

Research explores motivations and barriers for learners of te reo Māori

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Credit: Victoria University of Wellington

Dr. Te Huia, with Māori language researchers Dr. Mauren Muller and Tai Ahu, conducted interviews with 57 Māori language speakers and learners across 12 regions nationally, as well as conducting an indepth survey during the national kapa haka festival Te Matatini, held in Wellington in February 2019, with the support of the 'Te Mitatini' reo Māori campaign.

The survey included views of 980 Māori and non-Māori people about their motivations and barriers to learning and using te reo Māori.

Dr. Te Huia says positive attitudes towards te reo Māori within a participant's community were important to validate their efforts. If learners lived in a community or worked in jobs where the language was spoken and valued, their attitude towards learning te reo improved. "There is a relationship highlighted in this research between attitudes, values and community language use," Dr. Te Huia says.

"Those significant relationships with Māori-speaking people whose opinions people value are really important for helping Māori language learners and speakers to cope with the impact of racism, which is a key barrier to encouraging Māori to begin the Māori language learning journey," she added.

Best practice language use could also be supported through improved mechanisms for resource-sharing between Māori speaking whānau, she says. "One of the key recommendations of this study is that these resources need to come together in a hub, which could be administered by a central governing body." The Te Kauwhata reo Māori initiative announced by the government in 2019 supports these research findings.

Language anxiety was another significant barrier to learning te reo Māori, with the road to resolving this being laborious and emotionally draining, Dr. Te Huia says.

"While the numbers of Māori learning te reo are increasing, the research has highlighted some access issues, and a lot of the challenges are around inherited trauma—factors related to colonization. If these are left unaddressed it means Māori heritage language learners inaccurately attribute negative labels to themselves based on the challenges that they may experience when attempting to learn. Learners and educators need

better tools to identify and cope with the impact of historical trauma on the language learning processes," Dr. Te Huia says.

"The research results have also seen us recommend again that we need to invest in the teachers of te reo Māori. We need to invest in enthusiastic teachers who know about the language, who can teach it well, breaking it down to then be able to teach it. We need to encourage the training of empathetic teachers, that understand our colonial history so they can understand behaviors of our students, particularly when they are withdrawing and displaying behavioral traits related to the impact of colonization."

Dr. Te Huia thinks the future of te reo Māori is strong, and over the past decade she has observed te reo Māori becoming more visible in Aotearoa, particularly in the arts and through mainstream social media platforms. "Use of Māori in public spaces supports acceptance and normalization of te reo Māori, thereby increasing and encouraging the acceptance and use of Māori people and Māori [language](#) learners," she says.

More information: This research was commissioned by Te Mātāwai as part of their Te Maihi Māori Strategy and the full report will be available on the Te Mātāwai website shortly alongside a number of Māori language research projects that Te Mātāwai have commissioned: www.tematawai.maori.nz

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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