

Children and Young People's Voices Project



Results from survey on the Official Languages of New Zealand

During 28-Oct – 11 November 2015, 411 children in 5 schools took part in a survey about the official languages of New Zealand.

Most children thought all students should have the opportunity to learn te reo Māori and New Zealand sign language in school. You can re-use the italicised quotes from this report if you refer to the "Children's Commissioner's School Voices Project". Note that the children's spelling and grammar have generally been corrected to make quotes easier to read.

Some comments about why all students should learn te reo Māori at school are below.

Some students learn te reo Māori at school and some don't. Do you think all students should learn te reo Māori at school?

Yes, I think all students should learn te reo Māori at school	No, I don't think all students should learn te reo Māori at school	I don't know
62%	19%	19%

Tell us why:

(Or why not)

Tell us why:

<i>"to learn how to speak another language"</i> <i>"Because it gives people the opportunity to learn a language unique to our country"</i> "BECAUSE IT IS GOOD FOR MĀORI PEOPLE" <i>"because only 4% of new Zealanders can speak Māori"</i> <i>"because Māori was the first culture in New Zealand"</i> <i>"because te reo is one of the official languages in New Zealand"</i> <i>"so the New Zealand traditions don't go extinct like Australia"</i> <i>"because we should get to learn about the special culture in New Zealand even if we don't understand we shall have a try"</i> <i>"so they can know our tikanga"</i> <i>"because we are the only country to be gifted this language and some people don't even know the word kia ora (hello)"</i>	<i>"because I am not that interested"</i> <i>"because it's not fair for the other students from around the world if they come to a school and they won't understand as well"</i> <i>"because the language of te reo is pretty challenging (for) younger pupils"</i> <i>"I think it should be based on willingness, and whether they've learnt enough English skills. It all depends on choice, and circumstances"</i> <i>"because our country is multi-cultural and kids from other countries struggle (with) English itself"</i> <i>"because some students can't pronounce Māori and get teased"</i> <i>"because some people don't want to learn it, and to some people other education is more important"</i> <i>"because I am too lazy to learn"</i>	<i>"because some kids don't want to or have a lot of trouble learning"</i> <i>"because people might not want to learn the language and some do"</i> <i>"we learn it already"</i> <i>"It isn't my place to say"</i> <i>"It's not really important"</i> <i>"all kids and teachers should get to decide if they want to learn Te reo Māori"</i>
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Some comments about why all students should learn Sign Language at school are below:

Some students learn Sign Language at school and some don't. Do you think all students should learn Sign Language at school?

Yes, I think all students should learn Sign Language at school	No, I don't think all students should learn Sign Language at school	I don't know
62%	17%	21%

Tell us why:

(or why not)

<p><i>"I would like to learn sign language so I can do it with my friends"</i></p> <p><i>"so we can communicate with the kids who are deaf"</i></p> <p><i>"because some old people have hearing problems"</i></p> <p><i>"because sometimes that's the only way people can communicate to some people"</i></p> <p><i>"because it is one of New Zealand's (official) languages"</i></p> <p><i>"So if they have any friends or family members that are deaf you can talk (with) them instead of writing on paper"</i></p> <p><i>"so we can learn to be quiet"</i></p> <p><i>"for those that are deaf it's not fair if we don't learn it"</i></p> <p><i>"so we can communicate to everyone those who can hear and those who can't"</i></p> <p><i>"so we can communicate on the mat without the teacher knowing"</i></p>	<p><i>"I think it is an important skill but out of 80 people 2-10 will need to use it. I personally do not know anyone who would NEED to use it"</i></p> <p><i>"because not everyone is going to have to use it and when there is a deaf person at a school don't they teach the other students any way"</i></p> <p><i>"Because some won't probably know what it is"</i></p> <p><i>"It's their choice if they want to learn"</i></p> <p><i>"It is a very difficult language to understand, especially for people that forget things easily"</i></p> <p><i>"It is a good language to learn, and it will increase your ability to communicate with deaf people, But again, I believe it should depend on choice"</i></p> <p><i>"some schools might not have people who use sign language (deaf people)"</i></p>	<p><i>"my sister is deaf so I want to learn it but I don't know if other kid wants to learn it"</i></p> <p><i>"because there is a good and bad point others may think it's boring whilst others will think it's fun and they are experiencing a different language to communicate"</i></p> <p><i>"I don't really know about this sort of stuff"</i></p> <p><i>"It's important to lean sign language but some people won't put in the effort and won't want to do it"</i></p>
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Children were asked if they could learn one language at school, what would it be?

337 children identified their preferred language, and almost 20 children chose two or three preferred languages. Almost twice as many children chose Māori as their preferred language than the next most popular, which was Samoan. This reflected the dominant ethnic groups in the schools involved.



Language	Percent of children wanting to learn this language at school
Māori	30%
Samoan	16%
Spanish	9%
French	7%
Japanese	7%
Chinese including Mandarin	6%
NZ Sign Language	6%
Other Pacific Languages	12%
Other European Languages	11%
Other Asian Languages	3%
Other American or African languages	1%

Cultural connection, international travel and making friends

There were some common themes that came through from children wanting to learn another language.

Children said they had friends who spoke those languages and they wanted to make friends by speaking a new language (such as Japanese, Chinese, French).

I want to learn this language because...

"it might help me get more friends when I'm travelling" (11-12 year old Māori female, chose Cook Island Māori)

"I have a best friend that can speak Japanese and I want to talk to her and tell her secret in Japanese" (9-10 year old Māori female, chose Japanese)

"so I can learn how to speak Chinese and make more friends that speak Chinese" (11-12 year old Māori male, chose Chinese)

"because my friends are from France and is it is a nice language" (11-12 year old European female)

"I would love to learn Spanish, and talk to others from Spain, and make friends from Spain" (9-10 year old Māori and European, who didn't want to answer the gender question)

Children often said that they were from a particular culture and wanted to learn the language of their culture (namely Māori, Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan, Chinese, Korean, Italian, Spanish, Italian and German).

I want to learn this language because...

"some people in my family speak Maori and I only understand a little bit" (11-12 year old Māori male, chose Māori)

"because you don't really get taught Samoan in most classes" (11-12 year old Pacific, Māori and European female, chose Samoan)

"I am Italian and don't know many words in Italian"(15-16 year old 'other' ethnicity female, chose Italian)

"I would love to learn Spanish because it's part of my culture" (11-12 year old Māori and European female, chose Spanish)

"because I'm German and it would be nice to learn it to embrace it" (11-12 year old Pacific Island and 'other' ethnicity, who didn't want to answer the gender question, chose German)

"I'm Cook Island and I'm really keen to learn Cook Island (Māori)" (9-10 year old Māori and Pacific male, chose Cook Island Māori)

"because I want to speak to my dad in Tokelauan because he can't speak English" (11-12 year old Pacific Island male, chose Tokelauan)

"(it's) part of my culture and heritage" (13-14 year old Asian female, chose South Korean)



Many children said they wanted to learn languages, such as Japanese, Chinese, Spanish or French, because they could use it for international travel.

I want to learn this language because...

"because in life I want to travel there for a good sports career" (11-12 year old Pacific male, chose Japanese)

"when I grow up I might go to China or Japan" (9-10 year old Asian male, chose Japanese or Chinese)

"because I am going to America soon and there are a lot of people who speak Spanish so I want to like chat with them" (11-12 year old Pacific female, chose Spanish)

"because I want to learn from different kinds of countries" (11-12 year old Pacific female, chose Japanese)

"I want to go as an exchange student over there. It would be fun" (15-16 year old European female, chose French)

"I would be able to communicate with my family in Samoa" (7-8 year old Pacific female, chose Samoan)



A few students said they wanted to learn a language because it was an official or important language of New Zealand (i.e. Māori, English and Sign Language).

I want to learn this language because...

"it's an official New Zealand language" (11-12 year old Māori and 'other' ethnicity female, chose te reo Māori)

"it is New Zealand's native language" (13-14 year old European male, chose Māori)

"I want to learn Māori because it represents New Zealand" (9-10 year old Pacific female, chose Māori)

"it's one of New Zealand's native languages and because I know English very well" (11-12 year old Māori and Asian male, chose English)

Other comments on why students supported learning a language were:

I want to learn this language because...

"I have just moved to New Zealand" [5-6 year old MELAA (Middle East, Latin American or African) male, chose English]

"So I can show my Dad" (5-6 year old Māori female, chose Māori)

"It is an important part of our culture and I believe it should be taught to all children and adults, young and old. I also think that our language should be preserved because it is rapidly disappearing before our eyes " (11-12 year old Māori and European female, chose te reo Māori)

"If I could learn one language it would be really easy for me when I get older. I'd like to learn a new language" (11-12 year old Asian male, no specific language identified)

"Mummy speaks Samoan" (5-6 year old Pacific female, chose Samoan)

"If I could learn any language it would be Australian, because people always go to Australia for holidays and people don't get them" (11-12 year old Pacific student, chose Australian)

