



AFMLTA
Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
www.afmlta.asn.au

Questions on Notice

House Standing Committee on Education

Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond

- 1. How can the government support the education system to overcome barriers to access to Asian language and cultural studies in regional, rural, and remote communities?**

A regional (including rural and remote) strategy is required; which would need to include additional resourcing, incentives, and allowances to teach in these areas. Incentive and allowances might include provision of accommodation, support for additional study (on top of teacher education studies or as an in-service teacher) to undertake additional study of language subjects and languages teaching methodologies. There was a scheme like this in the NALSAS projects, which saw regional teachers supported with time release from the classroom, to study languages, with a subsequent increase in qualified teachers in the regions. Online study with regional universities would provide excellent platforms for this additional study.

Targeting Asian languages to be taught in regional and remote schools, with some kind of tangible benefit for doing so, would be another mechanism. Teachers of these languages could then have supported networks and hubs within regions to support each other.

Ensuring teacher education programs had more Asia capability requirements, study of a language or required core content (as is included now for a number of key areas) would support all teacher graduates to have the increased knowledge.

Additional professional learning to enhance regional teachers' Asian literacy and capability would also be a highly effective way of overcoming barriers and access. Teacher professional associations could be given control of this, through grants to them for this specific purpose. This could be in languages as well as cultural studies.

Supporting an Asia capability specialist in every region would be another mechanism, which would require work with the regional directors to identify and upskill relevant staff. A bonus payment for this role would assist, as would all the ideas above to provide greater skills.

A special program for in-country experience aimed specifically at staff at regional, rural and remote schools and universities would ensure more direct contact in Asia, with huge benefits for the whole school community.

Sibling school partnerships, communicating online, live, are also highly valuable.

Bilingual preschools to support an Asian language for 3–5-year-olds would be welcomed and achievable in regions and rural areas with relatively few resources. Bilingual preschool programs have well-established models, and provide a platform for ongoing language learning and understanding the importance of languages and cultures. Connecting with Asian languages and cultures would well-prepare children for school learning and Asia capabilities.

Provide equitable access for students in regional, rural, and remote areas to resources such as picture books, children’s literature, and textbooks through the implementation of mobile library services.

Provide increased opportunities for schools in regional, rural, and remote areas to access immersive language learning environments, such as the Nihongo Tanken Centre located at Kirrawee High School in Sydney, enabling students to engage in authentic Asian languages and cultural experiences.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning Asian languages and cultures in the education system?

There are no disadvantages- provided teaching is at an acceptable standard. There may be more or less willingness of school communities to embrace particular languages, but experience tells us when Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, local community languages (Indian languages, Thai, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Pacifica languages etc.) are introduced and taught well, there are high levels of embracing that language and culture by the school community. This is the case even when other languages had been taught at schools previously. Ideally, more than one language is available, so that if there is strong community support for particular languages, more than one can be included, but this is not necessary in every school.

Advantages are manifest. Increasing Asia literacy and capability through languages learning from the early years will certainly yield national benefits- as well as benefits for every child, school and community. Sufficient learning time will be necessary for meaningful outcomes, which could include Languages contributing to Literacy block/hours, and using Content and Language Integrate Learning (CLIL) models would hugely increase exposure, use and progression in Asian languages, which of itself would yield incredible Asian cultural knowledge gains.

Each language is different and requires different approaches, but all can be learned effectively by school children and young children in preschool contexts.

3. What factors have influenced the negative perceptions of parents and students towards learning an Asian language and culture?

a. How can the school system change negative attitudes?

Factors that influence negative perceptions towards Asian languages and cultures are complex, but include political circumstances and policies, around, for example, capital punishment, foreign policy, incarceration, and human rights, including those for LGBTQIA+ peoples.

Stereotypical views and static views of culture and historical events such as wars also still abound, and a high level of simply not knowing about the nations and peoples and cultures of Asia is prevalent.

Some perceive that non-alphabetic scripted languages like Chinese are ‘too hard’ for Australian students, and there are certainly – often legitimately – views about languages in the senior years being dominated by first language speakers, so additional language learners can’t compete on a level playing field and achieve high outcomes.

No doubt poor or inadequate teaching of languages and cultures has also had an impact. When languages are not afforded meaningful learning time and frequency, more damage than good can result, with students disengaged, and families wondering why their children can only use the most minimal language after years of seemingly learning the language. If we don’t teach it well, students will remain disengaged and negative perceptions will continue.

Unfortunately, there also remains, even in highly multilingual and multicultural nations, a perception from some that ‘English is enough’, and a very wrong perception that languages take up time that should be dedicated to the ‘basics’. As we know those who speak multiple languages generally perform better on all ‘basics’ testing, we need to work to counter this perception.

In contrast, evidence is available that many parents hold positive perceptions of Asian language learning and are wanting their children to learn an Asian language well. This can influence their selection of schools, for example many bilingual primary schools often have parents travelling a long distance to give students this opportunity, even for many whom the language studied isn’t a language spoken at home.

4. How will the National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia support Asian languages alongside other priorities, such as First Nations Languages?

The National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia includes First Nations, Community and additional languages. It is important to foster and increase learning of First Nations languages, especially in communities where this is the home or mob language. Students being supported to learn their first languages are also entitled to learn an additional language. Asian languages studied as the additional language will allow meeting both priorities.

Priorities around literacy and numeracy, and other 'core' curriculum can all be assisted by and through learning an Asian language. The research literature unequivocally supports the benefits of CLIL teaching, bilingual programs and well taught additional Asian languages for better outcomes across all curriculum areas.

5. What advice has the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association received from the Department of Education regarding the Government's consideration of its report and proposed national plan and strategy?

The Plan remains under consideration, in particular we have asked for priority to be given to the establishment of the National Institute of Languages Education. We are in ongoing discussions with the Australian Department of Education.