

## 4. LEARNING TE REO

All the cohorts agreed strongly that increasing the pool of Māori language speakers is key to language revitalisation (93% Māori, 81% Pākehā and 89% Mixed). This was, however, often for cultural and not economic purposes.

*“What place in the world does being able to speak Māori have when say an individual has to deal with a foreign diplomat or is working with foreign scientists or world leaders? None” (Pākehā)*

How and where the language should be learned attracted diverse commentary:

- Respondents were not strongly convinced that saving the language relies on children learning te reo Māori in the home, with only 59% of Māori, 69% of Pākehā and 75% of Mixed agreeing. They instead gave classrooms - not parents - responsibility to pass the language onto children.
- Some Māori raised concerns about placing demands on parents to raise children in te reo. They argued that a strong language policy infrastructure means parents do not need to carry the responsibility.

*“There are other options now. There was a whole generation who could not speak in Maori but their children have the opportunity to learn” (Māori)*

Respondents were also asked whether te reo Māori should become a compulsory subject in the New Zealand curriculum.

- 74% of Māori and 60% of Mixed agreed te reo Māori should become a compulsory school subject, but this view was shared by only 46% of Pākehā.
- Nonetheless, the majority of Pākehā still argued for more education. Rather than opposing language education, their concern was about a current shortage of quality teachers and that compulsion may lead to resentment rather than support for te reo.

## 5. GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Respondents described what language situation policy should create, and what they see as immediate policy priorities. The vast majority proposed significant changes to current education policy in order to achieve a better societal status for te reo:

- The majority proposed more te reo education. They raised dissatisfaction with the curriculum, especially tokenising the language, not following through in later years, and poor quality of teaching.
- The majority focused on increasing use of te reo only in daily life, in mainstream media, and by the prime minister, or on fostering more positive attitudes to the language.
- Ambitions for language proficiency were low. The vast majority considered basic, conversational or an undefined proficiency as sufficient, rather than transforming te reo into a means of communication on par with English.
- Only a very small minority saw the ideal language pool as comprising only Māori New Zealanders. Respondents were much more likely to propose that all, or most New Zealanders, learn te reo to some level.
- No cohorts proposed language policy governance by Māori, nor referred to dialectal maintenance.
- No respondents referred to increasing transmission of te reo in Māori homes.
- 10% of Māori, 7% of Pākehā and almost 20% of Mixed would pursue no changes to the status quo, often claiming language is not a government issue, that New Zealand faces other policy priorities, or that intervention disturbs natural language change.

*“Languages die all the time, sentimentality and a flawed sense of cultural entitlement is the large portion of why te reo is around and has become an issue” (Māori)*

# TŌ TĀTOU REO



## Te reo Māori and the policy ideas of Kiwi youth

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## 1. THE PROJECT

It is still unclear how endangered languages can best be saved, and te reo Māori is no exception. Despite theorising by sociolinguists and the benevolent commitments of successive governments, gains in revitalising te reo Māori into a vibrant and increasingly used official language have been limited.

Academia oftentimes relies on western European ideas of language vitality to guide language revitalisation theory - such as expanding where the language is used, reinstating it in indigenous homes, modernising the grammar and lexicon, and instilling indigenous language literacy - without asking communities if this is what they want. At the same time, significant change is underway with Te Matawai to pass Māori language policy responsibility to iwi. This is the pinnacle of a gradual shift in policy from seeing te reo Māori as a matter for all Kiwis to one of Māori self-determination.

This project therefore asked New Zealand youth what they understand revitalising te reo Māori to actually mean as a policy and sociolinguistic endeavour, what sociolinguistic situation they believe policy should achieve, what they see as policy priorities, and indeed whether they agree with the current changes in language policy.

In 2014, University of Otago students aged between 18-24 who self-identify as Māori, Pākehā, or both (Mixed), were invited to completed a qualitative and quantitative online survey about the meaning, purpose and desirable directions of Māori language policy. 1,297 responses were received, including 1,090 Pākehā, 54 Māori and 153 Mixed.

This brochure presents only some findings of potential interest to New Zealand policy makers. Further information is available from the researcher, Nathan Albury, University of Oslo, at [n.j.albury@iln.uio.no](mailto:n.j.albury@iln.uio.no).

## 2. WHY REVITALISE?

Māori, Pākehā and Mixed respondents showed strong agreement that language revitalisation is worthwhile. However, only 56% of Māori, 58% of Pākehā, and 64% of Mixed agreed that te reo Māori is endangered. This means youth are not necessarily aware of the language's predicament. For example:

- Some Māori perceived language acquisition and language use to currently be increasing.
- Some Pākehā felt the language is spoken widely in Māori homes and that its official status alone means it is not endangered.
- Others felt the language is integral to New Zealand's existence and is safe by default.
- Nonetheless, many felt that current 'tokenising' of the language in ceremonies is limiting its communicative potential.

*"Kia ora and other common sayings will always be around. The frequency and depth of the language is at risk of nearly dying" (Pākehā)*

Cohorts responded similarly about appropriate rationales for revitalisation, including that:

- The language is part of Māori culture (98% Māori, 96% Pākehā, 98% Mixed).
- The language is part of a shared, interethnic, New Zealand identity (83% Māori, 70% Pākehā, 87% Mixed).
- The language is not crucial to Māori ethnic and cultural identity, with only 4% of Māori, 5% of Pākehā, and 5% of Mixed agreeing the language is part of being a real Māori.
- The language is not a valuable skill, with only 48% of Māori, 21% of Pākehā, 30% of Mixed considering this the case.

*"It is a cultural novelty rather than a useful investment" (Pākehā)*

## 3. RAISING THE STATUS

Majorities in all cohorts agreed that language revitalisation means raising the status of te reo Māori in New Zealand society (95% Māori, 71% Pākehā and 84% Mixed). Only 6% of Māori, 22% of Pākehā and 8% of Mixed respondents felt that New Zealand should be monolingual. Interestingly, Pākehā tended to be concerned with preserving New Zealand's bicultural linguistic identity, while Māori were concerned with accommodating New Zealand's many immigrant languages.

*"Many cultures function while having many spoken languages, New Zealanders are just lazy and stubborn" (Mixed)*

However, the cohorts disagreed on where te reo Māori should be used:

- The majority of Māori felt the language should be used across societal domains, including in official contexts, workplaces, homes, in professions and in cultural ceremonies. However, the majority of Pākehā felt the language should only be used in familial or informal contexts.
- Pākehā argued that Pākehā are monolingual, meaning it is unfair to use te reo in public environments. They argued that informal contexts can preserve the cultural value of te reo Māori while formal contexts use English as the language of the global economy.
- Pākehā did not propose changing public language arrangements. Instead they implicitly asserted the normativity of Pākehā monolingualism and that societal bilingualism means bilingualism amongst Māori New Zealanders.

*"In settings where there are only English speakers there needs to be a consideration for their lack of ability and understanding" (Pākehā)*