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Enablers and barriers for successful completion of study identified by Māori students on a postgraduate programme for in-service teachers.

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Abstract

This article reports on a study that was undertaken into enablers and barriers to Māori student success on a postgraduate programme for in-service teachers. The study was led by Māori researchers and followed a Kaupapa Māori research philosophy —research by Māori, for Māori, and with Māori. Data was gathered via a series of hui (meetings) to which former students were invited, including both those who had completed the programme and those who had not. Thematic analysis was applied to student voice from the hui to identify the key themes that emerged, describing the student experience in terms of what impacted on their progress throughout the programme. The data revealed several areas where the tertiary institution could change its processes and practices to improve outcomes for Māori students. The article concludes by outlining some specific areas where the institution has already implemented changes in response to this study.

Keywords

Postgraduate study, Māori students, programme completion, qualitative study, hui

Introduction

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori graduates from higher education are critical to the social and economic development of Māori communities (Chauvel & Rean, 2012). Moreover, they are necessary if there is to be a reduction in the economic and social inequities that exist between Māori and non-Māori and therefore are essential for the transformation of Aotearoa New Zealand society (Meehan et al., 2017). Internationally, there is concern about low participation rates in higher education by people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, minority groups and underprivileged communities (James et al., 2008). In Aotearoa New Zealand the low participation rates of both Māori and Pacific (those living in New Zealand who migrated from the Pacific islands or identify with them because of ancestry or heritage) ethnic groups at higher levels of tertiary education, specifically degree-level study, is of significant concern and interest to policy makers (Meehan et al., 2017).

Factors that can support or impede Māori student success

From the literature that is available about Māori experiences in higher education, there are three significant factors that can support or impede Māori student success; 1) Whānau

(family) and community support and responsibilities; 2) An effective mentorship model within the institution, and 3) Monocultural curricula and institutional practices.

Whānau support can be an important factor in qualification completion, but responsibilities can be a significant barrier, "there is a pull when family calls for help and the studies go on the back burner while decisions and help are put into place**"** (Theodore et al., 2017, p. 126).

Whānau barriers to the successful completion of higher education include those with young families; solo parents who did not have access to support to care for their children whilst studying; caring for sick family members; and extended family commitments and responsibilities —including hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe) responsibilities. Theodore et.al (2017) highlight the multiple and interrelated responsibilities for some students that serve as a hindrance to programme completion, "Multiple demands. Employment, partner, children, house maintenance, injury, church, community, sports coaching" (p. 126).

Kidman, Chu, Fernández and Abella (2015) argue that those Māori students who identify whānau responsibilities as a critical factor is due in part to the fact that Māori students, both undergraduate and postgraduate are, on average, older than their non-Māori counterparts. This is a characteristic that is not uncommon amongst Indigenous students. For example, Pidgeon (2008) identifies that Indigenous peoples within Canada also tend to be, on average, older than non-aboriginal students, and thus tend to have family commitments and responsibilities which impact upon the ways in which they can engage with their studies. Despite whānau being identified as a challenge to successful completion of higher education, whānau as an enabling factor has also proven to be a critical factor in the success of Māori students in a range of tertiary level programmes of study. For many students, being one of the first in their family to complete tertiary level study and thus being role models for their whānau, are significant motivating factors (Kidman et al., 2015; Mayeda et al., 2014; Theodore et al., 2017).

For Māori students, whānau as an enabling factor is an approach that has been applied strategically by some tertiary providers to engage and support Māori learners, and has proven to be a critical success factor for Māori students in tertiary level study (Richardson et al., 2014). The provision of on-and-off-campus whānau for students provides them with a support system, within a cultural framework, whereby their academic, social and emotional needs are attended to (Theodore et al., 2017). Those institutions that have provided this support mechanism have reported significant increases in Māori student achievement such as programme completion and progression through to postgraduate level study (Pihama, et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2014). In addition, providers have sought and developed strong partnerships with Māori and Pacific communities and, jointly with those communities, focused on developing an on-and-off-campus whānau-based culture that fosters Māori student success.

Monocultural curricula and institutional practices have been identified as key barriers to Māori students progressing through the tertiary education system (Pihama et al., 2019). Through an investigation into the impact of *white streaming* in higher education, Potter and

Cooper (2016) found there is a significant impact on Māori staff and students when institutions do not provide for and enable culturally located programmes of study and approaches to learning and teaching. Given that Māori students often wish to undertake programmes of study and research framed within Kaupapa Māori — research by Māori, for Māori and with Māori (Smith, 2015) — and other Indigenous methodological frameworks, these tensions can create challenges and barriers to participation and programme completion that their non-Māori peers do not have to contend with (Kidman et al., 2015).

Although it has been argued that a significant factor in driving and promoting Māori student success is peer support (Kuh et al., 2006), the presence of Indigenous academics who serve as role models and mentors and who are a beacon of support for Māori students within the academy are also an extremely important factor in the success of Māori students in their programmes of study (Kidman et al., 2015; Mayeda et al., 2014; Pihama et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2011). Studies have shown that those mentors who offer continuous academic help to mentees provide a strong foundation for academic success (Pihama et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2014). Programmes of study with a well-established mentor support programme, that insist on "high expectations, high aspirations, high achievements, hard work, collective success and reciprocity, and achieving success in two worlds" (Wilson et al., 2011, p. 714) have demonstrated a steady increase in Māori student achievement and progression through to postgraduate levels of study (Richardson et al., 2014). Pihama et al. (2019) reiterate this point by stating that "…access to Māori and Indigenous scholars as supervisors, mentors, colleagues and as role models is critical to student success…" (p. 58).

Other identified factors that can act as barriers to Māori student success in higher education include, but are not limited to, financial constraints such as the cost of programmes, resources, travel to and from the tertiary provider and the need to work alongside study; a lack of preparedness for higher education study such as a lack of study and academic writing skills; and general institutional issues such as: administrative challenges, poor advice, and issues with university services and facilities (Theodore et al., 2017).

Research context

Much of the research in this area has been devoted to understanding Māori student transition into higher education programmes, and participation at degree and doctoral level study (Chauvel & Rean, 2012). However, there is a significant gap in the research about those students studying at the levels that lie between these boundaries. This study therefore aims to address the experiences of Māori students who had studied part-time on a Postgraduate Certificate programme. The students in question were all in-service kaiako (teachers) and the programme was related to education. Although it only addresses a single case, this study nevertheless offers insights that may be transferable to other contexts, in particular in the strategies that have been put in place in response to the data gathered in the study.

Unfortunately, Māori student completion of the programme in question has consistently fallen below that of non-Māori since it began in 2014. The most recent data prior to this start

of this study derived from the period 2014 to 2019. This is internal data from our own enrolment systems, not publicly available. During this period there were 4,236 enrolments onto the programme, of whom 792 (18.7%) identified as Māori. The overall course completion rate for all students was 84% but for Māori students it was only 71%, a significant variance. There were no differences in policies for acceptance of students onto the programme that might account for this variance. Students were largely in receipt of scholarships and were able to study locally. In addition, all students were qualified teachers studying at an appropriate level so did not lack the requisite academic skills. This suggests that many of the issues raised in other studies did not apply in this case. Available student feedback from internal end-of-course surveys did not reveal obvious issues from factors such as the teaching staff, the course content or the nature of assessment. Unfortunately, Māori students who had withdrawn from the programme early had not been formally surveyed or interviewed, and any informal data regarding their reasons for withdrawal had not been officially collected or analysed. These shortcomings in the data indicated that further research was required. The aim of this research was to identify and understand the factors that had contributed to a lower percentage of Māori students completing the programme compared to that of non-Māori. However, the focus was not only on the barriers to completion but also the enablers for those that did complete. Therefore, the research question that drove this study was:

“What are the enablers of, and the barriers to, study identified by Māori students studying on a postgraduate in-service teacher programme?”

The motivation for this question was to inform change at the institution by identifying which factors were most significant for our students. More broadly, it is hoped that this study contributes to the body of literature that addresses the issues faced by Māori students between undergraduate and doctoral study whose voices have not previously been widely heard in the research literature.

Methods

The study was carried out in a culturally appropriate way by a primarily Māori research team who had an established and sustained relationship with many of the participants involved in the study who had been enrolled in —and most had completed— the programme related to the study. Two members of the research team had been facilitators on the programme, while the other two were Pou Ārahi and Pou Whirinaki (Māori colleagues' positions at the tertiary institution). Data was gathered through a series of hui held at different locations to which these participants were invited. The Kaupapa Māori research philosophy was based on the following principles:

- manaaki: support, encouragement and care
- rangatiratanga: leadership, accountability, agency and authority
- ako: reciprocity of teaching and learning; culturally preferred pedagogy principle
- pono: truth, honesty, integrity and transparency

Here, we align aspects of our methodology to these four principles. Manaaki was at the centre of our research practice. As some of the participants had not completed the qualification itself, it was vitally important that the research team provided a safe and caring space for the participants to share their whakaaro (ideas). This was enabled through multiple ways; where possible, the hui were conducted in the local town or city of the kaiako (teacher) and at their school or kura (Māori medium school setting); each hui was facilitated by a member of the research team who had a professional and ongoing relationship with the kaiako that attended the hui; and through following tikanga {customs) appropriate to the participants and as guided by the lead facilitator or the kura who hosted the hui. All hui began with karakia (affirmation), mihimihi (introduction) and the sharing of kai (food), giving the research team and kaiako time to connect before entering into the sharing of whakaaro stage of the hui. The hui were predominantly unstructured to allow for kaiako to share their whakaaro in a manner determined by themselves.

Rangatiratanga in the context of this research study is most directly interpreted as self-determination. A clear message from Smith (2015) under this principle is that participants should not be the "objects" of research but should be "subjects in a meaningful way" (p. 50). This is why the data was gathered in regional hui, where researchers and participants were engaged in mutual respectful conversation and the outcomes were guided by the participants.

The purpose of this study was for the participants to share with the research team their experiences on the programme; the challenges they were faced with; and ways in which the institution and the programme could better meet their learning needs and address the challenges they identified. Therefore, in this manner ako was practised as it was vitally important to the research team that any changes to the programme or institutional practices — post research project— were identified, informed and guided in a reciprocal manner by participant whakaaro and feedback.

Underpinning the entire process was pono. The research team communicated the purpose of each hui —and the research project— in both Māori and English to the participants. It was important for the team to clearly articulate our approach and why we were conducting the hui in the manner that we did. All Māori former students were invited to be participants and collaborators in the research project knowing that our long-term goal was to provide a programme to meet the aspirations they had for themselves and their learners.

In addition, the study design included two researchers who were fluent in te reo Māori (the Māori language), therefore enabling participants to contribute in te reo whenever they wished, though it should be noted that most of the conversation that took place was in English.

We were able to gather data from four hui; three face-to-face and one online. The online hui was not our first choice in terms of a Kaupapa Māori approach but was necessary to enable participants to attend who were not close to a face-to-face hui. Table 1 shows the number of

participants in each hui location, including how many had completed the programme. The participants were predominantly female —reflecting the teaching profession in general— and most had completed the programme. Age is not included in the demographics, but all participants were mature students (over 25).

Table 1. Details of hui (meeting) participants

Hui Location	No. of Participants	Completed Programme
Auckland	6 (5 female, 1 male)	3 (2 female, 1 male)
Palmerston North	3 (female)	3 (female)
Wellington	3 (female)	3 (female)
Online	13 (12 female, 1 male)	11 (10 female, 1 male)
TOTAL	25 (23 female, 2 male)	20 (18 female, 2 male)

The hui were recorded and there were two researchers in each. Where both researchers took notes, the te reo Māori speaker's notes were used as the primary source of analysis, supplemented by notes from the other researcher where additional ideas had been recorded. Having gathered qualitative data from the hui, the synthesis and interpretation of that data followed standard approaches to qualitative analysis, where categories are derived inductively using constant comparison to describe and explain social phenomena (Pope et al., 2000). Given that the categories were emerging rather than predetermined —the categories were not decided in advance of the analysis— a four-step process was followed: 1) coding the data based in emerging topics, 2) organising the codes into emerging categories, 3) organising the emerging categories, and 4) recording the categories and adding quotations that represent each category (Efron & Ravid, 2014). Following grounded theory terminology used in Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), we refer to repeating ideas identified in the responses to code important topics, grouped into themes to show the emerging categories, from which theoretical constructs emerge by the organisation of these categories. Repeating ideas have been identified using descriptive coding (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Consistency in the coding process was ensured by beginning the analysis collaboratively, with all researchers analysing a single transcript.

Results

In the initial constant comparison phase, 132 statements made by participants were identified that expressed an idea related to the focus of the study. These were iteratively interpreted until 30 repeating ideas were identified. From these repeating ideas, five themes emerged from which three constructs have been proposed that may assist in deriving actions from the outcomes of the study. Table 2 shows a summary of this analysis, with the number of sources

for each repeating idea shown in the *Number of Mentions* column. For each theme, the total number of repeating ideas mentioned for that theme is also indicated.

Table 2. The repeating ideas, themes, and constructs from the study

Constructs	Themes	Repeating Ideas	Number of Mentions
Personal, social and cultural factors	External challenges faced by Māori students	Whānau-Whānau (family is at the forefront) way of life	18
		Feelings of isolation	4
		Challenges in the work context	3
		Feelings of being overwhelmed	5
		Academic challenges	10
		Accessibility of resources	4
	Total mentions for this theme		42
	Drivers for participation	Convenience	3
		Engagement	2
		Having a pathway	2
		Personal and professional development	6
		Wanting to complete	6
	Total mentions for this theme		19
Institutional factors impacting on the student experience	Mechanics of programme delivery	Delivery mode	4
		Intensity	4
		Study materials	3
	Total mentions for this theme		11
		Flexibility in time for completion of qualification	3

	Support from the Tertiary Institution	Importance of follow up	3
		Post study connections	2
		Responsiveness	2
		Support given by the facilitators	6
	Total mentions for this theme		16
The shared space of institutional and student factors and the interface between them	Connecting to a collaborative community of practice	Building relationships	3
		Connecting online	3
		Creating a learning community	5
		Importance of collaboration	3
	Total mentions for this theme		14
	Cultural aspects of content and delivery	Lack of Māori staff	4
		Māori research and pedagogy	4
		Importance of language	6
		Cultural dissonance	6
		Learning preferences	5
		Cultural context of learning	2
		Focus on Māori	4
	Total mentions for this theme		31

At the highest level of analysis, three constructs emerged. From the student perspective, the first construct we identified was *personal, social and cultural factors*. Themes within this construct relate to what Māori students bring to their learning experience, to which educational institutions must respond if they are to meet the needs of these students. The second construct we identified was *institutional factors impacting on the student experience*, which encompass the intrinsic barriers and enablers to student success that are embedded in the operations of the institution. However, these are not discrete constructs and the interaction between them is complex. As a result, we identified a third construct of *the shared space of institutional and student factors and the interface between them*. It was clear from the themes

within the other two constructs that there was some dissonance in the space between them and that the institution was in several ways not meeting the needs of Māori students, in particular in the theme of *cultural aspects of content and delivery*.

In the following sections we explain how each of the five themes were arrived at by illustrating the repeating ideas that were induced from the data and combined to form these emergent themes. Given the constraints of the ethics approval given for this study to ensure the anonymity of participants, only the location of the hui that the speaker attended is indicated for each of the quotes that are used to illustrate each theme.

Personal, social and cultural factors

The first two themes come under the construct of personal, social and cultural factors.

External challenges faced by Māori students

This section of the data analysis focuses on those challenges that were for the most part external to the mechanisms of the programme itself. A significant repeated idea that emerged is that of the *whānau-whānau way of life*. This relates to the care and support of the immediate and extended whānau of the participants but also their sense of responsibility to their students and their whānau, and the wider school community.

> Our whānau-whānau way of life is a real demanding drain (Auckland).

> Every kid in my school is my flesh and blood (Auckland).

Many of the participants struggled to find a balance between their professional and personal lives to set aside the time to dedicate to their postgraduate journey as there is no clear delineation between their work and personal lives. There was also the recognition that this simply is the experience of kaiako Māori.

> Wearing a lot of hats, how to find that balance when we want to do well? (Auckland).

> …carry the whole community for all tikanga, reo, Māori resources, kapa haka; pushing tamariki [youth] Māori to show them how to stand proud (Auckland).

Although these responses do fall under the theme of *challenges* it is important to acknowledge that these responsibilities to whānau and the wider community of the school, or kura, or hapū, or iwi, should not be considered as a *barrier* to success within the programme. Some participants felt this was an aspect that had to be unnecessarily justified.

> Felt like we needed to justify how we teach 24/7, not just 9-3pm (Palmerston North).

An additional repeated idea which posed a challenge to engagement in the programme was *feelings of isolation*, referring to their experiences both within and beyond the programme

> …feeling of isolation and looking for that support…(Auckland).

> Lonely - I need someone to talk to (Palmerston North).

> One person was the only Māori in the class - she spoke from her perspective, however others did not understand this and she felt isolated (Online).

and in some cases, as the only teacher within their school or kura enrolled on the programme:

> Samoan bilingual unit, etc. only Māori teacher in the kura at the time, no support (Auckland).

Although mentioned rarely, the repeated idea of *challenges in the work context* is one worthy of note, where some kaiako described tensions within the kura which served as a challenge to engaging with the programme or their ability to implement learnings from it.

> not acknowledged at school that digital learning is important for our students; I want to make sure that they come out learning and progressing (Auckland).

Another repeated idea was *feeling overwhelmed* by the demands of the programme and the postgraduate experience, which in turn led to a sense of disconnection.

> ...groups were still streams ahead of me so always felt like catching up... (Auckland).

> “You can get overwhelmed when you see others well ahead of you when you haven’t got anything done; can get too much (Auckland).

The repeated idea of the programme being academically challenging is not unique to Māori students but could be a contributing factor in them feeling isolated and overwhelmed within the programme.

> it is a postgraduate programme and you will be academically challenged (Wellington).

> you want it to be perfect, and there’s all this new information can be quite overwhelming (Auckland).

The final repeated idea of accessibility of resources highlights challenges that add to the workload of kaiako Māori — the ability to access relevant resources to support their areas of study:

> Accessible resources, e.g., online resources. Knowing the skills on how to navigate. Māori Land Court to access kōrero [discussion] of our tūpuna [ancestors] (Palmerston North).

A further resource related challenge is the limited teaching resources that exist for kaiako Māori to access —limited in relation to their non-Māori speaking colleagues.

> Mainstream has all the resources, we make do with what we've got. Word of mouth is the biggest resource (Palmerston North).

In summary, the most prevalent of the repeated ideas relating to external challenges was that of the whānau-whānau way of life. That kaiako Māori have an abundance of responsibilities both within the school or kura they work within and their personal lives will not change and is a key understanding that the institution needs to be cognisant of when designing pastoral and academic support programmes for their students. In addition, flexibility around assessment and programme completion may also better support these kaiako towards successful completion of the programme. It is vitally important that institutions understand these are not additional responsibilities that can be set aside at any given time and to consider that it is the support systems and processes of the institution that may need adapting to ensure Māori student success is not compromised.

Drivers for participation

The *drivers for participation* theme emerged from several repeating ideas where participants expressed their reasons for wanting to engage with the programme originally, and also for wanting to remain in the programme to completion. In terms of the repeating idea of "convenience", this related to accessibility, both physical and financial:

> Being after school was awesome (Auckland).

> Kāore he utu! Funding available to do the course for free (Auckland).

Repeating ideas related to "engagement" reflected both personal commitment and the commitment of leaders, which emphasised that participation may not be only an individual decision to make.

> If you're passionate about something, it just falls out (Palmerston North).

> Would the team have been successful if the leader hadn't been on board? (Wellington).

Although only expressed by two participants, the repeating idea of "having a pathway" is nevertheless worthy of note. This relates to the opportunity for graduates from the Certificate programme to progress to master's study:

> Offering a next step (Auckland).

It should be noted that the three repeating ideas described so far only encompassed a small number of responses. The final two ideas in this theme were more widely expressed. The first of these was "personal and professional development", which covered both the specifics of content and the broader development of pedagogy. The content focus was primarily on the digital technologies coverage of the programme:

> Be able to take the kids in the 21st century, the practical stuff. Keeping on top of what's happening out there (Palmerston North).

This ability to help their own students to develop contemporary skills was linked to the opportunity for the participants to develop their own skills through hands-on professional development:

> Hautūtūtanga [discovery through the eyes of a child] - to have a little play with things (Auckland).

> Learning some specific skills and knowledge so I can do my job better (Palmerston North).

Beyond this applied skill and content focus was a broader concern with developing pedagogical practice, including the participants' relationships with their students:

> enhance the teaching and learning (Palmerston North).

> learnt to know how things were going with our students (Auckland).

Beyond the reasons that related to individual skills development, there was also an element of leadership strategy in the idea:

> It was important that I do this, as I wanted the kura to move in a certain direction. I wanted to grow kaimahi [workers] in a certain way and what would be effective going forward (Wellington).

The final repeating idea in the "drivers for participation" theme was the concept of "wanting to complete":

> Ensuring completion was important for us (Wellington).

This is something that reveals some tensions between the original motivation to participate in the programme and the challenges faced by students in remaining engaged with the

programme over time, as outlined in some of the previous themes described in this analysis. One revealing quote from a student who had failed to complete the programme was:

> I really want to finish the course but don't know how to (Auckland).

And the related, more direct, question of

> Where to next for us that didn't finish that want to? (Auckland).

Several of those who had not completed expressed a desire to

> get back on the horse (Auckland).

Another student expressed a question that was important for the institution to take on board, again echoing the challenges faced by students already described in previous themes:

> How do we reach out to all those people who want to complete and couldn't in the past due to a lot of reasons? (Auckland).

The overall messages from this theme were twofold. First, the programme is seen by participants to offer valuable support in developing digital skills, more effective pedagogies and something that resonates with the passion of teachers for developing their practice. Second, this passion and interest can become frustrated by a range of factors that leave students feeling that there is no way forward to success. The challenge that emerges for the institution is to ensure that those who have been unable to complete the programme, for whatever reason, have the support, guidance, and opportunity to do so at a later date.

Institutional factors impacting on the student experience (construct)

The second construct identified from the themes within the data was the institutional factors impacting on the student experience.

Mechanics of programme delivery

The first theme that emerged in this construct was the *mechanics of programme delivery* managed by the institution. From the institutional perspective this interface is shaped by several factors, including compliance with external accreditation and funding regulations, as well as internal decisions made about programme design and assessment and the details of schedule, content, delivery mode and individual assessments. One area of focus was the delivery mode, and the relative values of face-to-face and online learning. It should be noted that all these students had enrolled in a blended delivery model where they had experienced both types of delivery. The face-to-face components were highly valued by some, who appreciated the opportunity to:

> speak kanohi ki te kanohi [face-to-face] for feedback (Auckland).

On the other hand, some also recognised the value of online study, which:

> made it easier to just sit down and work by myself (Auckland).

However,

> being online gives us opportunities but doesn't suit all of us (Wellington).

A significant area of omission in terms of the delivery mode identified by participants was that the programme is not offered in te reo Māori, which would offer a completely different framework for learning. Another repeating idea that emerged within the programme delivery theme was the "intensity of the learning experience", particularly during the first half of the programme, which was delivered face-to-face. It was felt that there was:

> too fast a pace going through each topic (Palmerston North).

and that

> every week there was a different topic - sometimes we needed to spend longer on topics (Wellington).

The impact of this intensive pace was that there was not enough time for reflection, and that the material needed to be separated by opportunities to produce some reflective work:

> We didn't have a lot of opportunity to feed back to each other. We would have liked to have the time to do that - I learnt from others. Allow somewhere in the course to consolidate thinking and learning (Wellington).

A related issue was the amount of time spent on individual topics, particularly technologies:

> Whatever tool we're going to need to know how to use, teach us how to use it properly (Auckland).

A final repeating idea under this theme was related to the study material provided. Although some aspects of the study materials have proved useful, for example:

> having templates was a bonus to get over the mental blocks (Auckland).

There were suggestions that more of a

> support system (Palmerston North)

was needed for resources, the library, knowledge etc., with suggestions such as having a study guide or even a book.

It was clear from the ideas within this emergent theme that although there were some areas that would be challenging for the institution to quickly address, such as revising aspects of a programme approved by external bodies, and resourcing te reo Māori delivery, there were also many areas where the mechanics of programme delivery could be improved to provide a better experience for Māori students.

Support from the tertiary institution

In the emergent theme *mechanics of programme delivery* described above, our hui participants were concerned with aspects of the structures and processes through which the content of the programme itself was delivered. Another emergent theme that was identified was equally about the relationship between the institution and its students; *support from the tertiary institution*. Unlike the content-related ideas in the previous theme, the focus here is on the way that the institution supports students, both through its processes and through the nature of the relationships that its staff form with students.

Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the strictness of the enrolment timeframe, with the repeating idea of *flexibility in time for completion of qualification*. Relating to the previously documented theme of *drivers for participation*, the desire to complete the programme is strong, but other factors such as those identified under the theme *specific challenges faced by Māori students* often made it hard for these students to keep up with their intake of enrollment and complete all the requirements in the time available. This also has links to the ideas expressed under the theme *mechanics of programme delivery*, where the intensity of the programme also led to students being unable to sustain engagement with their cohort. Several participants would have liked the opportunity to put the programme on hold for a while and rejoin later. When these types of requests were rejected by the institution,

> receiving a flat no was a turn off (Auckland).

Longer term suspension of enrolments was not necessarily the only requested option, however:

> If there's a way where you can put things on hold for one or two months, then that will be really helpful (Auckland)

Linked to these struggles to cope with the tight time frame of enrolment was the desire to have more direct support, emphasising the importance of follow up. There was an acknowledgement that without some specific encouragement from the institution, some students may lose their way:

> unless there's someone following me up, then I tend to slack off (Auckland)

Participants suggested that staff need to reach out to students who are not keeping up with their studies:

> need someone to ring me and push me (Auckland)

to avoid students losing the opportunity to, for example, resubmit assessments

> so the whole year is not wasted (Auckland)

Several participants noted the value of *support given by the facilitators*, which reinforced the need for these relationships to be built and expand beyond what was already offered. The value of

> access to the network and facilitators (Palmerston North).

was recognised, while one participant reflected on an occasion when they reached out for help, and had

> a good kōrero who showed how to structure the assignment; awesome face-to-face contact (Auckland)

Another emphasised how important it was to have

> someone to hold your hand and pull you through to get that focus (Auckland).

In contrast, there have been some negative experiences relating to the responsiveness of the institution's staff, with slow feedback on assignments submitted in te reo Māori and students feeling that offered services to Māori students were:

> too out of the way to get help (Auckland)

Some respondents also highlighted a need for those relationships to sustain beyond the scope of a specific programme enrolment, Participants wanted to know, for example:

> how many of the staff are still connected, [have] maintained a relationship with the students? (Palmerston North).

The message from our participants under this theme was that, although the staff of the institution were providing some valuable support services to the students, these did not go far enough and were reactive rather than proactive. In addition, the options that were on offer to students to assist them through the programme were not responsive enough to their needs, particularly in terms of not providing sufficient flexibility about completion of the programme. In essence, there is a chain of requirements that begins with the expectations of

students by the institution, including that they will reach out to the institution when they need assistance, but extends to a reciprocal expectation that the institution will reach out to the students in a supportive, rather than dismissive, manner, and be able to provide suitable options to enable students to complete their studies successfully.

The shared space of institutional and student factors and the interface between them

The third and final construct identified from the data was the *shared space of institutional and student factors and the interface between them*, which links both of the previous constructs.

Connecting to a collaborative community of practice

The theme of *connecting to a collaborative community of practice* emerged from repeating ideas relating to contributing factors towards engagement and success within the programme. Strong relationships with peers/colleagues and staff of the institution were seen as a key contributing factor to their success:

> Maybe have a buddy to get you into that timeframe? e.g., every Thursday I have the DP come over. Someone calling in at this time just to check in. Staff buddy to speak for you and understand you - "this person just needs a bit of time" (Auckland)

The use of online platforms provided a way to seek support from others and also served as a mechanism for accountability.

> Slack Channel: helps you to not slack off and you've got to visit it; 13hrs mahi a day; a way of connecting and help (Auckland)

More specifically, some kaiako identified the online platform as a way for those feeling isolated to connect with a learning community.

> Connecting online might help those that are isolated (Online)

It was in fact this community of learning that provided some kaiako with support and a sense of 'safety' which enabled them to participate in the programme:

> More comfortable in a group (Palmerston North)

> For us as a group - we collectively supported each other; persevered together. Needed a headspace (Wellington)

One group of kaiako felt empowered to extend their community of learning to the rest of the staff at their kura, which they identified as success for them, over and above completing the programme.

> We had the space to create a learning community that suited us - our intent was to bring this to our kura, create a community of learning here. This has been the long-term impact of our programme, this is a success for us. Success was enabled through teacher only days, giving planning time/days during the school day to work on the assignments (Wellington).

The kaiako emphasised collaborative practice as being important for their engagement in the programme as it provides them with opportunities to work with and support each other; to build relationships with others on the programme and the 'learning.'

> We got a lot out of the collaboration side (Palmerston North).

> letting us do assignments collaboratively - this works for us and is *real world* [emphasis added] (Online).

One repeating idea focused on being able to continue and extend this collaborative practice into their kura.

> The collegial support/bounce off ideas/critique each other/commit to timeframes and deadlines and commitments that collaboration was important. Good we were able to take that to our work (Wellington).

Although positive about the opportunities the institution provided for collaborative practice, kaiako did suggest that the institution may want to consider spaces being provided solely for Māori to collaborate with and work alongside each other.

> Need to set up spaces where we can connect/have our own context and experiences/our own webinars? (Online).

There is much within the current practices of the institution that supports collaborative practice, the development of communities of practice, also completion of assignments collaboratively as identified by the participants. However, within the current constraints of an English medium delivered programme, it is important that pastoral and academic support groups solely for Māori students are provided by the institution. It is vital these are supported by Māori facilitators who are familiar with the contexts and learning preferences of these kaiako.

Cultural aspects of content and delivery

The theme of cultural aspects of content and delivery relates to repeating ideas where the participants expressed ways in which the programme could better align with their contextual and cultural needs. One significant repeated idea that emerged was the lack of Māori facilitators delivering the programme.

> Didn't see too many Māori faces as tutors (Online).

> [name] was on her own, it seemed she needed more whānau… so she could support us (Online).

For some it was important for them that any content of a Māori kaupapa [principles and ideas for action] needed to be delivered by a Māori facilitator, who could also then facilitate the learning of others within the cohort. It would also mitigate what seemed to be an inauthentic way of incorporating 'Māori' into the programme.

> Inclusion of Māori was a tick box/checking box. Would like to see Māori kaiako coming in to teach when the focus might be a Māori kaupapa. i.e., For those that don't understand the concepts, they need a Māori kaiako/expert to help others in the group to understand the concepts (Online)

A lack of Māori facilitators or other staff may also have had a direct correlation to a significant repeated idea of weaknesses and gaps with regard to Māori research knowledge and pedagogies in the programme.

> Would like to see more Māori and Indigenous models/frameworks/readings to show different worldviews and perspectives (Online).

> Māori pedagogies were not being presented. We strongly recommend that you do this. We are in New Zealand. We want to hear about Māori theory/pedagogy (Wellington).

With a lack of Māori facilitators and an identified gap in indigenous research and pedagogies being present in the programme it is understandable that a further significant repeated idea to emerge was that of a cultural dissonance between kaiako Māori and the institution. Some kaiako focused specifically on a lack of authentic connection and depth of knowledge —on the part of the institution— with Kaupapa Māori aspects that were incorporated into the programme.

> Agree with [name] the component was missing… authenticity?... Whakawhanaungatanga [the process of establishing relationships] was missing. Connection not there (Online).

> A lot was being lost in translation. Felt like they had a list of answers that they read off of. They weren't responsive to us (Online)

One response focused on kaiako Māori having, at times, to adapt how they worked to enable them to work with others on the programme; but then also choosing to work separately so they would not have to compromise their own learning.

> Had to change how we worked. Meeting with others who did not understand our context; we worked with those that understood our context; therefore tended to stay in our groups or those that had similar contexts to our own (Wellington).

A further repeated idea was that of the importance of te reo Māori for the engagement of the Māori speaking kaiako. Although an English medium programme, there are aspects of te reo Māori and tikanga incorporated into the programme which was appreciated, however, some participants of the study felt this wasn't necessarily fully committed to by both facilitators and other students on the programme.

> Whakataukī [proverbs] needed to be addressed with more depth/authentic connection between the two (Online).

> The language you use is really important (Wellington).

Given this is an English medium programme one suggestion was for the institution to provide spaces for Māori speakers to be able to meet as a community of learners to support each other.

> Create spaces for reo [Māori language] speakers, can get together and share whakaaro (Online)

Although only a single comment of this type, it is important to note that one kaiako felt that they needed to spend a lot more time explaining context and concepts in their assignments, which in turn impacted on their ability to keep to the word limits set by the programme.

> Assignments need to come in te reo Māori - word limits were a challenge as I was needing to explain context and concepts (Online).

A further repeated idea focuses on the learning preferences expressed by those participants in the study. Some participants expressed that missing from the delivery of the programme were some core values that are a vital part of the learning process for Māori learners.

> Creating manaakitanga [reciprocal hospitality and generosity] within the classroom/lesson context. More immersion required (Online).

Further repeated ideas centred on the institution engaging with approaches to teaching and learning that would allow them to engage with learning and express their thinking in a variety of ways;

> more ways that Māori students can be engaged in the context that allows them to speak, express themselves in technology (Auckland).

> Have the kaupapa facilitated by the expert and then an opportunity to discuss it with your peers and referring back with new knowledge and tools (Palmerston North)

This last response refers to the kaiako having the time and space —within the learning sessions— to reframe the learning/knowledge presented to them, for their own context. However, this in itself further adds to their workload.

The repeated idea relating to the cultural context of learning is one that crosses over to the repeated idea of a *focus on Māori*. Across these two repeated ideas, participants identified that if the learning had been in a Māori context and that Māori knowledge was more readily presented and provided for in the programme, this would have better aligned to their learning needs and supported increased engagement levels.

> Would love to see our knowledge...what is going for Māori! (Palmerston North).

> more elements of Māori needed, Māori facilitators, more te reo Māori content and appropriate to us in Aotearoa [New Zealand] (Auckland).

One participant focused on an aspect that may be important for the institution to consider to reduce the cultural dissonance between the institution and Māori students:

> If Māori are not the target group - then you are not designing for Māori (Wellington).

Learnings from this theme are that although the institution does provide aspects of tikanga within the programme, there is much work to be done to embed these in the practice of the facilitators in an authentic way. Additionally, there is a recognised gap in the provision of Indigenous pedagogies and knowledge, which is important not just for the engagement and learning of kaiako Māori but in representing the educational landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Discussion

Some of the repeating ideas identified in our study align with previous work. In particular the literature review undertaken by the Tertiary Education Commission (Chauvel & Rean, 2012) provided a number of parallels. For example, a sense of isolation was identified as being linked with Māori learners being unfamiliar with academic requirements, "which is reinforced if students are not connected to supportive staff or peers." (p. 9). Other related ideas include the importance of collaborative peer relationships, convenience of programme delivery, and the need for a welcoming and supporting environment. The three significant factors that can support or impede Māori student success identified in the literature — whānau, mentorship and monocultural curricula and institutional practices — were all echoed in this study.

From this study, participants cited their "whānau-whānau" way of life as needing to take precedence over their studies. The data collected supports the significant amount of research already in publication that highlights whānau as both a driver and barrier to completion of the programme (Theodore et al., 2017; Kidman et al., 2015; Keil et al., 2014). However, the research team is concerned that considerations of whānau, hapū or iwi obligations as a barrier

to success is a deficit view of these factors and this viewpoint should not be adopted by the research team nor by the institution. Our position is that it is not whānau, hāpau or iwi obligations that are the barriers to successful completion of higher education but in fact inflexible institutional practices that do not take into consideration the wider obligations and aspirations of Māori students, and therefore, serve as a significant barrier to successful completion of higher education programmes.

Whānau and community responsibilities, in addition to work commitments, will always be a challenge to the engagement of Māori students in higher education and therefore are factors that must be taken into consideration when supporting Māori students towards successful completion of higher education study. As an institution we need to demonstrate a deeper understanding of these obligations and the ways in which we can support Māori students to meet community, work, and study obligations. The participants of this study clearly identified that institutional flexibility in assessment submission and timeframes for qualification completion would have further supported their participation and retention in the programme.

In addition to this, a whānau-based support system was identified by participants of this study as a factor that would have further supported them towards programme completion. A whānau-based approach with high quality mentoring, within programmes of study, has been at the core of significant success, most notably in the Āwhina | Māori student support programme at Victoria University of Wellington (Richards et al., 2014). The students on this programme spoke directly to mentoring and a whānau culture as being a significant factor in their success at university and the reason why they have been able to progress through higher education. Participants in our study expressed they would have been further supported through their study by being able to meet regularly with other Māori students —in particular te reo Māori speakers— to re-contextualise and re-theorise the content of the programme to align with the contexts they work within and to their worldview. This would also provide them with a space to support each other and be supported by Māori facilitators in other areas of concern such as academic writing and research skills.

The sense that your knowledge base, worldview, and preferred ways of learning are valued is vitally important to further Māori participation and success in higher education, which was strongly emphasised and reiterated by the participants of this study. Potter and Cooper (2016) argue there is a direct impact on Māori students when tertiary institutions continue to fail to provide programmes of learning that align with their cultural beliefs and worldview and serve as a clear barrier to the successful completion of their programmes of study. Thus, the ability for Māori students to engage in study relevant and authentic to who they are as Māori is critical to their engagement with —and therefore successful completion of— their programmes of study. Participants of this study identified that culturally preferred pedagogy and modes of learning such as co-operative and group-based learning, in combination with mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) learning, was vital to their engagement and success on the programme.

Consistent with previous studies, participants of this study also identified that to support their engagement and success on the programme the institution needs to embrace an enabling of

kaupapa Māori and Indigenous cultural approaches across all parts of the institution, in so doing, ensuring an affirmation of Māori identity. A socio-cultural perspective of engagement in higher education highlights the need for institutions to consider not just the academic programmes, but the student support systems; the culture of the institution as well as the wider political and social factors that impact on student engagement (Kahu, 2013). In addition, it is essential that education providers provide a safe space for Māori students to express their experiences and concerns with the systemic and institutional racism that they may be confronted with and to devise strategies to address these issues when confronted with them (Pihama et al., 2019).

Pihama et al (2019) further argue a key strategy that will encourage Māori student participation and retention at the higher levels of tertiary education is increased financial support - a key barrier to Māori student participation in extended tertiary study. However, this is a factor that did not hinder the students on this programme as the institution provided a range of scholarships that enabled many of the students to complete the programme at no cost to themselves or the educational organisation they work for. Another key enabling factor was that the programme was delivered in the towns and regional areas of the students, which eliminated the need for students to travel long distances (at their cost) to participate in all aspects of the programme. The programme itself was designed as a blended learning experience with both face-to-face and online delivery.

The research participants identified a range of factors that serve as enablers and barriers to their participation and completion of the programme. However, what came to the fore were a range of issues that were not necessarily just important to Māori but to all students, for example the drivers for participation, the mechanics of programme delivery and support from the tertiary institution. This reinforces the idea that what is good for Māori is good for the institution as a whole (Penetito, 2011), thus indicating that the outcome from this study must be positive changes to the institution.

Conclusion

A key driver of Kaupapa Māori research is the development of initiatives that result in positive outcomes for Māori (Barnes, 2000). Therefore, this study was undertaken not just to identify barriers and enablers for Māori student success but to drive positive action.

Given the wide range of findings from the study, not all of these can be effectively addressed at the same time, but we have prioritised certain actions to address specific themes and ideas that emerged from our research. One of the important ideas that we wanted to address immediately was the desire of many students to complete the qualification, and their frustration at the lack of flexibility by the institution in allowing this to happen. As a result, we ran a pilot version of the programme for students who had enjoyed initial success in the programme but had dropped out later. This was designed to be very affordable and to enable students to complete their studies with a flexible assessment schedule. The courses were facilitated primarily by Māori staff with extensive individual support for students.

In order to address the significant theme of connecting to a community of practice and also cultural aspects of content and delivery, a weekly ManaakiFono (online mentoring and support group for Māori and Pacific students) session was put in place as an online space for Māori and Pacific students to discuss any topics that they wish to, not necessarily course-related. A staff member fluent in te reo Māori is always present so students can converse in te reo Māori if they prefer.

We have also implemented a system of ohu (collaborative peer groups), whereby all students are allocated to an ohu with a member of the teaching staff with whom they can personally connect if they have any issues or problems with their studies. The need for the institution to provide better support, and the recognition of the value of the support that was provided, has been addressed by putting in place a better information system for student tracking. Teaching staff are now able to see immediately if a member of one of their ohu is falling behind and reach out proactively to offer support and a pathway forward.

All of these initiatives are recent innovations, and none can be fully evaluated at this stage. In addition, there are many more aspects of this research that can lead to further initiatives in programme design and delivery. In future work we will be evaluating the impact of the various initiatives that we have put in place as a result of this study.

Although this study was undertaken in a very specific context, its results can still be of interest to a broader audience. It is clear from the literature that there are many factors impacting on the success of Māori students, but not all of these apply in all contexts. In addition, some factors will be more important than others in different institutions, on different programmes, and with different student demographics. This article demonstrates the importance of isolating those factors that are most important in a given context and then, from these, formulating and implementing a strategy to address them.

Glossary

Māori language

ako	reciprocity of teaching and learning; the culturally preferred pedagogy principle
Āwhina	Māori student support programme at Victoria University of Wellington
hautūtūtanga	discovery through the eyes of a child
hui	meeting
iwi	tribe
kai	food
kaiako	teacher
kaiako Māori	Māori teacher
kaimahi	workers
kanohi ki te kanohi	face-to-face
kaupapa	principles and ideas for action
Kaupapa Māori	a research philosophy —research by Māori, for Māori and with Māori
karakia	affirmation

kōrero	discussion
kura	Māori medium school setting
manaaki	support, encouragement and care
manaakitanga	reciprocal hospitality and generosity
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
mihimihi	introductions
ohu	collaborative peer group
pono	truth, honesty, integrity and transparency
Pou Ārahi	Māori cultural and academic consultant
Pou Whirinaki	Māori cultural and academic consultant support
rangatiratanga	leadership, accountability, agency and authority; self-determination
reo	language; the Māori language
tamariki	youth
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tikanga	customs
tūpuna	ancestors
whakaaro	idea
whakataukī	proverb, adage
whakawhanaungatanga	the process of establishing relationships
whānau	family
Māori–Pacific hybrid terminology	
ManaakiFono	online mentoring and support group for Māori and Pacific students

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