GLOBAL vs. LOCAL OR ENGLISH vs. FRENCH?
A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS IN LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICIES IN VANUATU
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1906-1980
The New Hebrides were ruled jointly by Britain and France.

30 July 1980
The islands became the Republic of Vanuatu in 1980.

Constitution (Article 3.1)
The national language of the Republic is Bislama. The official languages are Bislama, English and French. The principal languages of education are English and French.

Government Language Policy: English and French are the only languages officially sanctioned in schools:
“Although Bislama is an official national language, it is not a language of instruction and where possible it should not be used when either English or French is appropriate” (Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 43)

Research question: How is this single language policy enacted in both Anglophone and Francophone schools?

By stipulating that only English and French can be used in Vanuatu’s education system, the separate Anglophone and Francophone schools inevitably become monolingual.

The dominant monolingual ideology prevalent in education worldwide has been duplicated in Vanuatu, rather than a genuinely bilingual or multilingual institution being created.

Students are punished for speaking Bislama at school. In each strand of the system, one official language is used as the medium of instruction; the second is taught as a subject; the third is banned.

Education is constructed as a strictly monolingual process, despite the role it plays in preparing citizens to participate in the officially trilingual (and realistically multilingual) nation.

Outside school, English and French are rarely used. There is therefore a gap between institutional and societal norms, as well as intra-institutional contestation.

A global issue deriving from British and French colonial policies has become a local conflict within Vanuatu’s education system, which may prevent the implementation of other education policies.

Vanuatu’s 106 vernaculars don’t even get a mention. They are excluded from the classroom. And therefore from the debate.