

Students' Motivations to learn te reo Māori

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Demand for te reo Māori courses has been high across the country, and providers of te reo courses are reporting being at full capacity with long waiting lists in many centres. The surge in student numbers has prompted one tertiary education institution to investigate their students' motivations for learning te reo and their aspirations for speaking and using it in their lives. In 2018, a team of Māori and non-Māori researchers conducted ten focus groups with students in five locations and campuses. Māori students reported it was their duty to keep the language alive as many of them are from the generation of speakers who were not taught te reo by their parents as a form of protection. Others noted that they wanted to understand what was being said on their marae and the aspiration was that one day they could step in to the role of kaikaranga or kaikōrero for their whānau on the marae. This was reinforced by some respondents reporting that key members of their whānau had passed away and there was no-one to step in to their role, which was their motivation to learn te reo. Others reported that learning te reo also gave them a sense of identity. Non-Māori students reported they felt a sense of responsibility to learn to speak Māori as one of New Zealand's official languages; many participants articulated political reasons for learning, and saw their learning te reo as a small part of the country moving forward together in a quest for social equity. Some people reported that attitudes were changing, and they were inspired by other Pākehā speaking Māori in the media. Clearly, there are many motivations for both Māori and non-Māori to learn te reo, and the upsurge in enrolments in te reo Māori courses around the country seems to be indicative of a shift in attitudes and interest, whether for personal, family-related or political reasons.