

Chapter 25

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN NEW ZEALAND: AGAINST ALL ODDS?

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching (ELT) is a multi-billion dollar sector of the New Zealand education system. This system, in spite of a high level of international respect, has been ambivalent to the teaching and learning of additional languages. ELT is viewed by many who are not centrally involved in the sector as an educational revenue stream, a perspective which, nationally, has important implications for the provision of quality programmes for international students. Add to this mix, the lack of a national languages policy, a rapidly changing ethnic profile and the delicate politics surrounding the revitalisation of a fragile indigenous language and the situation becomes one which is extremely complex to navigate. However, in spite of a number of potential barriers, the ELT sector is thriving but there are clearly a number of issues and challenges which will need to be fully addressed if the sector is to continue to flourish and grow in the future.

Keywords: ELT, language policy and planning, international education sector, NZ language education

INTRODUCTION

Aotearoa/New Zealand is a young nation state located in the southern Pacific Ocean to the south east of its nearest neighbour, Australia. The total population of the country, a former British colony, stands at approximately 4.20 million and, because it has a significant migrant population, its demographic profile is characterised by its ethnic diversity. A newspaper report following the release of the 2013 census results reports that:

[There] are more ethnicities in New Zealand than there are countries in the world. In total, there were 213 ethnic groups identified in the census, whereas there are 196 countries recognized by Statistics New Zealand (Manning, 2013).

Currently, the majority of New Zealand's population is made up of individuals of European descent (69%). The indigenous Māori people constitute the largest minority (14.6%), followed by citizens from various countries in Asia (9.2%) and non-Māori Pacific Islands (6.9%). Middle Eastern, Latin American and African migrants make up 1.5% of the total population. However, the population profile is undergoing almost constant change. More than one million (25.2%) people in the total population of New Zealand were born outside the country, with 40% of Auckland's (New Zealand's biggest city) citizens having been born overseas (Wikipedia, 2014). The majority of New Zealand's population lives in the North Island, with the city of Auckland now considered to be one of the largest Polynesian cities in the world (Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

THE NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION SYSTEM: SELECTED KEY POINTS

The New Zealand education system has long enjoyed a strong international reputation, as evidenced in the United Nations *Education Index* (United Nations Development Programme, 2013) where it is ranked among the highest in the world. Schooling is compulsory for children from the age of 6 to 16 although most children start school at the age of 5. In state schools, education is nominally free from a child's 5th birthday until January 1st following their 19th birthday (New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel Office,

2014). New Zealand performs consistently well in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Overall, New Zealand has an adult literacy rate of 99% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014), and over half of the population aged 15 to 29 holds some form of post-secondary qualification.

LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND: INFLUENCES FROM EARLY EDUCATIONAL AND MIGRATION POLICIES

While the general framework of the New Zealand educational system is robust, the country has always had an ambivalent attitude towards the teaching and learning of second/additional languages. This has been, and continues to be, reflected in its practices relating to language issues. In part, this ambivalent attitude can be traced back to New Zealand's colonial past. When Europeans first began to arrive, they were vastly outnumbered (Crosby, 1999, p. 17) and until around 1850 almost all social and economic communication with the indigenous Māori population was conducted in the Māori language (Spolsky, 2003, pp. 555-556). However it was not long before a 'systematic attempt to engineer a linguistic and cultural shift to English' (Benton, 1996, p. 66) began, with the Education Ordinance Act 1847 decreeing that only those schools that promoted English medium education would receive financial support. This kind of monolingual perspective has continued. It has had a detrimental effect on relationships among New Zealanders and has resulted in serious difficulties in relation to recent efforts to preserve the Māori language. In spite of vigorous attempts at revitalisation, te reo Māori (the Māori language) remains fragile and endangered, with number of speakers of the language decreasing. Indeed, the Waitangi Tribunal (2011, p. 449) has observed that while '[there] was a true revival of te reo in the 1980s and early-to-mid-1990s,' it is once again in decline.

Attitudes towards the teaching and learning of second/additional languages in New Zealand are almost certainly also linked to the nature of the immigration patterns and policies that have been part of New Zealand's history and development. As May (2002, p. 6) observes:

[For] much of its postcolonial history, Aotearoa New Zealand has not had to address seriously issues of second language learners because put simply, the history of immigration to this country from the 19th century

until the late 20th century has been dominated by migration from Britain and other nation-states where English is a national language (Australia, the US, Canada, South Africa).

Although the majority of migrants to New Zealand in the early stages of the country's development were English speaking, there were nonetheless clusters of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds who established themselves in New Zealand during this same period. Examples of these groups can be seen in the Chinese settlers who arrived to work in the South Island gold fields in the 1850s, the Dalmatians who arrived during the 1860s to be part of the kauri gum digging enterprise in the north, the Greeks who arrived to set up fishing businesses in the 1870s, and the many refugees who arrived mainly from Europe in the post -World War 2 period, including a large number of Dutch and Poles. Notwithstanding their commitment to living in New Zealand and their need to have English language skills to survive financially and socially, there was no official entitlement to formalised English language education to help them manage the transition from one language and culture to another. Generally, they lived and socialised within their own ethnic communities, maintaining their language and culture and remaining apart from mainstream society. While some adults managed to acquire a working knowledge of English in order to further their commercial interests, these language skills were 'caught' rather than taught. Even today, many older members of the various ethnic groups in New Zealand have limited control of English. For the children of these migrant communities, however, the situation was somewhat different. Under New Zealand law, they were required to attend school and, like their Māori peers, were expected to learn English, not by being exposed to any graduated or specialised teaching of the language but by being totally immersed in the language during the school day in a 'sink or swim' approach. In common with their Māori classmates, they often relinquished their heritage language and culture, something which inevitably led to inter-generational communication breakdowns and cultural discomfort within the relatively small ethnic groups to which they belonged.

FIRST STEPS IN EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH: THE ORIGINS OF THE ELT SECTOR IN NEW ZEALAND

The internationalisation of the education sector in New Zealand has its roots in the country's participation in Colombo Plan activities beginning in

1951. That year, as part of its commitment to the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) pact, New Zealand began to accept scholarship students from some of the other 25 other member nations, mainly from Asian countries, to study at its tertiary institutions. Initially, these students came from countries where English was widely spoken or where students would have been educated, at least in part, in English. However, as the programme developed, more and more requests for places came from those who did not have highly developed English language skills and who therefore required language support in order to be able to derive maximum benefit from their scholarship period. As Wallace (2007) reports, the English Language Institute (ELI) was therefore formed following an agreement between the Director of Education in New Zealand, the Deputy Secretary of External Affairs and the Head of the English Department at Victoria University of Wellington, and scholarship students who needed English language support before and during their scholarship period were directed to the Institute. Furthermore, from 1957 onwards, teachers from New Zealand were sent abroad (in the first instance to Indonesia) to prepare students for their scholarship period by working with them in their own country prior to their departure for New Zealand. While this was a sound idea in principle, it nonetheless highlighted the need to develop a specialised training programme for teachers of English as a foreign or second language. It was in response to this need that the first programme designed to train teachers of English language was established in New Zealand at the ELI. In its earliest stages, this training programme attracted many trainees from abroad and many of these early graduates now hold key educational positions in their home countries (Wallace, 2007).

The late 1950s and the 1960s also saw the beginning of a different pattern of migration to New Zealand. The number of English-speaking European immigrants began to decline and the number of non-English-speaking people from the Pacific Islands and refugees from war-ravaged countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia began to increase. As more and more people from a greater variety of countries began to migrate to New Zealand, the demographic profile began to change. What had been an almost totally English-speaking society up to that point was now undergoing significant change (May, 2000). To answer the needs of an increasingly diverse population, migrant resource centres began to be set up, notably in Auckland and Wellington where the greatest majority of new migrants chose to settle. English language training designed to support these families in integrating into a new society began to be more formalised. Primary and secondary school teachers began to abandon the earlier 'sink or swim' approach, with many undertaking some specialist

training in English language teaching (often at the ELI) and beginning to develop specialist courses for their non-English speaking background (NESB) students. The TESOL sector began to be accepted as a growing, albeit relatively localised, dimension of the New Zealand education system.

The early days of predominantly English-speaking European migrants have now passed and patterns of migration to New Zealand continue to fluctuate. Thus, for example, whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a large influx of migrants from the Pacific Islands, migration from Korea, Taiwan and mainland China increased significantly in the 1970s and 1980s. The ethnic and linguistic profile of New Zealand is in a state of constant evolution. In light of this, it seems impossible to imagine that the country can continue to operate, as it does currently, without a national languages policy.

NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN NEW ZEALAND: A LOST OPPORTUNITY?

In recognition of the language needs of a growing migrant population, discussions began to take place in the 1980s about the possible development of a national languages policy for New Zealand. These discussions began among those responsible for migrant education who saw the need for a national policy to manage the increasingly complex language issues that were emerging from the changes in New Zealand's population and who were particularly interested in the Australian model for language policy development (Lo Bianco, 1987). The issue was taken up by the New Zealand Association of Languages Teachers (NZALT) whose membership at that time included teachers of international languages, ESOL, Māori language and classical languages. The push for policy development was also strongly supported by teachers of languages in tertiary institutions. Following a long period of lobbying, the Ministry of Education commissioned Dr Jeffrey Waite to develop a report that would potentially provide the basis for the development of a national languages policy. In 1992, Waite produced a two-part document – *Aotearoa: Speaking for Ourselves* – a carefully measured yet robust summary of the language needs of the country. Waite's report was preceded and followed by consultation and debate throughout many sectors of New Zealand society. However, in spite of a number of detailed responses to the Ministry of Education's initiative in commissioning the report (see, for example, Kaplan, 1992 cited in Kaplan, 1993; Crombie and Paltridge, 1993; Peddie, 1993), no

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follow-up action was taken by the New Zealand government. This was no doubt, in part at least, related to the fact that it became evident even before the report was released that certain of its recommendations, such as the prioritisation of Māori language revitalisation and heritage language maintenance, would be resisted strenuously in some quarters and that that resistance had the potential to be dangerously socially divisive. It also became clear that the report would need to be supplemented by a more detailed study that attempted to quantify language needs (social and economic) more precisely and to set specific targets in relation to costs and benefits. This, in turn, would require the involvement of a number of government agencies since national language policy and planning inevitably impacts not only on education, but also on health, immigration, justice, business and many other key areas of society. For this reason, Kaplan recommended that planning should be 'separated as soon as possible from the Ministry of Education' so that others could be 'empowered to move policy implementation discussions toward a genuine national policy' (Kaplan, 1992, p. 3).

Those commenting on Waite's document, including Kaplan (1992), Crombie and Paltridge (1992) and Peddie (1993), made a number of other recommendations in relation to the establishment of a national languages policy in New Zealand. These included:

- establishing an implementation timetable;
- establishing a National Languages and Literacy Institute;
- initiating research into language learning, language use and language needs, including language needs relating to tourism and trade;
- initiating a publicity campaign to educate all New Zealanders about the importance of languages, the nature of language learning, and the cultural, social and economic value of languages in New Zealand society; and
- taking full account of the important place of te reo Māori, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi¹.

¹ The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 by Governor Hobson (on behalf of the British Crown) and, eventually, by approximately 500 of Māori chiefs. Article 2 of the Treaty guarantees protection of Maori *taonga* (treasures). The Waitangi Tribunal, established in 1975 (Treaty of Waitangi Act, 1975) to investigate claims relating to breaches by the Crown of the promises made in the Treaty, determined, in considering a claim (WAI 11) lodged in 1985, that Article 2 covered both tangible and intangible *taonga* and was, therefore, inclusive of the Māori language (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986, §4.3.9).

None of these recommendations has been implemented and the absence of real data regarding the language situation is as disturbing now as it was when the notion of a National Languages Policy was first mooted. Indeed, there is on-going concern among language professionals that language activities are continuing to take place in a national policy vacuum.

THE ELT SECTOR IN NEW ZEALAND

Writing in 1992, Robert Kaplan made the following observation:

[Language] education is not adequately provided for in New Zealand ...[and] an element of chaos exists in the various sectors that deal with language. ...[Language] rights - indeed, the very existence of some languages - are threatened by the failure to deal systematically with language matters. These concerns have, to some degree, been offset by a residual racism in society, by the mistaken belief that English is the only language necessary for New Zealand's development, and by the disturbing absence of real data regarding the language situation (Kaplan, 1992 cited in Kaplan, 1993, p. 3).

More than twenty years on, the situation regarding languages and language education in New Zealand continues to be of concern. Even so, a relatively robust EFL sector has been developed and is thriving.

One of the most significant turning points in the development of the ELT sector in New Zealand was the Education Amendment Act 1989 (New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel Office, 2014) which drew a clear distinction between domestic and international students and required all institutions to charge fees on a full cost recovery basis for all international students (as Australia had done earlier).

Primary and secondary schools which had previously received the same subsidy for international students as they had for domestic students now began to charge significant fees for international students (Ma and Abbott, 2007), with much of the additional revenue often being used to support developments which are not of direct benefit to those providing the funding.

As the principal of a high-status Auckland secondary school, where international students contribute approximately \$NZ3.2 million per annum to the school budget, has recently observed:

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It's one of the least-known but most dynamic export sectors in New Zealand ... simply put, without the income from international students the school's ability to provide an education of the level the community expects would be impossible (Jones, 2014).

Many schools in both rural and urban contexts now conduct joint marketing campaigns and collaborate to ensure pathways for international students through the various levels of education. There is general acceptance by school Principals that, as one study (Jones, 2014) reports: '[the] international market has become more important to funding the developments in New Zealand education generally.'

International students have also become an important revenue stream for New Zealand's national universities and thus when international student numbers drop or when the New Zealand dollar is high in relation to other currencies, New Zealand universities are placed under considerable economic pressure.

The Education Amendment Act 1989 (New Zealand Parliamentary Counsel Office, 2014) also opened the door to the establishment of private language schools and private training providers which now offer, among other subjects, English language tuition to international students. Most of the national universities and institutes of technology have also established English language centres to cater for students who need English language proficiency development before advancing to tertiary study. In the early period of the development of these schools and centres, there was almost no regulatory framework and students therefore had little or no protection in relation to the quality of provision. Nevertheless, largely because of the country's reputation as having a quality education system and being able to provide a safe environment, the number of international students arriving in New Zealand continued to grow, reaching its highest point in the period between 2001 and 2003.

In an attempt to protect the sector against its obvious vulnerabilities, a group of leading language professionals attempted to persuade the government and the Ministry of Education to establish national quality standards for all institutions engaged in ELT. In particular, they were concerned that curriculum content, teacher qualifications, teaching materials and the learning environment should be subject to appropriate quality assurance processes. Initially, these attempts were either ignored or, sometimes, vociferously opposed. Even so, some institutions did develop and implement their own quality standards and self-audit processes.

Unfortunately, but almost inevitably, a number of scandals involving international students began to emerge in the international education sector in the early 2000s. This, combined with the collapse of several language schools, had a very negative impact on New Zealand's reputation as an international study destination. When, during the same period, the value of the New Zealand dollar rose, student numbers fell dramatically. For example, whereas in 2004, 31% of all Chinese students who were studying abroad were located in New Zealand, that figure had fallen to 4% by 2012. As a consequence, 'the damage to New Zealand's reputation as a place to study has been difficult to overcome' (Day, 2014) and New Zealand is failing to attract students 'from the lucrative and rapidly expanding Chinese international student market as the education system ... struggles to recover from scandals in the early 2000s' (...reported in Day, 2014).

One positive outcome of the problems that New Zealand international education has experienced has been the development of *The Code of practice for the pastoral care of international students* (hereafter the *Code of Practice*) (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2013) which offers some protection to international students, particularly in relation to living conditions. Since its first iteration in 2002, the *Code of Practice* has been amended and strengthened over time and there is now also an International Education Appeal Authority which deals with any complaints made. In addition, it has now been placed under the oversight of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the body responsible for quality assurance in relation to educational institutions apart from universities (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2013). A report published in 2006 to evaluate the implementation of the *Code of Practice* (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2013) demonstrates that it is having a positive impact on the sector. In a further positive move, and closely related to the *Code of Practice* (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2013), the Ministry of Education and the Qualifications Authority have each articulated a range of procedures for monitoring the set-up, delivery and quality assurance of English language programmes for which they have responsibility. These initiatives have provided the basis for a much more secure footing for the overall quality of the sector.

ELT NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE

Of those international students who come to New Zealand with the intention of improving their English language skills, some study English in

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order to qualify for further academic study. For them, evidence of English language proficiency development is critical. The main instrument for assessing English language proficiency in New Zealand is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). There is, however, considerable debate about what IELTS test scores should be the benchmark for entry into various academic programme types. Many applied linguists argue that benchmarks are currently set too low to ensure that students are adequately equipped linguistically for their studies. However, raising the benchmarks would have recruitment and associated financial implications.

It is estimated that international education currently contributes 2.6 billion dollars to the New Zealand economy annually and supports 28,000 jobs, 13,607 directly and 14,563 indirectly. A breakdown of the financial contribution of international students to different sectors of New Zealand education is provided in Table 25.1 below, data for this table having been extracted from an Education New Zealand Report (2014).

The English Language Barometer 2012 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012), which included a survey of 11% of English language students in New Zealand, concluded that students appear satisfied with the social and support aspects of their study and that 80% of them would recommend their institution to others. 88% were satisfied with their overall learning experience (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012).

There are some positive signs that the ELT sector in New Zealand has begun to come of age but there is still much to be done. Projections for the future development and expansion of international education in New Zealand are still largely couched in economic terms, the ELT sector frequently being referred to as the 'ELT industry.'

Table 25.1. Contribution by sector to the value of New Zealand international education

SECTOR	CONTRIBUTION
Universities	NZ \$901 million
Private Providers	NZ \$583 million
English Language Schools	NZ \$310 million
Secondary Schools	NZ \$304 million
Institutes of Technology	NZ \$104 million
Primary Schools	NZ \$51 million
TOTAL	NZ \$2.6 billion

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Having recently committed an additional NZ\$40 million (spread over 4 years) to 'international education initiatives,' the government has indicated its aspiration that the financial value of international education will reach NZ\$5 billion by 2025. In support of this, some important policy development initiatives have been proposed by the Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (2014). Among these are that:

- some work rights be given to international students enrolled in publicly funded institutions with unlimited rights for PhD students and those doing Masters by research;
- incentives be given to providers of international education who strive for higher education standards;
- visas not be granted for study at education providers who score a 4 (the lowest category) on a Qualifications Authority External Evaluation and Review process;
- reviews and audits within the sector be more closely aligned with other areas of the New Zealand Education system; and
- linkages between international students and industry be made to facilitate visa, study and immigration applications.

There are some very hard-working, talented and dedicated teachers and researchers working to support the improvement of the ELT sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Against all odds, the sector has had some significant successes thus far. Some carefully considered strategic policy development combined with a more cohesive and coherent quality assurance framework would go a long way in securing further successes in the future.

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