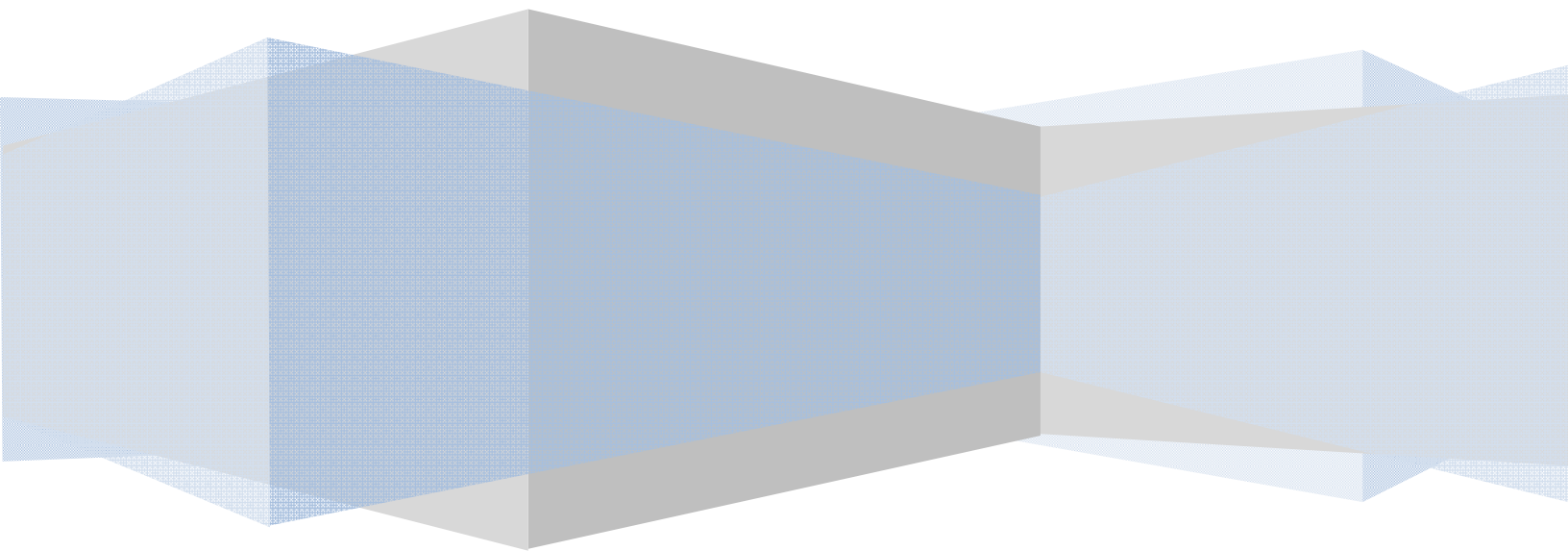


National Department of Education

Curriculum stock take

Vernacular Language Arts

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FSM Language Policy

A Language Policy was developed by the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) in 1997. The goal of the Language Policy is to *'sustain, reinforce, and expand our local languages and to provide the foundation skills for acquisition of English and other international languages'*.

The FSM Language Policy recognized that patterns of language acquisition had changed and that a serious loss of vocabulary was taking place. It observed that in some states, mastery of vernacular language was not assured before students made the transition to English medium education. In addition, it was found that vernacular languages were being used as a medium of instruction, often with the addition of loaned English vocabulary, but not as an object of instruction in its own right. Policy makers noted that instruction in Vernacular Language Arts ceased after the transition to English. The situation observed represented a departure from the findings of research, which indicated that *'the most effective means of second language acquisition is to develop cognitive skills in the first language and transfer those skills to second and third languages'*.

The FSM has adopted a bilingual approach to education. Bilingual education is where school subjects are taught in two languages and students become fluent speakers, readers and writers in both languages by the end of their schooling. The language used for teaching and learning is usually called the medium of instruction.

In FSM schools, students are taught and learn in their first, home or vernacular language almost exclusively in the early years of schooling. At this time they also begin to learn a little English as a second language. Later, the amount of time spent on learning English as a second language increases until English becomes the language of instruction. This practice is supported by research that indicates that children learn literacy and numeracy skills more effectively in their vernacular language. Later, literacy skills can be transferred to the second language and make second language learning more effective.

Most students in FSM start school with a good command of their first language, acquired from the home and local environment. They continue to learn their first language through immersion in classroom activities where vernacular language is used and taught. English is a second language for most FSM students. Most do not have experience of English in their homes or local environment. English is heard and used almost exclusively at school. This means that students do not have an opportunity to learn English in the same way as they learned their first language. Special methods and techniques must be used to teach English as a second language.

The duration of vernacular language medium teaching and learning varies between states. Most states begin a transition to English medium in Grade 3. If students do not have good basic literacy skills in their vernacular language by Grade 3, they will struggle with academic English and with learning more generally. It is important, therefore, to allow sufficient time for students to master their vernacular language before moving to English medium instruction.

The bilingual approach adopted in the FSM is called additive. In the additive approach, a second language is added to the child's vernacular language. The second language does not replace the vernacular language. Research shows that additive approaches are very effective educationally and result in students becoming bilingual as well as biliterate – being able to read and write in two

languages. In the additive approach, literacy skills are acquired in the vernacular language first and are used to support second language acquisition. Early teaching is conducted in the vernacular language medium. A period of transition occurs before transfer to the second language medium. Instruction continues in the vernacular language throughout all grades. This is called maintenance of the vernacular language.

The Department of Education in the Federated States of Micronesia published National Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks for all schools in 2008. Standards and benchmarks were developed by a working group consisting of representatives from each of the State Departments of Education. The working group recommended having standards and benchmarks for both English Language Arts and Vernacular Language Arts so that teachers and the community would be sent a clear message that Vernacular Language Arts is a priority for the FSM Government.

Vernacular Language Arts is one of four subjects mandated by the Department of Education in the FSM National Curriculum. The others are English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science.

The Vernacular Language Arts curriculum includes four standards; Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing and Literature Response. The Standards are more fully described in a total of 87 benchmarks. Benchmarks are clustered as follows;

ECE to Grade 3: 28 benchmarks
Grade 4 to Grade 5: 21 benchmarks
Grade 6 to Grade 8: 23 benchmarks
Grade 9 to Grade 12: 15 benchmarks.

Pohnpei State Department of Education

Pohnpei DOE published its Curriculum Framework in 2009. The language arts component of the curriculum framework was developed with assistance from Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL). The framework claims to be based on the FSM Language Arts standards.

The Curriculum Framework does not include Vernacular Language Arts and English Language Arts as two separate subjects. Vernacular Language Arts and English Language Arts are combined into one subject, called Language Arts. The framework does not, therefore, align with the FSM National Curriculum in this respect.

The Pohnpei Language Arts curriculum contains three standards, Reading, Writing and Oral and Visual Communications. These differ from the FSM National Curriculum Standards for Vernacular Language Arts and English Language Arts. The Framework applies to Grades 1 to 12. There are no standards for Early Childhood Education.

Each Standard contains a number of statements describing what students should be able to do at each grade level. These statements are not named in the framework. For the purposes of this analysis they will be referred to as Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

The Pohnpei Language Arts Curriculum Framework combines Pohnpeian languages and English into one framework and one subject. The framework does not make clear the relationship between the two languages and does not indicate how or at what pace the development of cognitive skills in the first language and transfer to the second language is to occur.

Some SLOs include mention of the specific language the outcome should be based on and assessed in, for example, '*Identify common signs and logos in Pohnpeian*'. Some SLOs specify that students should be able to demonstrate the outcome in both Pohnpeian and English, for example, '*Ask and answer questions at different levels in Pohnpeian and English*'. Other SLOs do not specify a language, for example, '*Recognize word and sentence structure to determine meaning*'.

An analysis of the languages specified for SLOs for Strand 1: Reading, at each Grade level, is shown in the table below.

Languages specified in SLOs for Strand 1: Reading					
Grade	Total number of SLOs	Total number of SLOs that specify Pohnpeian	Total number of SLOs that specify English	Total number of SLOs that specify Pohnpeian and English	Total number of SLOs that do not specify either Pohnpeian or English
1	12	2	0	0	10
2	12	2	0	1	9
3	11	4	0	0	7
4	5	1	1	1	2
5	8	1	0	2	5
6	7	0	0	3	4
7	7	0	0	0	7
8	9	0	0	0	9
9	8	0	0	0	8
10	7	0	0	0	7
11	7	0	0	0	7
12	7	0	0	0	7
TOTAL	100	10	1	7	82

The table shows that a specific target language is specified for 18 out of 100 SLOs (18%) while no specific target language is specified for 82% of SLOs. There is a slightly discernable trend from SLOs that specify Pohnpeian to SLOs that specify Pohnpeian and English between Grades 1 and 6, but no target language is mentioned after Grade 7. The failure to specify a target language or languages for 82% of the SLOs creates ambiguity within the framework.

The framework does not clearly support the National Curriculum in that that the study of Pohnpeian is not maintained to Grade 12, in accordance with the FSM Vernacular Language Arts curriculum. In addition, English is not taught as a distinct second language, as specified in the FSM English Language Arts curriculum.

The target language is further complicated by the use of 'Pohnpeian' in some SLOs and 'Pohnpeian languages' in one SLO at Grade 3 level. The use of 'Pohnpeian' suggests that students should learn and be assessed only in the majority language of the State while the use of 'Pohnpeian languages' suggests the inclusion of the minority languages of the State, such as Mokilese, Nukuoran and Kapingamarangian.

The Language Arts framework appears to contradict guidelines laid out in Section 3 of the Curriculum Frameworks document. This section includes the following statements that support the acquisition of literacy skills in the first language and later transfer of these skills to a second language.

'The PDOE Strategic Plan identified language and culture as perhaps the highest priority and perhaps the area of greatest concern for the PDOE. Learning English and English competence has become the medium of judging student performance in school. However, a well constructed and implemented first or native language program not only promotes the local language and culture, but also provided (sic) a basis for learning a second language.'

'Competence in the primary State language should be an entry requirement into high school and should be incorporated into high school entrance tests.'

'The primary language of the community should be both the medium and object of instruction in the elementary school. If the local language is not the primary state language, the primary State language should be taught in the school as a second language.'

'Transition into English should be based on cognitive skills developed in students (sic) primary and/or State language.'

'Instruction in second, third and other languages should be based on standards and curriculum frameworks that follow sound research on language acquisition and set a basis for assessments and reporting.'

'English and other international languages are used as international languages, second languages, and foreign languages in the FSM. Instructional strategies and materials should be appropriate to the language needs and usage of students. Note: while English is the official language of the Federated States of Micronesia it is the first language of less than 1% of FSM citizens.'

Yap State Department of Education

Yap State DOE published their Language Arts Curriculum Framework in 2000 as part of the 'New Baseline Curriculum'. Language and culture are integrated in the curriculum. The goals of the *Language Arts Curriculum 2000* are:

- 'a. The preservation and maintenance of the knowledge and use of the local languages and cultures.*
- b. The development of literacy in the local languages.*
- c. The development and use of the local languages as media of instruction.*
- d. The intellectualization of the local languages and*
- e) The development of an education register of the local languages."*

The Vernacular Language Arts curriculum is an integral part of a wider curriculum that includes components on culture, environment, native mathematics, arts, crafts and sports. The language component contains desired learning competencies arranged under two headings, Listening and Speaking and Reading and Writing. These are further arranged under four levels, covering the lower elementary school range from Grade 1 to Grade 4. The table below shows how desired learning competencies for writing at level 3 compare with the National Curriculum benchmarks for writing at Grade 3.

Comparison between National and Yap State curriculum, Language Component: Standard 3: Vernacular Writing: Grade 3	
National Curriculum Benchmarks	Yap New Baseline Curriculum Benchmarks
VLA.3.3.1 Write paragraphs of at least 5 sentences or short compositions that show some attempt to use descriptive language to clarify and enhance ideas.	None
VLA.3.3.2 Write for an intended audience and purpose.	None
VLA.3.3.3 Write with a command of the grammatical and mechanical conventions appropriate to the level.	None
VLA.3.3.4 Use revising and editing skills to improve clarity of writing.	None
VLA.3.3.5 Demonstrate the ability to use appropriate vocabulary in describing a variety of activities.	None

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There are no expected learning outcomes for writing in the NBC Language Component under Reading and Writing at level three (pp 36-37). However, there are some outcomes in the Scope and Sequence section found on pages 72-75. These have been added to the table below.

Comparison between National and Yap State curriculum: Standard 3: Vernacular Writing: Grade 3	
National Curriculum Benchmarks	Yap New Baseline Curriculum Benchmarks
VLA.3.3.1 Write paragraphs of at least 5 sentences or short compositions that show some attempt to use descriptive language to clarify and enhance ideas.	Writing Words in Cursive Form. Writing Down Reasons Why Children Have to Go to School. Report-Writing. Writing a Report/Composition.
VLA.3.3.2 Write for an intended audience and purpose.	Reading and Responding in Writing to a Question. Writing a Friendly Letter.
VLA.3.3.3 Write with a command of the grammatical and mechanical conventions appropriate to the level.	The Sentence: End-of-Sentence Punctuation. Ending the Sentence. Putting the Appropriate Punctuation Mark in a Sentence.
VLA.3.3.4 Use revising and editing skills to improve clarity of writing.	Writing Practice: Medicinal Plants. Improving Written Work. Improving Written Work: The Word and Sentence. Improving Written Work: The Text. Revision of Written Work.
VLA.3.3.5 Demonstrate the ability to use appropriate vocabulary in describing a variety of activities.	Writing the Steps in Learning a Boys' and Girls' Dance.

There is a reasonably good match between the National Curriculum benchmarks and the NBC Scope and Sequence. However, the NBC is rather prescriptive.

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The NBC contains a further curriculum guide for Vernacular Language Arts at Grade 5. This is accompanied by a set of resource materials. The table below shows a comparison between the National Curriculum benchmarks for writing at Grade 5 and the NBC syllabus for writing at level 5.

Comparison between National and Yap State curriculum: Standard 3: Vernacular Writing Grade 5	
National Curriculum Benchmarks	Yap New Baseline Curriculum Benchmarks
VLA.3.5.1 Take notes in local languages.	Knows how to summarize orally and in writing. Writing the summary and paraphrase.
VLA.3.5.2 Write letters and short compositions in local languages.	Knows and can write examples of the different kinds of sentences. Knows and uses transitional aids in speaking and writing. Can write conceptual/transitional paragraphs. Can comprehend and write expository paragraphs/discourse. Can comprehend and write descriptive paragraphs/discourse. Can comprehend and write narrative paragraphs/discourse. Can comprehend and write argumentative paragraphs/discourse. Can write reports. Can read and write expository essays. Can read and write descriptive essays. Can read and write narration on this level.
VLA.3.5.3 Identify and use grammatical patterns of language appropriate to grade level.	Phrases and sentences and their parts (writing sentences with transitive and intransitive verbs). Can write friendly and business letters for different situations.
VLA.3.5.4 Use precise words to convey meanings.	Can use new vocabulary words learned from reading and writing in conversation and writing.
VLA.3.5.5 Revise and edit their own writing and the writing of others.	Shows improvement in cursive writing skills. Students demonstrate ability to write in cursive legibly. Capitalization.

Again, there is a reasonably good match between the National Curriculum benchmarks and the NBC Scope and Sequence. However, the NBC is more aligned towards acquiring knowledge of grammar, rules and conventions than the examples above would suggest. For example, the following objectives appear on page 20;

- Knows the parts of a phrase.
- Knows the parts of a sentence.
- Knows the form–function of a word or phrase in a sentence.
- Knows transitive and intransitive verbs.
- Can identify and list transitive and intransitive verbs correctly.

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The NBC is resourced with a selection of student workbooks and reading materials. An analysis of the Grade 5 reading materials in the publication *Chep Ngea Yaat* is shown in the tables below.

Text type	Narrative	Persuasive	Expository	Descriptive
Number of examples	12	0	4	0

Text length	1 page	2 pages	3 pages	4 pages
Number of examples	1	8	6	1

The analysis shows that the most common text types presented are narrative and expository. The reading material does not present examples of persuasive or descriptive text types. The length of the reading material varies from 1 to 4 pages, with most material being 2 to 3 pages in length. The longest piece consists of 1,568 words. This may be of insufficient length and complexity to challenge a fluent reader at Grade 5 level. *Moving into English* reading materials for learners of English at grade five contain texts of 12 to 16 pages in length and with over 2,000 words.

The NBC does not contain learning objectives in Vernacular Language Arts beyond Grade 5. At grade 5 the NBC begins instruction of English as a second language. From Grade 6 to Grade 8 there are no further curriculum guides or objectives for Vernacular Language Arts. There are no curriculum guides or objectives for Vernacular Language Arts for Grades 9 to 12.

Kosrae State Department of Education

Kosrae State Department of Education published its Language Arts Program: Standards-Based Curriculum Guide in draft form in 2004. The document recognizes how important it is for students to develop “*the fullest possible achievement in the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in his/her first language.*”

Kosrae’s program integrates vernacular and English languages in one program. Vernacular language is taught in Grades 1 and 2. Grade 3 is described as the ‘*transition grade from Kosraean to English*’. English is taught from Grade 4 to Grade 12. Instruction in Kosraean ceases after Grade 3.

The Kosraean program is based on the California State Curriculum. This is a first language English program designed for speakers of English. It is not a curriculum designed for speakers of English as a second language.

Some adaptations have been made to the Californian curriculum. The main adaptation is the alignment of Californian grade levels with Kosraean grade levels. The table below shows how the alignment has been made.

Kosraean Curriculum	Californian Curriculum
Grade 1	Kindergarten
Grade 2	Kindergarten
Grade 3	Grade 1
Grade 4	Grade 2
Grade 5	Grade 3
Grade 6	Grade 4
Grade 7	Grade 5
Grade 8	Grade 6
Grade 9	Grade 7
Grade 10	Grade 8
Grade 11	Grade 9 and Grade 10
Grade 12	Grade 11 and Grade 12

The table shows that Kosraean students in Grade 1 and 2 are taught using curriculum standards that are designed for Kindergarten. This raises a number of issues.

The first issue is that the standards are too low for the Kosraean students. The skills and concepts Kosraean Grade 2 students are expected to acquire in their own language are similar to the skills and concepts students in kindergarten in California are expected to acquire. Kosraean students are being prevented from mastering skills and concepts that are consistent with their age and experience. The curriculum actually prevents Kosraean students from achieving their potential with the result that they do not have an opportunity to achieve a high enough level of skill in their first language in order to transfer these skills to a second language.

As a result of the Kosraean curriculum, Kosraean students graduate from Elementary school having been taught mostly kindergarten level skills in their own first language.

The second issue is that Grade 2 students repeat skills and concepts already mastered in Grade 1. The table below shows an example of some of the skills and concepts that appear in both Grade 1 and Grade 2.

Grade 1	Grade 2
Identify the front cover, back cover and title page of a book.	Identify the front cover, back cover and title page of a book.
Distinguish letters from words.	Distinguish letters from words.
Match all consonant and vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Match all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.
Write consonant-vowel-consonant words.	Write consonant-vowel-consonant words.

After the transition to English, the Kosraean curriculum in Grades 4 to 10 is designed to be two years behind the Californian curriculum. Students at Grade 10 are expected to work at Grade 8 level. Students are not given an opportunity to achieve grade level equivalency until Grade 12. In Grade 11 students are expected to complete content designed for Grades 9 and 10 to be completed over two years in the California curriculum. In one year in Grade 12 they are expected to complete two years' work designed for California's Grades 11 and 12.

In adapting the California curriculum, Kosrae curriculum developers have not paid sufficient attention to the fact that it is designed for speakers of English as a first language. The Kosraean curriculum contains no adaptation of the Californian curriculum to accommodate learners of English as a second language.

Chuuk State Department of Education

Chuuk State Department of Education published its K-12 Curriculum Framework in the form of a working draft in 2009. The framework was developed as a sub-project of the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education project (PRIDE). The PRIDE sub-project was jointly funded by the New Zealand Agency for International Development and the European Union.

The K-12 Curriculum Framework contains a section entitled Chuukese Cultural Studies Curriculum Framework, dated 1994. The purpose of this framework is to *'help each teacher to teach the children the culture and language of Chuuk in order to preserve and retain them'*. The framework combines skills in language, culture and traditions of Chuuk. Three language goals are listed. These are;

1. To develop listening and speaking skills
2. To develop reading and comprehension skills in Chuukese
3. To develop writing skills in Chuukese.

Four culture goals are listed. These are;

1. To develop an understanding of the Chuukese cultural spirit of unity.
2. To develop the behavior and attitude of respect and humility.
3. To develop knowledge of Chuukese arts and crafts.
4. To develop knowledge of Chuukese recreational activities.

The skills, values and attitudes associated with these goals are further elaborated in a series of four Scope and Sequence tables. These are titled Listening and Speaking, Reading and Comprehension, Writing and Beliefs (Traditions). Each of the Scope and Sequence tables lists knowledge, skills and attitudes that should be developed at certain grade levels from Grade 1 to Grade 8.

There are a number of issues with the scope and sequence that are not in alignment with the National Curriculum for Vernacular Language Arts for Grades ECE to 12. The main area of non-alignment is that the Chuukese scope and sequence covers only Grades 1 to 8, omitting high school grades 9 to 12.

The Chuukese approach to speaking and listening is more structured and focused on 'correctness' compared to the promotion of active participation, problem solving and higher order thinking skills and activities recommended by the National Curriculum. In reading there is an emphasis on decoding and literal meaning, with less emphasis on inference, appreciation and interpretation of figurative language. The process writing approach introduced in the National Curriculum at Grade ECE-3 is omitted in favor of a more mechanical approach to writing based on copying and penmanship. Emergent and early writing is limited to forming letters and drawing in Grade 1 and creative writing begins at Grade 5.

In the National Curriculum, Vernacular Literature is a separate Standard. In the Chuuk framework, Vernacular Literature is introduced through a sub-goal of Reading and Comprehension.

Opportunities for students to develop higher order skills in comparison, interpretation and appreciation of literature are limited.

The Chuukese framework fails to address the issue of multiple first languages in Chuuk State, where three distinct regional languages are used; Chuukese, Mortlockese and Western.

The Chuuk curriculum framework highlights the links between Chuukese language and culture and goes some way towards supporting the language preservation goals outlined in the FSM Language Policy. However, the framework fails to address a number of the guiding principles of the FSM Language Policy. The first of these is that language should be the foundation for developing thinking and learning skills. The framework supports limited use of Chuukese language for analysis, synthesis and evaluation in modern, non-traditional contexts related to educational, economic, political and social development issues.

Conclusions

While this Vernacular Language Arts curriculum stock take is by no means a comprehensive review of vernacular language arts curricula in the four states, it does identify some common issues. Perhaps the most important of these is that curricula for vernacular language arts are not always in harmony with the FSM Language Policy. This is most evident in the states' failure to provide and implement a curriculum for vernacular language arts from ECE to Grade 12. A further problem is that basic literacy and thinking skills in the vernacular language are not fully supported, leading to poor academic achievement and difficulties in learning additional languages.

The stock take also reveals a lack of alignment between the states' curriculum framework and the National Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks for Vernacular Language Arts. This lack of alignment leads to the omission of essential skills and concepts, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.