

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE REVITALIZATION OF THE MAORI LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

The article considers the significance of bilingual education in the revitalization of the indigenous language in New Zealand. New Zealand has three national languages: English, Maori, and the New Zealand Sign Language, with English being the most commonly used. Maori make up approximately 15 percent of the population. Maori is one of the well-known endangered languages. Since 1987, Maori has been legislated as an official language. It is worth noting that there have been a lot of initiatives to revitalize and encourage the Maori language. An important development for the preservation of the Maori language has been an initiative aimed at very young children. We have highlighted the importance of Maori language immersion primary schools (Kura Kaupapa Maori) and secondary schools (Wharekura). Te Kohanga Reo (language nests) was the first Maori language school where Maori grandparents passed on their language and customs to their grandchildren. It has since developed to all levels of education and has been incorporated into the state education system. The first bilingual Maori programs were created either entirely independently of the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Kura Kaupapa Maori), or as a part of the current education legislation within the core English programs (immersion programs and bilingual programs). It needs to be noted that the immersion program has some advantages over other programs, as it can create a favourable environment for teaching Maori children. The most effective bilingual schools are also those with the highest level of immersion. The authors come to the conclusion that in the past decade there has been a steady increase in the percentage of Maori at all levels of education, and at the same time there has been a renaissance in the teaching and learning of the Maori language and culture, partly through increasing numbers of bilingual classes in primary and secondary schools.

**Keywords:** Maori, indigenous, education, bilingual, New Zealand.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Language contact occurred in New Zealand when the first Europeans arrived from the seventeenth century, bringing Maori into contact with English. During the first voyage of Captain James Cook on behalf of the British Empire in 1769, the word «Maori» meaning 'ordinary' was identified as the term describing the

indigenous New Zealanders. In the early 1800s, when Europeans first began to settle in New Zealand, Maori was a thriving language.

In 1840, Maori and the British Crown signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which provided the basis for British colonization and the foundations of the new nation. In 1867, the government decreed that only English would be used in the native schools. Through the late 1880s, new communicable diseases significantly decreased the size of the Maori population, which occurred alongside rapid growth of the non-Maori population. Although it was estimated in 1913 that 90% of Maori children were native speakers of Maori (Reese, Keegan, McNaughton, Kingi, Carr, Schmidt, Mohal, Grant, 2016, p. 342). The Maori population was largely monolingual in Maori during the nineteenth century, was largely bilingual throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and is now largely monolingual in English. Maori migration to urbanized areas of the country (the cities of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch) in the 1930s and 1950s and the separation from their traditional cultural traditions created a real threat to the ethnocultural survival of Maori. This was due both to the rapid pace of industrialization of the country and the poor living conditions in the villages. The 1960s marked a period of tense interethnic relations and active cultural and political protest against racial discrimination.

The number of the Maori people who left the rural areas and moved to the cities has increased rapidly. In 1961, New Zealand cities were home to 41% of the total Maori population and 75% of the European population. In 1970-1980, Maori youth began to unite in criminal groups (Nga Tamatoa, Te Reo Maori Society, Nga Kaiwhakapumau), and there were frequent cases of mass public unrest in the form of protests and petitions. In 1973, 30,000 Maori collected signatures on a petition demanding the restoration of the position and status of their native language lost during the colonial period. Since European contact and settlement, the Maori language has experienced a history of decline and revitalization. Events in the colonial period directly influenced the language, causing a marked decline in the number of speakers. By the 1970s, R. Benton's research (1983) showed that Maori was on the verge of language death. The turning point for government support for Maori was the Waitangi Tribunal's (1986) publication of their Report on the Maori Language Claim and the ensuing 1987 Maori Language Act, giving the language official recognition for the first time. As awareness of the threat of language death arose, Maori communities began to engage in language revitalization. The most important of these initiatives have been the kohanga reo (language nest), preschool education in an environment that is linguistically and culturally Maori, and immersion schooling especially at primary level. New Zealand's estimated Maori population was 744,800, up 1.4% from the estimate for the previous year (Statistics New Zealand, 2018)

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

Until the mid-twentieth century, Maori spoke their native language. By 1930, 10% of the Maori population no longer spoke the Maori language. Four decades later, in the 1970s, 74% of Maori could not speak their native language.

Under the Maori Language Act, the Maori language was declared the official language of New Zealand in 1987. The Maori Language Commission, established in 1987, has its first few years been concerned mainly with the creation of new vocabulary and licensing of interpreters, and with ascertaining the views of Maori communities and interest groups on the future of the language.

The 1970s are seen as the start of the modern Maori language revitalization movement. Working for the New Zealand Council of Educational Research in the 1970s, Richard Benton undertook the first New Zealand sociolinguistic survey of knowledge and use of the Maori language. Richard Benton indicated that only 70,000 fluent speakers of Maori remained, about 5% of the Maori population at the time (Benton, 1996, p.170). He subsequently strongly advocated both Maori language immersion and bilingual education programs as means of stemming the language loss which his survey had identified. The Benton Survey (1983) demonstrated the perilous state of Maori. This seminal research is a key milestone in the history of the Maori language. These findings helped to stimulate a Maori revitalization effort with a particular focus on producing a new generation of younger speakers.

Bilingual education in New Zealand was introduced in the form of recognized programs in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, the conditions that led to the need for a formal settlement were created over 150 years as a result of colonization processes. In the 1950s, the Maori language was taught in some secondary schools in New Zealand. In those years, there was a need for the development of educational and methodological literature, linguistic dictionaries, and training of qualified teaching staff. An important step of the government in 1959 was the creation of the Maori Language Advisory Committee. This Committee was responsible for the creation of the first series of Maori pedagogical textbooks, Te Rangatahi, and the

linguistic magazine Te Whare Kura, which published works on the Maori language in New Zealand. The Oxford dictionary of the Maori language (1978) includes words and combinations of the distinctive vocabulary.

Despite the significant changes that have taken place since then, in particular the revival of Maori secondary education, recent statistics indicate that the Maori language is still under threat of extinction. In 1995, a General language study found that 9 out of 10 New Zealanders, then 3.8 million people, were first native English speakers. At the same time, a study of the Maori language found that among Maori adults, only 20% (about 68,000) spoke the language well or very well, and most of them were middle-aged or older. More worryingly, 58% of Maori adults could not speak Maori other than a few words or phrases.

It is for these reasons that the growth of bilingual education in New Zealand has accelerated. The first bilingual Maori programs were created either entirely independently of the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Kura Kaupapa Maori), or as part of current education legislation within the core English programs (immersion programs and bilingual programs). Today, all Maori bilingual programs are publicly funded and are free forms of education open to all New Zealand students.

R. Benton claimed that Maori began experimenting with bilingual education in the late 1970s in small rural schools such as Ruatoki (Benton, 1981, p. 40). However, significant changes occurred in 1982 after a series of meetings of elders to discuss the disappearance of the Maori language. This led to the opening of Te Kohanga Reo – the first Maori language school near Wellington, where fluent Maori speakers, usually grandparents, taught children the Maori language and culture and helped parents learn the Maori language with their children.

Although Kohanga Reo (language nest) was motivated by the needs of children, teachers also had to improve their knowledge of the Maori language and tikanga (customs). In addition, parents of youngsters had to confront their inability to speak Maori. R. Boshier suggested that Kohanga Reo (language nest) was an adult education exercise. By focussing on elderly teachers, parents with mediocre language skills, and eager youngsters, what started as a kindergarten turned into a national learning movement (Boshier, 2015, p. 218).

By the end of 1983, 148 schools were operating nationwide, with between 20 and 40 students. The increase in the number of educational institutions led to an increase in the use of the Maori language. In 1994, there were 819 students. The greatest prospects in the dissemination and cultural promotion of the Maori language had educational structures in which students were trained from an early age, which provided an effective continuous language education. In 1985, Hoani Waiti marae (the first specialized Maori school) was opened near Auckland. The first bilingual Maori school was opened under the leadership of the New Zealand Ministry of Education in 1978. Examples of a number of Maori social initiatives were the teaching activities of societies such as Te Ataarangi and Te Wananga o Raukawa.

The social and communicative significance of the Maori language as a means of education in school and the promise of the language policy method attracted parents of students, teachers and volunteer organizations. They developed an educational and methodological framework, as well as a special method of teaching the Maori language to both the Maori ethnic group and people who did not belong to this community. B. Spolsky claimed that New Zealand had 54 Kura Kaupapa Maori schools, 11 specialized and 86 bilingual schools in 1997. 27,000 Maori students and 5,000 other ethnic groups attended the Maori language schools in 1998, (Spolsky, 2005, p. 75).

Since the 1980s of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, the language policy in New Zealand has been constructive, centralized, that is mandatory on a national scale and is regulated by the Ministry of Education. The constructive policy refers to a policy aimed at expanding the communicative functions of languages, their scope of application, increasing their social and communicative role, and creating and developing literary languages.

Among Maori speakers, 73.4 % Maori are monolingual and 23.8% are bilingual. Basically, they are representatives of business circles and intellectuals. According to 2001 statistics, the number of Maori speakers was estimated at 160, 524 people, that is 4.6% of the population of New Zealand. In 2001, 19,986 people who did not belong to the Maori ethnic group claimed proficiency in the indigenous language of New Zealand, of which 13,000 were native speakers (Starks, Harlow, Bell, 2005, p. 20).

In 2002, the Maori language was studied in language nests (kohanga reo – a pre-school preparatory period of communication between teachers and children in the Maori language) and some pre-school educational institutions. Approximately, 31 % of enrolled Maori children in pre-school were in one of the 545 stimulating language nests where 80% of the school time was spoken in Maori.

In 2003, 5,000 Maori students attended cultural and language primary schools (kura kaupapa) and 1,000 students attended secondary schools. Of the total number of secondary school students, only 9% of Maori students studied their native language as a subject.

### **3 RESULTS**

Bilingual education is where school subjects are taught in two languages and students become fluent speakers and writers in both languages by the end of their schooling. Maori-medium education is immersion education where Maori is used for teaching most of the time.

In Maori-medium programmes, most of the students speak Maori as their second language – most come from homes where English is the first language. Maori-medium programmes focus on improving the students' Maori language skills and they also aim to revitalise the Maori language (May, Hill, Tiakiwai, 2006, p.4).

Now that Maori-medium education is becoming more well-established, S. May stresses the need to revisit the question of how best to develop alternative forms of additive bilingual education for Maori in so called mainstream education, where over 90% of Maori students are still being taught. S. May states that this requires a close and active engagement with the extensive international research literature on the various approaches to bilingual education that have been adopted in different educational contexts, including research on dual-medium education which may be more practicable in mainstream education contexts (May, 2002, p. 19).

Bilingual Maori programs are divided into four levels depending on their degree of immersion (Maori language instruction): Level 1 (81-100%); Level 2 (51-80%); Level 3 (31-50%); Level 4 (12-30%). While the clear majority of the 25,580 students in Maori-medium education are in Levels 1 (11, 064) and 2 (5,073) – 16,137 – it is equally clear that Levels 3 and 4 do not reach the minimum threshold criterion of 50% instruction in the target language which is regarded as a necessary condition for effective bilingual education in the research literature (May, Hill, 2005 p. 1570).

These levels are used by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to fund immersion programs. The immersion program has some advantages over other programs, as it can create a favourable environment for teaching Maori children. The most effective bilingual schools are also those with the highest level of immersion (Level 1). However, the study also shows that partial immersion schools can also be effective if at least 50% of the teaching is in Maori (Level 2 programs).

In New Zealand, Maori programs have been expanded in recent years, especially in English. But some do not use Maori enough as a language of instruction. This applies to Level 3 and 4 programs. Although these programs are culturally important, they are not as effective as Level 1 and Level 2 immersion programs, where the immersion rate is at least 50%. There are significant benefits from higher levels of immersion. Speaking, reading and writing learning in Maori means that a learner is more likely to succeed in studies, both in Maori and in English.

At the primary school level, a student must complete secondary education in the Maori language for a minimum of 6, preferably 8, years. One way to ensure that students are fluent in Maori and English is to start primary education with 90% of teaching in Maori and 10% in English, and to increase this to 50/50 within 4-6 years. Another way is to start with 100% immersion in the Maori language, but introduce English as a subject after a few years. There is no set year for starting English language training. In some Maori programs, English begins with 1 or 2 hours a week.

From 2000, emphasis on home and community support has come to be the main focus of government and tribal language strategies and the Maori Language Commission has invested significant funding on initiatives to support home and community language use. J. King claimed that since 2004, 1,5 million dollars per year has been allocated to Te Ataarangi to deliver the Kainga Kororero (speaking homes) initiative which works with families to increase language use in the home. Since 2001 the Maori Language Commission has administered the Ma Te Reo fund which provides 2,5 million dollars annually to community organizations to support Maori language projects, such as running camps, devising plans, or producing language resources (King, 2018, p. 600).

Effective secondary education for Maori means that education must be conducted in Maori at least 50% of the time, and preferably more, as in Level 1 and 2 programs. Learning a second language at school at the same level as the first language takes at least six years. The main result, however, is the ability to read and write well in two languages. Bilingualism, or the ability to read and write in two languages, is a key educational advantage.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Maori language endangerment began when Maori moved into English speaking environments. The decrease in the number of fluent Maori language speakers since the 1900s is intimately connected with the movement of Maori into those social, political, and economic environments where communication is always in English, such that the steady loss of Maori language speakers and the decline in the generational transmission of the Maori language accelerated after World War Two with the migration of Maori into urban areas. D. Day and P. Rewi pointed out that since then efforts to secure the Maori language as a language with modern relevance and use have tended to focus on educational initiatives and more recently on Maori communities and families through the home and Maori tribal and family groups (Day, Rewi, 2014, p.2).

The 1970s are considered as the beginning of the modern Maori language revival movement. Richard Benton encouraged both Maori language immersion and bilingual education programs as means of stemming the language loss which his survey had identified. These findings helped to stimulate a Maori revitalization effort with a primary stress on producing a new generation of younger speakers. The greatest perspectives in the promotion of the Maori language had academic institutions in which students were trained from an early age, which provided an effective continuous language education. It is worth noting that there has been a renaissance of Maori culture in New Zealand and the need to revitalize the language is widely supported. Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori emerged as two forms of Maori medium education that sought to ensure the survival of the language, and are now well known internationally. In addition to efforts focusing on the compulsory school sector, universities and other tertiary institutes and community organisations such as Te Ataarangi have taught Maori language to many thousands of learners and undertaken a great deal of Maori language promotion. Maori-medium programs focus on improving the students' Maori language skills and they also aim to revitalize the Maori language. Effective Maori-medium education means teaching must be in Maori for at least 50% of the time, and preferably more, as in Level 1 and 2 programs. We have highlighted the importance of immersion or bilingual schools in New Zealand that tend to be focussed on the preservation and revitalisation of Maori. Knowledge of the Maori language is the key to academic success to the Maori people. The authors have concluded that in the past decade there has been a persistent growth in the percentage of Maori at all levels of education, and at the same time there has been a renaissance in the teaching and learning of the Maori language and culture, partly through increasing numbers of bilingual classes in primary and secondary schools.

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