

2001 Survey on the health of the Māori language¹

This article presents results from the 2001 Survey on the Health of the Māori Language. Te Puni Kōkiri commissioned Statistics New Zealand to conduct the survey, the results of which will form part of a wider strategy aimed at revitalising Māori language.

Nearly 5,000 adults, who identified with the Māori ethnic group in the 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings, were asked to participate in the survey which took place in May and June 2001. Respondents were asked about the depth of their ability to speak, listen, read and write in te reo Māori, and their use of these skills in a range of contexts. The questionnaire covered the following broad subject areas concerning Māori language:

- language acquisition
- contexts for speaking and hearing Māori
- contexts for reading and writing Māori
- visibility of Māori language
- learning Māori
- children learning Māori
- Māori revitalisation activities.

This article highlights some key findings from each of these subject areas, beginning with a general overview.

General overview

Respondents were asked to classify themselves into one of the following categories for each of the language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing:

- very well
- well
- fairly well
- not very well
- no more than a few words or phrases.

Results showed that 42 percent of Māori aged 15 years and over (136,700 people) have some Māori language speaking skills – that is, they could speak more than a few words or phrases in Māori. This can be further divided into 9 percent who could speak Māori ‘well’ or ‘very well’, and 33 percent who could speak Māori ‘fairly well’ or ‘not very well’. The remaining 58 percent could speak ‘no more than a few words or phrases’. These proportions can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Māori Language Proficiency by Level of Skill

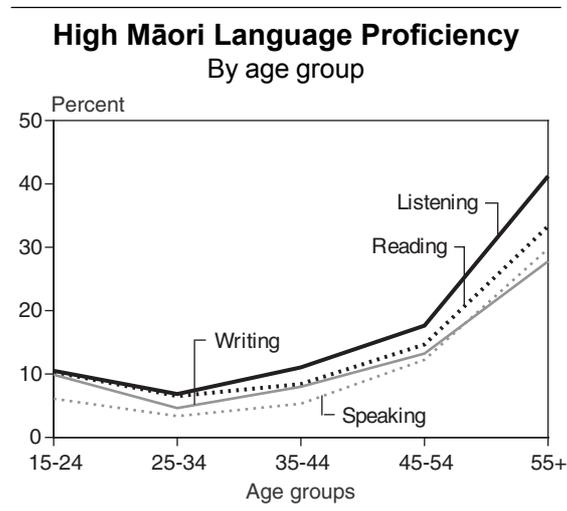
	Speaking Proficiency	Listening Proficiency	Reading Proficiency	Writing Proficiency
	Percent			
Well/very well	9	15	13	11
Fairly well/not very well	33	44	40	33
<i>Some Māori language skills</i>	2	59	53	44
No more than a few words or phrases	58	41	47	56
Total	100	100	100	100

¹ This article was prepared by the Social and Population Statistics Group of Statistics New Zealand.

This language proficiency pattern was fairly consistent across the other language skills of listening, reading and writing, although the passive language skills of listening and reading were more commonly reported than the active language skills of speaking and writing.

The proportion of people with higher proficiency skills, (ie people who could speak 'well' or 'very well'), increased with age, as can be seen in Graph 1. Another notable feature of the graph is that higher proficiency skills appear to be more common in the youngest age group (15 to 24 years) than in the second-to-youngest age group (25 to 34 years).

Graph 1



Within the youngest surveyed age group of 15 to 24 years, women were more likely than men to report higher proficiency skills. Eight percent of women aged 15 to 24 years said they could speak Māori 'well' or 'very well' (3,900 women), compared with 4 percent of men in this age group (1,600 men). This age group showed the biggest gender difference.

The reasons for the difference between men and women in the 15 to 24 years age group are not entirely clear, but may be related to the fact that young women are more likely to participate in Māori language courses, or that they are more likely to come into contact with revitalisation activities through their children's education (see the sections on learning Māori and children learning Māori).

In terms of regions, Northland had the highest proportion of Māori adults with higher speaking language proficiency skills – 17 percent of people in this region could speak Māori 'well' or

'very well'. Gisborne/Hawke's Bay and the Bay of Plenty had the next highest proportion with 13 percent each. Nearly one-third (29 percent) of Māori adults live in these four regions.

Language acquisition

One means of learning Māori language is through exposure to it during childhood. The survey found that those with higher speaking proficiency skills were more likely to have been exposed to Māori language during childhood. Over 80 percent (24,200 people) of those who said they could speak Māori 'well' or 'very well' said that adults had spoken to them in Māori during their childhood. There was a strong age factor, with close to half of these people (48 percent) appearing in the 55 and over age group.

In comparison, 47 percent of those who could speak Māori 'fairly well' or 'not very well' said adults spoke to them in Māori, and 24 percent of those who could speak 'only a few words or phrases' said adults spoke to them in Māori.

Contexts for speaking and hearing Māori

Those people who could speak more than a few words of Māori were asked questions about where they spoke the language. Few people conversed in Māori within the household as Table 2 shows. Adults appeared to be less likely to have conversations with other adults in Māori (excluding their partners), but more likely to have conversations with children in Māori.

Conversations outside the household were more likely in contexts where Māori language use has traditionally been strong, such as hui, marae activities, helping out at school, and clubs or interest groups (see Table 3)

This pattern was more noticeable for listening to Māori with 50 percent of those who had participated in marae activities in recent months reporting that they heard 'all Māori' or 'mostly Māori' spoken.

A high proportion of people listened to Māori language on Māori radio – 73 percent or 178,500 people with access to a Māori radio station, listened to Māori radio at least once a month. An even higher proportion watched Māori programmes on television – 85 percent or 274,700 people with a television, watched Māori programmes at least once a month.

Table 2

**Percentage of Māori Adults
Who Speak Māori in the Home, and Whom they Speak to**

Person Spoken to	All Māori/ Mostly Māori	Māori Equally with English	Some Māori/ No Māori (ie less than 50% Māori)
Parents	3	6	91
Spouse/partner	6	7	88
Pre-school children	8	11	81
Primary school children	6	10	84
Secondary school children	5	10	85
Other adults	4	8	88

Table 3

**Percentage of Māori Adults
Who Speak Māori Outside the Home, and Whom they Speak to**

Person Spoken to	All Māori/ Mostly Māori	Māori Equally with English	Some Māori/ No Māori (ie less than 50% Māori)
Visiting relatives/friends	9	10	82
Working	7	7	85
Sport	3	7	90
Helping out at school	20	12	68
Shopping	1	4	94
Religious activities	21	11	68
Club or interest group	20	16	63
Hui	23	19	58
Marae activities	32	17	51
Socialising	3	8	89

Contexts for reading and writing Māori

Those people who could read more than a few words or phrases in Māori were asked what sort of material they read. In the four weeks preceding the survey, most people reported that they had read pamphlets (56,800 people or 33 percent), and children's books (52,200 people or 30 percent) written in the Māori language.

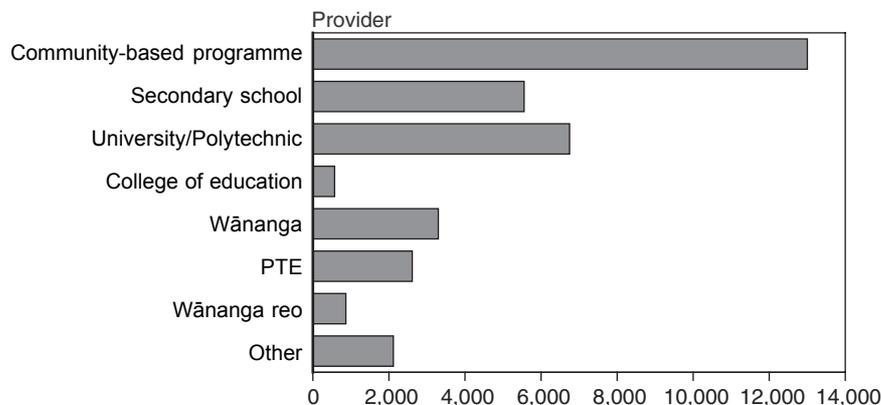
Less than half of those who could write more than a few words or phrases in Māori, said they had actually written something in Māori in the four weeks preceding the survey (58,600 people or 41 percent). These people were most likely to have written letters or notes in Māori (38,600 people or 27 percent of those who had written something in this period).

Visibility of Māori language

Survey respondents were asked to indicate how much Māori language they heard when dealing with professionals and government agencies. People reported hearing at least some Māori language spoken by teachers in immersion schools (72 percent of those who used this service), and by staff in Māori health services (55 percent). Conversely, Māori was least likely to be heard when visiting general health professionals (10 percent), and when dealing with Work and Income New Zealand/Child Youth and Family staff (13 percent) and the police (13 percent). In other words, Māori was most likely to be heard in those contexts where people expect to hear Māori spoken, and least likely to be heard outside those contexts.

Graph 2

Participation in a Māori Language Course By provider



As far as the visibility of written Māori is concerned, those who had seen official signs, forms and documents in the 12 months preceding the survey were most likely to report seeing 'a lot' or 'quite a few' signs in government/public buildings (77 percent) or on official forms/pamphlets (70 percent), and least likely to see the language in official correspondence (51 percent).

Learning Māori

Another means of learning the language is through formal educational courses. Some 11 percent of Māori adults (34,900 people) said they had been a student in a Māori language course in the 12 months preceding the survey. Women were more likely than men to participate in such courses (23 percent of women participated compared with 14 percent of men). Nearly two-fifths (38 percent) of participants were in the 15 to 24-year age group.

The most common provider was a community-based programme – 13,000 people or 37 percent participated in this type of course, as can be seen in Graph 2.

Children learning Māori

Māori adults who were responsible for the schooling of children under the age of 15 were also asked whether those children had been

learning Māori in the 12 months preceding the survey. A total of 132,800 Māori adults reported they were responsible for children's learning. Women were more likely than men to be responsible for children's education. Overall, 80,800 women were responsible, and the majority of these women (75 percent) were aged 15 to 25 years.

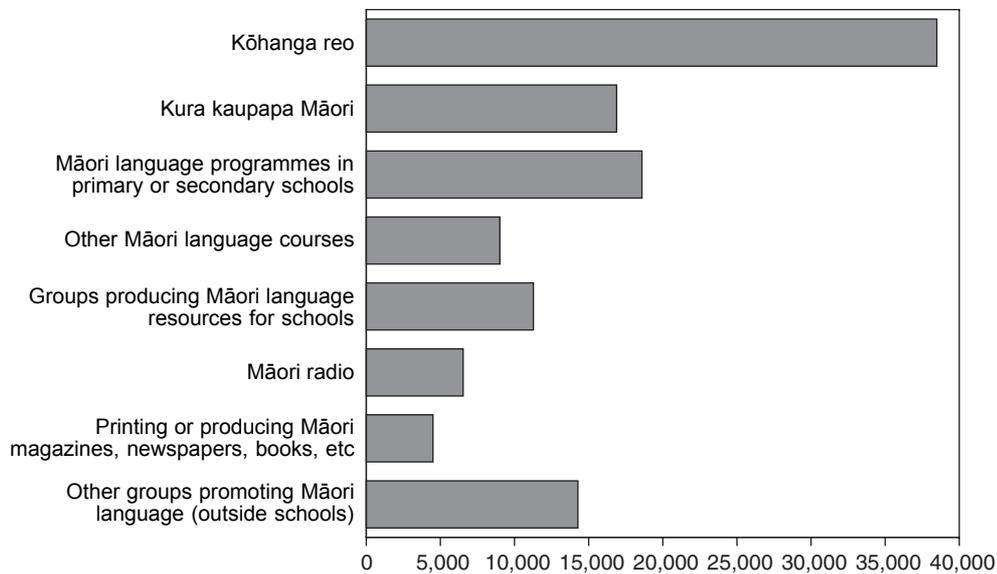
Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of those adults responsible for children's education said the children had been learning Māori. The most common type of Māori language programme was partial immersion (35,400 adults reported that children were learning Māori through a partial immersion programme).

Māori revitalisation activities

Close to one-fifth of Māori adults (19 percent or 60,900 people) said they had helped or worked for one or more Māori language revitalisation initiatives in the 12 months preceding the survey. The majority of these helpers were women (66 percent). These people supported a variety of initiatives (see Graph 3). Kōhanga reo received the most support with 38,400 people or 12 percent of all Māori adults assisting in some way. These people were generally unpaid workers, with 83 percent of kōhanga reo helpers saying they received no payment for their work.

Graph 3

Support for Māori Language Revitalisation Initiatives



More information

Data tables and methodological information about the survey can be found on the websites of Te Puni Kōkiri (www.tpk.govt.nz), Statistics New Zealand (www.stats.govt.nz), and Te Taura Whiri I te Reo Māori/ Māori Language Commission (www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz).

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