

MAORI LANGUAGE

What is this?

One of the three official languages of New Zealand (the others are English and New Zealand Sign Language)¹, Te Reo Māori is the basis of Māori culture and is considered a gift from the ancestors. It expresses the values and beliefs of the people and serves as a focus for Māori identity. It is generally recognised that language is a critical component of cultural identity which in turn is essential to the mental, physical and spiritual health of indigenous peoples – an expression of ways of life, thinking and shared cultural understanding.



Why is it important?

Māori language is a central part of Māori culture and is an important aspect of participation in society and identity. Māori language retention among the Māori population is significantly linked and associated with the broader cultural identity and heritage of New Zealand. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child upholds the right of a child to “enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language”.²

In the last 200 years, Te Reo Māori has experienced turbulent times. At the beginning of the 19th century it was the predominant language spoken in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As more English speakers arrived in New Zealand, the Māori language was increasingly confined to Māori communities especially with the introduction of English as the medium of instruction in the new school system. By the mid-20th century, Maori urban migration led to many people being isolated from their traditional communities and there were concerns that the language was dying out. Major initiatives launched in the 1980s have brought about a revival of Te Reo. The Kohanga Reo movement immersed infants in Te Reo from infancy to school age. The Maori language was recognised as an official language in 1987 and the Māori Language Commission was formed. Maori television and Māori language week have been introduced.

Currently it is estimated that there are about 50,000 fluent Te Reo speakers, however the Māori Language Commission believe that there are 10,000 fewer fluent speakers of Māori today than at the start of the decade.³

Data

Following the 2001 and 2006 census surveys were undertaken of the Māori population aged 15 years-old and over, looking at the health of the Māori language. Both surveys included self-assessment of three components of language proficiency, namely: speaking, reading and writing, with the 2001 survey also assessing listening. The results of this are shown overleaf.

The first table clearly indicates that the majority of Te Reo speakers are in the 55+ age bracket. In order for the language to survive long term, emphasis must be placed on learning Te Reo at earlier ages.

¹ <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/māori-language-week/history-of-the-māori-language>

² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

³ http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/issues_e/reo/index.shtml

Table 1 Proportion of Māori population proficient in Māori Language⁴

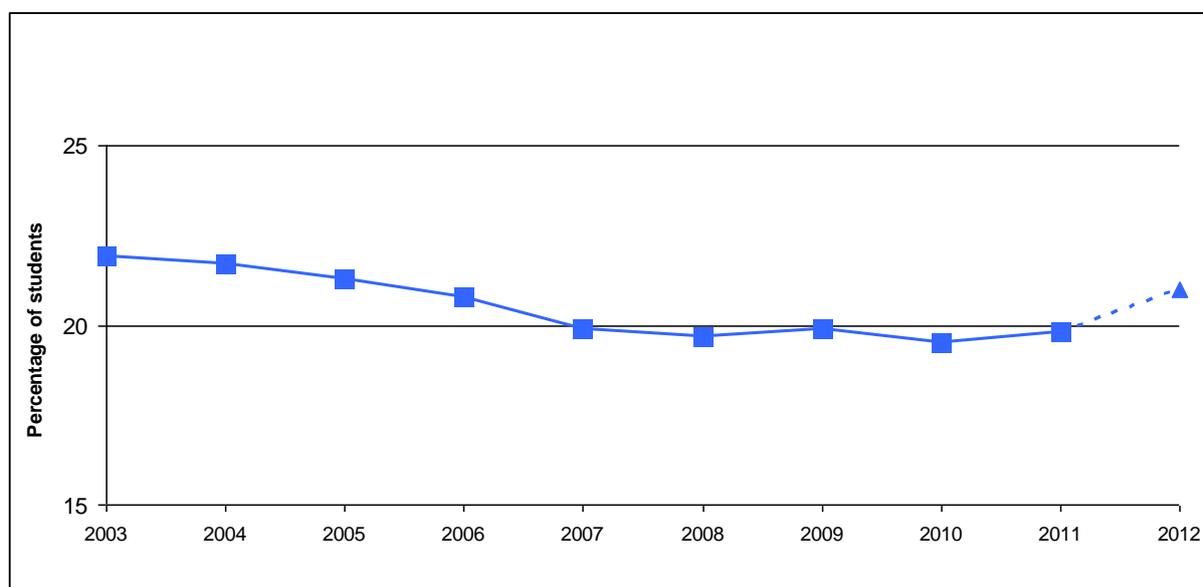
| Age Groups | Speaking | | Listening | | Reading | | Writing | |
|------------|----------|------|-----------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | 2001 | 2006 | 2001 | 2006 | 2001 | 2006 | 2001 | 2006 |
| 15-24 | 6.1 | 12.8 | 10.5 | NA | 10.3 | 20.5 | 9.9 | 16.4 |
| 25-34 | 3.4 | 11.1 | 6.8 | NA | 6.5 | 25.6 | 4.6 | 14.9 |
| 35-44 | 5.3 | 10.2 | 11.1 | NA | 8.4 | 15.8 | 8.0 | 13.0 |
| 45-54 | 12.2 | 10.3 | 22.0 | NA | 14.7 | 18.4 | 13.2 | 12.6 |
| 55+ | 29.8 | 29.3 | 41.2 | NA | 33.3 | 36.8 | 27.8 | 29.7 |
| 15+ | 9.2 | 14.1 | 15.3 | NA | 12.6 | 21.6 | 11.0 | 16.9 |

These surveys looked at enrolments in Te Reo. These are not age standardised so just show actual numbers.

Table 2 Students enrolled in Te Reo courses by ethnicity, 2001-2006⁵

| Ethnic Group | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|-----------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| European/Pākehā | 1,062 | 3,935 | 5,928 | 4,587 | 3,772 | 3,061 |
| Māori | 5,526 | 12,309 | 15,991 | 12,515 | 9,595 | 8,093 |
| Pasifika | 106 | 374 | 691 | 650 | 474 | 260 |
| Asian | 32 | 87 | 118 | 130 | 147 | 100 |
| Other | 71 | 283 | 318 | 186 | 173 | 174 |
| Unknown | 70 | 183 | 232 | 196 | 120 | 121 |

The following figure shows the proportion of students (primary and secondary) enrolled in Māori language education. This equates to around 151,000 students (19.8%) in 2011 with a target of 21% for 2012. This target comes from the Māori Language strategy *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success*.⁶

**Figure 1** Percentage of school students engaged in Māori language education, 2003-2011⁷

While the percentage has dropped since a high in 2003 it is remaining close to 20 percent - just under the target of 21%. This is a percentage of all students, not only Māori students.

⁴ Ministry of Education. 2008. Percentage of Māori population proficient in te reo Māori.

<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/indicators/main/education-and-learning-outcomes/1887>

⁵ ibid

⁶ <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspx>

⁷ http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/maori_education/36805#Table13

Impact on inequalities

In 2006, 18 per cent⁸ (4,554) of those people who belonged to the Māori ethnic group (25,725) in Christchurch could speak the Māori language. In 2007, 10% of Maori students left school with little or no formal attainment. They were almost three times more likely than Pākehā students to leave school with little or no formal attainment.⁹ The Māori Education strategy *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success* acknowledges that culture and education are interwoven and that Maori children and students “are more likely to achieve when they see themselves, their whānau, hapu and iwi reflected in the teaching content and environment, and are able to be Māori in all learning contexts”. Therefore it is important for educational providers to work out how to integrate Māori culture and Te Reo into classrooms to ensure that students can attain at the highest levels.

At school there are opportunities for many tamariki Māori to be taught in Te Reo and in English, however, the standard of education in both languages can vary and there are fewer resources available to tamariki Māori learning Te Reo. The availability of Māori medium material is improving but it is still a fraction of what is available in English, therefore there are fewer opportunities for tamariki Māori to learn about aspects of their world in Te Reo.

Solutions

Since the 1980s a number of institutions have been set up working toward recovering Te Reo. Even so, the decline of the Māori language has not been arrested and Table 2 indicates student numbers do not appear to be on the rise. There is a resurgence of Te Reo, but to remain viable as a language, Māori needs a critical mass of fluent speakers of all ages, and it needs the respect and support of the wider English-speaking and multi-ethnic New Zealand community.

In April 2011 *Te Reo Mauriora* was released, the purpose being to review the Māori language sector and review the Māori language strategy. The main two findings were to:

- a) re-establish Te Reo Māori in homes and
- b) establish a new infrastructure around governance, expenditure and delivery.¹⁰

The Māori medium education sector was established to ensure Te Reo Māori and Māori culture survived. Formal Māori medium schooling is still in early stages of development and is still building evidence base, however, this sector is growing.

Nga Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori are part of a wider work programme designed to include developing literacy and numeracy assessment tools for professional development for teachers of Te Reo and teachers in kaupapa Māori and other schools with a higher number of Māori children.

The Maori language commission is advocating for government institutes to be bilingual as part of standard practice giving Māori speakers not only the right to use Te Reo but also the right to be addressed. This would give a broader recognition of the language throughout New Zealand, reflecting our diverse society and also acknowledge that the ability to speak Maori is a vital and valued skill.¹¹

Connections with other issues papers

Social Connectedness, Racism

⁸ Ministry of Education. 2009. *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012*.

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Boards/TeachingAndLearning/MaoriEducationSuccess.aspx>

⁹ Ministry of Education. 2008. *State of Education in New Zealand 2008*.

<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/2551/34702/34656>

¹⁰ Te Puni Kōkiri. 2011. *Te Reo Mauriora: review of the Māori language sector and the Māori language strategy*.

<http://www.tpk.govt.nz/documents/te-reo-mauriora.pdf>

¹¹ http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/issues_e/reo/index.shtml

Data limitations

Data used is up to 2006. This does not reflect the initiatives put in place such as Ngai Tahu Kotahi Mana Kaika language programme set in line with their 2025 vision of 1000 homes speaking kai tahu dialect and other similar programmes and initiatives. Research, study and or evaluations to find out what has been happening in past 5 years, identify the most successful approaches to language resurgence, the effectiveness and or use or uptake of Te Reo in and out of the kainga (home) and data of Te Reo Māori being used as a first language in and out of the kainga would be useful in guiding where to put resources and focus for planning future effective initiatives.

The data relating to language proficiency is self assessed. There is no accurate data on Maori language competency against standardised measures.

Impact of the earthquakes

As time passes and these papers are updated the initial sections on the impact of the earthquake are going to be kept as an archive of what we thought the situation was at the time. Updates where possible are provided.

As at November 2012

The Ministry of Education has proposed an educational review of schools in Christchurch. As part of that review it has proposed the merger of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori O Te Whanau Tahī and Te Kura Whakapumau Te Reo Tutara Ki Waitaha as the schools have low rolls and low utilisation. This merger is currently being disputed by both schools.

As at November 2011

One of the significant influencers of language acquisition and revitalisation efforts in current day Canterbury has been Earthquakes that first hit the region on September 4th 2010. Although prior to that event, Te Reo was still in a status of poor health in Canterbury, there were, nevertheless, a number of arms of language revitalisation that were gaining in strength within the immersion and bilingual kura, the Māori communities and those initiatives driven out of the Kotahi Mano Kaupapa strategy by the language group of Te Rūnanga o Ngai Tahu.

The earthquake had the effect of compounding even more the ordinary challenges faced by individuals when committing to language acquisition and development. It is well known that Te Reo often takes the 'back seat' to other daily pressures experienced by individuals and whānau like work commitments, money troubles, lack of spare time and other whānau issues. However, when these ordinary challenges are then added to by the challenges of sheer survival; getting clean water, making houses water tight or finding alternative accommodation, ensuring whānau is safe and warm, finding food, maintaining employment, accessing schools and so on, then Te Reo becomes even further from the ranks of an immediate priority.

The earthquakes not only presented ongoing challenges for those who remained in Christchurch and wider Canterbury, but it also meant a significant number of Māori who were able to do so, chose to leave the area permanently and re-settle elsewhere. The impact of this exodus was a significant drop in the roles of a number of Te Reo bilingual and immersion kura, further strain of the limited fluent, qualified teaching resource base and a big drop in those studying Te Reo at the tertiary level. The drop in numbers of Māori was disproportionately high to non-Māori in all areas.

The challenge that remains is significant as those driving kaupapa reo in Canterbury try to strategise new ways to maintain the current language capacity whilst also desperately trying to attract more people to the kaupapa to ensure future sustainability if the revitalisation efforts.

Prepared by Community and Public Health with input from Hana O'Regan from CPIT.