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**Living and learning in New Zealand: Perceptions of Bhutanese students, parents and teachers of their learning progress**

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates twelve Bhutanese second language students' perceptions of their learning. The research locale is a Year 7-13 New Zealand school. Qualitative grounded theory research methods are used. Methodology consists of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with students, their parents' and teachers'. Questions sought details of the students' aspirations and expectations, barriers and facilitating experiences affecting their learning, with parents and teachers perceptions of the same.

Relevant findings reveal that the students have a very strong first-culture family and community web of support, to supports their personal investment in the maintenance of a multicultural identity, and upholds their involvement in L2 education. Student L2 learning progress is marked with time challenges, cognitive and articulation issues, decision-making about friendship, and concerns to establish a sense of legitimacy within the school population. Though supportive and affirming of their children's learning, parents' efficacy with student education is limited by second-language literacy and inexperience with New Zealand educational systems and practices. The study also shows wide differences of perception between English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) staff and mainstream staff about second-language background and learning needs. Mainstream staff show a lack of opportunity, and sometimes will, to engage in professional development about Bhutanese second language needs, in spite of some personal appreciation for the participants. Government funding is provided to support second-language learning, professional development, guidelines and research in schools, but there are no effective structures to monitor their use. The study concludes with implications for participants, their families, ESOL and mainstream staff, for further diversity in the New Zealand educational system.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis describes participants' journeys during a year of their adolescent school-learning life. It incorporates earlier journeys of their families from Bhutan to Nepal, to New Zealand. These journeys parallel the researcher's journey towards greater understanding of second language learning and the local systems and practices which delineate them.

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**“A nation is bound together not by the past, but by the stories of the past  
that we tell one another in the present.” Earnest Renan**