They in fact have a critical sense of the environment ‘or the macrosystem’ and were more vocal on issues relating to power and need for equity and balance (Cummins, 2000). Ecological approaches include the traditional in the works of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner’s, all giving emphasis on the constructivist nature of acquiring and retaining knowledge. As well, the shift in the way assessment is viewed as a learning experience is part of the constructivist approach that favours the majority of children regardless of economic backgrounds (Swaffield, 2011).

Of particular note was the SEGRA study that was introduced to Samoa in 2017 and which findings have provided a rich data for further studies. Limitations of this study have been noted, though as a pioneering effort, it has served as a major predictor of children’s foundational skills at the time, and basis for more improvement in devising effective teaching pedagogy and robust assessment design.

Overall, the literature supports the Saliemanu framework in terms of the varied but complementary perspectives of the most relevant traditions and research selected for this study. Of the five dimensions, the ‘ecological power relations’ stands to represent the framework’s main ethos, that is, the search for harmony and balance, and maintaining the right perspective (Tui Atua, 2018).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ua fili tagaga le tofa ma le faautaga

The deliberations among expert opinions have been thorough

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology utilised in the study. I have selected a mixed methods approach for this research due to its strengths in accommodating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Included is a description of the rationale for the mixed methods approach, and a description of Samoan cultural considerations observed during the study which aligned with my conceptual ‘holistic’ approach. Central to the methodology is the use of the SEPA Tool to collect data in order to test the thesis hypothesis. The SEPA Tool is discussed separately in the next chapter, along with research instruments, recruitment and data collection procedures, the ethical considerations and the procedures involved in the implementation of the test.

#### 4.1 Mixed methods research

Due to the dynamic nature of the project, a mixed methods approach was selected. The overarching mixed method research philosophy involves the combination both of quantitative and qualitative research. Greene (2007) noted that the mixed methods approach to social inquiry involves the planned use of more different kinds of data gathering and analysis techniques, and more rarely, different kinds of inquiry design within the same study or project (p. 274). Similarly, Wright-St Clair and McPherson (2014) suggest mixed method as an approach that encompasses multiple elements – commonly both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

This approach brings together methodologically diverse, yet complementary ways of doing research within a single study and is a way of triangulating data. Some educational researchers are increasingly recognising the value of using mixed methods because it allows flexibility in choosing methods of data collection and the presentation of results can be

“convincing and powerful” where summary numbers and in-depth portraits of a setting are included” (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegle, 2006, p. 282).

Greene (2007) suggested that mixed methods incorporate a range of philosophical positions that bridge post-positivist and social constructivist world views, pragmatic perspectives, and transformative perspective. Creswell, Klassen & Plano Clark, (2011) stated that ‘mixed methods’ provides an opportunity to synthesise and transform these approaches into new knowledge, by valuing both objective and subjective knowledge as well as create a more just and democratic space that permeates the entire process, from the problem to the conclusions, and the use of the results (p. 4). Studies that used mixed methods research become popular and appreciated as a legitimate approach (Brewer & Hunter, 2005).

Through a mixed methods approach a variables of data sets are blended to explore different research questions or a different aspect of a question in order to “provide stronger evidence for a conclusion through a convergence of findings” (O’Connell, 2010 cited in Siilata, 2014, p.60). One of the main purposes of using mixed methods suggested by Tuafuti (2016) is to “integrate multiple databases to best understand a phenomenon” (p. 119). Creswell (1998) argued that data could be collected separately in two phases so that data from one source could elaborate or complement data from the other source. According to McMillan (2008, p.11) the use of mixed methods allows a researcher to identify “strength of one method” in a way that “compensate the weaknesses” of the other. At least five methods have been selected for my purpose. These are: Interviews, Assessment (SEPA Tool, Samoan Faafaletui, Document Analysis, General Observations.

#### **4.1.1 The Samoan Fa’afaletui**

Information gathering and sharing intelligence is a human activity since human civilization emerged. It is what makes humans unique, and this is done through the faculties of language and memory. Understanding the way information is used in any culture helps us to unpack their own methods of inquiry, particularly the sharing of important information. Local researchers agreed that it is a way of empowering through information gathering and sharing intelligence (Su’aalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014).

The Samoans use the term Fa’afaletui to describe a serious conversation or discussion between two people or a small group of people. Samoan folklores referred to an ancient practice by Pasifika kings (tui) who meet, normally in pairs, to pick one’s brain through riddles and such intellectual pursuits; it has been adopted by the Samoan hierarchy

for generations (Tuafuti, 2016; Rimoni, 2016; Galuvao, 2014). Personal communications with several older teachers and parents also provided a clear understanding of the term Fa'afaletui. A pair or a small group of matai (chiefs) gather to share private information; and because of the confidential nature of such meetings, it is treated as such by the community. Moreover, it is an encounter that benefits both parties. Where power is involved, Faafaletui is considered the best approach to engaging the target environment (Tavita, 2021). Fa'afaletui involves specialised skills in oral traditions in order for any exchange to be meaningful. Inquiry skills at this level require experience and subtlety when negotiating terms of any information sharing (Tamasese & Su'aalii-Sauni, 2008).

All of the above researchers have considered Fa'afaletui the best approach in terms of doing research in the Samoan context. Both Su'aalii & Fulu-Aioluptoea (2014) and Galuvao (2014) emphasised the pivotal role of using Fa'afaletui in Samoan research; for example, its relevance in terms of its cultural physicality, as well as its broadened scope as a way of deconstructing, re-thinking and re-contextualising where issues are discussed, and new knowledge is co-constructed from within. The named researchers agreed that Fa'afaletui has the capacity to collect, share and in the process validate information that are acceptable by both researchers and participants. Tamasese et al (2005) described Faafaletui as a data collecting method that supports cultural perspectives, etiquette, protocols, and expression of the Samoan participating in the research. The general understanding shared among the local researchers is that Fa'afaletui is authentic. It empowers both researcher and participants and provides the means by which Samoan-related research can be done effectively.

#### **4.1.2 Interviews**

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 school principals whose schools were directly involved in the study. Conducted in the manner and protocols of Faafaletui, the interviews were based on a questionnaire of 5 open-ended questions. The questions were as follows:

1. Does your school have a language policy? If yes – Is your policy document available to the public? If no – Is there any particular reason?

2. How many languages does your school use for teaching and learning? So how do you use Samoan only or English only or even two languages in your early literacy program?
3. Do you have any prescribed resources from (MESC) Ministry of Education Sports and Culture to support the development of language/languages in your program?
4. How do you measure your children's academic progress in Samoan/English? Do you have a policy of reporting to parents on their children's achievement? Do you normally report the achievement of your children to their parents? Do you have standardised tests from (MESC) in two languages?
5. How do you describe your community involvement in terms of school development of early literacy development?

#### **4.1.3 Assessment Tool (SEPA). Collection of data using the Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness Tool and Oral Language Measure**

The main aim of the SEPA tool was to collect data accurately and systematically in order to describe a situation of the phonological awareness (understanding sounds in words). A story retell task which evaluates children's oral narrative skills of 5,6- & 7-year-old children who have Samoan as a first language was also administered. As it is descriptive research in nature, utilising a single session of assessment (per child) to gather data on emerging phonological awareness (understanding sounds in words) and oral narrative skills in Samoan speaking children were conducted.

Children participated in 1 x 30 – 40 minutes assessment sessions where they undergone two assessment tasks in which I was presented. The first task exploring awareness skills of 5 short activities for example: syllable segmentation, phoneme isolation, letter and sound knowledge, phoneme segmentation and phoneme blending. Each activity task takes 5-7 minutes to complete. Detailed information about the make-up and administration of each component of the SEPA is provided in the following chapter.

The second task explored the oral narrative skills of participants through administration of a short retell activity. Children listened to a short story and then were asked to retell story in their own words. Children were able to access the pictures from the story when they were retelling. There were also eight comprehension questions prepared to test the children's understanding of the story. This activity takes 7 – 10 minutes to complete.

Children retells and responses to the comprehension questions were audio recorded for later transcription and reliability purposes. Detailed information about how children's retelling were coded for linguistic complexity is provided in the next chapter. Story retelling is a well-established and robust method of ascertaining the oral language skills of children's oral language skills, particularly in the early school years.

Children's scores in the SEPA tool were recorded which enabled a series of statistical analyses on aspects of the SEPA tool. Analyses focused on comparison of children's proficiency across different subtests in the SEPA to gain an understanding of the complexity of the sub-tests (e.g., syllable awareness versus phoneme awareness) and understanding the phonological awareness proficiency of Samoan children across multiple features of this construct.

The performance of girls versus boys and children of different ages were also compared across subtests as a means to detect any developmental or gender differences in performance (despite children being in the same year of schooling). Finally, the performance of children from the four different schools participating in the research were compared as a means to ascertain some impacts of school curriculum, school leadership and other factors on the phonological awareness knowledge of Samoan children.

The complexity of children's oral language retelling and listening comprehension was also described through descriptive statistics. To mirror the analyses conducted with the SEPA, comparisons were made between children of different ages in the cohort, girls and boys, and across the four participating schools.

#### **4.1.4 General observations**

The four school communities provided the backdrop of the study which parents and teachers have become my sources on school matters and even the village on a daily basis. Daily conversations were a natural part of communal living and many of them were happy to share their stories about their concerns as school parents, or as villagers striving to make ends meet. This is not some new experience to me as a former teacher in the environment I've been accustomed to while serving locally. I also spent a lot of time with my village folks who also shared similar concerns and aspirations about their children and Samoa's education issues for that matter. They contributed to the study's general analysis.

## **4.2 The consultations**

The first consultations were done between schools, that is, the cohort of the Better Start initiative of the University of Canterbury, in New Zealand, and the National University of Samoa (Le Papaigalagala) representatives. A matter of authority emerged as to which body is responsible for overseeing the research. It was soon clarified that this was the business of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC). Consultations then were made with the Samoa Ministry of Education, who gave its consent, the university endorsed, and I was ready to go. Thus, at the time of my arrival I met up with both authorities, first, the Faculty of Education at the National University of Samoa to update on the outcome of the negotiations. Then a second meeting was held with the Acting CEO of MESC at the time. The meeting with the ACEO was focused on the confirmation of schools selected as participants, as well, the purpose of my research in Samoa and the process that I have planned for collecting my data. The previsits to selected schools following were extensions of the consultations at the top level. Overall, the consultations were successful even though a few things were learnt on both sides about the different ways the two systems work for each country.

## **4.3 Selection of Participants**

The Samoan children were selected from four Primary schools in Samoa. Three selected Primary schools are state schools, and only one school is a Private one. Three states schools are located at different locations. One school is located at Faleata District on Upolu region, and two other schools are located at Tuamasaga District, both situated at the island of Upolu. The Private School is located at Vaimauga District within the town area not far from Apia the capital city of Samoa. All the four are full Primary schools, the classes started from Year 1 to Year 8. Year 2 class level was the target level with the children's age range from 5-7years old. Presumably, children at this level were immersed in their first language, and use Samoan as a medium of instructions in their educational programmes. Selection of children were based on the following criteria: (1) 5-7years old); (2) Year 2 level; (3) A Samoan speaker; (4) Samoan is a first language.

There were 100 children from four Primary schools who were involved in this study. During the analysis, six children failed to meet the criteria, so their results were not recorded in the final analysis. Of the 94 children qualified, there were 43 males and 51 females. There were 24 children from School 1 - 11 males and 13 females; 24 from School 2 - 15 males

and 9 females; 25 children from School 3 – 12 males and 13 females, and 21 children from School Four - 5 males and 16 females, making up the total of 94 children.

The selection of schools was part of the ethics application to MESC (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture) in Samoa. Three state schools were selected, unfortunately, one state school in the village I was based, seemed reluctant to join. So I invited the principal of a nearby village school situated in the same district who willingly accepted. A meeting with the District School Inspector ensued to discuss the matter, all parties agreed on the change. There weren't any problems with the other two state schools whose principals were very supportive of my research. For the private school, the invitation was warmly accepted, the principals showed their appreciation to be chosen as a participant school. My choice of schools was based on my mobility first and foremost. It was easy for me to travel from one school to another due to their locations on the same route. I have only four weeks to do field work and needed a strategy to fully complete the work on time.

The consent forms for parents and children who met the criteria were handed over to five principals of selected schools at the time of my Pre visits to the schools, including the timetable for my visit to each school. The principal organised the rest, so when I arrived at schools the consent forms for parents and students were fully completed. The school teachers of the student participants were very supportive, the principals' too.

The criteria in the selection of participants comprised: (1) 5-7 years old, (2) Year 2 level, (3) A Samoan speaker (4) Samoan as a first language.

A total of 100 parents' consent forms and children's consent forms were sent out and returned in full. The consent forms were prepared in Samoan. The positive outcome affirmed that all 100 parents agreed for their children to be part of the research.

#### **4.4 Schools in Samoa: Participants & description**

This section provides more detailed information about the participants and schools that were the focus of the research. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the numbers of children from each school and the number of girls and boys that were recruited from each school. This information is vital when drawing implications from the findings of children's levels of phonological awareness and oral language that are included in the next chapter.

**Table 1. Breakdown of participants in schools and age brackets**

School	Gender		Age	Gender		Age	Gender		Age	Total
	Girls	Boys	5yrs	Girls	Boys	6yrs	Girls	Boys	7yrs	
School 1 APS	3	4	7	10	7	17	0	0	0	24
School 2 MPS	0	0	0	2	5	7	7	10	17	24
School 3 SPS	1	1	2	11	7	18	2	3	5	25
School 4 VPS			0	8	3	11	8	2	10	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>94</b>

#### 4.4.1 Description of School 1 (aka APS)

School 1 is a village school on the island of Upolu in Samoa. It is located on the central north coast of the island to the west of the capital Apia in the countryside. The population is 1,781 (2006, census). School 1 is part of a larger electoral constituency (faipule district) of Sagaga, which is part of the traditional political district of Tuamasaga.

There were 24 Year 2 children in School 1 who participated in this study. The participants were identified in age range and gender. There were 7 (5yrs old) 3 girls and 4 boys, and also 17 (6yrs old) 10 girls and 7 boys. Children come from Samoan speaking homes, so they are all fluent speakers of Samoan and English is their second language. School 1 is a full Primary school which starts from Year 1 class to Year 8. The school roll is 406 children. School 1 is one of the state schools, operated under the authority of the MESC (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture). As a semi-rural school, the majority of children come from low socio-economic families, many of whom rely on subsistence farming for daily sustenance. Quite a number of village members though work in Apia, less than an hour's drive. APS has 1 teaching principal, 12 staff and no teacher aides.

#### **4.4.2 Description of School 2 (aka MPS)**

School 2 is a village school on the island of Upolu in Samoa. It is located on the north coast in the electoral constituency (faipule district) of Sagaga, within the larger political district of Tuamasaga. The population of School 2 is 2,189 (2006, census). Like the village in School 1, MPS has had a prominent reputation in traditional Samoan governments of the past.

There were 24 Year 2 children in School 2 who were involved in this study. They were identified in age range and gender. There is no child in 5yrs category. There were 7 (6yrs old), 2 girls and five boys, and 17 (7yrs old) 7 girls and 10 boys. School 2 has a roll of 440 children, it is one of the largest Primary schools in the Tuamasaga District. It is also a state school, operated under the authority of MESC (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture). Samoan is a medium of instruction used mainly to deliver their everyday programme. As village locals, children are fully immersed in their village life, participating actively in cultural activities and church literacy programmes. MPS has 1 teaching principal, 13 teaching staff and no teacher aides.

#### **4.4.3 Description of School 3 (aka SPS)**

School 3 is located on the island of Upolu. It is 5 kilometre west of Apia the capital city of Samoa. The school was officially opened in January 2004. It is run as a private enterprise under the management of three co-principals, all of whom were New Zealand trained. The school is funded mostly by the parents through tuition of their children, with the support of sponsors that included local businesses. The total school roll is 446, including its Preparatory Class.

School 3 is one of the participant schools in this study and is the only private school selected. The selected participants of 25 children comprised 2 five years old - 1 girl and 1 boy, 18 six years old - 11 girls and 7 boys, and 5 seven years old - 2 girls and 3 boys. Most of the children were bilinguals whose first language is Samoan and English as second. The school teaches six academic subjects, namely, Maths, Basic Science, English, Social Studies, Computer Studies and Samoan.

The school curriculum and programmes are based on the principles of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism aligned with the Samoan government's own bilingual policy. As an advocate of Additive Bilingualism, the Dual Medium Model is pursued in which both Samoan and English are used in the delivery of the curriculum. Children in Year 2 level are

immersed in Samoan first before they are introduced to English at Year 4. The majority of parents of School 3 belong in the middle to high income earners. By Samoan standards, it is a well-resourced school. School 3 has three teaching principals; at the time of the research, it has 21 teaching staff, 14 teacher aides, and 7 support staff.

#### **4.4.4 Description of School 4 (aka VPS)**

School 4 is a village school that is located on the central north of the island of Upolu, within the periphery of the capital city of Apia, and has a population of 2,686 people (2011 census). It is a traditional village in the Faleata district, about 7 kilometres from the city. The total number of Year 2 children from School 4 selected in this study was 21, consisting of 11 six years old - 8 girls and 3 boys; and, 10 seven years old - 8 girls and 2 boys. All children were Samoan born and raised. Samoan is their first language, and the first medium of instruction in the teaching and learning. School 4 is a full Primary that starts from Year 1 Class to Year 8. The school roll was 455 at the time of the research. School 4 is a state school under the supervision of MESC (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture). Most children come from families of low socio-economic backgrounds.

For this particular school, including the first two mentioned, families rely much on the subsistence economy for their daily sustenance. Based on what I've been told by teachers and some parents themselves, they are more proactive in the raising of food crops mainly for the purpose of selling; many are traditional fishers for seafood for sale; and running foodstalls in Apia. Producing and selling Samoan handicrafts is another source of income for these families. On average, many of these families have only one income earner in a household. The plight of many villages close to Apia is lack of land for farming, thus it is essential that a regular employment in Apia be secured by a family member to support the family at least. The pressure of modern-day living, and cultural commitments have forced quite a number of young children to become peddlers in Apia, selling foodstuff and whatever merchandise to support their families. I've been informed early that some of the children in this village have never been to school. So their late entry has become an issue for the management and teachers. It has become a national issue and more so a challenge for the Samoan government in terms of enforcing own law that children must be in classrooms and not in the streets (Samoa Observer, Issue 18/02/2020).

On the positive, this school has a strong parents and teachers organisation under the current management. VPS has one teaching principal, and 11 teaching staff.

#### 4.5 Cultural responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness is a strength for those who live in a society such as Samoa which places values of politeness and reciprocity on the top of its cultural priorities. The Samoan hospitality to my visit has been remarkable since the day I arrived in Samoa and began working with the four schools. Moving out into schools has been a whole new experience for me since I left Samoa. My experience then can be described as enriching, first, as someone looking from outside; secondly, as a former resident looking in from prior experience of the place and the people. So while changes have been evident in certain parts of the school system, the old Samoan hospitality remains unchanged, and still an integral part of the school system values. There were previsits made to schools to confirm their consents as participants. The previsits and formal visits to schools afterwards involved customary protocols, especially the fact that school management are matai (Samoan traditional leaders); my experience as a matai myself served the purpose of these occasions well. At the end of my work with them, I reciprocated by a word of thanks and presenting a koha to each school. They too presented gifts as part of the custom. All principals and staff have been very facilitatory, some went out of their way to help, with transport, and so forth.

#### 4.6 Summary

This chapter described the research methodology adopted for the collection and analysis of data. Selecting a mixed methods was based on the fact of its strengths in accommodating both the qualitative and quantitative research methods. I have described each selected method in detail, the rationale and process and function in the analysis task. Several indigenous methods have been selected along with conventional approaches to facilitate the consultation and interview processes. Featuring in these methods was the Faafaletui, a Samoan own form of narrative inquiry. The participants were introduced in terms of their schools, general backgrounds and relevant details. The consultation process was crucial in the task of securing the consent of all participants to be interviewed, at the same time protected. The approval by the university's Ethics Committee reflected the trust that the Samoan authority – at all levels - had for the study to proceed. Central to the methodology was the SEPA Tool by which data was collected. Additional background information was collected from the principals through open interviews with five of them.

In the next chapter, the Samoan phonological and orthographic systems are introduced.

## Chapter 5:

# SAMOAN PHONOLOGICAL & ORTHOGRAPHIC SYSTEMS

Ua sanisani fa'amanuao –  
Like early birds tweeting

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with a comprehensive description of the Samoan phonological and orthographic systems. Given the central focus of this thesis on the development of phonological awareness in Samoan, it is important that the Samoan's phonological system be addressed well and fully. Understanding the phonological system is essential for developing a fair assessment of the task at hand, more specifically the issues that require research attention (Hyun Min, 2019; Derby, 2019; Gillon, 2017).

As well, the Samoan spelling system is basic to this understanding of the Samoan sound system as this thesis would like to argue. For example, the highly phonemic position of the Samoan such as the simple correspondence between a sound and its representation in print, as opposed to the non-phonemic orthographies such as English, where there can be many ways to articulate the same sound symbols (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019), called for better awareness of the differences. The argument is proposed that the use of phonics in early literacy development, since the missionaries, seemed to have provided strong evidence of sound-to-spelling correspondence (Kaefer, 2016).

For my procedure, I will introduce the Samoan phonology, including its role from a historical perspective and relevancy in today's learning and application of the Samoan language. The Samoan phonology is introduced with special reference to its relations to the orthography (spelling) and to that extent reading and writing. Part of the discussion is the role of Phonological Awareness in Samoan literacy development. Additionally, I wish to introduce the two types of registers which underpinned the two vernaculars that Samoans use in everyday communications. At the end of the chapter, the reader will have a much better understanding of the Samoan phonology and some of the pressing issues involved in research at the moment.

## 5.1 The Samoan Phonological system

**Table 2. Samoan phonology**

/a/	/ɛ/	/i/	/o/	/ʊ/, /w/	/f/	/ŋ/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/p/	/s/	/t/	/v/	/h/	/k/	/r/	/ʔ/
/a:/	/ɛ:/	/i:/	/ɔ:/	/u:/					ŋ/			/k/			/l/		

There are at least 18 sounds in the Samoan phonological system; 5 vowel sounds, and 13 consonants. The place of the glottal stop in Samoan orthography (spelling) is still an open discussion though in phonology it cannot be denied (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). First it was the missionaries that encoded the Samoan sound into symbols. The last three letters (H K R) were incorporated to the original 15 by the missionaries, when oral Samoan was appropriated with the singular purpose of translating the Bible in Samoan (Pratt, 1893).

Essentially the three additional sound-symbols were needed for the purpose of transferring foreign sounds into Samoa's own system. Thus, they are known as introduced sounds. The glottal stop, treated as the 15<sup>th</sup> phoneme of the alphabet, is represented by the apostrophe symbol. In the Samoan alphabet, each letter corresponds with own speech sound. As said earlier, part of the speech sound is the colloquial Samoan or the k register; this is acknowledged in Table 2 above, in the substitution of /l/ for /r/, /ŋ/ for /n/, and /k/ for /t/.

**Table 3. Samoan Orthography**

Aa,	Ee,	Ii,	Oo,	Uu,	Ff	Gg	Ll	Mm	Nn	Pp	Ss	Tt	Vv	Hh	Kk	Rr	'
Āā	Ēē	Īī	Ōō	Ūū													

### 5.1.1 Vowels

There are two types – the short and long. Samoan vowels are described as pure monophthongs that still maintain their sounds and quantities as diphthongs and triphthongs combinations (maea – rope, short; māe'a, long). Short vowels are common in the V, CV, and CVV formations; in minimal pairs, CVCV and VCV (mama – ring, ata – photo). There are at least 20 diphthongs identified; the vowel /ɐ/ (rotated lower case a) is the most frequently used as a monophthong or as part of a diphthong (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). These

are their sounds in close approximation with the International Phonetic Alphabet, first the close vowels /i/ and /u/. The I /i/ resembles the English E /i:/ and described as a close front unrounded vowel. The U /u:/ is described as a close back rounded vowel. E and O are mid vowels. The closest sound on the IPA is e and o with a small capital underscore. The A is a near open central vowel approximated to a rotated lower-case a (/ɐ/). But as emphasised earlier, these are close approximants.

The vowel sound has been the subject of a latest study about a paradigmatic shift in its pronunciation (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). The argument was that it has become ever more glottalized in its usage especially in Samoan diasporic contexts (ibid.). Certain factors are involved, including the issue of mistaken identity where the English sound-symbol is a misrepresentation of the Samoan's own sound (Ibid.). Evidence of the shift is noted in the pronunciation of the vowel phoneme in the initial position (alofa – love; aso – day). Unlike the English vowel that is glottalized, a Samoan vowel is an aspirated h unstressed (ibid.).

**Table 4. Samoan Monophthongs**

Vowel	a as in yard	e as in yellow	i as in window	o as in horse	u as in hook
Length short	a alu (go)	e esi (pawpaw)	i isi (others)	o oso (jump)	u usu (to sing)
schwa(ə)	asō (to date)	īloa (to know)	totō (to plant)		
(long)	a: mālō (Well done!)	e: metala (metal)	i: faitī (to have tea with)	o: Tōfā (Goodbye)	u: tū'ua (school breaks up for the day)

**Table 5. Samoan Diphthongs**

Diphthongs	ae	ai	ao	au
	ea	ei	eo	eu
	ia	ie	io	iu
	oa	oe	oi	ou
	ua	ue	ui	uo

**Table 6. Triphthongs**

Triphthongs	maea	faia	taia	laoa	maua
	taua	peia	leua	peleue	fa'alaeo
	iai	miau	ieova	ioana	liua
	aoa	moea	soia	loia	foua
	tuai	suia	maui	auo	

Pronunciation: in one syllable e.g . 1. Taia (be struck) as in *fire* 2. Aoa (banyan tree) as in *hello*; in two syllables e.g Māua (be heard) as in *rehab*

**Table 7. Quadthongs/Pentathongs**

Quadthongs	puaoa	taeao	tauia	aoao	auau
Pentathongs	aiaia	auaua			

### 5.1.2 Consonants

It needs to be noted that when it comes to formal literacy development, the Samoan consonants maintain the t-register in both phonology and orthography (see the following subheading 'the two registers'). There are 13 phonemes including the glottal stop: f (unvoiced bilabial fricative,  $\phi$ , as in far); g (voiced back dorsal velar nasal,  $\eta$ , as in tongue); l (voiced apical alveolar lateral fricative,  $\lambda$ , as in luck); m (unvoiced bilabial nasal stop,  $\text{m}^h$ , as in mortar); n (voiced apical alveolar nasal stop, n, as in noodles); p (unvoiced unaspirated bilabial stop,  $\text{p}^h$ , as in pillar); s (unvoiced apical alveolar sibilant fricative,  $\text{s}^h$ , as in summer); t (voiceless alveolar plosive, t, as in tea); v (voiced labiodental fricative, v as in vinegar); h (voiceless glottal fricative, h; as in heaven); k (voiceless velar plosive, k, as in karma); r (voiced alveolar approximant,  $\text{r}^h$ , as in roll); ' (creaky voiced glottal approximant,  $\text{ʔ}^h$ , as in ark).

**Table 8. Samoan consonants**

Symbol	Name	Say it	Allophones
f	Fa	As is Far	fa fe fi fo fu
g	Ga	As in Ngata	ga ge gi go gu
l	La	As in Laugh	la le li lo lu
m	Mo	As in Morgue	ma me mi mo mu
n	Nu	As in Noodle	na ne ni no nu
p	Pi	As in Pillar	pa pe pi po pu
s	Sa	As in Sun	sa se si so su
t	Ti	As in Tea	ta te ti to tu
v	Vi	As in Village	va ve vi vo vu
h	He	As in Her	ha he hi ho hu
k	Ka	As in Karma	ka ke ki ko ku
r	Ro	As in Roll	ra re ri ro ru
‘	Koma faaleo	As in ask, echo, inside, or, uber	

### 5.1.3 Phonotactics

Like most Pasifika languages a consonant is part of a word formation of which includes these – CV, CVV, VCV, VCVCV, or a variation along those lines. That is, there are no consonant blends or consonant in the final position of the syllable in Samoan. Samoan phonotactics is mainly syllabic which structure is CV, the vowel is either long or a diphthong; initial syllables are common as long vowels. The unstressed schwa usually stands as an initial sound or part of the CV syllable combination. As shown above, triphthongs, quadthongs and pentathongs are not uncommon too.

It is important to note that the pure consonant sound has been challenged by the presence of another register, popularly called Tautala Leaga or colloquial Samoan. The Samoans have adopted it as their everyday vernacular, both at home and even on formal occasions. This will be discussed in detail shortly.

## 5.2 The Samoan Alphabet

**Table 9. Alefapeta Samoa**

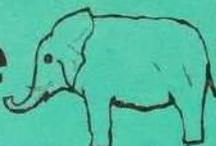
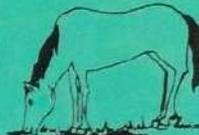
A	E	I	O	U	F	G	L	M	N	P	S	T	V	H	K	R	'
a	e	i	o	u	f	G	l	m	N	p	s	t	v	h	k	r	'

The Samoan alphabet was the work of the English missionaries who drew largely from the Latin script, when preparations were underway for the translation of the Bible in Samoan. An orthography was formulated in 1834 based on this script, hence shared many similarities with other world languages, including the Pacific (Pratt, 1893). All the letter sounds correspond with their symbol representation, making the alphabetical system predominantly phonemic. This is the basic reason why reading and writing using decoding strategies are considered regular or promoting phonemic awareness to both old and young readers alike is much more effective.

As mentioned earlier, a number of issues have been raised in relation to the Samoan orthography. First, the use of the diacritic marks: the macron and the glottal stop represented by an apostrophe sign. That fact that they can hardly make a difference for proficient readers and writers of Samoan makes it an important issue for young learners (Tavita & Fetui, 2017). The fact is, without the diacritic marks, especially the glottal stop sign, these learners would find it hard to decode the language appropriately.

In addition to, the misrepresentation or misreading perhaps of sounds has been the focus of a latest study, which findings affirmed a shift in vowel pronunciation, as it becomes more glottalized (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). In the context of language transfer this is very important for minority languages where English has become the favourite language of the majority. The argument is, the vowel pronunciation can hardly be maintained in such context unless something can be done, systemically at least. By far, explicit modelling by educators is the most effective strategy in this task of sound maintenance.

Table 10. The Samoan Alphabet Chart

O L E P I T A U T A U			
a 	e 	i 	o 
u 	f 	g 	l 
m 	n 	p 	s 
t 	v 	a i = ai a u = au e i = ei e u = eu i a = ia e a = ea	
h 	k 	r 	
a e i o u f g l m n p s t v · h k r			
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			
s f m t g n i o v a p e n k l r			
f s n t m g n i h p u s a r h o			

Printed by the Malua Printing Press, 1960

Source: Malua Press

### 5.2.1 Pi Tautau

In the promotion of literacy nationally, the missionaries devised the first Samoan Alphabet chart and was given the name Pi Tautau. Also called Pi Nofoa or Pi Faitau (Le Tagaloa, 1996) As a tool the Pi Tautau was taught using the phonics strategy; children follow the teacher's direction and modelling of each sound in correspondence with the letter. The letter name is identified as the teacher points it out on the chart, then reinforced it by saying the name of the object (image) beside. The letter is in the initial position of the object's name. This is further reinforced by the child as she/he pronounces the letter sound following the teacher's example. A more advanced assessment is shown at the bottom of the chart, when a child is tested on their versatility, meaning that they have mastered the letter-symbol identification at random. Then there is an introductory exercise in vowel blending, starting with diphthongs (refer to chart on the opposite page).

### 5.3 Spelling development

From the missionaries to the present, the teaching of spelling has been dependent largely on the success of this early nurturing in the alphabet using the phonics strategy. Because of the emphasis on oracy in teaching instructions, plus the phonetic quality of the Samoan orthography, spelling is hardly an issue for many children. As each phoneme is a single and unique sound, the learner would not take long to encode words as well as decode text once they master the spelling strategies (Le Tagaloa, 1996). These include skills in phonemic awareness, syllable segmentation and phonotactics, Samoan rules on good grammar and syntax, for example (Ibid.; Tanielu, 2004).

In practice, teacher modelling is the popular strategy, who guides a task by helping a learner to pronounce sounds correctly or provide cues to help them to self-correct. A teacher can be a parent, an older sibling, or an adult member of the extended family. Spelling out loud is encouraged in order to assist a learner in the task of literacy development, as they encode a word as in writing, or decode individual sounds correctly when reading or trying to guess a word with multiple meanings for example. This will reinforce their learning of the more advanced skills such as blending or mastering awareness of correct pronunciation of a word, more so in the context of a sentence.

One of the standing issues with the Samoan spelling is to do with the non-utterance of the glottal stop sound in a word that is spelt out (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). The concern is that it will only encourage the practice of leaving out the diacritic marks from the

development of literacy. As the above study (2019) argued strongly, it is such a risk for young learners when we continue to take these things for granted. This is related to the issue of correct pronunciation, particularly of the vowel sound as mentioned earlier.

As the above study pointed out, there is ambiguity noted in the chart itself. The vowels /a/, /e/, and /o/ do not correspond with their initial sounds as depicted in the images. These are glottalized vowels that could not model Samoan vowel sounds correctly. The exceptions were /i/ and /u/ which initial positions in the images (names) given correspond accordingly. The argument therefore, the Samoan vowel sound should not be equated with the glottalized English (apple – ‘apu; ask - fesili) at any time.

#### **5.4 Two types of speech registers – T and K**

Samoan is unique for the fact that two vernaculars coexist in everyday communication. They are referred to as speech registers (Le Tagaloa, 1996). The first is commonly called Tautala Lelei (Good Speech), it is the original vernacular, spoken by the Samoans for generations before its position of primacy was taken over by another. The latter is known popularly by the name, Tautala Leaga (Bad Speech); it is a variant of the original sound. Tautala Lelei follows the orthography prepared by the missionaries. It is used in formal situations, in the church, government and broadcasting. It is also the language of education and the elite. Speaking using the T register was a sign of being knowledgeable in both Samoan custom and European, according to a source and former principal.

The literacy is taught and maintained in this register in classrooms. It is the code used for the purpose of reading and writing. Gradually it has lost its place to the other register as the people’s everyday vernacular but still maintained its hold on the formal aspects of language application as mentioned. At Pastor’s School children are modelled the proper use of the T register (Tautala Lelei).

Tautala Leaga (also known as the k register) was adopted in the nineteenth century around the mid-fifties according to Pratt (1893) and since then has become the mainstay of everyday communication (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019; Fouva’a, 2011; Mayer, 2016). The missionary Pratt talked about its origins: the K sound that is common in other Polynesian dialects, was transmitted through native Rarotongan and Tahitian teachers and which local Malua students made fun word games with. The T sound is replaced with the K, so as the N sound supplanted by the /ng/ sound. It caught the people’s imagination, and the result

was a new vernacular (Pratt, 1893). By the time of the German Administration, Tautala Leaga has established itself steadily in the western islands of Samoa.

Tanielu (2004) argued that people prefer the K register because “it is relatively easier to speak with than it is with t, which she also considered a lazy way of speaking” (p. 149). At any rate, the education system insists on the use of the T register in classroom instructions, in which all literacy domains are developed and promoted. Both teachers and students are encouraged to use ‘t’ during school hours.

No empirical research has been conducted on the impact of the K register on Samoa’s literacy development, given the fact that the T register is the formal language of education and classroom instructions. This is important for the fact that the K register is spoken by most children at home after school. In school they will revert to the T register and back to K again in the home environment. Only a few parents use the T register at home, along with a number of church ministers and some community leaders. As it stands, the T register may have lost to the popular K at home and in everyday oral discourses, but it has the major institutions on its side in the church, education, the state services for example. Most importantly, reading and writing is still the prerogative of the T speech register. It needs to be noted that the K register is not promoted in this study, though its implication on language understanding is crucial and needs an awareness of in terms of its impact on phonology and orthography especially.

Noted, the T capital and ‘t’ are used interchangeably to refer to the same register throughout the study.

**Table 11. Two speech registers – t and k**

T register	a e i o u	f g l m n	p s t v h	k r ‘
K Register	a e i o u	f g l m g	p s k v h	k l ‘

**Table 12. Spelling examples of the two registers**

T	K	Language issues - Examples
fatu (heart)	faku	spelling, speech
potu (room)	poku	spelling, speech
tatou (us, our, ours)	kakou	spelling, speech
nafa (duty, be occupied)	gafa	spelling, speech
fana (to shoot)	faga	spelling, meaning
rapiti (rabbit)	lapiki	spelling, speech
tarako (dragon)	kalako	spelling, speech
Egelani (England)	Egelagi	spelling, speech
tasi (one)	kasi	spelling, speech
lua (two)	lua	spelling, speech
tolu (three)	kolu	spelling, speech
fa (four)	fa	spelling, speech
lima (five)	lima	spelling, speech
ono (six)	ogo	spelling, speech
fitu (seven)	fiku	spelling, speech
valu (eight)	valu	spelling, speech
iva (nine)	iva	spelling, speech
sefulu (ten)	sefulu	spelling, speech

### 5.5 Introduced sounds

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, there were foreign sounds that were introduced into the original fifteen. These were the /h/, /k/ and /r/. Included in this incorporation task was the English, which own sounds were derived from other languages (Kreidler, 2004). This was required for the purpose of translating the Bible in Samoan, more appropriately the transliteration of new sounds from one to the other. Hence a transliteration code was drawn by the missionaries as a guide. There is more to be said about the following graph (Table 13), but a number of things need to be noted for the purpose of this study. First, the translation from the Bible languages including English to Samoan was focused mainly on content words (verbs, adjectives, adverbs, adverbials).

**Table 13. Foreign Sounds and Samoan Equivalent examples**

Foreign Sounds	Example	Samoan Equivalent	Example
A /a/	Albert	A as in ask	Alapati, 'apu
B /b/	Barbecue	P as in pillow	papakiu
C /c/ or /tʃ/	Christ, Chinese, chowmein	K as in card OR S as in sigh	Keriso Saina, siaumeni
D /d/	David	T as in tea	Tavita
E /e/	England, English	E as in elephant	Egelani, elefane
F /f/	Frying pan	F as in father	falai, fulū
G /g/ or /dʒ/	Galilee, Germany	K as in garden S as in summer	Kalilaia, Koliata Siamani, Siaosi
H /h/ or /e/	Herod, Hebron, Henry, herring	H as in Herod OR E as in everything	Herota, Enele, elegi
I /i:/ or /aI/	India, Island, Ireland	I as in India, Israel OR Ireland	Initia, Israaelu, Aealani/Aielani
J /j/	James, Jack	I as in Yes Or S as in Simon	Iakopo, Iesu, Siaki, Semisi
K /k/	Karate, key	K as in Korea	key, karate
L /l/	London	L as in Latin	Latina, Lonetona
M /m/	mile, Mark	M as in mother	Maila, Mareko
N /n/	newspaper	N as in nugget	Nusipepa, Noue
O /ɔ:/	Short, port	O as in Otto	oloto, opera
P /p/	paper	P as in pudding	Puligi, pepa
Q /q/	Queensland	K as in keep	Kuiniselani
R /r/	rose	R as in rabbit	rapiti, rosa
S /s/	Solomon	S as in song	Solomona, siliva
T /t/	time, tiger	T as in time	taimi, taika
U /u:/ or /ju:/	book, Luke, ute	U as in took OR As in you	Luka, Ulisese iuni, iunivesitē
V /v/	van, violin	V as in village	veni, violini
W /w/	what, quick, wool wheel, watch	V as in village OR U as in winger	Viliamu, vulu; uili, uosi
X /x/	Xena	S as in sand	Sina
Y /j/	York	I as in Yard	Ioka, Ioane
Z /z/	zone, Zion	S as in sorrow	sone, Siona

Adapted from Hough (1923).

## 5.6 Summary

The focus of this chapter was on the Samoan phonology and its development since the missionaries introduced the first Samoan Alphabet chart (Pi Tautau). The orthography was based on the original Samoan sounds, later to be given the name Tautala Lelei or the T speech register to differentiate from a new variant (K register). Hence, the Samoan language is noted for its two vernaculars, one oral and the common medium of everyday conversation, the other formal and language of schooling, reading, writing and literacy development.

The Tautala Leaga continues to impact the literacy development of Samoan especially for the overseas' young learners, meaning that more awareness is needed about its distinction and role as a medium of communication. I have also pointed out some of the pressing issues about the Samoan phonology and orthography that are crucial in any discussion of the language. The shift in the pronunciation of the vowel for instance is considered important at this stage for the overseas learners. They are the ones who are disadvantaged in terms of the nurturing space which local learners take for granted.

In terms of challenges, the continual prevalence of the K speech register can be a concern, given the fact that both registers are given equal regard, however. Yet the fact that the T register is the choice of education and academic assessment, the young learners need as much encouragement from their parents and the wider community for its maintenance. More research is needed to find out whether there is a link in code-mixing and impact on language retention or loss for that matter. Finally, the argument was proposed at the beginning of the chapter, that the use of phonics in early literacy development seemed to have provided strong evidence of sound-to-spelling correspondence (Kaefer, 2016).

I have pointed out the strong connection between the spontaneous teaching of sounds and symbols with phonics strategies such as letter-sound identification, the domination of the oracy through the home, state and church institutions, plus the phonetic tendency of the Samoan language, all act as facilitators in the early stage of acquiring sounds.

The development of a phonological awareness assessment in any language is contingent to an in-depth knowledge of the phonological features of that language. Hence, having a fair understanding of the phonological and orthographic features of Samoan has been fundamental to the development of the SEPA tool, which was put to trial in this research. The next chapter introduces the SEPA tool.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE SEPA TOOL AND RETELL TASK – NOFOILO I LEO SAMOA: DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Tau mai na o 'auga o aute  
Pick only the choice flowers

#### 6.0 Background

Assessment of foundational learning skills that support early literacy success is crucial to understanding the development of Samoan emergent bilingual learners. Phonological Awareness is one aspect of foundational learning that needs to be considered in children's early literacy development, yet there is limited research related to phonological awareness development in Samoan speakers. Hence, the initiative called SEPA (Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness) tool came into being. For Samoan bilingual children, learning to speak and read in both Samoan and English can be facilitated successfully with the use of evidence-based teaching strategies.

Phonological awareness supports emergent readers to formulate and consolidate their knowledge of the sound structure of words across languages. As detailed extensively in the literature, research evidence supports the supposition that children who have strong phonological awareness skills are more likely to succeed in their early reading and writing development (Gillon, 2017; Westerveld, 2014). For young children who are Samoan and English emergent bilingual learners, it is important to understand their phonological awareness skill development in Samoan and English (Westerveld, 2014), so as to direct and reinforce effective literacy teaching practices. The SEPA Tool was prepared to gain insight in children's phonological awareness knowledge in Samoan.

Children's oral language competence is also an important foundational skill for reading and writing success. From the review of theoretical models earlier in this thesis (e.g., the simple view of reading), it is imperative that children develop print related skills and the ability to understand and use their oral language.

In this chapter, the performance of nearly 100 Samoan children on a phonological awareness tool developed within this thesis (i.e., the SEPA) is described. Further, the oral language skills of this cohort in a story retell task is also presented.

## 6.1 Summary of procedure

All children involved in this study were assessed in a quiet room, either a spare room in a school or the staff room. Children were collected from their classes according to a list that was prepared by the classroom teacher. Both the classroom teacher and myself (researcher) has a list of children's names and their surnames, birthdays, genders, and the Year level. The teacher sent the children individually for the test. The test was conducted in Samoan language only. There were two sessions per child of about 30-40 minutes for each child which was presented by this researcher.

The first task exploring emerging phonological awareness skills, consists of 5 short subtests exploring various aspects of phonological awareness skills. Each subtest in the phonological awareness assessment takes 5 – 7 minutes to complete.

The second task exploring oral narrative skills consists of a short story retell activity. The researcher read the story first, but before reading, the researcher introduced the title of the story and also talked about the pictures with the children. The researcher showed the book and started reading while the child was listening. The researcher read each page while the child was looking at the picture. After reading the story she asked the child to retell the story by answering questions about the story. This activity lasted for 7 – 10 minutes.

All scores were recorded on the child's scoring form; also the session was digitally recorded for transcription and reliability purposes. Before each session started, I greeted the participant in Samoan; they reciprocated as well as introduced themselves by saying their names, their parents' names, their age, and school. At the end, the researcher thanked the child and gave her/him a choice out of three objects (pencil, pen, rubber) to choose as a reward. A total of 100 children completed the phonological awareness assessment as well as the story retell task.

## 6.2 Phonological Awareness Instrument Development in Samoan

The development of the SEPA (Samoan Phonological Awareness) incorporated previous research on phonological awareness within monolingual and bilingual Samoan speakers as reviewed earlier in this thesis. In line with the critique of the literature that was presented earlier in the thesis, it was important to address gaps in the development of phonological awareness assessments that have been previously developed for bilingual Samoan speakers in New Zealand and Australia (e.g., Westerveld, 2014; Hamilton & Gillon, 2006; Ballard & Farao, 2008). Some key examples include the use of the ‘t’ language (tautala lelei) in teaching and learning as well as in the preparation of resource material and assessments. (See page 90, T & K registers for further details).

Given the lack of data regarding phonological awareness development in the Samoan language, it was important that initial evaluations of a phonological awareness tool in Samoan was instigated with first language speakers. Thus, part of the plan was to employ expert advice on its design and development in collaboration with my supervisors.

The design of the SEPA tool was also based on the researcher’s own experience as a language teacher and a native speaker, born and bred in own language and the fa’aSamoa (Samoan culture and language). Previous and current networks with Samoan scholars and colleagues in both Samoa and New Zealand all contributed to the outcome. My teaching experience and academic training gave me the confidence in its preparation. In total, every contribution counted in the design and content of the new tool. Together with latest research, the SEPA was well informed in terms of individual and collective contribution put into it.

## 6.3 Teaching Samoan Sounds

As in any language, teaching the Samoan sounds implies the need to be a bit more familiar with the Samoan sound system (phonology) (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019; Le Tagaloa, 1996; Pratt, 1893). Arguably, the following description of Samoan phonology as drawn from a few research and publications (Mosel & Hovdhaugen, 1992; Milner, 1996; Tavita & Fetui, 2012, 2017) can only offer much (ibid.). Some of the issues in relation to this task have been addressed in Chapter 5 in detail.

As said earlier, Samoan is an oral language, and its success depends on the explicit modelling at home and in schools by adults or teachers. There is a dilemma for children to differentiate between the two speech registers (t & k). At most homes, the family uses the k register, but at school and in church or any official functions, they are expected to use the t

register. Many Samoan children learn early about this differentiation. Their use of the t register is reinforced through the church at Sunday School and other such activities of whom they are active participants.

The use of the phonics in the teaching of Samoan sounds is considered traditional. As described in Chapter 5, children are taught sounds by way of their letter names. For example, the /m/ as represented by the grapheme [m], which letter name is Mo in Samoan, as in Morgue. Children are taught to identify the letter M then say its name out loud, /mo/ (lips close then open to articulate with stress). This method is contrasted with the English way of articulating /m/, with lips closed. Another example is that when the teacher introduces the letter 'f', it will be associated with the syllable 'fa' rather than the /f/ phoneme articulated in isolation as is commonplace in English instruction.

I have commented on this anomaly in teaching Samoan sounds, with implications on the assessment of the children as evident in the SEGRA findings for example. I have raised this as an issue of importance in the task of teaching correct sounds in Samoan. As I proposed, this issue needs addressing by the Samoan education system, especially with the induction of Phonological Awareness as part of the children's literacy skills.

#### **6.4 Designing the Sub-tests of the SEPA Tool**

The Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness Tool (SEPA) consists of five subtests in Samoan, *vaevaega o 'upu i silapela* (syllable segmentation), *tulaga o le leo i se 'upu* (phoneme isolation), *mata 'itusi ma o latou leo* (letter and sound knowledge), *vaevaega o le leo ta 'itasi* (phoneme segmentation), and *ta 'uga atoa o le ta 'itasi o i le 'upu* (phoneme blending) each examining a different phonological skill, using high frequency Samoan words familiar to children. The inclusion of a syllable-level subtest (in addition to the phoneme level sub-tests) is an important feature of the tool and is directly related to the phonological structure of the Samoan language. The images used in the tool identify the true nature of Samoan visual arts as shown in each drawing. A New Zealand Samoan born artist in Christchurch was chosen to do the job. The selection of vocabulary words used in each subtest were chosen carefully, such as simple nouns and verbs that children came across in their everyday conversation, within the context of their family and school. Care was also taken to include items related specifically to the phonological structure of the language, illustration designs that visualise aspects of Samoan life, to ensure its cultural responsiveness to the Samoan context.

#### **6.4.1 Validation of audio and transcripts**

Two Samoan language experts were asked to check the validity of the audio recording and the transcripts. Both were native speakers of the language and experienced educators. One has been involved in Early Childhood Education in New Zealand for more than 30 years. The other is a Samoa matai and a researcher in the Samoan language. They also checked the accuracy of the children's oral language transcripts of story retelling that was recorded on an audio device.

## 6.4.2 SEPA Tasks in the Samoan Language

### Su'ega Laitiiti 1 – Vaevaega o Upu i Silapela

E sefulumalelua upu sa filifili e su'e ai le malamalama o tamaiti i silapela i le upu. E ono nauna ae fitu veape. O upu e ta'ilua silapela se'ia o'o i le ta'ifa silapela sa fa'aaoga. Sa fa'ailoa mai e tamaiti le vaevaega o upu i silapela i le pati.

### Su'ega Laitiiti 2 – Tulaga o le leo i se upu

E sefulu fonime sa filifili, e tofu ma le ata e o fa'atasi e lagolagoina.

### Su'ega Laitiiti 3 – Mata'itusi ma o latou leo

E sefulumalefitu mata'itusi laiti o le Alefapeta Samoa sa filifili e fa'ailoa mai ai e tamaiti igoa ma leo o mata'itusi.

### Su'ega Laitiiti 4 – Vaevaega o leo ta'itasi

E sefulumalelua upu sa filifili e su'e ai le malamalama o tamaiti i le fa'aleoina mai o fonime ta'itasi i le upu. E sefulu nauna ae lua veape. O upu e ta'ilua, ta'itolu ma le ta'ifa fonime sa fa'aaoga.

### Su'ega Laitiiti 5 – Ta'uga atoa o leo ta'itasi o i le upu

E sefulumalelua upu sa filifili e su'e ai le malamalama o tamaiti i le ta'u mai o le upu pe a uma ona fa'aleo e le faia'oga po o le faisu'ega leo ta'itasi (fonime) i le upu. E sefulumalelua nauna. O upu e ta'itolu, ta'ifa ma le ta'ilima fonime sa fa'aaoga.

## 6.4.3 SEPA Tasks (English Translation)

### Subtest 1- Syllable Segmentation

Twelve words were selected to test children's understanding of syllables in a word. There were six nouns and seven verbs. Words ranging from two syllables to four syllables were used. Children indicated syllables by clapping.

### Subtest 2 – Phoneme Isolation

Ten phonemes were selected each with a corresponding image which name begins with the same phoneme.

**Subtest 3 – Letter and sound knowledge**

Seventeen letters (lower case of the Samoan alphabet) were chosen for children to identify by the letter names and their sounds.

**Subtest 4 – Phoneme Segmentation**

Twelve high frequency words were used to test children's ability in sounding out each phoneme in a word. There were ten nouns and two verbs chosen. Words ranging from two phonemes, three phonemes and four phonemes were used.

**Subtest 5 – Phoneme Blending**

Twelve high frequency words were used to test children's ability to say the word after listening to the teacher/assessor say the phonemes in the word individually. There were twelve nouns selected. Words ranging from three, four and five phonemes were used.

## 6.5 Administering of the SEPA Tool

### 6.5.1 Faafoega o Su'ega Laiti o le SEPA i le Gagana Samoa

E talafeagai le fa'afoeina o nei su'ega e se faisu'ega ua lava taoso i tomai tautala ma le fa'aleoga manino o leo i le Gagana Samoa. E le faitauina fua le fa'aliliuga i le Gagana Peretania, peita'i ua na o se soa e lagolagoina lona faamaninoga.

#### Su'ega Laitiiti 1 – Vaevega o upu i Silapela

O le galuega lenei o le vaeveaina o upu i silapela e fa'atino mai i le pā'o a le pati. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga ua saunia mo le su'ega lenei. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua e fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga. Ta'u e le faia'oga le upu “sua” ona vaevae mai lea o le upu “sua” i silapela i le pati (su - a). O le Fa'ata'ita'iga lonalua e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. E ta'u e le faia'oga le upu “momoe” ae vaevae mai e le tamaitiiti le upu “momoe” i silapela i le pati (mo – mo - e). O le Fa'ata'ita'iga lonatolu e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. E ta'u e le faia'oga le upu “faitau” ae vaevae mai e le tamaitiiti le upu “faitau” i silapela i le pati (fa- i – ta – u). A uma ona fa'ata'ita'i ona galulue loa lea o le faia'oga ma le tamaitiiti i galuega fa'atino e sefulumalelua ua saunia. E fa'amau e le faia'oga togi i le pepa ua saunia e fa'amau ai togi.

#### Su'ega Laitiiti 2 – Tulaga o le leo i se upu

O le galuega lenei o le ta'uina o le leo e fa'aaoga ai ata. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga ua saunia mo le su'ega lenei. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua e fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga. Su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo /m/. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonalua e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. Su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo /p/. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonatolu e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. Su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo /n/. A uma ona fa'ata'ita'i ona galulue loa o le faia'oga ma le tamaitiiti i galuega fa'atino e sefulu ua saunia. E fa'amau e le faia'oga togi i le pepa e faamau ai togi.

#### Su'ega Laitiiti 3 – Mata'itusi ma o latou leo

I le galuega lenei e ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga ua saunia mo le su'ega lenei. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua e fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga. Ta'u e le faia'oga le igoa o le mata'itusi 'g' ma lona leo – /g/. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonalua e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. Ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi 'k' ma lona leo –/k/. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonatolu e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. Ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi 'r' ma lona leo – /r/. A uma ona fa'ata'ita'i ona galulue loa lea o le faia'oga ma le tamaitiiti i

galuega fa'atino o le alefapeta Samoa e sefulumalefitu ua saunia. E fa'amau e le faia'oga togi i le pepa ua saunia e fa'amau ai togi a o fa'asolo le su'ega.

#### **Su'ega Laitiiti 4 – Vaevaega o leo ta'itasi**

I le galuega lenesi, o le a vaevae ai leo ta'itasi o i le upu. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga ua saunia mo le su'ega lenesi. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua e fa'atino e le faia'oga. Fa'aleo muamua e le faia'oga leo ta'itasi o i le upu “pe” /p/ - /e/. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonalua e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. Fa'aleo mai leo ta'itasi o i le upu “sau” /s/ - /a/ - /u/. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonatolu e fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti. Fa'aleo mai leo ta'itasi o i le upu “fala” /f/ - /a/ - /l/ - /a/. A uma ona fa'ata'ita'i ona galulue loa lea o le faia'oga ma le tamaitiiti i le galuega faatino o upu e 12 ua saunia. E fa'amau e le faia'oga togi i le pepa ua saunia e fa'amau ai togi a o fa'asolo le su'ega.

#### **Su'ega Laitiiti 5 – Ta'uga atoa o leo ta'itasi o i le upu.**

O le galuega lenesi o le ta'uga atoa o leo ta'itasi o i le upu. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga ua saunia mo le su'ega lenesi. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua e fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga. Fa'aleo leo ta'itasi o i le upu: /a/ - /f/ - /i/, ma ta'u le upu “afi”. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonalua o le upu ‘amio’. E fa'aleo leo ta'itasi /a/ - /m/ - /i/ - /o/ e le faia'oga, ae ta'u mai e le tamaitiiti le upu atoa “amio”. O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonatolu o le upu nofoa. E fa'aleo leo ta'itasi e le faia'oga: /n/ - /o/ - /f/ - /o/ - /a/, ae ta'u mai e le tamaitiiti le upu “nofoa”. A uma ona fa'ata'ita'i ona galulue loa lea o le faia'oga ma le tamaitiiti i upu e sefulumalelua ua filifilia mo le su'ega. E fa'amau e le faia'oga togi i le pepa ua saunia e fa'amau ai togi.

### **6.5.2 SEPA Subtests (English Translation)**

The subtests are designed to be administered in Samoan by a fluent Samoan speaker. The English instructions are provided for reference purposes only.

#### **Subtest 1 – Syllable Segmentation**

In this task, words are divided by clapping out each syllable. Three examples are prepared for this subtest. The first example is demonstrated by the teacher. The teacher says the word “sua” then divides the word into syllables by clapping (su – a). The second example involves the child. The teacher says the word “momoe” then asks the child to divide the word “momoe” into syllables through clapping (mo – mo – e). The third example also

involves the child. The teacher says the word “faitau” then asks the child to divide the word “faitau” into syllables through clapping (fa - i - ta - u). After practising the three examples given the teacher and the child will start working with twelve selected words. Scores are recorded by the teacher on the child’s scoring form during the assessment.

### **Subtest 2 – Phoneme Isolation**

In this task, pictures are used to find out the initial sound of a word using an image. Three examples are prepared for this subtest. The first example is demonstrated by the teacher. The teacher will point out the word that begins with the /m/ sound. The second and third examples are for the child to practise. In the second, the teacher asks the child to find out the word that begins with /p/ sound. The third example is finding out the word that begins with the /n/ sound. After three examples, the teacher and the child will start working with ten initial sounds that are prepared. Scores are recorded by the teacher on the child’s scoring form during the assessment.

### **Subtest 3 – Letter and Sound Knowledge**

In this task, a child says the letter name and its sound. Three practising examples are prepared for this subtest. The teacher demonstrates the first example. The teacher says the letter name ‘g’ and its sound –/g/. The second example is for the child. (Teacher instruction): Tell me the letter name ‘k’ and its sound. The third example is for the child. (Teacher instruction): Tell me the letter name and its sound. After practising three examples, the teacher and the child will start working with seventeen letters. Scores are recorded by the teacher on the child’s scoring form during the assessment.

### **Subtest 4 – Phoneme Segmentation**

In this task, each phoneme is uttered within a word. Three practising examples are prepared for this subtest. The first example is demonstrated by the teacher. The teacher will sound out each phoneme within a word –“pe” /p/ – /e/. The second example is for the child to practise. The child will sound out each phoneme within a word, for example, “sau” /s/ – /a/ – /u/. The third example is another for the child to practise. The child will sound out each phoneme within a word, for example, “fala” /f/ – /a/ – /l/ – /a/. After practising the three examples, the teacher and the child will start working with twelve words. Scores are recorded by the teacher on the child’s scoring form during the assessment.

### Subtest 5 – Phoneme Blending

In this task, a child says the word after listening to each phoneme within a word. Three practising examples are prepared for this subtest. The first example is demonstrated by the teacher. The teacher sounds out the phonemes in the word *afi* /a/ – /f/ – /i/. Then says the word “afi”. The second example is for the child to practise. The teacher sounds out the phonemes in a word, for example, /a/ – /m/ – /i/ – /o/. The child says the word “amio”. The third example also involves the child. The teacher sounds out the phonemes in a word, for example ‘nofoa’ /n/ – /o/ – /f/ – /o/ – /a/. The child says the word “nofoa”. After practising the three examples, the teacher and the child will start working with twelve selected words. Scores are recorded by the teacher on the child’s scoring form during the assessment.

#### 6.5.3 Faamanatu mo le Faia’oga poo le Faisu’ega

A o le’i fa’ataunuina le su’ega e ao i le faia’oga ona malamalama i le fa’asologa o le fa’ataunuina o su’ega ta’itasi. O fa’atonuga o su’ega ta’itasi e ao ona malamalama ai, e fa’apena fo’i i le fa’aleoga o leo Samoa i le upu ia sa’o lelei lona fa’aleoga.

Before the assessment, a teacher needs to understand the procedures in administering each subtest. The instructions in each subtest must be understood fully and also correct pronunciation of Samoan phonology in terms of sounding out the words.

#### 6.5.4 O mea ia manatua

Fai i le tamaitiiti e fa’ata’ita’i mai fa’ata’ita’iga i su’ega ta’itasi ua saunia. Afai e le mafai le fa’ata’ita’iga muamua, ona toe fa’ata’ita’i lea e le faia’oga. E taua tele le fa’alototele o le tamaitiiti i upu faamalosi e pei o le “lelei tele lau fa’alogo”, “malo le taumafai”. Ia ma isi fa’aupuga e fa’afiafia ma fa’anofofilemu ai le tamaitiiti a o fai le su’ega.

(Translation) Ask the child to attempt each example of the practising tasks in each subtest. If the child could not make an attempt for the first time, then the teacher will demonstrate the example once again. It is important that the child is encouraged through positive comments like “You are a good listener” “You are trying harder”. Such positive reinforcements will build up the child’s confidence and motivates him/her to participate well in his/her assessment.

## 6.5.5 Ripoti i le faatinoga o Galuega Faatino o le SEPA

### 1. Vaevaega o upu i silapela

O le autu o lenei galuega o le vaevaega o upu i silapela e fa'aaoga ai le pa'ō a le pati. O le su'ega o lo latou malamalama i silapela o le gagana Samoa. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga e aofia ai le faia'oga ma tamaiti. Sa fa'ata'ita'i muamua e le faia'oga i le upu sua, na ia faailoa mai i pati o silapela ta'itasi. O le isi faata'ita'iga o le upu momoe. Ta'u e le faia'oga le upu ae faailoa mai silapela e tamaiti i pati e fetau i ai. E faapena i le upu faitau, sa galulue faatasi ai le faia'oga ma tamaiti. E sefulumalelua upu o le su'ega. Sa mulita'ia e tamaiti uma faatonuga o le su'ega.

### 2. Tulaga o le leo i se upu

O lenei galuega, sa fai i tamaiti e su'e mai le upu o loo ta'u mai e le ata e amata i le ulua'i leo amata. Sa fai i tamaiti e fa'asino mai le upu o loo fa'aali mai e le ata o loo amata i le ulua'i leo amata sa filifilia e le faia'oga mai filifiliga e tolu. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga sa saunia e fa'amasani muamua ai. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua sa fai e le faia'oga. O isi fa'ata'ita'iga e lua sa fai e tamaiti. Fa'ata'ita'iga: E su'e mai e le faia'oga le upu ma fa'asino i le ata o loo ta'u maia le upu e amata i le leo amata /m/ mai filifiliga e tolu. E fa'ata'ita'i e tamaiti isi fa'ata'ita'iga e lua. Su'e mai le upu ma fa'asino i le ata o lo'o tau mai e amata i le leo amata /p/ mai filifiliga e tolu. E fa'apena ona fa'ata'ita'i e tamaiti le isi fa'ata'ita'iga e pei ona fa'ataunuu ai isi fa'ata'ita'iga e su'e le upu ma fa'asino i le ata o loo ta'u mai e amata i le leo amata /n/ mai filifiliga e tolu. E sefulu leo na su'e ai tamaiti i le su'ega lenei. Sa fai i tamaiti e fa'alogo lelei i fa'atonuga. Sa usita'ia foi e i latou.

### 3. Mata'itusi ma o latou leo

O lenei galuega, sa fai i tamaiti e fa'aailoa mai mata'itusi i o latou igoa ma leo. Sa fa'aali i ai le lisi o mata'itusi laiti ua uma ona tusia i totonu o poloka laiti mai le vaevaega o le (5 laina x 4 atu) i pepa malō. Sa fai i tamaiti e ta'u mai le igoa ma le leo o le mata'itusi a o fa'asino e le faia'oga mata'itusi ta'itasi. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga sa saunia e fa'amasani muamua ai. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua sa fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga. Sa fa'asino le lima o le faia'oga i le mata'itusi "g" ma ia ta'uina le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo, a o fa'alogologo tamaiti. O isi fa'ata'ita'iga e lua sa fa'ata'ita'i e tamaiti. Mo le fa'ata'ita'iga: Sa fa'asino le tamatama'ilima o le faia'oga i le mata'itusi "k" ma fai i le tamaitiiti e ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo. O le isi fa'ata'ita'iga sa fa'asino le tamatama'ilima o le faia'oga i le

mata'itusi "r" ona fai lea i tamaiti e ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo. Mulimuli ane, e sefulumalefitu mata'itusi laiti (17) sa saunia e su'esu'e ai tamaiti i igoa o mata'itusi ta'itasi ma o latou leo ta'itasi (l p k r a f g n v o s e h u i t m).

#### 4. Vaevaega o leo ta'itasi

O lenei galuega o le vaevaeina ma le fa'aleoina o silapela ta'itasi o i le upu. Sa fai i tamaiti e fa'aleo mai fonime ta'itasi o loo i le 'upu. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga sa fa'ata'ita'i muamua. O le ulua'i fa'ata'ita'iga sa fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga. A o isi fa'ata'ita'iga e lua sa fa'ata'ita'i mai e tamaiti. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua sa fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga o le ta'u lea o le 'upu (pe) ona fa'aleo lea o fonime (p – e). O le fa'ata'ita'iga lonalua sa ta'u e le faia'oga le 'upu (sau) ona fai lea i tamaiti e fa'aleo mai fonime ta'itasi o loo i le 'upu (s – a – u). O le fa'ata'ita'iga mulimuli sa ta'u e le faia'oga le upu (fala) ona fai lea i tamaiti e fa'aleo mai fonime ta'itasi o loo i le 'upu (f – a – l – a). Sa filifilia ni 'upu e sefulumalelua (12) e su'e ai tamaiti i le su'ega lenei.

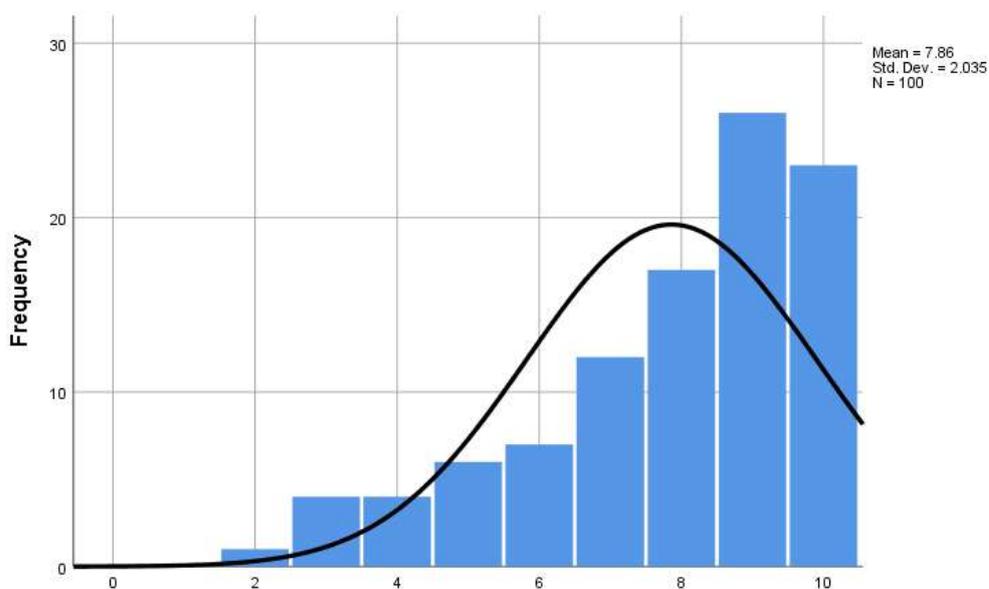
#### 5. Ta'uga atoa o leo ta'itasi o i le upu

O lenei galuega o le ta'uga atoa lea o leo ta'itasi o i le 'upu. Sa fai i tamaiti e ta'u mai le 'upu pe a uma ona fa'alogo lelei i le fa'aleoina o fonime ta'itasi. E tolu fa'ata'ita'iga sa fa'ata'ita'ia. O le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua sa fai e le faia'oga, a o isi fa'ata'ita'iga e lua sa fa'ata'ita'i mai e tamaiti. Sa fa'ata'ita'i e le faia'oga le fa'aleoina o fonime nei (a – f – i) ona ta'u atoa lea o le upu 'afi'. E sefulumalelua (12) 'upu sa filifilia mo lenei su'ega.

## 6.6 SEPA Analysis of results

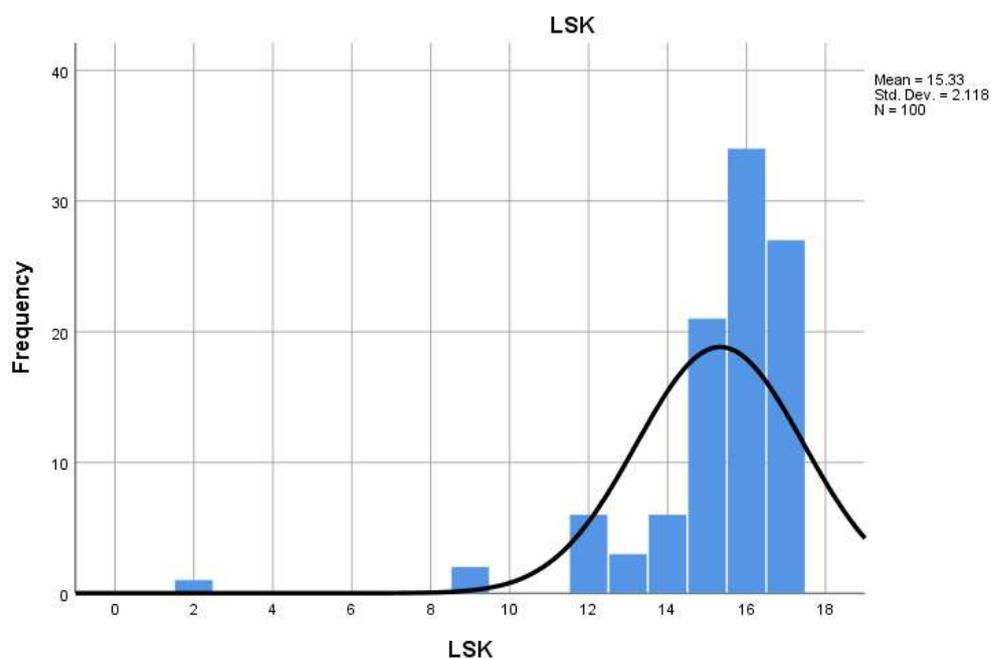
The SEPA was trialled with 100 native Samoan speakers (47 male, 53 female) from four schools in Apia, Samoa, who were aged 5-7 years, as part of its strategy and development. All children were in the first year of schooling. For the first stage of analysis, descriptive statistics for each sub-test of the tool were compared across children of different age groups. In the first instance descriptive statistics and a frequency analysis for each subtest for the cohort overall were conducted. The graphs from these analyses are presented below. Each frequency graph depicts the number of children from the cohort achieving a particular score.

The analysis for phoneme isolation subtest (see below) shows the average score for the cohort is 7.86 (out of 10) with the majority of children are scoring 7 or more (out of 10). These results show that the majority of the cohort have acquired this skill of being able to detect the first sound in words.



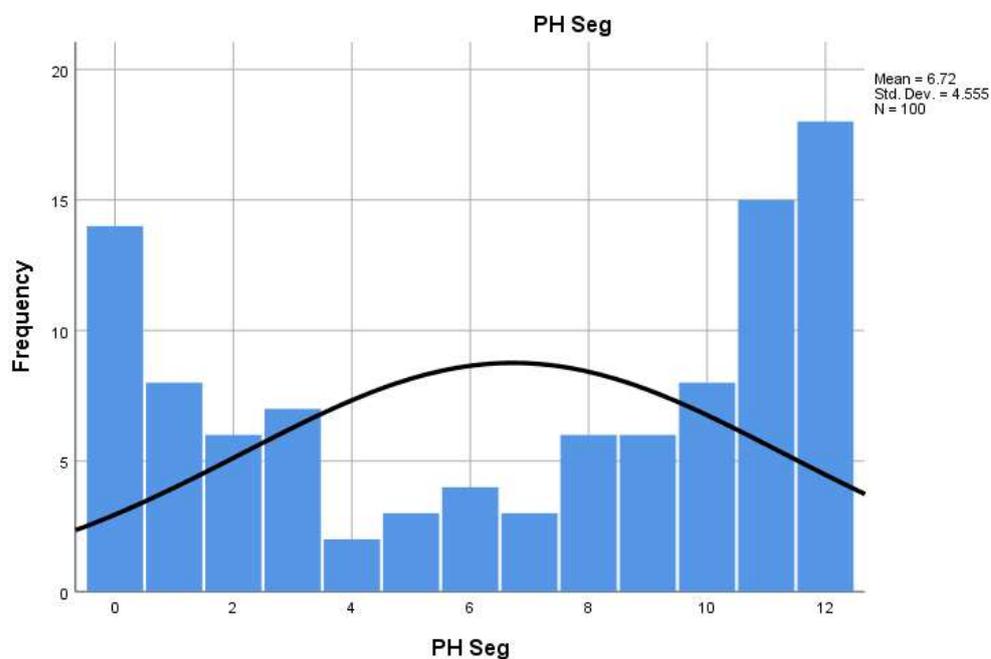
**Figure 3. Frequency graph for the initial phoneme isolation subtest (out of 10)**

The analysis for the letter-sound knowledge subtest (see below) shows the average score for the cohort is 15.23 (out of 17) with the majority of children scoring at or near ceiling level of the task. These results show that the majority of the cohort have successfully learned the link between the letters and sounds used in this sub-test.



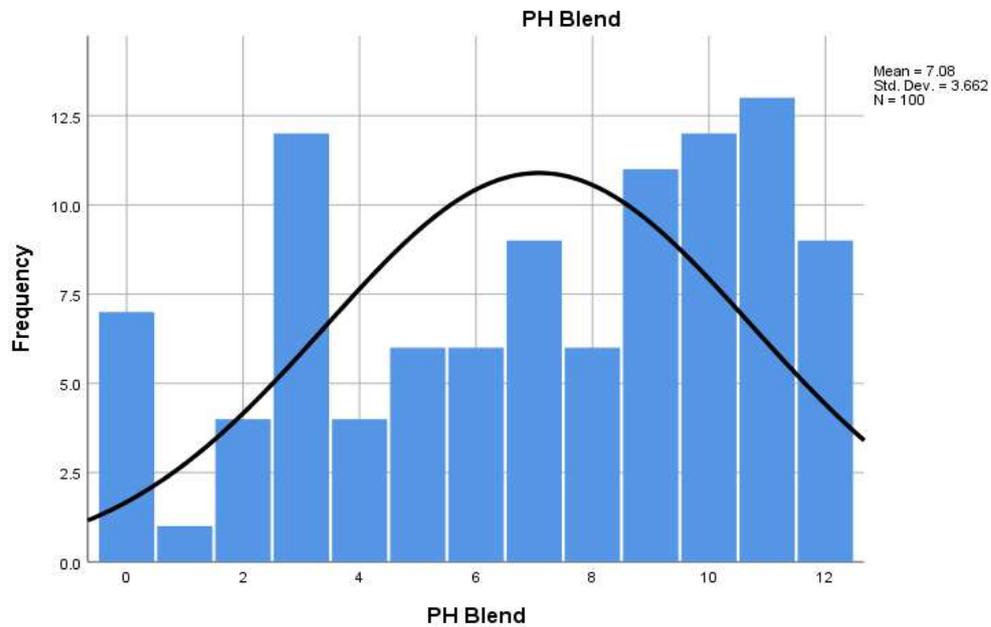
**Figure 4. Frequency graph for the letter-sound knowledge subtest (out of 17).**

The analysis for the phoneme segmentation subtest (see below) shows the average score for the cohort is 6.72 (out of 12). The results of this subtest show a different pattern with variable performance across the group and evidence that a large percentage of the cohort are still finding this task difficult. These results align with findings regarding the development of phonological awareness in English speaking children where initial phoneme isolation and letter-sound knowledge are less complex tasks than phonological awareness tasks that require awareness of phonemes right through the word such as phoneme segmentation (e.g., see Gillon, 2017, for review).



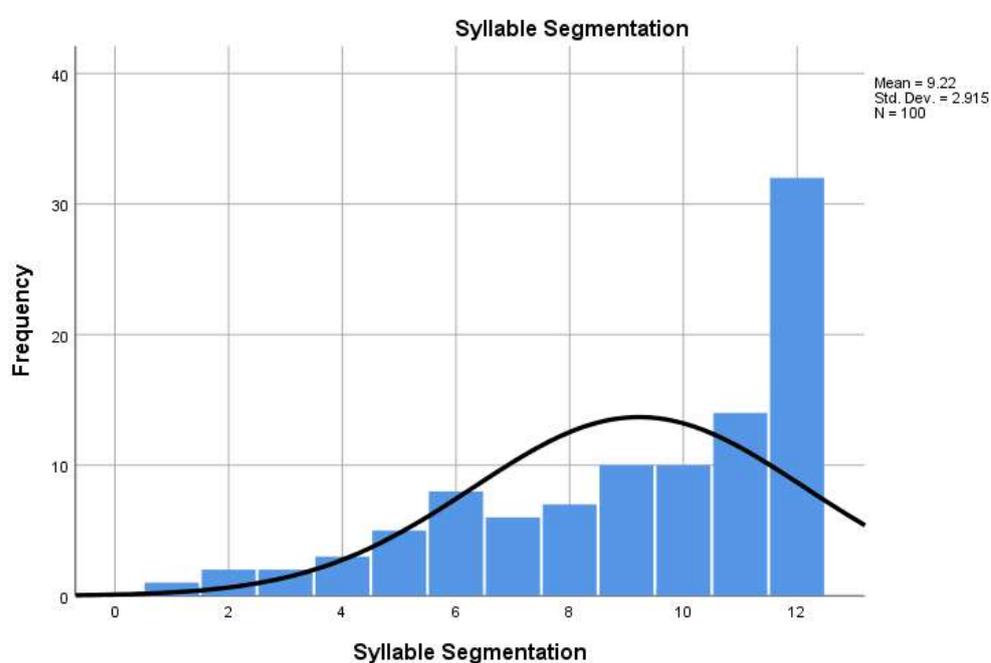
**Figure 5. Frequency graph for the phoneme segmentation sub-test (out of 12).**

The analysis for the phoneme blending subtest (see below) shows a similar pattern to the phoneme segmentation subtest. The average score for the cohort is 7.08 (out of 12) and results indicate variable performance across the group and evidence that a large percentage of the cohort are still finding this task difficult.



**Figure 6. Frequency graph for the phoneme blending sub-test (out of 12).**

The analysis for the syllable segmentation subtest (see below) shows the average score for the cohort is 9.22 (out of 12). The results of this subtest demonstrate this subtest is a relatively simple task with the cohort, with the majority of children scoring significantly above chance on the measure (i.e., 9 or above out of 12). These results align with findings regarding the development of phonological awareness in English speaking children where syllable level tasks are generally considered easier than phoneme level phonological awareness task (see Gillon, 2017, for review). The strong performance of Samoan children on this task may also be reflective of literacy teaching practices in Samoa which are focused around syllabification.



**Figure 7. Frequency graph for the syllable segmentation sub-test (out of 12).**

### 6.6.1 Performance in SEPA in Boys and Girls

In order to understand more about the performance of the cohort, the performance of girls and boys on the SEPA was conducted. Some previous investigations have shown that girls outperform boys in phonological awareness although such findings are inconsistent across studies (see Gillon, 2017, for review). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare scores between girls and boys. The analyses showed that the letter-sound knowledge subtest was the only sub-test in which there was a difference across girls and boys (with girls achieving higher scores) [ $F(1,98) = 4.15, p = .04$ ]. In the letter-sound knowledge subtest, girls achieved a mean score of 15.72 (1.12) whilst boys achieved a mean score of 14.87 (2.79). There was no difference between boys and girls in the other subtests or the total SEPA score: Phoneme Isolation [ $F(1,98) = 0.89, p = .35$ ], Phoneme segmentation [ $F(1,98) = 0.64, p = .43$ ], Phoneme Blending [ $F(1,98) = 0.56, p = .46$ ], Syllable Segmentation [ $F(1,98) = 2.57, p = .11$ ], Total Score [ $F(1,98) = 1.86, p = .18$ ].

### 6.6.2 Performance in the SEPA across age groups

Although the research participants were all in their first year at school, given the large age range (5-7 years) it is also important to explore developmental differences in phonological awareness to ascertain the tool's utility as an assessment. Thus, in the next set of analyses, the performance of each age group on each subtest of the SEPA was compared. The table below presents the mean and standard deviation performance of each age group within the 5 subtests of the SEPA. In general, children of all age groups were performing at near ceiling in the syllable segmentation, phoneme isolation and letter-sound knowledge subtests in line with the frequency analysis above. This developmental pattern is similar to that seen in English where syllable awareness and initial phoneme awareness is less complex than phoneme segmentation and phoneme blending tasks (Gillon, 2017).

**Table 14. Performance of participants across age groups**

Subtest	5-year-olds (n=10)	6-year-olds (n=57)	7-year-olds (n=33)
Syllable segmentation (/12)	8.44 (3.3)	8.89 (3.2)	9.59 (2.4)
Phoneme isolation (/10)	7.89 (1.8)	7.66 (2.1)	8.06 (2.0)
Letter-sound knowledge (/17)	14.11 (4.7)	15.30 (2.0)	15.56 (1.13)
Phoneme segmentation (/12)	7.11 (4.6)	6.26 (4.5)	7.06 (4.7)
Phoneme blending (/12)	7.33 (4.8)	6.81 (3.4)	7.22 (3.7)
Total score (/63)	44.89 (16.6)	44.92 (12.7)	47.50 (11.7)

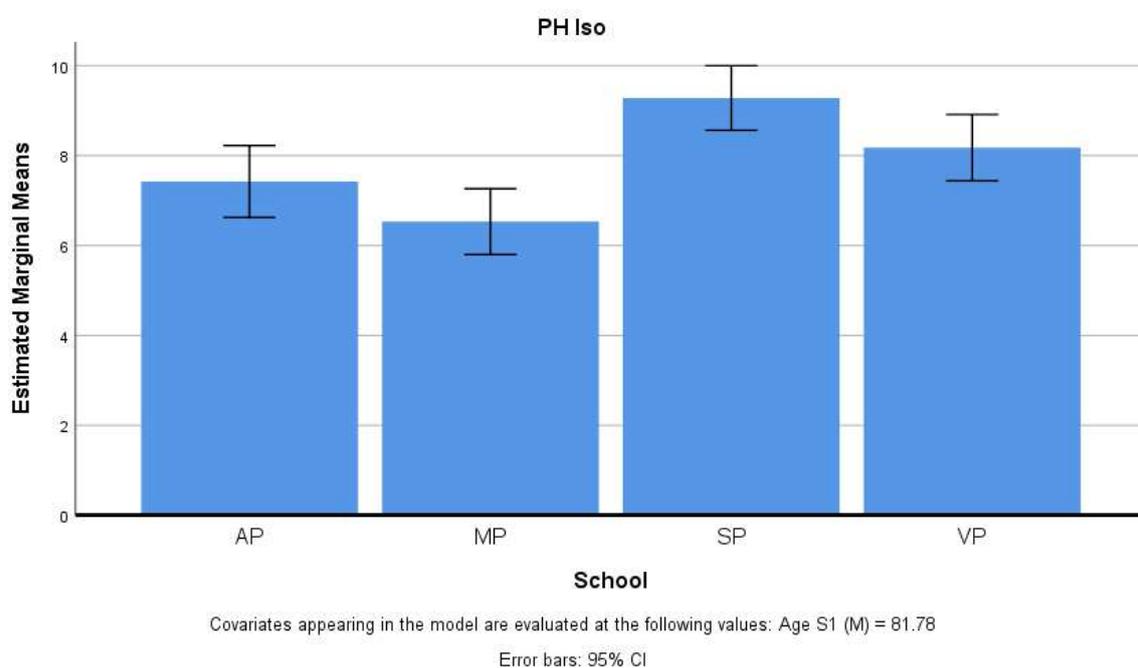
A one-way ANOVA was used to compare scores across each age-group (5-year-olds, 6-year-olds, 7 year olds). These results showed that there were no significant differences in any subtest performance across age groups: Phoneme isolation: [F(2,91) = 0.38, p = .69], Letter-sound knowledge [F(2,91) = 1.60, p = .21], Phoneme segmentation [F(2,91) = 0.36, p = .70], Phoneme blending [F(2,91) = 0.17, p = .85], Syllable segmentation [F(2,91) = 0.81, p = .45] and Total score [F(2,91) = 0.43, p = .65]. These results are unexpected given usual developmental trends in phonological awareness development but are likely to be due to this cohort being in the same year at school (despite differences in age).

### 6.6.3 SEPA performance across Schools

Given the research cohort was drawn from four schools with somewhat different educational and socio-economic contexts (see methodological chapter for detailed description of each of the four schools), an analysis was also conducted to determine whether there were differences in phonological awareness performance for children from different schools. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted where scores in the SEPA were compared between each school (controlling for age). As detailed in the methodology chapter, the research cohort included 24 children from School 1 (AP), 25 children from School 2 (MP), 25 children from School 3 (SP) (and 26 children from School

4 (VP). Analysis showed that there were significant differences between schools on all sub-tests of the SEPA along with the total score achieved on the tool.

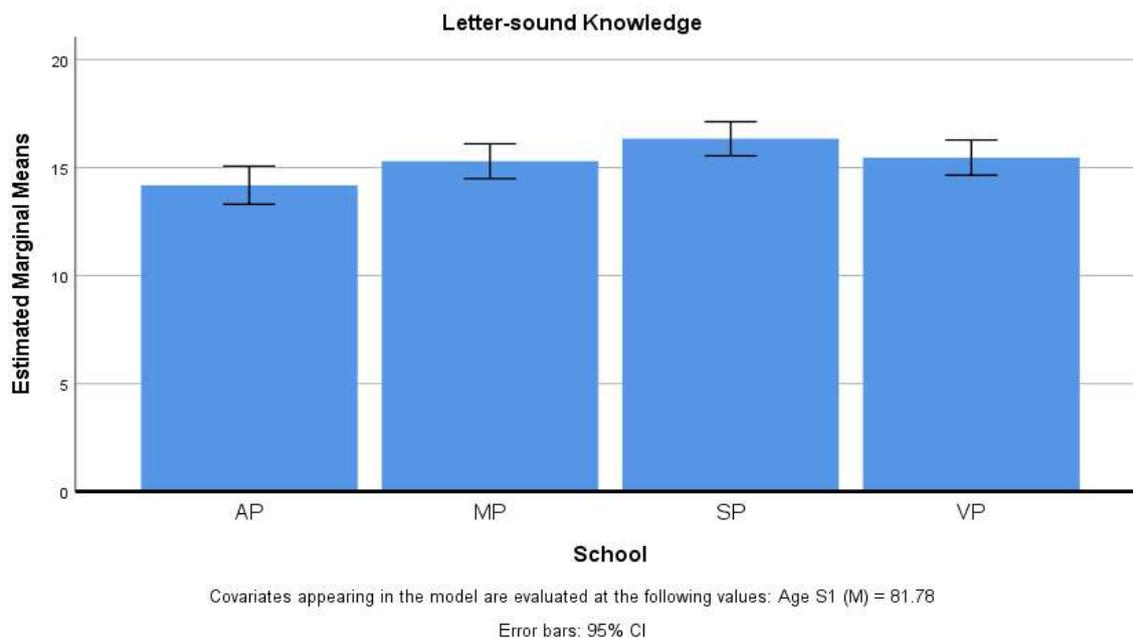
There was a significant effect of school on scores in the phoneme isolation subtest [ $F(3,95) = 10.57, p < .001$ ]. Post hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment showed that School 3 (SP) (private) school scored significantly higher than School 1 and School 2 respectively. School 4 (VP) on the other hand scored significantly higher than the School 2. The average scores achieved by the children in each school is depicted in Figure 8 below.



**Figure 8. Phoneme Isolation performance across the four schools in the study.**

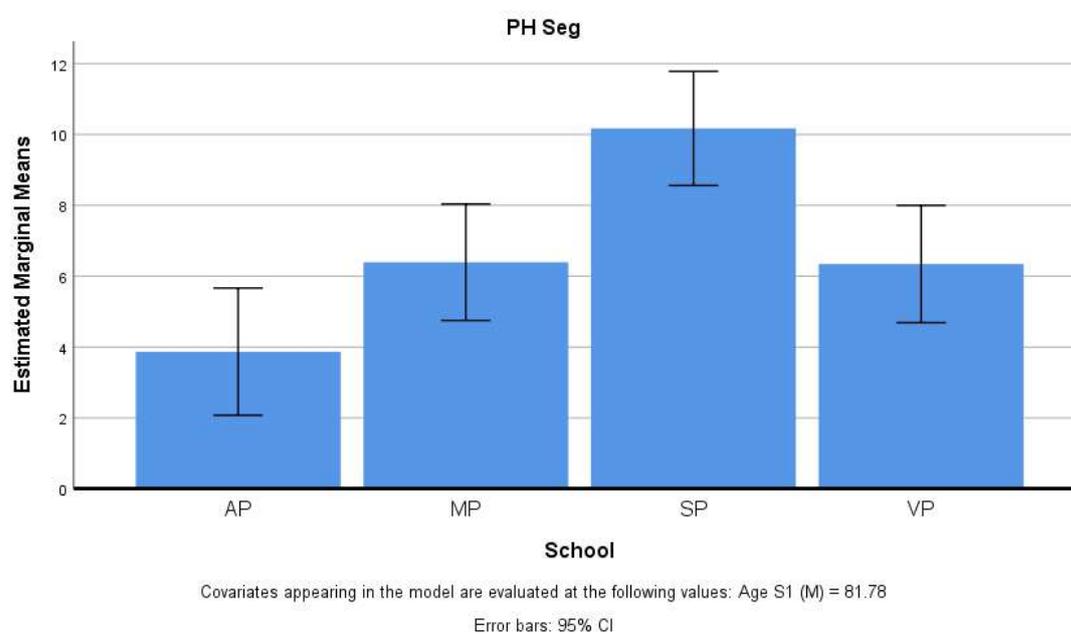
In all, children attending the private school showed stronger phonological awareness development. This detection of differences in children's performance across schools strongly points to the robustness of the SEPA tool.

There was a significant effect of school on scores in the letter-sound knowledge subtest [ $F(3,95) = 4.73, p = .004$ ]. Post hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment showed that School 3 (private) school scored significantly higher than School 1. Relatively there were no marked differences between the other schools. The average scores achieved by the children in each school is depicted in Figure 9 below.



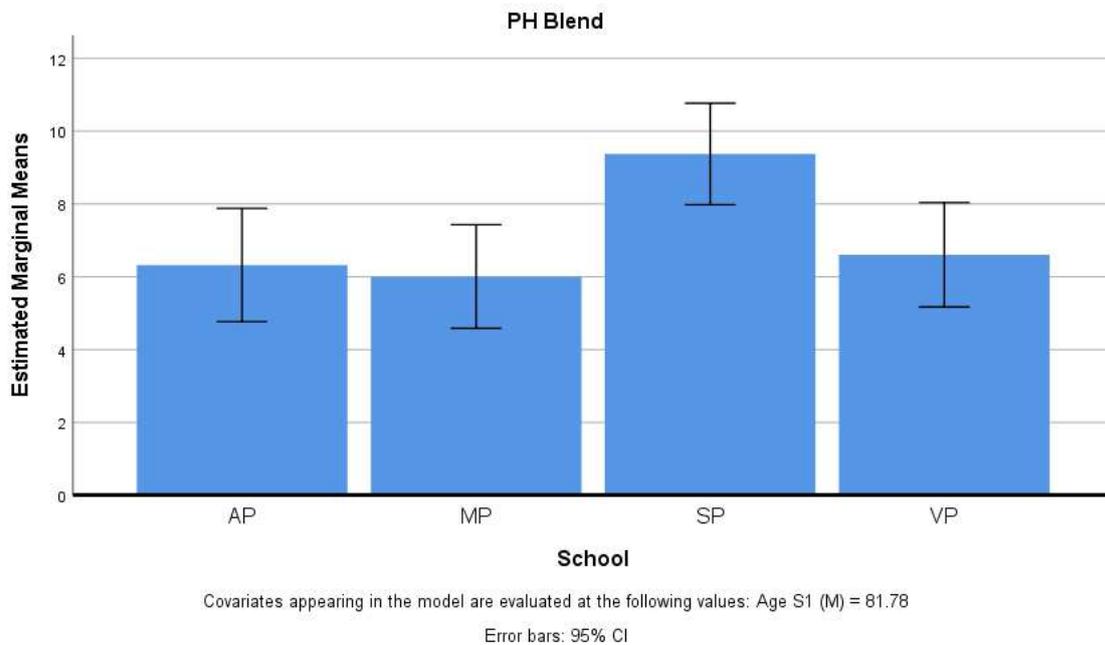
**Figure 9. Letter-sound knowledge performance across the four schools in the study.**

There was a significant effect of school on scores in the phoneme segmentation subtest [ $F(3,95) = 10.33, p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated that School 3 scored significantly higher than the other 3 schools. The average scores achieved by the children in each school is depicted in Figure 10 below.



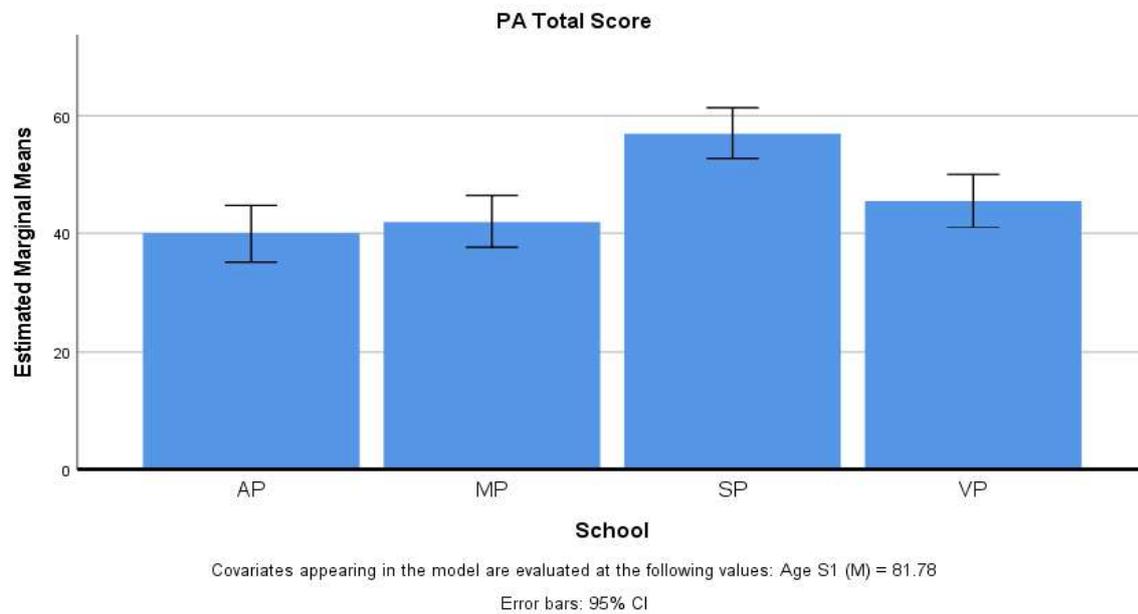
**Figure 10. Phoneme segmentation performance across the four schools in the study.**

There was a significant effect of school on scores in the phoneme blending subtest [ $F(3,95) = 4.89, p = .003$ ]. Post-hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated School 3 scored significantly higher than School 1 and School 2 respectively. The average scores achieved by the children in each school is depicted in Figure 11 below.



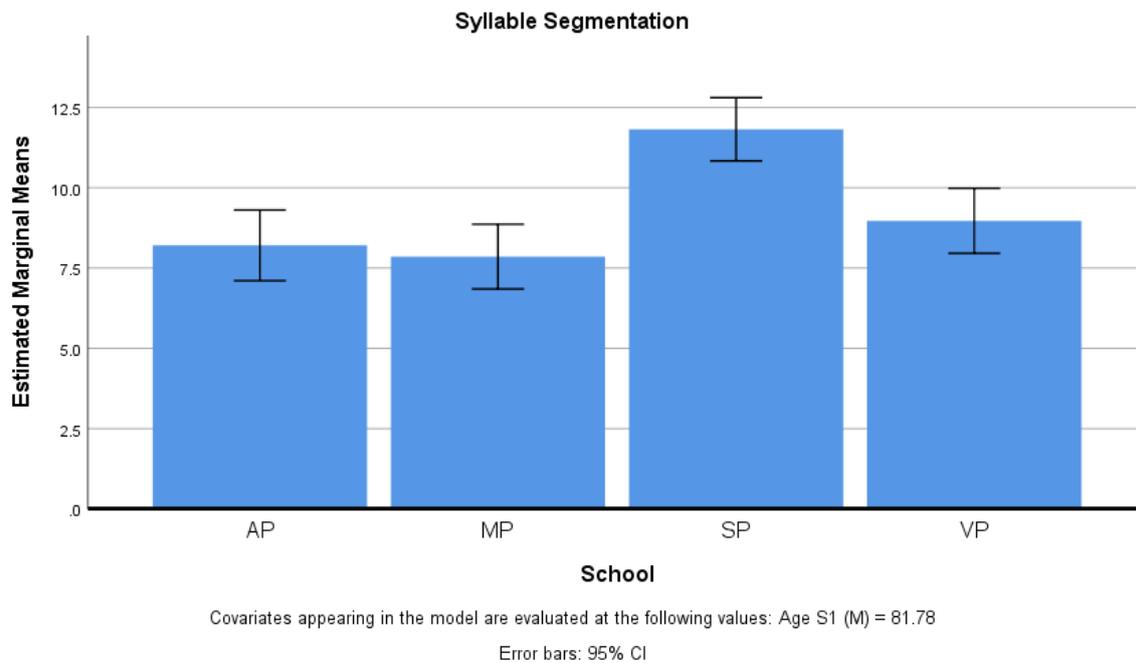
**Figure 11. Phoneme blending performance across the four schools in the study.**

There was a significant effect of school on scores in the syllable segmentation subtest [ $F(3,95) = 13.31, p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated that School 3 scored significantly higher than the other 3 schools. The average scores achieved by the children in each school is depicted in Figure 12 below.



**Figure 12. Syllable segmentation performance across the four schools in the study.**

There was a significant effect of school on total SEPA score (i.e., scores combined across subtests) [ $F(3,95) = 12.29, p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated that School 3 scored significantly higher than the other 3 schools. The average scores achieved by the children in each school is depicted in Figure 13 below.



**Figure 13. Combined phonological awareness scores across the four schools in the study.**

In all, children attending the private school showed stronger phonological awareness development. This detection of differences in children's performance across schools again points strongly to the robustness of the SEPA tool.

## 6.7 Oral Language Story retelling in Samoan

Story retelling is one of the strategies used by parents and teachers to engage their young children when reading to them. It is a strategy that is often used to stimulate interest, comprehension and expressive vocabulary (Gambrell & Dromsky, 2000; Geva & Olson, 1983, cited in Dunst, Simkus & Hamby, 2012). Young children are encouraged to re-tell or reiterate parts of the story read to them by a teacher, an adult or older children (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988). Isbell (2002) asserted, “Retelling stories encourage children to use their imagination, expand their ideas, and create visual images as they transfer the plot of the story to new settings, including different characters or new voices” (cited in Dunst, Simkus & Hamby, 2012) (page 1).

The use of narrative as an assessment for children’s oral language proficiency fits with Bruner’s (1990) argument that the structures of a narrative can provide information to facilitate children’s learning both to construct meaning and communicate their understanding. Narrative assessment emphasises the important roles of parents and their families, in reinforcing their values, culture and own ways of engaging in their children’s learning (MOE, 2009).

For the purpose of assessing children’s oral language proficiency in Samoan, an assessment framework was specifically designed. I adapted the task from Westerveld & Vidler (2016). This task required the children to listen to a Samoan story called “Alisa ma le ‘atopa’u”. Each part of the story was read by the researcher while the child looked at the pictures that accompany the story. The child was instructed to turn over to the next page while the researcher continued with the reading. There was no written word on the story pages (i.e., children were utilising their listening comprehension rather than their reading comprehension skills). The same process continued until the end of the story.

Following the first exposure to the story, a child was asked to retell the story using his/her own words from the beginning until the end. The researcher turned over each page and asked the child to tell what happened. The story retelling task was recorded using an audio device, then transcribed by the researcher, then used it for the levelling of 94 children’s oral language proficiency in the Samoan language.

The next part of this section on oral language proficiency assessment in Samoan has been adapted from the Samoan tool that was designed by Amituana’i-Toloa, Mc Naughton & Lai (2009). The tool was used to test reading comprehension and oral language development for Samoan students using narratives as a base. The analytic rubric detailing

the levels of competency in Samoan oral language outlined in Amituana'i (2009) was utilised to evaluate the oral language produced by children in this story retell task. After children had re-told the story in their own words, they were also asked a series of 5 comprehension questions to ascertain how well they understood the story.

### **6.7.1 Validation of Samoan oral language transcripts**

Two Samoan language experts were chosen to check the transcripts of children's audio recording in the Samoan language. One was an experienced Samoan teacher who is a New Zealand Primary trained teacher. She was involved in the education of Pasifika children in Early Childhood centres for decades. She worked as a Pasifika facilitator for the Ministry of Education and other Educational Sectors in this particular field. Her vast experiences of early intervention and bilingual assessments aligned well with the assigned tasks. The other was a Samoa matai and a language researcher. He worked as an editor for a bilingual newspaper, served as a Secondary teacher and a book publisher. Their task was to check the accuracy of the children's oral transcripts of story retelling that was recorded on an audio device.

### **6.7.2 Grading and Coding (Aulape e fua ai agava'a)**

The selection of a Samoan story called "Alisa ma le 'atopa'u" was based on the relevancy of a text to the level of children's literacy knowledge and skills both in Samoa and New Zealand. The story is a translation of an English text called "Alice and the suitcase" and the selection of the most familiar and relevant high frequency words in Samoan at these particular Year levels are taken into account. The researcher has access to Gagana Samoa Tausaga 1-8 Taiala mo A'oga Tulagalua (MESC, 2013) and Ta'iala mo le Gagana Samoa – The Gagana Samoa Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2009) as resources to reveal how vocabulary and grammatical structures are used to enhance the developing of the language knowledge (oral, spoken, and visual), that builds learner's proficiency in using gagana Samoa in different contexts.

The knowledge and skills gained from these documents were utilised by this researcher and collaborators to write up the success criteria to assess the children's oral language proficiency. In sum, the main focus of the assessment of oral language was based on three components of Samoan language development. First, the pronunciation of words component that assessed the correct pronunciation that children used in their retelling.

Secondly, the vocabulary component that assessed the kinds of words children used in their responses or retelling. Thirdly, the sentence structure component assessed how the children used words to form sentences. In assessing the children's oral proficiency, three sets of criteria were drawn from easy to difficult. All three components were rated on a three-point scale with Level 1 (Early), Level 1 (Basic) and Level 1 (Standard). Details regarding the success criteria at each of the three levels are presented below:

### **Early Proficiency (EP) La'asaga 1 Amata**

It consists of three criteria:

- Need prodding or cues by the assessor- taumafai e une le tamaitiiti e tautala pe fa'amanino mai sana tali.
- Took time to respond- alu le taimi o tau fa'atali se tali.
- Disconnected structuring of response- e le o maopopo le so'oso'oga o manatu.
- Can answer using one word – Mafai ona tali mai i le upu e tasi.

### **Basic Proficiency (BP) La'asaga 1 Feoloolo**

- Can respond in simple sentences or phrases – Mafai ona tali mai i fuaiupu faigofie po o fuiupu.
- Can display correct structures – grammar – Lelei le fa'ata'otoga o le fausaga ma le kalama.
- Demonstrate good coordination of listening and viewing skills – Mafai ona fa'aalia le tomai i le so'oina o tomai fa'alogo ma le va'ai.
- Respond quickly to the question – Vave ona tali mai i le fesili.
- Demonstrate a good understanding of Samoan grammar and usage – Mafai ona fa'aalia se malamalama lelei i le kalama ma lona fa'aaogaga.
- Can make predictions – what, when, where and how – Mafai ona mate'ia poo ai, poo anafea, o fea ma fa'apefea.

### **Standard Proficiency (SP) Laasaga 1 Lelei Mautū**

- Fluency in expressing response- opinion – Lelei le fa'aupuga o le tali ma le taofi.
- Respond using complex sentences phrases – Tali mai i fuaiupu lavelave.

- Demonstrate a proficient understanding of the story – Mafai ona fa'aalia se malamalama manino i le tala.
- Making inferences using why- Mafai ona fa'aaoga le fesili 'aiseā e fa'ataua i ai sona malamalama.
- Demonstrate a sound pronunciation of words – Mafai ona fa'aalia se agava'a lelei i le fa'aleoina o upu.
- Having a competent understanding of everyday language e.g use of possessive pronouns (lana, lona, ana, ona) singular(alu) plural (o) tafao, tafafao – Lelei tele le malamalama i le gagana o aso uma: fa'ata'ita'iga – fa'aaogaga o suinauna pule (lana, lona, ana, ona), segila (alu), pelulale (o), tafao (segila), pelulale (tafafao).
- Use of (fa'a) prefix (e.g.) fa'atofa.

### 6.7.3 Training session with the assessors

The researcher arranged individual meetings with each of the two assessors for the purpose. The audio recording of children's responses and transcripts, copy of the story, and success criteria were provided. In the first phase, the meetings with each assessor discussed the criteria and the expectation of their roles. The process was transparent and cordial.

For reliability, the transcripts were split between the two of them, two schools per each assessor. They completed their tasks in due time. I double-checked on their comments on the coherence in terms of their judgement. For example, how one's own emphasis on a particular criterion or point of argument differs. Also, by the way one assessor compliments the other.

My role was to do the reliability analysis. So, I chose 20 percent of each assessor's children at random to do my own analysis and rescore on. Then I compared my own analysis with both of assessors' findings. For the first assessor, her assessment findings of 10 children were consistent with my re-checking by 9 of my own). For the second assessor's analysis, out of 9 children I re-checked 8 were consistent. Inconsistencies in oral language competency ratings were resolved by consensus. This level of reliability based on rubric analysis was considered robust enough to ensure appropriate consistency across examiners.

Table 15. School 3 Participants Data Analysis: A SAMPLE

Coding	Levels	Comments
1. CS100 – LA	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing her own ideas and thoughts about the story without prompting. Demonstrate good understanding of the story by using complex sentences. Eg <i>Na faatofa ia na ia i lona tei la e alu i le a’oga, ae o ona matua i le galuega</i> . Making inferences using ‘why’ ‘how’ ‘what’ ‘who’ to respond to what is happening in the story. Demonstrate good pronunciation of words. Good understanding of everyday language and use of prefix, possessive pronouns, singulars and plurals.
2. CS101 – KM	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing responses and opinions about the story. Demonstrate good understanding of the story. Making inferences using why as she tells the story <i>e.g. Na alu i luga e tatala le atopa’u. Na alu si teine i, luga i i, luga o le potu lea e sipi ese le atopa’u</i> . Good understanding of everyday language and use of pronouns.
3. CS102 - CH	Level 1 Early Proficiency	Lots of prompting from the assessor to guide conversations. It took time to respond and could answer using one word or simple phrases. Some disconnections in structure responses when invited to share thoughts about the pictures. The conversations took only 2mins 16seconds due to short responses.
4. CS103- NF	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing thoughts from the beginning until the end of the story. Eg <i>I se tasi aso na vaaia e Alisa ona matua o o e faigaluega</i> . (Can make prediction as well). The student has responded in full and complex sentences and demonstrated a good understanding of the story. Eg <i>Na faapea se manatu o tinamatua e o i fafo e fai se la taaloga ma Alisa</i> . Making inferences using ‘why’ ‘how’ ‘what’ ‘who’ to respond to what was happening in the story. Demonstrated a good pronunciation of words and use of everyday language and use of present and past tense. Eg. <i>Na o o atu tama ma tina e piki Alisa</i> .

5. CS104- MF	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing her thoughts and opinions about the story from the beginning until the end. Respond in using complex sentences. Making inferences in responding to “why” “how” “what” and “who” questions. Eg. <i>Alu aku loa lona tina milimili lona ulu. Ia o loa laua ma lona kiga i o i oga makua ma ua fiafia loa le keige.</i> Also uses “k” in sentences. Demonstrate a good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of pronouns.
6. CS105 – MT	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Can respond in simple phrases and sentences and can display correct structures eg. <i>Na fesili Alisa i lona tina ma lona tama pe mafai ona nofo i le po.</i> Demonstrates basic skills of listening and viewing. Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage. Also can make predictions of “what” “where” “who” and “how”.
7. CS106 - TL	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Fluency in expressing thoughts and opinions about the story. Can make predictions about character’s age. <i>Na alu matua o Alisa. Sa nonofo e 80 tausaga o Alisa.</i> Responds in using complex sentences. Demonstrates her understanding about the story. Making references in responding to “why” “how” “what” and “who” questions. Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes. Eg <i>Fa’amole tama ma tina se’i ou nofo i le po. Uma loa na fai mai matua. Ioe.</i>
8. CS107 - SU	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing ideas and thoughts about the story. Demonstrate good understanding of the story and made her own predictions about the age of tinamatua (grandmother). Making inferences using “why” “how” “what” “who to respond” to what was happening in the story. Demonstrates a good pronunciation of words. Good understanding of using everyday language eg. <i>Sa o tama ma tina i lo la fale, ae nofo tinamatua ma Alisa.</i>

<b>9. CS108 - NM</b>	<b>Level 1 Standard Proficiency</b>	<p>Fluency in expressing her own ideas and thoughts about the story. Demonstrates good understanding of the story by using complex sentences. Eg <i>Na savali lemu atu loa Lisa i le fasitepu. Na alu atu laia o loo iai le faitoto'a o loo matala teisi, ona latu lea o Lisa ona maua se atopa'u e iai le pa'u .....</i></p> <p>Making inferences using “why” “how” “what” and “who” to respond to what was happening in the story. Demonstrates good pronunciation of words. Good understanding of using everyday language and use of prefixes. Demonstrates a good understanding of how to conclude a story. Eg. Ona o lea o matua o Alisa e faigaluega, ae nonofo Alisa ma lona tinamatua.</p>
<b>10. CS109 – JJ</b>	<b>Level 1 Basic Proficiency</b>	<p>Can respond in sentences and phrases but unsure about her responses when invited to talk about the pictures. Can display correct structure and grammar in sentences. Eg. <i>Vaai o la ua tutu atu matua o i le fale fogafaletasi.</i></p> <p>Demonstrate good coordination of listening and viewing skills and responds quickly to the questions. Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan language and can make predictions in responding to “how” “why” “how” what and where questions.</p>
<b>11. CS110 - TL</b>	<b>Level 1 Basic Proficiency</b>	<p>Lots of prompting by the assessor. Disconnected structuring some of her responses and can respond in sentences eg. When the assessor asked “<i>Aisea ua fefe ai?</i>” she responds “<i>Lea na ofu i le ofu lelei</i>”.</p> <p>Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage. Demonstrates average coordination of listening and viewing.</p>
<b>12. CS111 - EG</b>	<b>Level 1 Standard Proficiency</b>	<p>Fluency in expressing her opinions. Responds in using complex sentences. Demonstrates her understanding about the story. Making inferences to “why” “how” “what” and who questions. Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes. Eg <i>Ae la na faatofa i lona tina la e i totonu o le taavale.</i></p>

13. CS112 – MA	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Can respond in sentences. Can display some correct structures in some of his responses. Also refers to himself as one of the characters eg. <i>Na moe lo'u tina matua i le potumoe ae ua ou alu e su'e mai.</i> Can demonstrates basic skills of listening and viewing. Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage. Can make predictions of what, where and who.
14. CS113 - JF	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing his opinions. Responds in using complex sentences. Can recognises that he uses fusipa'u when explaining what was in the room, and he changed it to atopa'u (self-correction). Demonstrates his understanding about the story. Making references in responding to “why” “how” “what” and “who” questions. Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes. Eg <i>“Ua toe fa'afetai Alisa ia tinamatua mo le vaai o ia, ma toe o i lo latou aiga.</i>
15. CS114 – FF	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing his opinion. Responds in using complex sentences. Eg. <i>Na vaai e Alisa tina ma tama o sauni e o e faigaluega, ae peitai o taimi o tuuaga o aoga, e fiafia tinamatua e lalaga le sikafu.</i> Demonstrates his understanding about the story from the beginning to the end. Making inferences in resonding to “why” “how” “what” and “who” Questions.
16. CS115 - JP	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing responses and opinions. Eg <i>Ua tilotilo Alisa i fafo, ae ua fia taalo a ua timu.</i> Demonstrates good understanding of the story about Alisa ma tinamatua, which reflects the beginning, middle, and the end of the story. Makes inferences using “why” “ how” “what” and “who” to respond to what was happening to the story. Demonstrates a good pronunciation of words. Good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes. Eg <i>Ua fa'afetai i lona tinamatua.</i>
17. CS116 – ST	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Fluency in expressing responses and opinions. Demonstrates good understanding of the story from the beginning to the end. Making inferences using “why” “how” “what” and “who” to respond to what was happening in the story. Eg. <i>Aisea na fefe ai Alisa? “Ona ua pogisa”.</i>

18. CS117 – MS	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Can respond in sentences. Can display correct structures in some of the sentences with correct pronunciation. However, she uses some English words in her responses e.g. (sink). Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills. Can make some predictions of “what” “where” and “how” in her responses.
19. CS118 – NE	Level 1 Standard Proficiency	Very fluent in expressing his responses and opinions of the story. Responds using complex sentences. Demonstrates his understanding about the story. Making inferences in responding to “why” “how” “what” and “who” questions. Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language. Eg possessive pronouns, singular and plurals, pronouns and use of prefixes. <i>“Ua toe fa’afetai Alisa ia tinamatua mo le vaai o ia, ma toe o i lo latou aiga.</i>
20. CS119 – CD	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Lots of prompting from the assessor to express his responses about the story. Can respond in simple sentences. Can display some correct structures and grammar in some of his responses. Eg <b>Ua o matua o Alisa e faigaluega.</b> Can demonstrate basic skills of listening and viewing. Demonstrates average understanding of Samoa grammar and usage. Can also make predictions of “what” “where” “who” and “how”.
21. CS120 – MI	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Lots of prompting from the assessor to guide the conversations. Can respond in using sentences. Can display some correct structure and grammar. Eg <i>Ona lafi lea i totonu o le atopa’u ua fefe. Ua tatala e le loomatua ua ata.</i> Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills.
22. CS121 – LP	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Can respond in sentences. Can display correct structures and grammar in her responses. Can demonstrate basic skills of listening and viewing. Respond quickly in some questions. Demonstrate average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage. Can also make predictions of “what” “where” “who” and “how”.
23. CS122 – EE	Level 1 Basic Proficiency	Can respond in sentences. Can display correct structures and grammar in his response. Can demonstrate basic skills of listening and viewing. Respond quickly in some questions. Demonstrate average understanding of Samoan

		grammar and usage. Can also make predictions of "what" "where" "who and how".
<b>24. CS123 – PtT</b>	<b>Level 1 Standard Proficiency</b>	Very fluent in expressing his responses and opinions of the story from the beginning until the end. Respond using complete sentences. Eg <i>O loo vaai atu ua timu. Na vaai Lisa i le loomatua o moegase.</i> Demonstrate her understanding about the story. Making references in responding to "why" "how" "what" and "who" questions. Demonstrate good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language. Eg possessive pronouns, singular and plurals, pronouns and use of prefixes. Eg <i>O loo fiafia le aiga o Alisa, ua fa'afetai i le loomatua.</i>
<b>25. CS124- SS</b>	<b>Level 1 Basic Proficiency</b>	Can respond in sentences. Can display correct structures and grammar in responses. Eg <i>Ua fiafia tama ma tinamatua ua vaai Alisa.</i> Can demonstrate basic skills of listening and viewing. Respond quickly in some questions. Demonstrate average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage. Can also make predictions of "what" "where" "who" and "how".

Table 16. Level 1 Standard Proficiency (Laasaga Muamua Lelei Mautu).

**SAMPLES FROM FOUR SCHOOLS**

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>CS100 - LA</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Demonstrate good understanding of the story by using complex sentences	<i>Na faatofa o ia i lona tei la e alu i le a'oga., ae o ona matua i le galuega.</i>
<b>CS101 – KM</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Making inferences using why as she tells the story.	<i>Na alu i luga e tatala le atopa'u. Na alu si teine i, luga ii, luga o l potu e sipi ese le 'atopa'u.</i>
<b>CS103 - NF</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Fluency in expressing thoughts from the beginning until the end of the story.  The student has responded in full and complex sentences and demonstrate a good understanding of the story.  Demonstrate a good pronunciation of words and use of everyday language, and use of present and past tense.	<i>I se tasi aso na vaaia e Alisa ona matua o o e faigaluega.</i>  <i>Na faapa se manatu o tinamatua e o i fafo e fai se la ta'aloga ma Alisa.</i>  <i>Na o atu tama ma tina e piki Alisa.</i>
<b>CS104 – MF</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Making inferences in responding to why, how, what and who questions. Also uses “k” in sentences.	<i>Alu aku loa lona tina milimili lona ulu. Ia o loa laua ma lona kiga i o i oga makua, ma ua fiafia loa le keige.</i>
<b>CS106 – TL</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Can make predictions about character's age.  Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes.	<i>Na alu matua o Alisa. Sa nonofo e 80 tausaga o Alisa.</i>  <i>Fa'amolemole tama ma tina se'i ou nofo i le po. Uma loa na fai mai matua. Ioe.</i>
<b>CS107 - SU</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Good understanding of using everyday language.	<i>Sa o tama ma tina i lo la fale, ae nofo tinamatua ma Alisa.</i>

<b>CS108 - NM</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Demonstrates good understanding of the story by using complex sentences.	<i>Na savali lemu atu loa Lisa i le fasitepu. Na alu atu laia o loo iai le faitoto'a o loo matala teisi, ona latu lea o Lisa ona maua se 'atopa'u e iai le pa'u.</i>
<b>CS111 - EG</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes.	<i>Ae la na fa'atofa i lona tina la e i totonu o le ta'avale.</i>
<b>CS113 - JF</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes.	<i>Ua toe fa'afetai Alisa ia tinamatua mo le va'ai o ia, ma toe o i lo latou aiga.</i>
<b>CS114 - FF</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Fluency in expressing his opinion. Responds in using complex sentences.	<i>Na va'aia e Alisa tina ma tama o sauni e o e faigaluega, ae peita'i o taimi o tu'uaga o a'oga, e fiafia tinamatua e lalaga le sikafu.</i>
<b>CS115 - JP</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Fluency in expressing responses and opinions.  Demonstrates good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes.	<i>Ua tilotilo Alisa i fafo, a ua fia ta'alo ua timu.  Ua fa'afetai i lona tinamatua.</i>
<b>CS116 - ST</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Making inferences using why, how, what and who to respond to what was happening in the story.	<i>Aisea na fefe ai Alisa? Ona ua timu.</i>
<b>CS118 - NE</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language. Eg possessive pronouns, singular and plurals.	<i>Ua toe fa'afetai Alisa ia tinamatua mo le va'ai o ia, ma toe o i lo latou aiga. Cs</i>
<b>CS123 - PT</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Demonstrates good pronunciation and good understanding of everyday language.	<i>O loo fiafia le aiga o Alisa, ua fa'afetai i le loomatua.</i>
<b>CS205 - EL</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	Making inferences using why, how, what and who.	<i>Na tilotilo atu Alisa i le loomatua ua moegase mai. Na savali lemu atu loa.</i>

<b>CS209 - KT</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	<p>Fluency in expressing an opinion.</p> <p>Demonstrates proficiency of understanding the story.</p>	<p><i>E fiafia le loomatua e lalaga le sikafu. Ua alu Alisa e su'e solo.</i></p> <p><i>O la e va'ai atu Alisa o la e iai le 'atopa'u la e fai i pa'u. Tago loa Alisa tatala le 'atopa'u, maua ai 'api, ma 'ula ma 'ofu.</i></p>
<b>CS215 - CT</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	<p>Good understanding of everyday language use.</p> <p>Demonstrates good pronunciation of words.</p>	<p><i>O lena tilotilo i le ta'avale. O la e nofo Alisa e va'ai lona tinamatua.</i></p> <p><i>Ua tilotilo atu Alisa i le 'atopa'u lea ua maua ai lona 'ofu.</i></p>
<b>CS220 - KM</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	<p>Fluency in expressing responses and opinions.</p> <p>Making inferences using "why"</p>	<p><i>Sa manatu Alisa e la o ma lona tinamatua e ta'aalo ae va'ai atu ua timu.</i></p> <p><i>I le taeao o le Aso Gafua sa va'aia ai e Alisa ona matua ua o e faigaluega. Sa nofo i le taimi na o tu'uaga. Sa nofo i lonatinamatua.</i></p>
<b>CS303 – RL</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	<p>Fluency in expressing and opinions.</p> <p>Demonstrates good understanding of the story.</p> <p>Making inferences using why, how, what, and who to respond what was happening to the story.</p>	<p><i>Ua savali atu Alisa. Ua savali atu Alisa. Ua moegase tinamatua.</i></p> <p><i>Ua ala Alisa ua valaau mai lana igoa. Alisa, Alisa, O fea oe?</i></p> <p><i>Fai mai Alisa pe mafai ona latou.... Na o ai loa. Na o i le falealalo.</i></p>
<b>CS305 - MM</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	<p>Demonstrates good pronunciation of words. A mix of "n" and "k" in pronunciation - twice</p>	<p><i>Fainaluena (faigaluega), lakou (latou).</i></p>
<b>CS306 - AI</b>	<b>Level 1 SP</b>	<p>Fluency in expressing ideas /thoughts about the story.</p> <p>Demonstrates good understanding of the story by using complex sentences.</p> <p>Making inferences using why, how, what, who to respond to what was happening in the story.</p>	<p><i>Na manatu Alisa na la ta'aalo fa'atasi fa'atasi ma lona tinamatua aua timu ifo.</i></p> <p><i>Na manatu Alisa na la ta'aalo .... Aua moegase lava le loomatua.</i></p> <p><i>Ua o mai la matua o i le falealalo. Na o mai tama ma tina, omai omai o i la aiga.</i></p>

CS309 - SV	Level 1 SP	Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and a good understanding of everyday language and use of prefixes. However, she used English 'grandma' for tinamatua, and the K register for three content words in the story.	<i>K(kilokilo), kokogu, 'akopa'u.. Fa'aaoga "grandama" e sui ai tinamatua i lana fa'asoa.</i>
CS311 - II	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing thoughts from the beginning until the end of the story.</p> <p>The student responded in full and complex sentences and demonstrated good understanding of the story.</p> <p>Making inferences using why, how, what, who to respond to what was happening in the story.</p>	<p><i>E alu Alisa ua moe gase lona tina.</i></p> <p><i>Na alu atu loa tatala, tilotilo loa i mea la e i totonu, ona soso loa lea i totonu. Motusi, ma 'ofu ma peni.</i></p> <p><i>Ua fiafia tinamatua ua maua lana tama. Sa fia alu i lona tama ma lona tina.</i></p>
CS312 - MM	Level 1 SP	<p>Very fluent in expressing her responses and opinions of the story.</p> <p>Responds in using complex sentences.</p> <p>Demonstrates a good pronunciation of words.</p>	<p><i>O le teine e igoa ia Alisa. Sa o ona matua i le galuega. Ae nofo tinamatua e va'ai Alisa.</i></p> <p><i>O la e savali Alisa i luga o le fasitepu, ma sa va'aia la e matala le faitoto'a. O lea ua o mai tama ma tina ma va'ai ia Alisa. O la ua fa'afetai ia tinamatua i le va'aiga o Alisa.</i></p>
CS315 - HL	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing her opinions.</p> <p>Responds in using complex sentences.</p> <p>Demonstrates her understanding about the story.</p> <p>Making references in responding to why, how, what, and who questions.</p>	<p><i>Tau alu le teineitiiti i fafo a o la ua timu.</i></p> <p><i>O la e va'ai i lona tina. O la e fa'atofa i lona tina.</i></p> <p><i>Ua fiafia le loomatua o lea ua toe maua Lisa.</i></p> <p><i>Ua alu Alisa e va'ai se potu o matala, e alu e vaai poo iai i totonu se 'atopa'u.</i></p>

CS317 - SI	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing her opinions.</p> <p>Responds in using complex sentences.</p> <p>Making inferences in responding to why, how, what, and who questions.</p>	<p><i>E tilotilo atu Alisa ua moe le loomatua.</i></p> <p><i>Tago Alisa tatala le faitoto'a, tilotilo mai i le 'atopa'u</i></p> <p><i>E tilotilo atu Alisa ua pogisa. Ua tiga le loto o le loomatua.</i></p>
CS318 - SL	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing her opinions.</p> <p>Responds in using complex sentences.</p> <p>Demonstrates her understanding about the story.</p>	<p><i>Ua o mai ona matua. Sau ma le teine, sau fai lona ulu, toe tui lona 'ofu, sau loa tu i 'autafa o ona matua.</i></p> <p><i>Ua fefe Alisa. Ua fono mai Alisa i le aitu.</i></p> <p><i>O le a o ona matua. E o i lo latou aiga.</i></p>
CS322 – TA	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing her opinions.</p> <p>Responds in using complex sentences.</p> <p>Making inferences in responding to why, how, what, and who questions.</p>	<p><i>E tilotilo atu Alisa ua moe le loomatua.</i></p> <p><i>Tago Alisa, tatala le faitoto'a, tilotilo mai i le 'atopa'u.</i></p> <p><i>E tilotilo atu Alisa ua pogisa. Ua tiga le loto o le loomatua.</i></p>
CS407 - SA	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing responses and opinions.</p> <p>Demonstrates proficiency of understanding the story.</p>	<p><i>E fiafia lana tinamatua e lalaga le sikafu. Na alu ia fealua'i solo i totonu o le fale, ma tilotilo i fafo ua timu.</i></p> <p><i>Ua sau Alisa ua moe lona tinamatua. Na sau ia i luga o le fale, ma tilotilo i le faitoto'a ua tasi le faitoto'a ua matala.</i></p>
CS411 – MA	Level 1 SP	<p>Fluency in expressing responses and opinions.</p> <p>Making inferences using why, how, what and who.</p>	<p><i>O la e mana'o Alisa e alu i fafo, aua timu. Na sau Alisa ua matua moegase lava le loomatua.</i></p> <p><i>Sa savali lemu mai lava Alisa, i luga o le auala maualuga. Ae sau o lea e matala atu le faitoto'a.</i></p>

Table 17. Level 1 Basic Proficiency (Laasaga Muamua Feoloolo).

**SAMPLES FROM FOUR SCHOOLS**

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>CS105 - MT</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple phrases and sentences and can display correct structures.	<i>Na fesili Alisa i lona tina ma lona tama pe mafai ona nofo i le po.</i>
<b>CS109 - JJ</b>	Level 1 BP	Can display correct structure and grammar in sentences.	<i>Va'ai o la ua tutu atu matua o i le fogafaletasi.</i>
<b>CS110 – TL</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Disconnected structuring some of her responses, can respond in sentences.	<i>Aisea ua fefe ai? She responds, lea na ofu i le ofu lelei.</i>
<b>CS112 - MA</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can display some correct structures in some of his responses.	<i>Na moe lo'u tina matua i le potumoe ae ua ou alu e su'e mai.</i>
<b>CS117 - MS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can responds in sentences. Can display correct structures in some of the sentences with correct pronunciation.	<i>She uses some English words in her responses. Eg. Sink</i>
<b>CS119 - CD</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can display some correct structures and grammar in some of her response.	<i>Ua o matua o Alisa e faigaluega.</i>
<b>CS120 - MI</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in using sentences. Can display some correct structure and grammar.	<i>Ona lafi lea i totonu o le 'atopa'u ua fefe. Ua tatala e le loomatua ua ata.</i>
<b>CS121 - LP</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in sentences. Can display correct structures and grammar.	<i>O Alisa ma tinamatua. O la e tilotilo i le ta'avale. Na moe le tinamatua, na savalivali mai i luga o se faitoto'a.</i>
<b>CS122 - EE</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can demonstrate basic skills of listening and viewing.  Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.	<i>O Alisa ma tinamatua e 80 ona tausaga. Ua ta le taimi e alu ai i le aoga.  Na amata ona toe alu Alisa i fafo ua timu.</i>
<b>CS124 - SS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can display correct structures and grammar in responses.	<i>Ua fiafia tama ma tinamatua ua vaai Alisa.</i>
<b>CS 200 – LM</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills.	<i>Ua pogisa le mea ua matafefe.</i>

		Can respond quickly to the question.	<i>Na savali mai loa le teineitiiti i le falealuga.</i>
<b>CS202 – ME</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can display correct structures and grammar.  Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills.	<i>Ua lagona le loto fa’anoanoa o Alisa. Na va’ai atu ua moegase le tinamatua.  Na va’ai i totonu o le ‘atopa’u o loo iai ni teuga.</i>
<b>CS204 - LS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple sentences.  Demonstrates good understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.	<i>O la ua tilotilo atu Lisa o la ua timu mai.  Ua va’ai atu ia Alisa o pogisa fa’asoloatoa. Ae fa’alogo atu o fono atu le tagata ia na ia.</i>
<b>CS207 - BV</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple sentences or phrases.  Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills.	<i>Ua ala Alisa ua valaau loa Alisa.  “Alisa, Alisa”. Sau loa tina milimili loa le ulu. Fai mai pogisa tele lena pito.</i>
<b>CS210 - LR</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple sentences.  Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.	<i>O Alisa ma ona matua.  E musu Alisa e o ma lona tina e tafafao.</i>
<b>CS212 – GA</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.  Can make predictions using what, when, where and how.  Can respond in simple sentences.	<i>O la e va’ai i lona tina la e i totonu o le ta’avale.  O la e va’ai i le ‘atopa’u. Sau loa va’ai i lavalava, ma ata la e i totonu.  E fia mana’o le teine e alu i fafo ae timu.</i>
<b>CS214 – MS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.  Can make predictions of what, why, where and how – things were happening in the story.	<i>Ua moegase le loomatua. Ua la’a lemu le teine po o matala le faitoto’a.  Ua tilotilo atu le teine i le ‘atopa’u ua la’a lemu. Ua oso i luga o le ‘atopa’u e su’e se</i>

CS217 – SP	Level 1 BP	<p>Can respond in simple sentences and phrases.</p> <p>Can demonstrate average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.</p>	<p><i>Sa ia va'aia le tina fa'anoanoa.</i></p> <p><i>Sa savali mai Alisa i se potu malolo o loo matala. Sa tatala sa se'e mai Alisa i totonu.</i></p>
CS300 – RT	Level 1 BP	<p>Can display correct structures in some sentences.</p> <p>Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.</p>	<p><i>Alisa, Alisa, ua fefe la ua po.</i></p> <p><i>Ua fa'atofa Alisa i lona tama ma lona tina.</i></p>
CS302 – PK	Level 1 BP	<p>Can respond in simple sentences.</p> <p>Can display correct structures and grammar in some of her responses.</p>	<p><i>Ia o le a le mea e te tau manatua la e tupu i le tala? O le a? O le a? O la e lalaga le sikafu.</i></p> <p><i>Na savali mai Alisa i lalo ma alu i le fogafalelua, ua leai se faitoto'a.</i></p>
<p>CS310 – FS</p> <p>CS310 – FS continued</p>	Level 1 BP	<p>Can respond in simple sentences. Can display correct structures.</p> <p>Can make predictions on what was happening in the story.</p>	<p><i>Ua moe le teine o Lisa i le fefevale.</i></p> <p><i>Ua moe le teine o Lisa ua fefevale ua pogisa.</i></p>
CS314 - TT	Level 1 BP	<p>Beginning with lots of prompting and then progressing to less prompting as the conversations unfold.</p> <p>Can display correct structures.</p>	<p><i>O le a le mea lea ua tupu ia Alisa? Na valaau atu Alisa, Alisa. Valaau atu loa. O fea oe? Ae uma ifo ua po.</i></p> <p><i>O le a le mea lea e tupu i lea ata? La e alu Alisa e tilotilo i le 'atopa'u.</i></p>
CS319 - NS	Level 1 BP	<p>Can respond in simple sentences.</p> <p>Can display correct structures and grammar in some of her responses.</p> <p>Can display basic skills of listening and viewing.</p> <p>Understands that one word can replace with more words.</p>	<p><i>O la e tilotilo i le timu.</i></p> <p><i>O la e tilotilo i le timu. Na fia alu e ta'alo i fafo.</i></p> <p><i>Ua pogisa uma le mea, ua fefe Alisa.</i></p> <p><i>Tinamatua is the same as loomatua, grandma, and nana.</i></p>

<b>CS320 – LR</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can respond in simple sentences.</p> <p>Can display correct structures in some of the sentences with correct pronunciation. However, in some of the words she uses ‘k’ as in ‘akopa’u, and kilokilo (tilotilo)</p>	<p><i>O la e va’ai i le fale.</i></p> <p><i>O la e alu e va’ai tinamatua. O lea ua moe.</i></p>
<b>CS323 – SS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can respond in simple sentences.</p> <p>Can display correct structures and grammar in some of her responses.</p> <p>Can demonstrate basic skills of listening and viewing. Demonstrates average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.</p>	<p><i>O Lisa sa alu i le ta’avale.</i></p> <p><i>O lena e nofo i luga o le nofoa.</i></p> <p><i>Ua sau Lisa i le fogafalelua, Ua pogisa. Na toe maua e le fafine Alisa.</i></p>
<b>CS401 – FI</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can respond in simple sentences.</p> <p>Can display correct structures and grammar in some of her responses.</p>	<p><i>Na tilotilo Alisa i le ‘atopa’u tuai.</i></p> <p><i>Na alu Alisa tilotilo i ‘ofu, ma tusi, ma ‘ula.</i></p>
<b>CS402 – FM</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Demonstrates good pronunciation of words and good understanding of everyday language.	<i>La e savalivali lemu Alisa i luga o le falemaualuga e va’ai se faitoto’a o matala teisi.</i>
<b>CS403 – LE</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can display good coordination of listening of viewing skills when asked of what happened.</p> <p>Can make predictions of what, when, where, and how to answer the questions.</p>	<p><i>Ua soso atu e tilotilo i le ‘atopa’u, o la e iai mea e fai ai teuga.</i></p> <p><i>Ua valaau atu le tagata, Alisa o fea oe? Ae tatata atu le ‘atopa’u la e iai.</i></p>
<b>CS404 – LM</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can display correct structures and grammar.</p> <p>Can demonstrate average understanding of Samoan language and grammar.</p>	<p><i>E ala ane le teine ua usu ona matua e fainaluenafaialuega).</i></p> <p><i>Na alu solo le teine, na manatu o le tinamatua la te ta’aalo.</i></p>
<b>CS405 – LT</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple sentences or phrases.	<i>Ua alu Alisa i le paipa.</i>

		Can demonstrate good coordination of listening and viewing skills.	<i>E sau Alisa ua moe tinamatua. La ua sau Alisa, po ua ia se potu matala.</i>
<b>CS406 – NP</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple sentences.  Can display good coordination of listening and viewing skills.	<i>O la e o i lo latou aiga.  Ua valaau atu le tagata ia na ia. Ua pogisa.</i>
<b>CS409 - YS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can respond in simple sentences of phrases.  Can display correct structures and grammar.	<i>O loo fia alu Alisa i fafo, ae o loo timu. Ona savali mai lea o Alisa o loo moegase le loomatua.  Na sau lea o Alisa i totonu o le potu, ona maua lea o Alisa o le 'atopa'u e fai i le pa'u.</i>
<b>CS418 – PA</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can display correct structures and grammar.  Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills.  Can make predictions of what, when, where and how to answer the questions.	<i>O le ata o Alisa ma lona tinamatua.  O le ata o lona tama ma lona tina la e o e faigaluega.  Ua fiafia tinamatua ua maua Alisa.</i>
<b>CS420 – TF</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Can demonstrate average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.  Demonstrates proficiency of understanding the story.	<i>La e la'a mai luga. La e tilotilo i le 'atopa'u i le 'atopa'u e fai i le pa'u.  La e tilotilo i 'ofu ma tusi. La ua fiu e valaau Alisa, la e pogisa tele, lea na fefe ai loa Alisa.</i>
<b>CS421 – SS</b>		Can demonstrate good coordination of listening and viewing skills. Respond quickly to the question  Can respond in simple sentences and phrases.	<i>Ua sau le teine i totonu o le fale. Ua moe le loomatua.  Ua alu Alisa e su'e se faitoto'a o matala.</i>
<b>CS423 – TL</b>		Can demonstrate good coordination of listening and viewing skills.	<i>O lona tinamatua la e moe.  Ua fefe le teineitiiti ua pogisa.</i>
<b>CS424 – VL</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	Demonstrates good average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.	<i>Sa tilotilo o le 'atopa'u. sau loa i totonu fai ana mea. Sau loa me'ime'i i tua, sau loa moe ii.</i>

<b>CS211 – NS</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can respond in simple sentences.</p> <p>Demonstrates good coordination of listening and viewing skills.</p>	<p><i>Sa o Alisa i le ta'avale.</i></p> <p><i>Savalivali lemu, i le laau. Ua moegase lana tinamatua.</i></p>
<b>CS416 – BT</b>	<b>Level 1 BP</b>	<p>Can respond in simple sentences or phrases.</p> <p>Can respond quickly to the question.</p> <p>Can demonstrate average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage.</p>	<p><i>Ua inu Alisa. Ua le au Alisa i le paipa.</i></p> <p><i>Sa fia ta'alo Alisa i lona tinamatua, aua timu.</i></p> <p><i>Ua moe le tama/tinamatua o Alisa. Ua va'ai ane Alisa ua matala teisi le faitoto'a.</i></p>

Table 18. Level 1 Early Proficiency (Laasaga Muamua Amata).

SAMPLES FROM FOUR SCHOOLS

Coding	Levels	Comments	Examples
CS202 – CH	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting from the assessor to guide conversations. It took time to respond and could answer one word or phrases.	<i>Se’i va’ai po o le a le mea na tupu ia Alisa. O fea ua lau i ai Alisa? Ua timu. O le a lea mea? Va’ai. Moe</i>
CS203 - MT	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide conversation. The student took time to respond by using short sentences.	<i>Ua alu atu, ua alu atu.</i>
CS206 – AS	Level 1 EP	Need prodding or cues by the assessor. Disconnected structuring of responses.	<i>O la e lalaga. Le a?</i>
CS208 – LL	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation. Can answer one or two words.	<i>Savali. O tina.</i>
CS213 – AT	Level 1 EP	Disconnected structuring of response.	<i>Ona la ua ma’i le loomatua. Na ia maua ‘ofu ma tago tui. O ‘ofu ma le ‘ula.</i>
CS218 – SF	Level 1 EP	Need prodding or cues by the assessor. Takes time to answer the questions.	<i>O le a le mea lena e te tau manatua? “O lena e nofonofo”.</i>
CS219 – VT	Level 1 EP	Can answer using one or two words.  Takes time to respond when asking questions.	<i>O Alisa.</i>  <i>O le a le mea ua tupu i le tala? O le a le mea lena e tupu mai fafo. “O lena e va’ai Alisa i timuna(timuga).</i>
CS221 – HS	Level 1 EP	Takes time to respond when asking questions.	<i>O le a le mea na tupu ii? O le a le mea lea e tupu i le ata lea? Ua timu. O le a le mea ua tupu i lena ata? “Ua timu”. Ia o le a le mea ua tupu i lena ata? “Ua fefe Lisa ua po”.</i>

CS301 – LL	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide conversations.	<i>O le a le mea lea e tupu i le ata? Fa'amatala mai e oe i au lava upu. Le mea lea na tupu i le ata. Fa'asolosolo laia. O ai le igoa o le teine? O A.A....</i>
CS304 – HV	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting from the assessor to guide conversations.	<i>O ai lea teine? O le a le mea lea e tilotilo i ai le teine? "O le ta'avale".</i>
CS307 – MF	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide conversations.	<i>O le a le mean a tupu ai? O ai lea ua tilotilo atu ii? "O tina". O ai le igoa o le teine lea? "O Alisa".</i>
CS308 – AP	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting from the assessor guide conversations. It took time to respond and could answer using one word or simple phrases.	<i>Taumafai e manatunatu po o le a le mea lea e tupu i le amataga lava o le tala. O ai le teine lea. "O Alisa".</i>
CS313 – MFD	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting by the assessor. Took time to respond.  Some disconnections in structuring responses when invited to share thoughts about pictures.	<i>O le a le igoa o le mea lea? O le a? "O le ta'avale".  O le a le ta'avale lena e tilotilo i ai Alisa? "O le 'atopa'u".</i>
CS316 – LT	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting by the assessor.  Took time to respond to the questions.	<i>O a mea a Alisa na e fai? O le a le mea lena e alu ifo i i? "O timuga".  Va'ai i le ata ma ta'u mai le igoa. Ia o le a? Tautala mai ma fa'amatala. "O le 'atopa'u".</i>
CS400 – AL	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting at the beginning and then during the process she was able to respond without prompting.	<i>O le a le mea lea e tupu i le amataga o le tala? I le ata lea? Fa'amatala mai i au 'upu. O fea lea e va'ai i ai teine? "O la e va'ai i ona matua. O la e o i le galuega".</i>
CS410 – PA	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting at the beginning and then during the process he was able to respond without prompting.	<i>O la e siva. O lona tinamatua.</i>
CS412 – IF	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation.	<i>E te manatua o le a le mea na tupu i le amataga lea o le tala? "Alisa ma lona tinamatua".</i>

		It took time for the student to respond.	<i>Va'ai o ni tamaiti ia e i? O la e tilotilo ia ai? Ae a lea ata? "Ua timu".</i>
CS413 – FF	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation.	<i>O ai lea teine? O a mea a Alisa lea e fai i le ata lea? Fa'atofā. Fa'amatala mai Fa'alafi. Ae a la i? "O la e alu i luga o le potu e va'ai po o matala le faitoto'a".</i>
CS414 – TT	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation.	<i>O le a le mea la e lalaga e Tinamatua? "Pulou". O le a le mea lea e tupu ii? "La e tau alu Alisa i fafo, ae la ua timu".</i>
CS415 – LP	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation.	<i>O a mea a Alisa na e fai? "O la e tilotilo i le ta'avale". O ai lena e i totonu o le ta'avale? "O tama ma tina".</i>
CS417 - CT	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation. It took time for the student to respond.	<i>O le a le mea o e manatua na tupu i le amataga o le tala? Va'ai i le ata ma fa'amatala mai. O ai le igoa o le teine? "O Alisa. La e tofā."</i>
CS419 – FL	Level 1 EP	Can answer using one word,  Took time to respond of what happened in the story.	<i>"Alisa."  O le a le mea lea e tupu ii? "O Alisa". La e tūtū. La e tilotilo ese".</i>
CS422 – NI	Level 1 EP	Lots of prompting and cues from the assessor to guide the conversation.	<i>O a mea a tinamatua na e fai? Sa ta'u atu i le tala. O le a? O le a? "O la e lalaga le sikafu".</i>

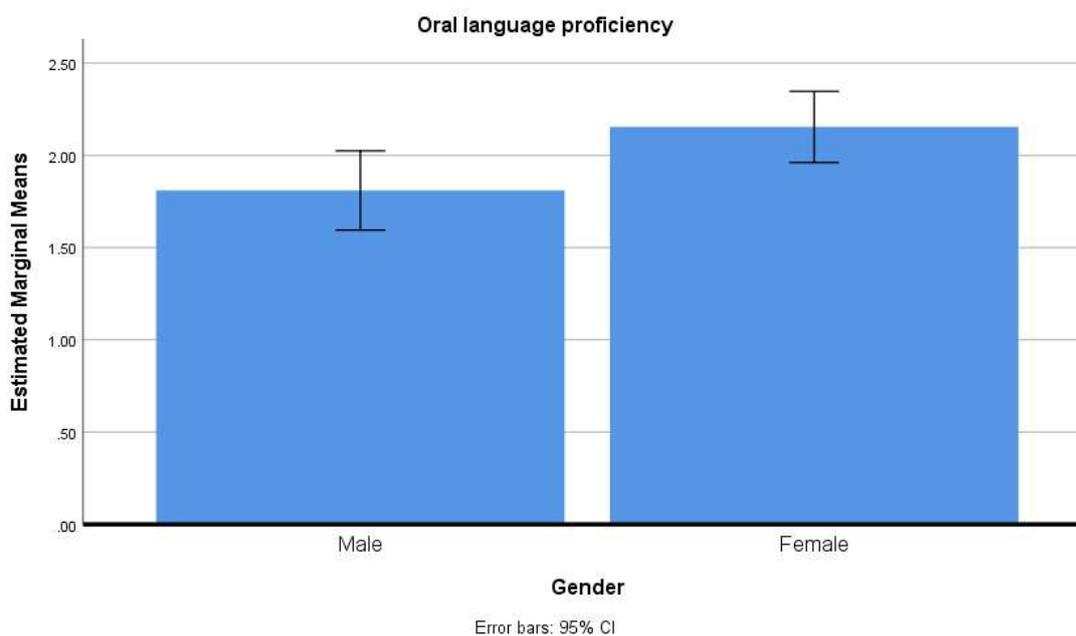
### Conclusion:

In the presentation of data analysis by the two assessors and myself, the overall outcome was favourable for all participants involved. Forty-one (41) students achieved Basic Proficiency Level 1, thirty (30) students achieved Standard Proficiency Level 1, twenty-three (23) students achieved Early Proficiency Level 1. The same data was further quantified to reveal comparisons: 1. between girls and boys in oral proficiency (expressive), 2. comparison across schools in oral competency, and 3. across schools in retell comprehension questions. A summary of the analysis breakdown in Section 6.8 page 147 provides a clear picture of the students and schools' overall comparative performance.

#### 6.7.4 Results Oral Language Proficiency

The first series of analyses focused on understanding the cohort's performance in the story retell or their expressive language. The results showed that 23.5% (n=24) of the cohort achieved Level 1 (Early), 45.1% (n=46) achieved Level 1 (Basic) and 23.5% (n=24) achieved Level 1 (Standard), in the context of the complex language produced in the story retell. Descriptive statistics regarding the comprehension of the story showed that the Mean score was 3.9 (SD=1.7) out of 10 correct.

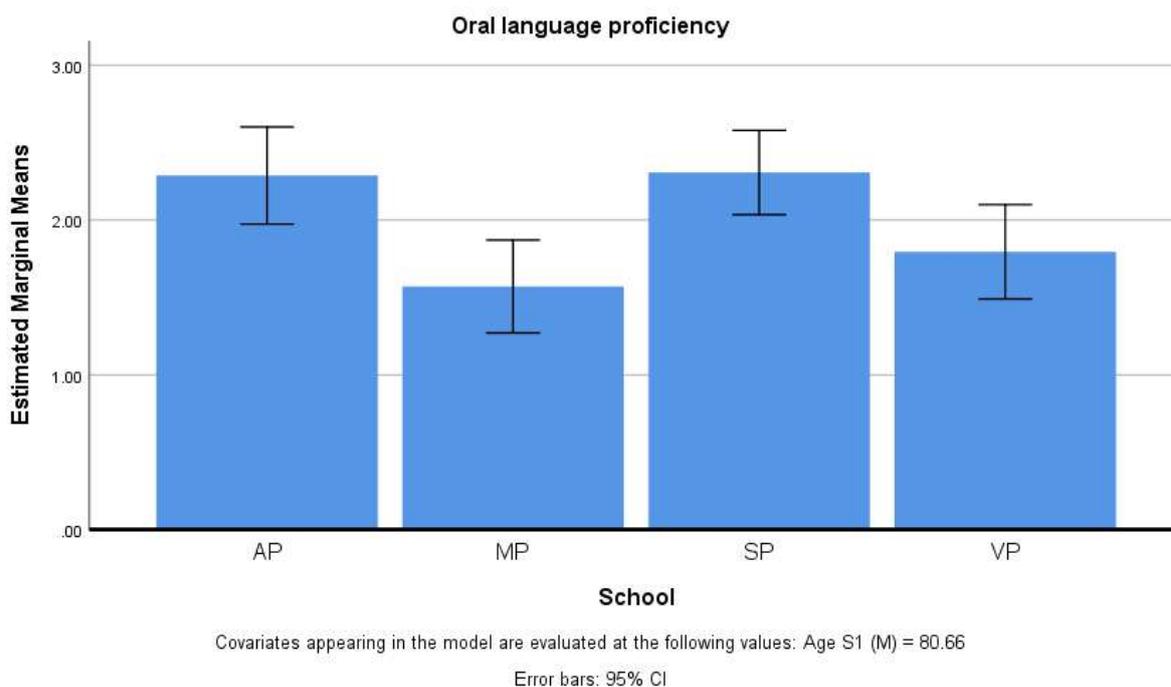
The next set of analyses examined whether there were any gender differences in oral language proficiency. A Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the performance of girls and boys on oral language proficiency via the three-points scale described above. Results showed that girls scored significantly higher in this assessment [Mann-Whitney U = 812.00 ( $z = -2.31$ ),  $p = .02$ ; Females (M=2.15, SD=0.70); males (M=1.81, SD=0.71)]. This result is depicted in Figure 14 below. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no difference between girls and boys in the comprehension questions for the retell [ $F(1,92) = 1.01$ ,  $p = .32$ ].



**Figure 14. Comparison between girls and boys in oral language proficiency (expressive).**

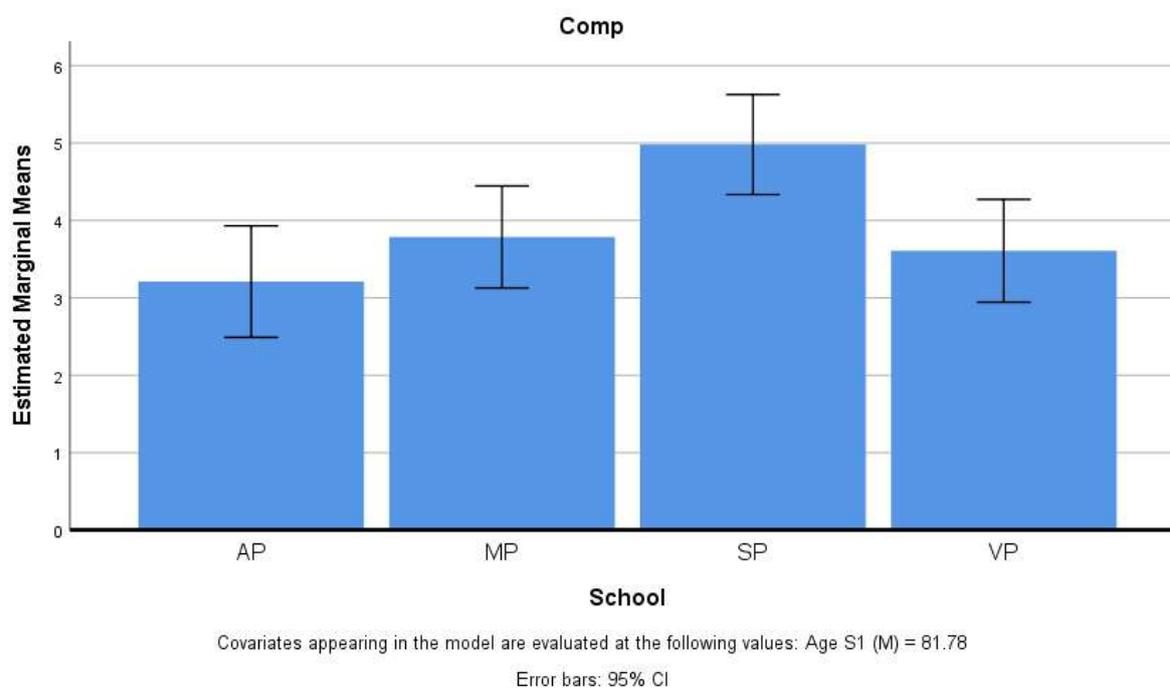
The next set of analyses examined whether there were differences across age groups in their performance on the story retell measure. A Kruskal-Wallis test showed there was no difference in the language proficiency of each age group as assessed via the three-point scale [Kruskal-Wallis  $H(4) = 6.72, p = .15$ ]. A one-way ANOVA also showed there were no difference across 5, 6 and 7 year olds in scores on the comprehension questions from the retell [ $F(2,91) = 2.15, p = .12$ ].

The final set of analyses explored the oral language competency of participants across the four participating schools. An Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) which controlled for age showed there were significant differences in story retells (as measured by the 3 point scale) across schools [ $F(3,89) = 4.92, p = .003$ ]. Post-hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated that both AP and SP scored significantly higher than MP. This result is depicted in Figure 15 below.



**Figure 15. Comparison across schools in oral language competency (controlling for age).**

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) controlling for age also showed significant differences between schools in children's performance on the comprehension questions [ $F(3,95) = 5.60, p = .001$ ]. Post-hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment indicated that SP scored significantly higher than AP and VP. These results are depicted in Figure 16 below.



**Figure 16. Comparison across schools in retell comprehension questions (controlling for age).**

## 6.8 Summary

The SEPA tool is a comprehensive phonological awareness assessment that evaluates multiple aspects of phonological awareness that are relevant for the Samoan language, that is, it includes syllable and phoneme level subtests and takes into account key features of Samoan phonology. The suitability of the tool for Samoan children is also due to the selection of culturally appropriate vocabulary and illustrations.

Evaluation of the performance of the research cohort on the SEPA tool showed some important findings. Similar to findings in other languages, the cohort performed near ceiling on more basic sub-tests (phoneme isolation, letter-sound knowledge and syllable segmentation). The other subtests (phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation) were more difficult and will be critical subtests to include once children are beyond the initial stages of learning to read. This result highlights the importance of including more and less

complex subtests within a phonological awareness tool rather than relying on a single indicator of phonological awareness as done within a tool such as the SEGRA.

Surprisingly, there was not a developmental effect on the performance of children in different age groups across subtests. This finding is likely to be due to the fact that all children in the cohort had equivalent formal schooling experience (i.e., all within their second year at school) despite the varied age range. There were, however, clear differences across schools in phonological awareness performance, with children from SP school achieving the highest scores across subtests.

A story retell assessment was used to measure children's oral language competency and their listening comprehension. The complexity of the language that children used in their retell was the focus of the analysis by a panel of two expert evaluators. Further, their listening comprehension was evaluated by asking children questions about what happened in the story. Results for the story retell assessment mirrored the general outcome of the SEPA tool, that is, no developmental effect on scores per age groups, though differences were detected in scores across schools.

Such differential across schools is an important outcome in the results that have not been explored in other studies that focused on Samoan emergent literacy. For example, findings regarding the use of the SEGRA tool (which was described in detail in the literature review chapter) did not look at school-specific differences in outcomes. On the other hand, the SEPA results reaffirmed the SEGRA findings in the gap between girls and boys to an extent though. The results revealed that the girls outperformed boys in the letter-sound knowledge subtest only, and on par with the girls in all other sub-tests. But as the SEGRA results showed, the boys could not sustain their equal status in later years, which has become an issue of concern not just for Samoa but New Zealand also (UNICEF, 2018).

In line with the Saliemanu framework, which forms the conceptual basis for this thesis, there were many school-specific factors that influenced students' foundational learning. For example, the socioeconomic backgrounds of families, the delivery of the bilingual programme and understanding of dual-medium models, the teaching pedagogy and classroom practice, the level of participation in ECE which the private school seemed to have had an advantage compared with state schools, as the results proved.

The next chapter uses a qualitative approach to understand the content of each school in depth from the principal's perspective, that will help explain the differences in outcomes across schools, as identified in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' INTERVIEWS

Ia fili i le tai se ua agavaa –  
Let the ocean decides which one is capable

#### 7.0 Introduction

The rationale behind this chapter is to bring the collective voice of the principals into the discussion. The principal is perceived as the key figure in almost every aspect of school governance from leadership to the curriculum and its intricate details including the assessment policy. Their role in this thesis is crucial not only as facilitators but direct stakeholders of a school curriculum and pedagogy. Central to the purpose of interviewing principals is to gain a better understanding of school-specific factors which may account for the children's performance in phonological awareness and oral language skills in their schools; whether there is a correlation between these factors and the SEPA results.

Five principals were interviewed, three in state schools and two in a private school. Each provided own rationale and perspective on the role of assessment in their curriculum objectives, planning and outcomes. Together they provided the viewpoint of the school leadership that is vital to an in-depth analysis of the thesis problem. As participants, they comprised three state school and two private school principals.

First, leadership in a school context is a vital factor when defining children's success (Hattie, 2009). Principals are leaders of their school communities and the expectation of what they can offer is there from their first day in office. Even the claim that the principal is the key to successful schools is strongly supported (Bottoms et al., 2003). First, in their roles as a facilitator on behalf of both the teacher and the student. Hattie (2009) among others believe that effective principals create conditions that ensure that the school is focused first and foremost on effective teaching and learning (Robson & Bassett, 2017). Under their direction pedagogical leadership is promoted among the staff and the school community. The principal is the model of such leadership in terms of having a good knowledge of the school curriculum and a strong command of the most relevant approaches that deliver the best results for the teachers and students. The general focus is about

providing quality support for teachers, the children and even the families, hence fostering an organisational climate in which everyone can improve own practice (Abel, 2016).

International research has testified of the direct connection between good leadership and the best results (Hattie, 2013; Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). Bottoms et al (2003) simply argued that the best way to improve school performance is to hire good principals. Describing the idea of a good principal can be a problem though the task of choosing one must be taken seriously. Six strategies have been proposed by the latter, most of which revolved around the idea of accomplishments or those who have proved their worth by means of their previous performance. The importance of having a solid academic background is also part of the overall strategy. The idea is that knowledge plays a crucial role in a leader's capability and capacity to perform at such level.

But the most relevant quality in hiring a good principal is to do with his/her creation of the ideal environment for teaching and learning. The principal is both leader and motivator who provides the vision and direction as well as encourages others to be visionaries and innovators in their lines of work (Fa'amanatu-Eteuati, 2020; Tuia, 2016; Lee- Hang, 2011).

In certain environments, expectations of a school principal are based on cultural perception or a people's way of doing things. In Samoa for example, the culture pervades every aspect of living in general and a principal will have to attend to the cultural needs of the school on top of his/her other main duties and responsibilities (Fa'aulufalega, 2008). The Samoan parents' expectations of their primary school principals could not be higher, first, to raise their children's performance and achievement so they can have a chance of a placement in a prestigious high school later (Lee- Hang, 2011).

Middle leadership is crucial in this collective task as they are the ones who influence both the top and the lower tier of the organisation structure (Robson & Bassett, 2017). Classroom teachers also are leaders in their own rights. As a cohort of leaders, they are supposed to be agents of change, according to Hattie, in one of his 'eight mind frames' aimed at promoting effective school leadership (2015).

Aspiring principals who have proved their merits, commitment and passion for their calling must be given every means of support; teachers who've shown such qualities and skills must be encouraged and nurtured within the system. To sum up, using one of the principals' own definition, 'A principal is a leader with a vision, a mission, who has diverse

skills, compassionate, with a lot of passion and determination to take everyone with him/her to new heights of success' (Personal communication with P4).

To begin with, the introduction of the SEPA Tool as an extra assessment was welcomed by all five principals with open arms. All of them acknowledged the contribution of the home and language in the first years of schooling. For example, the prior knowledge that children bring with them to the primary, especially their proficiency in the first language (oral fluency and vocabulary skills) can make a difference for a child in their learning or understanding teaching instructions. All of them agreed that the role of the school is to make good use of this knowledge to extend literacy in reading and writing, by means of effective strategies such as promoted in the SEPA Tool for example. In sum, the rationale behind this chapter is to listen to the collective voice of the principals so as to gain a better understanding of how early literacy is nurtured and developed in our own society.

### **7.1 Method of inquiry**

I used Faafaletui as my inquiry approach. Fa'afaletui refers to a serious conversation or discussion between two people or a small group of people. Both the interviewer (researcher) and interviewee are free to alternate roles at will, thus enriching the sharing as well as add value to information gathering (Tavita, 2021). Fa'afaletui encourages relationship building that leads to effective collaboration; thus enhancing the capacity to collect, share and in the process validate information on behalf of both the researchers and the participants (Tamasese, et al, 2005; Tuafuti, 2016; Rimoni, 2016; Sua'alii-Sauni & Aiolutotea, 2014; Alefaio-Tugia, 2014). Compared with Bruner's (2004) Narrative Inquiry, it is a study of peoples' experience understood narratively, or the inquirers, thinking narratively about experience through inquiry (ibid.). Through stories people communicate normally, revealing themselves through stories. They engage actively telling stories naturally. Researchers will need Fa'afaletui to approach the Samoan world of traditional leadership (matai) and specialized discourses encased in the language (Tavita, 2021). As such it demands a certain competency in Samoan oracy skills in order for any exchange to be meaningful (ibid.).

By means of one-to-one interviews with five principals, their insights were shared as school leaders, high chiefs (alii sili/ alii taua), wives of high chiefs (faletua) of the faamatai (matai system and jurisdiction), and church leaders in their religious denominations.

## 7.2 The Interviews

In line with the research questions, the interviews were focused around gaining the principals' insights on aspects of the governance to the curriculum as school leaders, the school vision, language policy, assessments used in schools and parents and community involvement in the life of the school. The interviews were done individually and involved cultural protocols of the people such as using honorifics and polite language. Prior to the interviews, the principals' consents were requested to satisfy the ethics requirement, which included the recording of the interviews for analysis. The duration of interviews varied, depending on the interviewees' responses, but most lasted between 45 minutes to at least an hour. For this study, two interviews were conducted in the school environment while the other three interviews took place at the principals' own homes. The advantage of the home environment was evident in the amount of time allowed by the participants. Questions were designed specifically for the purpose of eliciting the right type of information from them. Their responses were recorded and transcribed later.

Thematic Analysis was utilised as the analysis method given the importance of individual stories in predicting and identifying patterns of behaviour in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Described as one of the most capable tools in the interpretation of qualitative analysis (*ibid.*), it is meant to simplify the task of coding where the diverse and complicated nature of the data present themselves (Patton, 2002). The task of coding involved the process of tracing themes which were not only significant but highly relatable in the context. This can be achieved by familiarizing oneself with the produced text, in a process of transcribing, correcting, and checking, generating codes, searching patterns, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, then producing the report (Gomm, 2004; Tuafuti, 2016). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), "a code is a word or brief phrase that captures the essence of why you think a particular bit of data may be useful" (p. 207).

The themes were selected, based on the purpose of each question as well as the participants' responses. More importantly, these themes were meant to suggest the reality of lived experience which van Manen (1990) called the "structures of experience" (p.78). For example, in justifying the selection of a particular theme, the text was engaged on behalf of all participants to find out the degree of concern or commitment given to an issue or topic of interest. Major themes have been highly traceable in the text and even the participants' body language. Sub-themes were just as important in the context of justifying the coding process (*ibid.*).

### 7.3 Reliability

Two Samoan educators were given the task of doublechecking the original transcriptions and English translations, based on audio material and analyses. These were provided for in private and in turn served the purpose of reliability for the research. Both educators are natural speakers of the Samoan language and are based in New Zealand.

### 7.4 Interview Research Questions

#### 7.4.1 English Version

1. Does your school have a language policy? If Yes – Is your policy document available to the public? If No – Is there any particular reason?
2. How many languages does your school use for teaching and learning?
  - So how do you use Samoan only or English only or even two languages in your early literacy program?
3. Do you have any prescribed resources from (MESC) Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to support the development of language/languages in your program?
4. How do you measure your children's academic progress in Samoan/English?
  - Do you have a policy of reporting to parents on their children's achievement?
  - Do you normally report the achievement of your children to their parents?
  - Do you have a Standardised Test from MESC in two languages?
5. How do you describe your community involvement in terms of school development of early literacy program in your school?

#### 7.4.2 Samoan Version

##### Fesili o le Fa'atalanoaga

1. E iai se Anava Taugagana a la outou 'ā'oga? A fa'apea e iai, e avanoa la mo tagata lautele? A fa'apea e leai, e iai tonu lava se mafua'aga?
2. E fia gagana o loo fa'aaoga e la outou 'ā'oga mo 'a'oa'oga?
  - E a la? E fa'apefea ona fa'aaoga e na o le faa-Samoa poo le faa-Peretania poo gagana uma fo'i e lua i le tau amataga mai o le Polokalame o le Literasi?
3. E iai ni alaga'oa ua uma ona saunia pe fa'aagagaga mai le Ofisa o A'oga, Ta'aloga ma Aganu'u e lagolago ai le atiina a'e o le gagana poo gagana i la outou polokalame?
4. E fa'apefea ona e fuaina le alualu i luma o ausiga fa'alea'oa'oga a le fanau i le fa'a-Samoa ma le fa'a-Peretania?

- E iai ni faiga fa'avae a la outou a'oga e lipoti ai ausiga a le fanau i matua?
  - Pe o se faiga masani le lipoti o ausiga a outou tamaiti i o latou matua?
  - E iai se su'ega fa'alemālo e su'e uma ai tamaiti o le atunu'u a le Ofisa o A'oga, Ta'aloga ma Aganu'u i gagana e lua?
5. O le a sau fa'asoa mai i le auai o le pulega ma faiganu'u, o matua ma le nu'u i le atina'e o 'ā'oga i polokalame tau amata o le literasi i totonu o la outou 'ā'oga.

## 7.5 Selection of Participants & Interview Procedures

Five principals were selected purposefully in their roles as principals of the participants' schools who were involved in this study. J.W. Creswell and Poth (2018) alluded to the purposeful sampling techniques or selecting participants on that basis as, "they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. The same view has been supported by Gray (2014) who asserted that purposeful sampling enables the researcher to decide who will provide the best perspectives about the phenomenon being studied. Patton (2002) also supported the idea that purposeful sampling is extensively utilised in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. The process is well informed of the identification and selection of individuals that have more knowledge and relevant experiences relating to the research topic (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Sandelowski (2000) noted (cited in Finau, 2017) that the fundamental aim of purposeful sampling in any qualitative study is selecting "an information rich case" (p.250).

Spradley (1979) highlighted two factors which indicate the capacity and suitability of the participants in this context, so knowledge and experience identified its relevance on this particular case. The views from other researchers, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) also supported the relevance of availability and readiness to participate.

Purposeful sampling aligned with the mix method methodology that I chose to investigate my research topic with. As a single study of its own, part 2 of this study was focussed more on school principals' views based on my research questions mentioned above. I understood the principals were well educated, they had a variety of teaching experiences and huge leadership skills intertwined with traditional knowledge of Samoan protocols. Their involvement in village ceremonies and traditional activities were utilised positively in their roles as public servants, and they were also well aware of the challenges they encounter in striving to fulfil all these duties as expected of them.

## 7.6 Profiles of Five Principals in Samoa

In this section, I will profile the five principal participants in the thesis. Key characteristics of the participants are presented in the Table 8.1 and then a detailed profile is provided.

**Table 19. Profiles of Principal Participants**

Name	Type of school	Years of service as a classroom teacher	Years of service as a principal	Country of training	Age
P1 Principal 1	State School School 1	23 years	14 years	Samoa	60+ years
P2 Principal 2	State School School 2	14 years	12 years	Samoa	48 years
P3 Principal 3	Private School School 3	21 years	14 years	New Zealand	60+ years
P4 Principal 4	Private School School 3	15 years	14 years	New Zealand	60+ years
P5 Principal 5	State School School 4	26 years	2 years	Samoa	50+ years

### 7.6.1 Principal 1

Principal 1 holds a high chiefly title from his village. He is a male school principal of 60+ years of age with 37 years of teaching experience. He has experience as a principal for 14 years in two state primary schools in the Sagaga District. He trained at Western Samoa Teachers' College. His community involvement revolves mainly around his role as school principal. As a matai (leader) of his village and aiga he also has duties to attend to. He is also an active member of his church. All of these roles coincide, and which demand his time and resources on a weekly basis. Principal 1 has served in School 1 for 14 years to the date of this interview.

School 1 is a village school on the island of Upolu. It is a full Primary school which starts from Year 1 class to Year 8. The school roll is 406 children. School 1 is one of the state schools operated under the authority of the government MESC (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture).

By Western standards, the majority of children come from low socio-economic families though on average Samoan children are well fed and catered for; most of the families depend on a subsistence economy for their daily supply. Remittances from their families overseas has become part of the village education support system. The school has a committee whose role is to ensure that the school programmes are supported by the community, among other needs of relevance to the betterment of the school.

Located in a traditional village on the central north coast to the west of the capital Apia; it takes about 13 kilometres of driving distance to the capital. The village population is 2137 (2016 census), 853 belongs in the category of 1-14 years age group, almost 40 percent of the population (39.9%). As a political constituency it is part of Sagaga Le Usoga district which is part of the larger political district named Tuamasaga. The village bears a lot of prestige in the faa-Samoa due to the genealogical connections to a famous title and traditions pertaining to.

### **7.6.2 Principal 2**

Principal 2 hails from one of the villages in the Tuamasaga District on the island of Upolu, Samoa. He holds a high chiefly title. At 48 years of age, he is the youngest of all the principal -participants. He has 26 years of teaching experience, which included 12 years as a principal in two different State Primary schools in the Sagaga District. He is a Samoan trained teacher and also a lay preacher of his church. As a matai he is as much committed to his family and village affairs as in his role as principal. His situation is different to other participants for the fact that he is also another resident of the village which means that he needs little introduction to his community and the school children. In that case there are certain advantages as well as disadvantages. Overall, he is well-respected by his staff and the village hierarchy.

School 2 shares the same electoral constituency with School 1. The roll is 440 and is considered one of the largest full primaries in the Tuamasaga district. Like all state schools, the national curriculum is delivered bilingually in Samoan and English. Most of the children begin school with quite a fair understanding of the faa-Samoa and oral fluency

in the language, given the homogeneous character of the culture itself. The village main has a population of 2417 (2016 census) of which 975 belongs in the 0-14 age group or 40.3 percent of the total population. Like all traditional villages, it is steeped in traditions, being the seat of a famous title and capital of old successive governments.

### **7.6.3 Principal 3**

Principal 3 is 60+ years of age. After high school in Samoa, she decided to become a teacher and was offered training in New Zealand under a government scholarship. Upon her return, she has been teaching for 35 years in both Primary and Secondary schools in Samoa. She is one of the co-principals in SPS school and has held this position for 14 years. As an educator her interests revolve around the Samoan language and culture. An advocate of bilingual education and bilingualism, she also has other duties relating to the national curriculum where her input is needed. Her community commitments include roles in her church denomination, and wife of a village chief, in her family and his.

School 3 is located on the island of Upolu, about 5 kilometres west of the capital of Apia. Opened in 2004, it is a non-government school, operated under the directorship and management of three co-principals. The school is funded mostly by the parents with the support of government and local businesses. The school roll is 446. It caters mainly to the middle-class working parents who share the school's vision in promoting bilingual education and solid grounding in traditional values – cultural and Christian. All the three principals have been trained in New Zealand and have incorporated as much of their unique experience of both worlds into their vision and leadership strategy.

Like the other peers mentioned, they are all proactive in the professional development of their staff. Their belief in the value of the first language in the teaching and learning in the early years, and proof of success in children's performance, has moulded the school practice and pedagogical identity. As the SEPA results showed, children attending the private school have shown stronger phonological awareness development in their first language. Such differential in children's performance as compared with other schools point to the robustness of the SEPA tool.

#### **7.6.4 Principal 4**

Principal 4 is 60+ years of age with 29 years of teaching experience in both Primary and Secondary schools in Samoa. She was trained as a teacher in New Zealand after her schooling in Samoa. She was also a former Lecturer at the National University of Samoa, before embarking on the establishment of a private school with her two colleagues. She is one of the co-principals in her school. She has been a principal for 14 years.

Her experience and skills have been acknowledged through appointments to important roles in the system, including the curriculum. She holds the position of chairperson in Samoa's Teacher's Council. Her own affiliation with the community is through her church, and family and as a wife of a Samoan high chief (matai). Principal 4 shares the same school with Principal 3 in the cohort of leadership.

On average School 3 is well resourced by Samoan standards. While parents' support may not be visible, their rallying to supporting school programmes financially is highly commended by the school management. As a private school, School 3 does not belong to any particular village. In that case there are advantages as well as disadvantages. One of the advantages according to Principal 4 is the freedom to get things done quickly without much of the red tape involved, as characteristic of the public system and even cultural traditions for that matter.

#### **7.6.5 Principal 5**

Principal 5 is 50+ years of age with 28 years of teaching experience. Within that span of time, School 4 has been her first appointment as principal, going on to 2 years now. She holds a Bachelor of Education from the National University of Samoa. Community-wise, she holds a high chiefly title and a seating member of two committees, including the Education Committee, of her church. Like most principals with titles, her commitment to her family, village and church are all part and parcel of her job description and cultural expectations of a Samoan principal.

School 4 is located on the central north of the island of Upolu, to the west of the capital city of Apia, only about 5 kilometres from Apia. It has a population of 2,686 people (2016 census), of which 1,111 of its residents belong in the 0-14 age bracket. It is a full Primary school that starts from Year 1 Class to Year 8. It is a state school under the authority of the government Ministry (MESC). The school roll is 455. The majority of children come from low socio-economic family backgrounds.

There have been ongoing issues with social hardships affecting the families and subsequently the children of the school. Truancy and absenteeism have been featuring highly in the list of the management's concerns. For this particular school, many families rely on their young in the task of providing the food supply on a daily basis. Peddling in the streets of Apia has become a popular source of income earning for families in which children play a crucial role for example. A good number of families run stalls in the city market that sell either traditional food, Samoan handicrafts, or traditional wear to earn their keep. It comes at a cost for the school and children's own education; as the principal commented, it is a problem for the school when some of them decide to join in at a later stage.

Like many other villages, the majority of families depend on the land to supplement their living. Many families have only one income earner in a household, the remittances from overseas make a difference with paying school uniforms and gears. School 4 has a strong organisation of parents and teachers under the current management.

### 7.6.6 Coding summary

In the analysis process, 14 themes were highlighted in the interviews; these were broken down to two groupings – major themes (9) and supporting themes (5). The major themes have been selected based on their high relevance to the key objectives of the study, as well as their being prioritised by the principals. The supporting themes on the other hand refer to other main issues raised by the principals though secondary to the purpose of the analysis. Many of these themes are conventional or well-known to the reader. Each principal brought to the interview his/her knowledge, understanding and experience of the role as overseer of their school's language policy and programmes. Their responses to the questions highlighted their priorities in terms of what's been achieved or counted as successful, additionally the concerns and aspirations on what can be done to improve their children's learning in the future. For my procedure I will attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of some of the major themes first.

**Table 20. Major themes and sub-themes**

Major themes	Sub-themes	Frequency of reference					
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	T
1. Priority 1st language (L1)		7	2	11	12	7	39
2. Cultural responsiveness		20	7	54	43	37	161
3. Approaches/strategies		4	1	53	10	6	74
4. Standard assessments		26	8	29	19	21	103
5. Reporting to parents		13	12	13	10	8	56
6. Resources		6	4	8	12	15	45
7. Professional development		12	12	45	40	36	155
8. Community involvement		8	5	16	17	12	58
9. Teacher delivery		11	12	14	7	8	52
	1. Extracurricular	3	1	10	2	4	20
	2. Dual medium	5	8	1	4	6	24
	3. Book habits	0	0	0	3	1	4
	4. Systemic issues	5	0	2	3	0	10
	5. Creativity	1	2	4	4	5	16

The list of major themes that came out strongly in the analysis were: Priority of first language, Dual medium programme, Approaches/strategies, Systemic issues, Resource issues, Standard assessments, Teacher professional development, Reporting to parents, Community involvement, Principals visions. For sub-themes: Extra-curricular, Delivery, Social and cultural responsiveness, Book habits, Teacher shortage, Creativity. Table 20 provides a summary of the frequency in which these themes and sub-themes were referred to during the interviews. Note: frequency refers to the total number of times the theme was mentioned directly by the Participant in the transcript, which included concrete examples and indirect references.

## 7.7 Thematic Analysis

### 7.7.1 *Prioritising of the first language (L1).*

All five principals agreed that the children's home language is an integral part of their policy and planning. Principal 4 asserted: *O matou e faamuamua lava le gagana. For us we give the language the first priority.* For P4 the importance of the first language begins in the children's immediate environment; the environment is a blend of many things. But priority puts language first as the medium of establishing and nurturing values and social virtues. *Na fai a matou virtues o mea foi na e o uiga tausaaafia ma alagatau i le tuputupu a'e. Lotoalofa ma mea faapena, amata lava i lo tatou si'osi'omaga ma aganuu Samoa. Faata'ita'iga – Tulou, faamolemole, faafetai. We discussed our virtues or those we called manners or social etiquettes that are necessary for social growth. Being kind and those stuff that are intrinsic to their immediate environment and the faa-Samoa. For example – Excuse me, please, thank you.*

Secondly, the immediate environment also refers to the quality of the learning material by which children are instructed and assessed. P4 commented: *E le o talafeagai su'ega. Lona lua e avatu foi su'ega e mo'i e le o faia e ni Samoa; afai foi o ni Samoa e le lelei ona edit pe moderate. The assessments are contestable. In addition to, they seemed to have been prepared by non-Samoans; or if they are indeed then the editing and moderation are not done well.* P4's concern about the importance of contextuality and reliability in the preparation of learning material in Samoan highlighted some of the issues about the use of the first language at this day and age. (I will address this concern and others separately later on in the discussion).

Also, all of the principals emphasised the importance of the first language for its functional purposes and the fact that it is part of the state school policy wherein bilingualism is now promoted as a national policy for all government schools.

Principal 1 stressed one of the key principles of bilingualism: *Talitonuga a mautu le gagana Samoa o le a faigofie ona a’oina ai se isi gagana. O le Gagana Samoa o loo a’oa’oina ai le polokalame a le a’oga. Training a faia’oga e faamautinoaina ai le fa’aaogaga o le gagana Samoa. The belief that if the first language is embedded then it will facilitate the learning of another language. It is the Samoan Language by which the school programme is delivered. The training of teachers can only reinforce the application of the Samoan language.* Also, the responsibility of devising a school policy pertaining to language usage rests with the school: *O policies a le a’oga e faavae e le a’oga. Matafaioi le le pulea’oga ma faia’oga e faataatia lava le policy i le a’oga latou. School policies are designed within the school. [It is] the principal and staff’s responsibility to lay out the policy for the school itself.*

Principals 4 and 5 have been more direct and substantial in their responses to the question, Does your school have a language policy? P5’s school motto is, *Faataua lau gagana. Value your language.*

### **7.7.2 In search of better approaches/strategies**

The consensus is that any language policy requires the adoption of the most effective approaches to deliver its programmes. While no specific question was asked regarding this theme at least four principals mentioned so directly or impliedly.

Principal 3 emphasised the integrated approach or the holistic perspective. Such an approach for P3 is practical, functional, exploratory, critical (Why? How?), bilingual, incidental, multidimensional, multimedia, flexible, creative. *We believe the more practical activities that children are engaged in the more children will learn in a fun way. Aua ne’i uma le aso na o le saofafa’i o nai tamaiti ma faalogologo mai a o lea e te faamatala atua mea. Do not let the day pass by with children sitting and listening while you talk to them. Let the children handle things, and touch and find out for themselves, because in that way they retain information.* Integrating the faa-Samoa into the school curriculum and programmes has been part of the government policy.

Principal 5 mentioned Scaffolding as part of her school strategy. Principal 4 talked about the role of languages in the promotion of cultural and spiritual values. Manners is

important for her in a social environment where politeness and such values are very much part of a child's upbringing. The best approach involves skills in facilitation, according to P3, teachers need to be creative in the way subjects or themes are taught, including the use of simple language to teach an unfamiliar topic for example.

Principals 1 and 5 interpreted this integration as a collective undertaking on the part of all parties involved. The school through the management and staff does its part, the parents and the community need to fulfil its own part. For the school, improving the quality of teaching pedagogy and delivery. This includes a relook into the state curriculum and adapting it to suit the school environment according to P5.

### **7.7.3 Assessments**

It was clear from the principals' responses that each school has own measures of assessment – formative and summative. Formative assessments are ongoing with the teacher having a lot of control on a daily basis. This includes marking children's works and assessing by means of weekly tests for example. Summative assessments are mainly the prerogative of the Ministry of Education in national standardised tests at each year level. There are also regional tests, two of which are prepared in English and one in both English and Samoan. Lately the government ministry has introduced a new cohort of assessments to test the Samoan literacy skills from Year 1 to 6. This came about as a by-product of the international SEGRA that was used to assess many Pacific children, including Samoa.

Principal 4 affirmed that her school prepare their own reading assessments for Years 5, 6, 7 and 8. Assessment include standardised tests for reading and a variety of creative activities such as dancing. The juniors (Y1-4) are not formally assessed, instead observed and commented on by the teacher when talking with a student and draw own judgement (OTJ). The emphasis is on their understanding of social values and skills. Her peer, Participant 3 talked about their syllabus as drawn from many sources.

Overall, the assessment of children is driven by the school's holistic approach to learning, which caters to the children's interests and creativity. Noted earlier, P4 commented on the reason why her school has opted out of the state assessments. First her concern was to do with the quality of the assessments or the preparation. Impliedly, the teacher would prefer to use more high-frequently used words that most young children know. Participant 4 would like to see more effort put into moderation of material for sake of validity and reliability.

#### ***7.7.4 Reporting to parents and feedback***

In both state schools and the private school, the teachers report to the parents twice a year. The private school has a monthly newsletter to update parents about the school business. There is the Parents and Teachers Day for all five schools, which gives the parents the opportunity to visit classrooms, view their children's portfolios and books. The Cultural Day is meant for parents and their families to be entertained through their children's cultural performance. One school reported the excellent support of the community, while two others were not so successful.

While the parents are singled out for not doing their share of the work, there are other factors for sure which literature mentioned, that explained. From Principal 1 and Principal 5's responses, it seemed that every effort was made on the part of the school to make these particular 'days' count for quality interaction with parents and general community. The poor turnout was a reflection on the village support.

Part of the reporting are prizegiving ceremonies at the end of the school year. Parents come in numbers, some with high expectations that their children performed well. The final year ceremony is still by far the most popular communal evaluation of a child's effort throughout the year. It can also be argued, the evaluation of a teacher's performance, even the school itself. For instance, the success of a full primary school is measured by the number of students who could secure places in the most reputable colleges in Apia. Usually there is reputation and honour of a village that need maintaining, especially in Samoa which culture puts social capital high priority (Bourdieu, 1989).

By contrast, the private school has decided not to follow the end of year prizegiving tradition; instead, all of its school leavers' various successes are highlighted. This is based on the belief that learning is not just about academic but the overall development of a person, including competency values and admirable social skills.

### 7.7.5 Resource Issues

All the five principals were unanimous that the issue of resources is crucial to the delivery of the policy. First, the problem of not having enough reading material in Samoan (Suaalii, 2013). P4 commented: *E le o lava tusifaitau o le gagana. There aren't enough reading material in the language [Samoan].* Some of the material that are available are translated from foreign readers which contexts are quite different. Even the task of translating from English to Samoan is questionable according to P4. *O le 'oa o tala o le gagana o loo i aao o faia'oga. O early readers a Niu Sila e le namu Samoa. Tusi Peretania very colourful, e le pei o a tatou a le black and white they are still figures o la e taufeoloolo nei. Maimau e pe ana iai se funding faapena e tusi lava e le a'oga a latou tala. O mea ia e tutupu iinei. Content e decontextualized tele mea ia e sau. The richness of the stories in the language is in the safekeeping of teachers. The early readers from New Zealand do not smell Samoan. The English readers are very colourful, not like our black and white they are still figures though not as bad currently. Wish there is a funding so that schools can write their own stories. The things that happen in here. [Concerning the] content, many of the stuff coming are decontextualized.*

As implied in P4's concern, the need for local material cannot be more emphasised, not only in terms of their authenticity but the promotion of the first language itself. As P4 asserted, *'The richness of the stories in the language is in the safekeeping of teachers.'* To enhance learning the children need to be introduced to the aesthetics of the language that are rich in imagery and symbolism of own environment; the teachers are well able to deliver that as resources themselves.

Principal 1 testified that the only resources from the Ministry are Stationary. The allocation of the grant from the government is based on the number of children per school. This covers resources which also include repairs, maintenance, administration, and so forth. There are times when additional materials are distributed to schools. But overall, such distribution is inconsistent according to P1.

However, Principals 3 and 5 seemed to have found a way to balance the lack of local resources. For the latter by being proactive in seeking for funding to buy books and material. The material would later be part of own school production of resources catered to their own needs. Some schools do not have any readers, according to P4.

Principal 1 agreed with P4 that the emphasis must be on the teachers as primary resources; they are experts of the language but need as much support to translate their oral skills and knowledge into written or other forms for permanent usage.

### **7.7.6 Parents' involvement**

All the five principals have an issue or two with the involvement of the parents in the education of their children. Principal 1 places the responsibility squarely on the parents and the teachers. Community involvement has been an issue for P1 school. *O le lagolago a matua e 50%; e iai nisi matua e tuulafoa'i mai tamaiti i faia'oga. O le manatu o matua, o le tamaitiiti a ia o le faia'oga. O le faia'oga muamua lava o le tamā ma le tina. The parents support is [needs to be] 50%. Some parents abandon the children to the care of teachers. The parents think that children is the responsibility of the teacher. The first teacher is the father and the mother.*

This lack of support is self-evident, only 15 percent of parents responded to the school invitation to come to the school's Culture Day at one stage.

Principal 2 shared the same concern. *E 70 pasene o matua e tuutia'i a le fanau. E 30 pasene fua i le lipoti a faia'oga e le faia ni galuega a tamaiti. About 70 % of parents do not attend to their children's [educational needs]. Based on teachers' reports about 30 % do not help out with the children's homework.*

Principal 5 is concerned with the imbalance of doing schoolwork and home chores. Children are compelled to do home chores but are not encouraged with their reading and homework. There were parents who did their children's homework perhaps to save them from the teachers' reprimand though the teachers were not easily deceived.

Principal 3 and 4 came from a school where parental involvement can be described as indirect mainly. Through its newsletter parents are encouraged to send their children to school, and to help out with food and such provisions when the school caters for guests or to farewell a member of the staff, and so forth.

Extracurricular activities also demand the support of the parents. Principal 3 spoke well of such support. The SP school does not have a board of trustees, so the coordination between community and school is the onus of the three principals of the school; they are the board; they oversee the budgeting of programmes and remuneration of the staff and support workers.

Overall, the idea of the parents' involvement is read differently by each principal. As shown in the data, principals of state schools are more concerned with the lack of physical contact and support given to the children at home by their parents.

The principals of the private school on the other hand seemed to be satisfied with the present arrangement, so as the parents, many of whom are working couples and are busy with their careers. None of the principals mentioned any initiatives where parents are targeted as part of their schools' professional development. But Principal 5 has managed to utilize some of the parents as relievers when members of the staff are absent.

### **7.7.7 *Emphasis on the dual-medium programmes and the bilingual strategy***

All the principals acknowledged the placement of the state bilingual policy in their school programmes including extracurricular activities. While special emphasis is given to the nurturing of the first language, the consensus is, there are two languages involved in the teaching and learning of children in schools. All the principals seemed to have a good understanding of the rationale for bilingual education, even the way the two languages are used from early literacy to the mature years on a daily basis.

The separation of the two in the early years tends to follow the international norm where the child's L1 is given priority until such time when an L2 is gradually introduced. Participant 5 was pretty much assured of the strategy for her early entrants: *O le Tausaga I ma le 2 e faamalosia le Gagana Samoa ae faamalosia faia'oga i le ORAL ENGLISH i nai upu faigofie – mum, dad, food. For Year 1 and 2 the Samoan Language is encouraged while teachers are encouraged [to use] ORAL ENGLISH using simple words like mum, dad, food.* The end goal is to achieve balanced bilingualism in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> year of a full bilingual programme (Collier & Thomas, 1989).

However, none of the state school participants made any reference to the successful aspects of the policy in terms of verified school data or anecdotal evidence. On the other hand, two participants from the private school provided anecdotal evidence in support of the programme's long-term impact. They remarked on the positive feedbacks of their former students who've been doing further studies overseas; whose socialization at home through the school in bilingualism provided comfort in their stay abroad.

These ex-pupils spoke highly of their overseas experience and how they have been well accommodated among their New Zealand born peers and families, due to their speaking of the first language. They therefore were very appreciative of their bilingual nurturing in

their old school. In theory though, the state's Bilingual Education Policy Handbook clearly spelt out these merits based on international findings.

I can only assume that these merits of the bilingual policy are yet to be proven quantitatively and substantially in the policy's application for all schools involved. Hence until better assessment tools are devised, with some proven coordinated approaches put in place nationally, such merits will not be verified confidently soon from a quantitative research viewpoint.

P3 mentioned holistic learning and the importance of integrated approaches in this dual learning space. P1 on the other hand tied the policy to the most common problems in the system such as lack of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, the lack of support in terms of staff professional development, quality of delivery, and so forth. *Faafitauli o loo tupu i Samoa o le le lava o le aufaigaluega. Onosefulu tamaiti i le faia'oga e to'atasi, feoa'i faia'oga e fai assessments. Faata'ita'iga, activities e assess ai. The problem as it affects Samoa is the lack of teachers. Sixty children per teacher; teachers moving around to do assessments. For example, assessment activities.*

#### 7.7.8 *Systemic issues*

One of the main issues in relation to the system is shortage of teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning for both teachers and students is jeopardised. Mentioned earlier, the lack of teachers is the most pressing issue for Samoan schools. Principal 1 reported: *Faafitauli o loo tupu i Samoa o le le lava o le aufaigaluega. Onosefulu tamaiti i le faia'oga e to'atasi, feoa'i faia'oga e fai assessments. Faata'ita'iga, activities e assess ai. The problem as it affects Samoa is the lack of teachers. Sixty children per teacher; teachers moving around to do assessments. For example, assessment activities.*

The same issue of shortage was raised by other researchers (Suaalii, 2013; Tuia, 2013). The Samoan system calls for the retirement of a teacher at 50 which for many is a key contributor to the problem. First it lacks any incentives for the young school leavers to choose teaching as a long-term career, when they do university studies. As a result, many leave the profession early for other well-paid careers or migrate to other countries where teaching salaries are a lot better.

In addition to, there is a need for better collaboration among all stakeholders of the education system in the country. This is clearly implied in the varied responses of the five

principals. First, in relation to the bilingual policy, the need to clarify the principles in terms of enforcing and monitoring the progress as well as assessing the outcome collectively.

The merits of sharing information between and among schools is one of the key factors in the success of any bilingual policy (May, 2020; Siilata, 2014). Such advantage is not well articulated in the data and even the literature. This may be explained by the type of system where competition is still the keyword in the assessment activity. The knowledge is still viewed as a prized possession to enhance a school's own reputation when competing with other schools for placings in secondary schools and other national competitions.

As a result, expert knowledge is still confined to a certain space or small group of teachers or students. The disparity is still evident between schools in Apia and those in the rural areas in terms of national achievements (World Bank 2017). In addition to, overreliance on the ministry direction tends to weaken creativity and such practical experience which a school can share for the benefit of their neighbouring schools, only if such environment can be encouraged.

The private school has decided to do away with the prizegiving ceremony; their approach to assessment as said earlier is holistic and democratic. Rather than highlighting a few students, all students efforts are given equal focus in terms of their strengths and skills. Such approach tends to be working for the school's overall success, as also demonstrated in the results of the SEPA test. The results showed an overall consistency in performance compared to the state schools.

The need for more collaboration and coordination also relates to the curriculum. Principal 3 talked about the need for more facilitation in terms of simplifying the text for the sake of the teachers and the learners. Principal 3 thinks that the content is 'too wordy' and there's a need to break it down into a more comprehensible form/arrangement. This includes the delivery of instructions/content of lesson/ selection of activities, and so forth.

The private school has attempted to integrate classroom activities with real life observations. Hands on activities that includes the culture, home and the church is a way to integrate extracurricular activities with the main curriculum content.

Principal 4 commented on the state curriculum as taught in subjects or templates that according to P4 taught in isolation. For example, the problem of children's indifference to reading is stemmed from the home or lack of investing in such habits for the sake of the children. Such coordinated approach is needed to encourage these habits nationally; the same approach required to counter the influence of social media on children's academic

success. The curriculum needs as much exemplars as possible to support the teachers with their preparations. Otherwise, the need to share these resources among schools is the right thing to do.

### **7.7.9 Other issues**

In addition to the above issues, there were other highlights such as the principal's vision, the need to support such vision from within the school and from other stakeholders outside such as parents and the Ministry itself. Also, the rationale of extracurricular learning and how it supports the curriculum in promoting social and cultural responsiveness. Encouraging a book habit as noted earlier can be achieved at a national level, with a strategy similar to the old Pastor's School Bible reading sessions.

The quality of the leadership input in a school's overall performance can make a lot of difference. Sometimes taking a good initiative can make changes in the direction of a school for the better. The three issues may not have been prominent in the discussion but their relevance to the research questions is quite as important.

## **7.8 Final analysis**

The interviews with the principals served to provide a general overview of the Samoan school environment from their perspective. For this research, the issue of facilitating information came out quite strongly at the end of the analysis. While the theoretical frameworks in terms of the curriculum and policy handbooks have been prepared, they still need breaking down into comprehensible reading for the sake of the teachers, even children and parents. This may also be done through collective facilitation, that is by sharing experiences among clusters of schools so that teachers and children benefit as a result. As Principal 5 also alluded to, the curriculum must not be treated as the Bible, rather it is a guide that is meant to be helpful for all who need clear direction. English is the second language of the majority, and this needs to be taken into account.

In relation to the above is another systemic issue, the rationale of the assessment in the teaching pedagogy. Performance, whether individual or school-based, is still heavily measured by academic ability. Putting priority on placings can only serve to reinforce the division between groups of fast academic learners and those who are not but whose abilities may be in the social and cultural domains. Noted, one of the schools in this study has decided to address this gap by highlighting all strengths equally (holistic approach). Thus, in

response to the research questions, a child's phonological awareness has a lot to do with the beliefs of a community about education. Many parents have been bought into the idea of a palagi education for their children. Obviously, it means promotion of English only.

It has been a growing concern for educators in New Zealand and Samoan communities overseas of the prevalence of this type of thinking (Alefaio, 2019; Wilson, 2017; Tuafuti, 2016; Amituana'i-Toloa, 2005; Tuia, 2013). Samoa has the advantage due to the overall predominance of the Samoan in everyday conversations. But with the growing influence of globalization and social media, it has become more of a challenge (Pouono-Alexander, 2010).

Finally, the lack of resources was a concern for all of them, which is a reflection on the funding capacity of schools, mainly the state schools. The fact that the private school can count on their parents as sponsors for this purpose is a general indication of the socio-economic factors involved in Samoan education or affordability based on parents' wealth.

## **7.9 Summary**

In total, the promotion of early literacy for Samoa is well supported by the environment through socialization, beginning in the home and reinforcing any prior knowledge that the children bring with them to formal schooling. This is affirmed by the results of the SEPA Tool itself. The variations in performance between schools or that between private and state schools speak for the gaps that need to be attended to. These gaps are either systemic, theoretical, or pedagogical, as highlighted or alluded to in the principals' interviews, though in the overall assessment, most are quite fixable.

In total, the principals' interviews provided a close-up view into Samoa's education system at the grassroots level, and the challenges that a school management faces in the task of raising literacy performance.

## Chapter 8

### FINDINGS, DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Tatou 'ae'ae lea manu ua ulu  
Let us relish our catch of the day

#### 8.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and initiate discussions in relation to, as well as draw some implications for effective teaching strategies. The findings were the outcome of the study's problem, guided by the research questions. My role was to explore and report on Samoan children's phonological awareness and oral narrative development in the Samoan language. There is little understanding of the link between children's emerging phonological awareness in Samoan literacy development and their biliteracy success in Samoan and English. Well-established findings affirmed that phonological awareness is critical to children's early reading and spelling success in alphabetic languages (Gillon, 2017), yet only a few studies have shown interest in this gap. Similarly, research on the importance of children's storytelling or oral narrative ability and link with their reading comprehension agreed that this has not been fully explored (Amituana'i-Toloa, 2005; Collins, 2021; Westerveld, 2014). Only a few studies have targeted Samoan children's early reading and language development directly or in relation to transnational education settings. This study's findings affirmed that there is a link between the two basic components and reading to the extent they impact on the comprehension capability of the participants.

#### 8.1 Findings & Discussion

1. The Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness (SEPA) assessment tool which was developed and trialled in this thesis proved useful to describe the phonological awareness skills of Samoan children in Samoa in their early school years. Analysis proved that the performance of the one hundred 5–7-year old children who participated in this study was favourable overall, particularly in early developing phonological awareness tasks like initial phoneme identity. This supports the argument of the children's early exposure to phonics and a phonological teaching strategy used in the Samoan schools to teach letter names and

letter sounds. Out of five subtests developed for the SEPA tool (Phoneme Identity, Letter Sound Knowledge, Syllable Segmentation, Phoneme Blending, Phoneme Segmentation), the first three areas proved to be well developed in most 5–7 year old children as indicated by the cohort's overall performance. For example, in the Phoneme Identity subtest, five years old had a 100 percent pass rate and all children performed strongly in the letter and sound knowledge task. In summary, all children managed to score at 12 and above and 25 children had a perfect score of 17 items correct. In the Syllable Segmentation, the three cohorts again performed solidly; out of a total of 12 items, 50 children scored correctly at 10-12 items; 28 gained a full score (100 percent).

By contrast, the children had much more difficulty in the phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation subtests though data showed a wider variability in individual performance on these tasks. The varied performance tended to highlight a couple of factors. First, it may be due to different school teaching practices or even within classroom teaching practices, depending on methods used to support children on how to decode printed words and to spell correctly. Secondly, the different techniques used for teaching Samoan sounds may also have influenced the outcomes. The data suggested that children's early developing phoneme awareness skills in the junior school years were strong, but that later developing phoneme awareness skills were much more varied.

2. The findings from our SEPA subtests were not consistent with those of the Samoa Early Grade Reading Assessment (SEGRA). In the Samoa's Ministry of Education's report of the findings; in the Initial Sounds Identification, many children could not identify a single phoneme; that is, more than half of Year 1 students (58%); at least a quarter of Year 2 (29%) and 21% for Year 3 students. In addition, the report verified that 15 percent of all students could not correctly identify a single letter sound with 20 percent from Year 1 and 12 percent from Year 2 and 3. Noted earlier, SEGRA was adapted from EGRA hence had much influence on its design and means of administration. As such, differences in teaching pedagogy may have also influenced outcomes. This problem is linked to the first part of the argument: different ways by which Samoan sounds have been taught.

While doing the field work, I became aware of two different ways by which children were taught individual phonemes in some Samoan schools; first, by sounding it out using the letter names (fa); secondly, by sounding it out using the initial sound /f/ as with the English way of teaching sounds. The former has been the traditional way of identifying

letter sounds, that is by their names. I gathered from my sources that the latter strategy was only introduced through the SEGRA assessment process. That is, children were expected to segment Samoan words using individual phonemes supposedly with the English strategy. The mixed results from the two subtests seemed to reaffirm this for me.

The matter then is not as straightforward; there were issues involved as pointed out earlier. For example, the Samoan phonotactics which rule is, no two consonants stand together at any time in a word, or at the end of a word or sentence, implies an open syllable system. Its own syllable formation is quite simple (V, VV, CV, CVV) compared with English which has consonant blends. Nicholson (1999) referred to the problem of speech production for the English phonemes as difficult. To quote, ‘The task of isolating phonemes is difficult for children, due to the problem of parallel transmission in speech production. Speech sounds are not beads on a string. They are glued together in the speech stream. For example, the phoneme /d/ can’t be said in isolation; instead, we say it as /duh/. This makes it difficult for the child to connect the letter *d* with the phoneme /d/. To isolate /d/ they mentally have to segment the syllable /duh/ into /d/ and /uh/’ (p.15).

For the Samoan language, the English letters *d* and *t* are transliterated as *t*, as in *Tavita* for David, or *taimi* for time. Thus, phoneme /t/ can be uttered as /ta/ (syllable with a short vowel) to properly distinguish itself from *t* the letter name, pronounced /ti/, which is a syllable with a long vowel. Another example, the English letter *f* shares the same grapheme with the Samoan though speech production may be a problem when compared. For instance, while the English *f* is voiceless, the Samoan is voiced /fa/. The argument is that the Samoan sounds have always been treated as voiced, including their English equivalents - /p/, /s/, /t/ that are considered voiceless in that language. Butcher (2018) noted certain groups of languages which lack any distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants, including the Polynesian languages.

The above information is important when teaching and understanding sounds bilingually. Researchers have established that the two foundational skills (phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation) are the most critical when learning to read and spell in the English language (Nicholson, 1999), more so in the prevention of persistent reading problems such as dyslexia for example (Gillon, 2017). The final results of the SEPA assessment affirmed that most of the participants have demonstrated a good understanding of the basic Samoan *leo* (sound) in spite of the constraints involved. The SEPA findings aligned with the New Zealand based studies (Hamilton & Gillon, 2006; Ballard & Farao,

2008; Westerveld 2014), relatively speaking. In other terms, the SEPA findings may not be surprising. Normally most of the Samoan children are introduced to the Samoan alphabet from day one of schooling, having a better innate grasp of own sounds through the phonics teaching strategy. In total, the varied though overall favourable results of 100 participants tested have proved such capacity that can only be utilized further using phonological awareness skills (Sonnenschein, 2002; Jones Diaz, 2007).

3. It is established that the ability to decode words successfully in the early years leads to further success in reading comprehension and writing (Nicholson, 1999; Koda, 1998). The children in this study enjoyed participating in the oral narrative storytelling task which was administered in their native language by a native researcher using culturally appropriate and familiar routines. Again, a comparative analysis between our oral narrative and listening comprehension task and those of SEGRA showed some major differences. The data reported from the SEGRA suggested a bleak picture of Samoan children's comprehension performance. In the SEGRA Listening Comprehension subtest, the overall mean score was only 30 percent; Year 1 students achieved 18 percent correct on average; Years 2 and 3, 30 percent correct on average. Almost half of Year 1 students (43%), less than a third of Year 2 students (25%) and 13 percent of Year 3 students could not answer even one listening comprehension question correctly (p. 39). According to the report, the overall reading comprehension as per total students assessed was well below the international benchmark. In total, only 6 percent of all students tested achieved above the international benchmark for listening comprehension.

By contrast, data from our SEPA tool, trialled about seven months after the SEGRA implementation, showed a much better picture for Samoan children's oral comprehension for Year 2 students. As described in Chapter 6, an assessment grid was prepared for the purpose of examining the children's oral proficiency. The results indicated a very strong performance at level 1 early language proficiency for all four schools. A total of 41 students proved themselves proficient at this level; 24 attained Level 1 Basic Proficiency; and 29 performed at Level 1 Standard Proficiency. In essence, the overall positive results from our oral narrative tasks indicated that children have the potential to comprehend oral stories, implying that the level of the selected text matched their abilities. The contradictory findings between the two assessment tools have raised several issues. In the SEGRA test, the children were tested in a Reading Comprehension subtest. Perhaps it wasn't surprising the results

that they showed given the nature of the task. The report said, “Significant proportions of students scored zero in this subtest across all three years with almost all students in Year 1 (96%), more than half of Year 2 students (72%) and half of those in Year 3 (50%).” Hence the overall negative results supported the idea that the material and level of difficulty may have been unsuitable for the children.

Many of the assessment conditions for the SEGRA may have also been demanding from a cultural perspective. For instance, my Samoan sources, some of whom were parents, agreed that with SEGRA, children have been submitted to an ordeal they haven’t been used to; the local Samoan educators I talked to felt the same way too, that there were too many test items and the experience for students would have been overwhelming. With the SEPA, children were more responsive to the story, especially where support was provided, such as picture prompts to support comprehension as well as provide more useful skills in dealing with information. In sum, the children’s overall positive results tended to agree with the experience. It may also be a good reflection on the SEPA tool, or more specifically, the way the assessment was designed for this purpose.

4. Feedbacks from the principals’ interviews and interaction with participants in this thesis highlight the need to improve teaching pedagogy and practice. In the interviews with the principals, reference to Professional Development came out as a second priority in their list. Appropriate assessments came third; teaching approaches and strategies and teacher delivery came fourth and seventh, respectively. Together the findings indicate a strong message from principals of the need for more resourcing and improvement in this regard to facilitate children’s reading and literacy success. The principals talked about professional development in the context of other needs, most of which point to the teachers’ teaching pedagogy. Lack of resources affect teacher delivery, so as lack of sharing of knowledge and expertise point to pedagogy at least in national policy. Teaching pedagogy does impact teaching practice directly. Teaching practice has become crucial as the Samoan language becomes more mobile and transnational. It also comes with challenges, most notably the influence of English as a predominant language in multilingual environments.

For example, evidence of a shift in the way the Samoan vowel sound is pronounced (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019), is linked to a variety of linguistic issues with future implications (ibid.). The argument is, the oral development of the Samoan language outside of Samoa is crucial to the retention of its true sounds, thus demanding its incorporation in the teaching

practice and modelling by Samoan born and bred educators in overseas countries like New Zealand. In other terms, wherever the Samoan language is used for educational purposes, whether inside or outside of the classroom, there are matters that need the attention of new educators (ibid.). One of these is to do with the two registers (t and k) or mediums by which people interact daily. As discussed earlier, while the t register is taught in schools and used for assessments, the k speech is popular in the home and everyday conversations. Professional development is crucial in order to raise awareness on these matters for teachers who need as much support to become effective facilitators.

5. Key factors such as the socio-economic statuses of schools and families also impact on children's performance. The private school tends to have an advantage in terms of material and human resources, a well-trained staff, support staff, learning materials and working parents who can afford to pay for their children's education and extracurricular activities. The private school also has its own A'oga Amata (Preschool) within the compound, making the transition to Primary a lot easier and more predictable for profiling and planning. By its adoption of a bilingual strategy, the school has become a great role model for biliteracy in Apia. Many of the children in the private school have the advantage of accessing information at home on the internet or the public library in Apia compared with their peers in state schools or those that are further away from town.

In other terms, the difference in literacy outcomes for the selected schools clearly relates to external influences such as families' socio-economic position. As in many developing nations, poverty and low literacy rate correlate. While children may have a very good level of support in oracy at home but without books or role model readers at home, any reinforcement between sound and text is not there at all.

One of the five dimensions in Sailiemanu framework is the Cultural, which both the Western ecological theories and local approaches have all agreed on its decisive role in a child's early literacy development. Given the cultural constraints (*tapu of va* for example), a culture does have an overall influence on children's academic success for better or otherwise (Ewing, Callow & Rushton, 2016; Bialystok, et al., 2004). Saying that, the literacy landscape as we knew it before the Internet arrived is quite different from what we have now. Digital technology has promoted own kind of literacy and the concern for leaders of many developing democracies, which literacy traditions are predominantly oral oriented, is the impact it has on young learners who haven't been well immersed in their foundational

language skills (Harris, et al, 2018; Yienger, 2016). Given the powerful hold of digital media on modern society, its negative influence such as excessive and addictive use is no small challenge for today's governments and education authorities (ibid.).

(Not too long ago, almost all families – parents and children - sat down around a kerosene lamp to read the Bible during evening prayers 'lotu afiafi.' The custom provided quality reinforcement of the children's reading skills at home daily. For many families, it has been the only time that children could hear their parents read to them at home. Along with *a'oga faifeau*, past generations have enjoyed such quality learning experience. Introduced by the church, such customs could not be maintained, thus the story of the family 'evening literacy session,' as an intergenerational legacy, is mostly a thing of the past).

6. The traditional role of leadership in the direction and facilitation of the school curriculum and programmes is crucial. As data showed, each principal seemed to have their own unique influence on their school's overall success, whether in promoting good policies or improving children's performance, or enhancing their own capability as leaders. For example, performance in favour of the private school over state schools reflects the merits of having three co-principals whose impact on the overall success of their learners cannot be denied. It can be argued that leadership in the private school is far less constrained by external policies and has more freedom in educational activities which encourages creativity and innovation than in a large government institution.

In fairness to the state schools, the principals are bound by many other responsibilities, including Samoan cultural duties, church, and government in terms of extra duties and obligations, while also dealing with systemic issues such as lack of teachers, resources, and crowded classrooms. Leadership at all levels is crucial because they have a lot of influence in Pacific communities' own power relations. Community leaders therefore can make big calls for changes in favour of the children (Talen, 2017).

7. The results from this study aligned with my own classroom teaching experience, where teaching children the necessary foundational oral language skills for good word decoding ability in culturally appropriate contexts, correlate with their reading and oral language comprehension success. The literature reviewed in this thesis highlighted the importance of best practices in learning to read, including the importance of all the five dimensions, when children become the focus of attention. Appropriate resources, the use

of culturally relevant reading materials, engagement of children's parents in their learning, quality professional development for teachers, reducing class size, promoting critical thinking, developing children's personal learning motivation, supporting children's reading ability by using data of assessment to promote future learning. Noted also, both local and international research are unanimous that children who read for pleasure in school and at home, and encouraged to do so, have a much better chance to succeed and excel. The oral comprehension test affirmed this for a number of students, who have proved to have a better understanding of the story than others.

## 8.2 Implications, recommendations & limitations

Knowledge is the key to devising better assessments and teaching strategies, given the changing patterns and shifts in the Samoan language and phonology. For example, pronouncing Samoan vowels correctly is a matter of good practice and explicit modelling; as well, a better understanding of the function of the glottal in the Samoan phonology, or issues pertaining to such as lack of consensus on its actual role in Samoan orthography (Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). The fact that the glottal stop is not part of the spelling is part of the problem (*ibid.*). These are some of the issues that teachers need to be aware of as they strive to increase their knowledge of Samoan phonology or understanding the intricacies of both languages in relation in bilingual contexts. Such output can inform strategies in good pronunciation and keen awareness of individual sounds in words, which in turn will support teachers' use of new strategies to improve children's reading and comprehension in both languages.

In relation to issues raised in Findings 1 & 2, this study would like to recommend the development of a new phonetic inventory of Samoan sounds, so that all Samoan children can articulate sound together in the same manner. This will help resolve the confusion partly due to the influence of English sounds' articulation on the Samoan's own. My argument is, if the traditional way of articulating sounds, that is synonymous with naming letters, suffices for our own purpose, then this will provide certainty for everyone. Otherwise, a new formula can be looked at where a distinction is drawn, based on short vowel for letter sound versus long vowel for letter name. The study also proposed the promotion of an integrated system in oral and print awareness, by ensuring that phonics and phonological awareness complement each other well. The keyword is awareness or instilling a strong sense of relationship between sound and letter in the early years of socialization. Such a coordinated approach is

highly recommended at this stage so that children can be well supported when they begin to learn English as a second language

It is important that specific Samoan assessment tools are developed that reflect the children's prior knowledge and own literacy/literary environment (Tuafuti, 2016, Siilata, 2014). Indigenous languages need to have their own identities within assessment frameworks, to be able to facilitate the adoption of another language successfully (Baker, 2001; Tui Atua, 2013). Furthermore, the whole purpose behind the design of effective assessment tools is to advance children's learning, hence the importance of feeding forward in order to improve their future performance (see also Galuvao, 2016). Adopting and adapting assessment tools on a global scale is an international trend (Black et al., 2004). As the world's focus becomes more towards assessment for learning (AfL), it is anticipated that the task of designing assessments must be relevant to the linguistic and cultural context and needs of learners (Black et al., 2004; Harris, 2007). The need for relevant assessments developed by native speakers of the language (rather than translations of assessments) to support teaching and learning of Samoan children is crucial (Aukuso, 2002; Amituana'i-Toloa, 2005; Tuafuti, 2016; Galuvao, 2016; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017).

The traditional focus on assessment for ranking children in academic achievement levels always favours the high achievers; the downside is the impact it has on the low achievers and less abled (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2021). Part of the long-term plan of this study is to continue the discussion on how raising literacy awareness, informed by its findings, can enrich future research on designing effective assessments, and building teaching capacity that will benefit literacy development for all students and not just a few (*ibid.*).

Noted earlier, the merits of sharing information between and among schools is one of the key factors in the success of any bilingual policy (May, 2020; Siilata, 2014). Such advantage is not well articulated in the data and even the literature. This may be explained by the type of system where competition is still the keyword in the assessment activity. The knowledge is still viewed as a prized possession to enhance a school's own reputation when competing with other schools for placings in secondary schools and other national competitions. As a result, expert knowledge is still confined to a certain space or small group of teachers or students. The disparity is still evident between schools in Apia and those in the rural areas in terms of national achievements (World Bank 2017). In addition to, overreliance on the ministry direction tends to weaken creativity and such practical

experience which a school can share for the benefit of their neighbouring schools, only if such environment can be encouraged.

Lastly but just as important, the limitations of this research are mainly to do with the practical and experiential nature of its implementation. As a new tool, the SEPA has been employed on a trial basis just like the SEGRA and will need more testing to reaffirm its credibility in the long run. Due also to the restricted scope of the study design itself, the major factors that influence early literacy at both the microsystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) could have been articulated thoroughly. I believe that such gaps have been filled by previous literature referenced herein, however. What has been offered is a comprehensive overview of Samoan early literacy in Samoa, focusing mainly on the role of phonological awareness in early literacy, sampling four schools, with a holistic approach, as modelled in the Saliemanu conceptual framework.

### 8.3 Conclusion

From the outset of this study, I have proposed a holistic approach in the Saliemanu conceptual framework. As the analogy indicated, the child in the centre of an interdependent ecosystem is either the focus of all stakeholders' attention in terms of the best provisions offered, or else a target of systemic abuse, which needs are not met, is vulnerable, much like the whitebaits in Nature's food chain. Thus, a child's development is dependent largely on a balanced interaction among the five dimensions. Striving for balance could not be more emphasised for bilingual learners, that the capacity and quality of any measurement or strategy need to be fair and consistent on their behalf (Amituana'i-Toloa, 2005; Galuvao, 2016; Cummins, 1989).

The Saliemanu framework highlighted the importance of creating harmonious spaces wherein Samoan children anywhere can learn proactively as bilinguals. Through languages, children engage with the natural world, which own exemplars and models they learn from, through reproducing words, symbols, ideas, meanings, that are upheld for their relevance in people's own worldviews and even transitioning to new spaces (Maffi, 2005; Tui Atua, 2018). Being relevant or responsive to the learners' needs have become the call for assessments nowadays (Black et al., 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2011), the question of whether an assessment can promote quality learning. As research solidly affirmed, such promotion is facilitated better in learning spaces where additive principles of bilingualism are promoted (May, 2020; Tuafuti, 2010).

Finally, in this study, I have proposed that Phonological Awareness, in tandem with Phonics, has a vital role in the promotion of Samoan early literacy development. Empirical research have emphatically attested to the benefits of creating such awareness in the early years of oracy development for reading (Gillon, 2010; McNeill & Kirk, 2014; Milankov et al., 2021). This research also confirmed this link in its findings, the fact that such cognitive ability can make a difference in those students' performance whose achievements in their L1 reading comprehension stood out. To this end, the SEPA Tool would like to assume its own input in promoting such ability. Like the birds in search of choice food, the goal for educators is to provide the best strategies, in order to make a difference for not just a few but as many young Samoan learners as possible.

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## Appendix 1 – Consent form for Students-Participants

### Pepa o le Maliega o Tamaiti

(E faitau i le tamaitiiti e se tagata matua)

### College of Education, Health and Human Development

#### Igoa o le Poloketi: A Better Start – E Tipu e Rea

#### Ta'iulu o le Su'esu'ega: Polofesa Gail Gillon

Sa ta'u mai e lo'u tinā/ lo'u tamā la outou Poloketi.

Ou te fia auai i lenei su'esu'ega o la'u faitautusi. Ua ou iloa o le a aofia ai ni gaioiga (activities) o le faitautusi.

Ua ou iloa o le a malutia fa'amatalaga sa aoina fa'ataua ia te a'u, ma o le a teuina i se nofoaga saogalemū. O lo'u igoa, o igoa o o'u matua, o le igoa o le tausitama ma le igoa o la'u a'oga o le a le fa'alauiloaina fa'alaua'itele.

O fa'amatalaga uma o le a fa'aleaogaina, pe a uma ona tusia fa'amatalaga o lenei poloketi.

O o'u matua/ tausitama o le a latou maua se lipoti o lenei poloketi.

Ua ou malamalama e mafai ona toe sui lo'u mafaufau i le auai i lenei poloketi, ma o le a le afaina lea i nisi. Ua ou iloa a iai ni a'u fesili e mafai ona ou fai i lo'u tinā/tamā/tausitama.

**Igoa o le tamaitiiti (Fa'amolemole Tusi Lolomi)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Aso:** \_\_\_\_\_

Mo le silafia – O le a maua e mātua/tausitama le pepa o fa'amatalaga uma, ma o lea e mana'omia fo'i le uma ona fa'atumu le pepa o le maliega, a o le'i auai lou alo i lenei su'esu'ega.

Fa'afetai tele le lagolago mai

Saili Lemalu Aukuso PhD candidate (Tamaita'i Su'esu'e)

A Better Start: E Tipu e Rea

Imeli: saili.lemaluaukuso@canterbury.ac.nz

## **Appendix 2 – Consent form for Students-Participants**

### **Pepa o Fa'amatalaga – Tamaiti**

**(E faitau i le tamaitiiti e le tagata matua)**

### **College of Education, Health and Human Development**

**Igoa o le Poloketi: E Tipu e Rea**

**Ta'iulu o le Su'esu'ega: Polofesa Gail Gillon**

O Saili Lemalu Aukuso o loo faia lana su'esu'ega i le Iunivesite. O loo mana'o o ia e fia iloa atili lau faitautusi, e fesoasoani ai i isi tamaiti o loo tau a'o a latou faitautusi.

O le a outou galulue ma Saili i le fa'atinoga o nisi o gaiioiga fa'ata'alogā e iloa ai le tulaga o lau faitautusi.

A'o tusi e Saili mea i lalo e fa'ataua ia te oe, o le a avatu ia te oe se igoa e sui tulaga i lou igoa mo'i mo le pui puiga o oe i lenei sailiiliga, o lona uiga e le mafai e se tasi ona iloa lou igoa, le igoa o lou faia'oga, poo le igoa o lau a'oga. O fa'amatalaga uma sa aoina e fa'ataua ia te oe, o le a malupuipua lona teuina atoatoa pe a uma ona fa'aaoga e Saili.

Afai e iai ni au fesili e mafai ona e talanoa i lou tinā/ lou tamā/ i le tausiama poo Saili.

Afai ua toe sui lou mafaufau i lou auai i le poloketi, e le afaina lea. Pau le mea e te faia o le ta'u i lou tinā/ lou tamā/ ma le tausiama poo Saili.

Fa'afetai tele i lau lagolago i le poloketi

Gail Gillon

### Appendix 3 – Research questions for Principals

#### Fa'atalanoaga a Puleao'ga i le Gagana Samoa

##### Fesili

1. E iai se Anava Taugagana a la outou ao'ga? A faapea e iai, e avanoa la mo tagata lautele? A fa'apea e leai, e iai tonu lava se mafua'aga?
2. E fia gagana o loo fa'aaoga e la outou a'oga mo a'oa'oga?

E a la? E fa'apefea ona fa'aoga e na o le Fa'aSamoa poo le Fa'apeletania poo gagana uma fo'i e lua i le tau amataga mai o le Polokalame o le Literasi?

3. E iai ni alagaoa ua uma ona saunia pe fa'aagaaga mai le Ofisa o A'oga, Ta'aloga ma Aganu'u e lagolago ai le atina'eina o le gagana poo gagana i la outou polokalame?
4. E fa'apefea ona e fuaina le alualu i luma o ausiga fa'alea'oa'oga a le fanau i le Fa'aSamoa ma le Fa'apeletania?

E iai ni faiga fa'avae a la outou a'oga e lipoti ai ausiga a le fanau i matua?

Pe o se faiga masani le lipoti o ausiga a outou tamaiti i o latou matua?

E iai se suega fa'alemālo e su'e uma ai tamaiti o le atunu'u a le Ofisa o A'oga, Ta'aloga ma Aganu'u i gagana e lua?

5. O le a sau fa'asoa mai i le auai o le pulega ma faiganu'u, o matua ma le nu'u i le atina'eina o le a'oga i polokalame tau amata o le literasi i totonu o la outou a'oga?

**Appendix 4 – Letter of endorsement by Education CEO**



GOVERNMENT OF SAMOA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORTS & CULTURE

P.o. Box 1869, Apia. SAMOA Telephone (0685) 64601/64602 Facsimile (0685) 64664  
Email Address: [education@mesc.gov.ws](mailto:education@mesc.gov.ws)

9 June 2018

Leali'ie'e Tufulasifa'atafatafa Taleni  
College of Education, Health and Human Development  
University of Canterbury  
Christchurch  
NEW ZEALAND

Phone: 03 369 3389 Extension: 93389 Email:

RE: Phonological Awareness and Oral Narrative Skills of 6-year-old Samoan Children

Talofa Tufulasi,

Thank you for providing your documents as per MESC ethics requirement.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture has considered the documents and note the study focuses on 6 year olds who are at Year 2 instead of Year 1 as stated in your proposal. With this aside, I am pleased to advise that the ministry grants your research team permission to conduct your study on the above-mentioned topic in [REDACTED] Primary, [REDACTED] Primary and [REDACTED] Primary school. In order to gain permission to conduct your study at [REDACTED] Primary, please contact the Samoa Primary office directly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Afamasaga'.

Afamasaga Dr Karoline Afamasaga-Fuata'i  
Chief Executive Officer

## Appendix 5 – Research Proposal

### Title

Phonological Awareness and Oral Narrative Skills of 6-year-old Samoan Children

### Purpose of the research

The primary purpose of this research is to gather normative data regarding the phonological awareness and oral narrative skills of 6-year-old children who have Samoan as a first language. Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate sounds in words. It is a key skill underpinning literacy development across languages given children need to learn to link graphemes (e.g., letters) and sounds in early reading and writing development. Children's broader oral language skills (listening comprehension and spoken expression) are also important skills underlying literacy success. Oral narrative ability (e.g., a child retelling a story in their own words) is a robust method used to evaluate this construct.

The research proposed is important as currently there is relatively little known about the development of phonological awareness and oral narrative ability in Samoan (particularly for children who have Samoan as a first language). This knowledge is important for educators to be able to (1) identify when a Samoan speaking child may be at risk for later literacy difficulties, (2) recognise when Samoan children may need support with skills underpinning early literacy development, and (3) to monitor the impact of early literacy teaching in the classroom.

This research forms part of a larger research project based in New Zealand which endeavours to enhance the early literacy achievement of Year 1 students. A significant sub-group of children in the New Zealand based research are bilingual Samoan-English speakers. We are interested in supporting these children's oral and written literacy development across both English and Samoan. Having an understanding of the phonological awareness and oral narrative abilities of first language speakers of Samoan is thus also critical to this endeavour.

### Research topic or questions

1. What are the phonological awareness skills of Samoan-speaking 6-year-old children?
2. What are the oral narrative skills of Samoan-speaking 6-year-old children?

### Details of the researcher, organisation conducting the research and any partners or associates in the research.

This research will be conducted by researchers from the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. This study is funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Business and Innovation as part of A Better Start, National Science Challenge (see <http://www.abetterstart.nz/en.html> and <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/education/research/a-better-start-literacy-and-learning-theme/>). This particular aspect of broader study will be led by Saili Aukuso as part of her doctoral research.

### Methodology

The proposed research is descriptive in nature, utilising a single session of assessment (per child) to gather data on emerging phonological awareness (understanding sounds in words) and oral narrative skills in Samoan speaking children. Children will participate in 1 x 30–40-minute assessment session, where they will undergo two assessment tasks which will be presented by Saili Aukuso.

The first task, exploring emerging phonological awareness skills, consists of 4 short activities exploring various aspects of phonological awareness skills. Each activity will take 5-7 minutes to complete. The second task, exploring oral narrative skills, consists of a short story retell activity. Children will listen to a recording of a short story and then be asked to retell the story using their own words. Finally, children will be asked a series of 8 comprehension questions about the story. This activity takes 7-10 minutes to complete.

MESC documents or data requested to be used. None. Position of any MESC staff who the proponent is requesting to be involved and level of involvement. None.

### **Ethical Issues**

No foreseeable risks or possible offence to participants has been identified. Once returned to New Zealand, the data with identifying information will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office of the lead researcher. On receiving data, all identifying information will be removed and children will be allocated a code. Coded data will also be placed on secure computer platforms where it can be shared electronically amongst researchers.

In addition to the named research team, the Project Manager (Dr Amy Scott), Research Fellow (Dr Amanda Denston) and doctoral student (Saili Aukuso) will also have access to the complete data. Transcription will be completed as required by contracted research assistants but no identifying data (e.g., names, schools etc.) will be provided with the audio footage.

Unauthorized persons will not be able to access the secure electronic platforms where the data is stored. They will also not be able to access hard copies of the data given will not have a key to the relevant filing cabinets. In line with usual practice, the data will be kept for 10 years and then destroyed. The data collected from this research will be published in international and national peer-reviewed journals.

PhD theses that examine some aspect of the project will be uploaded to the UC library database. Whenever the data is published, it will be published in summarized form with no individual name or centre/school identified. If case data is used, then pseudonyms will be used to avoid identification.

This research proposal has been submitted and accepted as low-risk application by the University of Canterbury's Education Research Ethics Committee.

### **Declaration**

The following will be provided to MESC

- Copy of a letter to participating schools which MESC can use to inform schools
  - o This is attached.
- Copy of Background Information of the research for participants / parents
  - o This is attached.
- One-page report to all schools involved of the findings and recommendations to improve the schools and student Performance
  - o This will be provided at the conclusion of the research. Schools will also be gifted with copies of the assessment tools utilised in the research.
- MESC assistance will be acknowledged in our final research report and in any subsequent publications from the research.

### **Contact Details**

Saili Aukuso  
 (PhD scholar)  
 School of Teacher Education  
 University of Canterbury  
 Private Bag 4800  
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 New Zealand  
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## Appendix 6. Better Start Project Poster 1

# Development of Samoan Phonological Awareness Tool (SEPA): (Enabling learners to learn effectively)

Sali Lemalu Aukuso – PhD Candidate, University of Canterbury  
Supervised by Associate Professor Brigid McNeill and  
Distinguished Professor Niki Davis

### Rationale/Background / Uiga o le Su'esu'ega

There is a need for an assessment tool to measure the Samoan emergent learners' skills in Phonological Awareness. Very little research has been done on this topic (Hamilton & Gillon, 2006; Tagalialagi-Leota Glynn, et al., 2005; Tavita & Aukuso, 2019). Hence the initiative called the SEPA Tool came into being. The need for effective strategies to support themselves in reading is crucial in their early years of schooling (Cummins, 2009; Garcia, 2009). For bilingual Samoan children reading in both languages can be facilitated successfully with the use of strategies that have proven to be effective in this situation (Tuafuti, 2016; Siliata, 2014). Phonological awareness is such that supports emergent learners at this important stage of formulating and consolidating sound in both languages – Samoan and English. Once the skills are learnt then there is promise of a confident start for them in these early years (Gillon, 2017; Gillon & McNeill, 2017). This is linked to the need for good assessment tools to support children's literacy competency and thus reinforcing effective teaching practices. The SEPA Tool (Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness) was prepared for this particular purpose.

### Method/ Auai e Su'esu'e ai

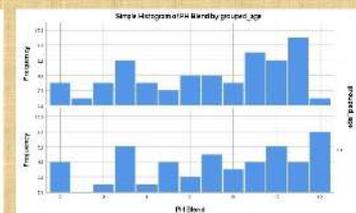
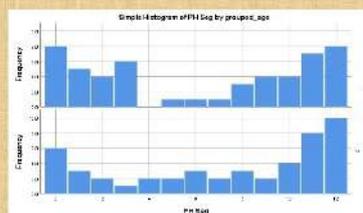
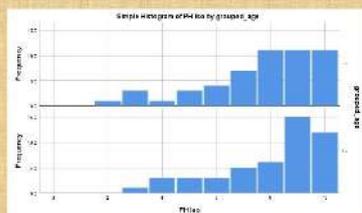
Data was collected by means of assessment results of the SEPA Tool filled in 4 schools in Samoa and involved 100 Year 2 participants (54 females, 46 males).

School 1	- 13 females	12 males	(25)
School 2	- 18 females	8 males	(26)
School 3	- 13 females	11 males	(24)
School 4	- 10 females	15 males	(25)
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	

- SEPA Subtests (5)**
- Phoneme Isolation
  - Letter and Sound knowledge
  - Phoneme Segmentation
  - Phoneme blending
  - Syllable Segmentation

### Results/O mea na maua ma ta'anoaga e atua mai ai

Data is yet to be interpreted thoroughly as part of my study's findings, what can be said at this stage is, there was a good indication of some positive development going with Phonological Awareness for the majority of the participants involved. The variation in performance among schools suggests for me a few things; first, the emphasis given to teaching the sounds and secondly, the methods of teaching. After implementing the tool, I have raised an issue in relation to the teaching methods that may benefit the SEPA Tool.



### Conclusion/ Upu fa'ai'u

In this search for the most effective strategies, I believe that a holistic approach to identifying such practices works best for most students. For bilingual Samoans, the role of their culture and language is crucial to designing the best strategies, where the best of the Western theory and practice is braided with indigenous way of doing things is the pathway to success.

### Acknowledgements/Fa'ailoaga/Fa'afetai

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## Appendix 7. *Aulape e su'esu'e ai agava'a*

### Early Proficiency (EP) La'asaga 1 Amata

It consists of three criteria:

- Need prodding or cues by the assessor- taumafai e une le tamaitiiti/fa'amanino mai
- Took time to respond- alu le taimi o tau fa'atali se tali
- Disconnected structuring of response- e le o maopopo le so'oso'oga o manatu
- Can answer using one word – Mafai ona tali mai i le upu e tasi

### Basic Proficiency (BP) La'asaga 1 Feoloolo

- Can respond in simple sentences or phrases – Mafai ona tali mai i fuaiupu faigofie po o fuiupu.
- Can display correct structures – grammar – Lelei le fa'ataotoga o le fausaga ma le kalama.
- Demonstrate good coordination of listening and viewing skills – Mafai ona fa'alia le tomai i le so'oina o tomai fa'alogo ma le vaai.
- Respond quickly to the question – Vave ona tali mai i le fesili.
- Demonstrate average understanding of Samoan grammar and usage – Mafai ona fa'aalia se malamalama masani i le kalama ma lona fa'aogaga.
- Can make predictions – what, when, where and how – Mafai ona mate'ia poo ai, poo anafea, o fea ma fa'apefea.

### Standard Proficiency (SP) Laasaga 1 Lelei Mautū

- Fluency in expressing response- opinion – Lelei le fa'aupuga o le tali ma le taofi.
- Respond using complex sentences phrases – Tali mai i fuaiupu lavelave.
- Demonstrate proficiency of understand the story – Mafai ona fa'aalia se malamalama manino i le tala.
- Making inferences using why- Mafai ona fa'aaoga le fesili 'aiseā e fa'atautau iai sona malamalama.
- Demonstration a good pronunciation of words – Mafai ona fa'aalia se agava'a lelei i le fa'aleoina o upu.
- Good understanding of everyday language e.g use of possessive pronouns (lana, lona, ana, ona) singular (alu) plural (o) tafao, tafafao – Lelei le malamalama i le gagana o aso uma: fa'ata'ita'iga – fa'aogaga o suinauna pule (lana, lona, ana, ona), segila (alu), pelulale (o), tafao (segila), pelulale (tafafao).
- Use of (fa'a) prefix (e.g.) fa'atofa.

**Appendix 8. Tala sa fa'aaoga i le galuega fa'atino o le toe fa'amatalaina o le tala.**

**Alisa ma le 'Atopa'u**

I le tasi Aso Gafua i le taeao, sa va'aia ai e Alisa ona matua ua usu i le galuega. O le taimi lea o tu'uaga a a'oga, o lea sa nofo ai Alisa i lona tina matua ua 80 ona tausaga. E fiafia tināmatua e lalaga le sikafu.

Sa le i manatu Alisa e mana'o lona tinā matua e la te ta'a'alo. O lea sa fealua'i solo ai i le fale o tināmatua. Sa manatu e alu i fafo, ae peita'i ua timu.

Ina ua toe fo'i Alisa i le potu malōlō, sa ia va'aia ai le moegase o tināmatua. Sa iai se lagona le fiafia ia Alisa, o lea sa manatu ai e alu e su'e totonu o le fale. Sa savali lēmu i le fogafalealuga, ma ia va'aia ai se faitoto'a o loo matala teisi.

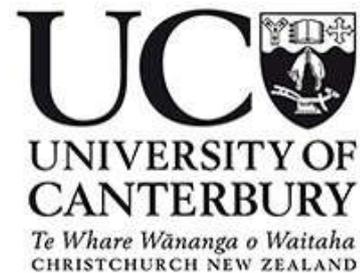
Sa autilo i totonu ma sa ia va'aia ai se 'atopa'u tuai e fai i le pa'u. Sa tatala e Alisa ma ia mauaina ai ni 'ofu e fai ai teuga, o 'olua ma tusi o ata. Sa sōsō i totonu ina ia iloa lelei atu.

Sa ala a'e Alisa, sa vala'au se tagata i lona igoa. Alisa, o fea oe? Ua matuā pogisa lava, ma ua fefe fo'i ma Alisa. Ona fa'apea lea ona matala le 'atopa'u. Sa va'aia foliga fiafia o tināmatua ina ua maua o ia.

Sa fa'atali atu tinā ma tamā i le fogafalealalo. Sa fesili Alisa i ona matua pe mafai ona toe nofo i le po. O le tele ia o 'olua tāua e fia su'e. Sa manatu tinā ma tamā o se tonu lelei tele. Sa fa'afetai ia tināmatua mo le va'aiga o Alisa, ma toe o loa i lo latou aiga.



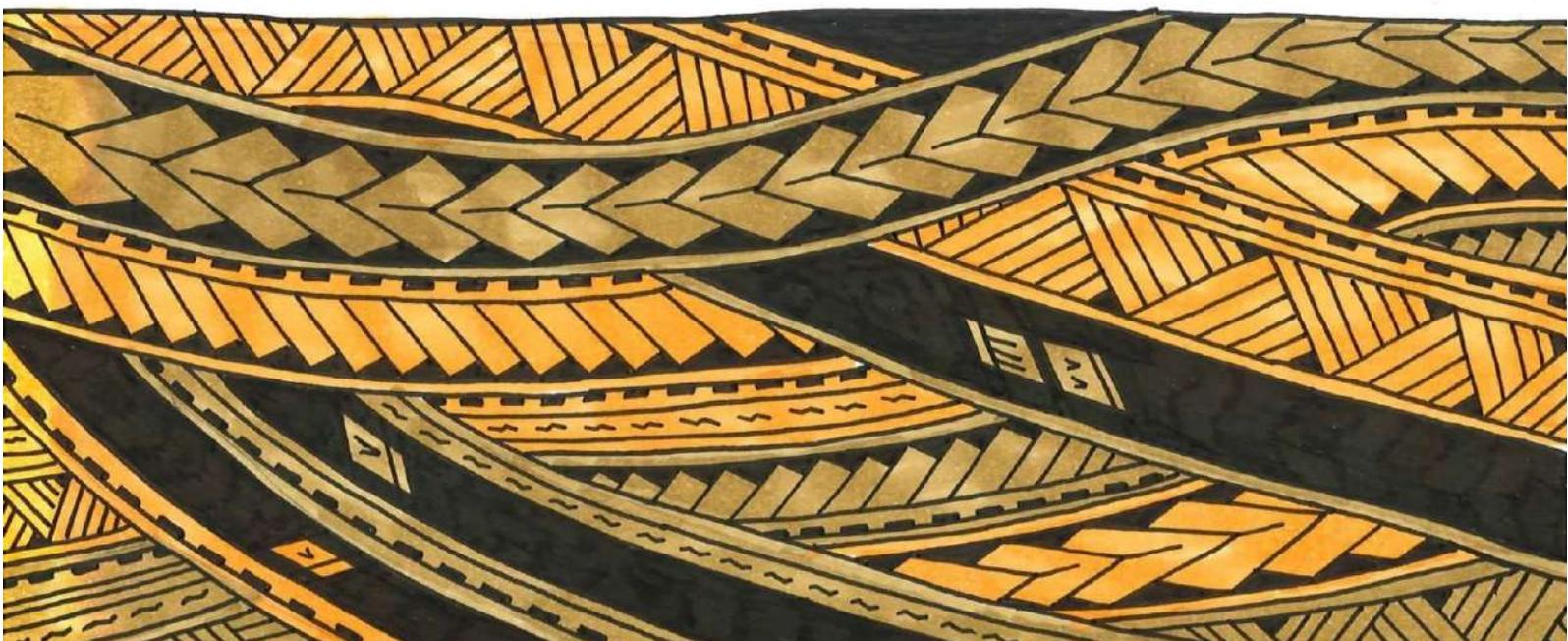
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# **Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness (SEPA) Task**

*(Research trial version, July 2019)*

**Saili Aukuso,**  
**Brigid McNeill, PhD, Gail Gillon, PhD**  
**University of Canterbury**





*E avea ia lenei galuega(SEPA) e fa'ailoa ma manatua ai le sao taua o le tama'ita'i foma'i o Patisepa Tuafuti, o se tasi o tamafanau a Samoa na iloga lona tula'i mai i le finauina ma le lagolagoina o le fa'atauaina o Gagana e lua o le Fa'aSamoa ma le Fa'aPeretania e fa'atino ai polokalame i totonu o A'oga i Aotearoa Niu Sila.*

*Saili Aukuso would like to dedicate this SEPA project to Dr **Patisepa Tuafuti**, a Samoan educator who has been proactive in Samoan Bilingual Education in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

## Contributors to SEPA Development

We are very grateful to the following contributors for their expertise and advice in the development of SEPA.

University of Canterbury, Child Wellbeing Research Institute Team Members:

- Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni, Kaiarahi Pasifika
- Amy Scott, PhD, Project Manager
- Amanda Denston, PhD, Data Collection Manager
- Angus Macfarlane, PhD and Sonja Macfarlane, PhD (Associate Research Advisors)

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- Silivelio Fasi

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- Vavao Fetui, Pacific Studies, University of Auckland
- Fa'atili Iosua Esera, Principal Sutton Park School, Mangere East School
- Levi Tavita, Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury

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We are also very grateful to the **Samoan Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture** and the **National University of Samoa** for their support of this project initiative.

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## **O e na fai sao i lenei galuega**

E fia fa'ailoa lo matou agaga fa'afetai ia i latou uma nei sa tofu sao i le tapenaga o le SEPA.

Aufaigaluega a le Iunivesite o Kenetaperi, Matagaluega Su'esu'e i le Ola Maloloina o Tamaiti:

- Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni, Kaiarahi Pasifika
- Amy Scott, PhD, Project Manager
- Amanda Denston, PhD, Data Collection Manager
- Angus Macfarlane, PhD and Sonja Macfarlane, PhD (Associate Advisors)

Tusiata:

- Silivelio Fasi

O e na iloiloina:

- Fa'atili Iosua Esera, Principal Sutton Park School, Mangere East School, Auckland
- Vavao Fetui, Pacific Studies, University of Auckland
- Levi Tavita, Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury

## **Fa'ailoaga**

Matou te fia fa'ailoa ma fa'afetaia le mamalu o laumua a'oga ma a latou pulea'oga, faia'oga, fanau ma aiga i Samoa sa lagolagoina lenei poroketi. E fa'apitoa le fa'afetai i le fanau sa filifilia mo le su'esu'ega.

E fa'alua le agaga fa'afetai i le Matagaluega o A'oga a Samoa ma lona pulega, ae fa'apea fo'i le Iunivesite Aoao a Samoa, i le lagolagoina o lenei taulagalaga.

O le fa'atupega o lenei galuega sa fesoasoani mai ai le New Zealand National Science Challenge: A Better Start, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) [Grant number 15-02688]; ae fa'apea fo'i le Matagaluega o su'esu'ega i le Ola Maloloina o Tamaiti, Iunivesite a Kenetaperi.

## **Foreword**

*It has long been known that children's ability to understand the sound structure of their spoken language (or phonological awareness ability) is critical to their early reading and writing success. It is very exciting, therefore, to see this development of a practical assessment task in the Samoan language that may assist educators in their important work of language and literacy instruction for young learners who are Samoan speakers, or who are emergent bilingual in Samoan and English.*

*This Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness (SEPA) task is still under development. Further work is continuing as part of Saili Lemalu Aukuso's research project. However, we would like to gift back to the community this first version of the task with a summary of the data collected from 5-7 year-old children in Apia, Samoa. We hope this task may be useful for teachers and we look forward to receiving their feedback and to further developing this work over time.*

*I have had the wonderful experience of visiting Apia and Savaii and meeting with local teachers and children, as well as the honour of meeting academics and leaders at the National University of Samoa. Soaking up the richness of Samoan culture, language, and the warmth of its people is truly a great privilege. We are very grateful to the many individuals and leaders who are supporting us in the development of SEPA. We hope this task will contribute to young Samoan learners flourishing in their early literacy development to enable lifelong education success and wellbeing.*

*Gail Gillon, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019*

*Professor and Director of the Child Well-Being Research Institute  
College of Education Health and Human Development  
University of Canterbury*

## **Upu Tomua**

*Ua silafia lava lenei mea taua, ua iloa se so'otaga malosi o le malamalama o le fanau i fa'avae o leo o a latou gagana tautala ma ausiga manuia i le faitautusi ma le tusitusi. O se mea lea e fa'atupu fiafia, i le auai i le tapenaga ma le atina'e o lenei galuega; o se su'ega faata'ita'i e lagolago ai le galuega fita a susuga i faia'oga. E le ese le naunau o Samoa i le a'oa'oina o ana tupulaga i leo o lana gagana pei fo'i o isi atunuu. E fa'apea fo'i le agaga sa fa'atino ai lenei fe'au e le 'autapena.*

*O le Nofoilo i Leo o le Gagana Samoa o le igoa lea o lenei meafaigaluega; poo i le gagana Peretania, Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness (SEPA); o se vaega o se su'esu'ega o lo'o galue ai se tasi o matou sui, Saili Lemalu Aukuso, mo sana su'esu'ega i lenei matā'upu. Talu ai le so'otaga mafana ma fanau i Samoa ua manatu ai e toe ofoina mai o se mealofo mo latou. O le a faitauina o se teuteuga muamua, e fua i le aotelega o iuga mai le fanau sa su'eina. Ae moomia se tu'ualalo mai faia'oga i se taimi o i luma, ina ia saga fa'aleleia i ni vaivaiga poo ni ava e matauina.*

*Mo a'u o se taimi aoga ma le fa'amalieina lo'u asia mai o Apia ma avanoa foi e feso'ota'i atu i le mamalu o laumua a'oga; susuga i faia'oga, matua ma le fanau. Tau'a'oina fo'i le fa'aaloalo a pa'aga i le faiva atoa le pulega a le lunivesite o Samoa sa mafuta i lea taimi. O se avanoa e le laumua le auai ma tofo i aga ma tu faaSamoa, lana gagana aemaise uiga talimalo o ona tagata. E fia fa'aailoa le agaga faafetai i sui ta'ito'atasi ma ta'ita'i sa lagolagoina i matou a o faasolo fuafuaga o lenei galuega. O la'u tatalo ia aoga le SEPA i le atina'e o alo ma fanau Samoa i la latou gagana; ia ausia le sini o le avea ma ni e a'o'oga i le olaga i a latou leo, ma saga fa'amausali ai le atoaga o le ola maloloina.*

*Gail Gillon, Iulai 12, 2019*

*Polofesa ma le Fa'atonu o le Matagaluega Su'esu'e Ola Maloloina o Tamaiti Kolisi o A'oga Atina'e o le Soifua Maloloina ma Tagata Lunivesite o Kenetaperi*



## **FA'AMATALAGA E LAGOLAGO AI**

### **Afuaga o le Taulagalaga**

E mo'omia se fua e fesoasoani i le lagolagoina o le literasi a fanau i tausaga amata. O sea fua o le a faigofie ai i le faia'oga ona mamate taualumaga o se tama ma se teine i lona atina'e i lea vaega taua tele. Na mafua ai ona a'e se tofa o le tu'ufa'atasia o lenei meafaigaluega. Ua iloa le oge alaga'oa o le gagana Samoa ma fa'apea ona fa'amalosia ai le naunau e tapena. E lua vaega taua i le saunia o lenei alaga'oa, muamua e su'esu'e ai le malamalama o le fanau i leo Samoa; lua, e fa'amalosia ai le naunau e a'oina tomai e mafai ai ona fa'amatala aga o le leo pe fa'afeso'ota'i fo'i i lona mata'itusi. O le nofoilo i leo ma a latou aga (phonological awareness) o le faavae lea o se atina'e mautu i le tautala, faitau ma le tusitusi. E iloga le lagolagoina e su'esu'ega o ausiga manuia a fanau sa fa'afailele mai i nei tomai. O le faamoemoe maualuga lea i le tapenaga o le SEPA.

### **O le a le Nofoilo i Leo?**

O le nofoilo i leo o se upu e aotele ai se iloa o nofo ma se tasi i fausaga o leo pe a tautala pe talanoa ni tagata. Fai mai su'esu'ega e taua tele sea iloa i le a'oina o le faitau ma le sipela (Gillon, 2017). O le nofoilo i leo e aofia ai se iloa i totoga o se upu e fausia i leo ta'itasi (fonime); o le a faigofie ai i le tamaitiiti ona fa'aleo le upu i le tusi faitau. E mafai ai fo'i ona latou tu'ufa'atasia ni leo e fau ai ni upu pe a sipela pe tusi i le 'api.

E amata ona atia'e tomai faanofoilo i iunite lapopo'a e iai le silapela ma le so'oleo. Mulimuli i le iunite ma o latou vaeveaga ta'itasi. A maua e tamaiti nei tomai e tauilo ai ona mautinoa lea se faavae lelei mo le faitau, sipela ma le tusitusi fo'i (Gillon, 2017).

### **Aisea e taua ai le Nofoilo i Leo?**

O le Nofoilo i Leo o se tasi tu masani e a'oa'o ai; ua fa'amaonia sona malosi'aga i le fa'afailelega o fanau iti i le faitau ma tusitusi i tausaga tauafua. O se tasi lenei auala ua iloa lona aoga o se fa'auilavea pe a le ogatusa le gasologa manuia e tatau mo se tama ma se teine i lona matua. Ua fa'amaonia fo'i lona aoga tele mo fanau e feagai ma fa'afitauli o le tautala. O i latou na e faigata ona sipela pe faaleo manino upu ona o ni gasegase tauletino (Gillon, 2017).

## A'oa'oina o leo Samoa

Sa siligia su'esu'ega tau i le mataupu, atoa fo'i le mau a e na iloiloina le galuega. Mai fautuaga a i latou ua avanoa ai se fa'aleleiga o le SEPA mo le ofoina atu o se meaalofo. I luga o na fautuaga, atoa fo'i se fautuaga mai faia'oga Samoa, o le a saga fa'alelei ai i sona teuteuga e gata ai. O nisi o vaega taua e fia fa'ailoa mai fautuaga a e na iloilo e iai nei:

E eseese auala e a'o ai leo a le gagana Samoa ma le leo Peretania; fa'ata'ita'iga, o leo po'o fonime Samoa e faaleo i o latou leo matala po'o igoa o mata'itusi; a o leo Peretania e fa'aleo i iunite, po'o aga a totoga fa'aleo; e iai ona le lagona le ta'uga o le P ma isi fonime; ua masani fanau Samoa i le P o se leo e lagona (ta'u le Pi). E taua se la'asaga faamasani i le gagana o le Nofilo i Leo ma lona a'oa'oina i potua'oga. E fia fa'ataua i le su'ega le fa'aleoga tonu o le leo vaueli; ua tauau e afaina i le faaleoga o le vaueli Peretania.

## O lona fa'atinoga

E ui ina ua leva ona masani fanau i le faaleoga o leo e ala i le Alefapeta, ae e le i iloga ona tala'iina i sona fa'auigaga fou i Samoa ae faapea foi Niu Sila. Atonu e faapena foi isi atunuu o loo a'oa'o ai leo Samoa i potua'oga. Ona o lona mafua'aga e telē se vaega e le o manino i ai, aemaise i le potomasani. E pei ona ta'ua i luga, o le tasi faamoemoe o le SEPA e a'oa'o ai tomai e nofoilo ai fanau ma so'o se tasi e fia malamalama; faapitoa i auala fou nono mai le faa-Peretania e a'oa'o ai. O lea e taua ai se la'asaga mautu e fa'amasani ai le fanau i le gagana ma lona su'eina. E fia fa'amanino i le fanau lena, O le sini muamua o le su'ega o se fa'ailoilo e saga fa'alelei ai lona taumafai.

### Fausaga o le Su'ega

E lima su'ega laiti o le SEPA; e tofu ma se tomai e su'esu'eina; o lo'o fa'aaoga ai upu fa'aaoga so'o o le gagana e masani ai le fanau i aso uma.

- **Su'ega Laitiiti 1 – Vaeveaga i Silapela ~ Syllable Segmentation:** E sefululua upu ua filifilia e su'esu'e ai le malamalama i lea vaeveaga. Mai upu ta'ilua i le ta'ifa silapela ua filifilia. E fa'ailoa mai silapela ta'itasi i le pati a lima.
- **Su'ega Laitiiti 2 – Tulaga o le leo i se upu ~ Phoneme Isolation:** E sefulu fonime (leo ta'itasi) ua filifilia; e mate mai e le tamaitiiti le upu e ala i le ata ma le fa'atonuga a le faia'oga.
- **Su'ega Laitiiti 3 – Mata'itusi ma lona leo ~ Letter and Sound Knowledge:** E sefulufitu mata'itusi e ta'u mai o latou igoa ma leo.
- **Su'ega Laitiiti 4 – Vaeveaga i leo ta'itasi ~ Phoneme Segmentation:** E sefululua upu masani ua filifilia e su'e ai le tomai i le fa'aleoga o fonime ta'itasi i se upu.
- **Su'ega Laitiiti 5 – Ta'uga atoa o leo ~ Phoneme Blending:** E sefululua ni upu e fia maua o latou leo. E su'esu'eina ai tamaiti i lo latou mafai ona ta'u atoa ni leo e ala i se upu.

### **Fa'avae o le vaueli Samoa**

E lima leo vaueli e mafai ona faa'u'umiina foi e ala i le faailoga faamamafa. O ni faatusatusaga nei i le leo Peretania

- a e pei ona iloa i le far; alu (go)
- e e pei ona iloa i le fed; esi (pawpaw)
- i e pei ona iloa i le finish; isi (others)
- o e pei ona iloa i le fought; oso (jump)
- u e pei ona iloa i le full; usu (to sing)

### **Faata'ita'iga o leo vaueli uumi e iai nei.**

- a: Mālō! (Well done)
- e: metala (metal)
- i: faitī (to have tea with someone)
- o: Tōfā (Goodbye)
- u: tū'ua (school breaks up for the day)

E iai ma le leo mama ma pu'upu'u lona faaleoga (schwa): o lona tulaga masani o le silapela muamua: āsō (to date), ĩloa (to know)).

### **O vaueli so'olua**

E tusa ma se 20 le aofa'i o vaueli so'olua; ua iloa i le tulaga tuto'atasi o le leo vaueli lava ia. E ai o nei - ae, ai, ao, au, ea, ei, eo, eu ia, ie, io, iu, oa, oe, oi, ou ua, ue, ui, uo

**Vaueli so'otolu** maea, faia, taia, laoa, maua, taua, peia, leua, peleue, fa'aleo, iai,

miau, ieova, ioana, liua, aoa, moea, soia, loia, foua, loua, tuai, suia, auo, etc

**Vaueli so'ofa** puaoa, taeao, tauia, aoao, auau, etc

**Vaueli so'olima** aiaia, auaua, etc

## **Konesane**

E 13 leo konesane - F G L M N P S T V H K R ma le leo ta'e, fa'ailo e le komaliliu ('). Ua iloa le eseesea o leo pe a fa'aaoga le gagana o le K (tautala leaga) e sui ai le T i le K, le N i le G, ma le R i le L.

O igoa nei o o latou fa'ailoga mata'itusi: FA (far), GA (Ngati Porou), LA (lark), MO (Morgue), NU (nook), PI (Piano), SA (Sun), TI (TV), VI (Viola), HE (head), KA (car), RO (roll)

O fausaga masani e iai nei: KV, KVKV ma le VKV.

E ta'ilima alofoni i le konesane: Faata'ita'iga i le F: FA FE FI FO FU; LA LE LI LO LU

## **Leo ma mata'itusi**

E manino ma tuusa'o le so'otaga o le leo ma lona mata'itusi.

# **DEVELOPMENT OF THE SAMOAN EMERGENT PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS (SEPA) TASK**

## **Background**

Assessment of foundational learning skills that support early literacy success is crucial to understanding the development of Samoan emergent bilingual learners. Phonological Awareness is one aspect of foundation learning that needs to be considered in children's early literacy development, yet there is limited research related to phonological awareness development in Samoan speakers. Hence the initiative called the SEPA (Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness) task came into being. For Samoan bilingual children, learning to speak and read in both Samoan and English can be facilitated successfully with the use of evidenced-based teaching strategies. Phonological awareness supports emergent readers to formulate and consolidate their knowledge of the sound structure of words across languages. Research evidence supports that children who have strong phonological awareness skills are more likely to succeed in their early reading and writing development. For young children who are Samoan and English emergent bilingual learners, it is important to understand their phonological awareness skill development in Samoan and in English (Westerveld, 2014) so as to direct and reinforce effective literacy teaching practices. The SEPA task was prepared to gain insight in children's phonological awareness knowledge in Samoan.

## **What is Phonological Awareness?**

Phonological awareness is an awareness of the sound structure of spoken words and is critically important in learning to read and to spell (Gillon, 2017). Phonological awareness, particularly the awareness that words are formed of individual sounds or phonemes, helps children to decode written words and helps them to put individual sounds together to form words when spelling.

Phonological awareness generally emerges in a developmental sequence from awareness of larger units, such as syllables and onset-rimes, to awareness of individual phonemes in words. It is the explicit awareness of phonemes in words, as indicated by tasks such as the ability to detect sounds in words, segment words into phonemes and blend phonemes together to form words that is most relevant to the reading and spelling processes (Gillon, 2017).

## **Why is Phonological Awareness Important?**

Phonological awareness is one of the instructional practices that has confirmed its effectiveness in children's early reading and writing success and is particularly crucial for children who may be at risk of persistent reading and spelling difficulties (such as children with spoken language problems). The Early Childhood Literacy Project (1999) found that "children who do not start to demonstrate these early sound awareness skills in pre-school and kindergarten are at risk of later literacy difficulties" (Hanmer & Adams, 2002, p.125). Children with good phonological awareness become better readers in the early years at school. The SEPA task is designed to help educators understand whether children are acquiring these important phonological awareness skills in Samoan in response to their language and literacy experiences and classroom teaching.

## Teaching Samoan Sounds

When teaching Samoan sounds, it is important to be familiar with the Samoan sound system (phonology) (Tavita & Fetui, 2012; Le Tagalao, 1996; Milner, 1966; Pratt, 1893). *The following description of Samoan phonology draws from Ballard & Farao, 2008; Mosel & Hovdhaugen, 1992; Milner, 1993; Tavita & Fetui, 2012.* Together with recent research on the topic, SEPA was also informed by the collective experience of the research team; and complemented by the advice of reviewers who are specialists in Samoan language. This has added value to the work and its final outcome. Some of the advice from the reviewers is important to mention for task implementation:

*The Samoan way of teaching sounds is different from English. Traditionally Samoan teachers teach the alphabet by way of each letter name and sound it represents. M for example is represented by the grapheme M, which letter name is Mo as in Morgue. Children are taught to identify the letter M then say its name out loud, Mo (lips close then open to articulate with a stress). This method is contrasted with the customary English practice of connecting the letter 'm' with the /m/ sound. A further example is that when teachers introduce the letter 'f', it will be associated with the syllable 'fa' rather than the /f/ phoneme articulated in isolation as is commonplace in English teaching. In other words, all the consonants are taught by supporting children to connect the letter with their letter names as opposed to their phonetic articulation as is the normal practice with English phonics teaching.*

## The Samoan Vowel System

Within Samoan, there are five monophthong vowel sounds which also have a lengthened form (which are denoted by a macron in the orthography).

Examples of monophthong short vowel sounds are presented below:

- a as in far; alu (go)
- e as in fed; esi (pawpaw)
- i as in finish; isi (others)
- o as in fought; oso (jump)
- u as in full; usu (to sing)

Examples of monophthong long vowel sounds are presented below:

- a: Mālō ! (Well done)
- e: metala (metal)
- i: faitī (to have tea with someone)
- o: Tōfā (Goodbye)
- u: tū'ua (school breaks up for the day)

The schwa (unstressed vowel) is also present within Samoan:

- āsō (to date)
- ȳloa (to know)

### Diphthongs and vowel clusters

There are around 20 diphthongs within the system alongside the presence of vowel clusters where two vowel sounds are positioned side by side in a word and both vowel sounds preserve their individual sounds when part of the cluster.

*Diphthongs:* ae, ai, ao, au, ea, ei, eo, eu ia, ie, io, iu, oa, oe, oi, ou ua, ue, ui, uo

*Triphthongs:* maea, faia, taia, laoa, maua, taua, peia, leua, peleue, fa'aleo, iai, miau, ieova, ioana, liua, aoa, moea, soia, loia, foua, loua, tuai, suia, auo ,etc

*Quadthongs:* puaoa, taeao, tauia, aoao, auau, etc

*Pentathongs:* aiaia, auaua, etc

### Consonants

There are 13 consonant sounds – F G L M N P S T V H K R and the glottal stop ('). It should be noted, however, that the 'h' 'r' and 'k' consonant sounds do not appear often within Samoan and are primarily utilised within borrowed words from other languages. Further, there is also a distinction between formal and colloquial Samoan with the colloquial language utilising 10 consonant sounds (i.e., it excludes the 't' 'n' and 'r' sounds).

Their letter names are FA (far), GA (Ngati Porou), LA (lark), MO (Morgue), NU (nook), PI (Piano), SA (Sun), TI (TV), VI (Viola), HE (head), KA (car), RO (roll).

Samoan consonants cannot be blended together to form a consonant cluster and cannot be positioned at the end of syllable. As such, the common phonotactic structures are CV (consonant-vowel), CVCV and VCV.

There are 5 allophones for each consonant – E.g., F: FA FE FI FO FU; LA LE LI LO LU etc

### Orthographic Transparency

Samoan is a transparent orthography where there is a one-to-one mapping between letters and sounds.

## Implication for the SEPA Task

The SEPA task includes trial items to help familiarise children with the strategy of articulating sounds in isolation. There has been limited research into investigating methods to promote phonological awareness development in Samoan speakers or young children who are emerging bilingual in Samoan and English. The best approach for the assessor at this stage of our knowledge is to ensure that SEPA is administered with good support for children during the practice items and that interactions with the child during the assessment task are very positive.

### Test Structure

The Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness Task (SEPA) consists of five subtests in Samoan, each examining a different phonological skill, using high frequency Samoan words familiar to children.

- **Subtest 1 – Syllable Segmentation:** Twelve words are selected to test the children's understanding of syllables in a word. Words ranging from two to four syllables are used. Children will indicate syllables by clapping.
- **Subtest 2 – Phoneme Isolation:** Ten phonemes are selected each with a corresponding image whose name begins with the same phoneme.
- **Subtest 3 – Letter and Sound Knowledge:** Seventeen letters (lower case of the Samoan alphabet) are chosen for children to identify by the letter names and their sounds.
- **Subtest 4 – Phoneme Segmentation:** Twelve high frequency words are used to test children's ability in sounding out each phoneme in a word.
- **Subtest 5 – Phoneme Blending:** Children are tested on their ability to say the word after listening to the teacher/assessor say the phonemes in the word individually. Twelve words are selected.

## Pilot Evaluation of the SEPA

The SEPA task was trialled with 94 native Samoan speakers (43 male, 51 female) from four schools in Apia, Samoa. The children were aged between 5-7 years were all in their **first year** of schooling. This is the initial stage of investigating the broader psychometric properties of the task and the association between children’s performance on SEPA and their writing and oral language (Aukuso, in progress).

The table below presents the mean and standard deviation performance of each age group within the 5 subtests of the SEPA. In general, children were performing at near ceiling in the syllable segmentation, phoneme isolation and letter-sound knowledge subtests. This developmental pattern is similar to that seen in English where syllable awareness and initial phoneme awareness is less complex than phoneme segmentation and phoneme blending tasks. Please see the Appendix for further statistical detail and a comparison between the performance of the girls and boys.

Subtest	5 year olds (n=9)	6 year olds (n=53)	7 year olds (n=32)
Syllable segmentation (/12)	8.44 (3.3)	8.89 (3.2)	9.59 (2.4)
Phoneme isolation (/10)	7.89 (1.8)	7.66 (2.1)	8.06 (2.0)
Letter-sound knowledge (/17)	14.11 (4.7)	15.30 (2.0)	15.56 (1.13)
Phoneme segmentation (/12)	7.11 (4.6)	6.26 (4.5)	7.06 (4.7)
Phoneme blending (/12)	7.33 (4.8)	6.81 (3.4)	7.22 (3.7)
Total score (/63)	44.89 (16.6)	44.92 (12.7)	47.50 (11.7)

## O le su'ega i lona tulaga tauavamea

O lo'o iai le su'ega i lona tulaga faata'ita'i e tauavamea auā sini o su'esu'ega ma sona fa'aleleia atili. Pei ona silafia sa fa'ata'ita'ia le SEPA i fanau a'oga e 94, 5-7 tausaga o le matutua; o i latou e ana le gagana (43 tama, 51 teine). E fa a'oga sa filifilia. O i latou nei e afua mai i le taimi e ulufale ai i le a'oga. O se ata fa'ailoilo lenei e fua i ai ni manatu fa'aali o se su'esu'ega o lo'o faia; o le a fa'ailoa sona fa'aiuga i se taimi o i luma.

I le laulau numera i lalo o lo'o ua folasia ai se ata o le iuga o le su'esu'ega fa'ata'ita'i sa faia. E atagia manino i le folasaga le tulaga maualuga o tomai i le vaevaega i silapela, tulaga o le leo i se upu, ma mata'itusi ma o latou leo. E le ese naua lenei aga ma le Igilisi; e matauina ai le fa'afaigata o su'ega 4 ma le 5.

Fa'amolemole taga'i i Itulau Fa'apipi'i

Su'ega Laitiiti	5 tausaga (n=9)	6 tausaga (n=53)	7 tausaga (n=32)
Vaevaega i Silapela (/12 togi)	8.44 (3.3)	8.89 (3.2)	9.59 (2.4)
Tulaga o le leo i se upu (/10 togi)	7.89 (1.8)	7.66 (2.1)	8.06 (2.0)
Mata'itusi ma lona leo (/17 togi)	14.11 (4.7)	15.30 (2.0)	15.56 (1.13)
Vaevaega i leo ta'itasi (/12 togi)	7.11 (4.6)	6.26 (4.5)	7.06 (4.7)
Ta'uga atoa o leo ta'itasi (/12 togi)	7.33 (4.8)	6.81 (3.4)	7.22 (3.7)
Togi Aofa'i (/63togi)	44.89 (16.6)	44.92 (12.7)	47.50 (11.7)

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## **O Su'ega Laiti o le SEPA**

E talafeagai le fa'afoeina o nei su'ega e se faisu'ega ua lava taoso i tomai tautala ma le fa'aleoga manino o leo i le Gagana Samoa. E le faitauina fua le fa'aliliuga i le Gagana Peretania, peita'i ua na o se soa e lagolagoina le manino.

Fa'amolemole taga'i i pepa o fa'amaumauga, o ata( mana'omia mo le su'ega laitiiti 2) ma mata'itusi (mana'omia mo le sue'ga laitiiti 3) i Itulau Fa'apipi'i pe a fa'atinoina su'ega laiti.

## **SEPA Subtests**

*The subtests are designed to be administered in Samoan by a fluent Samoan speaker. The English instructions are provided for reference purposes.*

*Please refer to the record forms, pictures (required for subtest 2) and the letters (required for subtest 3) in the Appendix when administering the subtests.*

**Task:**

## **Subtest 1 – Syllable Segmentation**

Divide words into syllables by clapping out each syllable

### **Example 1: Teacher demonstration**

Instruction: A teacher says the word “sua” then claps the word “sua” in syllables:

su - a

### **Example 2: A child to practise the task**

Instruction: A teacher says the word “momoe” then asks the child to clap the word “momoe” in syllables.

Child: mo – mo – e

### **Example 3: A child to practise the task**

Instruction: A teacher says the word “faitau” then asks the child to clap the word “faitau” in syllables. Child: fa – i – ta – u

Twelve items are selected for children to attempt in Subtest 1 (Please see record sheet).

lua, savali, tusitusi, pati, tautala, fanau, sapo, la’au, asiasi, tolu, teine, matamata

**Remember:** Ask the child to clap the words into syllables. If the child can’t do it the first time, then the teacher will demonstrate the example once again. Please encourage the child through positive comments like “good listening,” “you are trying hard.” You can use other positive reinforcements to build up the child’s self-esteem and motivate him/her to participate well during the assessment.

## Su'ega Laitiiti 1 Vaevaega o upu i silapela – Syllable Segmentation

O silapela o le vaevaega ia o upu i se pā'o a le pati e fua i ai le vaevaega tonu.

**Galuega:** Vaevae upu i silapela i le pā'o a le pati

Faitau muamua e le faisu'ega fa'atonuga ina ia malamalama

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 1:** Fa'ata'ita'i muamua e le faisu'ega/faia'oga le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Ta'u e le faia'oga le upu "sua" ona pati lea o le upu "sua" i silapela  
su - a

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 2:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Ta'u e le faia'oga le upu "momoe" ona fai lea i le tamaitiiti e pati mai le upu "momoe" i silapela

Tamaitiiti: mo – mo - e

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 3:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Ta'u e le faia'oga le upu "faitau" ona fai lea i le tamaitiiti e pati mai le upu "faitau" i silapela

Tamaitiiti: fa - i – ta - u

E sefululua upu ua filfilia e vaevae mai i silapela e faatino ai le Su'ega Laitiiti 1 (Taga'i i le Pepa o Fa'amauga). Upu: lua, savali, tusitusi, pati, tautala, fanau, sapo, laau, asiasi, tolu, teine, matamata

**Manatua:** Fai i le tamaitiiti e vaevae mai upu i silapela. Afai e le mafai e le tamaitiiti ona fai le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua, ona toe fa'ata'ita'i lea e le faia'oga. E lelei ona fa'alototele le tamaitiiti i ni upu fa'amalosi e fiafia ai e fa'ataunu'u le galuega e pei o le "lelei tele lau fa'alogo", "Malo le taumafai malosi." Ia ma isi upu faapena e una'ia le naunau e fai le su'ega.

**Task:**

## **Subtest 2 – Phoneme Isolation**

Find out the picture that begins with an initial sound using an image

To understand the instructions the teacher/assessor should read the form first.

**Example 1:** Teacher demonstration

Instruction: A teacher to find out the word that begins with “m” sound

**Example 2:** A child to practise the task

Instruction: Find out the word that begins with “p” sound

**Example 3:** A child to practise the task

Instruction: Find out the word that begins with “n” sound

Ten items are selected for children to attempt in Sub test 2 to find the pictures that start with the following target sounds (Please see pictures and record sheet):

m, t, a, p, g, f, s, l, v, r

**Remember:** Ask the child first to find out the word that begins with an initial sound, if a child can't do it the first time then the teacher will demonstrate the example once again. Please encourage the child through the positive comments like “good listening,” “you are trying so hard.” You can use other positive reinforcements to build up the child's self-esteem and also to motivate him/her to participate well during the assessment.

## Su'ega Laitiiti 2 Tulaga o le leo i se upu – Phoneme isolation

**Galuega:** Ta'u le leo – Fa'aaoga ata

Faitau muamua e le faisu'ega fa'atonuga ina ia malamalama.

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 1:** Fa'ata'ita'i muamua e le faisu'ega/faia'oga le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Su'e mai e le faia'oga le upu e amata i le leo /m/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 2:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo /p/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 3:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo /n/

E sefulu ata ua filifilia e fa'atino ai le galuega o leo amata o le Su'ega Laitiiti 2 o leo amata nei (Fa'amolemole taga'i i ata ma le Pepa o Fa'amaumauga)

m, t, a, p, g, f, s, l, v, r

**Manatua:** O le su'ega lenei e fa'aaoga ai ata. Fesili muamua i le tamaitiiti e su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo, ta'u le leo. Afai e le mafai e le tamaitiiti ona fai le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua ona toe fa'ata'ita'i lea e le faia'oga. Taumafai e fa'alototele le tamaitiiti i ni upu fa'amalosi e fiafia ai e fa'ataunu'u le galuega e pei o le "lelei tele lau fa'alogu," "ese ma lou taumafai malosi." Ia ma le tele o nisi fa'aupuga e fa'afiafia ma fa'alototele ai le tamaitiiti a o fai le su'ega.

**Task:**

## **Subtest 3 – Letter and Sound Knowledge**

Say the letter name and its sound

To understand the instructions the teacher/assessor should read the form first.

**Example 1:** A teacher/assessor to practise it first

Instruction: Teacher to say the letter name and its sound – /g/

**Example 2:** A child to practise the task

Instruction: Tell me the letter name and its sound – /k/

**Example 3:** A child to practise the task

Instruction: Tell me the letter name and its sound – /r/

Seventeen letters of the Samoan alphabet are used for children to attempt in Sub test 3 (Please see the Samoan Alphabet and the record sheet):

l, p, k, r, a, f, g, n, v, o, s, e, h, u, i, t, m

**Remember:** Ask the child to say the letter name and its sound. If a child can't do it then the teacher will demonstrate the example once again. Please encourage the child through positive comments like "good listening. "you are trying hard." You can use other positive reinforcements to build up the child's self – esteem and also to motivate him/her to focus and be comfortable during the assessment.

## Su'ega Laitiiti 3

### Mata'itusi ma o latou leo – Letter and Sound Knowledge

**Galuega:** Ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo.

Faitau muamua e le faisu'ega/faia'oga fa'atonuga ina ia malamalama

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 1:** Fa'ata'ita'i muamua e le faisu'ega/faia'oga

Fa'atonuga: Ta'u e le faia'oga le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo - /g/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 2:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo – /k/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 3:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo – /r/

E sefulu ma le fitu mata'itusi o le Alafapeta Samoa ua filfilia e faatino ai le Su'ega Laitiiti 3 (Fa'amolemole taga'i i le Pepa o Fa'amaumauga):

l, p, k, r, a, f, g, n, v, o, s, e, h, u, i, t, m

**Manatua:** Fai muamua i le tamaitiiti e ta'u mai le igoa o le mata'itusi ma lona leo, afai e le mafai e le tamaitiiti ona fai le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua, ona toe fa'ata'ita'i lea e le faia'oga. Taumafai e fa'alototele le tamaitiiti i ni upu fa'amalosi e fialia ai e fa'ataunu'u le galuega e pei o le "lelei tele lau fa'alogo." "Malo le taumafai malosi". Ia ma le tele o nisi fa'aupuga e fa'alototele ai le tamaitiiti a o fai le su'ega.

**Task:**

## **Subtest 4 – Phoneme Segmentation**

Sound out each phoneme within a word

To understand the instruction the teacher/assessor should read the form first

**Example 1:** A teacher/assessor

Teacher: I will sound out each phoneme within a word – “po”

po = /p/ – /o/

**Example 2:** A child to practise this task

Teacher Instruction: Sound out each phoneme within a word – “sau”

Child: sau = /s/ – /a/ – /u/

**Example 3:** A child to practise this task

Teacher Instruction: Sound out each phoneme within a word – “fale”

fale = /f/ – /a/ – /l/ – /e/

Twelve items are selected for children to attempt in Subtest 4 (Please see the record sheet):

aso, pa, fale, alu, musu, pu, ipu, pusa, mu, tua, la, uati

**Remember:** Ask the child to sound out each phoneme within a word. If the child can't do it the first time, then the teacher will demonstrate the example once again. Please encourage the child through positive comments like “good listening,” “you are trying hard.” You can use other positive reinforcements to build up the child's self-esteem and also to motivate him/her to participate well during the assessment.

## Su'ega Laitiiti 4 Vaevaega o leo ta'itasi – Phoneme Segmentation

**Galuega:** Fa'aleo leo ta'itasi o i le upu

Faitau muamua e le faisu'ega/faiaoga fa'atonuga ina ia malamalama

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 1:** Fa'ata'ita'i muamua e le faisu'ega/faia'oga

Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo e le faiao'ga leo ta'itasi o i le upu – “po”

po = /p/ – /o/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 2:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo mai leo ta'itasi o i le upu – “sau”

sau = /s/ - /a/ - /u/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 3:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo mai leo ta'itasi o i le upu – “fale”

fale = /f/ - /a/ - /l/ - /e/

E sefululua upu ua filfilia e faatino ai le malamalama i Leo Samoa i le Su'ega Laitiiti 4 (Fa'amolemole taga'i i le Pepa o Fa'amauga):

aso, pa, fale, alu, musu, pu, ipu, pusa, mu, tua, la, uati

**Manatua:** Fai i le tamaitiiti e fa'aleo uma mai leo ta'itasi o i le upu, afai e le mafai e le tamaitiiti ona fai le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua, ona toe fa'ata'ita'i lea e le faia'oga. Taumafai e fa'alototele le tamaitiiti i ni upu fa'amalosi e fiafia ai e fa'ataunu'u le galuega e pei “o le lelei tele lau fa'alogu” “e ese ma lou taumafai malosi”. Ia ma le tele o nisi fa'aupuga e fa'alototele ai le tamaitiiti a o fai le suega.

## Subtest 5 – Phoneme Blending

**Task:** Say the word after listening to each phoneme within a word  
To understand the instruction the teacher/assessor should read the form first.

**Example 1:** A teacher to demonstrate

Instruction: Teacher to sound out the phonemes in the word *afi* (/a/ - /f/ - /i/) then say the word - /afi/

**Example 2:** A child to practise the task

Instruction: Teacher/assessor to sound out the phonemes in the word *amio* (/a/ - /m/ - /i/ - /o/). Child to say the word - /amio/

**Example 3:** A child to practise to task

Instruction: A teacher/ assessor to sound out the phonemes in the word *alofa* (/a/ - /l/ - /o/ - /f/ - /a/). Child to say the word - alofa

Twelve items are selected for children to attempt in Subtest 5 (Please see the record sheet):

a - t - a, g - u - t - u, n - o - f - o - a, l - i - m - a, a - f - u, m - e - l - e - n - i, f - a - l - a,  
i - s - u, 'a - l - u - g - a, s - a - l - u, i - l - i, p - u - l - o - u

**Remember:** Ask the child to say the word. If the child can't do it the first time then the teacher will demonstrate the example once again. Please encourage the child through the positive comments like "good listening." "you are trying hard." You can use other positive reinforcements to build up the child's self-esteem and also to motivate him/her to participate well during the assessment.

## Su'ega Laitiiti 5

### Ta'uga atoa o leo ta'itasi o i le upu – Phoneme Blending

**Galuega:** Ta'uga o leo ta'ita'itasi o i le upu

Faitau muamua e le faisu'ega fa'atonuga ina ia malamalama

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 1:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le faisu'ega/ faia'oga

Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo e le faia'oga leo ta'itasi o i le upu ma ta'u le upu

/a/-/f/ - /i/ = /afi/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 2:** Fa'ata'itai e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo e le faisu'ega leo ta'itasi o le upu amio (/a/-/m/-/i/-/o/)

Tamaitiiti: Ta'u mai le upu: /amio/

**Fa'ata'ita'iga 3:** Fa'ata'ita'i e le tamaitiiti le galuega

Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo e le faisu'ega leo ta'itasi o le upu alofa (/a/- /l/-/o/-/f/-/a/)

Tamaitiiti: Ta'u mai le upu: /alofa/

E sefululua upu ua vaevaeina i leo ua filifilia e faatino ai le galuega i le Su'ega Laitiiti 5 (Fa'amolemole taga'i i le Pepa o Fa'amaumauga):

a - t - a, g - u - t - u, n - o - f - o - a, l - i - m - a, a - f - u, m - e - l - e - n - i, f - a - l - a,  
i - s - u, ' a - l - u - g - a, s - a - l - u, i - l - i, p - u - l - o - u

**Manatua:** Fai i le tamaitiiti e ta'u mai le upu. Afai e le mafai e le tamaitiiti ona fai le fa'ata'ita'iga muamua, ona toe fa'ata'ita'i lea e le faia'oga. Fa'amolemole fa'alototele le tamaitiiti i ni upu fa'amalosi e fiafia ai e fa'ataunu'u le galuega e pei o le "lelei tele lau fa'alogo." "Malo le taumafai malosi". Ia ma le tele o isi fa'aupuga e fa'afiafia ma fa'alototele ai le tamaitiiti a o fai le su'ega.



## **Itulau Fa'apipi'i A**

**O ata, mata'itusi ma pepa o fa'amaumauga  
mo Su'ega Laiti**

### **Appendix A**

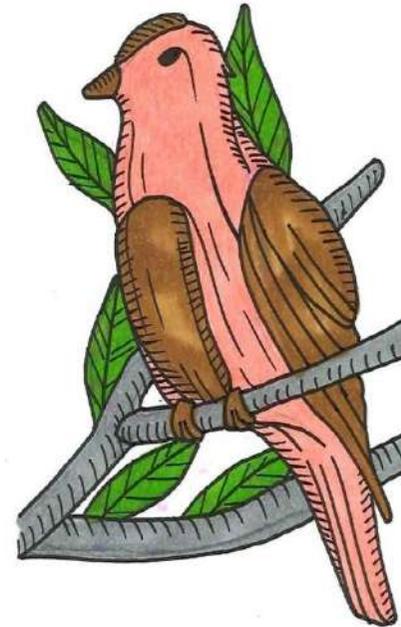
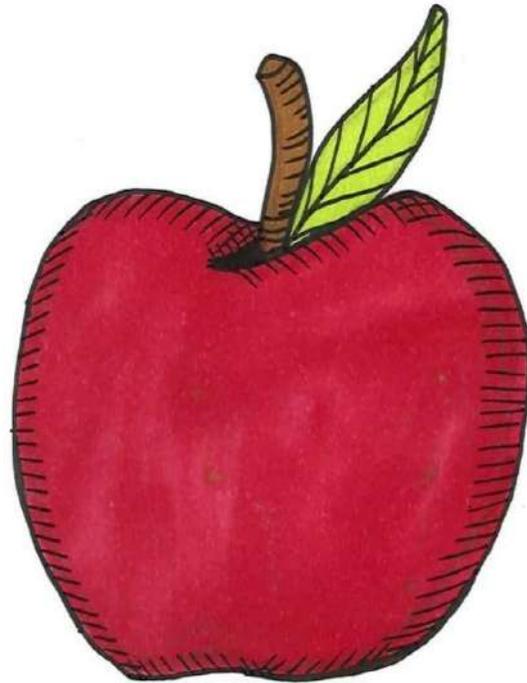
**Pictures, letters and record forms for the  
Subtests**

## SU'EGA LAITIITI 2 – SUBTEST 2

Malamalama i le tulaga o se leo i le upu (Leo i le amataga o le upu)

### PHONEME ISOLATION

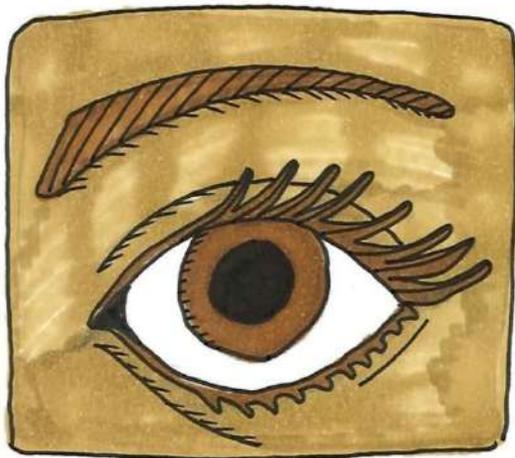
Fa'ata'ita'iga 1 Practice Item 1



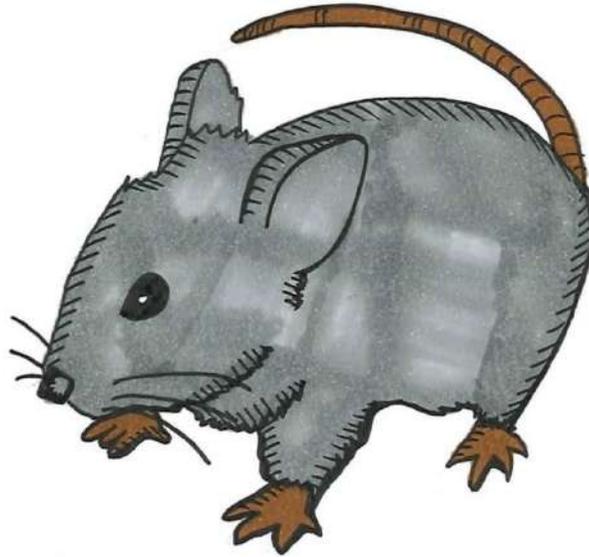
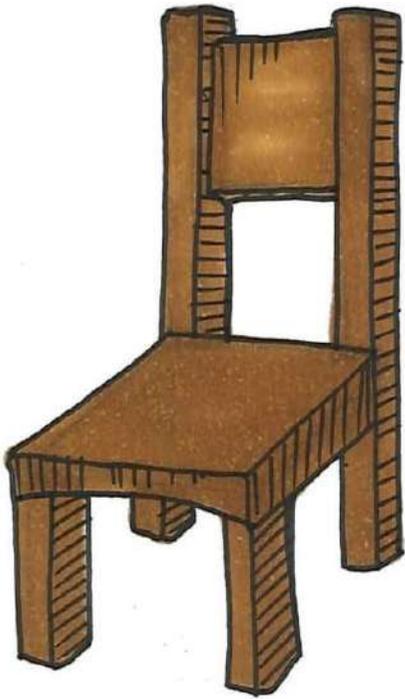
Fa'ata'ita'iga 2 Practice Item 2



# Fa'ata'ita'iga 3 Practice Item 3



Fa'atinoga 1 Item 1



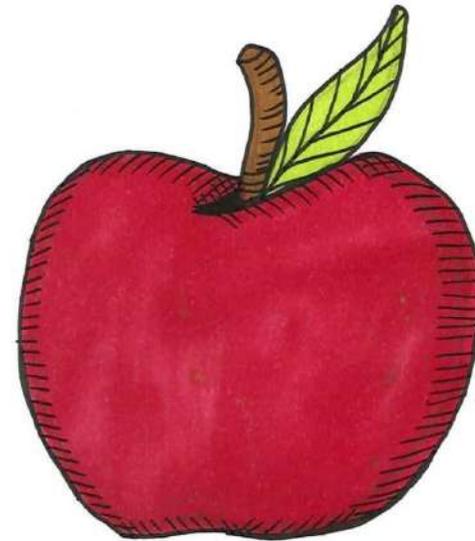
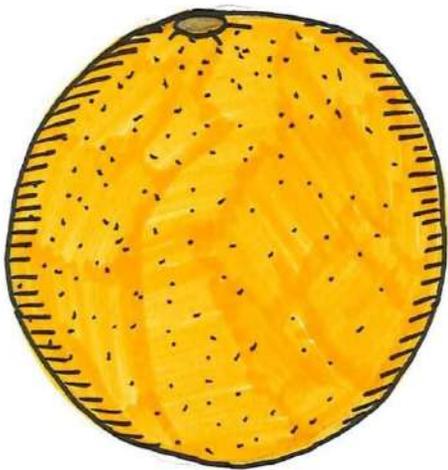
Fa'atinoga 2 Item 2



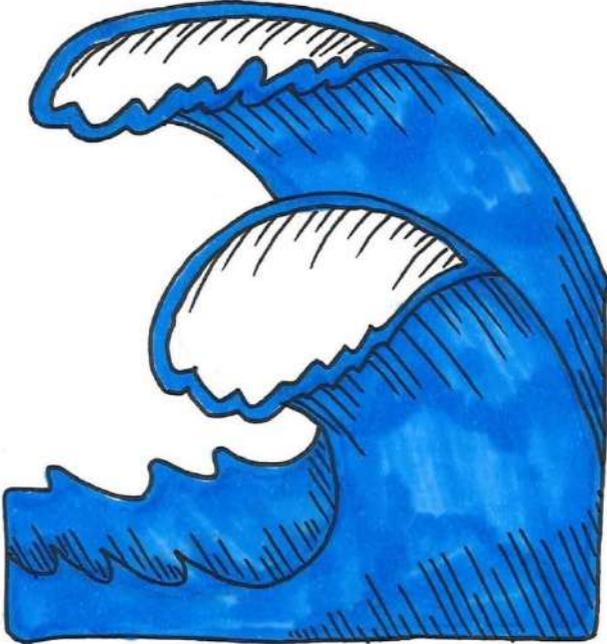
Fa'atinoga 3 – Item 3



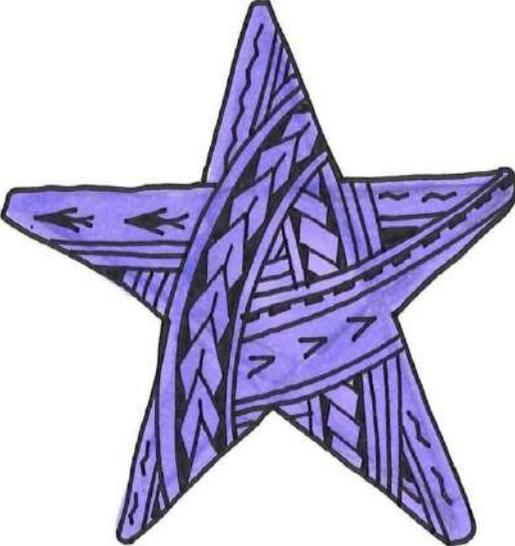
## Fa'atinoga 4 – Item 4



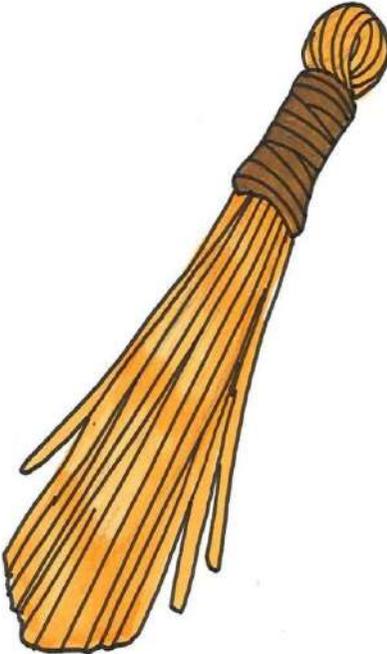
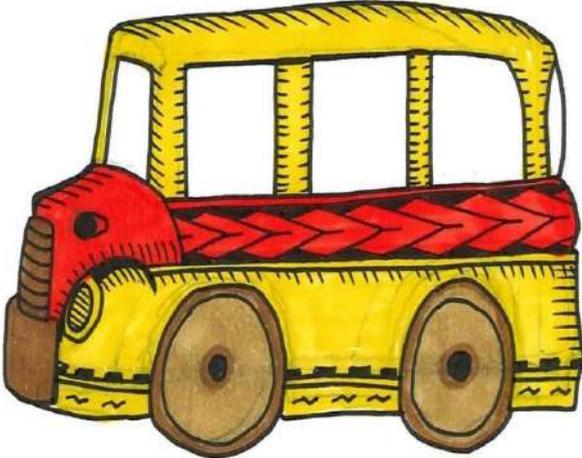
Fa'atinoga 5 – Item 5



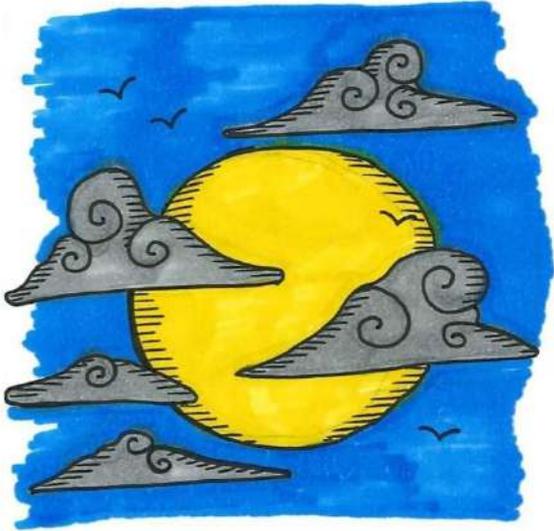
Fa'atinoga 6 – Item 6



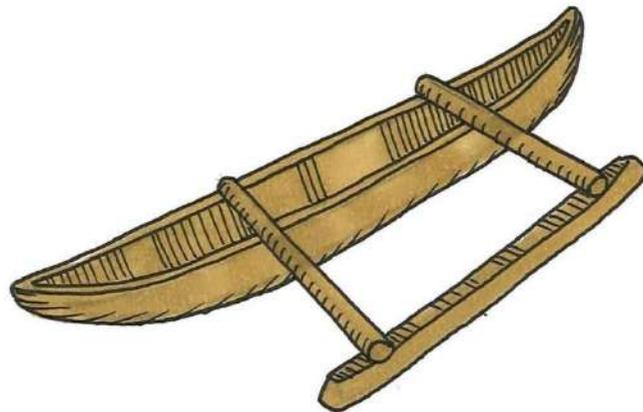
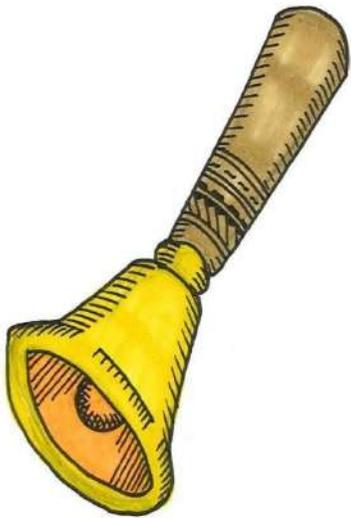
Fa'atinoga 7 – Item 7



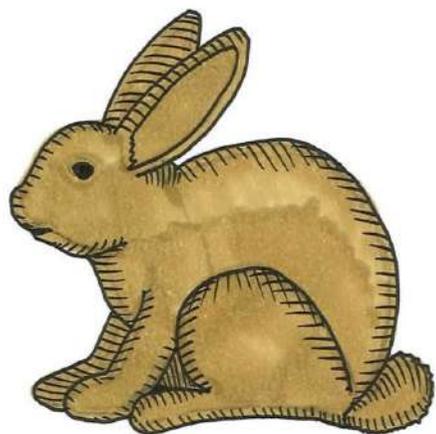
Fa'atinoga 8 – Item 8



# Fa'atinoga 9 – Item 9



Fa'atinoga 10 – Item 10



## SU'EGA LAITIITI 3 – SUBTEST 3

### Malamalama i Mata'itusi ma o latou leo – LETTER SOUND KNOWLEDGE

#### Fa'atinoga (Item 1-8)

l	p	k	r
a	f	g	n

## Fa'atinoga (Item 9-17)

v

o

s

e

h

u

i

t

m

## RECORD FORM

### Samoan Emergent Phonological Awareness (SEPA) Task

Child's Name:

School:

Code:
-------

### SU'EGA LAITIITI 1 – SUBTEST 1

#### Vaevaega o upu i silapela – Syllable Segmentation

O silapela o vaevaega ia o se upu i ni pā'o a le pati, e fua iai le vaevaega tonu.

Fa'atonuga: Pati mai upu o loo i lalo i silapela.

Item 1 <i>lua (2)</i>	Item 2 <i>savali (3)</i>	Item 3 <i>tusitusi (4)</i>	Item 4 <i>pati (2)</i>	Item 5 <i>tautala (4)</i>	Item 6 <i>fanau (3)</i>	Item 7 <i>sapo (2)</i>	Item 8 <i>la'au (3)</i>	Item 9 <i>asiasi (4)</i>	Item 10 <i>tolu (2)</i>	Item 11 <i>teine (3)</i>	Item 12 <i>matamata (4)</i>
<b>Total correct:</b>											

### SU'EGA LAITIITI 2 – SUBTEST 2

#### Malamalama i le tulaga o se leo i le upu

Leo i le Amataga o le upu – Phoneme Isolation

Fa'atonuga: Su'e mai le upu e amata i le leo.

Item 1 <i>m</i>	Item 2 <i>t</i>	Item 3 <i>a</i>	Item 4 <i>p</i>	Item 5 <i>g</i>	Item 6 <i>f</i>	Item 7 <i>s</i>	Item 8 <i>l</i>	Item 9 <i>v</i>	Item 10 <i>r</i>
<b>Total correct:</b>									

**SU’EGA LAITIITI 3 – SUB TEST 3**

**Malamalama i mata’itusi ma o latou leo – Letter Sound Knowledge**

**Fa’atonuga: Ta’u mai le mata’itusi ma lona leo.**

Item 1 l	Item 2 p	Item 3 k	Item 4 r	Item 5 a	Item 6 f	Item 7 g	Item 8 n	Item 9 v	Item 10 o	Item 11 s	Item 12 e	Item 13 h	Item 14 u	Item 15 i	Item 16 t	Item 17 m
												<b>Total correct:</b>				

**SU’EGA LAITIITI 4 – SUB TEST 4**

**Vaevaega o Leo Ta’itasi – Phoneme Segmentation**

**Fa’atonuga: Fa’aleo mai leo ta’itasi o i le upu.**

Item 1 aso (3)	Item 2 pa (2)	Item 3 fale (4)	Item 4 alu (3)	Item 5 musu (4)	Item 6 pu (2)	Item 7 ipu (3)	Item 8 pusa (4)	Item 9 mu (2)	Item 10 tua (3)	Item 11 la (2)	Item 12 uati (4)
											<b>Total correct:</b>

**SU'EGA LAITIITI 5 – SUB TEST 5**

**Ta'uga atoa o vaega o le upu – Phoneme Blending**

**Fa'atonuga: Fa'aleo mai leo ta'itasi o i le upu ona ta'u lea o le upu.**

Item 1 <i>a-t-a</i>	Item 2 <i>g-u-t-u</i>	Item 3 <i>n-o-f-o-a</i>	Item 4 <i>l-i-m-a</i>	Item 5 <i>a-p-i</i>	Item 6 <i>m-e-l-e-n-i</i>	Item 7 <i>f-a-l-a</i>	Item 8 <i>a-s-u</i>	Item 9 <i>o-l-a-g-a</i>	Item 10 <i>s-a-l-u</i>	Item 11 <i>'o-f-u</i>	Item 12 <i>p-u-l-o-u</i>
								<b>Total correct:</b>			

## Appendix B

### SEPA Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Phoneme Isolation	5;4 – 5;11	9	7.89	1.764	.588	6.53	9.24	5	10
	6;0 – 6;11	53	7.66	2.148	.295	7.07	8.25	2	10
	7;0 – 7;11	32	8.06	2.047	.362	7.32	8.80	3	10
	Total	94	7.82	2.069	.213	7.40	8.24	2	10
Letter-Sound Knowledge	5;4 – 5;11	9	14.11	4.729	1.576	10.48	17.75	2	17
	6;0 – 6;11	53	15.30	1.977	.272	14.76	15.85	9	17
	7;0 – 7;11	32	15.56	1.134	.200	15.15	15.97	12	17
	Total	94	15.28	2.167	.224	14.83	15.72	2	17
Phoneme Segmentation	5;4 – 5;11	9	7.11	4.649	1.550	3.54	10.68	0	12
	6;0 – 6;11	53	6.26	4.520	.621	5.02	7.51	0	12
	7;0 – 7;11	32	7.06	4.704	.832	5.37	8.76	0	12
	Total	94	6.62	4.563	.471	5.68	7.55	0	12

Phoneme Blending	5;4 – 5;11	9	7.33	4.796	1.599	3.65	11.02	0	11
	6;0 – 6;11	53	6.81	3.374	.464	5.88	7.74	0	12
	7;0 – 7;11	32	7.22	3.696	.653	5.89	8.55	0	12
	Total	94	7.00	3.598	.371	6.26	7.74	0	12
Syllable segmentation	5;4 – 5;11	9	8.44	3.321	1.107	5.89	11.00	3	12
	6;0 – 6;11	53	8.89	3.197	.439	8.01	9.77	1	12
	7;0 – 7;11	32	9.59	2.367	.418	8.74	10.45	4	12
	Total	94	9.09	2.946	.304	8.48	9.69	1	12
Total Score	5;4 – 5;11	9	44.89	16.579	5.526	32.15	57.63	16	61
	6;0 – 6;11	53	44.92	12.708	1.746	41.42	48.43	21	61
	7;0 – 7;11	32	47.50	11.687	2.066	43.29	51.71	25	63
	Total	94	45.80	12.688	1.309	43.20	48.40	16	63

## Comparison between Boys and Girls

The performance of boys (n=43) and girls (n=51) was conducted across the subtests in the SEPA. The analysis showed that letter-sound knowledge was the only subtest where there was a significant difference between the performance of girls and boys with the girls outperforming the boys ( $t(92) = -2.2$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Descriptive statistics for the performance of girls versus boys along with the t-test data are included in the tables below.

**SEPA Descriptive Statistics for Girls and Boys**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PH Isolation	male	43	7.56	2.185	.333
	female	51	8.04	1.959	.274
Letter-Sound Knowledge	male	43	14.74	2.846	.434
	female	51	15.73	1.218	.171
Phoneme Segmentation	male	43	6.05	4.509	.688
	female	51	7.10	4.597	.644
Phoneme Blending	male	43	6.53	3.744	.571
	female	51	7.39	3.459	.484
Syllable segmentation	male	43	8.53	3.232	.493
	female	51	9.55	2.625	.368
Total Score	male	43	43.42	13.349	2.036
	female	51	47.80	11.864	1.661

### Average performance in each sub-test

An analysis of the average performance (percent correct) of each sub-test was conducted. These figures show that generally children found the letter-sound knowledge, phoneme isolation and syllable segmentation tasks the easiest to complete (mean performance of 78%, 90% and 75% respectively). The most difficult tasks to complete were the phoneme segmentation (55%) and phoneme blending (58%) tasks. Please see the table below for further information.

#### One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean Percentage correct	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Syllable segmentation (% correct)	94	75.7128	24.55435	2.53259
Phoneme Isolation (% correct)	94	78.1915	20.68519	2.13351
Letter-sound knowledge (% correct)	94	89.8532	12.74372	1.31441
Phoneme segmentation (% correct)	94	55.1457	38.02894	3.92239
Phoneme blending (% correct)	94	58.3351	29.98487	3.09270

Appendix 10. Images - Schools 3 and 4 in their morning assemblies.



*Images - Better Start Project*



*Images – Gifting the SEPA Tool to MESC*



Me and my supervisors on the day of my oral defence – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021



Nofoilo I Leo Samoa – Samoan Phonological Awareness:  
A study of Samoan early literacy development and implications  
for effective teaching strategies

Supervisors:  
Professor Brigid McNeill and Professor Gail Gillon

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