

Whakawhiti i te Ara Mātauranga

Transitioning from Kura Māori to English-medium schools

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Abstract

Ākonga Māori experience diverse and often complex transitions when moving from Māori-medium education into English-medium schooling. While some navigate this shift successfully, others encounter challenges that can affect their learning, identity, and sense of belonging. Despite increasing numbers of Māori learners making this transition, limited research has examined their lived experiences or how effectively current schooling practices support them. This study addresses this research gap by exploring how ākonga Māori and their whānau experience the decision to transition, and following this, how the transition process impacts learning, wellbeing, and cultural identity.

The research is guided by a Kaupapa Māori methodology and draws on semi-structured wānanga (forum for discussion) and kōrero (discussion) as primary methods of data collection. Ten participants contributed to the study, including six ākonga who had transitioned from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling and four whānau members involved in the decision-making process. Data was analysed thematically to identify shared patterns across participant experiences.

Five key themes emerged from the analysis: Holding on to Being Māori: Cultural Continuity, Identity and Belonging; Choosing New Pathways: Possibility, Agency and Becoming; Finding Safety in New Social Worlds; Learning in a New System: Language, Teaching and Educational Continuity; and What Made the Difference: Support, Advocacy and Collective Care. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that transition experiences are shaped by the extent to which cultural identity is recognised, whānau are included as partners, and appropriate academic and language support is provided. They further suggest that more coherent and collaborative approaches between Māori-medium and English-medium education may strengthen transition processes and contribute to more positive outcomes for ākonga Māori.

By centring the voices of ākonga and their whānau, this research contributes new insight into how transitions between schooling contexts are experienced and how educational practices may better support Māori learners navigating these pathways.

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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AI Declaration

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Artificial Intelligence Guidelines:

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<i>Specify the chapter number(s) in your research proposal/research component where AI was used.</i>	
Chapter number(s):	One
<i>Briefly explain why the AI tool was used (e.g., idea generation, summarization, data analysis, image creation, etc.).</i>	
Purpose of AI Use:	Image creation
<i>Clearly state the AI tools used.</i>	
AI Tool(s) Used:	Chat GPT
<i>Prompts or queries entered into the AI tool (only the instructive portion of the prompt is required). Include all relevant variations.</i>	
Prompts Used:	Create an image or sketch of a traditional Māori waka (canoe). The image should resemble a realistic waka labelling the various parts of a waka Include these words for labelling and accurately position the labels for the following parts of the waka: • Tauihu – Prow / carved bow (front of the waka) • Rauawa – Gunwale / top sides of the hull • Takere – Hull bottom / keel / underside • Kiato – Crossbeam (thwarts connecting across the hull) • Te Kei – Stern (rear of the waka) • Haumi – Hull join / scarf joint where sections are fitted together Labels must be placed in the correct position on the waka and include both Māori and English translation
<i>A summary or description of the AI-generated output. (Optional: attach output in an appendix.)</i>	
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Student Name:
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Date: 29.04.26

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Tuatahi ake me mihi ka tika ki a koutou ngā ākonga me ō koutou whānau. Tēnā koutou i a koutou kaha ki te koha mai i ō koutou wheako, ō koutou whakaaro, ā koutou kōrero hoki ki tēnei kaupapa. Nā koutou i āhei ahau ki te rangahau i tēnei kaupapa. He taonga te katoa a ā koutou kōrero. Mei kore ko koutou, mei kore au e whakaatu i tēnei kaupapa ki te katoa. Ko koutou te pūtake o tēnei kaupapa, nōku te waimarie ki te mahi tahi ki a koutou katoa. Nō reira, tēnā koutou.

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Ethics

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC). Approval was granted Friday 30th August 2024 (AUTC 24/38).

Tauihu: Introduction

Kai te tētēkura, māu ngā ngaru whatiwhati i wāhi e eke ai tō tatou waka, nō reira ka mihi rā ki a koe.

It was you, our canoe figurehead, that parted the crashing waves so that our canoe could embark upon its journey, so thank you.

(Black, 2021, p.138)

Introduction

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, ākonga Māori (Māori learners) and their whānau (family) can pursue education through both Māori-medium and English-medium pathways. These options reflect the diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational landscapes that shape schooling experiences across the country. For some learners, this may involve movement between educational settings at different stages of their schooling journey.

This chapter outlines the background and rationale for this research and traces the whakapapa (lineage) of the thesis. By whakapapa, I refer to the genealogy of experiences, contexts, and considerations that have informed the development of this study. The chapter situates me as the researcher in relation to the kaupapa (topic) and outlines my personal and professional positioning, including the origins of and rationale for undertaking this research.

Personal Context

My father was as Māori looking as you could imagine; his kiri (skin) was deeply pigmented and his strong stature, being a hard-working man, reflected the strong genes of his tūpuna (ancestors). However, this was the extent of his commitment to his Māori heritage. My father was blessed to be the son of a mother who was grounded in her language and cultural practices. She was raised on her whenua (land) surrounded by her whānau who were all native speakers of te reo Māori (Māori language), as well as committed followers of tikanga and kawa (rules, lore and practices). On his paternal side, he had a father who had a lack of knowledge of te reo Māori, lost due to the impacts of trauma experienced by his previous generations (Chrisp, 2005). And, as a

product of parents who had moved away from their tūrangawaewae (ancestral lands) during the “Rural-Urban Drift” in search of work opportunities and a better life, my father had little interest in his tuakiritanga (cultural identity) and did not encourage his children to pursue it either.

Being named after my grandfather (my father’s stepfather) became pivotal in forming my connection to my taha Māori (Māori cultural identity). It was the foundation for a deep relationship with my grandparents, who were themselves strongly connected to their Māoritanga (Māori cultural heritage). From birth, I immersed myself in their world, spending as much time as possible with them. Being surrounded by whānau, attending hui (meetings and gatherings), and returning to the marae was the norm when with my grandparents. This became a rhythm of life I sought to maintain in every facet of my own journey, regardless of my parents’ choices.

My cultural connection was nurtured entirely through my grandparents, and because of the depth of our relationship, anything I did reflected them. While formal education had not been a priority for my parents or grandparents, their aspirations for the next generation were rooted in a desire for educational success. My own educational decisions were guided more by my cultural connection, steeped in te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (the Māori language and cultural practices). Regardless of the type of school I attended, I sought out every opportunity to grow and flourish as Māori.

Taku Haerenga Ako – My Learning Journey

My education began within the embrace of my rūruhi (grandmother) in a whare (house) that hosted our local Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori language preschool). More than an early childhood education programme, it was a living expression of whānau, reo (language), and tikanga Māori. Learning under my nanny’s guidance made these early experiences feel special and sacred. Te reo Māori was not merely taught, it was lived. This immersion in language and culture gave me a deep sense of belonging and identity, shaping the way I would view education for the rest of my life.

Following Te Kōhanga Reo, I entered the English-medium primary school system. Because of my parents' transient lifestyle, I moved frequently between schools. While such movement is often framed as disruptive, I learned to adapt and settle quickly into each new environment. Through these shifts, one constant remained, which was my deep gravitation towards my culture. Whether through kapa haka (Māori cultural group) or opportunities to engage with te reo Māori, I actively sought to remain connected to my identity.

At intermediate school level (11 years old), I entered a bilingual unit with the hope that it would further strengthen this connection. However, this period became one of the most challenging stages in my education. While I expected to feel a sense of belonging, I instead found myself struggling with cultural and social difficulties. I struggled with the reo Māori literacy components of the programme and felt displaced among dominant peer groups who ridiculed difference, particularly targeting those with lighter skin tones. These dynamics left me feeling culturally alienated, despite being within a supposedly culturally sustaining environment.

Still, I remained steadfast in my desire to deepen my connection to te ao Māori (the Māori world). Kapa haka became my refuge, an outlet where I could express myself confidently and reconnect with the legacy of my tūpuna. It offered a sense of pride and purpose that kept me engaged in school.

These early experiences revealed to me the complexities of navigating education as a Māori learner in both English-medium and bilingual contexts. They seeded the questions that now inform my research: what does true cultural sustenance in schooling look like? And, how can our systems ensure that Māori learners, in all their diversity, feel seen, valued, and connected?

These foundations also shaped my future as a kaiako (teacher). I had learned firsthand the value of cultural connection, the importance of safe learning spaces, and the cost of their absence. When I stepped into my own classroom, these insights became the lens through which I supported ākonga Māori who were navigating similar transitions.

Taku Haerenga hei Kaiako – My Journey as a Teacher

As a teacher of Māori descent with a grounded knowledge of tikanga and developing understanding of te reo Māori, I was privileged to work with and nurture many ākonga Māori. This also extended to my classroom being the space where any ākonga Māori who had previously attended kura Māori (Māori school/s)¹ would begin their English-medium schooling experience. It was an honour for me to ensure that these students received a great depth of care and maintain their cultural connection. However, I do not think that there was much thought put into the placement of these ākonga (learners), let alone any additional supports they might require; a concern also highlighted in research on Māori students' transitions (Weir, 2012).

From my observations, most students entered my class from kura Māori for two reasons. Either their whānau had relocated to areas without easy access to kura, or they were seeking opportunities that Māori-medium settings could not offer such as specialist subjects or extracurricular activities. However, the English-medium schools I taught in were culturally very different from kura Māori. Kura Māori environments are deeply rooted in Māori values and language, while English-medium schools, even when making efforts to include Māori culture, tended to reflect the identity and culture of the senior leadership. I noticed that some ākonga were unprepared for the differences in school culture and for academic expectations shaped predominantly through English. At times, these differences affected their ability to engage with learning and demonstrate what they knew.

One striking inequity I observed was in language support. Funded and structured English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes support learners whose first language is not English, yet there is no equivalent for Māori learners who have been immersed in te reo Māori for much of their schooling. Although ESOL policy does not explicitly exclude Māori learners, its eligibility criteria are oriented towards migrant and refugee backgrounds rather than bilingual learners transitioning within Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2024a). Consequently, Māori-medium graduates may face

¹ Kura Māori refers to all types of educational providers that focus on immersion Māori language provision.

significant linguistic adjustment without access to equivalent structured language support.

Regardless of these systemic gaps, I made it a priority to connect with ākonga and their whānau who had transitioned from kura Māori. Open kōrero fostered a shared responsibility between the whānau and I, enabling us to collectively support each learner's transition. In one school, I was given permission to develop an accelerated learning programme for ākonga (learners) with advanced reo Māori proficiency, allowing them to extend their skills while adapting to English-medium expectations. I also encouraged participation in kapa haka to provide cultural affirmation alongside academic adaptation.

These experiences as a kaiako made me increasingly aware that the challenges ākonga encountered were not simply individual matters of adjustment, but reflected broader differences between Māori-medium and English-medium educational environments.

He Tirohanga Māmā — A Mother's Perspective

While my role as a teacher allowed me to support many ākonga Māori through their educational transitions, it was not until I became a māmā (mother) navigating that journey with my own child that I truly understood the emotional and cultural complexities that whānau can face. Moving from the position of professional observer to that of a personal participant deepened my perspective and strengthened my commitment as both an advocate and a researcher.

My connection to my culture and heritage had been evident from a young age. While I was not fortunate enough to be educated in a Māori language immersion school, I was determined that my children would be. I wanted my children to learn within a whānau environment that nurtured te reo and tikanga Māori, both to reconnect our wider whānau to our Māoritanga and to contribute to the revitalisation of te reo Māori.

Although the decision to enrol my children in a Māori immersion environment felt natural, it also brought challenges. The expectations placed on whānau to fully commit to the kaupapa could be difficult to balance alongside work and other daily demands. Over time, our tamaiti (child) also began seeking learning opportunities that were not available within her kura, which ultimately influenced her decision to transition to a English-medium school.

The decision to transition was not one that we took lightly. In considering which school would best meet our child's needs, our concern extended beyond academic opportunities to how her reo, tikanga and cultural identity would be maintained. We wanted her to enter an environment that, if not fully reflective of her Māori-medium journey, would at least nurture the foundations she had built since infancy.

This transition challenged many of my assumptions about Aotearoa New Zealand's education system. I was struck by the contrast between the collective and whānau-centred environment of kura Māori and the highly individualistic approach of the English-medium secondary setting we entered. The school we chose for our tamaiti was strongly influenced by Pākehā (European - introduced from or originating in a foreign country) traditions and values, and it did not readily welcome wider whānau involvement. For our whānau, these differences made navigating the transition a socially and culturally isolating experience. There were, however, positives. Our tamaiti developed resilience and autonomy as she learned to take responsibility for her own learning. She was also exposed to cultures and experiences outside of te ao Māori, which broadened her worldview.

Experiencing this transition as a māmā shifted my understanding beyond what I had observed as a kaiako. It prompted me to question how ākonga Māori experience the move from kura Māori to English-medium schooling, and whether systemic changes are needed to better support them through this transition. As a māmā, educator and researcher, I was motivated not only by the experiences of my own tamariki and future mokopuna (children and grandchildren), but by a desire to improve these experiences for all ākonga Māori.

Researcher Positionality

The personal, cultural, and professional experiences outlined above position me as an insider within this research context. As a Māori researcher with whakapapa ties to multiple iwi, my relationship with this kaupapa extends beyond academic interest and is shaped by lived experience and a deep relational understanding of the educational landscapes and whānau experiences being explored (Bishop, 1996; Smith, 1997). My experiences as a kaiako within bilingual education, and as a māmā of a tamaiti who transitioned from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling, have further shaped my understanding of the complexities associated with moving between these educational contexts.

This insider positionality provides a culturally grounded foundation for the research and brings both opportunities and responsibilities. My familiarity with Māori education communities and the experiences of whānau navigating Māori-medium and English-medium education provides an understanding of the cultural, relational, and educational contexts in which these transitions occur. It also shapes my commitment to ensuring that the voices and experiences of ākonga and their whānau remain central to the research.

At the same time, shared cultural and educational experiences do not mean that I share or fully understand the experiences of participants. I recognise that my own experiences, assumptions, and perspectives influence how I approach the kaupapa and that these cannot be assumed to reflect those of the ākonga and whānau involved in this study. My position as an insider therefore requires humility, reflexivity, and an awareness of the influence I hold as the researcher. Rather than positioning myself as an authority on participants' experiences, I recognise their right to define and describe those experiences from their own perspectives.

My positionality therefore informs both why I have undertaken this research and how I approach it. It reinforces my responsibility to undertake research that privileges Māori

voices, respects the mātauranga and experiences shared by participants, and remains accountable to the communities to whom the research relates. How this positionality was managed and enacted throughout participant engagement, data collection, interpretation, and reporting is discussed further in the methodology chapter.

He Aha te Take? What is the Issue?

Ākonga Māori transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schools for many different reasons. These decisions are often shaped by limited subject options in kura, geographic relocation, whānau aspirations, sporting opportunities, or preparation for tertiary pathways (May & Hill, 2005). However, regardless of the reason, there is no consistent system, policy, or framework in place to support these transitions. Many ākonga and their whānau are left to navigate the shift between two very different educational environments, a challenge documented in studies of Māori students' transition experiences (Weir, 2012). These differences extend beyond language, encompassing culture, values, expectations, curriculum, and pedagogy (Macfarlane, 2004).

Transitions occur at various key stages across the schooling journey. The most common is at the end of primary school (Years 1-6), and/or intermediate school (Years 7-8), when whānau consider secondary options beyond their local kura. In some cases, this is not a matter of preference but of necessity, as there may be no wharekura (Māori immersion secondary school) nearby to continue Māori-medium education through to Year 13. Earlier transitions can also take place, such as following Te Kōhanga Reo or during the intermediate years, often triggered by whānau relocation or the desire for particular programmes (Rameka et al., 2016). At the senior secondary level, curriculum and staffing limitations in some wharekura can also influence decisions. For example, a student who wishes to pursue certain Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) subjects for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) may have no choice but to move into an English-medium school (Murphy, 2019). These structural constraints mean that transitions are not always voluntary but are shaped by availability and access.

Whānau aspirations further shape these decisions. Some parents believe that increased exposure to academic English will better prepare their tamariki for tertiary study or employment, while others prioritise continuity in te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. Where the move to English-medium is made, the receiving school's approach to Māori learners becomes critical. Research shows that without explicit strategies to recognise and build on te reo Māori proficiency, cultural knowledge, and identity, transitions can disrupt learning continuity, undermine confidence, and accelerate language loss (May & Hill, 2005).

From my experience as both a kaiako and a māmā, I have seen how difficult these transitions can be. Weir (2012) has shown that students moving from kura Māori to English-medium contexts often struggle not only academically but also socially; this is particularly so when their prior learning and assessment experiences have been entirely in te reo Māori and they are suddenly required to meet expectations in English. Without adequate support, the ākonga may lose confidence in their abilities, disconnect from their cultural identity, and experience regression in their reo Māori proficiency (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011). Whānau too can feel uncertain and unsupported in the transition, despite their critical role in sustaining student success (Durie, 2006).

In contrast, English language learners from backgrounds other than Māori receive targeted support through ESOL funding and structured frameworks (Ministry of Education, 2024a). Yet ākonga Māori who transition from kura Māori into English-medium schools are not given an equivalent consideration. This inequity disadvantages Māori learners and reflects deeper systemic issues in how the education system values and responds to Māori pathways (Bishop et al., 2014a). Similar patterns of institutional inequity have been documented across other sectors in Aotearoa, such as health (Came & Cornes, 2020). Together, these dynamics outline the problem.

Why this Study is Needed

Based on publicly available information accessed during this study, no national dataset was found that systematically monitors the number of ākonga Māori transitioning from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling. While enrolment statistics are collected, they only provide limited snapshots in time (Ministry of Education, 2025c). These figures tell us how many tamariki are enrolled in Māori-medium education at a given point, but not how many have left, where they have gone, or what their long-term outcomes might be. The Office of the Children's Commissioner and New Zealand School Trustees Association (2018) have also highlighted the lack of information about Māori-medium progress and about the impact of transitions more generally. Together, these gaps mean that the experiences of ākonga who shift between education systems remain largely misunderstood and even invisible at a national level. Without such information, it must be difficult for policymakers, educators, or researchers to fully grasp the scale or impact of transitions, let alone design targeted systems of support.

Without a formal dataset to tell the story, community knowledge and lived experiences become crucial. Whānau, kaiako, and community leaders consistently describe transitions as both common and complex. These moves occur at multiple points across the schooling journey: some following Te Kōhanga Reo, some at the end of primary and/or intermediate school, others at the start of secondary school, and some during the senior secondary years (Weir, 2012). Each stage brings its own pressures. Whānau may decide to move their tamaiti after Year 8 to access specialist subjects such as the sciences or arts, or for greater exposure to sporting activities, yet these opportunities often come at the cost of immersion in te reo Māori (Hill, 2016b). Others may relocate for employment or housing, with fewer Māori-medium options available in their new area. What is evident is that these decisions are rarely simple; they require balancing aspirations for academic achievement with commitments to culture, reo, and practical realities such as transport, zoning, and future pathways.

The quality of these transitions also varies significantly depending on the level of support available. When transitions are well supported, ākonga can strengthen both their learning and their identity. A child who continues to hear, see, and use te reo Māori

in their new school can build confidence in two languages, while developing new academic skills. This continuity affirms cultural identity and allows whānau aspirations to be reflected. However, when transitions are poorly supported, the outcomes can be damaging. Whānau and kaiako have spoken about how quickly reo Māori can fade if it is not upheld, and how this decline affects not only language proficiency but also a child's confidence and sense of belonging. The risks are not simply academic but also deeply cultural and emotional.

Support across the education system is inconsistent. Some English-medium schools make deliberate efforts to create welcoming environments for Māori learners and to grow reo Māori pathways. Others struggle to put strategies in place or to find the staff needed to sustain them. The shortage of qualified reo Māori teachers has become one of the most pressing barriers to continuity. In a recent national survey, many schools reported they could not meet demand for te reo Māori instruction, and 70% identified recruitment of teachers as a serious challenge (Li & McDonald, 2025). Even where goodwill exists, many schools lack the resources to act on it, resulting in a mixture of support across the country. This inequality reflects deeper systemic issues. National strategies such as Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia² and Tau Mai Te Reo³ affirm the importance of Māori success as Māori and the need to sustain te reo Māori in education (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2020b). They signal government commitment, but they stop short of providing detailed guidance on how to manage the specific realities of moving between kura Māori and English-medium schools. Nor do they establish the infrastructure required to ensure that te reo Māori pathways are consistently available in every community. This gap between aspiration and practice leaves too much to chance, and too often the responsibility falls on whānau and kaiako to advocate, navigate, and negotiate for themselves.

For these reasons, there is an urgent need for research that goes beyond description and seeks to understand transitions from the perspective of those most directly

² Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia: is the Ministry of Education Māori education strategy

³ Tau Mai Te Reo is the Ministry of Education's Māori language in education strategy

affected. Existing studies have highlighted the risks of disrupted language learning, identity loss, and cultural disconnection, but few have examined the practical supports that make a difference or the kinds of system-level changes required to achieve equity. By centring the voices of ākonga Māori and their whānau, this study aims to capture the lived realities of transition: what is gained, what is lost, and what could be done differently. In doing so, it seeks to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the development of more culturally responsive, bi-literacy-affirming practices that uphold the aspirations of Māori learners and their whānau.

What's at Stake

The transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling is not simply a logistical move between educational institutions. Instead, it can mark a critical moment where the future of language, identity, and belonging hangs in the balance (Webber, 2012). When these moves are poorly supported, the disruption extends far beyond academic progress. Ākonga Māori may experience a loss of confidence, a weakening of te reo Māori, and cultural displacement that may shape their wellbeing long into adulthood (May, 2012; Rameka, 2016).

Without pathways that affirm Māori identity and sustain te reo Māori, the education system risks alienating the very learners it is meant to serve (Berryman et al., 2018). Many tamariki arrive in English-medium classrooms carrying the strength of their Māoritanga, only to find that those strengths are undervalued or invisible (Webber, 2012). Such experiences undermine their achievement and send a message that their culture and language are secondary. Whānau too may feel excluded, as their contributions, central to Māori-medium settings, are often marginalised in English-medium schools (Rameka et al., 2016).

The costs of neglect are not sustained by individuals alone. Each time te reo Māori fades through poorly managed transitions, the aspiration for a bilingual and bicultural future is weakened (May, 2012). This is not only an educational risk but also a cultural one, undermining intergenerational language transmission and the survival of Māori

knowledge systems. For a nation committed to te reo Māori revitalisation, the transition from Māori to English-medium school represents a critical time. It is here where the alignment or misalignment between policy aspiration and lived educational experiences become visible.

These inequities are further magnified when compared to the structured supports available to ESOL learners, who receive targeted funding and frameworks to support their English acquisition (Ministry of Education, 2024a). By contrast, Māori students transitioning into English-medium settings are not afforded equivalent recognition or resources, despite facing similar challenges in navigating a new linguistic environment. This disparity highlights the institutional inequities still embedded in the education system and calls into question how fully Aotearoa honours its responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

What is at stake, then, is not only the learning journey of individual students but also the collective future of te reo Māori and the integrity of the education system itself. The ability of Aotearoa to nurture and sustain te reo Māori, to uphold its bicultural commitments, and to provide equitable education for Māori learners is directly tested in these moments of transition. This study responds to the challenge of transition by amplifying the voices of ākonga Māori and their whānau, making visible what is gained and what is lost through transition, and advocating for responses that protect both Māori language and identity.

Research Aims and Questions

This study explores the experiences of ākonga Māori who transition from kura Māori into English-medium school education. The transition from one educational context to another can have significant implications for learners' language use, cultural identity, academic achievement, and overall wellbeing. While kura Māori are grounded in Māori worldviews, te reo Māori, and tikanga, English-medium education often reflects Western cultural and English linguistic norms. This study seeks to understand how

these shifts affect ākonga Māori and how well English-medium settings respond to their needs.

The study aims to:

- Explore the experiences of ākonga Māori during their transition from kura Māori to English-medium schooling.
- Understand the extent to which the transition disrupts or sustains learner wellbeing, cultural identity, te reo Māori use, and academic achievement.
- Identify what supports or hinders a smooth transition, with a view to informing more culturally responsive strength-based practices in English-medium education.

Main Research Questions

- What experiences do ākonga Māori have when transitioning from kura Māori to English-medium education?
- Is the transition for ākonga Māori seamless and fair?
- Is the learners' experience disrupted, and if so, is their academic achievement also disrupted?

This research is underpinned by Kaupapa Māori values. It prioritises tino rangatiratanga (autonomy), by giving voice to Māori learners and their whānau, while acknowledging their right to define and shape their own educational experiences. It is founded upon the principles of hauora (holistic wellbeing) and oranga (relational wellbeing), focusing on the holistic wellbeing of ākonga Māori as they navigate complex educational systems. The centrality of te reo me ngā tikanga is recognised, as language and cultural knowledge are integral to Māori identity, belonging, and success. Through these lenses, the study seeks to inform transformative practices and policy. In doing so, it aims to uphold the mana (legitimate authority, dignity, influence, and relational standing) of ākonga Māori across all educational contexts.

To fully appreciate the significance of these research questions and the experiences of ākonga Māori transitioning between educational settings, it is important to understand the broader context in which these transitions occur. I will therefore discuss the historical development of Māori-medium education, the central role of te reo Māori in identity and learning, and the structural and cultural characteristics of English-medium schooling. The following section provides a contextual overview of both Māori-medium and English-medium education systems in Aotearoa, outlining key points of difference and the common circumstances under which transitions take place. This foundation helps to situate the experiences of the ākonga within the wider educational landscape.

He Tirohanga Whakamuri: A History of Māori-Medium Education

The history of Māori-medium education in Aotearoa is one of resistance, reclamation, and the determined leadership of whānau, hapū (subtribe), and iwi Māori (Māori tribes) (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Prior to colonisation, Māori maintained a rich and sophisticated system of education, grounded in te ao Māori and transmitted through oral tradition, whakapapa, and wānanga (Mead, 2003). However, the introduction of colonial schooling systems in the 19th and 20th centuries led to the systemic suppression of te reo Māori and tikanga. Legislation such as the Native Schools Act 1867 promoted English only instruction, and by the mid-20th century, te reo Māori was a critically endangered language (Simon & Smith, 2001).

In response, Māori communities finally mobilised in the 1980s to reverse the decline of te reo Māori through educational initiatives (Smith, 2022; Waitangi Tribunal, 2011). This saw the establishment of Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori preschool language nests) in 1982 which provided immersion environments for tamariki in early childhood (King, 2001). *The* Te Kōhanga Reo system was established utilising intergenerational support from kaumātua (elders) and whānau. As a movement it laid the foundation for the development of Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori language immersion schools), which were designed to provide culturally grounded primary education guided by Te Aho Matua, a Māori philosophical and pedagogical framework (Ministry of Education, 2008). These kura aimed not only to revitalise te reo Māori but to nurture ākonga as confident and

culturally rooted individuals with a strong sense of who they are. The progression into Wharekura (Māori-medium secondary schools) followed, creating a full pathway for Māori-medium education through to Year 13 (Smith, 1997; Simon & Smith, 2001).

Over time, policies such as the Education Act 1989 formally recognised Kura Kaupapa Māori as legitimate educational institutions. Later strategies, including Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success for Māori (Ministry of Education, 2013), positioned Māori success as a national priority, promoting culturally responsive approaches across the sector. However, as has been mentioned, the Māori-medium sector continues to face challenges relating to funding inequities, limited curriculum resources, and inconsistent policy implementation (Murphy, 2019).

As both a teacher having taught in bi-lingual and language immersion classrooms and a parent of a child who transitioned from Māori-medium to English-medium education, I have witnessed the transformative impact of Māori-medium education. I have seen how kura Māori foster cultural pride, self-belief, and academic resilience. At the same time, I have experienced the barriers that arise when transitioning into English-medium contexts that may not fully value or understand the strengths that ākonga Māori bring with them.

Te Reo Māori Revitalisation

The revitalisation of te reo Māori sits at the heart of Māori-medium education and is a defining purpose of Te Kōhanga reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, and Wharekura. Te reo Māori is more than a tool of communication; it is a cornerstone of Māori identity, a vessel of whakapapa, and a living expression of tikanga and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). Through language, ākonga Māori are connected to their tūpuna, their culture, and te ao Māori (Durie, 2001a; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011).

The decline of te reo Māori was not accidental. It was the deliberate outcome of assimilationist policies, such as those implemented through the Native Schools Act 1867, which promoted English-only instruction and discouraged the use of Māori

language in schools (Simon & Smith, 2001). By the 1970s, the language faced the risk of extinction, prompting urgent community-led efforts to restore its vitality. The establishment of Te Kōhanga Reo in 1982, followed by Kura Kaupapa Māori guided by Te Aho Matua, were crucial interventions in intergenerational transmission (May & Hill, 2005). These initiatives created spaces where tamariki could grow up immersed in their language and culture, supported by whānau and kaumātua committed to ensuring te reo Māori survived.

Revitalisation is not simply about linguistic proficiency; it is also a political act of resistance, reclamation, and transformation (Higgins et.al., 2014). Education has become a primary site of this transformation, with Māori-medium pathways enabling language and identity to flourish together. Yet, when ākonga Māori transition into English-medium schools, there is often a risk that their te reo Māori development is stalled or diminished. The dominance of English in curriculum and assessment, coupled with inconsistent te reo Māori provision across English-medium settings, can undermine years of immersion learning and weaken confidence, belonging, and identity (Berryman et al., 2018).

Understanding te reo Māori revitalisation is therefore essential to this study. The research does not only investigate how ākonga move between two schooling systems; it also examines how their reo Māori is carried, lost, or transformed across those boundaries. By analysing these experiences of transition, the study highlights the extent to which the education system enables or disrupts the aspirations of whānau and iwi for the survival and flourishing of te reo Māori. Placed alongside these revitalisation efforts, the design and everyday realities of English-medium schooling shape how (and whether) te reo Māori and identity are sustained through transition.

Overview of the English-medium education System

The English-medium education system in Aotearoa New Zealand is grounded in Western pedagogical traditions and is largely delivered through the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2007). While it is designed to be inclusive and

flexible, the system has historically privileged monocultural, monolingual, and Eurocentric worldviews (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). For many ākongā Māori transitioning from Māori-medium education, English-medium schooling can present significant shifts in language, pedagogy, and cultural affirmation.

English-medium schools typically operate with English as the primary language of instruction. Although there have been growing efforts to include te reo Māori through bilingual units or curriculum content, these efforts vary widely in quality, visibility, and commitment across schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). The NZC includes principles that acknowledge the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and cultural diversity, but in practice, the integration of Māori values, reo Māori and tikanga Māori remains inconsistent (Macfarlane et al., 2007).

Pedagogically, English-medium education emphasises individual achievement, standardised assessment, and cognitive development aligned with Western constructs of success. This is often a contrast to the whānau-based, holistic, and Kaupapa Māori approaches that underpin Māori-medium education. For Māori learners who have been immersed in culturally sustaining environments, the shift to English-medium classrooms may involve a loss of relational teaching practices, reduced opportunities for language use, and a diminished sense of identity recognition (Rameka et al., 2016).

While initiatives such as Ka Hikitia⁴ and Te Kotahitanga⁵ have sought to enhance cultural responsiveness and raise Māori student achievement, there continue to be systemic disparities that remain. These include lower retention rates, disproportionate disciplinary actions, and gaps in academic performance (Ministry of Education, 2025a; Ministry of Education, 2025b). Such disparities are not only educational but also structural, reflecting broader inequities within the school system (Tomorrow's Schools

⁴ Ka Hikitia is a Ministry of Education strategy aimed at improving system-wide outcomes for Māori learners and supporting Māori to achieve success as Māori.

⁵ Te Kotahitanga is a professional development initiative focused on strengthening culturally responsive and relational teaching practices to improve Māori student engagement and achievement.

Independent Taskforce, 2019) and the marginalisation of Māori knowledge systems (Smith, 2022).

Understanding the English-medium context is critical to appreciating the challenges and opportunities that exist when ākonga Māori transition from Māori-medium into these predominantly English learning environments.

Thesis Structure

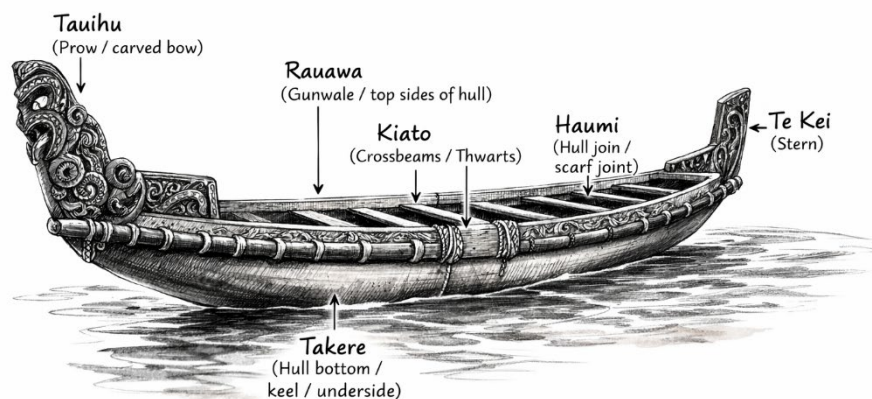


Figure 1

Waka (Traditional Canoe)

Note: Waka framework illustrating methodological components. This image was created by the author with the assistance of generative AI (ChatGPT, 2026) for the purposes of this research.

This thesis is presented in six chapters, each building on the last, to explore the lived experiences of ākonga Māori transitioning from Māori-medium education to English-medium schooling. The structure reflects both the academic intentions of the study and the personal, cultural, and ethical commitments that underpin it. Each chapter

contributes to a holistic understanding of the transitions these ākonga experience, while maintaining a Kaupapa Māori orientation that centres Māori voices, values, and aspirations. Across the chapters, I weave personal narrative, participant kōrero, and Kaupapa Māori analysis to centre Māori voices and aspirations.

To honour the kaupapa and the relational nature of this research, the structure of the thesis is framed through the metaphor of a waka, a vessel that carries people, purpose, and meaning across time and space (See Figure 1). The waka (traditional canoe) is not employed merely as metaphor, but as an organising Indigenous methodological framework grounded in relationality, whakapapa, and collective navigation. It provides both structure and ethical orientation for the research journey. Each chapter is named after a distinct part of the waka, acknowledging the different roles that each plays in carrying the research forward.

Chapter One: Tauihu

Like Tauihu, the carved figurehead at the front of the waka, this chapter sets the direction and intent of the research journey. It begins by positioning the researcher within the kaupapa, drawing on personal experiences as a bilingual learner, a teacher supporting transitioning students, and a parent whose child moved from Māori-medium to English-medium education after 14 years. These experiences inform the guiding questions and frame the study as both personal and political.

The chapter outlines the rationale for the research, identifies critical gaps in the literature, and presents the central research questions. It critiques deficit based, system centric approaches to educational transitions and argues for a Kaupapa Māori lens that centres the voices of ākonga and whānau. While a brief contextual overview of Māori and English-medium education is included, detailed methodological and theoretical discussions are reserved for later chapters.

Chapter Two: Rauawa

Rauawa, or raised sides of the waka, provide protection and structural integrity. In this chapter, the literature performs a similar role by framing and supporting the kaupapa of the research. This chapter critically reviews literature on bilingual and immersion education, educational transitions, identity development, and language maintenance.

The chapter highlights a notable gap in research. While Māori-medium education and bilingualism are well studied, transitions from kura Māori to English-medium settings, particularly from Māori perspectives, remain underexplored. The review challenges dominant theories and reframes them through a Kaupapa Māori lens, ensuring that Māori values and aspirations guide the academic framing. This chapter also introduces the conceptual framework that informs subsequent chapters, ensuring alignment with the kaupapa.

Chapter Three: Takere

Takere, the hull or base of the waka, holds the kaupapa and sustains the entire journey. This chapter provides the methodological foundation for the study, grounded in Kaupapa Māori research principles. It explores how Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing shape every stage of the research process.

Key concepts such as whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships), manaakitanga (process of showing respect), and rangatiratanga (chiefly authority) guide relational and ethical engagement with participants. The chapter explains how the data was gathered through wānanga, kōrero, and semi-structured interviews, creating safe and culturally grounded spaces for participants to share their stories.

Ethical considerations are addressed with reference to both theoretical frameworks and Kaupapa Māori ethics, alongside discussions of Māori data sovereignty. The analytic approach, Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, is applied within a Kaupapa Māori paradigm, ensuring that insights are developed in a way that honours tikanga and the integrity of the participants' kōrero.

Chapter Four: Kiato

Kiato are the crossbeams that connect and stabilise the waka, binding its structure together and ensuring balance and cohesion. In this thesis, Kiato represent the ākonga and whānau whose lived experiences hold this research together.

This chapter introduces the participants through rich, contextualised biographies. Rather than presenting them as anonymous data sources, their stories are situated within their whakapapa, schooling journeys, language backgrounds, and aspirations. These biographies acknowledge the relational nature of the research and foreground the mana of each participant.

Chapter Five: Te Kei

Te Kei, the stern of the waka, direction is given and meaning is navigated. In this chapter, findings and discussion are woven together, drawing participant kōrero into dialogue with the conceptual framework and the wider literature. Rather than separating description from interpretation, this chapter integrates both, allowing analysis to remain grounded in the lived realities of ākonga Māori and their whānau; at the same time it engages critically with broader educational debates.

Themes are presented thematically, including navigating identity between education systems, experiences of language maintenance or loss, cultural connection and disconnection, and the vital role of whānau, kura Māori, and English-medium schools during transition. Participant voices are privileged throughout, with interpretation emerging alongside their narratives in a way that honours their worldviews and contextualises their experiences within existing scholarship.

The chapter examines both the systemic barriers and enabling conditions encountered by ākonga Māori as they move between linguistic and cultural worlds. It acknowledges the strengths, aspirations, and positive experiences shared by participants alongside the challenges they described. In doing so, it offers recommendations for improving

transitional support, sustaining te reo Māori, and fostering culturally sustaining schooling environments.

These implications are framed not only for policy and practice, but also for whānau, hapū, iwi (tribe), and communities engaged in education. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the tensions inherent in navigating between educational paradigms and reaffirming the importance of Māori-led solutions in advancing equity and self-determination within the Aotearoa education system.

Chapter Six: Haumi

Haumi is the joining section of the waka that binds the front and back, completing its structure. In this final chapter, the research journey is drawn together, revisiting the kaupapa, reflecting on the findings, and offering concluding thoughts.

This chapter reflects on the significance of the research for the participants, for Māori education, and for the researcher's own positionality as a Māori educator and māmā. It summarises key insights and contributions, identifies limitations, and proposes directions for future research. It also affirms the importance of Māori research led by and for Māori, with the strength of tikanga and kaupapa as its binding force.

By bringing all parts of the waka together, this chapter ensures that the research is not left adrift, but instead completes its course with clarity, integrity, and purpose. The waka not only structures the thesis but also affirms the Kaupapa Māori principles of tino rangatiratanga, manaakitanga, and whānau that underpin the research journey.

This waka metaphor reflects the relational, layered, and purposeful nature of the research. It serves not only as an organising structure but as a cultural assertion, a reminder that this thesis moves forward under the guidance of Kaupapa Māori, carrying with it the aspirations of ākonga Māori, their whānau, and te ao Māori.

Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to use a combination of Māori and English headings and subheadings. This is an intentional authorial choice, allowing each language to be used where it best reflects the meaning and context of the section.

Rauawa: Literature Review

Taihoa e tohu i te Rangatira kia whakaritea ētahi hunga tautoko hai niao mō te waka.

Don't appoint a chief until you have organised the supporters who will be the gunwale of the canoe. (Black, 2021, p. 142)

Introduction

Education plays a critical role in the preservation and revitalisation of te reo Māori (the Māori language) and Māori culture (Mahrooqi & Asante, 2012). Over the past few decades, the formation of Māori-medium education, through establishments such as Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori and other Māori immersion programmes, has provided Māori students with an educational environment that reflects their cultural identity and strengthens their language skills. The establishment of these Māori-medium initiatives has been instrumental in revitalising te reo Māori and reinforcing Māori cultural identity (May & Hill, 2005). School mobility research demonstrates that students change schools for a range of structural, academic, and family-related reasons (Rumberger, 2003). Through this choice to move education providers, ākonga Māori often face significant linguistic, cultural, academic and social challenges.

This transition between schools is a complex process that requires support from both Māori-medium and English-medium schools. Research highlights that Māori-medium schools play a crucial role in preparing students with English language skills required for transition but suggests that this preparation may need to occur earlier (Hill, 2016b), while English-medium schools must provide adequate cultural and language retention support to ensure students' success (Hill, 2011). The effectiveness of this transition has major implications for educational equity, language revitalisation, and student well-being.

Although there is growing research on Māori-medium education and bilingualism, less attention has been given to the transition process itself, particularly how both Māori-

medium and English-medium schools can work together to support students. Existing studies suggest that (Hill, 2016b; May & Hill, 2005; Weir, 2012):

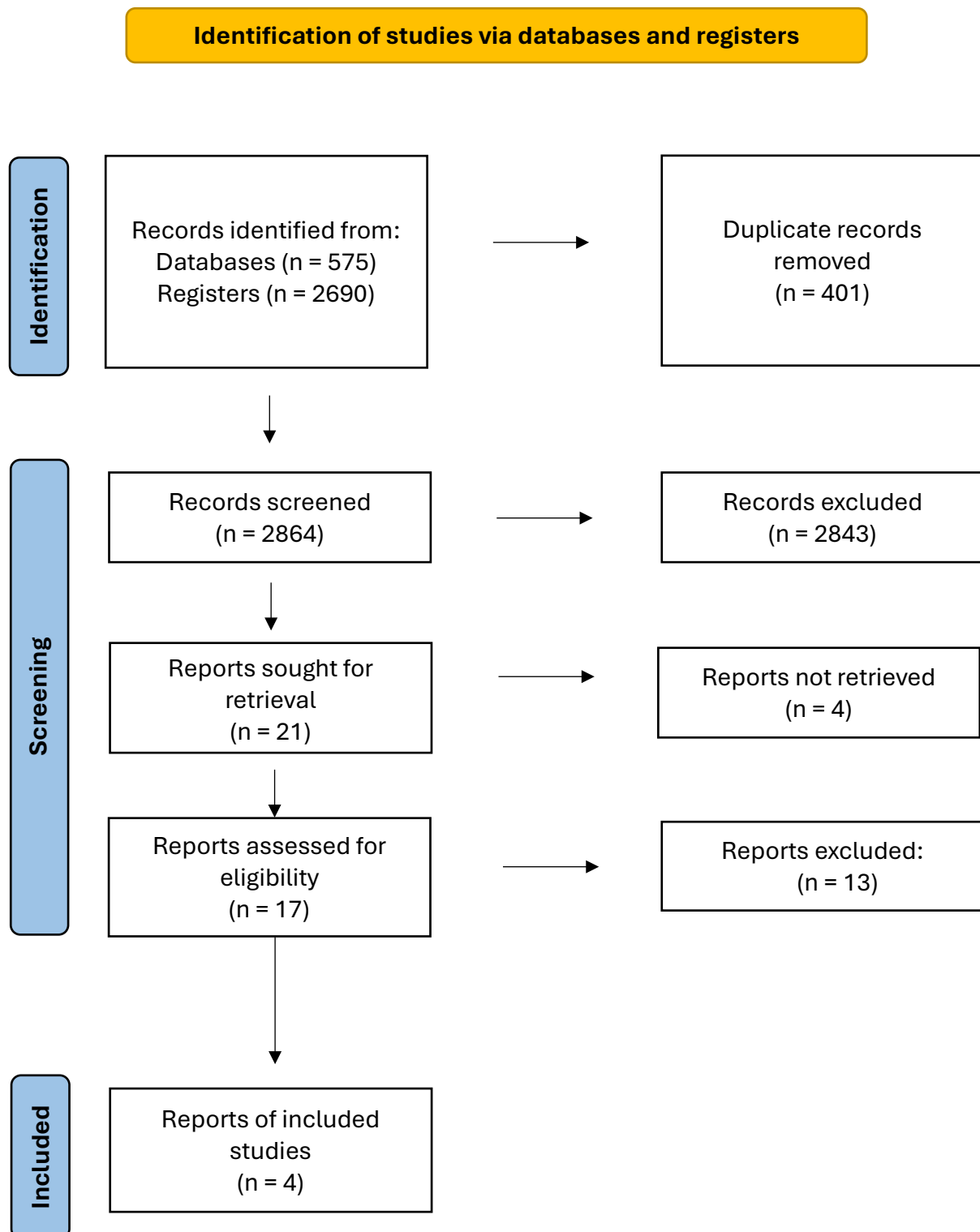
1. There is inconsistency in English preparation across Māori-medium schools, leading to varied experiences for students transitioning into English-medium education.
2. English-medium schools often lack adequate cultural and linguistic support, making it difficult for students to retain their Māori identity and language.
3. The emotional and social impact of transition is under-researched, despite evidence that students experience significant cultural disruption.

This literature review aims to examine the transition of Māori students from Māori-medium education to English-medium education, employing a PRISMA methodology (explained later in the chapter) to identify relevant research. The review highlights key themes, including the role of Māori-medium schools in preparing students with English proficiency, and the responsibilities of English-medium schools in maintaining and retaining Māori cultural identity and language. The review will also examine the theoretical frameworks that shape how transition is understood, as well as the methodological approaches used within the literature.

Findings suggest that both educational settings have significant roles in ensuring a smooth transition for students. Research recommendations focus on enhancing bilingual education, increasing cultural responsiveness in English-medium schools, and improving support mechanisms for students and whānau. By reviewing the existing literature, this chapter will highlight research gaps and suggest areas for future study to improve the transition experience for Māori students.

Figure 2

Literature Search Strategy PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



Note: Flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only. Adapted from “The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews,” by M.J. Page et al., 2021, *British Medical Journal*, 372(71), (<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>). Copyright 2020 by M.J. Page et al. In the public domain.

Search Criteria

To conduct the search for literature relevant to understand the experiences ākonga have when transitioning from Māori-medium education to English-medium education, it was important that I utilised a framework that undertook a structured approach to systematically find, review and analyse the various forms of information and research currently available. To undertake this review, I used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to guide the selection of literature (See Figure 2). The PRISMA framework provides a structured approach to reporting systematic reviews and includes four key phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The identification phase involves systematically searching multiple databases and sources to locate potentially relevant literature (Page et al., 2021). A comprehensive search was conducted using various databases such as Google Scholar, Sage, Scopus and A+ Education. These databases were selected as they contain literature and publications relevant to education and were also relevant to publications for Kaupapa Māori. An additional search for Kaupapa Māori publications relevant to education was conducted through databases such as Te Puna o te Mātauranga (National Library of New Zealand) and Tūwhera (Auckland University of Technology Library Open Access Publications).

An inclusion and exclusion criteria for this literature search was vital to ensuring that the literature located was suitable and relevant to this research Kaupapa (See Table 1). Clearly defined eligibility criteria are essential to the systematic review process, as they help determine which studies are included or excluded and contribute to the rigour of the review (Meline, 2006). Literature and studies were included if they focussed on Māori or other Indigenous students transitioning between Māori or other Indigenous language educational settings regardless of the level of education, if they used Kaupapa

Māori or other Indigenous frameworks and qualitative methodologies and provided realistic or observed data. Studies that lacked a direct focus on Māori-medium or other Indigenous language education or were outside of the twenty-year timeframe for the search were excluded; as was literature that focussed on teacher pedagogy and training or professional development. The inclusion criteria ensured that only studies directly related to the transition experiences of Māori or other Indigenous students were analysed, prioritising those that examined linguistic, cultural, and social factors. Research that employed Kaupapa Māori methodologies was favoured due to its alignment with Indigenous knowledge systems and community engagement principles. Studies using qualitative methods, such as interviews and case studies, were also included to provide in-depth perspectives on student, whānau, and teacher experiences. Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused solely on bilingual education without a specific emphasis on Māori learners, did not draw on observed evidence from real-world educational settings, or provided only theoretical discussions without practical application. Additionally, research with outdated findings or insufficient methodological transparency was omitted to maintain the reliability and relevance of this review (See Table 2).

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Māori tamariki, rangatahi, Indigenous	Non-Māori/non-Indigenous
Years 1-13 age 5-19	Under 5 years or over 19
Kōhanga reo, primary school, high school, college, secondary	Adult focussed
Kura Kaupapa, kura Māori, kura ā iwi	Not inclusive of young people
Kaupapa Māori, Māori culture	Transition from bi-lingual to English-medium
Published no earlier than 2005 - overall if a child completes the entirety of their school life that's 13 years of schooling. A broader timeline will help cover that	Did not focus on transition from kura Māori to English-medium schools

Table 2*Excluded Literature*

Author	Title	Reason For Exclusion
Asil (2017)	A school-based measure of culturally responsive practices	While focussing on lifting achievement for Māori students, this article was not applicable as it looked at culturally responsive practices within schools to lift achievement
Berryman & Glynn (2003)	Transition from Māori to English: A community approach	This text studied students that transitioned from Māori to English-medium education; however, it was excluded as it sat outside of the selected date range for the literature search
Bishop et al. (2014b)	The centrality of relationships for pedagogy: The whanaungatanga thesis	Did not meet the inclusion criteria for this study. Focussed on teacher pedagogy
Fallace (2015)	The Savage origins of child-centred pedagogy	This article does not focus on children or young people, nor their educational experiences
Glassey et al. (2023)	“Whiriwhiria, kia ora ai te tamaiti”: An exploration of mātauranga Māori to support day-to-day learning in five primary schools in regional New Zealand	A Kaupapa Māori article that didn’t meet the criteria. Although the focus was on whether the curriculum is fit for purpose to accommodate Māori learners, the interviews were of principals in Aotearoa schools.
Harris & Kaur (2012)	Challenging the notions of partnership and collaboration in early education: A critical perspective from a whānau class in New Zealand	This study observed within a whānau Māori class but doesn’t meet the criteria as it had a focus on establishing relationships with the crown to inform curriculum development that considers and is reflective of Māori culture
Haworth (2009)	The quest for a mainstream EAP pedagogy	Discussed supporting students with English as a second language but was focussed on teacher pedagogy and strategies used to support these students
Hynds et al. (2016)	School expectations and student aspirations: The influence of schools and teachers on Indigenous secondary students	Doesn’t meet the inclusion criteria as it focusses on Māori student experiences within secondary school and what schools and teachers do to contribute to these experiences

Jahnke, H.J. (N.D)	Māori education that works. Rangahau	Kaupapa and kura Māori focussed text; however unapplicable as it reports on the success of Māori students within Māori-medium education over English-medium due to cultural differences
Miller (2017)	Giftedness and talent – Chapter 7: Academic success among a cohort of gifted and talented Māori and Pasifika boys: Elements contributing to their achievement	Although looking at the success for students achieving in secondary school, this text was not applicable as it did not focus on the transition experiences, or on students that moved from Māori-medium education
Ministry Of Education (2024b)	Māori language in schooling. Education Counts.	Not applicable as this report looks at the statistics of the amount of Māori language taught across the three categories of New Zealand education providers, Māori-medium, Māori language in English-medium and students not involved in Māori language education
Stewart & Roberts (2015)	Philosophy of education, dialogue and academic life in Aotearoa New Zealand	Excluded this text as it focused on the issues and experiences faced as Māori academics within the tertiary sector
Taani (2023)	Whakaritea te pārekereke: Teacher preparedness to teach te reo Māori speaking children in English-medium education settings	This study was not applicable as although it discusses teaching Māori language, the focus was on the best practice for teacher preparedness to teach Māori speaking students

Following the completion of this literature review, only four pieces of literature were identified as being relevant to this Kaupapa (See Table 3). This was not an unexpected outcome as personal experience as an educator have highlighted the lack of support with supporting ākonga Māori when they transition from Māori-medium education to English-medium education. Much of the literature located focussed on teacher pedagogy and developing resources, or on professional development to support teachers' practice when working with students of Māori descent. The final literature that was chosen for use within this review were published studies that have observed and examined the experiences of students that have moved to English-medium education settings, following a consecutive timeframe, within a Māori-medium education setting.

Table 3*Included Literature*

Author (Date)	Key Finding	Focus
Hill (2016a)	• The decline of Māori language proficiency after transitioning to English-medium schools • Māori-medium schools lack a standardised approach to bilingual and bi-literate education • Academic English language challenges • Overall success of ākonga	• Conversational and academic language • Māori-medium ākonga transitioning to English-medium secondary schools • Support required to maintain both Māori and English languages • Systemic issues
Hill (2016b)	• English-medium schools need to recognise Māori-medium student's backgrounds • Need for English-medium schools' pedagogy and practice to incorporate a te ao Māori perspective • Maintenance of Māori language • Recognition of cultural challenges that ākonga Māori face • Parents role in supporting Māori-medium students, particularly in English and Māori language development	• Māori-medium ākonga transitioning to English-medium secondary schools • Language development • Contributors to language and cultural success after transition • Impacts of early transition from Māori-medium • Bi-literacy
Rona & McLachlan (2018)	• Effective teaching strategies • Importance of Māori cultural values • Learning environments • Language instruction approaches • Bilingual assessment practices • Culturally appropriate assessment tools • Teachers training and practice	• Te Kōhanga Reo children transitioning to various language medium schools • Bilingual education • Strategies that support language retention • Culturally responsive pedagogy • Standardised assessments • Bi-literacy
Weir (2012)	• Academic, social, and cultural challenges ākonga face • Differences between Māori and English-medium educational philosophies • Rigid shift in language use by speaking only Māori in immersion schools and only English in English-medium schools • A fluid approach to bilingual transition	• Māori students transitioning to English-medium education • Kaupapa Māori methodology • Impacts on academic success and cultural identity • Education policy and structural changes • Shared responsibility • Challenges in transition

Characteristics of Literature Found

The studies selected for this literature review were all very similar in methodology. Qualitative methods, including interviews and case studies were predominantly used. Many of the studies utilised semi-structured interviews with ākonga Māori, their whānau, and primary educators to gain broader views into the personal experiences and perspectives. Some of the case studies provided a contextual analysis of specific schools and their transition programmes. These four studies highlighted both successes within an academic and cultural context, but also the challenges faced.

All four studies were short term projects, however two of the studies incorporated longitudinal designs, tracking the students over a longer timeframe to assess the long-term impact of the transition strategies. Three of the studies employed mixed-methods approaches, which incorporated quantitative data, such as student achievement scores and retention rates, to complement the qualitative findings. The diversity of methods allowed for a thorough understanding of the transition experience, granting both subjective narratives and objective performance indicators. Across all four studies, themes of language maintenance, identity negotiation, and institutional support structures emerged as crucial factors that led to successful transitions.

The transition of Māori students from Māori-medium education to English-medium education is a complicated procedure influenced by linguistic, cultural, and institutional factors. Six themes emerged from the four pieces of literature selected as being applicable to the research kaupapa (See Table 3). The themes identified within the literature explore the philosophical underpinnings of Kaupapa Māori research, the role of Māori-medium schools in preparing students for transition, and the responsibilities of English-medium schools in maintaining cultural identity and language retention. The following review of the themes identified through the literature contributes to the knowledge and understanding of the experiences that ākonga Māori and their whānau have when transitioning from Māori-medium education to English-medium education.

The Role of Māori-medium Schools in Preparing Students for Transition

Māori-medium schools have a pivotal role in the educational journey of ākonga Māori by promoting strong cultural identity and language proficiency in te reo Māori (Weir, 2012). However, the transition from these immersion settings to English-medium education presents both opportunities and challenges. While Māori-medium education could strengthen students' confidence and sense of belonging within te ao Māori (the Māori world), and critical thinking skills, research indicates that the shift to an English-dominant setting can generate linguistic, academic, and cultural difficulties. The following sections will examine how Māori-medium schools prepare ākonga Māori for transitioning to English-medium schools and for English language acquisition. It will also critically analyse the challenges ākonga Māori face when they enter English-medium education.

Optimal time for English language acquisition

The timing of English language introduction within Māori-medium education is a nuanced and contested issue. While it may appear to be a logistical decision, it is deeply intertwined with broader goals of Māori language revitalisation, academic success, and culturally responsive schooling. Research reflects significant variation in practice across kura, with some delaying English until the later primary years and others integrating it earlier to facilitate smoother transitions to English-medium education (Hill, 2016a). This variation highlights an ongoing debate within bilingual education in Aotearoa New Zealand: how to balance early English exposure with the need to establish and protect strong proficiency in te reo Māori.

One approach, favoured by many Kura Kaupapa Māori, is to delay formal English instruction until around Year 5 or later⁶. This delay is based on the belief that a strong foundation in te reo Māori must be established first, ensuring that the acquisition of English does not come at the expense of the heritage language. Hill (2016a) and Weir (2012) both argue that early exposure to English can be detrimental to the acquisition of te reo Māori and may not necessarily improve English language outcomes. Weir (2012)

⁶ In New Zealand Year 5 begins the upper primary school levels, usually ages 9-10.

advocates for additive bilingualism, emphasising that students benefit most when both languages are developed in parallel, rather than one replacing the other. From this perspective, the timing of English introduction is important to ensure that English is added to, rather than developed at the expense of, students' te reo Māori development.

In contrast, some research supports the earlier introduction of English where it is designed to complement, rather than compete with, te reo Māori. Hill (2016b) found that many ākonga Māori enter kura with conversational English but may have had limited exposure to the academic English required in English-medium education. Rather than viewing language acquisition as a linear process, Hill describes it as fluid and circular, suggesting that bilingual development can be supported when both languages are effectively scaffolded. Similarly, Rona and McLachlan (2018) advocate for a dual-language or biliteracy approach that builds on ākonga existing language knowledge and uses both languages to strengthen literacy development.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori-medium education is classified according to the proportion of curriculum instruction delivered through te reo Māori. Levels 1 and 2 are considered Māori-medium education, with 51–100% of instruction occurring through te reo Māori, while Levels 3–5 involve progressively less instruction in te reo Māori (Ministry of Education, 2025d). Within this thesis, bilingual education refers to an educational approach in which both te reo Māori and English are used as languages of teaching and learning, rather than te reo Māori being taught only as a separate language subject. Bilingualism and biliteracy are treated as related but distinct concepts and are not used interchangeably, with biliteracy defined later in this thesis.

There is little consensus in the literature about an optimal time to introduce English within Māori-medium and bilingual settings. Decisions are influenced by factors such as language use in the home, kura philosophy, teacher capability, and whānau and community aspirations. The literature therefore suggests that successful English language acquisition is less dependent on a fixed point of introduction and more dependent on how English is introduced and supported alongside te reo Māori (Hill, 2016b; Rona & McLachlan, 2018).

A recurring theme across the literature is the importance of maintaining te reo Māori while introducing English in a way that does not undermine the student's identity or language foundation (Hill, 2016a; Weir, 2012). The literature implies that kura need flexibility to make contextually appropriate decisions, and that effective timing decisions must be aligned with Kaupapa Māori goals, whānau aspirations, and students' developmental readiness. Rather than seeking a universal model, the evidence supports a responsive, bilingual approach that honours both languages and provides students with the linguistic tools they need to succeed across both worlds.

The literature highlights variation in the timing and method for introducing English within Māori-medium education. Although there is broad consensus on the importance of establishing a strong foundation in te reo Māori (May & Hill, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2020b), most studies support a bi-literacy approach that values proficiency in both languages (Weir, 2012). From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, there is no single best model; rather, effectiveness depends on pedagogies that uphold the Māori language and identity while enabling access to English (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Rata, 2012). This affirms the need for approaches that are contextually grounded, culturally responsive, and shaped by the aspirations of Māori learners and their whānau (Lee, 2009). Within this context, Māori-medium schools may also play an important role in supporting ākonga who are likely to transition into English-medium settings, particularly by developing the English language and literacy skills needed to navigate a different learning environment. However, such preparation needs to occur without positioning transition to English-medium education as the expected pathway or compromising the central role of te reo Māori and Māori identity within Māori-medium education.

Bi-literacy Development

Ākonga Māori learning in a Māori-medium learning environment are taught solely in te reo Māori. When transitioning to English-medium schools they are required to learn in the dominant language which is English. This then reflects a need and ability to be bi-literate. Hornberger (1990) describes how bi-literacy differs from bilingualism as it goes beyond speaking and understanding multiple languages. Bi-literacy is more complex. It

is the ability to read and write proficiently in two languages, in the case of this study, that would be English and Te Reo Māori. It is crucial to understand these differences as students can be bilingual without being bi-literate, especially when educational institutions prioritise one language over the other. Bi-literacy is much more complex and isn't always achieved (Hill, 2016b).

The literature in this study identifies a concerning issue with the development and maintenance of bi-literacy for ākonga Māori transitioning from Māori-medium to English-medium schools. Weir (2012) evaluates the one directional language model that ākonga Māori face when transitioning into English-medium schools. He argues that English replaces the student's dominant language which is Māori. This forces a limitation on ākonga Māori to continue developing their literacy in Māori, causing their reo Māori to be weakened and in some cases lost. Comparable findings are evident in Tukimata's (2024) doctoral study of vagahau Niue, where participants described how transition into English-medium schooling diminished the status and use of their heritage language, shifting families from productive bilingualism to receptive bilingualism. This highlights the risks to sustained bi-literacy when first-language development is not actively supported. Weir (2012) argues that students should be supported to build upon their first language, which in this case would be Māori, in order to acquire their second language successfully.

In support of that argument, Rona and McLachlan (2018) discuss how the literacy development that ākonga Māori have had within Te Kōhanga Reo and kura Māori is often neglected in favour of English when transitioning to English-medium schools. They argue that regardless of the strong Māori language foundation ākonga Māori bring with them into the English-medium setting, this neglect of te reo Māori reflects a devaluing of their language proficiency and capabilities, resulting in ākonga Māori being treated as beginning language learners. This narrow view of literacy ignores the wealth of language knowledge ākonga Māori have and can build upon, to be successful in English-medium schools.

In the study conducted by Hill (2016b) they found that although some students had success with their academic English language in secondary schools, sadly, their proficiency in te reo Māori suffered because of a lack of support to maintain and grow their Māori language ability. Hill (2016b) states that students need explicit teaching with academic English alongside their Māori language development so that the non-dominant language can be developed successfully and that one language is not prioritised over the other.

All schools play a critical role in ensuring that students are literate. They also play a critical role in ensuring that language is acquired and maintained. Schools have a responsibility to develop bi-literacy by supporting the development of a second language, while maintaining the ability and growth of the initial language. By not committing to intentional efforts that help maintain and grow te reo Māori literacy, educational systems are risking reinforcing inequities; this contributes to language loss, rather than the revitalisation of Māori language (Hill, 2016b; Rona & McLachlan, 2018).

Māori Cultural Dislocation

When transitioning or considering transitioning from Māori-medium to English-medium education, an area or issue of deep concern for ākonga Māori and their whānau is the loss of Māori cultural identity and language. Unlike Western institutes of learning, Māori-medium educational settings do not solely teach language development through a Western way of learning. They are instead educational environments that consider a holistic approach to language learning, grounded in Māori cultural values, immersed in all facets of te ao Māori, guided by tikanga and whakapapa (genealogy) (May, & Hill, 2005; Smith, 1997). Sadly, when ākonga Māori transition into English-medium settings, they are commonly required to assimilate into a culture that varies from what they knew within their kura Māori. They go into an environment that does not hold the same cultural values or collective responsibility (Webber, 2012). These spaces can seem foreign to ākonga Māori and their behaviours or responses to their new learning environments can often be misunderstood by the academic staff, resulting in a poor or challenging experience for ākonga Māori (Bishop & Berryman, 2006).

The literature identified within this review highlighted several issues that contribute to the dislocation of cultural identity for Māori students when transitioning from Māori-medium schools to English-medium schools. Weir (2012) describes how students discuss having to forget their Māoritanga and are expected to assimilate into the cultural norms of the English-medium schools. He describes this as being a “shedding of the Māori skin”(p. 51). Weir (2012) discusses how students are expected to disregard their Māori language and cultural values to be included and succeed within the English-medium education settings. Sadly, the transition is not seen to be one of an amalgamation of cultures where there is bi-cultural accommodation; rather, it is a system where you’re required to adapt to the norms of the dominant culture.

Kura Māori reinforce the value of whanaungatanga (relational connection), explicitly the tuakana-teina relationship (between elder and younger) to support growth and learning. This value is not necessarily viewed as learning solely from the elder, but is a form of reciprocity that acknowledges that learning can be achieved from and between younger people too. Hill (2016a) discusses a study of a Māori student that transitioned to English-medium education and how the values she learned through her Māori-medium education were misinterpreted by teachers as being disruptive. Tuakana-teina relationships which are an opportunity to display leadership and collective responsibility were instead seen as misbehaving. Hill (2016a) describes how this misunderstanding of cultural values and ways of connecting and working were then used to justify discipline. This case shows that English-medium schooling lacks the cultural competence required to recognise, appreciate and respond appropriately to the behaviours and cultural values of ākonga Māori.

This misunderstanding of cultural values is also reflected by Rona and McLachlan (2018) where they discuss the lack of culturally appropriate and responsive pedagogical strategies that teachers of ākonga Māori have. Rona and McLachlan (2018) state that teachers potentially weaken student identity and engagement within education because they are not able to respond to students approaches to learning with culturally appropriate strategies. They discuss that ākonga Māori from Te Kōhanga Reo and kura

Māori enter English-medium schooling bringing with them an approach to learning that informs how they connect and communicate. Rona and McLachlan (2018) stated that students may become disengaged from learning because they do not see themselves reflected within the way the learning is delivered, what is being taught, and the relationship between the student, teacher and the school. Additionally, there is often little relationship fostered between the school and the wider whānau. Māori ways of doing and being are seen as a collective responsibility. This lack of culturally responsive pedagogical practice can be damaging to the learning experiences of ākonga Māori. Rona and McLachlan (2018) describe the importance of ākonga Māori having a deep cultural connection to their learning environment.

The literature studies within this review highlight a central aspect of ākonga Māori learning experiences, where they all describe the importance of cultural identity within educational institutions. For ākonga Māori, education isn't just about acquiring knowledge through Westernised teaching practices, it is rather about having a well-rounded approach to learning that considers and affirms who they are and what they bring; this includes not only their physical selves but the lived experiences of ākonga and their whānau, and the histories and legacies that shape who they are. It is evident that when these facets of Māori ways of learning are not considered or implemented, ākonga Māori are being required to change who they are in order to reflect the environment they are entering. This contributes to what Bishop and Berryman (2006) discuss regarding the misalignment between the cultural values and practices of Māori students and those prevalent in New Zealand's English-medium education system. This misalignment reflects what is more broadly described in literature as cultural incongruity and is a major contributor to underachievement among Māori learners in English-medium schools.

To support successful transitions, there is a need for a major transformation in how English-medium schools view and engage with Māori culture. Culturally responsive pedagogy must go beyond the tokenistic use of Māori greetings or displaying Māori artwork. It requires recognising Māori ways of knowing, teaching, and learning as valid and valuable. Cultural displacement is a barrier to the success of Māori students

transitioning from Māori-medium to English-medium education. If schools are to truly support ākonga Māori to be successful when transitioning from Māori-medium to English-medium schools, then they must actively work to create culturally responsive and sustaining environments that honour the identities that ākonga Māori bring with them.

Role of Whānau and Community

A decision to transition from Māori-medium school to English-medium schools would not be a decision ākonga Māori would make in isolation. It would instead be a decision made with whānau. Māori approach all things in a relational manner; whakapapa and whanaungatanga are frequently central to any interaction. All things, including education are usually done in a collective manner. Whānau play a pivotal role in education. It is therefore essential that when a decision has been made to transition from the Māori-medium school, whānau are a part of and considered during this process.

Hill (2016a, 2016b) provide examples that discuss the importance of having strong whānau support within education, especially when transitioning to a English-medium school. They explain that ākonga that have strong whānau support and that are informed and show care about their child's education, tend to be proactive, resulting in a successful transition from Māori-medium to English-medium school. Their studies show that whānau involvement can mitigate many of the challenges that arise during the transition process. In a pilot study, Hill (2016a) states that whānau being informed about their child's learning, having an understanding about the educational system, being able to identify weaknesses in their child's learning, and engaging with the school and staff, all played a crucial role in a students' ability to adapt to the different academic and social environments.

Supporting this notion, Weir (2012) and Rona and McLachlan (2018) describe an emphasis on the benefit of collaborative relationships between a school and the whānau of their students. Partnerships with the whānau of ākonga Māori are vital to

understanding the cultural background and educational foundations that students coming from kura Māori bring to their new environment. As alluded to in the previous theme, it is essential to the success of ākonga Māori that there is an understanding and awareness of their cultural background and values. Rona and McLachlan (2018) discuss how when schools partner with whānau, they can co-construct strategies that reflect and support the needs of the ākonga. It is only through this shared connection and commitment that the needs and aspirations of the ākonga are understood, resulting in a smooth transition into the English-medium school.

The literature suggests that transition support should extend beyond the ākonga and involve their whānau. The studies position whānau as being key to supporting successful transitions of ākonga Māori into English-medium schools. Rather than just having inactive involvement, whānau can be seen as cultural navigators, advocates, and educators in their child's learning (Hill, 2016a; Rona & McLachlan, 2018). However, most English-medium schools tend to marginalise whānau input, favouring Western institutional practices and authority over partnership. This idea works in contrast to Māori-medium education, where whanaungatanga is foundational to education and whānau have a pivotal role to play in the success of the whole Kura kaupapa.

The literature consistently acknowledges that whānau play a pivotal role in supporting the educational success of ākonga Māori, particularly during the transition from Māori-medium to English-medium education. However, English-medium schools do not often engage whānau in meaningful, culturally grounded ways. Weir (2012) notes that many Māori families feel excluded from the educational decision-making process, despite their central role in sustaining language and cultural identity. Similarly, Hill (2016a) identifies the lack of reciprocal relationships between schools and whānau as a barrier to smooth transitions, arguing that schools often overlook the rich cultural and linguistic knowledge whānau can bring. Rona and McLachlan (2018) reinforce the importance of strong home-school partnerships in literacy development, suggesting that transitions are more successful when whānau aspirations and practices are recognised and built upon.

The implication is that English-medium schools must move beyond tokenistic engagement to adopt genuinely whānau-centred approaches. This includes co-constructing transition plans with whānau, inviting them into school spaces as equal contributors, and recognising their expertise as essential to their child's educational journey. Hill (2016b) argues that professional development for English-medium educators should be informed by whānau perspectives, enabling staff to better understand te ao Māori and respond more effectively to ākonga needs. Developing authentic partnerships with whānau is not only culturally responsive, but is also a strategic lever for ensuring that transitions are empowering, identity-affirming, and academically successful for Māori learners.

Systemic Issues and Policy

At the heart of the themes described above are significant challenges related to the systemic and policy related issues that are evident in New Zealand's education system. Weir (2012) and Hill (2016b) both critically discuss the lack of clear, well informed, ministry guidelines and strategies to support schools and whānau involved in transitioning ākonga Māori from Māori-medium to English-medium education. They describe how schools are often left to experiment or identify, on their own, the best practice for transitioning students from Māori-medium to English-medium schools. This leads to inconsistent practices, resulting in varied outcomes for students undertaking the transition experience.

Hill (2016a) and Weir (2012) identify issues with school staffing and resourcing that negatively impact ākonga Māori. They highlight the lack of teaching staff in English-medium schools with expertise in te ao Māori or proficiency in te reo Māori. Unfortunately, this means that even well intentioned and experienced teachers, regardless of their ethnicity, may not be suitable or able to support transitions well.

Another key concern, highlighted by Rona and McLachlan (2018), is the lack of consideration for Māori-medium learners within the national curriculum and national assessment frameworks. They maintain that the curriculum, assessment frameworks,

and tools are predominantly monolingual and monocultural and focused on Western ways of thinking and learning. They go on to argue that the use of standardised tools does not accommodate the learning abilities of bilingual or bi-literate students. This issue or gap within policy and practice means that schools often fail to recognise and support the distinct capabilities of students who transition to English-medium education.

Additionally, funding allocation or government changes to school funding priorities, do not always reflect the additional support required for ākonga Māori. Similar to students who have migrated to New Zealand and require additional English language support, schools need to provide tailored support for ākonga Māori who have spent the vast part of their educational journey in Māori-medium and Māori-speaking environments. To do this, schools need to be resourced with appropriate bi-lingual learning materials, adequate professional development in the Māori language, and guidance materials to support whānau engagement. Without policy and processes that explicitly support schools' needs, systemic barriers will remain, and ākonga Māori will continue to face challenges when transitioning to English-medium education.

Conclusion

This literature review has explored the key themes and approaches relevant to supporting ākonga Māori when transitioning from Māori-medium education to English-medium education. The review has shown that although there are limited studies available, there is a body of work that does address some of the successes and challenges ākonga Māori face when transitioning to English-medium education. Specifically, this literature has highlighted gaps for ākonga Māori, including linguistic challenges, cultural dislocation, the role whānau play in the transition experience, bi-literacy development, educational policy, and systemic issues.

There remain, however, challenges and gaps in knowledge about how ākonga Māori are supported through transition. These gaps are particularly evident in the limited guidance available to support transition, insufficient knowledge about the optimal

timing of second-language acquisition, and a lack of longitudinal research examining ākonga experiences following transition. The following section outlines the methodological approach used in this study to explore the experiences of ākonga Māori and their whānau as they navigate the transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling.

Takere: Methodology

He waka kōtuia kāhore e tukutukua ngā mimira.

A canoe that is interlaced will not become separated at the bow. In unity there is strength. (National Iwi Chairs Forum, n.d.)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological framework and analytical approach that guided this study. It introduces the Kaupapa Māori methodology as the primary model underpinning the research design and data collection process and explains its relevance to the thesis focus: the experiences of ākonga Māori transitioning from Māori-medium education to English-medium schooling. This chapter also details how thematic analysis is applied as the method of data analysis and discusses the ethical considerations relevant to this project, particularly from a Māori perspective.

Grounded in ‘by Māori, for Māori’ principles, this research is shaped by Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing. Kaupapa Māori methodology emerged from the work of Māori academics who recognised the need to challenge dominant Western research models and instead, prioritise Māori epistemologies, tikanga, and aspirations (Pihama, 2010; Smith, 1997). It is an approach that asserts tino rangatiratanga over the research process and centres Māori voices, values, and knowledge systems. In the context of this study, Kaupapa Māori methodology ensures that the research process is culturally responsive, relational, and collectively beneficial. It enables the voices and experiences of ākonga Māori and their whānau to be heard, understood, and reflected authentically in the research outcomes.

Kaupapa Māori methodology aligns closely with the intent of this study, which seeks to understand the lived realities of Māori students navigating the shift from Māori-medium to English-medium education. It affirms Māori agency, upholds the mana of the participants, and draws on relational principles such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and aroha (love) (Cram, 2001). The approach employed recognises that

research involving Māori must not only reflect Māori perspectives but also contribute meaningfully to Māori aspirations and wellbeing. Through this methodology, participants are positioned as knowledge holders, not subjects, and their kōrero forms the foundation of the research narrative.

To support this methodological approach, thematic analysis is used as the method for interpreting the qualitative data. This method was selected for its capacity to surface individual and collective experiences through the identification and analysis of recurring patterns across participant narratives. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe thematic analysis as a process that goes beyond simply summarising data; rather, it involves constructing analytic insights in response to research questions. Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, which will be discussed, offers a systematic way to engage with participants' stories, ensuring that both unique and shared experiences are acknowledged. Thematic analysis is compatible with Kaupapa Māori research because of its theoretical flexibility, its emphasis on participants, and its focus on making meaning of lived experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2022, Smith, 2022). Thematic analysis allows the voices of participants to remain central, while also respecting the integrity of their lived realities.

The remainder of this chapter elaborates the principles and application of the Kaupapa Māori methodology in this study, describes the research design and data collection process, and outlines the analytical process used to generate findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations, including how tikanga and Kaupapa Māori principles informed decisions throughout the research. This chapter demonstrates why the methodology and methods chosen were not only appropriate, but essential, to the kaupapa and intent of this research.

Definition of Kaupapa Māori Research

Kaupapa Māori research is a methodology that focuses on Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing (Smith, 1997; Smith 2022). It is grounded in mātauranga Māori and is dedicated to the shared aspirations of Māori communities (Cram, 2001). In addition to

being a research tool, it is also an approach that is decolonising and transformative, as it allows Māori to assert control over research about them, the research process and the outcomes (Smith, 2022; Cram, 2001). Kaupapa Māori is a methodology that places emphasis on Māori as knowledge holders (Smith, 1997). It also serves as a means of actively resisting deficit-based thinking and narratives that have historically only viewed Māori learners, communities, and knowledge through a colonial lens (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

As a result of resistance from Māori led scholars and movements during the late 1980s, Kaupapa Māori research methodology emerged. This development responded to the marginalisation of Māori within many of the state sectors. It also addressed the positioning of mātauranga Māori within Westernised institutions (Hiha, 2016; Smith, 1997). Kaupapa Māori methodology challenges Western ideologies that position themselves as superior to Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of understanding (Smith, 2022). Rather, Kaupapa Māori methodology validates Māori ways of knowing, being and doing and upholds the importance of the Māori language and Māori cultural practices (Cram, 2001). It promotes Māori and validates their right to have control over research that affects them (Smith, 2022). This methodology is vital to the research project, as its exploration of the experiences of ākonga Māori and their whānau (when transitioning to English-medium schools), will be grounded in Māori ways of knowing and doing. A Kaupapa Māori approach will ensure that the voices of ākonga and their whānau are both honoured, and central, to the outcomes of this research (Cram, 2001).

This research is guided by two core Māori principles: tino rangatiratanga and whanaungatanga. The first principle involves Māori having the right, and control, over any research that may be about them or impact them. The second principle, whanaungatanga (relational connectedness), recognises that relationships are at the core of all things Māori and that people do not exist in isolation. Māori research is collaborative and favours collective benefit over the individual (Bishop, 1996; Cram, 2001; Smith, 1997, Smith 2022).

Smith (1997) discusses six main principles of Kaupapa Māori methodology:

- Tino Rangatiratanga - relative autonomy, self-determination
- Ako Māori (Culturally Preferred Pedagogy)
- Taonga tuku iho - the cultural aspirations principle
- Kia piki ake i ng[ā] raruraru o te kāinga - the socio-economic mediation principle,
- Whānau - the extended family structure principle
- Kaupapa - the collective philosophy principle.

All of these principles influenced this study: from the questions that were asked, how the participants were engaged with and recruited, to the way findings were interpreted and shared. A Kaupapa Māori approach ensures that ākonga Māori and their whānau are viewed through a lens of strength, identity, and potential throughout the research and transition experience.

Kaupapa Māori research involves being accountable to Māori. It requires researchers to work in ways that are respectful, relational, and uphold mana. Smith (2022) states that Indigenous research is not neutral or detached, it is grounded in self-determination and responsibility to the communities it engages. Therefore, Kaupapa Māori research does not just look to create understanding, rather, it is a way to contribute to the wellbeing and success of te ao Māori.

Key Principles of Kaupapa Māori Methodology

As previously alluded to, Kaupapa Māori methodology is guided by a set of core principles that are grounded in mātauranga and te ao Māori. These principles are interconnected and are rarely applied in isolation. The principles were used throughout this research, alongside other Māori values, to inform every aspect of the study, from research design, engagement with and recruitment of participants, to the analysis and interpretation of the data. Each principle is outlined in Table 4 below, beginning with a description of the principle, followed by an explanation of its contribution to the philosophical framework of this study.

Table 4*Kaupapa Māori Principles*

Principle:	Tino rangatiratanga — relative autonomy, self-determination
Description:	Māori sovereignty or self-determination is guaranteed in Te Tiriti o Waitangi
Contribution to study:	Tino Rangatiratanga is a central principle within any Kaupapa Māori research project. It ensures that Māori are given the right to control and shape how their knowledge and experiences are shared. Tino Rangatiratanga guided the methodology throughout the entirety of this research project, prioritising the voices of the ākonga and their whānau. The principle ensured that the ākonga and their whānau were not just contributors of knowledge to be studied but were instrumental in how this project was influenced. Kōrero shared throughout the wānanga, utilising tikanga Māori, enabled a space for ākonga and their whānau to share their experiences, while having control over how they shared. They were able to share in te reo Māori when this better articulated an aspect for them or allowed them to draw from each other, reflecting a collective response. As the researcher, I facilitated the kōrero by listening to what was shared, being mindful to hold my own experiences and voice, valuing and elevating the experiences of the whānau and ākonga. Tino Rangatiratanga extended beyond the wānanga as I also ensured that the transcripts were returned to the participants for their approval to add, amend, or remove any information that they didn't feel reflected their kōrero; this ensured that their integrity was protected. Tino Rangatiratanga is important to Māori when researching Māori. It is vital that what is used affirms the realities of tāngata Māori (Māori people).
Principle:	He taonga tuku iho — cultural aspirations
Description:	Tikanga (Māori custom), te reo (language), and mātauranga (knowledge) are invaluable treasures passed down to us
Contribution to study:	He taonga tuku iho affirms the value of being Māori, validating Māori culture, language and knowledge, centring cultural connection and stability within education and research. Within Kaupapa Māori research, this principle affirms a Māori researcher's position for undertaking research as it is for the benefit and advancement of

	Māori. Throughout this study, tikanga and te reo Māori informed every aspect. As a researcher it allowed me to recognise and display how I felt proud to be Māori, thus supporting the students and their whānau to be proud of their cultural identity when facing experiences such as transitioning school. This principle allowed me to challenge deficit thinking about Māori culture and knowledge, positioning Māori cultural identity as a strength. He taonga tuku iho ensured that Māori ways of being and doing were central within the outcome of this research project, validating what was shared by the ākonga and their whānau.
Principle:	Ako — culturally preferred pedagogy
Description:	Everyone is a learner / has something to learn; everyone is a teacher / has something to share
Contribution to study:	Within te ao Māori, Ako refers to the reciprocal nature of both teaching and learning, emphasising the interchangeable correlation between both teaching and learning. Ako challenges traditional understanding of how knowledge is gained, reinforcing that just as researchers learn from participants, participants can also learn from researchers. Throughout the wānanga, it was reinforced that the ākonga and their whānau were the experts, sharing their experiences. The kōrero that was shared wasn't treated as data collection, but more of a relational exchange naturally building a narrative that reflected the ākonga and whānau experiences. Wānanga began in the foundations of tikanga Māori, respecting a generational hierarchy, offering kaumātua or the head of the whānau the opportunity to lead the wānanga, this was also offered to the ākonga before this opportunity being taken up by the researcher. Ako reinforces that everyone has something to share and learn (Cram, 2017).
Principle:	Kia piki ake i ng[ā]a raruraru o te kāinga — mediation of socio-economic and home difficulties
Description:	Kaupapa Māori mediation practices can successfully intervene to moderate the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage

Contribution to study:	Kia piki ake i ng[ā] raruraru o te kāinga is a principle that refers to and acknowledges the extensive social and economic aspects that have impacted Māori for generations. These impacts have had severe intergenerational trauma and are evident in most Māori whānau and communities. Kia piki ake i ng[ā] raruraru o te kāinga guided this research project by recognising and acknowledging not only the systemic challenges ākonga and their whānau faced when transitioning schools but also the everyday challenges. Throughout the wānanga the participants openly shared kōrero and identified challenges such as educational resourcing, social isolation, as well as language and cultural barriers. Participants were able to share this kōrero without fear of judgement and were listened to empathetically.
Principle:	Whānau — extended family structure
Description:	Whānau is a persistent collective structure by which Māori organise their social world
Contribution to study:	Whānau was a fundamental principle in this study as it recognises the collective responsibility and nature towards knowledge and experiences. Whānau is often translated as family; however, in Kaupapa Māori theory it is more complex and refers to a collective group that is multi-generational. This study recognised that the standard understanding of whānau may not represent what is considered to be whānau by Māori. It is for this reason that ākonga were invited to include their wider whānau within the wānanga. The immediate whānau were seen as being central to the experiences ākonga faced, but as whānau is a collective and are part of the core that supports ākonga Māori, it was imperative that wider whānau voices were included. This reflects an approach that affirms the importance of intergenerational contribution and support and also supports the fact that educational journeys are taken as a collective.
Principle:	Kaupapa — collective vision
Description:	Having a collective vision binds people to one another for the achievement of cultural wellbeing and prosperity

Contribution to study:

Kaupapa refers to the underlying philosophy or the collective responsibility in ensuring better outcomes for Māori. The kaupapa within this study was grounded in ensuring that the outcome highlights the experiences of ākonga and their whānau when transitioning between Māori-medium and English-medium education systems. This was done by privileging Māori voices, while identifying ways to ensure Māori aspirations were communicated. By focussing on ākonga and whānau experiences, this research highlighted the collective agenda and identified areas within the educational system for transformation, that continue to challenge Māori.

Note: Adapted from “Kaupapa Māori research,” by F. Cram and A. Adcock, in P. Liamputtong (ed.), *Handbook of qualitative and cross-cultural research methods: A social science perspective* (p. 64), 2022, Edward Elgar <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800376625> . Copyright 2022 by the Pranee Liamputtong.

When selecting an appropriate methodology to underpin a research study, it is essential that the research goals, values, and ethical foundations are aligned. Employing a Kaupapa Māori methodology was therefore necessary for this study. It ensures that Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing remain central to the research process (Pihama, Smith, Taki & Lee, 2002; Smith, 1997), and that the research is accountable to the people and communities it seeks to serve.

Kaupapa Māori methodology is grounded in tikanga and mātauranga Māori, and reflects relational values such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and aroha. These values shape the way research is conducted, from relationship building to data analysis. This all helps to create a culturally safe and empowering space for ākonga and their whānau (Bishop, 1996; Cram, 2001).

Ākonga who attend Māori-medium education are often strongly connected to te reo Māori, their cultural identity, whānau, hapū, and iwi. These connections are foundational to their learning journeys and aspirations. However, English-medium education systems are not always equipped to recognise or support these cultural dimensions. As a result, Māori learners and their whānau frequently face challenges

such as disconnection, identity loss, and limited linguistic support when transitioning between educational settings (Berryman et al., 2018; Hill, 2016a).

Historically, Western research paradigms have positioned Māori as objects of study rather than knowledge holders, often applying a deficit-based analysis that fails to reflect the realities and strengths of Māori communities (Smith, 1997; Smith, 2022). Kaupapa Māori research challenges these colonial approaches and reasserts Māori authority over the research process. It is inherently political and transformative, enabling Māori to define their own narratives, experiences, and solutions.

This methodology aligns directly with the study's aims which are to explore transitional experiences in a culturally grounded way and to inform educational practice in both Māori- medium and English-medium contexts. Through wānanga and kōrero with ākonga and whānau, the research upholds Māori voices and contributes to a wider movement for educational equity and Māori success.

Ethical Considerations in Kaupapa Māori Research

Ethical considerations within Māori research are fundamental to ensuring that studies affirm Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing. Within a Kaupapa Māori framework, ethical practice is guided by tikanga Māori, shaping not only what is researched, but how it is researched, with whom, and for whose benefit. This study was underpinned by *Te Ara Tika: Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics* (Hudson et al., 2010), which outlines four interrelated principles for ethical Māori research: Whakapapa, Tika, Manaakitanga, and Mana. These principles, grounded in tikanga Māori, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and Western ethics, guided the entire research process from ideation through to dissemination.

In Kaupapa Māori research, relationships are central. The principle of whakapapa relates to connections and obligations between the researcher and participants. It encompasses consultation, engagement, and kaitiakitanga (guardianship). In this study, the researcher acknowledged any existing relationships with ākonga, whānau, and educators, recognising that these ties come with responsibilities (Hudson et al.,

2010). Through this research, ākonga Māori and their whānau were empowered to share their experiences authentically, and their narratives were honoured with the intent of contributing to systemic educational change.

Manaakitanga is an expansive and nuanced concept that does not translate easily into English. It relates to expressions of care, respect, and ensuring the mana of all those involved (Hudson et al., 2010). While a formal kāhui kaumātua (elder advisory group) was not established for this study, the researcher maintained regular engagement with kaumātua and trusted cultural advisors from within their community, to ensure that the research process reflected appropriate cultural practice and accountability. This ensured that tikanga was upheld, and that relationships were nurtured with aroha, humility, and care.

The principle of mana acknowledges the power and authority of all those involved in the research. It recognises that ethical research must consider who has rights, roles, and responsibilities, particularly in relation to potential risks and benefits (Hudson et al., 2010). As this study explored potentially sensitive and personal experiences of transition, the researcher was mindful of protecting the mana of participants throughout. This began with tikanga-based practices. Every wānanga was opened with karakia (prayer) and mihi and shaped by whanaungatanga processes to foster trust and connection. Participants were offered hui ā-kanohi (face-to-face) engagements, allowing for whakaaro (thoughts) and questions to be shared before informed consent was given. Participants were also given opportunities to review and reflect on their contributions, and findings were returned in accessible and meaningful ways, reinforcing the principle of reciprocity.

The final principle, Tika, refers to the integrity and validity of the research. It encourages us to ask whether the research design is sound, appropriate, and likely to lead to outcomes that benefit Māori (Hudson et al., 2010). This project was designed with ākonga Māori at the centre. The research question emerged from the personal experiences of the researcher and was further refined through kōrero with other Māori whānau and Kaupapa Māori researchers. Through the ethics approval process,

potential risks were carefully considered, and mitigation strategies were put in place to ensure participant safety and wellbeing.

Overall, this research embodies the Kaupapa Māori principle of tino rangatiratanga, enabling Māori to define their own realities and solutions. The study addresses a clear gap in educational research by investigating the transitions of ākonga Māori from a Māori perspective. The ethical framework ensured that the research process was relational, actively protects and upholds individual mana, was culturally safe, and contributes meaningfully to the aspirations of Māori whānau, communities, and education systems.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As outlined in Chapter One, my insider positionality informed how I engaged with participants and facilitated the research process. During data collection, my role was to facilitate respectful, culturally aligned kōrero, ensuring that the process upheld whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and tikanga Māori. This included leading or supporting cultural practices such as karakia and mihi and responding to the natural flow of kōrero with humility and attentiveness.

My insider position supported trust and openness with participants but also required ongoing reflexivity to avoid assumptions or over-identification with their experiences (Cram, 2001; Smith, 1997). I was conscious not to assume authoritative knowledge, but instead approached the research as a facilitator and collaborator, creating space for participants to express their own mātauranga and experiences. This reflects the principle of ako within Kaupapa Māori, where learning is reciprocal and knowledge is generated collectively through respectful engagement (Pihama et al., 2002). In this way, I remained conscious of supporting participant-led narratives rather than imposing interpretations shaped by my own experiences.

Reflexivity was woven throughout the research process. I continuously reflected on how my own experiences and assumptions shaped the research design, facilitation of

wānanga, interpretation of kōrero, and reporting of findings (Smith, 2022). I maintained regular dialogue with kaumātua and trusted cultural advisors to ensure that tikanga Māori remained central and that my approach was both accountable and responsive. This ongoing reflection helped balance the responsibilities of insider knowledge with the need for critical distance and ethical rigour.

The credibility and accuracy of the research were also supported through member checking, whereby participants were given the opportunity to review and amend their contributions. This process helped ensure that participants retained control over how their experiences were represented and that their kōrero was reflected accurately and with care. It reinforced the commitment of this study to Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing, not only in what was shared, but in how participants' experiences were interpreted and represented.

Research Aims and Questions

As outlined in Chapter One, this study explores the experiences of ākonga Māori transitioning from kura Māori into English-medium schooling. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What experiences do ākonga Māori have when transitioning from kura Māori to English-medium education?
- Is the transition seamless and equitable?
- Does the transition process disrupt the learner's experience and, if so, does it also impact their achievement?

These questions informed the methodological design of the study, including the selection of a Kaupapa Māori methodology and the methods used to engage with ākonga Māori and whānau. A Kaupapa Māori approach enabled these experiences to be explored in ways that privilege Māori voices and participants' understandings of their own experiences. The research process was therefore grounded in tikanga Māori and practices including whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga and karakia (Smith, 2022).

Qualitative Approach within a Kaupapa Māori Framework

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in Kaupapa Māori methodology, reflecting a by Māori, for Māori, with Māori ethos. A qualitative paradigm was selected for its alignment with Kaupapa Māori principles, allowing the research process to centre relationships, dialogue, and context specific meaning making (Bishop, 1996; Cram, 2001).

Cultural values such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and kotahitanga (collective unity) underpinned both the research design and the interactions with participants. These values are central to Kaupapa Māori research and Māori ethical frameworks, which emphasise relational accountability, collective responsibility, and upholding mana (Hudson et al., 2010; Smith, 2022). Grounding the research in these values contributed to an environment where ākonga and their whānau felt safe and respected, and where their experiences could be shared openly and authentically.

Qualitative methods are well suited to Kaupapa Māori research because they focus not only on outcomes, but also on the relational processes by which knowledge is gathered and co-constructed (Pihama et al., 2002). In this study, the method enabled kōrero (dialogue) that was flexible and responsive, creating a space for participants to reflect on their lived experiences, and for those stories to be understood within their wider whānau and cultural contexts.

The emphasis on collective rather than individual perspectives recognises the central role that whānau play in the educational journeys of ākonga Māori. By including whānau voices, the research values diverse viewpoints, acknowledges shared decision making, and reflects the lived reality that schooling is never experienced in isolation.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants who meet criteria relevant to the research, while snowball sampling uses existing participants or networks

to identify other suitable participants (Kawharu, 2024; Palinkas et al., 2015). These strategies were selected to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria, while also drawing on established relationships and community networks to support engagement and trust.

The inclusion criteria focused on ākonga Māori aged 13–19 years who had attended a kura Māori for at least five consecutive years and had transitioned into a English-medium school setting. Whānau members, including parents, guardians, or significant others responsible for supporting the ākonga were also invited to participate, acknowledging the vital role they play in the transition process.

Recruitment occurred through advertising in closed Facebook groups connected to kura Māori and te reo Māori advocacy (see Appendix B), with prior consent to post recruitment materials and invite participation obtained from group administrators or Tumuaiki (principals). Interested ākonga and whānau contacted the primary researcher directly. Kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) hui were offered to introduce the research, answer pātai (questions), and establish whanaungatanga. Information sheets and consent forms were provided following this initial engagement (see Appendix C and D).

Research Setting and Context

Interview settings were determined collaboratively with participants, to ensure comfort, cultural safety, and accessibility. Options included the participant's home, a public space, the university, or online platforms such as Microsoft Teams. All interviews ultimately took place either at participants' homes or online, as these spaces offered familiarity and flexibility.

It was also essential that the venue supported tikanga Māori, including karakia, mihi, and manaakitanga. The environment needed to accommodate collective participation, reflect whānau values, and allow ākonga and whānau to engage in ways that were meaningful to them.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was informed by tikanga Māori and employed a wānanga style approach using semi-structured interviews. Ākonga were offered the choice of being interviewed independently or alongside their whānau. Indicative questions helped initiate kōrero, but the structure was intentionally flexible to allow narratives to flow naturally. Follow up questions were posed to clarify or deepen the discussion, creating a space where ideas could build and evolve collaboratively.

All interviews were bi-lingual and embedded in tikanga practices. Each session began and ended with karakia, with participants invited to lead if they wished. Mihi (greetings and acknowledgements) followed, guided by the preferences of each whānau. The researcher shared her own background and connection to the kaupapa, as part of establishing relational trust.

At the conclusion of each wānanga, a koha was offered to acknowledge participants' time and mātauranga, and kai was shared to whakanoa (return to neutral state), returning to a state of balance and completion. If appropriate, a waiata was also sung, reinforcing manaakitanga and honouring the space created through shared dialogue.

Introduction to Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach was selected to analyse the kōrero shared during the wānanga, as it supports the identification of common themes while preserving the integrity of participant narratives. More than simply describing the data, thematic analysis involves constructing an analytic story that meaningfully responds to the research questions.

This approach is particularly well suited to culturally responsive research, as it enables deep engagement with participants while acknowledging context and meaning (Braun & Clark, 2022). In this study, participant kōrero was interpreted through a cultural lens, with themes generated through a reflexive process informed by shared experiences

(Braun & Clark, 2022). The use of pūrākau (oral narratives or traditional stories), as described by Lee (2009), provided a culturally grounded approach to engaging with and interpreting the kōrero. Reflexive thematic analysis enabled the research to express kaupapa through these narratives, supporting interpretation in a way that upheld cultural safety, accuracy, and integrity (Braun & Clark, 2022). The process was underpinned by relational accountability, ensuring that the researcher remained responsive and accountable to ākonga and their whānau throughout the research process, rather than positioning themes as imposed or detached from their lived realities.

A Kaupapa Māori Lens on Data Analysis

While data analysis is often viewed as a technical process, within this study it was relational, reflexive, and grounded in the lived experiences of the ākonga and their whānau. Kaupapa Māori principles guided the interpretation of data, ensuring that the analysis remained aligned with Māori values and worldviews. The values of manaakitanga and tino rangatiratanga were central in this phase of the research. Manaakitanga ensured that the mana of participants and their kōrero was upheld, while tino rangatiratanga ensured that the interpretation remained in the control of the participants.

To maintain cultural accuracy and authenticity, any uncertainties or misinterpretations were clarified directly with ākonga and their whānau. Fluency in te reo Māori and a deep connection to te ao Māori were essential in this process, supporting the interpretation of metaphors, expressions, and conceptual meanings that emerged. These skills enabled the researcher to make sense of the data in a way that was culturally grounded and consistent with Kaupapa Māori principles.

Thematic Analysis Process

This research utilised Reflexive Thematic Analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase model. This approach highlights the active and interpretive role of the

researcher in forming themes and aligns with Kaupapa Māori methodology, which values reflexivity, relational engagement, and cultural positioning.

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the dataset

Following each wānanga, participant kōrero was transcribed and reviewed while listening to the original audio recordings. This allowed for deeper engagement with the stories and ensured the accuracy and integrity of the data. Transcripts were read and re-read to develop a holistic understanding of participant narratives. Kupu Māori were translated with careful attention to context, retaining cultural and conceptual meaning. Reflexive journaling supported this phase, helping the researcher track initial impressions and positional influences during analysis.

Phase 2: Coding

Coding was carried out manually through a combination of highlighting, margin notes, and categorisation. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe this phase as the systematic identification of features relevant to the research questions. Codes were developed at both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying meaning) levels. Participant language, metaphors, direct quotes, and whakataukī (proverbs) were all coded in either te reo Māori or English to retain the cultural and conceptual integrity of the kōrero. These codes were shared and discussed with supervisors and participants to ensure that the ngako (essence) of the kōrero was accurately captured.

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

Coded data was reviewed and grouped into clusters of similar ideas or concepts to develop initial themes. These early themes reflected shared experiences and conceptual patterns, rather than just summaries of participant responses. The goal was to identify collective stories about the transition from kura Māori to English-medium education while still respecting the uniqueness of individual narratives.

Phase 4: Reviewing and refining themes

Initial themes were reviewed against both the coded data and the full dataset to ensure coherence and internal consistency. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe these as

candidate themes that require refining to ensure they meaningfully reflect the data. During this phase, attention was paid to maintaining the integrity of participant voices and upholding Kaupapa Māori values. Both challenges, and strengths in the participant experiences were retained, to present a balanced and authentic representation.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Themes were refined and named in ways that reflected their core concepts. Where appropriate, themes were named using Māori language, whakataukī, or expressions used by participants. This naming process was guided by te ao Māori and Kaupapa Māori principles. However, as the themes were refined, no single Māori term or expression adequately captured the collective experiences represented within each theme. The final themes were therefore named in English to ensure they accurately reflected the breadth and shared meaning of the ākonga and whānau experiences.

Phase 6: Writing up

The final phase involved weaving together the thematic findings with theoretical interpretation, contextual insights, and illustrative participant quotes. The final write up serves not only to describe the themes but to advocate for systemic change in education, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive approaches that support successful transitions for ākonga Māori.

Reflexivity in the Analytical Process

Reflexivity was a critical component of the analytical process, particularly given my close connection to this kaupapa. As a mother of a child who has experienced the transition from kura Māori to English-medium education, and as a kaiako who has supported ākonga through similar journeys, I occupy a deeply embedded position within this research. These lived experiences provided me with rich insight and empathy, enabling me to engage with the kōrero in a way that was relational, culturally attuned, and emotionally responsive.

However, this proximity to the kaupapa also required intentional and continuous self-reflection. It was essential to be mindful of the ways my own experiences, beliefs, and assumptions could influence the interpretation of the data. While it was natural to feel resonance with the stories shared by participants, many of which mirrored my own experiences, it was important to ensure that their voices were not overshadowed by my own. Reflexive journaling, discussions with supervisors, and checking my interpretations with participants helped to mitigate bias and maintain analytic integrity.

Reflexivity in this context was not just a methodological tool, but a tikanga Māori practice that honoured the relationships and whakapapa connections woven through the research. The process demanded a balance between aroha and tika, in order to listen with compassion, while also interpreting with discipline and accountability. By consciously positioning myself within the research, while also stepping back to critically reflect, I was able to uphold the mana of the kōrero; this allowed the themes to emerge authentically, grounded in the lived experiences of the participants.

Summary

This section has outlined the approach taken to analyse participant data using reflexive thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase model. This analytical method allowed for an in-depth and culturally responsive engagement with the kōrero shared during the wānanga. Each phase of the analysis was undertaken with careful attention to relationality, cultural context, and reflexivity; this ensured that the themes were not only systematically derived, but also remained grounded in the lived realities of ākonga Māori and their whānau.

The incorporation of Kaupapa Māori principles such as manaakitanga and tino rangatiratanga helped maintain the integrity and mana of the kōrero throughout the analytical process. These values ensured that interpretation was not imposed, but co-constructed in partnership with participants, reflecting a by Māori, for Māori approach. The research process acknowledged the spiritual, cultural, and emotional weight of the stories shared and sought to honour them in a way that aligned with Māori ways of

knowing and being. The themes that emerged from this process will be presented in the following findings chapter, offering insight into the transition experiences of ākonga Māori and the supports needed to uphold their success.

Kiato: Participant biographies

Mā te kiato te waka e tauta, mā te whānau te kaupapa e whakakaha

Just like the crossbeams of a waka stabilise it, so do the people strengthen and uphold the research. (Tui Marie Barbarich-Tawera)

Introduction

Before turning to the themes that emerged in this study, it is only right to ground this chapter in the mana of the whānau whose kōrero gives life to this research. Doing so, upholds the relational foundations of Kaupapa Māori research and reflects a commitment to the whakapapa of the kōrero shared. It is important to first acknowledge and introduce the whānau who generously contributed to this study. Their kōrero, whakaaro, experiences, and aspirations form the heart of this research, and this chapter honours the whakapapa and context each whānau brings. Understanding who they are, where they come from, and the educational pathways they have journeyed along, provides essential grounding for the findings that follow.

This research involved five whānau Māori whose tamariki transitioned from Māori-medium to English-medium school education. To ensure that the kōrero shared by the ākonga and their whānau is respected, and to uphold confidentiality, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms and identifying information, de-identified. They are only used for interpreting data, and not interchangeable with Mātua and ākonga. These pseudonyms align with the waka metaphor that grounds this thesis and reflects the journeys experienced by the ākonga and their whānau, positioning them as integral parts of the waka itself. In this project, ākonga are represented as hoe (paddles) and their whānau as punga (anchor stones), emphasising the important and interconnected roles each plays in navigating the educational pathway ahead. Table 5 provides a summary of the pseudonyms used for each ākonga and whānau grouping throughout this thesis.

Each whānau profile presented in this chapter draws upon the kōrero shared through the whakawhanaungatanga established during our wānanga-style kōrero. Following the researcher introduction, ākonga and their whānau were given time and space to share openly about themselves, their journeys, challenges, and hopes for their tamariki. Their kōrero, whakapapa, and aspirations are conveyed with care, respect, and a commitment to maintaining the intentions and integrity of their voices.

By situating these biographies within a broader Kaupapa Māori framework, this chapter acknowledges that educational experiences cannot be separated from identity, whānau dynamics, cultural commitments, or the histories that shape these pathways. The transition from kura Māori to English-medium schooling is rarely a simple decision or transactional administrative process. Instead, for many whānau, it is an emotional, cultural, and often challenging process considered deeply by the collective. Introducing the whānau first provides a foundation that supports the interpretation of the themes in the findings chapter, ensuring their experiences are understood within the fullness of their contexts.

The following profiles provide an overview of each whānau, their educational backgrounds, the supports they provided or received throughout the transition, and the factors that influenced their decision to leave kura Māori. While their iwi affiliations, locality, and schooling histories varied, each whānau shared a strong commitment to te reo Māori, cultural identity, and the educational aspirations of their tamariki. Across the group, ākonga and their whānau had engaged in a range of Māori-medium pathways, including Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, Kura ā Iwi, Rūmaki Reo classes, and bi-lingual units. Each whānau brought their own experiences and contexts shaped by their schooling environments and the wider influences of their whānau and communities.

Collectively, this overview highlights the diversity of experiences, the shared values present among the participants, and the common dedication to ensuring the wellbeing and educational success of their tamariki. It also provides the necessary foundation for understanding the kōrero that follows and the themes that emerged through this research.

Table 5
Participant Pseudonyms and Whānau Groupings

Whānau	Ākonga pseudonym	Whānau pseudonym
Whānau A	Hoe1 Hoe 3	Punga 1
Whānau E	Hoe 4	Punga 2
Whānau I	Hoe 5	Punga 3
Whānau O	Hoe 6	Punga 4
Whānau U	Hoe 2	

Whānau A:

Whānau A consisted of Punga 1 and their two tamariki, Hoe 1 and Hoe 3. Hoe 3 shared their kōrero alongside Punga 1, while Hoe 1 participated in a separate kōrero session. This whānau spent their schooling years living between Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) and Kirikiriroa (Hamilton). Punga 1 was not raised with te reo Māori as a first language, but maintained a strong connection to their tūrangawaewae (ancestral lands) and has continued to prioritise their own reo Māori learning alongside their tamariki. Punga 1 is academically successful and is well established within their professional field. Punga 1 has been a central source of support, encouragement, and aspiration for both hoe throughout their education.

The educational pathways of Hoe 1 and Hoe 3 reflect a blend of Māori-medium and English-medium schooling. Hoe 3, now in their final year of wharekura, began their journey in ECE (early childhood education), Te Kōhanga Reo and attended kura Māori from Years 1–6, before transitioning to English-medium intermediate. The move into English-medium was initiated by Hoe 3, although Punga 1 strongly encouraged their return to Māori-medium education for secondary school in order to sustain their reo, cultural grounding, and sense of belonging within Māori educational spaces. This encouragement played a significant role in Hoe 3 re-entering wharekura for their senior schooling years. Hoe 1 attended a mix of English-medium ECE and Te Kōhanga Reo before enrolling in a kura Māori, later moving into English-medium education for both intermediate and secondary schooling. Both Hoe received additional tutoring in English

literacy and numeracy; their whānau were committed to, and deeply involved in, supporting their learning. They also maintained strong relationships with, and active roles in, the kura their tamariki attended.

The decisions to transition to English-medium schooling in the first place were initiated by both Hoe themselves. Although these decisions were emotional and somewhat sad and upsetting for the whānau, Punga 1 prioritised supporting their autonomy and educational needs. Hoe 3 sought a new challenge, describing feelings of boredom at their kura Māori and a desire to learn alongside whanaunga of a similar age. Hoe 1 wished to strengthen their English literacy, expand their social circle beyond the tamariki they had grown up with, and pursue learning opportunities in the arts that were unavailable at their kura Māori.

Together, the experiences of Whānau A reflect a deep commitment to te reo Māori and cultural identity, balanced with thoughtful decision-making around educational aspirations, personal growth, and the long-term opportunities available to their tamariki.

Whānau E:

Whānau E consisted of Punga 2 and their tamaiti, Hoe 4, who chose to share their kōrero together during the wānanga. Punga 2 is a trained teacher working within English-medium schooling, specialising in the teaching of te reo Māori. Although Punga 2 was not raised with te reo Māori as their first language, they returned to immersion learning as an adult, and have worked hard to make te reo Māori a central part of their personal and whānau life. This commitment strongly influenced the upbringing of Hoe 4, who was raised with te reo Māori from infancy and encouraged to stand confidently as Māori.

Hoe 4 began attending Te Kōhanga Reo before the age of one and continued their learning in kura Māori until the end of Year 8. When it came time to transition into secondary schooling, Punga 2 actively sought a school that they believed would continue to strengthen Hoe 4's reo. Their initial choice was a bilingual secondary that

was highly sought after and valued within te ao Māori. However, the level of immersion provided did not match what Punga 2 had initially expected. The programme did not reflect the depth of reo Māori learning they envisioned for their tamaiti, and as a result, Punga 2 made the decision to withdraw Hoe 4 from the school.

Hoe 4 then moved to a second secondary school, this time a local English-medium school, that appeared to be developing its Māori-medium pathways. Punga 2 also wanted their tamaiti to experience a kura that was local, as the closest kura Māori was quite a fair distance from their home. Although the move brought them geographically closer to home and seemed more promising, this school presented a new set of challenges. The Māori department at this kura was under significant pressure, facing limits on resourcing, staffing constraints, and tensions between the aspirations of Māori educators and the expectations of school leadership. These systemic barriers created a difficult environment for Hoe 4, who struggled to feel supported both personally and academically. Despite remaining connected to their identity and reo, the environment did not allow Hoe 4 to fully thrive. Hoe 4 did identify a positive to this experience, which was the depth of friendship they were able to develop during their time at this kura, friendships they continue to maintain.

Recognising the challenges and drawing upon their understanding of the English-medium schooling system, Punga 2 advocated strongly for their tamaiti and sought a more supportive environment. Hoe 4 then transitioned to a third secondary school, another English-medium setting, where they finally found the opportunities and support they needed. Here, Hoe 4 thrived, particularly within kapa haka, gaining leadership roles and experiencing a sense of belonging and recognition that had been missing in earlier schools. At the time of the kōrero Hoe 4 had completed their schooling successfully and was in their first-year post-secondary school. Hoe 4 was still strongly connected to their reo and their culture.

Throughout these transitions, Punga 2's aspirations remained consistent; that was, for their tamaiti to stand strong as Māori while confidently navigating both te ao Māori and

te ao Pākehā. Ensuring that Hoe 4's reo Māori was nurtured and allowed to flourish remained central to every decision made along their educational journey.

Whānau I:

Whānau I consisted of Punga 3 and their tamaiti, Hoe 5. They reside in the wider Tāmaki Makaurau region, surrounded by extended whānau who are deeply committed to their marae and its cultural responsibilities. Regular return to the marae is a central part of their whānau life, grounding them in tikanga, whakapapa, and tuakiritanga. These are elements that have shaped both Punga 3 and Hoe 5 throughout their educational journey.

Although not fluent in te reo Māori, Punga 3 has always held a strong commitment to te ao Māori and language learning. They completed Māori studies at both secondary and tertiary levels and have a professional background in early childhood education, including time working in Te Kōhanga Reo. These experiences strengthened their aspirations to raise Hoe 5 in a reo Māori rich environment and instilled confidence in supporting their child's Māori-medium education pathway.

Hoe 5 began their early learning in English-medium ECE before transitioning to Te Kōhanga Reo, where they were cared for by their tūpuna and immersed in reo and tikanga Māori. They then continued into kura Māori, remaining there until Year 10. During this time, they developed strong cultural grounding and a deep sense of belonging. However, as Hoe 5 grew older, the whānau became increasingly frustrated by decision-making within the kura that they felt was unjust and biased. They experienced situations where certain ākonga were prioritised over others, limiting the opportunities available to Hoe 5. These patterns conflicted with the whānau expectations of equity, fairness, and collective care within Māori-medium education.

As a result, the whānau made the difficult decision to transition Hoe 5 to a new school. Their next step was an English-medium secondary school with a dedicated Māori unit, a space that promised cultural alignment and support for Māori learners. However, even

at the point of transition, the challenges continued. During the interview process for entry into the Māori unit, Hoe 5 experienced pushback from kaiako who questioned their reasons for leaving their previous kura Māori. Because the kura Māori was viewed as prestigious, the kaiako appeared sceptical about the motivations behind the move. This experience added another layer of emotional complexity to the transition, leaving the whānau feeling judged, rather than supported, during what was already a difficult decision.

Despite these early challenges, this school still offered continuity of Māori values and practices, and the whānau felt confident that the environment could nurture both Hoe 5's identity and their learning needs. The move ultimately reflected the whānau commitment to ensuring that Hoe 5 was supported equitably and positioned to access opportunities aligned with their strengths and aspirations.

Throughout their journey, Punga 3 remained steadfast in wanting their tamaiti to stand strong as Māori, while confidently navigating the wider world. Every decision made was grounded in their whānau values, their cultural commitments, and their hope for a schooling environment in which Hoe 5 could thrive in every aspect, academically, culturally, and personally.

Whānau O:

Whānau O consisted of Punga 4 and their tamaiti, Hoe 6. This whānau is of Māori and Tongan heritage and resides within the wider Tāmaki Makaurau region, maintaining close connections to their marae and wider whānau networks. The whānau have a deep commitment to ensuring their tamariki are raised with te reo me ngā tikanga Māori and this underpins many of their whānau decisions, including the educational pathways chosen for Hoe 6. Punga 4 is highly experienced within their professional field and is working towards higher academic study, demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning that also shapes the aspirations they hold for their tamariki.

Hoe 6 began their early education in Te Kōhanga Reo before transitioning into kura Māori, where they remained until the end of Year 6. Throughout these years, Hoe 6 experienced a reo Māori rich environment that was grounded in tikanga and collective learning. However, as they grew older, Hoe 6 began to question some of the behaviour they observed within the kura. They noticed frequent negative or off-task behaviours among some ākonga and found themselves wondering whether such behaviours were typical or acceptable within a learning environment. After reflecting on this and deciding that these patterns did not align with what they believed learning should look like, Hoe 6 initiated a conversation with their whānau about transitioning to English-medium schooling.

The decision surprised their whānau, who were deeply committed to Māori-medium education and initially discouraged the move. Wanting to ensure that Hoe 6 made an informed decision, they arranged for them to attend an English-medium school for a week, before returning to kura Māori to reassess their choice. Even after this trial period and returning to the familiar environment of kura Māori, Hoe 6 remained firm in their decision to transition. Their desire for a more focused learning environment and a different educational experience became the driving reasons behind the move to English-medium schooling.

Although the whānau supported Hoe 6's autonomy, Punga 4 also expressed a long-term aspiration for their tamaiti to return to Māori-medium education for their secondary years. This reflects the ongoing commitment of this whānau to nurturing te reo Māori and grounding their tamariki in cultural identity, regardless of the schooling context.

At the time of the kōrero, Hoe 6 was attending a Māori unit within an English-medium secondary school, while also taking classes on the English-medium side. This provided a balance between cultural grounding and broader academic opportunities. Hoe 6 is well supported by their whānau, who prioritise academic acceleration, te reo Māori development, and strong cultural identity for all their tamariki. While the children are confident in communicating in te reo Māori, Punga 4 continues their own reo journey

alongside them, modelling the value of intergenerational learning and cultural commitment.

The experiences of Whānau O highlight the careful negotiation between honouring cultural aspirations and responding to the evolving needs of tamariki; this ensures that Hoe 6 is supported to thrive both as Māori and Tongan, and as a learner within multiple educational worlds.

Whānau U:

Whānau U consists of a young adult, Hoe 2, who was in their second year out of post-kura education at the time of the kōrero. After completing Year 13, Hoe 2 moved directly into the workforce, where they continued to build their independence and confidence as a young adult. Their whānau were raised within Tāmaki Makaurau and they have maintained deep connections to their whānau, iwi, and tūrangawaewae. These connections continue to anchor their identity and shape the values they carry into adulthood.

Hoe 2's educational journey began in Te Kōhanga Reo before transitioning into kura Māori, where they remained through to the end of Year 9. Their early schooling years were shaped by a whānau with a strong commitment to reo Māori, tikanga, and whānau-centred learning environments. Hoe 2 reflected positively on these experiences, acknowledging that Māori-medium education played a significant role in grounding them in cultural identity during their formative years.

The decision to move to English-medium education at the end of Year 9 emerged through a conversation with their parent, who felt that Hoe 2 would benefit from branching out beyond te ao Māori. Their parent believed that exposure to new activities, opportunities, and social environments, that were not available at their kura Māori, would help Hoe 2 to develop their confidence and broaden their skills. Although the transition from a small kura Māori to a large English-medium school was significant,

Hoe 2 was well supported by their whānau, who encouraged their growth and independence throughout the shift.

As Hoe 2 settled into English-medium schooling, they experienced substantial personal development. They noted changes in their personality, confidence, and sense of identity as they navigated new learning environments, diverse peer groups, and the wider range of extracurricular activities available. Despite moving into English-medium education, Hoe 2 maintained strong ties to their cultural identity and continued to be deeply connected to their tūrangawaewae.

Reflecting on their experiences, Hoe 2 expressed an ongoing belief in the strengths and potential of kura Māori. They acknowledged the positive impacts that Māori-medium education had on their early years; and, shared that in the future, they would choose to raise their own tamariki within Māori-medium pathways because of the positive changes they had observed for ākonga within kura Māori settings. Their aspirations reflect a continued commitment to te reo Māori, culture, and the opportunities afforded through Māori education, even as they themselves have navigated multiple educational worlds.

The biographies shared in this chapter honour the ākonga and whānau who contributed to this research, acknowledging the trust, generosity, and whakapapa carried within their kōrero. Providing this background upholds the relational foundations of Kaupapa Māori research, ensuring their voices are situated within the cultural, educational, and whānau contexts that shape their journeys. Although all names and identifying details have been deidentified, every effort has been made to preserve the integrity and intention of their stories.

Understanding who these participants are, where they come from, and the pathways they have navigated, is essential for interpreting the experiences they later share. Their biographies provide the grounding from which the findings in the next chapter emerge, reminding the reader that the themes identified are not abstract concepts but lived

realities held by real people. The following chapter builds upon the foundations laid here, guided by the voices of those who shaped this research.

Te Kei: Findings and Discussion

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua.

I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past. (Rameka, 2016, p. 387)

Introduction

This chapter integrates the findings from kōrero with ākonga Māori and their whānau with the discussion of those findings. This approach reflects the qualitative and Kaupapa Māori orientation of the research. It does this by allowing participant voices, theme interpretation, and relevant literature to sit alongside one another, rather than being separated. Integrating findings and discussion enables a more relational and coherent exploration of meaning, where ākonga and whānau experiences are not only presented, but also interpreted in conversation with existing research on Māori education, identity, wellbeing, and schooling transitions.

Through the analysis, there were five interrelated themes that arose which captured patterned meanings across the data set. The themes identified through the analysis were:

1. Holding on to being Māori: Cultural continuity, identity and belonging
2. Choosing new pathways: Possibility, agency and becoming
3. Finding safety in new social worlds
4. Learning in a new system: Language, teaching and educational continuity
5. What made the difference including support, advocacy and collective care

These themes reflect both the immediate experiences of ākonga Māori, as well as the broader intergenerational perspectives offered by the whānau participants.

Within each theme, findings are presented through narratives of the ākonga and whānau kōrero. To support this process, direct quotes of their kōrero have been inserted, followed by an interpretive discussion. Ākonga voices are prioritised first, and where appropriate, whānau perspectives follow, adding an additional layer of the experience.

This chapter goes beyond describing what happened during transition, to examining how these experiences are understood within wider educational, cultural, and systemic contexts. By weaving the participant kōrero with discussion, the chapter highlights both the strengths and challenges that are present in current transition pathways and foregrounds the relational, cultural, and structural factors that influence outcomes for ākonga Māori. This chapter concludes by synthesising insights across themes and identifying implications that inform the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Themes

Theme 1: Holding on to Being Māori: Cultural Continuity, Identity and Belonging

Cultural continuity, identity, and belonging emerged as a central theme across both ākonga and mātua (parents) experiences of transition from Māori-medium education into English-medium schooling. In this study, cultural continuity refers to the ability for ākonga Māori to maintain their language, culture, and values across schooling contexts, and to remain grounded in who they are as Māori, without being required to adapt themselves to fit dominant norms. Belonging, is understood as relational and collective, shaped through shared values, whakapapa, and connection; rather than individual achievement or assimilation, it is influenced by whether schools recognise and sustain Māori ways of being in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways. It is about the right to be our authentic selves.

Throughout the data, ākonga described cultural continuity as closely tied to the everyday use of te reo Māori, shared values, and a sense of relational safety that characterised their experiences within Māori-medium settings. When this continuity was disrupted during transition, ākonga reported a weakening of their overall te reo competency; this reflected a decline in both receptive and productive language use, due to limited opportunities for engagement with the language. This decline was often accompanied by feelings of discomfort and conflict, as Māori values such as

kotahitanga and whanaungatanga were often in tension with the individualised norms of English-medium school cultures.

Mātua similarly emphasised the importance of sustaining cultural identity and connection, expressing a strong desire for their children to retain their reo Māori and tikanga. While some English-medium schools attempted to provide culturally supportive opportunities, these efforts were often constrained by limited capacity or internal tensions between Māori staff and leadership. Mātua described observing a form of cultural dislocation, where responsibility for maintaining cultural continuity shifted onto ākonga themselves.

This first theme is explored through three interconnected sub-themes: the loss of Māori cultural grounding during transition, navigating identity across two school worlds, and being seen but not supported. Together, these sub-themes illustrate how cultural continuity and belonging are negotiated, disrupted, and, at times, maintained during transition, highlighting the relational and structural conditions that shape Māori learners' experiences.

Sub-theme 1.1: Losing Māori Cultural Grounding Through Transition

Across the ākonga data, the transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling was frequently accompanied by a loss of Māori cultural grounding. This loss was described as a growing disconnection from the cultural, linguistic, and relational environment that had previously formed everyday learning in kura Māori. Rather than being sudden or absolute, this disconnection occurred gradually, as ākonga moved into schooling contexts where Māori language, values, and ways of being were no longer embedded or consistently supported. Importantly, the loss of cultural grounding described by ākonga did not reflect a lack of commitment to their Māori identity, but emerged in response to changed environments that made it difficult to sustain the practices that they were used to.

One of the most visible expressions of this loss was a weakening of te reo Māori. Ākonga spoke of losing fluency and confidence in their reo, reflecting a decline in both their

understanding and active use of the language, not because they lacked capability, but because opportunities to practise and engage with te reo Māori were significantly reduced.

I felt like my Māori was kind of declining too, because I wasn't speaking it at all.

Hoe 6

One of the negatives is I did feel like I had of a loss of my reo because of lack of use. It was like no one else spoke reo. So, I just wasn't using it. Hoe 1

These comments highlight how language maintenance is deeply relational and contextual, relying on daily use and interaction, rather than individual effort alone. For those ākonga used to immersion environments, the absence of peers and teachers who they could speak te reo Māori with resulted in a gradual erosion of linguistic confidence and recall. Language loss, in this sense, was not an individual deficit, but a consequence of environments that did not support Māori language use at a level that the ākonga were familiar with.

For some, this loss of cultural grounding was intensified by institutional instability within English-medium schools. Hoe 4 described how internal issues at their school directly affected their ability to maintain te reo Māori, explaining that challenges regarding leadership commitment resulted in the collapse of Māori language spaces within the school. They shared,

I only have pretty much one term with them to be able to speak my reo... the whole rest of the year [I] couldn't speak my te reo with anyone pretty much. Hoe

4

This kōrero illustrates how cultural grounding is dependent on consistent institutional support and leadership commitment. When Māori programmes are disrupted or deprioritised, the impacts are felt immediately by ākonga, whose learning and identity development become vulnerable to factors beyond their control. The experiences of

those interviewed, show that cultural continuity depends on structural stability and long-term commitment, not isolated initiatives.

Alongside language loss, ākonga also described a disconnection from the values that had shaped their experiences in kura Māori. Ākonga reflected on the shift from a learning environment grounded in whanaungatanga to one where relationality was less central, noting,

I was all used to... a Māori environment where whanaungatanga is one of the biggest priorities... it wasn't as whānau as kura was. Hoe 3

They still had those values but then there was the Pākehā side where it was like, it's in it for you. You got to do it yourself. I wasn't very familiar with that system. So if mainstream schools can kind of get out of their head of that individualism and they can sort of enter more, what is it called collectivism, more of like a whānau kind of perspective that would, I feel 100% make a transition easier for a student, from a kura to a mainstream [school]. Hoe 6

While English-medium schools attempted to be values-based and build relationships, ākonga experienced these efforts as different from the deeply relational and collective ethos of kura Māori. This shift created a sense of cultural and emotional distance, as ākonga navigated school environments where Māori values were present in name, but not embedded in everyday practice.

These experiences demonstrate that loss of Māori cultural grounding during transition is produced through a combination of reduced linguistic opportunity, institutional instability, and misalignment of values. Ākonga were not abandoning their cultural identity; instead, they were navigating school environments that made it harder to maintain the cultural grounding that had shaped their sense of belonging. This sub-theme highlights that cultural continuity is not dependent on individual resilience, but rather on the extent to which schools provide environments that actively support Māori language, values, and relational ways of being.

Discussion Sub-theme 1.1: Losing Māori Cultural Grounding Through Transition

The first sub-theme showed that transition was often linked to a loss of Māori cultural grounding, especially through fewer chances to use and maintain te reo Māori. This reflects research on bi-literacy, which highlights the importance of ongoing language use across different settings (May, 2012; Rona & McLachlan, 2018). Previous studies also show that bi-lingual and bi-literate development does not continue on its own, but depends on school environments that recognise students as bi-lingual and actively support continued language use (Hill, 2016b).

The experiences shared by ākonga in this study add to existing research. They show that language decline was not just about having less time for instruction, but was closely linked to differences in values between Māori-medium and English-medium schooling. Māori-medium settings emphasised shared responsibility, whanaungatanga, and relationship-based teaching, while English-medium schools were often experienced as more individual and task-focused. This reflects Hill's (2016b) finding that graduates of Māori-medium education may be academically capable, but can experience cultural tension when school expectations clash with the relational practices learned in kura Māori.

These experiences challenge deficit views of Māori language loss by placing responsibility with schools, rather than with learners. As Rona and McLachlan (2018) note, language and literacy development depend on the quality of school environments and how responsive teaching practices are. In their study, when English-medium schools lacked the capacity, commitment, or stability to support Māori programmes, ākonga had fewer opportunities to use te reo Māori and affirm their cultural identity, leading to feelings of disconnection.

Sub-theme 1.2: Navigating Identity Across Two School Worlds

Transitioning from Māori-medium into English-medium schooling involved actively navigating unfamiliar cultural, linguistic, social, and pedagogical environments. Identity was not experienced as something fixed or stable, but as something that required

constant negotiation, as ākonga moved between the schooling contexts with differing norms, expectations, and value systems. This navigation was often undertaken without clear guidance or sustained support, placing the responsibility for managing identity largely on ākonga themselves.

Several ākonga described the transition into English-medium schooling as exposing them to environments that were noticeably different from what they had known previously. For some, this difference was framed positively, as an opportunity to broaden experiences and test themselves in new settings. Hoe 2 reflected on the contrast between kura Māori and English-medium schooling.

I just felt it was like a breath of fresh air. It's like I was living under a rock going to kura Māori, and then going to a English-medium school, everything's so different. Everyone acts different... so many different teachers. That was actually really good for me. Hoe 2

For Hoe 2, the transition was experienced as an opportunity for growth, rather than disruption. Their reflections highlight an ability to adapt to new environments and suggest that for some, change can be both affirming and beneficial. Similarly, Hoe 3 described the transition as a chance to “get out of the Māori environment and test the waters” in English-medium schooling:

It was, you know, good to get out of the Māori environment and test the waters in kura auraki (English-medium school). You know, I'm getting new experiences, learn what most students go through in New Zealand and expand on my English as well, because I came out of Kura Kaupapa and I didn't know the alphabet. Hoe

3

This kōrero illustrates how navigating difference involved reframing unfamiliar environments as opportunities for growth, with ākonga repositioning themselves as adaptable learners, capable of moving between Māori and English-medium worlds.

However, alongside these expressions of agency, other ākonga described navigating English-medium schooling as far more challenging and emotionally demanding. Hoe 4 reflected on withdrawing from classroom participation as they struggled to engage with unfamiliar teaching approaches delivered in English:

I just sat at the back of the room, just daydreaming. I couldn't understand the English down to their ways of teaching. It was different. A lot of Māori teachers will be there and sit there and break it down and help everyone out... help me out. Where the Pākehā, the mainstream side, it was less straightforward. And I didn't understand anything they were saying. Hoe 4

For Hoe 4, disengagement was a response to teaching practices that felt less relational and supportive than those in kura Māori, being left to manage confusion quietly on their own and in isolation. This experience highlights the emotional impact of transition, where shifts in language and teaching practice can lead to feelings of disconnection.

Ākonga also spoke about navigating social and relational expectations within English-medium environments, where collective Māori ways of relating were not always welcomed. Hoe 6 described feeling unsettled by expectations of independent and quiet work, particularly when relational engagement was discouraged:

When everyone would work, everyone would just mind their own business, go to the workbooks, listen to the teacher, go back to their books, when I wanted to have a conversation. But I couldn't do that. I felt I was a stranger. I felt like I was a foreigner. Hoe 6

These descriptions highlight how navigating identity involved managing visibility and participation in classrooms shaped by individualised norms, with ākonga adjusting their behaviour to avoid standing out or being excluded.

While ākonga described the daily demands of navigating identity within English-medium classrooms, mātua tended to interpret this process from a broader, protective

perspective. Rather than focusing on everyday adjustments, mātua spoke about transitions as needing careful planning to protect Māori identity over time. Kura Māori was consistently seen as a cultural and relational space, while English-medium schooling was viewed as largely monocultural and carrying risks for cultural continuity if exposure was not carefully managed.

Our goal for them was to be immersed in te reo and tikanga. Punga 1

This emphasis on immersion shows that Māori language and values remained central for mātua. As such, they were prepared to reconsider schooling pathways where a return to Māori-medium would better support the continued development of te reo and tikanga Māori.

Importantly, mātua did not see engagement with English-medium schooling as turning away from Māori identity. Instead, it was described as a careful and intentional choice, made with clear limits in mind. One mātua spoke about plans for their child to eventually return to kura Māori:

We did have the intention that she should go back into kura for college. Punga 4

This highlights how kura Māori continued to hold an important place in maintaining cultural grounding, even when English-medium schooling was explored. At the same time, mātua expressed concern about mainstream environments perceived as predominantly Pākehā and English-only. They worried that a limited understanding of Māori experiences could increase the risk of discrimination, particularly for children transitioning from kōhanga and kura Māori who had limited English proficiency:

I'm thinking about other schools, where it's very white and English is all they know, then they may be more discriminative, you know, against someone that has solely had a kōhanga and kura Māori upbringing with limited English. Punga 4.

Such concerns reflect mātua awareness of the risks children may face in schooling environments where Māori language, identity, and experiences are not well understood or supported.

These ākonga and mātua perspectives show that navigating identity across Māori-medium and English-medium schooling is a shared, intergenerational process. Ākonga do the immediate work of adjusting how they learn, communicate, relate to others, and present themselves at school, while mātua make careful decisions to manage these experiences and protect cultural continuity over time. As outlined earlier in this theme, these identity negotiations were shaped less by individual choice and more by the schooling environments ākonga moved into.

Discussion Sub-theme 1.2: Navigating Identity Across Two School Worlds

The second sub-theme showed that ākonga Māori actively worked to manage their identity as they moved between Māori-medium and English-medium school settings. This involved adjusting how visible they were, how much they participated, and how they related to others in response to unfamiliar school expectations. Rather than showing uncertainty or weakness, these adjustments reflect what Webber (2012) describes as Māori young people's ability to move between different cultural worlds, while maintaining a strong sense of who they are.

However, this way of navigating school came at a cost. Ākonga talked about having to constantly watch how they behaved, hold back how they normally learned through relationships, and tell themselves that being different was something they needed to learn to grow from, just to get by in English-medium classrooms. Instead of being supported to show up as their full Māori selves, they were often expected to fit in with school rules and expectations that valued working alone and staying quiet. Research in Māori education raises similar concerns, showing that schools often expect Māori learners to do the adjusting, rather than changing their own practices to be more culturally supportive (Bishop et al., 2009; Hynds et al., 2016). Looking at this through a language and power lens, English-dominant school systems tend to treat majority ways of learning as normal, while pushing Māori ways of being to the margins (May, 2012). In

this study, English-medium schools rarely created space for learning to go both ways; this left ākonga Māori carrying the responsibility for fitting in.

Mātua perspectives supported this view that Māori students are required to adjust, by describing kura Māori as a protective cultural base for maintaining Māori identity, language, and values across generations. English-medium schooling was not rejected, but was approached carefully and with clear boundaries to reduce the risk of cultural loss. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, these decisions principally reflect whānau exercising tino rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga through collective responsibility for cultural continuity, rather than resistance to English-medium education (Pihama, 2015; Smith, 2022). Mātua were not opposed to wider educational opportunities, but were clearly aware of the risks for their children in school environments that did not actively support Māori language, identity, and wellbeing.

Sub-theme 1.3: Being Seen but Not Supported: Tokenism in Schools

Across the ākonga data, tokenistic cultural representation emerged as a significant feature of English-medium schooling contexts. Māori culture was often acknowledged in spaces of visibility or ceremonial moments. However, these acknowledgements were experienced as shallow and conditional, rather than opportunities for Māori culture to be embedded within everyday school practices. For ākonga transitioning from kura Māori, where Māori language, tikanga, and values were a normal and shared part of daily learning, these forms of recognition highlighted the limits of inclusion and intensified feelings of exposure, rather than belonging.

Ākonga described being treated as cultural representatives because of assumptions linked to their kura Māori backgrounds. This often happened without their consent, preparation, or support from teachers, and was usually framed as recognition rather than responsibility. Hoe 1 recalled being asked by a teacher to provide te reo Māori in a public setting, where they felt frustrated by the unequal expectations placed on them:

She was like, oh, can you say a greeting thing in Māori to say thank you or something and give this gift? And I was like, well, I am 12 you're like 40, you can do it. Hoe 1

This quote shows how a child was expected to carry cultural responsibility, with Māori knowledge treated as something to be extracted rather than supported by adults in the school. These moments reflect cultural labour, where ākonga are expected to provide knowledge that benefits the school. Repeated expectations of this practice, risk normalising the extraction of cultural knowledge and placing additional pressure on young people who are already navigating complex situations.

Other ākonga described being given cultural leadership roles simply because they had come from kura Māori, regardless of their age or whether they felt ready. Hoe 3 spoke about being placed in leadership positions at a young age and feeling that these expectations were linked to assumptions about kura Māori students:

I was looked upon as a Rangatira (chiefly person) at 11 and was asked to sit on the paepae. Hoe 3

Being asked to sit on the paepae, a space traditionally reserved for experienced speakers, placed this ākonga in a role they did not feel ready for. Surrounded by elders, they felt uncomfortable and aware of the gap between how others perceived them and how they saw themselves. Similarly, Hoe 4 described being the only person in their school who could speak te reo Māori and being expected to take on cultural responsibilities as a result:

I was the only person who pretty much knew how to speak Māori. So they'll get me to do all the kōrero and that for manuhiri (visitors). Hoe 4

Rather than building confidence or supporting leadership development, these experiences placed a heavy cultural burden on young students who were still adjusting to unfamiliar school environments.

Tokenistic representation also appeared through cultural stereotyping that went beyond language into expectations around performance. Hoe 3 described being expected to sing simply because of their kura Māori background:

They thought all kura kids could sing... 'you went to kura, you can sing.' And I was like, no, no. Hoe 3

These assumptions reduced Māori identity to narrow and fixed ideas about what Māori students should be able to do, rather than recognising their wide range of Māori experiences, interests, and abilities.

Mātua placed these experiences within wider concerns about cultural safety and responsibility. While they strongly valued cultural continuity and immersion in te reo Māori and tikanga, they expressed discomfort when English-medium schools placed cultural expectations on Māori students. In these settings, ākonga were often expected to represent or perform Māori culture simply because of their schooling background.

They kind of had expectations of her that she would do anything Māori. So maybe that's like a kind of a safety aspect for kura kids. Just because they've been in a reo Māori environment for that long doesn't mean they are everything, do everything, can be everything. Punga 1

This response highlights mātua concerns that cultural knowledge should be supported collectively by schools, rather than relying on individual students. Mātua also raised concerns about English-medium environments they saw as largely monocultural, where limited understanding of Māori culture increased the risk of stereotyping or discrimination.

These experiences show that surface-level cultural recognition does not support cultural continuity or a sense of belonging for ākonga Māori. Instead, it reinforces unequal power by treating Māori identity as something to be performed, when asked,

and by placing responsibility for cultural knowledge onto children. For ākonga going through transition, these practices created feelings of being exposed or singled out, highlighting the need for schools to move beyond token gestures and towards practices that share cultural responsibility in respectful and collective ways.

Discussion Sub-theme 1.3: Being Seen but Not Supported: Tokenism in Schools

The third sub-theme showed the limits of how Māori culture was recognised in some English-medium schools, especially when it appeared only in surface-level or ceremonial ways. Ākonga experiences of being singled out to perform te reo Māori, tikanga, or take on cultural roles reflect what Bishop et al. (2009) describe as the difference between meaningful cultural practice and tokenism. Instead of weaving Māori ways of being into everyday teaching and school life, some schools relied on individual Māori students to represent culture on behalf of the school.

This finding reflects wider concerns about surface-level inclusion in English-medium schools, where support for Māori culture is inconsistent and often depends on individual teachers or students rather than the school as a whole (Macfarlane et al., 2015; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). In this study, these practices placed extra pressure on young people who were already adjusting to new school environments, making them feel singled out and different, rather than genuinely included.

Research on mātauranga Māori in English-medium schools helps make sense of what ākonga described in this study. Glassey et al. (2023) describe how when schools do not have clear guidance or shared responsibility, efforts to include Māori knowledge often stay at the surface. They note that many schools lack explicit guidelines or frameworks to support the consistent use of mātauranga Māori in everyday teaching. Some schools were able to genuinely weave mātauranga Māori into school life, but others found this difficult because of curriculum pressures, limited leadership support, or a poor understanding of Māori ways of thinking and being. The experiences shared by ākonga here reflect what can happen in these situations, particularly when Māori culture is acknowledged in name, but not fully part of how the school actually works.

Theme 1 discussion

The findings in this theme *Holding on to Being Māori: Cultural Continuity, Identity and Belonging* challenge the idea that successful transition depends only on individual resilience or adaptability. Instead, they show that cultural continuity, identity, and belonging are shaped by school commitment, leadership, and everyday teaching practices. The data shows that when Māori identity is supported in collective ways through language use, relationships, and shared responsibility, ākonga are better able to navigate transition without losing their sense of self.

These findings support what Māori focused research has long argued; that, culturally sustaining environments are not optional extras, but essential for Māori learner success (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Durie, 1998; May, 2012). The experiences shared by both ākonga and mātua in this study, suggest that English-medium schools need to move beyond symbolic gestures and genuinely embed Māori values, language, and relational practices into everyday school life. Without these changes, transitions are likely to continue creating cultural disconnection and reinforcing the same inequities that Māori-medium education seeks to overcome.

This theme brings together three sub-themes to show that cultural continuity, identity, and belonging are shaped by the schooling environments ākonga Māori move into. Experiences of cultural loss, identity work, and tokenistic recognition highlight how belonging often became conditional rather than assumed. Together, the experiences of ākonga and mātua, show that cultural continuity is shaped by the schooling environments ākonga Māori move into, setting the conditions for how they later navigate pathways, learning, wellbeing, and support.

This study shows that cultural continuity, identity, and belonging are central to how ākonga Māori experience the move from Māori-medium education into English-medium schooling. Rather than being ‘things’ learners simply carry with them unchanged, identity and belonging are shaped and tested in new school environments. Across both ākonga and mātua kōrero, cultural continuity was closely linked to everyday language

use, relationships, and shared values. These were strongly present in kura Māori, but were supported unevenly in English-medium schools.

Drawing on Durie's (2001b) broader work on Māori wellbeing, this study interprets cultural continuity as something lived and relational, rather than as a symbolic recognition of Māori identity. For them, cultural continuity meant being able to speak, relate, and live as Māori in everyday school life. While kura Māori were experienced as cultural homes, English-medium schools were often spaces where Māori identity had to be adjusted, closely managed, or explained. This reflects wider research on transitions from Māori-medium education, which shows that gaps between schooling environments can create cultural and language challenges when schools do not recognise, or build on, the cultural knowledge students already have (Hill, 2016b; Rona & McLachlan, 2018).

Theme 2: Choosing New Pathways: Possibility, Agency and Becoming

This theme looks at how moving from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling changed how ākonga and mātua thought about learning pathways, future options, and who ākonga saw themselves becoming as learners. While Theme 1 focused on cultural continuity and belonging, Theme 2 looks ahead, exploring how transition opened up new possibilities, while also bringing uncertainty and the need to rethink identity. Ākonga described English-medium schooling as making new academic, social, and career options more visible, but also as a space where they felt unsure as they adjusted to unfamiliar expectations. Mātua also saw these transitions as forward-looking and strategic, viewing schooling choices as flexible pathways, rather than a permanent move away from kura Māori. Together, these perspectives show transition as an ongoing process where new opportunities are explored, identities shift, and future possibilities are actively imagined. This theme is examined through three sub-themes: seeking new opportunities and challenge, who I am as a learner, and uncertainty and imagining future pathways.

This theme examines how ākonga actively chose, tested, and imagined new pathways through and beyond schooling.

Sub-theme 2.1: Seeking New Opportunities and Challenge

For many ākonga, moving from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling was about wanting new opportunities and challenges. Rather than turning away from kura Māori, they saw the move as a way to access different experiences, subjects, and school environments which had not been available before. This desire for “more” reflected curiosity and ambition, and a willingness to step into unfamiliar spaces, even when this felt uncertain or uncomfortable.

Ākonga frequently spoke about curriculum breadth as a key reason for moving into English-medium schooling. Hoe 1 described wanting access to learning opportunities that were not available in kura Māori, particularly in relation to music and performance:

Yeah. Well, because I'm not very sporty. And they had heaps of sports opportunities, but I'm not about that. And obviously I've played saxophone for most of my life, and that's not really a Kura Kaupapa curriculum thing. When I went to other schools, I got into jazz band and performing. I just didn't see that being offered in a kura setting. Hoe 1

Similarly, Hoe 2 described seeking a wider range of subjects and future pathways through English-medium schooling:

I just wanted more opportunities with learning and career pathways and also just more subjects in general. Because there's not much really at kura Māori. Moving to a English-medium school was overwhelming with all the different subjects, but it was really good for the career pathways and learning. Hoe 2

These ākonga experiences show how some ākonga viewed English-medium schooling as offering broader and more specialised learning opportunities that matched their interests and future goals, even when the transition felt challenging or overwhelming.

For some ākonga, this choice was also about readiness for change and variety, rather than dissatisfaction with kura Māori. Hoe 3 spoke about feeling ready for something different after spending many years in the same kura Māori:

I just got bored. I spent about seven years in the same school, and I wanted to experience stuff, something different. It got very repetitive, and I don't like sitting nohopuku (quiet or inactive). Hoe 3

Similarly, Hoe 5 talked about wanting to widen their social world and learn alongside students from different backgrounds:

I've surrounded myself my whole life around Māori kids. I want to see what it was like with different type of kids from different cultures, with different beliefs and different religions and stuff like that. Hoe 5

This kōrero shows that for some ākonga, moving into English-medium schooling was less about dissatisfaction with kura Māori and more about feeling ready to explore new learning and social environments.

Wanting new opportunities did not mean that the transition felt easy or comfortable. Hoe 6 talked about a growing awareness that things they had once accepted as normal no longer felt right, especially in relation to the attitudes of teachers and students:

When I really think about it, it was because I didn't like the teachers' and students' attitudes towards certain behaviours. It was normal for me at first, but then I started thinking it shouldn't be normal. I wondered if it was a problem for anyone else, so I talked to my mum and dad. After that, I realised it wasn't normal, and I felt uncomfortable in some situations. That's when I mainly wanted to move out of that environment. Hoe 6

Although this discomfort was challenging, it did not stop or alter the decision to transition. Instead, it led to reflection and a desire for a different kind of challenge. For some ākonga, feeling unsure became a reason to seek change rather than something that held them back.

Mātua also talked about transition as a planned decision made with the future in mind. Rather than seeing English-medium schooling as a permanent move away from kura Māori, they described it as a way to open up more options, while keeping long-term choices open. One mātua explained that English-medium schooling helped their child strengthen their English and experience a different type of school:

It helped them fine tune their English and be exposed to a different type of school. Punga 4

Practical factors also shaped these decisions. For some whānau, moving closer to home reduced the daily strain on ākonga and allowed them to learn within their local community:

It was one close to home, you know they could live, learn and hang out in their own community. They were leaving home at like 5:30[am], having to travel all that way, three buses and a train sometimes, or maybe five buses if they weren't working. Punga 2

Mātua described taking time to see how the transition worked, before making further decisions:

We just waited it out, and we saw that there were benefits in them going to mainstream. Punga 4

This mātua kōrero shows that whānau approached transition as a flexible and practical decision, shaped by both future opportunities and the everyday wellbeing of their children.

Together, these accounts show that many ākonga actively chose English-medium schooling as a way to access broader opportunities, challenge themselves, and explore future possibilities. These decisions were not reactions to failure with a kura system, but expressions of agency shaped by curiosity, readiness for change, and whānau considerations. Transition, in this sense, functioned as an opening rather than a closing of pathways.

Sub-theme 2.1 discussion

These experiences show that transition was driven by choice and curiosity, rather than dissatisfaction with kura Māori or a lack of capability. Hill (2016a) and Rona and McLachlan (2018) describe these transitions as planned and hopeful choices, rather than responses to problems. For the ākonga in this study, English-medium schooling opened up new academic, creative, and social pathways, especially through access to English-medium subjects and specialist courses. Importantly, choosing English-medium schooling did not mean rejecting kura Māori, but reflected a readiness to explore new environments while keeping strong cultural foundations.

Mātua perspectives supported this view by describing transition as a temporary and purposeful step. Instead of seeing English-medium schooling as a straight path, mātua talked about staying flexible and checking over time whether the move was working well for their tamaiti. This way of thinking aligns with Durie's (1998, 2001b) view of wellbeing pathways as holistic, relational, and not always linear. Hill (2016a) discusses transitions from Māori-medium education as showing that schooling decisions are often revisited and adjusted based on context and wellbeing. In this way, pathways were understood as changeable and responsive, shaped by opportunity, relationships, and long-term hopes, rather than as fixed outcomes. This challenges deficit views that see Māori-medium education as limiting and instead shows how whānau actively manage schooling choices over time.

Sub-theme 2.2: Rethinking Who I am as a Learner

Alongside seeking new opportunities, many ākonga also began to rethink how they saw themselves as learners as they moved into English-medium schooling. This repositioning was not about losing ability, but about adjusting to new expectations, forms of recognition, and ways of measuring success in unfamiliar school environments. Rather than a clear step forward or backward, this process involved reflection, recalibration, and learning how to navigate challenge.

Some ākonga talked about changes in confidence as an important part of moving into English-medium schooling.

I gained so much confidence being at an all-girls school especially. It was really good for me. I enjoyed it. Hoe 2

This confidence did not appear straight away but developed over time as ākonga adjusted to new school expectations and social situations. For some, being in a different school environment created space for them to find their voice, take on leadership roles, and feel more sure of themselves than they had before.

Rethinking who I am as a learner also meant reflecting on changes in academic standing across different school environments. Hoe 6 talked about noticing a shift from being a top student in kura Māori to no longer holding that position in English-medium schooling, and then returning to the top again after moving back into a Māori-focused environment:

I was top all the time in primary school. I wasn't at top all the time in mainstream. And now for the moment, I'm at the top. But like, why is that? But I was able to just slowly, but surely get used to the type of education and pace of learning. Hoe 6

This experience led Hoe 6 to question why their learning felt different in the new school. The challenge was not because their ability had changed, but because they had moved

into a much larger English-medium school with many more students, where it was harder to be seen, supported, and recognised. Their reflection shows how learning environments shape how success is understood and supported. Changes in confidence and achievement encouraged Hoe 6 to think more deeply about whether the school setting was the right fit, what was expected of them, and what it meant to be a successful learner in different types of schools.

Mātua perspectives added an important layer to understanding how academic identity shifted during transition. Many mātua noticed changes in how their children understood success and challenge as they moved from kura Māori into English-medium schooling. For some ākonga, this meant going from being consistently high-achieving in familiar environments to facing greater academic stretch and different expectations. Rather than seeing this shift as a problem, mātua often described it as a valuable part of learning and growth.

They went from every year being top academic, top all around, they were always the top. So, when they went to mainstream, that was so different. There were lots of challenges, but I thought actually that's good for personal growth in terms of not being top all the time, and actually having to work through stuff and start new. It was kind of like learning a new language. Punga 4

From this perspective, challenge and struggle were understood as helping ākonga build confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of themselves as learners, rather than signalling failure or loss of ability.

Sub-theme 2.2 discussion

Across both ākonga and mātua kōrero, repositioning self as a learner involved changes in confidence and how success was understood. Ākonga noticed these shifts through everyday classroom experiences and comparisons with others, while mātua often interpreted them over time as part of learning how to manage challenge. Rather than showing a loss of ability, these experiences reflected changes in context and expectation.

For ākonga, this process was not about giving up the strengths developed in kura Māori, but about learning how those strengths showed up differently in new school environments. In this way, repositioning self as a learner involved adjusting to challenge and uncertainty, while continuing to build confidence across different settings.

Moving into English-medium schooling also led many ākonga to rethink how they saw themselves as learners. Changes in confidence, self-belief, and academic identity became more noticeable as ākonga faced new expectations and comparisons with others. These experiences reflect the idea that learner identity is shaped by school environments, relationships, and teaching practices, rather than being fixed or based only on ability (Hynds et al., 2016). For some ākonga, going from being consistently high achieving to facing more challenge required them to adjust how they understood their own ability. While this process was sometimes uncomfortable, it supported learning and personal growth.

Mātua perspectives also helped explain how changes in academic confidence were understood during transition. Rather than seeing challenge as a loss of ability, mātua described it as a normal and valuable part of learning. From their perspective, struggle created opportunities for growth, particularly when ākonga were supported to work through new expectations. This interpretation aligns with Bishop et al. (2014a), who emphasise that learners experiences and outcomes are shaped by relationships, expectations, and support within school contexts.

Sub-theme 2.3: Uncertainty and Imagining Future Pathways

For some ākonga, uncertainty about future pathways emerged while they were still in kura Māori, particularly when thinking ahead to secondary or tertiary study. This uncertainty was strongest when ākonga did not see clear examples of others who had followed similar pathways beyond Māori-medium education. In this context, English-medium schooling was often seen as a way of accessing possibilities that were not visible within kura Māori, even as feelings of excitement and uncertainty sat side by side when thinking about what might come next.

Some ākonga described uncertainty about the future as a key reason for moving into English-medium schooling. Hoe 1 described worrying about whether tertiary education was achievable, especially because they had not seen others from kura Māori take that pathway:

I was really worried about going to uni or going to tertiary education because I hadn't heard about other people that had gone through kura, like all of the stages, and actually gone to uni. Hoe 1

Alongside this uncertainty was a strong desire for more options and clearer pathways. Hoe 2 described transition as a way to access broader learning and career opportunities:

I just wanted more opportunities with learning and career pathways. Hoe 2

For other ākonga, English-medium schooling also provided practical and immediate opportunities that helped make future pathways feel more real. Hoe 4 spoke about gaining hands-on skills and qualifications through school:

The education was good there in my opinion. There were more opportunities. I got my forklift licence and tried to get my driver's licence. And I was going to do my carpentry stuff two days a week, yeah, through the school course. Hoe 4

These experiences show that transition was not only about uncertainty or aspiration, but about exploring what might be possible. While some ākonga felt unsure about long-term outcomes, English-medium schooling offered new learning and work-related opportunities that helped them think more broadly about future pathways, even when the direction ahead was not yet clear.

There was limited input from mātua in the data that directly spoke to the uncertainty ākonga expressed about their future pathways. However, the perspectives that were

shared suggest that some mātua approached transition with a longer-term view. For these whānau, moving into English-medium schooling was not seen as a final or fixed decision, but as something to be given time and closely observed. While this perspective was not widely reflected across the mātua data, it highlights that uncertainty was, for some whānau, understood as a normal part of transition; that is, something to be navigated over time rather than a sign of failure or heightened risk.

Sub-theme 2.3 discussion

While moving into English-medium schooling opened up new possibilities, ākonga Māori felt unsure about what the future might look like. Worries about tertiary study, and not seeing others who had followed similar paths, shaped how they thought about what was possible. This uncertainty was not about a lack of ambition, but about limited guidance and few visible examples to follow. Rona and McLachlan (2018) also found that Māori-medium graduates often feel anxious about secondary and tertiary transitions, especially when schools do not provide clear support or role models.

Mātua responses to uncertainty showed how whānau helped protect and support their children during transition. Instead of needing clear answers straight away, mātua were comfortable leaving things open and allowing time to see how pathways unfolded. By not locking in fixed expectations, they created space for their children to explore options and adjust plans over time. This way of thinking fits with Durie's (2001b) view that wellbeing and success develop through ongoing, relational processes, rather than being decided by one early choice. From this perspective, uncertainty was not a problem, but part of having more choices available.

These experiences show that uncertainty was not experienced as a lack of direction or ambition, but as a natural part of exploring new possibilities. Ākonga and mātua approached future pathways as flexible and changeable, allowing time for options to emerge rather than expecting immediate certainty. In this way, uncertainty functioned as part of having more choices available, rather than as a sign of risk or failure.

Theme 2 discussion

The findings from Theme 2 show that transition was about adjustment and change, not a sudden shift from one kura to the next. Ākonga did not simply move from one school system to another; they rethought what opportunity and challenge looked like and reconsidered how they saw their futures within new environments. This reflects New Zealand transition research that positions movement between educational settings as part of a broader learning journey rather than a discrete event (Peters, 2010). Transition, in this sense, is ongoing and relational, shaped by context, expectations, and evolving identities.

Mātua perspectives further demonstrate that these transitions were carefully thought through. Decisions were not reactive or deficit-driven but reflected deliberate consideration of what would best support their children's futures. This aligns with Kaupapa Māori scholarship that centres whānau as active shapers of educational pathways (Berryman & Bishop, 2011; Rameka & Glasgow, 2015). Transition here was not a response to failure, nor a linear progression from one system to another, but an intentional navigation of opportunity within complex schooling landscapes.

Overall, this theme challenges views of transition as a straight line or as evidence of loss. Instead, it positions transition as an ongoing process in which ākonga and mātua explore new possibilities, adjust expectations, and imagine futures that are still taking shape. In doing so, it reframes transition as relational, negotiated, and future-oriented within the socio-cultural realities of Aotearoa.

Theme 3: Finding Safety in New Social Worlds

This theme examines how ākonga Māori experienced social life, safety, and wellbeing as they transitioned from Māori-medium education into English-medium schools. Safety in this context relates to ākonga experiences of feeling socially, emotionally, and physically secure within their new school environments. Leaving the close, relationship-based environments of kura Māori and entering larger, less familiar schooling contexts required ākonga to quickly learn new social rules, manage increased independence,

and determine where they felt safe or at risk among peers. These changes extended beyond classroom learning, shaping how ākonga experienced belonging, vulnerability, and emotional security within their new school environments.

Mātua perspectives add a wider lens to this theme, highlighting how safety and wellbeing were understood not only through individual experiences, but through the quality of school culture, relationships, and collective care. Together, ākonga and mātua kōrero show that wellbeing during transition was closely tied to how social environments were structured and supported, rather than being solely an individual responsibility.

This theme is explored through three interrelated sub-themes: racialised discipline and unmanaged behaviour, unfamiliar social practices, and the role of peer relationships in either protecting or placing wellbeing at risk.

Sub-theme 3.1: Racialised Discipline and Unmanaged Behaviour

This sub-theme focuses on how English-medium school environments produced conditions of risk for ākonga Māori, through racialised disciplinary practices and uneven adult oversight. Rather than arising from individual behaviour alone, these risks were institutionally produced, shaping how safety, fairness, and care were experienced during transition.

Some ākonga described noticing differences in how teachers responded to Māori students compared with their Pākehā peers. Hoe 3 reflected on being aware of differential treatment directed at Māori students, particularly those from kura Māori backgrounds:

She would mistreat some of the kura kids, Māori kids, the browner ones. Even though they were acting the same way as some of the white kids, they would get scolded more and put in trouble more. That's like low key racist. Hoe 3

Experiences such as these heightened feelings of exposure and surveillance for ākonga. Rather than feeling supported or understood, they described classroom interactions that positioned them as more visible, more monitored, and more likely to be disciplined, undermining their sense of emotional safety.

Ākonga also described being exposed to peer behaviour in English-medium schools that felt unsafe or unsettling. Hoe 5 spoke about encountering behaviour they perceived as negative and inconsistent with the standards they were accustomed to in kura Māori:

I was seeing bunch of hood rats every day. That's pretty negative. I don't know, 'cause I'd never seen Māori and Islanders like that, a bunch of ding dongs. Kura Māori has a high standard and there's still a high standard there. Hoe 5

Similarly, Hoe 3 described a school environment marked by frequent conflict:

There were a lot more fights at English-medium school. A lot more fights, a lot more arguments. I was just minding my business in the background. I had a few scuffles with a few boys. Hoe 3

For ākonga transitioning from kura Māori, where behaviour and relationships were closely guided within collective and relational frameworks, these environments signalled a lack of consistent adult control and care. Safety concerns were therefore not limited to specific incidents, but reflected broader institutional conditions in which behavioural boundaries were unevenly maintained.

Mātua also observed these differences, noting that behavioural issues appeared more visible in English-medium schools and were often linked to the wider circumstances of students' lives. One mātua contrasted this with kura Māori environments, where students were more likely to come from strong whānau and reo speaking backgrounds:

There were a lot of behavioural things that were really just the circumstances of the families those kids were living in, I think. But they were more noticeable.

Whereas the mix of kura kids was different, because you did have really good kids from strong families and reo speaking families. Punga 1

Together, these experiences show that concerns about safety were shaped less by isolated incidents and more by institutional practices, including racialised discipline and uneven adult oversight. For ākonga Māori transitioning from kura Māori, these conditions created heightened exposure and vulnerability within environments that lacked consistent relational protection. While peer behaviour was a visible feature of these environments, it is discussed in this section as an outcome of institutional conditions, rather than as a relational dynamic between students. The relational dynamic will be explored further in Sub-theme 3.3 - The Role of Peer Relationships in Protecting or Placing Wellbeing at Risk.

Sub-theme 3.1 discussion: Racialised Discipline and Unmanaged Behaviour

The experiences described by ākonga suggest that safety in English-medium schooling was shaped not only by overt incidents of harm, but by everyday interactions that signalled differential treatment and heightened surveillance. Perceptions of being spoken to differently or disciplined more harshly, reflect broader patterns of racialised discipline within New Zealand schooling contexts. Research has found that Māori learners are disproportionately subject to behavioural monitoring and punitive responses (Hynds et al., 2016). Such interactions undermine emotional safety by positioning Māori students as problems to be managed, rather than learners to be supported.

From a relational perspective, these experiences indicate a breakdown of whanaungatanga within classroom environments. Bishop and Berryman (2006) and Bishop et al. (2014b) argue that when relational trust and mutual respect are absent, disciplinary practices are more likely to be experienced as alienating and threatening. For ākonga transitioning from kura Māori, where behavioural expectations are typically embedded within strong relational and collective frameworks, this shift represented a loss of relational protection and heightened vulnerability (Hill, 2016b).

Exposure to unmanaged peer behaviour further heightened this effect, requiring ākonga to remain alert within environments where institutional care was inconsistent. These findings highlight how racialised discipline and uneven behavioural oversight, functioned as structural threats to wellbeing, rather than as isolated or incidental challenges.

Sub-theme 3.2: Unfamiliar Social Practices

Ākonga described encountering everyday social practices in English-medium schools that felt unfamiliar and, at times, unsettling, yet were treated as normal within those environments. These practices shaped how independence, responsibility, and emotional safety were experienced during transition, particularly where expectations shifted without relational guidance or support.

For Hoe 2, the size of the school and expectations of independence were particularly challenging:

I really had to do things independently moving from kura Māori to the English-medium school. So that was a bit hard. It was just very different moving from such a small kura, especially then going to a school with over like 600 students. That was a lot. Hoe 2

Other everyday practices also came as a shock. Hoe 2 described being surprised by the use of phones during the school day, which contrasted with the structured expectations they were used to:

When I first started, I was overwhelmed because everyone was allowed on their phones. And I was shocked. I was like, oh my God. Can I just pull my phone out and play on it? And I could. Hoe 2

For some ākonga, unfamiliar ways of speaking and teaching further contributed to feelings of disorientation. Hoe 4 described struggling to understand teachers due to differences in pronunciation and delivery:

I couldn't understand the English. It was less straightforward, and I didn't understand anything they were saying. Hoe 4

Coming from kura Māori, where teaching was often carefully scaffolded and understanding was closely monitored, adjusting to these differences added pressure and affected ākonga confidence and engagement.

At the same time, some ākonga identified positive aspects of transition that also required adjustment. Hoe 1 spoke about enjoying the opportunity to form new friendships:

There was heaps of different friends that I was making, and that was cool. Hoe 1

Together, these experiences show that unfamiliar social practices shaped wellbeing, not because they were inherently harmful, but because they were normalised without adequate relational scaffolding. For ākonga Māori transitioning from kura Māori, where expectations were closely guided within collective frameworks, these shifts required constant adjustment and increased personal responsibility for managing comfort and safety.

Sub-theme 3.2 discussion: Unfamiliar Social Practices

The normalisation of unfamiliar social practices within English-medium schools reveals how risks to wellbeing can become invisible when they align with dominant schooling norms. Ākonga described feeling overwhelmed by large environments, managing increased independence, and navigating permissive practices such as unrestricted phone use. These experiences align with what Rona and McLachlan (2018) describe as transition shock, where the emotional and social demands of moving into English-medium schooling are underestimated, and responsibility for adjustment is implicitly shifted onto students.

From a Māori wellbeing perspective, drawing on Durie's (1998, 2001b) frameworks, this shift is significant. Durie (2001b) emphasises that wellbeing is relational, collective, and sustained through supportive environments rather than individual responsibility alone. When schools prioritise independence without strong relational scaffolding, emotional safety can be undermined, particularly for learners accustomed to collective care and close guidance. Highfield and Webber (2021) similarly highlight the importance of mana ūkaipō (a sense of belonging, connection, and care), in supporting Māori student wellbeing. Where these relational foundations are weak or uneven, unfamiliar practices become normalised. Ākonga are left to manage discomfort and risk themselves, rather than schools adapting to support diverse wellbeing needs.

Sub-theme 3.3: The Role of Peer Relationships in Protecting or Placing Wellbeing at Risk

This sub-theme examines how ākonga navigated English-medium school environments relationally, with peer relationships emerging as contingent sources of both protection and risk. In contexts where institutional support was uneven, friendships sometimes functioned as informal sources of safety, belonging, and guidance, but were not consistently reliable or sufficient on their own.

For some ākonga, friendships with peers helped them feel safer during the transition into English-medium school. Being connected with other students, reduced feelings of being alone and helped them find their way in a new and unfamiliar environment. One ākonga suggested that pairing new students with an older peer could make the transition easier, especially for those arriving from kura Māori into large English-medium schools, where they may not know anyone.

I just think pairing up the new students with maybe an older student just to help with the transition... to make things more comfortable. Because if you're coming from a kura Māori into a English-medium school, you're going to be going [it] alone. I think having a peer system or a buddy to stay with them till they're comfortable enough, to know their way around the school and how things go, would be a good support. Hoe 2

At the same time, peer environments could also feel challenging and risky. Some ākonga described feeling overwhelmed by new social expectations and unfamiliar school systems, which required them to rely on friends for support. One participant described the transition as a sudden shock, highlighting how exposed and unprepared they initially felt.

I kind of felt like I just jumped into a pool of cold water. I wasn't very familiar with that system; I was kind of caught off guard. So, then I kind of leant on my friends.

Hoe 6

Mātua perspectives strongly reinforced the importance of peer relationships as indicators of wellbeing. Punga 3 explained that their child “didn’t want to leave his friends” and that forming “good friendships” was central to decisions about remaining at or leaving a school. For mātua, peer relationships were not incidental, but key measures of emotional safety and well-being.

Sub-theme 3.3 discussion: Peer Relationships as Relational Protection or Risk

Peer relationships emerged as critical mediators of wellbeing, functioning as both protective buffers and sources of vulnerability. This aligns with Bishop et al. (2014b), who emphasise that learning and wellbeing are deeply relational, with peer connections serving as important sites of whanaungatanga when institutional support is uneven. For ākonga navigating new social environments, friendships provided emotional safety, guidance, and belonging, which helped mitigate the challenges of transition.

Equally, peer cultures characterised by aggression or exclusion heightened vulnerability and required active navigation to avoid harm. Glassey et al. (2023) highlight how wellbeing is sustained through everyday relational practices, rather than singular interventions, suggesting that peer dynamics can accumulate to either support or erode emotional safety over time. Mātua perspectives further reinforce the centrality of peer relationships, positioning friendships as key indicators of wellbeing and influential factors in decisions to remain in or leave schools. Together, these findings show that peer relationships played an important, but limited role, in shaping experiences of

safety and wellbeing during transition. While friendships could provide moments of protection, familiarity, and guidance, they did not consistently mitigate the broader risks produced by school environments. These accounts highlight that reliance on peers alone was insufficient, reinforcing the importance of institutional and adult responsibility for ensuring safety and wellbeing.

Theme 3 Discussion:

Overall, this theme shows that transitioning into English-medium schooling required ākonga to actively navigate new social worlds in ways that directly affected their wellbeing. Ākonga were not simply adjusting to academic expectations; they were learning unfamiliar social norms, managing increased independence, and working out where they felt safe and valued. This aligns with New Zealand transition research, that positions successful transition as relational and grounded in belonging, rather than academic readiness alone (Peters, 2010).

Mātua perspectives reinforce that wellbeing during transition was shaped by relationships and school environments, not individual effort. Research on culturally responsive schooling also highlights that Māori student success depends on relationally safe, culturally affirming contexts (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Macfarlane, 2004).

This theme reframes wellbeing during transition as socially produced; successful adjustment depended not only on ākonga adapting, but on schools fostering belonging and relational safety.

Theme 4: Learning in a New System: Language, Teaching and Educational Continuity

This theme focuses on how ākonga Māori experienced learning as they moved from Māori-medium education into English-medium schools. It includes both ākonga and mātua perspectives on language, learning, and how well classroom practices supported continuity during transition. While earlier themes examined cultural identity, pathways, and wellbeing, this theme centres on pedagogical fit and bilingual navigation,

emphasising that academic adjustment was shaped by schooling contexts rather than learner ability.

Across both ākonga and mātua kōrero, academic adjustment was not described as a lack of ability. Instead, students spoke about having to learn how a different schooling system worked. This included learning through English, adjusting to new teaching styles, and working out what teachers expected in class and in assessments. Many ākonga described doing this while trying to keep up with schoolwork, often without their prior learning being fully recognised.

Ākonga entered English-medium schools with strong learning foundations developed through te reo Māori and Māori-medium teaching approaches. However, they were often required to translate what they already knew into English-medium contexts. This movement between languages and ways of learning was not a short-term challenge, but an ongoing part of academic life that shaped confidence, engagement, and success over time.

A key part of academic adjustment was bi-lingual navigation. For ākonga in this study, the challenge was not learning new concepts, but translating existing knowledge developed through te reo Māori into English-dominant classroom contexts. Several ākonga described feeling academically confident when they first entered English-medium schooling. Hoe 3 challenged the idea that Māori-medium students needed to “catch up,” saying:

I didn't need to catch up. I was already top student straight away. They were coming to me for help, and I was fresh out of the kura system. Hoe 3

This kōrero clearly shows that Māori-medium education had not held students back. At the same time, being seen as capable sometimes meant that the effort involved in learning through English was less visible. Students still had to work out unfamiliar language, expectations, and classroom routines, even when their academic ability was recognised.

Teaching approaches played an important role in how well students could manage this bi-lingual navigation. Ākonga described learning more successfully when teaching was clear, supportive, and hands-on. Hoe 2 explained that practical learning helped knowledge to stay with them over time:

There were more in-depth subjects like maths, calculus, and then physics and chemistry. I felt like I learnt so much more and I still have that knowledge today because it was hands on stuff. Not just in books or watching a screen. Hoe 2

These experiences suggest that when learning was explained clearly and made practical, students were better able to connect new content with what they already knew, rather than struggling with language alone.

In contrast, some ākonga described struggling when teachers assumed students already understood key concepts or could easily learn through English. Hoe 6 spoke about the importance of teachers going back over basic ideas:

They retaught the student's simple things like mean, median and mode... if they hadn't retaught it, it would have been doomsday for me. Hoe 6

This quote highlights both the academic and emotional impact of curriculum assumptions. Without deliberate support, students were left at risk of falling behind, even though they had strong learning foundations developed in different contexts.

Bi-lingual flexibility also made a significant difference to students' confidence. Hoe 6 described being offered the chance to complete an assessment in te reo Māori after struggling in English:

I did it in English and I kind of struggled... the teacher came up to me afterwards and said, 'Do you want to redo that in te reo Māori?'. I went and did it in te reo Māori and I was really happy with that. Hoe 6

Being able to show what they knew in their strongest language helped reduce stress and affirmed their ability at a critical point in the transition. This kind of flexibility supported learning, rather than interrupting it.

Mātua kōrero reinforced these experiences by framing English learning as a matter of timing and exposure, not deficit. One mātua described their child beginning English classes in Year 7 and improving quickly, showing that Māori-medium education had not limited language development. Other mātua described organising English tutoring to support early stages of transition. These supports were seen as helping students adjust to English-medium learning, rather than fixing a lack of ability.

Beyond language, academic adjustment was shaped by differences in teaching styles and expectations. Ākonga described moving from kura Māori environments where learning was collective and relational, to English-medium classrooms where learning was more individual and expectations were often left unstated. Hoe 6 contrasted their learning experiences across kura Māori and English-medium schooling, highlighting differences in the level of instructional support provided.

In kura, Māori teachers would break it down and help everyone out. Hoe 6

Some ākonga experienced challenges when teacher expectations and curriculum differences were not fully accounted for during transition. While a kura Māori background was sometimes viewed positively, it could also lead to assumptions that students would manage without additional support. Differences in how learning was structured and sequenced across settings meant that some students encountered gaps that were not always recognised or addressed, leaving them to adjust on their own.

Academic expectations also came into tension with Māori cultural commitments. Hoe 5 described students disengaging or withdrawing from school:

A lot of the kids would quit going to the mainstream classes because they would either find it difficult to learn in there, or they've missed so many classes from kapa haka so they're failing. Hoe 5

This kōrero highlights how cultural participation was sometimes treated as competing with academic success, rather than being recognised as an important part of students' lives and wellbeing.

Together, these findings show that academic adjustment for Māori-medium graduates was not about fixing deficits, but about learning within systems that were often misaligned with their prior experiences. Ākonga did not struggle because they lacked ability, but because they were required to navigate English-medium academic environments that did not always recognise bi-lingual strengths, relational learning styles, or curriculum differences. Mātua perspectives strengthen this interpretation by emphasising fit, timing, and support rather than individual failure. This theme highlights the importance of teaching practices and schooling structures that actively support bi-lingual learning and continuity, during transition.

Theme 4 discussion: Learning in a New System: Language, Teaching, and Educational Continuity

The findings from this theme show that academic adjustment for the ākonga Māori who were transitioning from Māori-medium education into English-medium schooling, was shaped by pedagogical alignment rather than academic capability. Challenges emerged not from a lack of knowledge, but from differences in language of instruction, teaching approaches, and how prior learning was recognised and built upon in English-medium classrooms. Both ākonga and mātua kōrero challenge the idea that Māori-medium education limits academic ability. Rather, difficulties arose when the way learning taught in English-medium classrooms did not align with the learning approaches used in Māori-medium education.

Ākonga experiences of bi-lingual learning show that learning through a second language involves more than simply picking up new vocabulary. It also requires significant

thinking and processing effort. In this study, ākonga described having to translate ideas they had already learned through te reo Māori into English for assessments, writing, and classroom discussions. This supports research showing that Māori-medium graduates often have a strong conceptual understanding but can struggle when that knowledge is not recognised or built upon in English-medium settings (Cummins, 2000; McLachlan, 2018).

Mātua perspectives reinforced the importance of timing and exposure. Several described improvements in English language development when it was introduced later, after strong foundations in te reo Māori had been established. This aligns with research showing that a solid first language supports later academic language learning (Cummins, 2000). From this perspective, bilingualism is not a barrier to learning, but an academic strength. Where bi-lingual ability was acknowledged and supported, learning continuity was maintained. Where it was not, responsibility for adjustment fell back onto learners.

Ākonga accounts also pointed to a clear mismatch between kura Māori learning environments and English-medium classroom practices. Research on Māori education shows that learning is most accessible when it is grounded in relationships, dialogue, and collective support (Bishop et al., 2014b). Learning became harder to access when moving from relational, scaffolded kura Māori settings into English-medium classrooms where expectations were often indirect and learning more individualised. These experiences reflect critiques of pedagogical approaches that privilege independence and unspoken expectations over explicit guidance and collective learning (Stewart & Roberts, 2015).

Teacher assumptions further shaped how learning was experienced. While ākonga being seen as capable or culturally grounded could affirm their identity, it did not always result in teaching approaches that supported learning. This reflects research showing that high expectations alone are not enough, without deliberate strategies that help Māori learners succeed (Hynds et al., 2016). In similar ways, symbolic recognition of

Māori identity did not consistently translate into teaching practices that supported academic progress (Harris & Kaur, 2012).

Curriculum continuity also emerged as a system-level issue. Ākonga described needing key concepts to be retaught after transitioning into English-medium schooling, echoing findings of McLachlan (2018) that Māori-medium graduates often encounter gaps in curriculum sequencing when prior learning is not aligned or recognised. Mātua framed these gaps as matters of school design rather than student capability, reinforcing the view that responsibility for continuity should sit with institutions, not learners.

Tensions between academic expectations and cultural commitments, such as kapa haka, further highlighted this misalignment. Rather than being recognised as supporting wellbeing and engagement, cultural participation was sometimes positioned as competing with academic success. Māori education research challenges this framing, stating that belonging, cultural connection, and learning are closely linked and mutually reinforcing (Highfield & Webber, 2021; Hynds et al., 2016).

This theme shows that academic adjustment for Māori-medium graduates is shaped less by ability and more by how well English-medium schooling recognises bilingual strengths, aligns teaching approaches, and provides continuity across learning environments. Ākonga did not struggle because they lacked capability, but because they were navigating systems that were not designed with their prior learning experiences in mind. Mātua perspectives strengthen this interpretation by reframing challenge as pedagogical misalignment rather than deficit, highlighting the need for bilingual, relational, and structurally responsive approaches to teaching and learning in English-medium schools.

Theme 5: What Made the Difference: Support, Advocacy and Collective Care

This theme examines the relational, cultural, and structural conditions that enabled ākonga Māori to navigate the transition from Māori-medium education into English-medium schooling more successfully. While earlier themes highlighted the cultural,

academic, and social risks associated with transition, this theme focuses on what mitigated those risks. Across both ākonga and mātua kōrero, success was not attributed to academic ability or individual resilience, but to the presence of relational support, active advocacy, and collective approaches that reduced exposure and vulnerability. Where these conditions were present, transition was experienced as safer and more manageable; where they were absent, even capable students were left exposed.

Rather than being individually achieved, successful transition emerged as relationally produced and structurally enabled. Two interrelated sub-themes are identified: relational and advocacy networks as conditions of safety; and, collective and sustained approaches versus fragile individual support. Together, these findings demonstrate that the conditions enabling success were not incidental, but fundamental to how ākonga navigated unfamiliar schooling environments.

Sub-theme 5.1: Relational and Advocacy Networks as Conditions of Safety

Relational support and adult advocacy emerged as foundational conditions enabling ākonga Māori to navigate transition safely. Within this theme, safety encompasses both physical safety and the sense of security ākonga experienced through trusted relationships with adults who provided support, protection, and advocacy. Ākonga consistently described supportive teachers and adults as central to their sense of security, confidence, and willingness to engage with learning, particularly in environments where other forms of protection were uneven. These relationships were characterised by approachability, encouragement, and genuine care, rather than formalised support structures. What mattered most was that students felt noticed, believed in, and supported as individuals during a period of significant change.

Several ākonga spoke about the importance of teachers who created classrooms where they felt safe to take part, ask questions, and make mistakes. Supportive teachers helped reduce anxiety and made learning feel more manageable, especially in subjects where English was central and could feel overwhelming. One ākonga described their

English class as a place where they felt encouraged and supported, which made it one of their most positive learning experiences.

English class was very, very supportive. I loved that class. It was probably one of my favourites. They're probably more supportive because English is everywhere.

Hoe 2

Other ākonga also described how everyday interactions with caring adults helped them feel settled during the transition. Support was not limited to classroom teachers, but included other staff who took the time to connect and show care. These relationships helped create a sense of stability at a time when many aspects of school felt unfamiliar.

The teachers were really good, quite supportive. Miss G, she was all good. The office ladies were nice. Matua was always nice. I could always get out of trouble talking to him. Hoe 3

For some ākonga, feeling supported was closely linked to feeling safe in a new environment. Relational support helped them manage the uncertainty of moving into a large English-medium school and regain confidence during the transition.

I just felt a lot more secure in this new, weird, different environment. The support I had was really nice. That was probably the main positive I got from the transition. Hoe 6

Encouragement from teachers also played an important role in helping ākonga stay engaged with learning. When teachers recognised effort and showed belief in students, it helped counter self-doubt and reinforced a sense of purpose. One ākonga described how teachers noticed their motivation and responded by actively supporting their learning.

The teachers were actually very proactive because they probably saw that I wanted to achieve something in my future. I was actually engaging in the work, so the teachers were very good. Hoe 3

Ākonga also spoke about advocacy in relation to the wider culture of English-medium schooling. One participant linked an easier transition to collective ways of working, suggesting that shared responsibility and a whānau-based approach would better support students moving from kura Māori.

If mainstream schools can get out of that individualism and enter more collectivism, more of a whānau kind of perspective, that would one hundred percent make the transition easier for a student. Hoe 6

These ākonga kōrero show that relational support and advocacy were not optional extras, but central to helping ākonga feel safe, supported, and able to persist in English-medium schooling.

Mātua kōrero strongly emphasised the importance of adult advocacy, especially when schools were open, honest, and proactive. One parent described valuing clear and honest conversations at enrolment, particularly when schools acknowledged areas where their child might need support. This honesty helped build trust and made the school feel like a partner, rather than an authority.

I was quite up front in terms of what can they offer for them being fluent te reo Māori and from kura and stuff like that. He was quite honest. There's a lot of improvement they can make, and I respected that honesty. Punga 4

Mātua also spoke about the importance of teachers acting as allies to Māori students and whānau. Advocacy was not limited to Māori staff. One parent described feeling supported by a non-Māori teacher, who made a deliberate effort to check in and maintain communication with the whānau. These actions showed that advocacy could

be expressed through everyday relationships and practices, regardless of cultural background.

He wasn't Māori, but he was pro-Māori. He would purposely check in with us.

Punga 4

Whānau support was another key part of these support networks. Mātua consistently described themselves as advocates for their children, staying closely involved and watching how their children were being treated at school. Their focus went beyond academic achievement and included whether their children felt safe, supported, and comfortable being Māori. While ākonga did not always speak directly about whānau involvement, mātua kōrero showed how important emotional reassurance, encouragement, and cultural grounding were during the transition.

Their kōrero show that advocacy and relational support helped create a sense of safety for ākonga. When strong relationships existed between home and school, and when students were known and supported by adults, they were better able to engage with learning and manage new and unfamiliar environments. When these networks were missing, mātua felt that their children were more vulnerable to negative experiences at school, particularly when there were fewer trusted adults available to notice concerns, provide support, or advocate on their behalf.

Sub-theme 5.1 discussion: Relational and advocacy networks as conditions of safety

The significance of supportive teachers and adult advocacy in the findings reflects longstanding arguments that relational safety is a prerequisite for learning, particularly during periods of transition and uncertainty. Bishop et al.'s (2014b) whanaungatanga thesis positions relationships not as an addition to pedagogy, but as the medium through which learning occurs. In this study, everyday relational practices, teachers being approachable, encouraging effort, and checking in, created conditions of safety that enabled ākonga to engage with learning despite unfamiliar academic and social environments.

These findings also extend Hynds et al.'s (2016) argument that high expectations alone are insufficient to support Māori learners. While expectations were present in many English-medium contexts, it was advocacy, teachers acting on behalf of students, encouraging them, and intervening when challenges arose, that translated belief into meaningful support. Where advocacy was visible and intentional, students felt affirmed and capable. Where it was absent, vulnerability increased, reinforcing inequities rather than alleviating them.

Importantly, advocacy in this study was not limited to Māori staff. Mātua accounts of non-Māori teachers acting as pro-Māori allies align with Harris and Kaur (2012) critique of symbolic partnership models, highlighting the importance of genuine relational commitment over performative inclusion. These findings suggest that advocacy is best understood as a set of enacted practices rather than an identity-based role, and that responsibility for supporting Māori learners must be shared across school communities.

Whānau support further strengthened these relational networks. Māori education literature consistently emphasises the central role of whānau in supporting learning and wellbeing (Bishop et al., 2014b; Glassey et al., 2023). In this study, whānau functioned as cultural and emotional anchors, providing continuity across schooling contexts and reducing the stress associated with transition. Mātua positioning themselves as monitors, advocates, and protectors reinforces arguments that whānau engagement is not peripheral, but integral to equitable educational experiences.

Sub-theme 5.2: Collective and Sustained Approaches Versus Fragile Individual Support

Across both ākonga and mātua accounts, collective and sustained approaches to care emerged as crucial conditions enabling safer and more manageable transitions. English-medium schooling was often experienced as highly individualised, with responsibility for recognising difficulty and seeding support placed on students themselves. In contrast, kura Māori environments were remembered as collective spaces where responsibility for wellbeing and success was shared rather than individualised.

While collectivism was not a major focus in ākongā accounts of transition, their kōrero did point to the value of shared responsibility and not having to manage challenges on their own. In contrast, mātua spoke more directly about the importance of collective care and relational accountability in supporting wellbeing during transition. Together, these perspectives highlight that environments where care and support are built into everyday practice, rather than only activated in response to problems, were seen by whānau as making transition easier and safer; this also echoes the emphasis on whanaungatanga found in Māori-medium settings.

Mātua extended this critique by describing how support in English-medium schools was often organised around individual responsibility, rather than shared care. Several parents contrasted this with Māori-medium environments, where learning support was more hands-on and relational. Punga 3 reflected on their child's move into a setting that expected students to manage learning independently, even when they were struggling. When speaking with their child's maths teacher, they questioned whether support would be available if their child did not understand the work:

I think there's a lot of self-directed learning. He came from a place where there was more hands-on support. Even when I was talking to the maths teacher, I was like, if he needs help, are you there? Are you available if he doesn't understand? And he was like, it's all on the link, it's all there. There are links to YouTube, the examples are there. He had everything there for the students, except for someone actually sitting there and helping. Punga 3

This kōrero shows how support was framed as access to resources rather than relational presence. While materials were available, responsibility for recognising difficulty and seeking help were placed on the student, increasing the risk that needs would go unmet.

Punga 4 raised related concerns about the fragility of support when it relied on particular individuals, rather than being embedded within school structures. Reflecting on the departure of key staff, they noted:

Whaea left and then Matua left... that's going to be crap for the students. Punga 4

This comment highlights how quickly support could disappear when it was tied to specific people, rather than sustained systems. Together, these mātua accounts emphasise that effective support needs to be collective, relational, and embedded within schools. When care depends on individual effort or goodwill alone, students are left vulnerable to disruption, particularly during periods of transition.

Across this theme, relational support, advocacy, and collective responsibility emerged as the key conditions enabling successful transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling. Ākonga Māori were more likely to adapt and persist when they felt known, supported, and advocated for by teachers and whānau, and when care was embedded within school structures. Mātua perspectives reinforced this view by locating responsibility for successful transition within everyday practices that are maintained over time, rather than student resilience.

While peer relationships shaped experiences of safety and risk during transition, these dynamics were addressed in Theme 3. The findings in this theme show that peers were not consistent or reliable conditions enabling success. Instead, success was more strongly linked to forms of support that could be intentionally enacted and sustained by adults and institutions.

Together, these accounts highlight the fragility of support that relies on individual goodwill, rather than being embedded within school structures. Where care and advocacy depended on specific people, continuity was vulnerable to disruption, leaving ākonga exposed during periods of transition. The loss of key staff removed relational safety nets that had been carrying significant responsibility for student wellbeing. These findings reinforce that successful transition requires collective, sustained, and

institutionally embedded approaches to support, rather than isolated or informal acts of care.

Sub-theme 5.2 discussion: Collective Support Versus Fragile Individual Care

The strongest structural critique within this theme concerns the fragility of support that relies on individual goodwill, rather than institutional commitment. Ākonga and mātua experiences highlighted the contrast between collective approaches experienced in kura Māori and the individualised nature of English-medium schooling. This critique aligns with Stewart and Roberts (2015) analysis of dominant educational norms in Aotearoa, which often privilege individual responsibility and independence at the expense of collective care.

Mātua concerns about the loss of key Māori staff, underscore broader critiques of schools that rely on a small number of cultural brokers without embedding responsibility across systems and leadership (Hynds et al., 2016). When support structures depended on specific individuals, continuity was fragile and students were left exposed when those individuals left. These findings reinforce the argument that equity cannot be achieved through isolated acts of goodwill, but requires sustained, collective, and institutionalised approaches to support.

By foregrounding collectivism, the findings challenge English-medium assumptions that successful transition is a matter of individual adaptation. Instead, they position responsibility with schools and systems to design environments where care, advocacy, and relational accountability are embedded rather than optional. In doing so, this theme reframes success as a shared outcome rather than a personal achievement.

Theme 5 Discussion: What Made the Difference: Support, Advocacy and Collective Care

The findings associated with Theme 5 demonstrate that successful transition from Māori-medium education into English-medium schooling was relationally produced and structurally enabled, rather than achieved through individual resilience or academic capability alone. Read alongside Themes 3 and 4, this theme shows how

relational and institutional conditions mitigated the social risks, cultural dislocation, and pedagogical misalignment experienced by ākongā Māori during transition.

These findings align strongly with Kaupapa Māori and Indigenous education research that positions relationships, care, and collective responsibility as foundational to educational success (Bishop et al., 2014b; Glassey et al., 2023). Rather than treating relational support as supplementary, the data from this study shows that it functioned as a primary mechanism through which safety, engagement, and persistence were made possible.

Together, these findings and literature indicate that relational support, advocacy, and collective responsibility are essential conditions enabling successful transition, rather than supplementary enhancements. Theme 5 provides a relational and structural counterweight to the risks and misalignments identified in Themes 3 and 4, demonstrating how ākongā Māori were able to persist and succeed, despite systemic challenges.

These findings reinforce Kaupapa Māori and Indigenous education scholarship that positions relationships, whānau, and collective care as foundational to educational equity (Bishop et al., 2014b; Glassey et al., 2023). They also underscore the need for English-medium schools to move beyond individualised models of support and embed relational and advocacy-based practices as part of institutional design. In this way, Theme 5 contributes to broader debates about educational responsibility by making visible the conditions under which equity becomes possible.

Conclusion

This chapter has shared the experiences of ākongā and mātua as they navigated the move from Māori-medium into English-medium schooling. The findings show that transition was not a single event, but a complex process shaped by identity, opportunity, relationships, and school systems. Ākongā spoke about holding on to being Māori while adjusting to new expectations, social practices, and ways of learning. While some saw

new possibilities and challenges, others experienced uncertainty, tokenism, or racialised discipline. Across the themes, wellbeing and success were shaped not just by academic ability, but by belonging, safety, and the quality of relationships within schools.

Overall, the findings position transition as a shared responsibility rather than an individual hurdle. When schools recognised and supported Māori ways of being and learning, transition felt safe and enabling. When they did not, risks to identity and wellbeing increased. What made the difference was not resilience alone, but strong relational support, advocacy, and collective care. The next, final chapter, draws these insights together and outlines recommendations to strengthen cultural, relational, and structural supports for Māori learners moving across schooling contexts.

Haumi: Conclusion and recommendations

Ki te kotahi te kākaho ka whati ki te kāpuia e kore e whati.

If there is but one reed it will break, but if it is bunched together, it will not.

(Kīngi Tāwhiao)

Revisiting the Research

This study has explored the experiences of ākonga Māori and their whānau who have transitioned from kura Māori to English-medium schools. It is grounded in a Kaupapa Māori research framework. The research sought to understand how this transition was experienced through cultural, relational and educational dimensions and to what extent ākonga wellbeing, cultural identity, te reo Māori or academic engagement was sustained or disrupted. By centring the ākonga and whānau voices, the study aimed to go beyond deficit focussed experiences of transition to identifying the conditions, supports and practices that supported ākonga Māori and their whānau to navigate this shift.

Across the kōrero shared by ākonga and their whānau, the study found that their transitions into English-medium schooling were shaped by a combination of aspiration, uneven support and structural misalignment. Many of the ākonga and their whānau described a desire to access new academic and social opportunities that were not available or differed from those within kura Māori. These experiences were approached optimistically and with agency. However, it became evident that the extent to which this potential was realised, depended really on the presence of supportive peers or teachers within the English-medium settings, rather than on consistent school wide practices. Ākonga and their whānau also highlighted a lack of consistently enacted values within English-medium schools, with relationality often coming second to individualised expectations. While Māori identity and cultural knowledge were at times recognised, this recognition was frequently experienced as tokenistic; this placed additional leadership and cultural responsibilities on ākonga Māori who had to navigate this without guidance or institutional support.

This final chapter synthesises the key conclusions of the study, outlines recommendations that have arisen from the findings and considers their implications for educational practice, partnership and policy. The recommendations presented are grounded in the kōrero from the lived experiences of the ākonga Māori and their whānau. They offer a pathway forward, for more culturally responsive and relationally grounded approaches to transition experiences.

In maintaining alignment with a Kaupapa Māori framework, the recommendations presented in this chapter suggest that ākonga and/or their whānau should have the ability to make the decision to transition, without having to heavily adjust themselves. They instead, highlight the responsibilities of educational institutions and systems to enable conditions where cultural continuity, relational safety and language identity are sustained. These recommendations are not prescriptive solutions but are grounded responses shaped by the experiences of ākonga and their whānau. The recommendations are presented with the intention to contribute to ongoing research and conversations into how both kura Māori and English-medium schools can better honour the pathways, strengths and aspirations of ākonga Māori that choose to transition from Māori-medium education.

Key Points in the Thesis

A clear and central conclusion that emerged from this study is the way in which ākonga positioned themselves as having autonomy, by being active agents within their transition experience. They did not describe themselves as inactive recipients of change during this experience and they did not consider that they were victims disadvantaged by the transition. Instead, the ākonga consistently articulated a sense of self responsibility, intention, and reflection in relation to their educational pathways. The move from kura Māori to English-medium schooling was approached by many as a deliberate decision or desire, as one that was associated with personal aspirations for different or extended academic opportunities, broader social experiences, and future possibilities. This framing challenges the deficit narratives that might position Māori

learners as struggling or being ill-prepared. The ākonga in this study demonstrated insight, motivation, and a clear awareness of both the opportunity and risk involved in transitioning between schools.

The agency described and displayed by the ākonga must be understood within context. While ākonga navigated the transition with resilience, the responsibility for adapting rested largely with them. They described actively learning new expectations, adjusting their language use, changing to adapt to classroom participation styles, and building new relational networks in environments that were structurally different from those they had known. More importantly, these adjustments were rarely explicitly stipulated, they were instead encountered through subtle norms observed regarding behaviour, performance, and linguistic dominance. In this sense, transition was not simply a change of school, it was a shift between educational value systems.

This study has affirmed that transition from kura Māori to English-medium schooling is far more than an academic progression. It involves movement between culturally grounded, relationally centred environments and predominantly English dominated settings that prioritise individual performance. Where kura Māori normalised te reo Māori, collectivism, and relational accountability, English-medium schooling frequently positioned these as secondary, rather than foundational. Māori-medium ways of being were not consistently recognised as normal; as a result, successful transition to English-medium settings often depended on the extent to which ākonga could strategically reposition aspects of their identity and expression to align with the dominant expectations.

The complexity of transition, therefore, cannot be reduced to questions of student readiness. The findings demonstrate that the ease or difficulty of transition is actually shaped by the degree of institutional alignment between Māori-medium foundations and English-medium structures. Where recognition, relational responsiveness, and shared responsibility were present, ākonga described feeling supported and affirmed. However, where these were absent, adapting became individualised labour.

Another key conclusion is related to systemic design. This study demonstrates that transition between Māori-medium and English-medium schooling is not consistently recognised within national education frameworks. There is no consistent mechanism for tracking this pathway, there is no structured guidance for the release and receipt of learners, and there is no coordinated policy expectation that addresses the bi-lingual and bi-cultural dimensions of this shift. Consequently, approaches to transition are variable and dependent on individual leadership rather than embedded in systemic responsibility.

This absence of systemic responsibility is particularly significant given the abilities ākonga Māori bring from Māori-medium education. Bilingualism in te reo Māori, cultural fluency, and relational confidence represent strengths developed through sustained language and cultural immersion. However, unlike other forms of language transition, Māori-medium learners do not consistently receive structured linguistic or pedagogical support when entering English-medium settings. This reveals a broader tension within the education system: te reo Māori is symbolically valued, yet not always institutionally supported when it intersects with a Western structural design.

Teacher preparation and professional development further reflect this gap in institutional support. The findings indicate that educators are not consistently equipped with standardised frameworks, resources, or collaborative systems and processes to support this specific transition pathway. Without systemic orientation, responsibility becomes fragmented. What appears at first glance to be school level inconsistency, in fact, reflects a deeper absence of national coherence.

The study also brings to the surface the issue of cultural labour. Māori language and cultural knowledge were often acknowledged within English-medium contexts, yet this recognition was frequently visible rather than structural. Ākonga were called upon to lead acknowledgements, perform whaikōrero, or guide waiata based on their competence and prior schooling. While such opportunities can affirm cultural identity, they also positioned ākonga as representatives or cultural resources for the school

community. This expectation was not always accompanied by mentoring, developmental scaffolding, or shared responsibility.

The pattern revealed here is not one of explicit exclusion, but of a somewhat partial inclusion. Māori culture was welcomed in performative or ceremonial moments, yet not consistently embedded in institutional practice. The labour of cultural continuity therefore remained individualised. Ākonga were required to carry out, represent, and at times defend their cultural knowledge within environments that had not structurally reorganised themselves to share that responsibility.

The findings from this study suggest that the burden of transition remains unevenly distributed, falling heavily on the ākonga that transition. Ākonga demonstrated agency, resilience, and critical insight; however, their success was often dependent on their ability to adapt to systems that did not reciprocally change for them. Without greater structural alignment, clearer policy recognition, and shared accountability across the education sector, transitions between kura Māori and English-medium schools will continue to rely on the strength of individual learners rather than collective design.

Ultimately, this study calls for a reframing of transition responsibility. If kura Māori are expected to prepare ākonga for engagement across educational contexts, English-medium systems must equally prepare to receive learners who are grounded in Māori language, culture and tikanga. Transition should not require ākonga to recalibrate their identity to belong. Institutional structures, instead, must expand and develop to recognise and sustain the cultural foundations which ākonga came from. Only then can transition be understood not as an individual adjustment, but as shared educational responsibility, grounded in equity and relational accountability.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study and are organised by the key groups responsible for supporting ākonga transition: the Ministry of

Education, English-medium schools, kura Māori, teacher education and professional development providers, and future research.

Policy and System-Level Design

The conclusions of this study indicate that transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling is not currently recognised or intentionally designed as a distinct educational pathway within national policy frameworks. This lack of recognition indicates that responsibility for supporting this transition should extend beyond individual schools to system level change makers. Considering the structural gaps identified, the following recommendations are directed toward the Ministry of Education and associated policy bodies:

- National education policy should explicitly recognise the transition from Māori - medium to English-medium schooling as a specific and recurring pathway within the education system. Such recognition would acknowledge the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical shifts essential, in this movement, and affirm that this transition is not a neutral or routine progression. Formal recognition would provide the foundation for coherent guidance, resourcing, and accountability.
- The Ministry of Education should develop a cross-sector transition framework that outlines shared responsibilities between Māori-medium and English-medium schools. This framework should articulate expectations for preparation, reception, relational support, and cultural continuity, ensuring that transition is not managed informally or inconsistently across schools. Clear guidance would support greater coherence and reduce reliance on the initiative of individual educators.
- Intentional design requires alignment across policy, resourcing, and professional expectations. The Ministry of Education should ensure that planning documents, funding models, and school evaluation processes reflect the realities of this transition pathway. Embedding transition considerations within broader system

planning would signal institutional commitment and reduce the current fragmentation experienced by learners and whānau.

English-medium schools and Educators

The findings of this study demonstrate that English-medium schooling environments play a critical role in shaping transition experiences. While ākonga Māori demonstrated agency and resilience, the responsibility for adapting frequently rested disproportionately with learners. In response, the following recommendations are directed toward English-medium schools and educators:

- English-medium schools should implement intentional transition processes for students arriving from Māori-medium settings. This includes proactive communication with kura Māori, early relational engagement with students and whānau, and clear preparation of teaching staff prior to enrolment. Structured processes reduce reliance on informal support and signal institutional readiness to receive learners in culturally sustaining ways.
- Schools should prioritise relational approaches that reflect the collectivist foundations many ākonga bring from Māori-medium education. This includes fostering classroom environments where whakawhanaungatanga is actively cultivated, and where belonging is established as foundational to learning, rather than secondary to performance. Relational safety should be understood as a shared institutional responsibility.
- English-medium schools should avoid positioning ākonga Māori as default cultural representatives. Responsibility for te reo Māori, tikanga, and cultural leadership should be distributed across staff, with appropriate mentoring and support provided when students choose to take on leadership roles. Cultural knowledge must be nurtured, rather than relied upon as an existing resource.

Whānau–School Partnerships

The study highlights the central role of whānau in navigating and supporting transition experiences. Whānau were often key advocates, interpreters of institutional expectations, and sources of cultural continuity. However, the responsibility for managing transition frequently fell heavily upon them. The following recommendations emphasise the importance of shared partnership:

- Schools should initiate early, proactive engagement with whānau prior to and during transition. Engagement should extend beyond administrative processes to relational conversations about aspirations, concerns, and cultural priorities. Establishing whakawhanaungatanga at the outset, supports trust and shared understanding.
- Transition support should not rely solely on whānau advocacy. Schools must ensure that systems, communication processes, and relational supports are structured in ways that reduce the need for constant parental intervention. Shared responsibility fosters equity and signals institutional accountability.

Māori-Medium Settings

While the findings highlight systemic gaps within English-medium schooling and national policy, the study also indicates that Māori-medium settings play a role in preparing ākonga for transition; that is, where this pathway is anticipated. The following recommendations are offered in a strength based and future-focused manner, recognising the existing cultural and linguistic foundations established within kura Māori:

- Where transition to English-medium schooling is anticipated, kura Māori may consider embedding structured preparation processes that acknowledge the linguistic, pedagogical, and relational shifts learners may encounter. This preparation should not compromise the integrity of the Māori-medium

philosophy, but rather equip ākonga with confidence to navigate differing educational contexts.

- Māori-medium settings could intentionally support ākonga to articulate their bilingual competencies and reflect on differences between Māori-medium and English-medium expectations. Developing metalinguistic awareness may assist learners in understanding that shifts in language use, represent contextual navigation rather than changes to the identity.
- Proactive communication between kura Māori and English-medium schools may support clearer shared expectations and smoother transitions. Establishing channels for information sharing, where appropriate, can reduce uncertainty and support continuity.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Learning

The findings of this study indicate that educator readiness plays a significant role in shaping transition experiences. Variability in relational practice, cultural responsiveness, and understanding of Māori-medium education, suggests that teacher preparation and professional learning require greater attention in this transition:

- Initial teacher education programmes should include focused content on Māori-medium education pathways, bi-lingual development, and the specific dynamics of transition into English-medium schooling. Greater awareness at the point of qualification would reduce reliance on individual educator initiative and support more consistent responsiveness.
- Ongoing professional development should equip teachers with practical strategies for sustaining te reo Māori competence, supporting identity continuity, and sharing cultural responsibility within classrooms. Professional learning should move beyond symbolic inclusion, toward deeper understanding of bi-lingual and bi-cultural educational contexts.

- School leaders should also be supported to recognise and plan for this transition pathway within broader school improvement strategies. Leadership awareness is essential for ensuring that transition support becomes institutional rather than optional.

Future Research

While this study contributes to understanding the transition experiences of ākonga Māori moving from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling, further research is needed. Continued research grounded in Māori perspectives remains essential to ensuring that educational pathways honour linguistic, cultural, and relational foundations.

Future research could include:

- Longitudinal studies examining transition outcomes over time to provide deeper insight into academic trajectories, language retention, and identity development.
- Comparative research across different regional contexts to illuminate how varying school environments influence transition experiences.
- Evaluation of structured transition frameworks to support evidence-informed policy development.

Concluding Remarks

This study affirms the strength, insight, and aspiration of ākonga Māori and their whānau as they navigate complex educational pathways. Transition from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling is not simply a movement between institutions, but a shift across value systems, languages, and relational environments. The findings highlight that responsibility for sustaining cultural continuity, relational safety, and equitable opportunity should not rest with learners alone. It is a responsibility that needs to be shared across schools, systems, and policy makers. By intentionally designing transition pathways that honour the linguistic and cultural foundations of Māori-medium education, the education system can move toward greater consistency,

equity, and collective accountability for all ākonga. Ākonga and their whānau are not asking for small changes, they are calling for alignment between systems, values, and practice.

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Glossary

The words used within this thesis are described and translated in the glossary. The translations have been sought from several sources such as online and hard copy dictionaries. I acknowledge that some translations are diverse and dependant on the context in which the words are used. Therefore, the words used and translations presented are specific to the usage within this thesis.

Term	Definition
Ako Māori	Culturally preferred pedagogy
Ākonga	Learner; student
Ākonga Māori	Māori learner(s)
Aroha	Love
Hapū	Subtribe; kinship group
Haumi	Joining section of a waka that binds structural components together
Hauora	Holistic wellbeing encompassing physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational dimensions
Hoe	Paddle(s)
Hui	Gathering(s), meeting(s)
Hui-ā-kanohi	In-person meeting
Iwi	Tribe; extended kinship group
Kaiako	Teacher
Kāhui kaumātua	Elder advisory group
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship
Karakia	Prayer
Kaumātua	Respected elder(s)
Kapa haka	Māori cultural performing arts group
Kaupapa	Topic; purpose; guiding philosophy or agenda

Term	Definition
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, philosophy, or methodological framework grounded in Māori values and principles
Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga	The socio-economic mediation principle
Kiato	Crossbeam(s) (thwarts) of a waka that provides stability and connection
Kiri	Skin
Kirikiriroa	Hamilton
Kōrero	To speak; discussion; narrative
Kotahitanga	Collective unity
Kura	School
Kura ā iwi	Māori immersion tribal schools
Kura auraki	English-medium school
Kura Kaupapa Māori	Māori language immersion primary school operating under Māori philosophy and values
Kura Māori	Māori-medium school
Māoritanga	Māori culture, customs, and way of life
Māmā	Mother
Mana	Authority; prestige; spiritual power
Mana ūkaipō	Sence of belonging, connection, and care
Manaakitanga	Process of showing care, hospitality, generosity, and respect
Manuhiri	Visitor(s)
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge systems and ways of knowing
Mātua	Parents
Mihi	Formal greeting(s)
Mokopuna	Grandchild(ren)

Term	Definition
Ngako	Essence
Oranga	Wellbeing; relational and collective flourishing
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Pātai	Question(s)
Punga	Anchor stone(s) for a waka
Pūrākau	Oral narrative(s) or traditional story/stories
Rangatiratanga	Chiefly authority; self-determination; leadership
Rangatira	Chiefly person; leader
Rauawa	Raised side(s) of a waka
Reo	Language
Rūruhi	Elderly woman; grandmother
Rumaki Reo	Māori immersion class
Taha Māori	Māori dimension or aspect, often referring to cultural identity
Takere	Hull or underside of a waka
Tamariki	Children
Tamaiti	Child
Taonga tuku iho	The cultural aspirations principle
Tāmaki Makaurau	Auckland
Tauihu	Prow or front of a waka
Te ao Māori	The Māori world; Māori worldview
Te kei	Stern of a waka
Te Kōhanga Reo	Māori language immersion early childhood centre
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Te reo me ngā tikanga Māori	The Māori language and associated cultural practices
Tikanga	Customs; correct procedures; cultural practices
Tikanga Māori	Māori customs and cultural practices

Term	Definition
Tikanga and kawa	Cultural protocols, customs, and formal procedures
Tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination; autonomy; sovereign authority
Tūpuna	Ancestors
Tūrangawaewae	Place of standing; ancestral place of belonging
Tuakiritanga	Identity; sense of self, often cultural identity
Tuakana-teina	Relationship between elder and younger
Tumuaki	Principal
Waka	Traditional canoe; ancestral vessel
Wānanga	Forum for discussion; to deliberate; learning gathering
Whakaaro	Thought(s)
Whakapapa	Genealogy; lineage; relational layering
Whakanoa	Return to neutral state
Whakatauki	Proverb
Whakawhanaungatanga	Process of establishing and strengthening relationships
Whanaungatanga	Relational connection
Whānau	Family; extended family
Wharekura	Māori immersion secondary school
Whare	House
Whenua	Land

Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval



30 August 2024

Tania Ka'ai
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Tania

Re Ethics Application: **24/38 Whakawhiti i te ara mātauranga– Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 30 August 2027.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please qualify for group participants what is being received for review, noting that this should not be the transcripts as it is not ethical to offer someone the chance to edit another's voice. Endorsing or amending a summary or aggregate report is different.

Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC unless requested but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: tui.barbarich-tawera@aut.ac.nz

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster



Kia Hiwa Rā, kia hiwa rā!

He mahi rangahau – A research project

Whakawhiti I te Ara Mātauranga (Transitioning from kura Māori to Mainstream Education Schools)

- Are you an ākonga Māori (13-19 years old) that have moved from kura Māori to a mainstream school?
- Did you spend at least 5 years in kura Māori?
- Did your tamariki move from kura Māori to mainstream school?
- Interested in having your say on a kaupapa Māori research project?

Āwhina mai koa - We need you!

We are inviting Māori students and their whānau to wānanga (interview) to help us understand the experiences ākonga have when transitioning from a kura Māori to a mainstream school.

The aim is to understand the experiences ākonga Māori and their whānau have when transitioning their tamariki into mainstream schools, the support systems available to them throughout this experience looking at what works and what needs more attention. We would appreciate hearing your views about this kaupapa

If you are interested or thinking about participating, please contact:

Tui Barbarich-Tawera on

Phone: 02102212390

Email: tui.barbarich-tawera@aut.ac.nz

*Ākonga aged 13-16 will sign an assent form and need to have a signed consent form from their whānau

Any pātai – questions please contact me.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi Engari, he toa takitini
Success is not the work of one, but the work of many*

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30th August, 2024 AUTEK
Reference number 24/38*

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheets



Participant Information Sheet

Pakeke (adults)

Date Information Sheet Produced:
29 May 2024

Project Title

Whakawhiti i te ara mātauranga – Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools.

An Invitation

Tēnā koe. My name is Tui Barbarich-Tawera and I am a Masters student in Education at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). I extend an invitation for you to take part in this research project. Your participation is purely voluntary, and you are able to withdraw at any time, this will neither advantage nor disadvantage you in any way.

What is the purpose of this research?

The primary purpose of this research is to interview ākonga (learners) and their whānau (family) to produce a thesis regarding the experiences of ākonga when transitioning from kura Māori (Māori medium schools) to mainstream schools. The thesis will help in creating a space for dialogue about the experiences Māori have when transitioning to mainstream education and highlight the supports systems and effective or ineffective practices within the New Zealand education system. This research has been approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC) (insert date).

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been invited to participate in this research because you have responded to an advertisement you have seen. You have self-identified to participate in this research based on the following criteria:

- 1) You are the whānau (parent or guardian) of a child aged 13-19 years old that has attended kura Māori for 5 years or more that has transitioned to a mainstream school

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research project, you will need to complete and sign the consent form provided by me (the researcher) with this participant information sheet prior to or at the interview. The interview will be held at a venue where you will feel comfortable. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

For the purposes of gathering information for this research, you will be participating in an interview. The interview will be conducted face-to-face by myself and will take no more than 60-minutes which will be scheduled to fit around your activities and environment. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed by myself. You will have the choice to be interviewed separately as ākonga, whānau or all together.

What are the discomforts and risks?

All interviews will be conducted according to tikanga Māori. As the interviewee you can advise me of any discomfort at any point prior, during and post interview. Furthermore, you are completely free to stop the interview or your overall participation in the research at any time if you choose to do so.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

As already mentioned above, you have the option of not responding to any of the questions asked. You also have the option of withdrawing from the interview at any time.

What are the benefits?

This research will support future generations moving from kura Māori to mainstream schools. Participants may feel empowered as they will be actively contributing to and involved in developing a resource that will support the research outcomes. Indirectly their knowledge and experience shared through this research will benefit their whānau and future generations to ensure the educational experiences they receive support their kaupapa should they choose to transition. This will support the ākonga when facing language and cultural differences within mainstream schools.

In addition, this research will not only benefit Māori society, but also the teaching community in how to engage with and support ākonga Māori who have transitioned from kura Māori. Furthermore, this research will help to inform policy to ensure adequate resources are developed and implemented that reduce the barriers identified thus promoting a smoother transition process.

The researcher will gain new knowledge and understanding about education for Māori and will contribute to the advancement of practice within the discipline. This project will support the researcher to develop and enhance her research skills and methodologies. It will also contribute to her professional development and completion a Master of Philosophy degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

All recordings and transcripts will only be available to the research team. All identifiable details will be held in a secure location and no information identifying you as a participant will be included in the final research thesis. You will be referred to in the study using a pseudonym name. We will have a discussion with you to decide how you will be named in the study. This will be used to identify their data during discussions with supervisors as well as any written reports of the research. All the information you provide will be treated with respect to your confidentiality and privacy and will not be shared with anyone other than the research team.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The only cost to participate will be your time and your invaluable sharing of your experiences. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face and take approximately 60 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

After the initial contact to discuss the parameters of this research, you will have two weeks to consider the information provided to you. During this time, I will organise to hui with you to discuss any questions that you may have regarding this information sheet, the consent form or anything regarding the project.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

As stated in the consent form, you will be offered the opportunity to review the material before it is published and a summary of the report will be given to you.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Tania Ka'ai: email tkaai@aut.ac.nz, phone (+64) 9 921 9999 ext 6601.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Email: ethics@aut.ac.nz +64 9 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Tui Barbarich-Tawera
Email: tui.marie046@gmail.com
Mobile: 021 022 12390

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Tania Ka'ai
Te Ipukarea Research Institute, AUT
University, New Zealand
Email: tkaai@aut.ac.nz
Tel: +64 9 921 9999 ext 6601

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30th August 2024 AUTC Reference number 24/38

Please do not
staple your
application

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

Ākonga

Date Information Sheet Produced:

29 May 2024

Project Title

Whakawhiti i te ara mātauranga – Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools.

An Invitation

Tēnā koe. My name is Tui Barbarich-Tawera and I am a master's student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). I'm doing a project and I'd love for you to be a part of it! You don't have to if you don't want to, and it won't affect you either way.

What is this research about?

I want to kōrero with ākonga and their whānau who have moved from Māori-speaking schools to pākehā schools. I'm trying to understand how this transition feels and what could make it easier. This research has been approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (insert date).

How did I find you and why are you being invited to participate?

You or your whānau would have seen an advert about this kaupapa and have emailed me because you're interested in being a part of it and fit these criteria:

- 1) You've been at a Māori school for at least 5 years.
- 2) You've switched to a regular pākehā school.
- 3) You're between 13 and 19 years old

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research project, you and possibly someone from your whānau will need to sign the consent form provided by me with this participant information sheet before the interview. The hui can be held wherever you and your whānau feel comfortable.

What will happen in this research?

We'll have an interview where we will kōrero about some questions I want to find answers to. It'll take about an hour. During the interview I'll ask you some questions about your experience moving from kura Māori to pākehā school. The interview will be conducted face-to-face by myself and will take no more than 60-minutes. I'll audio record the interview and then write up all the kōrero myself. You can choose to have the interview by yourself or altogether with your whānau.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The interview will follow tikanga Māori. If you don't feel good about the kaupapa at any time during the interview, we can stop and you don't have to answer the questions I ask. You can choose to stop the interview and pull out at any time.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you need to talk to someone else about anything that might make you uncomfortable about the kaupapa, Youthline provides counselling to young people via phone - call 0800 376 633, or text 234. They're available 24 hours, 7 days.

What are the benefits?

You get to share your kōrero about how you felt about moving from kura Māori to kura pākehā, help others, and maybe learn something new yourself! You'll also be helping me to learn about this kaupapa and to get a Masters tohu (certificate)

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy is super important. So, only me and my Kaiako will see what we kōrero about, and all your info will be kept safe. Together you and I will come up with a name to use for you so that no one knows what you've said. If I use any of your kōrero in my mahi (the report or presentations), I will refer to you using the name we've chosen together.

Can I think about if I want to share my kōrero?

We'll have a kōrero before the interview to make sure you understand what will happen and ask any questions you have. You can then take two weeks to decide if you want to have an interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I'll share all your kōrero with you once I've written it down. You can choose to change some of your kōrero or leave it if you're happy with it. I'll also give you and your whānau a report of what I found out.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Got questions or concerns? You can reach out to me or my supervisor, Professor Tania Ka'ai: email tkaai@aut.ac.nz, phone (+64) 9 921 9999 ext 6601. If you're worried about how things are going, you can contact the Ethics Committee too. Email: ethics@aut.ac.nz +64 9 921 9999 ext 6038.

If you have any questions or want to have a kōrero send me a text message or email

Researcher Contact Details:

Tui Barbarich-Tawera
Email: tui.marie046@gmail.com
Mobile: 021 022 12390

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Tania Ka'ai
Te Ipukarea Research Institute, AUT
University, New Zealand
Email: tkaai@aut.ac.nz
Tel: +64 9 921 9999 ext 6601

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30th August 2024 AUTECH
Reference number 24/38*



Consent Form – Pakeke (adults)
Uiui (Interviews)

Project title: *Whakawhiti I te ara mātauranga – Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools.*

Project Supervisor: *Professor Tania Ka'ai*

Researcher: *Tui Barbarich-Tawera*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 29 May 2024
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to be identified in this research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I consent to my details being retained for contact about future projects (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I understand that my privacy will be agreed upon between myself and the researcher (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30th August, 2024 AUTEK
Reference number 24/38*



Consent Form – Wānanga (groups)

Uiui (Interviews)

Project title: *Whakawhiti I te ara mātauranga – Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools.*

Project Supervisor: *Professor Tania Ka'ai*

Researcher: *Tui Barbarich-Tawera*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 29 May 2024
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to be identified in this research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I consent to my details being retained for contact about future projects (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I understand that my privacy will be agreed upon between myself and the researcher (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30th August, 2024 AUTEK
Reference number 24/38*



Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Uiui (Interviews)

Project title: *Whakawhiti I te ara mātauranga – Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools.*

Project Supervisor: *Professor Tania Ka'ai*

Researcher: *Tui Barbarich-Tawera*

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 29 May 2024
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to my child/children and/or myself removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of our data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to my child/children taking part in this research.
- ☐ I understand that my child is able to refuse to give assent to take part in this research
- ☐ I consent to my details being retained for contact about future projects (please tick one): Yes ☒ No ☐
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Child/children's name/s :

.....

Parent/Guardian's signature :

Parent/Guardian's name :

Parent/Guardian's Contact Details (if appropriate) :

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

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Date:



AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Assent Form

Uiui (Interviews)

Project title: *Whakawhiti I te ara mātauranga – Transitioning from kura Māori to mainstream education schools.*

Project Supervisor: *Professor Tania Ka'ai*

Researcher: *Tui Barbarich-Tawera*

- ☐ I have read and understood the sheet telling me what will happen in this study and why it is important.
- ☐ I have been able to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I can stop being part of this study whenever I want and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.
- ☐ If I stop being part of the study, I understand that then I will be offered the choice between having any information that that other people can know is about me removed or letting the researcher keep using it. I also understand that sometimes, if the results of the research have been written, some information about me may not be able to be removed.
- ☐ I agree for the researcher to keep my information to contact me in the future about other projects (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
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Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30th August, 2024 AUTEC
Reference number 24/38*