European Journal of Geography

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Received: 19/09/2025
Revised: 28/11/2025
Accepted: 08/01/2026
Published: 24/01/2026

Special Issue:
Teaching Geography for a World in Transition - Powerful Teaching in Uncertain Times

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DOI: 10.48088/ejg.k.fin.17.2.S001.S015
ISSN: 1792-1341
E-ISSN: 2410-7433

Research Article

Reorienting Aotearoa New Zealand Secondary School Geography Towards Decolonisation and Indigenisation

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Abstract: Secondary school geography in Aotearoa New Zealand has a Western-centric curriculum due to the British colonial influence. Despite being the knowledge system of the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) has been sidelined from geography curricula. A recent system-wide review and overhaul of the national curriculum and assessment system aimed for equal status for mātauranga Māori, respecting it and addressing its exclusion and denigration, and added aspects of decolonising geography, such as critiquing power, to the secondary school geography curriculum. This study investigated how Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school geography teachers understand decolonising and indigenising geography. Qualitative data were gathered through an online survey of 47 geography teachers and analysed using content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis. The study findings are presented as three orientations that teachers take when decolonising geography: decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom, engaging with Indigenous people to decolonise geography and reflexivity for decolonising geography. In doing so, the research outlines practical implications for geography teachers, initial teacher education and policy.

Keywords: Decolonising geography; decolonisation and indigenisation; secondary education; curriculum studies; culturally responsive pedagogies

Highlights:

- Qualitative research involving 47 secondary school geography teachers.
- New model of teachers' three orientations to decolonising geography.
- Classroom decolonisation, engagement with Indigenous peoples and reflexivity are required.

1. Introduction

Secondary school geography in Aotearoa New Zealand has a Western-centric curriculum due to the British colonial influence. Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), the knowledge of Aotearoa New Zealand's Indigenous people, has been sidelined from geography curricula. It is only since the 1990s that limited attempts have been made to add Māori perspectives into geography. More recently, a system-wide review and overhaul of the national curriculum and assessment aimed for equal status for mātauranga Māori (Ministry of Education, 2023b), to give it respect and address its exclusion and denigration (Stewart, 2025). In addition, the recent changes added aspects of decolonisation, such as critiquing power, to the national geography curriculum. To implement the geography changes, teachers needed to incorporate information about te ao Māori (the Māori world), mātauranga Māori and critique of power into their curricula, which aligns with decolonising geography (Radcliffe, 2022).

"Decolonising geography," as a space of practice and research, interrogates how geography perpetuates colonisation. Geography is directly implicated in the colonial project through how it understands and maps the world (Radcliffe, 2022). Decolonising geography hopes to reimagine what can be known in geography and how geography is learned. Decolonisation challenges geography's assumption that Western knowledge is the only scientific knowledge and questions how geographic knowledge is created (Radcliffe & Radhuber, 2020). It acknowledges plurality, opens space for multiple perspectives, and prioritises engagement with Indigenous peoples and their knowledges and learning approaches (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Radcliffe, 2022; Radcliffe & Radhuber, 2020). Furthermore, decolonising geographers reflect on the impact of colonisation and power relationships on their assumptions and teaching (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Radcliffe, 2022). Although some research and a textbook exist at tertiary level (Radcliffe, 2022), research into decolonising geography is limited at secondary school level.

This study aimed to research how Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school geography teachers understand decolonising and indigenising geography. During educational changes that aligned with decolonising geography, the research sought to investigate what teachers were already doing well to support teachers, particularly non-Māori, to further develop geography curricula.

2. Decolonising and Indigenising Geography

Decolonisation and indigenisation challenge colonial systems. The role of curriculum is to inform which knowledge is taught, which leads Martin et al. (2020) to argue that curriculum is a colonising concept, especially in the Aotearoa New Zealand context where curriculum has been used as a tool to assimilate Māori into the dominant Pākehā culture (Hetaraka, 2019). Therefore, the colonial structure of the Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school curriculum would benefit from decolonisation and indigenisation. Decolonisation reassesses the colonial assumptions behind settler-colonial systems, such as education, and (re)engages with Indigenous knowledge systems (Mercier, 2020). Reflecting on the colonisation of educational structures requires reconsidering methodology, how students are taught and supported; epistemology, what is in the curriculum and whose voices are made invisible; and ontology, how education is modernist and embedded in Western society (Stein, 2019). However, it has been argued that decolonisation focuses on colonisers and does not provide a suitable description of the changes needed to centre Indigenous peoples and knowledges (Hoskins & Jones, 2022). Indigenisation goes further to normalise Indigenous ways, decentre colonisers and move from critique into possibility (Hoskins & Jones, 2022). It requires operating through Indigenous worldviews and on Indigenous terms (Oliveira et al., 2024). In addition, Oliveira et al. (2024) insisted that indigenisation and decolonisation work together for a Tiriti-based partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand, emphasising that both are needed (curriculum indigenisation requires decolonisation, and curriculum decolonisation requires indigenisation). However, decolonisation and indigenisation processes vary across disciplines due to the roles each discipline played in colonisation. Moreover, as geography education is situated in education institutions that are at heart colonial, geography education is challenging to decolonise (Puttick, 2023).

Geography's role in colonisation and its lens on the world require it to be decolonised in particular ways. Colonisation was enacted by applying geography's systems of mapping, classifying and understanding people and place (Radcliffe, 2022). Decolonising geography hopes to reimagine what can be known in geography and how geography is learned. Radcliffe (2022) described decolonising geography education as broadening the knowledge learned, encouraging discussions about colonisation, and reflection on positionality, while de Leeuw and Hunt (2018) included interrogating settler-colonial power, making space for multiple ways of knowing and being, decolonising geographic practices that produce knowledge, and working with Indigenous peoples. Taken together, Radcliffe's (2022) and de Leeuw and Hunt's (2018) understanding of decolonising classroom geography can be understood as context-specific critiquing and indigenising geographic knowledge, self-reflexivity and engagement with Indigenous peoples and their knowledges.

Decolonising geography education critiques geographic knowledge and the assumptions built into its creation. Decolonised geographic content critiques colonial power (Nayeri & Rushton, 2022; Winter et al., 2024) and continued dispossession and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples, especially from their lands (Radcliffe, 2022). Decolonising geography also interrogates how knowledge is made and learned (McLean et al., 2019; Trolley, 2020) and challenges how the discipline privileges the West by treating it as having the only scientific knowledge (Radcliffe & Radhuber, 2020), marginalising Indigenous peoples and their ways of being, thinking and understanding place. In contrast, decolonised geographic content acknowledges plurality and makes space for multiple perspectives, especially context-specific Indigenous knowledges (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Hurt & Wallace, 2005; Nursey-Bray, 2019; Radcliffe, 2022). Decolonised

https://doi.org/10.48088/ejg.k.fin.17.2.S001.S015

pedagogies centre Indigenous ways of being, knowing and learning (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Nursey-Bray, 2019) and change classroom power relationships (Murrey et al., 2023). Furthermore, the literature calls for teachers to not just take responsibility for decolonising their teaching but to decolonise themselves.

The internal reflective work teachers enact towards decolonisation is another feature of decolonising geography. Radcliffe (2022) and de Leeuw and Hunt (2018) attested that decolonising geographers often identify their relationship to colonisation and Indigenous peoples by outlining their positionality and their relationship to settler-colonial power. Further self-reflexivity was promoted by others, including identifying privilege (Fritzsche, 2022) and interrogating racialised assumptions (Winter et al., 2024). Moreover, Hoskins and Jones (2022) gave additional context-specific areas for self-reflection, encouraging "non-Māori to understand their own identities in relation to Māori, to history, to this whenua [land], and to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in its modern status as a foundational guide to our work" (p. 311). To decolonise themselves, teachers, especially settler colonisers living on Indigenous lands, need to commit to learning context-specific Indigenous knowledges, which may require unlearning colonial approaches (Murrey et al., 2023). Hoskins and Jones (2022) suggested basic knowledge non-Indigenous people should know, including correct reo Māori (Māori language) pronunciation, common Māori terms, basic tikanga (system of correct values, practices, procedures, customs and protocols), that Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi are different and what the differences are, the basic history of colonisation and conflict, and the histories and aspirations of local hapū (primary kinship groups, sub-tribes) and iwi (tribe/s). Language learning needs to go together with learning knowledge, because te reo Māori is integrally connected to te ao Māori (Mika, 2019). Furthermore, learning subject-specific Indigenous knowledges helps secondary school subject teachers to develop and teach decolonised curricula (Hurt & Wallace, 2005). However, non-Indigenous people need to be cautious when working with Indigenous knowledge because it is not theirs, and there are limits to what they can learn (Gale, 1996). Permission and respect are needed for working with Indigenous knowledge (Nursey-Bray, 2019) and teachers need to be careful not to essentialise, generalise and romanticise Indigenous peoples, worldviews and knowledges (Radcliffe, 2022).

Decolonisation of geography requires movement from teaching about Indigenous peoples towards relationships. Geography has a long tradition of teaching about Indigenous peoples as an object of study (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018), especially through regional geographies that teach about foreign people and places (Morgan, 2017). However, teaching about people groups risks essentialisation (Radcliffe, 2022). Therefore, Jones and Jenkins (2008) explained that learning from difference, which requires relationship, should replace learning about Indigenous peoples. Inviting guest speakers is a common approach in the literature (Carter & Hollinsworth, 2017; Daigle & Sundberg, 2017; Nursey-Bray, 2019), that Moorman et al. (2021) promoted as intergenerational learning. However, Berryman and Ford (2014) insisted that a collaborative relationship, involving mutual respect, shared expertise, interdependence and power sharing focused on teaching and learning goals and processes, is a preferable way for schools to work with Māori. Time and trust are key to building relationships (Coombes et al., 2014). Long-term collaborative relationships thwart neoliberal and educational needs for speed and efficiency (Barker & Pickerill, 2020) and disrupt geography's colonising assumptions and practices (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018).

Decolonising geography has lofty goals which puts it at risk of being too theoretical for busy teachers. Little empirical research has been undertaken into decolonising geography in secondary school classrooms or by secondary school teachers. Therefore, this research project aimed to investigate how Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school geography teachers understood and implemented decolonising geography.

3. Educational Context

The earliest forms of education in Aotearoa New Zealand are those of Māori. Māori children learned through their whānau (families), hapū and iwi, and under the direction of tohunga (chosen experts, priests), with children and youths selected for education in specific areas of social life. Two hundred years ago, British missionaries brought Western education to these shores at the invitation of Māori, but also as part of their evangelisation project (Jones & Jenkins, 2016). Following the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Māori language treaty, which differs from the English language version, known as Treaty of Waitangi) between Māori chiefs and British Crown on February 6, 1840, full scale British colonisation began. The establishment of British law led to Western education for Māori being enacted in 1847 (Hetaraka, 2019). Subsequent laws ensured separate schools and curricula for Māori and European children until after World War 2, when Māori urbanisation led to more Māori children enrolling in schools together with European children. Despite Te Tiriti o Waitangi promising authority over lands and treasures, such as language, knowledge and education, education excluded

and denigrated mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori, limited the curriculum for Māori students and aimed to assimilate Māori into European society. Since the 1980s, Māori-medium education has grown (Stewart & Tocker, 2021). However, most Māori and non-Māori children learn in an English-speaking education system where subjects such as geography teach Western knowledge with little mātauranga Māori included.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, geography is an optional subject for the final 3 years of secondary school. While *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) establishes a brief geography curriculum, the content taught in schools is not prescribed and there are few national textbooks, giving teachers a high level of autonomy. Aotearoa New Zealand's national qualification is the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA). There are three levels of NCEA: Levels 1, 2 and 3. The levels broadly correspond with the last 3 years of secondary schooling. External and internal forms of assessment are used in geography. Externally assessed end-of-year examinations are set and marked centrally. Internal assessments are set and marked at school level and allow students to present their learning in a wider variety of ways throughout the year. Both external and internal assessments are standards based, with each achievement standard assessing a defined set of knowledge or skills. In creating curricula, teachers balance the autonomy of *The New Zealand Curriculum* with NCEA's more detailed assessment requirements and topics.

During this study, a broad body of educational change was taking place in Aotearoa New Zealand, aiming to improve access to and quality of education (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The changes included refreshing the curriculum and reviewing the NCEA. A mini pilot of the change to Level 1 NCEA and curriculum changes was underway while the research data for this project were being collected. The change process proposed strengthening NCEA by requiring equal status for mātauranga Māori within mainstream secondary school subjects such as geography (Ministry of Education, 2023b). Equal status means respecting mātauranga Māori within curricula in an attempt to address its exclusion and denigration (Stewart, 2025). As *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and NCEA provide frameworks but not specificities for what is taught in the classroom, the changes required all teachers to put significant thought and effort into curriculum development. To implement the geography changes, teachers need to incorporate te ao Māori, mātauranga Māori and critique of power into their curricula (Ministry of Education, 2023a), which aligns with decolonising geography (Radcliffe, 2022).

4. Materials and Methods

This study was part of a wider research project that employed a decolonising methodology to investigate how teachers decolonised and indigenised geography. Decolonising methodology intersects rather than separates theory, practice and ethics (McGregor et al., 2018). A Māori ethical approach, āta (to do something carefully, deliberately and intentionally; Pohatu, 2013), was applied when gathering, holding and sharing mātauranga Māori. Sharing with researched communities was a core responsibility (Smith, 2021) and this project intended for geography teachers to benefit equally with Māori students and communities. Although much decolonising research is by, with and for Indigenous peoples, Smith (2021) supports non-Indigenous people, such as the first author, undertaking decolonising research.

Two research questions were investigated:

1. How are Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school teachers decolonising geography?
2. How do geography teachers integrate mātauranga Māori into their curricula and teaching?

4.1. Participants

The project recruited 47 teacher participants who taught NCEA geography. The ethnic breakdown showed Māori made up 13% of participants; most teachers were Pākehā (European; 91%), 4% were Pacific and 2% African. Females made up 55% of participants and males 45%. Teaching experience of the participants ranged from 1-2 years to 20+ years, with most reporting 10-20 years. Teachers from around Aotearoa New Zealand participated in the study.

4.2. Procedures

Data were collected through an online questionnaire using Qualtrics. Data collection took place between July and October 2022 during the first pilot of changes to NCEA Level 1. At this time, most geography teachers were thinking about or planning for the NCEA and curriculum changes (Alansari et al., 2022). In line with the decolonising methodology, the online questionnaire was selected to honour participants' time and enable them to complete the questionnaire

at a place and time suitable to them – as part of a broader intentional effort to rethink research and prioritise the interests of the teacher participants and geography education community.

Consent was informed and voluntary. Ethical approval was obtained through a university Human Participants Ethics Committee on 22 July 2022. Potential participants were directed to a Qualtrics link, where they read participation information and completed the questionnaire. Teachers could leave the questionnaire at any stage prior to final submission. Final submission of the questionnaire indicated consent to participate. The questionnaire was anonymous. To differentiate between participants, teachers were coded to identify their gender, ethnicity and geographic region; see Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Scheme

Gender		**Ethnicities teachers identify with (could choose multiple)***		**Regions where teachers work**	
Code	Gender	Code	Ethnicity	Code	Region
f	Female	M	Māori	TT	Te Tai Tokerau/Northland
m	Male	PE	Pākehā/European	TM	Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland
		OE	Other/European	Wk	Waikato
		P	Pacific	MT	Te Moana-a-Toitehuatahi /Bay of Plenty
		Af	African	MM	Te Matau-a-Māui/Hawke's Bay
				T	Taranaki
				MWh	Manawatū-Whanganui
				WhT	Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington
				Wh	Whakatū/Nelson
				Wt	Waitaha/Canterbury
				Ō	Ōtākou/Otago

* In Aotearoa New Zealand people who identify as multiple ethnicities are reported in all categories.

Data analysis involved content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis, which were undertaken applying a decolonising approach called āta. Word frequency searches in NVivo Release 1 identified how often teachers referred to certain terms, which supported the familiarisation and coding stages of reflexive thematic analysis. The reflexive thematic analysis was an iterative process involving familiarisation; coding in NVivo; initial theme generation; theme development and review; theme defining, refining and naming; writing up and renaming; and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During the phases and iterations in reflexive thematic analysis, inductive and deductive codes were developed. Meaning was sought within the data and codes and knowledge of the literature applied to generate themes. In contrast to basic content analysis, which prioritised recurring themes, reflexive thematic analysis allowed for flexibility in identifying themes. A potential implication is that although the selected themes are relevant for this project, they are not the only way to interpret the data. By working between the study's inductive and deductive codes and the literature, we could see that the themes aligned with the features of decolonising geography found in disparate lists within the literature. The data showed how the three orientations were connected, which supported creating a model of all three orientations of decolonising geography: decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom, engaging with Indigenous people to decolonise geography and reflexivity for decolonising geography.

5. Results

This research investigated Aotearoa New Zealand geography teachers' understanding and implementation of decolonised and indigenised geography. Three main themes that are teachers' orientations towards decolonising geography were generated from the data. Orientation 1 is decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom. Orientation 2 is engaging with Indigenous peoples to decolonise geography. Finally, Orientation 3 is reflexivity for decolonising geography; see Figure 1. The subthemes form the main focus of the analysis and will be explained and illustrated with participant quotes. In line with the qualitative methodology, participant frequencies are not reported.

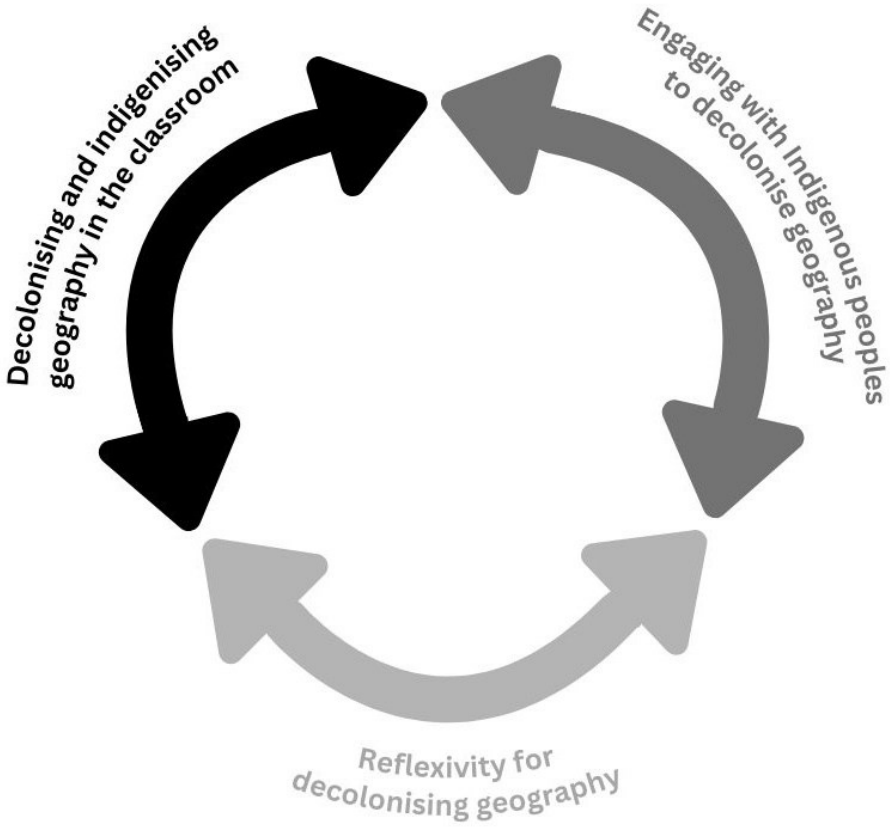

Figure 1. Three Orientations of Decolonising Geography

5.1. Orientation 1: Decolonising and Indigenising Geography in the Classroom

Orientation 1 focuses on teachers' descriptions of how they decolonised and indigenised geography in the classroom through subject matter and pedagogy. Within this theme are four subthemes: critiquing colonisation and power, incorporating Indigenous knowledge into geography, approaches to including Indigenous knowledge, and decolonising pedagogies.

5.1.1. Critiquing Colonisation and Power

Critique of colonisation and power structures featured in some teachers' understanding of decolonising geography. For example, one teacher explained that decolonising geography helps students and teachers to "question the current and past power structures/systems in NZ [New Zealand]" (m-M&PE-T)[1]. However, some teachers did not explain how critiquing colonisation was geographic, instead focusing on historical or sociological angles. One teacher hoped that through decolonising geography, students would "understand our history and impacts of colonisation that are reflected in society today" (f-PE-WhT). In contrast, other teachers' statements reflected a desire for criticality within environmental management or land ownership aspects of geography. Another teacher thought decolonising geography would help teachers "to critically analyse contexts and not have to tiptoe around the realities of power dynamics in our society, specifically with reference to our interactions with the environment" (m-PE-TM). Teachers seemed to struggle with connecting the critique of colonisation and power to geography, and those who did focused only on management aspects of geography. Some teachers discussed critiquing colonisation's role in land ownership by referring to the dispossession of land from Māori and the application of British-derived land laws. One teacher used critique "to challenge our notions of sovereignty and rights over land" (f-PE-TM). As land is central to geography and te ao Māori, critiquing

[1] Participant codes indicate gender-ethnicity-region; see Table 1.

land ownership supports decolonisation. Furthermore, moving from teaching about the importance of land to Māori to critiquing the concept of land ownership itself is necessary to decolonise geography.

5.1.2. Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Into Geography.

Some teachers decentred Western geography by incorporating Indigenous knowledge into curricula. Greater incorporation of te reo Māori, mātauranga Māori concepts and Māori perspectives was suggested. Teachers gave extensive examples of Māori vocabulary that teaches about te ao Māori and social structures, as well as geography-specific vocabulary, including names of geographic features and geographic concepts. One teacher explained that "important concepts from te ao Māori would feature throughout and our educators would feel confident in teaching this information as well as being able to communicate important kupu [words] and ideas in te reo Māori" (m-PE-TM). As geography is a concept-based subject, a focus on concepts supports indigenisation. Furthermore, the desire to use more reo Māori shows some teachers understood the holistic connection between language, culture and knowledge within te ao Māori, and the need for equity of language, culture, knowledge and concepts.

5.1.3. Approaches to Including Indigenous Knowledge

Teachers' discussions suggested two different approaches for including Indigenous knowledge in curricula: adding Indigenous knowledge to existing curricula or giving Indigenous knowledge equal importance with Western knowledge. An additive approach was seen when teachers supplemented existing curricula with mātauranga Māori. For example, one teacher explained that "For every topic, we acknowledge Indigenous knowledge first, and then we explore other geographic features of said place" (f-P-WhT). Even when teaching mātauranga Māori first, an additive approach positions Indigenous knowledge as less important than Western geographic knowledge.

A few teachers engaged in indigenisation by assigning mātauranga Māori equal importance with Western knowledge. One teacher aimed for "teaching Māori viewpoints and perspectives and Indigenous ideas without privilege and respecting and promoting Māori ideologies with the same emphasis and [the] same authority as White perspectives" (f-P-MT) to give the mātauranga Māori respect and priority within their curriculum. Other teachers suggested blending or braiding Māori and Western knowledges to give the knowledges equal importance. For example, one teacher explained that "decolonised school geography would seamlessly blend te ao Māori with te ao Pākehā [European/Western worldview] in a way that our ākonga [students] could learn about [and] walk effortlessly between both worlds and navigate various perspectives" (m-PE-TM). Indigenising geography requires giving Indigenous knowledge the same respect and value in the curriculum as Western knowledge.

5.1.4. Decolonising Pedagogies

Teachers suggested several pedagogies that aid in decolonising geography. Some teachers thought decolonising geography would involve a pedagogy that changes the power balance between teachers and learners to give students the power to decide what to learn. One teacher explained that, in the classroom, "power imbalances are broken down and levelled, so that our ākonga [students] have a genuine say in what they learn and why. Not just 'consultation' but 'co-construction'" (m-PE-TM). A different teacher suggested ako [reciprocal teaching and learning] and whanaungatanga [relationship building], which are Māori pedagogies that change teacher–learner power relationships. Engagement with Māori power sharing pedagogies would support further decolonisation of pedagogies.

Some teachers considered decolonising geography to involve pedagogies that respond to learners' needs. A few teachers focused on benefits for Māori students. One teacher's aim was a geography where "our Māori ākonga can see themselves in [their learning]" (f-PE-Wt). Other teachers wanted to include all learners. For example, one teacher thought geography should be "relevant and accessible to everyone… Not delivering assessments through traditional means. Trying to have inclusive teaching for all" (f-P&PE-TM). Such cultural responsiveness and inclusivity support decolonisation by considering the benefits for all learners. Some teachers proposed alternative assessment approaches to decolonise geography. One teacher wanted "an alternative achievement measurement system that does not centre on the European hierarchical model" (f-OE-TT). Linking inclusivity to decolonisation suggests that changing pedagogies and assessments helps teachers focus on who benefits from decolonisation.

https://doi.org/10.48088/ejg.k.fin.17.2.S001.S015

5.2. Orientation 2: Engaging With Indigenous Peoples to Decolonise Geography

Orientation 2 investigates teachers' discussions of how they teach about and interact with Indigenous peoples. Teachers' engagement with Māori ranged from teaching about Indigenous peoples, to one-off communication and inviting guest speakers, and schools forming relationships with Indigenous people.

5.2.1. Teaching About Indigenous Peoples

The most limited level of engagement with Indigenous peoples was by teachers who made general statements about Māori. For example, one teacher advocated "acknowledging mana whenua [Māori who hold rights associated with land] and tangata whenua [people of the land] above all else" (f-PE-WhT). Although acknowledgement of mana whenua highlights the importance of Māori status as first peoples, it does not involve direct engagement with Māori communities. Notably missing from the discussion at this limited level were references to specific Māori iwi or communities in proximity to the school. Referring to Māori in a general way without mentioning their iwi may mean students gain an essentialised view of Māori that assigns a single, historicised and traditionalised culture and worldview.

5.2.2. One-Off Communication and Inviting Guest Speakers

A second level of engagement with Indigenous peoples came from teachers who invited Māori guest speakers or asked Māori for viewpoints on issues. One teacher wrote that they were "communicating with local iwi about their experiences and perspectives" (m-M&PE-TM). Some teachers invited Māori experts to class, which asks Māori to invest time and knowledge, and might either support teachers to learn or allow teachers to avoid taking responsibility for indigenising curricula. Although these teachers are engaging with local Māori communities, one-off communication does not encourage long-term relationships and reciprocity, which are major elements of tikanga. A limited understanding of relationships in te ao Māori was also evident. One teacher reported challenges communicating with Māori, stating, "We have not always been successful in contacting mana whenua to get the help we need to address their perspectives correctly. I can see a lot of inaccuracies being present as a result" (m-PE-Ō). This quote suggests some teachers may see Māori as subject material rather than people with whom to grow relationships. The quote is also concerning because it indicates the teacher knew they were teaching inaccurate content, suggesting that some teachers might not think that Māori knowledge is valuable enough to be taught correctly. Inaccuracies and assumptions about Māori knowledge and history are likely when teachers and schools have not yet developed strong and ongoing relationships with Māori communities.

5.2.3. Schools Forming Relationships With Indigenous Peoples

A third level of engagement with Māori was offered by teachers who wanted to draw on their relationships with Māori for curriculum development. For example, one teacher explained that:

> *[a] truly decolonised school geography would consult with whānau [families], hapū and iwi on what is being taught and why and would allow for genuine input on topics… Funds would exist to enable iwi to… share their information and knowledge in a reciprocal relationship. (m-PE- TM)*

Reciprocity and long-term relationships, aligning with tikanga, are key to generative relationships between Māori and schools. However, teachers did not give examples of what reciprocity might entail. Furthermore, Māori involved in curriculum development need remuneration. Therefore, schools and teachers need to consider the implications of using relationships with Māori for developing curricula and plan for payment and reciprocity.

Teachers thought the NCEA and curriculum changes encouraged schools to engage with Māori when developing curricula because of the requirement to give mātauranga Māori equal status. One teacher pointed out that the change "pushes teachers to connect with local iwi voice rather than retelling [an] existing Māori perspective from a non-Māori lens" (m-PE-WhT). However, some teachers worried that requesting support to incorporate knowledge specific to Māori tribes and localities would overburden Māori communities. One teacher was concerned that "many communities simply do not have the resources to support schools" (f-OE-TT). In response, some teachers desired a long-term commitment

https://doi.org/10.48088/ejg.k.fin.17.2.S001.S015

to remunerating Māori communities involved in curriculum development. One teacher explained the need for a government "commitment to resourcing community leaders to co-construct content consistently and for a long-term process (not something that ends [with] a new government)" (f-OE-TT). Although the geography changes may encourage collaboration with Māori, the government needs to consider the impact on Māori communities and designate money for resourcing.

5.3. Orientation 3: Reflexivity for Decolonising Geography

Orientation 3 found that decolonising geography also required teachers to engage in reflexivity and learning. This theme explores findings through the subthemes of reflecting on positionality and taking responsibility for learning.

5.3.1. Reflecting on Positionality

Some non-Māori teachers discussed how their perception of their ethnic identity related to decolonising geography, which suggested they were beginning to develop reflexivity. One thought his positionality limited his ability to indigenise geography: "I would need a better understanding of what te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori are to be able to apply them to geography… as a foreign-born teacher and trained in New Zealand" (m-PE-WhT). Another teacher reflected on positionality and questioned their right to teach Indigenous knowledge. This teacher also assessed their knowledge and committed to learning more:

> *It is hard for someone who is not Māori to feel comfortable teaching Māori and mātauranga Māori… do we have the right to teach this with our own limited but growing knowledge? I understand that we need to but what supports do we have in place to make sure this knowledge is valued and protected? (f-PE-WhT)*

Although these teachers reflected on their positionality, they used it as a justification for not teaching mātauranga Māori, suggesting space for further reflexivity and potential action. Decolonisation would necessitate teachers moving beyond reflection and justification to take responsibility for their own learning

5.3.2. Taking Responsibility for Learning

The next step of self-reflection is to learn. Learning about mātauranga Māori and the effects of colonisation requires active teacher engagement. However, few teachers appeared to take responsibility for this learning. Some teachers reflected on their lack of Indigenous knowledge. For example, one teacher explained that "although we can't teach what we don't know, it's important that we extend ourselves and try" (m-PE-TM). Some teachers explained they had not learned due to busyness, while others blamed a lack of resources and support. For example, one teacher wrote: "There are limitations in my learning due to [a] lack of professional support; there is a shortage of funding" (f-PE-WhT). Similarly, another teacher wrote: "I need to attend teachers' college again to re-learn how to teach. More specific materials are required to support teachers that are lost. As in, detailed unit plans and lessons" (m-PE-WhT). It was unclear whether the desire for professional development led teachers to take responsibility for their learning or if they wanted others to provide for them. This teacher made a valuable point about initial teacher education supporting preservice teachers to learn about and integrate te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, which challenges teacher educators to undertake professional development and learning about mātauranga Māori related to their areas of expertise. However, even if experienced teachers are resourced, they will only learn if they choose to do so. Laying blame elsewhere allowed teachers to abdicate responsibility for learning.

Only one teacher discussed acting on the lack of resources by creating their own. This teacher explained that it took a lot of work to write geography resources incorporating mātauranga Māori:

> *I wrote two brief history booklets during my own time… regarding the local iwi, and early European settlers—with key geographic interests noted… This development has required a lot of effort and a bit of skill in developing relevant, suitable, and easy-to-understand resources for both teachers and students. (m-M&PE-TM)*

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It was surprising that more teachers did not mention resource creation, because limited textbook availability means geography teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand often create their own resources. Notably, the teacher who mentioned resource creation was Māori, suggesting that some Māori teachers might carry the burden of indigenising geography.

A lack of resources and teacher knowledge risks the classroom being culturally unsafe for Māori students. One teacher suggested relying on Māori students to bring mātauranga Māori into geography:

> *I feel teachers like myself who have been taught in a colonised way do not have the knowledge we need to do this properly… Long term, though, I think this will be improved. Especially as we see more Māori engaging successfully in our subject and bringing their knowledge and that of their iwi into the subject. (m-PE-Ō)*

However, reliance on students shifts the problem onto Māori students instead of schools and teachers taking responsibility.

These findings highlight that teachers take three orientations when decolonising geography: decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom, engaging with Indigenous people to decolonise geography and reflexivity for decolonising geography. However, this research found that the three orientations did not receive equal emphasis, with teachers mainly focussing on what they taught in the classroom.

6. Discussion

This study investigated geography teachers' understanding of decolonising and indigenising geography in Aotearoa New Zealand, finding three orientations for decolonising geography. From the findings, several discussion points emerge that suggest ways teachers can reorient secondary school geography towards decolonisation and indigenisation.

6.1. Orientation 1: Decolonising and Indigenising Geography in the Classroom

When teachers attempted indigenising subject matter, they often added mātauranga Māori to existing curricula rather than indigenising the curricula. Macfarlane et al. (2015) warned that because reconciling culturally bound knowledges from different ontologies is challenging, one knowledge, usually Western knowledge, may dominate, with the other siloed or added on, as found in this study. Similarly, Banks (2009) asserted that teachers commonly employ an ethnic additive approach, where teachers add ethnic content to existing topics without reconceptualising curricula or pedagogies. Ethnic addition treats Indigenous knowledge differently from Western knowledge, assigning it less time, importance and value. Ethnic addition has similarities to Indigenous inclusion, which makes Indigenous people visible in educational spaces without fundamental system changes (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Thus, when some teachers in this study applied ethnic addition to bring mātauranga Māori into geography, their approach did not indigenise geography or give Māori knowledge equal status.

A few teachers suggested blending mātauranga Māori and Western knowledges together in geography curricula. Although teachers' suggestions lacked specificity, they aligned with Moorman et al. (2021), who promoted teaching Indigenous and Western knowledges in geography using an Indigenous Two-Eyed Seeing approach that draws on the strengths of each. An example that may support teachers' movement forward with blending geography knowledges is provided by Saha et al. (2024), who engaged a well-established Māori approach, He Awa Whiria (a braided river; S. Macfarlane et al., 2015), to create a volcanology education resource that equally valued Māori and Western knowledges and strengths. As braiding knowledges was proposed by a few teachers but not implemented, applying He Awa Whiria in geography could be a space for teachers to further develop.

Teachers mentioned only a few ways to decolonise pedagogies. They suggested changing the classroom power balance, inclusive pedagogies, co-constructing curricula and alternative assessment methods. The decolonising geography literature asserts that decolonising geography requires changing relationships between teachers and students (Laing, 2021; Radcliffe, 2022) but gives few examples. The present study's examples of co-construction of curricula and changing power relationships using indigenous approaches expand on the literature's broad statements. One teacher suggested enacting the Māori pedagogies, ako and whanaungatanga, which aligned with Radcliffe's (2022) and Nursey-Bray's (2019) promotion of context-specific pedagogies. However, it was surprising that only one teacher mentioned ako and whanaungatanga because these pedagogies are well established in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system (for example, see Bishop & Berryman, 2009 and Ministry of Education & New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011).

https://doi.org/10.48088/ejg.k.fin.17.2.S001.S015

Perhaps a reason that only one teacher discussed Māori pedagogies was because some teachers do not think equal status for mātauranga Māori holistically encompasses content and pedagogy.

6.2. Orientation 2: Engaging With Indigenous Peoples to Decolonise Geography

Some teachers discussed Indigenous peoples as an object of study. Teaching about Indigenous peoples as an object is not a decolonising approach but rather a traditional geography, described by Morgan (2017) as regional geographies. Research assuming that one can know about Indigenous peoples was critiqued by Smith (2021) as colonial extractive research that takes Indigenous knowledge for itself, yet ensures Indigenous people remain as other. Additionally, teaching pan-Māori perspectives risks ignoring tribal and local specificities and maintains an essentialised view, which the literature cautions against (Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Radcliffe, 2022). Jones and Jenkins (2008) reasoned that learning from difference should replace learning about Indigenous peoples so that non-Indigenous people are alert to and surprised by difference instead of aiming to reduce it. Learning from difference is important because indigeneity cannot be fully understood by non-Indigenous people.

Relationships with Māori help teachers to learn from, rather than about, Māori. Some teachers reported inviting Māori guest speakers and asking for perspectives on issues. Although inviting Indigenous guest speakers is advocated in the decolonising geography literature (Carter & Hollinsworth, 2017; Daigle & Sundberg, 2017; Laing, 2021; Moorman et al., 2021; Nursey-Bray, 2019), Hoskins and Jones (2022) cautioned that seeking a Māori perspective may treat Māori as "native informants" (p. 313) and ask a speaker to represent all Māori. Instead, building relationships with whānau, hapū and iwi was suggested by some teachers, which is a preferred approach. According to Berryman and Ford (2014), before initiating relationships with Māori, schools need to invest time in identifying and addressing barriers, such as schools' assumptions of holding superior knowledge and the education system's failures for Māori. Furthermore, Coombes et al. (2014) observed that time and trust are key to building relationships, while Saha et al. (2024) and Berryman et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of basing relationships on Māori values and tikanga, such as reciprocity. Similarly, a teacher in this study suggested that relationships with iwi should be reciprocal. However, investing time, building trust and centring cultural values were not mentioned by participants. Building long-term, culturally grounded, reciprocal relationships between schools and Indigenous peoples would support decolonisation of geography.

Some teachers highlighted concerns that funding was not available to pay Indigenous communities who help schools indigenise curricula. This finding aligned with Smith's (2021) concerns that Indigenous communities share their knowledge for the benefit of those in power without remuneration. Furthermore, Laing (2021) noted that asking for voluntary labour reinforces power hierarchies between volunteer Indigenous people and paid non-Indigenous people. In addition, concerns about lack of remuneration by the participants of this present study reflect the cultural taxation findings of Torepe (2018) and Turner-Adams and Rubie-Davies (2023). Similar to the findings of Gaudry and Lorenz (2019) and Alansari et al. (2022), the curriculum changes occurring during the present study required extra work by Māori. A recommendation of this study is that schools and the Ministry of Education remunerate Māori communities for their work indigenising curricula.

6.3. Orientation 3: Reflexivity for Decolonising Geography

Teachers appeared to be more comfortable reflecting on positionality than their privilege, their role in colonisation, or Indigenous land dispossession. Existing literature highlights the importance of reflecting on positionality in connection to colonisation (Fritzsche, 2022; Radcliffe, 2022), but Tuck and Yang (2012) suggested that White teachers may find reflecting on privilege and their role in colonisation challenging. Reflecting on the role of colonisation in land ownership may undermine the sense of stability a teacher has in a home or employment in a school located on stolen land (Tuck & Yang, 2012), which may explain why teachers avoided interrogating their place within colonisation.

Knowledge gaps were openly identified by teachers. However, some teachers used their positionality to justify their lack of knowledge of mātauranga Māori or abdicate responsibility for taking action to indigenise geography. Avoidance of engagement with te ao Māori has been described as 'Pākehā paralysis' (Tolich, 2001), which results in Pākehā avoiding engagement with te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori for fear of doing something wrong. Moorman et al. (2021) insisted that it is crucial for teachers to reflect on their knowledge but, along with Hoskins and Jones (2022), they also cautioned that reflection on knowledge can be unsettling for teachers who see themselves as subject experts. Furthermore, the legacy of teaching regional geographies (Morgan, 2017) suggests geography teachers could learn mātauranga Māori to

teach about it. In the present study, some teachers identified their knowledge gaps and committed to learn more mātauranga Māori. These teachers turned reflection into decolonising actions (Mercier, 2020). Therefore, reflection on knowledge and knowledge gaps could lead teachers to seek learning.

One teacher suggested that teachers' lack of knowledge could be overcome through Māori students supporting the class to learn mātauranga Māori. However, Hoskins and Jones (2022) asserted that non-Māori people who request to be taught by Indigenous people assume that all Māori know everything about te ao Māori and that mātauranga Māori is a single knowledge. Furthermore, relying on Indigenous students to bring Indigenous knowledge into geography might be unsafe for them (Carter & Hollinsworth, 2017; Nursey-Bray, 2019). Carter and Hollinsworth (2017) warned that such requests are inappropriate given that the students joined the class to learn geography. Instead of asking students to teach Indigenous knowledge, teachers could reflect on how they could engage in their own learning. Addressing these areas for development through changes to teaching, building relationships with Indigenous peoples and continued reflexivity and learning has the potential to strengthen efforts towards decolonising secondary school geography.

7. Conclusions

This article presented research into how Aotearoa New Zealand geography teachers understood decolonising geography. The major finding was that teachers took three orientations when decolonising geography: decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom, engaging with Indigenous peoples to decolonise geography, and reflexivity for decolonising geography. However, these three orientations did not receive equal emphasis, with teachers mainly focusing on the content they teach, which is one part of Orientation 1: Decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom. The study identified directions for teachers to reorient and develop further across all three orientations. First, teachers could braid knowledges to give Indigenous geographic knowledge equal status. Next, teachers and schools need to build relationships with Indigenous peoples to move away from teaching about Māori as an object of study. Finally, ongoing reflexivity and learning are required so that teachers can be confident in teaching Indigenous knowledge accurately.

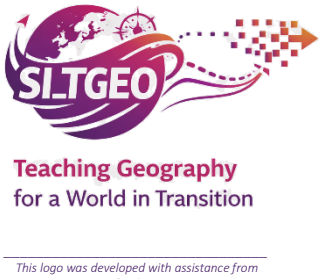
The study also found that schools, policy makers, funders and initial teacher education need to reorient to support indigenisation and decolonisation of geography. Teachers need support from schools, particularly in developing long-term reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities. Government investment in decolonising education, in the form of resourcing for teachers and funding for Indigenous communities is required. In addition, NCEA and other education policies influence the ways teachers bring mātauranga Māori into geography, and these need to be consistent and embody Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is therefore important for educational policy and resourcing to better support and align with the policy of equal status for mātauranga Māori. Finally, initial teacher education has a formative role through encouraging teacher self-reflection, teaching mātauranga Māori in subject areas, and modelling reciprocal relationships with Māori.

Further research could investigate the various people, spaces and places connected to teachers decolonising geography. Future studies could find out more about how students learn indigenisation and decolonisation, how effectively initial teacher education programmes teach indigenisation and decolonisation, or highlight the voices of Indigenous peoples about curriculum decolonisation, or develop case studies of secondary school teachers successfully decolonising and indigenising their geography teaching. The findings of this study challenge initial teacher education programmes to engage with Indigenous knowledge and model partnerships with Indigenous peoples. Everyone in education – teachers, schools, policy makers and initial teacher education – has a role in reorienting geography towards decolonisation and indigenisation.

Funding: This research was funded through a University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments: This article forms part of the Special Issue (SI_TGEO), Teaching Geography for a World in Transition. Powerful Teaching in Uncertain Times, published in the European Journal of Geography. The Special Issue draws inspiration from the 2026 EUROGEO Conference, held in Tilburg, The Netherlands, 21 to 22 May 2026. The collection brings together research on geography education and geographical inquiry, with a focus on powerful geographical knowledge, spatial thinking, and critical, future oriented pedagogies. Contributions address key transformations shaping contemporary geography, including deglobalisation, multipolar world orders, postcolonial critique,



https://doi.org/10.48088/ejg.k.fin.17.2.S001.S015

contested knowledge and places, and the integration of artificial intelligence in educational practice and research. The Special Issue is edited by **Dr. Neli Heidari**, University of Bremen, Germany, **Dr. Uwe Krause**, Fontys University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands, **Dr. Susan Caldis**, Macquarie University, Australia, **Prof. Tine Beneker**, Utrecht University, The Netherlands, and **Dr. Alexandros Bartzokas-Tsiompras**, National Technical University of Athens, Greece, & Associate Editor of the European Journal of Geography.

Contribution to the Special Issue Topics: This empirical research article focuses on the special issue topic of decolonising geography education. It presents ways that geography teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are decolonising and indigenising geography in the classroom, engaging with Indigenous people, reflecting and learning. This article aims to support geography teachers, teacher educators and policy makers to create more inclusive geography curricula that empower students to navigate uncertain futures in a changing world.

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