

# Maintaining Interest in English Medium Secondary School Māori Language Programmes for Students in Years 11 to 13

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## Abstract

*Aotearoa, New Zealand has long been proclaimed as an impressive example of how to resurrect an indigenous language from near extinction into a vibrant everyday conversational language of value. Recent research would suggest otherwise. After approximately thirty years of having enjoyed a resurgence te reo Māori (the Māori language) is once again in decline.*

*Statistics show that although Aotearoa, New Zealand has a world renowned indigenous education model, in the order of 85 percent of Māori students are enrolled in English medium secondary schools. It is therefore imperative that te reo Māori programmes in English medium secondary schools are effective at retaining high numbers of students willing to learn te reo Māori. Historically these programmes have tended to suffer from elevated rates of attrition.*

*This article outlines the findings of research conducted to determine the factors which encourage continued student participation in senior te reo Māori (Māori language) programmes in English medium secondary schools in Waitaha, Canterbury. While the research itself has a very narrow focus the findings have broad implications across all teaching areas and also internationally.*

## 1. Introduction

For many years kaiako reo Māori (Māori language teachers) in English medium secondary schools have grappled with the issue of high attrition rates from their senior te reo Māori programmes. This is a significant issue as 85 percent of ākonga Māori (Māori students) still participate in the English medium education system. This problem however plagues not only ākonga Māori but also those who are non Māori. Te reo Māori programmes in English medium New Zealand schools are offered to ākonga as optional subjects. While retention is relatively unproblematic for ākonga in the junior levels of secondary schools (ages 13 to 14), it becomes a significant issue in the senior levels (ages 15 to 18) where attrition rates are considerably high.

## 2. Contextualising the research

It is generally agreed that Aotearoa/ New Zealand was occupied by Māori from approximately 1000 AD. At that time the Māori population is estimated to have been approximately 100, 000 according to Rice [1]. Māori was the only language spoken in Aotearoa however it was not homogenous as dialectal variations emerged due to bioregional and other factors. In 1642 Abel Tasman and the crews of his ships were the first Europeans to discover Aotearoa/ New Zealand. Tasman sent some of his crew ashore and they had an unfortunate encounter with Ngāti Tumatakōkiri [2]. Consequently no other Europeans ventured this far south until Captain James Cook in 1769. The indigenous people of Aotearoa were collectively named Māori by Cook with the help of a Tahitian navigator named Tupaia. Shortly afterwards European whalers, sealers and traders began arriving to harvest the wealth of resources Aotearoa provided. In order to expedite trade successfully most of the European traders became fluent speakers of te reo Māori.

Missionaries then arrived to introduce and convert Māori to Christianity. They quickly realised that if they were to achieve their mission they would need to speak te reo Māori. The missionaries transformed te reo Māori from an oral into a written language and it became the lingua franca of Aotearoa states Biggs [3]. Mission schools were set up where reading and writing in te reo Māori was taught.

In the 1820's and 1830's the number of English speaking Māori increased and the need to converse in te reo Māori gradually declined. The suppression of te reo Māori by the colonial government was one very negative characteristic of colonisation. Laws were enacted which required English to be the language of instruction in schools. As a result, children were prohibited from speaking te reo Māori at school. This was a critical time as te reo Māori was in decline and fading from general use in the Māori community which was also in a state of decline [4].

Many Māori parents succumbed to the indoctrination that the English language was necessary to succeed in a world dominated by English migrants. Accordingly, parents who were fluent in te reo Māori did not pass the language onto their own children. The decline of te reo Māori was

exacerbated by a decreasing Māori population and government policies promoting assimilation [5]. It only takes one generation to lose a language and at least three to restore it insists Fishman [6].

During the 1960's Māori people concerned about the state of te reo Māori (the Māori language) lobbied the New Zealand government to have te reo Māori included as a teaching subject in New Zealand primary and secondary schools. In the early 1970's they reaped the rewards of their hard fought efforts when te reo Māori became a taught subject in the New Zealand curriculum.

In the 1980's Māori took the initiative and the birth of Māori medium early childhood education centres named Kōhangā Reo (Language Nests) was the result. Shortly afterwards Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori medium primary schools) emerged followed by Wharekura (Māori medium secondary schools). There was a ground swell of support for these community driven initiatives and it seemed te reo Māori would be returned from the brink of extinction. Even given the emergence of Māori medium educational facilities including Wānanga (Tertiary Institutes), the majority of Māori students have remained in English medium education. With the introduction of te reo Māori in English medium schools, an assumption has been made that it has undergone a renaissance.

The Wai 262 report has found this not to be the case and in fact the use of te reo Māori is again in decline creating more anxiety about its survival. In its introduction to the Wai 262 report, the Waitangi Tribunal has stated that, "Te reo Māori is approaching a crisis point" [7]. Due to the dwindling numbers of young te reo Māori speakers there is now a smaller pool of people able to succeed older native speakers.

## 2.1. An overview of the population, structure and language use in Aotearoa/ New Zealand

The following data was compiled from information collected during the 2006 New Zealand Census. The graphs provide a visual representation of the ethnic composition of the New Zealand population, the number of languages spoken by New Zealanders, the percentage of Māori able to speak te reo Māori and the Māori population residing in Te Waipounamu (the South Island). The final graph highlighting attrition rates from te reo Māori classes, was sourced from *Ngā Haeata Mātauranga - The Annual Report on Māori Education 2007/08*.

The statistics showing the ethnic breakdown of the population of New Zealand are now presented in Figure 1.2.1.

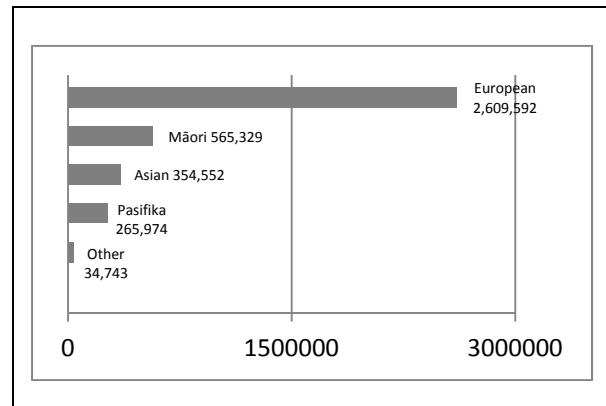


Figure 1.2.1. Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006) Census

Respondents providing census information were able to identify with more than one ethnicity. The total population of New Zealand in the 2006 census was 4,143,279. Europeans at the time comprised 68 percent of the New Zealand population. One in seven people identified as Māori contributed to 15 percent of the population. Asian people made up 9 percent followed by Pasifika (Pacific) peoples at 7 percent. 1 percent of the population consisted of people from the Middle East, Latin America and Africa.

Figure 1.2.2 below illustrates the numbers of New Zealanders who are mono, bi- or multi-lingual.

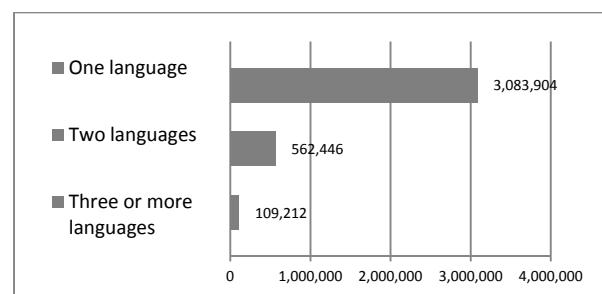


Figure 1.2.2. Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006) Census.

Figure 1.2.2 demonstrates that most of the New Zealand population is monolingual and that English is the dominant language of Aotearoa, spoken by 95.9 percent of the population. Māori was the next most common conversational language spoken by 4.1 percent of the population equating to 157,110 people. Less than six hundred thousand people speak two languages and just over one hundred thousand people speak three or more languages. Bilingual respondents affirmed that English was one of the languages they spoke. The census data indicated that migrants were more likely to speak two or more languages than New Zealand born residents stating

that, "New Zealand's changing ethnic composition ... was reflected in the increasing diversity of languages spoken."

Figure 1.2.3 The percentage of the Māori population able to speak te reo Māori by age.

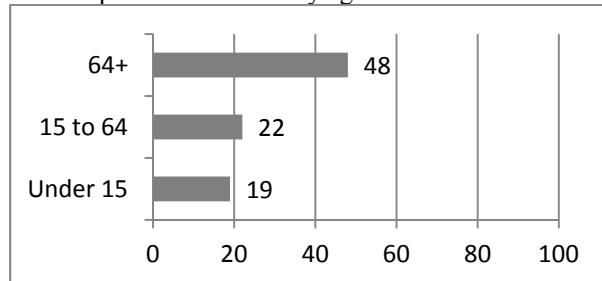


Figure 1.2.3. Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006) Census

Figure 1.2.3 shows that forty eight percent of Māori aged 64 or older are able to speak te reo Māori. Twenty two percent of Māori aged from 15 to 64 and nineteen percent of Māori who are younger than fifteen can speak Māori. In total 29.6 percent, less than a third of the total Māori population stated they were able to speak te reo Māori. These statistics are significant when considered alongside the crises identified by the Waitangi Tribunal. Of further interest there was no data available on the number of non-Māori who were able to speak Māori.

Figure 1.2.4 Attrition rate of students from te reo Māori programmes in New Zealand.

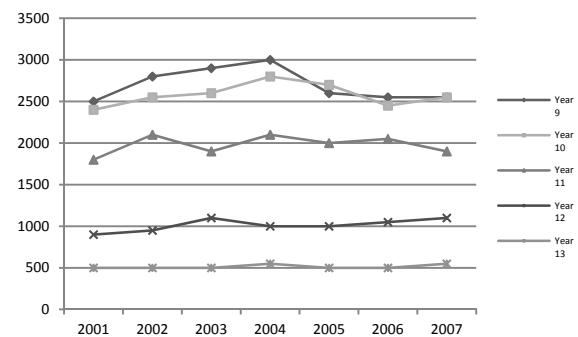


Figure 1.2.4. Adapted from Ngā Haeata Mātauranga 2007/08

When following the 2001 Year 9 cohort (see figure 1.2.4 above), it can be seen that between Years 9 and 10 there is a minimal amount of student loss. However there are significantly higher attrition rates from Years 11, 12 and 13. It is this attrition rate that has been the catalyst in commencing this research and the needs to determine the factors that lead to this result.

### 1.3 Conclusion

The Māori population able to speak te reo by age is declining according to the data collected in the 2006 census. The responsibility for ensuring the survival of te reo Māori must now be shared by the government, schools, school communities, iwi, hapū, whānau, parents and the young people who are currently in the education system. The younger generations will have the potential to fill the void left by their elders.

However, if all the reports, programmes and financial input into language development are not providing the desired outcome, then another approach must be found. A starting point is to pose the question why are students who have the opportunity to learn the language not taking up the challenge? For those who do, why are they not continuing to take it into adulthood, their career aspirations and their everyday experience? This research aims to answer some of these questions but first these issues need to be placed in context.

## 2. Relevant Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

The themes emphasised in the literature focus primarily on improving student engagement, improving student retention and raising the levels of academic achievement, all themes consistent with this research topic.

### 2.1.2 Mātauranga Māori

Mātauranga Māori (Māori epistemology) is a knowledge tradition that originated in ancient Polynesia and was conveyed to Aotearoa by the ancestors of the present day Māori. Western knowledge systems did not recognise the validity or reliability of mātauranga Māori and completely disregarded it as a legitimate research epistemology [8]. With the renaissance of te reo and tikanga Māori in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century mātauranga Māori has earned academic respect acknowledging that it possesses integrity in its own right.

### 2.2 Kaupapa (Themes)

There are many kaupapa (themes) common to the findings of initiatives developed to raise the levels of Māori educational achievement and to the retention of students in senior te reo Māori programmes in English medium schools. These kaupapa are discussed under the broad headings of whanaungatanga (relationships), te akomanga (the learning environment), tuakiri (identity) and te anga whakamua (future directions).

## **2.2.1 Whanaungatanga (Relationships)**

Whanaungatanga (relationships) is the most crucial element in encouraging positive student participation in education. Relationships take a number of different forms. The student-teacher relationship, the student-whānau relationship and the student-school relationship are some of these.

Whanaungatanga encourages positive student participation in education. The student-teacher and student-whānau connections are central to raising academic achievement. Success at school can be strongly influenced by the relationship and interaction whānau have with the school. Positive peer associations are of paramount importance for the academic progression of students. Therefore whanaungatanga needs to be of a positive nature to ensure students are provided with the best opportunities for educational engagement and academic success. Despite this, whanaungatanga alone does not guarantee positive student encounters with teaching and learning.

## **2.2.2 Akomanga (Learning Environment)**

The learning environment is another key element for student engagement and achievement. The learning environment includes the physical area of the classroom and the teaching that occurs in that room. Good pedagogical practices and the creation of culturally responsive teaching settings enhance Māori academic achievement.

While teachers' influence is moderated by a number of factors, such as students' prior learning and family contexts, it is teaching that has the greatest influence on education. [9].

School policy also needs to reflect academic priorities and expectations that provide holistic teaching programmes encouraging student engagement. In this way schools will create an environment where students feel valued and safe to identify as Māori.

## **2.2.3 Tuakiri (Identity)**

Ethnicity is difficult to identify through mere physical appearance alone. There are few clues to indicate whether a person of European origin is from the United Kingdom, Europe or New Zealand. Likewise a person of Asian lineage is from China, Korea or Vietnam or a person of Polynesian descent is from Tonga, Samoa or Hawaii. Indeed it is not

until a casual observation becomes more analytical that ethnic identity is more apparent. There are two major contributing factors leading to the recognition of ethnic identity. They are culture and language.

Identity is a product of cultural practice and is an important part of belonging. Māori identity is promoted by membership of groups such as whānau (family), hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe). Māori identity is enhanced by having knowledge of te reo and tikanga Māori.

Socio-linguistic researchers believe language is important for identity formation. Language is one of the most common ways of identifying a person and is an intrinsic part of socialisation.

## **2.2.4 Kāwanatanga (Leadership)**

Government policy has a direct influence on educational outcomes. It has been suggested that there is a 'one size fits all' policy that pervades the New Zealand educational system which does not meet the needs of many Māori students. Consequently some Māori students respond to a system that does not meet their needs by misbehaving or truancy. The assimilation policies of the 1930s which were fundamental to the education policies of the time were modified, allowing for some aspects of the Māori culture to be implanted into schools. However te reo Māori the heart of the culture was still excluded. Māori education between 1881 and 1930 was initially academic eventually becoming dominated by a curriculum aimed at producing manual labourers [10].

## **2.2.5 Te Anga Whakamua (Moving Forward)**

Career choice is a reflection of a person's emerging identity [11]. For some young people career choice is a reflection of a continued relationship with their parents' occupations, while for others career choice is based on societal expectations of them. The labour market generally has little bearing on career choice.

Three broad goals for Māori education were proposed by Mason Durie at the Hui Taumata Mātauranga in 2001. The first was, to live as Māori and is described as having access to all things Māori such as language, culture and marae. To actively participate as citizens of the world and promote Māori education so as to enable students to access and participate in technology, the economy, the Arts and Sciences is the intention of the second goal. A third goal states that to enjoy good health and a high standard of living requires Māori education to provide the foundation for students to maintain a healthy lifestyle and career.

It reaffirms the expectation that Māori students will be able to plan appropriately to achieve their

future career or educational aspirations. However, there is recognition that Māori students tend not to consider continuing education or future employment opportunities when choosing subjects.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1.1 Methodology**

This research is designed using a mixed research methodology. A qualitative methodology was selected in order to obtain rich data. Baseline data was obtained by using a quantitative method, a survey, where students were asked to answer thirteen questions relating to the research topic. They were given options from which to select and they were able to select as many options as they believed applied to them. The survey also allowed students to make comments about the options they chose. Once the survey data had been collated, a group of students was selected to participate in a focus group discussion. The data collected from the focus group interview was compiled alongside the survey data. The focus group was selected from the school which had the best record of student retention in senior te reo Māori programmes of the six schools that participated in the survey. The survey questions formed the basis of the focus group discussion and allowed the students to comment further on various aspects of learning te reo Māori.

A teacher was also involved as a research participant. The teacher was selected by virtue of their school having the highest rates of retention of students in senior te reo Māori programmes out of the six participant schools. An individual interview was conducted with the teacher. Once again the survey provided the foundation for the interview. The purpose of the individual interview with the teacher was to provide a more personal perspective and to bring some balance to the discussion.

#### **3.1.2 Participants**

This research was conducted across six English medium secondary schools in Waitaha, Canterbury, New Zealand. These schools represented a cross section of decile ranges, single sex and co-educational schools and were urban or rurally located. The students were both Māori and non-Māori in years 11 to 13. There were no private schools included in this cohort.

There were a total of 260 students learning te reo Māori in Year 9 across all six schools. Four schools offered te reo Māori as an optional subject. In two schools te reo Māori was compulsory for all Year 9 students. These students had one term of experiential learning in all of the optional subjects available.

There were a total of fourteen classes spread across the six schools. The number of contact hours for students in these programmes ranged from two to four hours per week.

#### **3.1.3 Kaupapa Māori Research**

Kana and Tamatea [12] have produced six principles which they believe are essential guidelines when conducting kaupapa Māori research. These principles underpinned the entire data collection process in order to provide cultural safety and security for the research participants and myself. The researcher was also cognisant of being an insider involved in this research as this research has a kaupapa Māori basis, has a te reo Māori basis and a te reo Māori teacher aspect to it. This approach has demonstrated clarity in data collection and analysis which will lead to the reliability and validity of the findings.

### **4. Findings**

#### **4.1.1 Tikanga and identity.**

This research found that learning tikanga was a primary reason students chose to learn te reo Māori. For a variety of reasons, learning te reo and tikanga Māori at school was the only means many of these students had available to establish a connection with their Māori identity. Many of the students who were second or third generation urban dwellers stated that learning about their own identity, their ancestral language, the ways of their tūpuna and their culture was really exciting. One student felt it was their responsibility to learn te reo Māori as it was a part of their heritage. Language, culture and identity are intertwined [13]. Many academics [14] agree with Sir James Henare's [15] statement that the Māori language is the essence of Māori culture and the two cannot be separated.

The te reo Māori class plays a vital role in connecting students with their heritage, promoting self belief and pride in their culture consequently encouraging active and positive participation in secondary education.

Likewise, identity was the reason most frequently given by students for learning te reo Māori. The programme provided students with the opportunity to learn about who they were and where they were from. The teacher too stated definitively that whakapapa (genealogy) and identity were the two most important reasons that students continue to learn te reo Māori at senior level. This class provided a safe environment where the students could be immersed in their culture and language.

Schools could take advantage of the students' desire to use te reo Māori as a means of discovering their identity and culture to enhance their learning.

Aspects of tikanga could be infused into the whole schools teaching and learning curriculum to provide cultural links promoting a sense of belonging.

#### **4.1.2 Building community and leadership.**

Whānau and community support were important for encouraging and maintaining students continued interest in learning of te reo Māori. This position is supported by a myriad of Ministry of Education policy documents [16]. As early as 2001 Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu showed its support of the assertion that community engagement is an essential component to engaging Māori in education when they developed and published (the now defunct) Te Kete o Aoraki [17] highlighting the value of utilising the diverse range of skills which exist within school communities.

Students enjoyed interacting with members of the community who volunteered to teach various cultural activities such as kapahaka and mau rākau. Participation in noho marae and Ngā Manu Kōrero speech competitions were also relished by students. These events provided opportunities to network with likeminded students from other schools. Such events also created authentic contexts and opportunities in which to consolidate learning while also exposing them to a wider community of te reo Māori speakers. Whānau played an important role in the school community.

Some students were offered advice and encouragement from their whānau, friends, parents and kaumātua when making decisions about subject choices. Other students had access to community groups such as marae for advice and encouragement. Active whānau involvement in their education however was limited.

Although some students stated that peers did not influence their subject choices the kaiako totally disagreed. The kaiako stated that peers played a central role in the choices students made. Accordingly, whānau, parents and peers were students' primary source when making decisions on subject choice, offering encouragement to continue and help with learning the language. They stated that parents wanted the best for their children's futures. Some students asked teachers for advice and others consulted the school career advisors.

The findings of this research would suggest that the participating schools should be encouraged to establish relationships, actively engage with and utilize the local expertise that exists within their communities. Schools may also like to consider creating and strengthening links with other schools which have similar aims and goals for their students. In this way schools could share the resources available and provide a broader range of knowledge and skills for the students to access. This finding aligns with other research conducted by:

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998), Bishop et al (2003) and The Ministry of Education (2003).

#### **4.1.3 Teaching and learning.**

Students stated that subject enjoyment was the single most influential factor when selecting subjects at senior levels. Students were encouraged when their teacher employed strategies that made the learning of te reo Māori fun and they found such strategies very effective. Those activities included composing songs and rhymes that the students would sing in other learning environments to enhance their understanding of te reo Māori. Subject enjoyment was very dependent on the personality and quality of the teacher.

Students who had established good relationships with teachers were also more likely to select the subjects they taught. Classroom practice, teacher expectations and positive relationships have been identified [18] as important factors in engaging students in education. Positive relationships combined with excellent classroom practice encouraged students to remain in the subject.

Conversely, students were less likely to select subjects taught by teachers with whom they did not have a positive relationship and/ or considered ineffective classroom practitioners. Some students' had decided not to continue learning te reo Māori because they had difficulty learning the language and others had left school. On the other hand some students believed the subject was too academic and that there was too much assessment involved. Furthermore, some believed that there were limited career opportunities available while others had succumbed to pressure from their peers. While teachers are the main players in influencing student retention, the school also has a role to play.

The creation of culturally inclusive and safe teaching environments, that value and embrace students' culture and heritage, are essential to engaging these students. The students stated that they enjoyed learning te reo Māori because their teachers created an environment where they felt safe being Māori. The students were steadfast in their belief that their teacher was sincerely concerned about their welfare and this helped create a safe and comfortable environment [19]. Cultural education outside of the classroom further encouraged students to continue learning te reo Māori [20].

Cultural interactions with other schools such as kapahaka and noho marae have had a positive effect on student retention levels in senior te reo Māori programmes. According to some students kapahaka and noho marae encouraged students to continue their study of te reo Māori. These events provided the students with opportunities to network with likeminded students from other schools and provided them with authentic contexts for the use of te reo

Māori. They also provided safe environments where students could speak freely reinforcing and contextualising their learning.

The school wide acknowledgement of te reo Māori and successful Māori students emerging as role models also contributed to healthy student retention levels in the programme. Students clearly felt that their language and culture is valued within their school community when they see their language and peers affirmed by the schools leaders. Hence the role of the principal has the potential to be the greatest encumbrance or advocate to the implementation of culturally responsive initiatives in the school. The teacher believes that the principal's position on the status of te reo Māori in the school greatly influences support from staff and students.

Principals and Boards of Trustees need to support the te reo Māori programmes in their schools. Without their support te reo Māori will never be taken seriously by the wider school community. The school will also struggle to attract a well qualified and passionate teacher of te reo Māori. In order to attract the best teachers of te reo Māori that are available schools need to provide a firm support network, particularly for single teacher departments. It is important that schools employ teachers who are proficient in tikanga and te reo Māori. It is equally important that those teachers are also excellent classroom practitioners and outstanding communicators who can forge good relationships with members of their school communities. These teachers *must* be able to provide encouragement and direction to engender enjoyment, a sense of achievement and maintain student motivation. Finally teachers of te reo Māori must be fully conversant with the NCEA assessment requirements to ensure that their students have every opportunity to experience success.

These recommendations are consistent with a significant body of earlier research findings. They should moreover provide the impetus for developing strategies that encourage the retention of students in senior te reo Māori programmes in English medium secondary schools located in the Canterbury region.

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