Attachment 2: Report on the analysis of student, parent and principal surveys

Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project

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Executive summary

The Australian Government Department of Education commissioned Asia Education Foundation (AEF) to conduct research and report on ways to enable and encourage more secondary students to continue languages education in Year 11 and 12. Known as the 'Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project', the research is part of the Australian Government's 'Strengthening the Australian Curriculum' initiative. AEF has contracted the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to assist in the collection of data from young people (18–25), parents and principals.

This report presents findings from the corresponding online student, parent and principal surveys. The surveys were developed by ACER and AEF, in consultation with stakeholders. The student and parent surveys ran in June-July 2014, and the principal survey ran in August-September 2014.

Student survey

Three hundred and thirty two respondents completed the survey asking them to reflect on their language study at school, of which 304 indicated completing Year 11 or 12 in an Australian school. These 304 students were considered eligible for the analysis. Of these, 266 indicated that languages were offered in Year 11 and 12 in the school they last attended. The results reported here are based on these 266 respondents. The majority (90 per cent) of these respondents were aged 18–22.

Approximately half of students in the sample had studied at least one language at school in Year 11 and 12. Overall, from the perspective of language ability, the sample was skewed towards:

- students who studied a language in Year 11 and 12

- students currently studying a language (38 per cent of respondents)

- students who can speak another language (59 per cent of respondents).

The data from the sample remain useful for the purposes of the current project because the sample could be split readily into: 1) those who studied a language in senior secondary; and 2) those who did not study a language in senior secondary. For 90 per cent of these students, English is their first language. Hence, the results from the survey provide insight into what causes students in Australia to study, or not study, languages in senior secondary (even if the initial sample was not representative).

Some key findings include:

- Language study in Year 11 and 12 was more frequently undertaken by students who had attended secondary schools in capital cities.

- Parents or carers and teachers had the greatest influence on students about their senior secondary subject selection. However, when it came to studying a language in senior secondary, parents had significantly less influence on the choice.

- For students who studied languages in senior secondary, high levels of enjoyment correlate with high levels of achievement and perceptions of ease.

- Students appear to be strategic when it comes to subject selection, considering future studies and career, and how to increase their ATAR.

- ATAR maximisation was a strategic consideration for those who did not study languages in senior secondary (47 per cent at least to 'moderate extent'); it was much less a factor for those who studied a language (25 per cent at least to 'moderate extent').

- Quality of the learning experience is a factor, but not the most important factor, in determining enrolment in senior secondary languages. For those who studied languages it was a very positive influence; for those who did not, lack of enjoyment and non-engaging teaching, topics and materials (31 per cent at least to 'moderate extent') were factors. Only 11 per cent listed teaching as the main reason for stopping enrolment.

- The nature of demand for languages is complex. Those who study languages in senior secondary are generally intrinsically motivated, but other extrinsic and instrumentalist reasons are worth considering. Those who do not study languages are largely motivated by extrinsic and instrumentalist factors, such as ATAR maximisation and usefulness for future study/career.

- Nonetheless, key reasons for studying a language in senior secondary include cognitive advantage (i.e. effective thinking), cross-cultural communication and intercultural understanding.

- Key reasons for not studying a language include a perceived lack of usefulness for future study/career and a language not being part of the ideal combination of subjects for future study, and not because English is the global language or languages are seen as unimportant.

- Not studying a language in Year 11 and 12 correlates with lack of importance placed on language study by parents.

- Not studying a language in Year 11 and 12 is not always due to lack of interest in language study. Nearly half (45 per cent) of those who did not study a language in senior secondary were at least moderately interested in language study at school. This seems to point more to the issue of perceived *utility* of languages, rather than the importance of languages in and of itself. However, lack of interest, when it exists, is reason enough to not study language in Year 11 and 12.

- Some (mostly structural) factors can single-handedly inhibit demand for languages in senior secondary, regardless of the quality of the language learning experience beforehand. Main reasons for not studying languages relate to barriers within a school (offered through distance learning only, not offered, continuity problems) or senior secondary structures such as timetable conflicts. Provision/access is a much bigger issue for regional, rural and remote schools than capital city schools; lack of interest was a greater issue for those who had attended schools in capital cities.

- Students are likely to perceive the lack of direct access to preferred language, or any language, at school as a barrier to language study.

Parent survey

Five hundred and sixty seven parents completed the survey about their children's language study at school. Of these, 534 were considered 'in scope' because they have at least one child currently attending school in Australia.

Fifty eight per cent of respondents speak a language other than English, although the level of daily usage varies. The sample appears skewed towards parents who have at least some fluency in languages apart

from English. This was expected given the subject matter of the survey—which perhaps appealed more to parents who speak more than one language—and the convenience sampling methods.

Nonetheless, the data gathered are useful for the purposes of the current project because the sample could be split into: 1) parents who speak English only; and 2) parents who speak English and another language. The results from the survey provide insights into the different ways in which these two broad groups of parents view languages education for their children (even if the initial sample was non-representative).

Some key findings include:

- Compared with parents who speak English only, parents who speak an additional language more frequently said that they had enjoyed and excelled in their study of a language while at school. This, in turn, correlates to more positive attitudes toward their own children's language learning.

- The language studied by children correlates with parent language background and level of education. Japanese is the most frequently studied language and Italian the next most frequently studied language among the children of parents who speak an additional language. Chinese is the most frequently studied language among children who speak English only. French is the most frequently studied language of children whose parents hold a postgraduate degree. However, other factors such as geolocation, jurisdiction, school type and sector might be influencing this result.

- The vast majority of language study undertaken by the children of parents surveyed occurs through a school, either face-to-face or via distance learning.

- Language study through weekend school and private tuition are more frequent among children of parents who speak an additional language compared with children of parents who speak English only.

- Both parents who speak and those who do not speak an additional language see languages education as important:
    - for their children to study a language in senior secondary
    - for better academic outcomes
    - for their children to get the job they want
    - for their children's intercultural understanding.

- Parents who speak an additional language were much more emphatic about the importance of languages for these reasons.

- The importance placed on various learning areas in Year 11 and 12 differed to some extent according to parents' language background, with the greatest disagreement observed for Languages: 62 per cent of additional language speakers agreed it was very important, compared with 30 per cent of English-only speakers, of whom 27 per cent indicated it was not at all important or of low importance.

- The Languages learning area had the highest percentage of 'not at all important' responses, as stated by English-only speakers, although the overall percentage is quite small at 7 per cent.

- For parents who speak an additional language, languages study was seen as important also for their children to get into their post-secondary course of choice.

- Parents who speak English only and those with school or VET as their highest education qualification more frequently believe that studying a language at school is a disadvantage for their children, perceiving other subjects as more important for further study or a career.

Principal survey

Ninety-one principals completed the survey on the study of languages in their schools. These 91 respondents constitute only 23 per cent of the designed sample, but they are distributed across jurisdictions and school sectors so that they reflect the distribution of all schools in Australia. It is not known if principals did not respond because no language is taught in the school, and it is possible that the results may be biased by the potential underrepresentation of schools with no language programmes. Nevertheless, the principals' responses offer valuable insights into their views on language education and reflect many of the students' and parents' responses.

Some key findings, based on the survey respondents, include:

- At least one language is taught in the vast majority of responding secondary schools. School sector is not a factor in whether a school offers a language.

- In the three schools that do not currently offer a language, two do not teach a language because a teacher is not available; in the third school, there is no perceived demand from students or parents for language study.

- Japanese is the most frequently offered language in all schools surveyed and in Government schools. Italian is the most frequently offered language in Catholic schools and French is the most frequently offered language in Independent schools.

- Of the four most frequently offered languages across all schools, two are European (French and Italian) and two are Asian (Japanese and Chinese).

- Most schools offer one or two languages.

- The majority of responding schools that offer language study meet the perceived demand for languages either fully or to a major extent. Principals of schools that offer one or two languages more frequently stated that they met the demand, compared with schools where more languages are offered.

- Principals use a wide variety of techniques to promote language study, including school newsletters, information evenings, and formal and informal discussions among teachers, students and parents.

- The greatest impediment to the provision of languages in schools is access to quality teaching. The structure of the timetable, requirements for the study of other subjects and the lack of demand from students are also important factors.

- One barrier to the provision of languages in schools is the staffing and funding formulae used. Many of the language classes in senior secondary are small and must be combined to ensure the efficient use of teaching resources. This potentially discourages some students to continue their language study.

- To increase student enrolment in language study, principals recommend that university preparation of language teachers be improved, particularly in their learning of classroom management practices. Principals, as well as students and parents, noted that enrolment in languages is enhanced when the language teacher is enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable about the language taught.

- Principals noted that there is not always a match between languages spoken in the community and languages offered for study in school. To encourage demand for language study, principals recommend that schools teach languages that are relevant to the needs of the school community.

Overview

The Australian Government Department of Education has commissioned Asia Education Foundation (AEF) to conduct research and report on ways to enable and encourage more secondary students (in all jurisdictions and sectors) to continue languages education in Year 11 and 12. Known as the 'Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project', the research is part of the Australian Government's 'Strengthening the Australian Curriculum' initiative. AEF has contracted the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to assist in the collection of data from young people (18–25), parents and principals.

This report presents findings from the corresponding online student, parent and principal surveys. The surveys were developed by ACER and AEF, in consultation with stakeholders. The student and parent surveys ran in June–July 2014, and the principal survey ran in August–September 2014.

Student survey

Background information

Young people (18–25) were invited to complete a short online survey on their past experiences of language study at school in Australia, focusing in particular on the factors that influenced their enrolment, or non-enrolment, in languages at senior secondary level.

The survey comprised mostly closed-response items and a small number of open-ended questions inviting students to elaborate on factors influencing their enrolment, or otherwise, in languages in Year 11 and 12.

Convenience sampling was used considering time and resource constraints of generating a random sample. The target group was reached mainly via social media with the assistance of youth associations/ organisations and universities. AEF networks were also used. Detailed survey dissemination information can be found in Appendix 1.

Overall, 445 young people attempted the survey. Of these, 113 did not complete the survey and were deemed 'not in scope'. Of the remaining 332, 28 indicated that they had not attended an Australian school for Year 11 or 12 and were also deemed 'not in scope'. A further 38 students stated that their school did not offer language study in Year 11 and 12 and were also deemed 'not in scope'.

Of the 266 in-scope students, 73 students were male, 189 were female, and four students provided no response on their gender. More than 90 per cent of the students were aged between 18 and 22 years.

More than 90 per cent of students indicated that English is their first language; 26 students indicated that another language was their first language spoken. One hundred and forty one students (59 per cent) reported that they speak an additional language. Of these 141 students, only 15 per cent indicated that they speak that language poorly.

The greatest number of students had attended school in Victoria (Vic) (47 per cent), followed by Queensland (Qld) (23 per cent), New South Wales (NSW) (11 per cent) and South Australia (SA) (9 per cent). Western Australia (WA), Tasmania (Tas), the Northern Territory (NT) and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) each recorded less than 5 per cent of respondents. Most students (59 per cent) had attended a school in a capital city, followed by 33 per cent from regional location and 8 per cent from rural or remote location. Half of students had attended a Government school, 29 per cent had attended an Independent school and 21 per cent had attended a Catholic school. Compared with the national proportion of school sectors, Catholic and (even more so) Independent schools are over-represented in the sample of this survey.

More than one-third of respondents – 101 students, or 38 per cent – reported that they are currently studying a language via various formal and informal modes. Sixty five per cent of students indicated that they had at least two friends at school who could speak a language fluently, and 64 per cent indicated that they had at least two friends at school who were not born in Australia.

Background information on the student respondents is presented in Appendix 3.

Influences on students' decision-making

Students rated six items identifying important influences on their subject choices for Year 11 and 12. These items used a four-point scale, from 1 for 'not at all' to 4 indicating 'to a major extent'. Two items – one referring to the influence of parents or carers, the other one on the influence of teacher(s) at school – received approval rates of over 50 per cent, indicating that these people had at least moderate impact on them when making decisions about what to study. Other members of their family and career counsellors had much less impact on their decision making (see Table1).

Table 1: Influences students consider when choosing subjects for Year 11 and 12

Influence	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
My parents or carers	19.3	29.5	37.9	13.3	264
Other members of my family	52.7	29.8	15.6	1.9	262
A teacher or teachers at my school	11.0	31.8	42.0	15.2	264
A career counsellor	52.3	21.7	21.3	4.7	258
My friends	27.9	44.3	25.6	2.3	262
University open days	36.3	26.0	28.2	9.5	262

Influences varied by geolocation[1] of the secondary school the student had attended for Year 11 or 12, as shown in Table 2). More than one-third of students from rural schools (37 per cent) were greatly influenced by their teachers when considering what to study, compared with 13 per cent of those from schools in other locations. Students from rural locations were also less likely than students from other locations to rely on their parents when choosing subjects for Year 11 and 12.

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[1] Geolocation refers to the geographic classification assigned to all Australian schools, as described in the *Schools Geographic Location Classification Scheme* of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA).

Table 2: Influences students consider when choosing subjects for Year 11 and 12, by geolocation of secondary school attended

	Geolocation	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
My parents or carers	Capital	19.2	30.8	39.7	10.3	156
	Regional	20.9	24.4	34.9	19.8	86
	Rural	15.0	40.0	40.0	5.0	20
Other members of my family	Capital	54.8	29	14.2	1.9	155
	Regional	49.4	28.2	20.0	2.4	85
	Rural	55.0	40.0	5.0	0.0	20
A teacher or teachers at my school	Capital	10.9	32.1	42.3	14.7	156
	Regional	12.6	32.2	43.7	11.5	100
	Rural	5.3	26.3	31.6	36.8	19
A career counsellor	Capital	54.5	20.8	20.1	4.5	154
	Regional	48.8	23.2	23.2	4.9	82
	Rural	55.0	25.0	20.0	0.0	20
My friends	Capital	27.7	40.6	29.0	2.6	155
	Regional	28.2	51.8	17.6	2.4	85
	Rural	30.0	35.0	35.0	0.0	20
University open days	Capital	37.8	26.3	28.2	7.7	156
	Regional	35.7	27.4	26.2	10.7	84
	Rural	30.0	10.0	40.0	20.0	20

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Influences also varied by school sector. The greatest differences were between students who had attended Government schools and those who attended Catholic or Independent schools (see Table 3). More than one-quarter of students from Government schools indicated that parents or carers had no influence on decisions about study, compared with one in ten students from non-government schools. However, Government school students said that university open days had a major influence on decisions about what to study more frequently than did students from other schools.

Table 3: Influences students consider when choosing subjects for Year 11 and 12, by school sector

	School type	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
My parents or carers	Government	27.3	31.1	29.5	12.1	132
	Catholic	8.9	19.6	55.4	16.1	56
	Independent	13.2	34.2	39.5	13.2	76
Other members of my family	Government	57.3	27.5	14.5	0.8	131
	Catholic	48.2	30.4	17.9	3.6	56
	Independent	48.0	33.3	16.0	2.7	75
A teacher or teachers at my school	Government	12.9	29.5	43.2	14.4	132
	Catholic	8.9	35.7	37.5	17.9	56
	Independent	9.2	32.9	43.4	14.5	76
A career counsellor	Government	51.2	24.8	19.4	4.7	129
	Catholic	47.3	23.6	25.5	3.6	55
	Independent	58.1	14.9	21.6	5.4	74
My friends	Government	27.5	38.9	31.3	2.3	131
	Catholic	33.9	39.3	23.2	3.6	56
	Independent	24.0	57.3	17.3	1.3	75
University open days	Government	38.5	23.8	23.8	13.8	130
	Catholic	37.5	30.4	28.6	3.6	56
	Independent	31.6	26.3	35.5	6.6	76

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Language study in Year 11 and 12

When in Year 11, all students in the sample had studied at least one subject in the learning area English and more than 90 per cent studied at least one mathematics subject. Forty seven per cent of students did not study a language, 45 per cent studied one language, 8 per cent studied two and 1 per cent studied three. The most frequently studied languages in Year 11 were Japanese, French and Indonesian, with more than one in five language students enrolled in each. Indonesian was studied more frequently in regional, rural and remote locations; Chinese was more frequently studied in capital city locations, although only 7 per cent of students were enrolled in Chinese overall (see Table 4). The survey findings do not indicate any difference by school sector among those who had studied Japanese in Year 11. French was more frequently studied in Independent schools and Italian was studied more frequently by those who had attended Catholic schools.

Table 4: Languages studied in Year 11, by geolocation

Language	Capital city (%)	Regional/ rural/remote (%)	All schools (%)
Chinese	9.9	2.1	7.2
French	25.3	18.8	23.0
German	7.7	10.4	8.6
Indonesian	14.3	33.3	20.9
Italian	12.1	12.5	12.2
Japanese	31.9	25.0	29.5
Other	14.3	8.3	12.2
Count (n)	91	48	139

Note: Students may have studied more than one language, so columns may sum to more than 100 per cent. These figures apply only to the sample and do not represent actual proportions in Australia.

When these students were in Year 12, Japanese was again the most frequently studied language, followed by French and Indonesian, similar to the pattern of languages studied in Year 11 (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: Most frequently studied languages in Year 11 and Year 12.

Year 11

Language	Percentage
Japanese	29%
French	23%
Indonesian	21%
Other	12%
Italian	12%
German	9%
Chinese	7%

Year 12

Language	Percentage
Japanese	30%
Indonesian	23%
French	23%
Italian	13%
German	9%
Other	8%
Chinese	8%

Note: These figures apply only to the sample and do not represent actual proportions in Australia.

In Year 12, Indonesian was studied more frequently in regional, rural and remote schools, and Chinese and French more frequently in schools in capital cities (see

Table 5). German was more frequently studied in Government schools and Italian in Catholic schools (see Table 6). Japanese was studied across all school sectors.

Table 5: Languages studied in Year 12, by geolocation

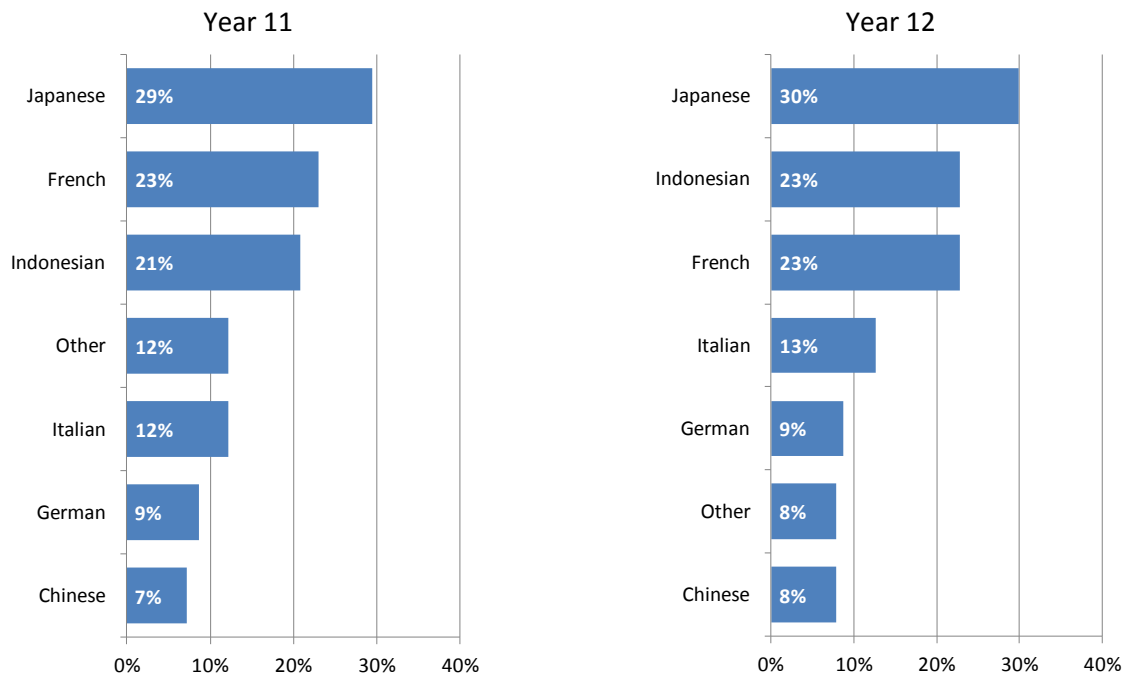| Language	Capital city (%)	Regional/ rural/remote (%)	All schools (%)
Chinese	10.8	2.3	7.9
French	26.5	15.9	22.8
German	7.2	11.4	8.7
Indonesian	15.7	36.4	22.8
Italian	12.0	13.6	12.6
Japanese	31.3	27.3	29.9
Other	8.4	6.8	7.9
Count (n)	83	44	127

Note: Students may have studied more than one language, so columns may sum to more than 100 per cent. These figures apply only to the sample and do not represent actual proportions in Australia.

Table 6: Languages studied in Year 12, by school sector

Language	Government (%)	Catholic (%)	Independent (%)	All schools (%)
Chinese	10.3	3.6	7.3	7.9
French	15.5	25.0	31.7	22.8
German	15.5	0.0	4.9	8.7
Indonesian	29.3	7.1	24.4	22.8
Italian	5.2	42.9	2.4	12.6
Japanese	27.6	32.1	31.7	29.9
Other	5.2	7.1	12.2	7.9
Count (n)	58	28	41	127

Note: Students may have studied more than one language, so columns may sum to more than 100 per cent. These figures apply only to the sample and do not represent actual proportions in Australia.

Students' experiences and background in the language studied in senior secondary

Of those students who had studied a language in Year 11 and 12, more than one quarter (29 per cent) had a 'strong background' in that language and 42 per cent had visited the country where the language was spoken for at least one month, although it is not known if that visit had occurred before, during or after

studying the language. Fifteen per cent of those who had studied a language at school stated that they had native speaker fluency. These factors are not mutually exclusive.
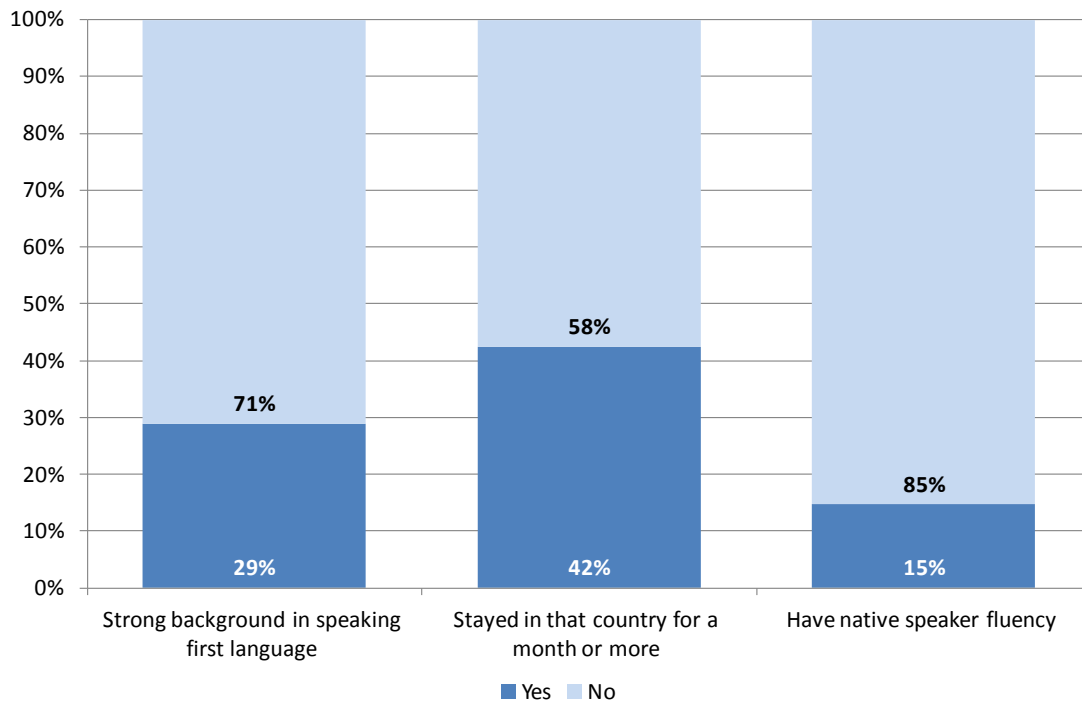

Figure 2: Students' experiences and background in the language studied in senior secondary

Reasons for studying a language at senior secondary

Students responded to eight items to describe their reasons for studying a language in Year 11 and 12. The ratings were on a four-point scale with 1 indicating 'not at all' and 4 indicating 'to a major extent'. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 7. The first six items in the table cover predominantly extrinsic reward or motivation and the last two items cover predominantly intrinsic reward or motivation.

On the two intrinsic items, between 59 and 78 per cent of students agreed to a moderate or major extent. Only on one of the six extrinsic items, in relation to effective thinking, a higher proportion of students (85 per cent) agreed to at least a moderate extent; the other extrinsic items received clearly less approval. Based on this sample of students, it appears that intrinsic motivation is more important for students studying a language, and extrinsic motivation is important only when it is perceived to bring cognitive advantage.

The importance of intrinsic motivation for students who choose to study a language has also been demonstrated in the responses to the ATAR/OP question. ATAR maximisation was found to be a relatively minor reason (25 per cent at least to 'moderate extent') for studying languages in senior secondary. However, it was a much more important factor for those who decided not study languages (47 per cent at least to 'moderate extent', see Table 13).

Table 7: Students' reasons for studying a language in Year 11 and 12

Extrinsic motivation

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
Many of my friends were in my language classes.	22.9	38.9	27.8	10.4	144
It was important for my parents that I studied a language at school.	54.9	24.3	13.2	7.6	144
My decision to study a language at school was influenced by my career plans.	38.2	23.6	21.5	16.7	144
I was inspired to study a language because of a multilingual person who I admire.	38.9	33.3	14.6	13.2	144
If a person can speak more than one language, they will, on average, be more effective thinkers.	1.9	13.5	46.2	38.5	104
I chose to study a language in Year 12 because the language bonus would help my ATAR/OP score.	45.0	30.0	12.5	12.5	40

Intrinsic motivation

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
I thought learning a language might be useful in my daily life (eg, in communicating with friends, watching movies, travelling or researching hobbies).	9.6	31.7	26.0	32.7	104
I thought learning a language would help me get skills to understand people from different backgrounds.	6.7	15.4	27.9	50.0	104

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

There was no difference in reasons for studying a language based on the geolocation of students' schools, but there were differences by school sector (see Table 8). These differences were apparent in the item regarding the utility of learning another language ('I thought learning a language might be useful in my daily life'): 44 per cent of students who had attended Government schools agreed to at least a moderate extent, compared with 71 per cent of students from Catholic and Independent schools. In response to the item regarding understanding people from different backgrounds, nearly all of those who had attended Catholic schools (95 per cent) agreed, compared with 74 per cent of those from Government and Independent schools.

Table 8: Reasons for studying a language in Year 11 and 12

	School sector	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
Many of my friends were in my language classes.	Government	25.0	42.2	23.4	9.4	64
	Catholic	18.8	40.6	28.1	12.5	32
	Independent	22.9	33.3	33.3	10.4	48
It was important for my parents that I studied a language at school.	Government	60.9	20.3	9.4	9.4	64
	Catholic	50.0	18.8	25.0	6.2	32
	Independent	50.0	33.3	10.4	6.2	48
My decision to study a language at school was influenced by my career plans.	Government	40.6	21.9	23.4	14.1	64
	Catholic	37.5	25.0	21.9	15.6	32
	Independent	35.4	25.0	18.8	20.8	48
I was inspired to study a language because of a multilingual person who I admire.	Government	37.5	29.7	15.6	17.2	64
	Catholic	34.4	34.4	12.5	18.8	32
	Independent	43.8	37.5	14.6	4.2	48
If a person can speak more than one language, they will, on average, be more effective thinkers.	Government	2.1	12.5	50.0	35.4	48
	Catholic	4.8	9.5	42.9	42.9	21
	Independent	0.0	17.1	42.9	40.0	35
I chose to study Year 12 of a language because the language bonus would help my ATAR/OP score.	Government	31.2	31.2	12.5	25.0	16
	Catholic	63.6	18.2	18.2	0.0	11
	Independent	46.2	38.5	7.7	7.7	13
I thought learning a language might be useful in my daily life (eg, in communicating with friends, watching movies, travelling or researching hobbies).	Government	16.7	39.6	14.6	29.2	48
	Catholic	0.0	28.6	28.6	42.9	21
	Independent	5.7	22.9	40.0	31.4	35
I thought learning a language would help me get skills to understand people from different backgrounds.	Government	10.4	18.8	29.2	41.7	48
	Catholic	0.0	4.8	33.3	61.9	21
	Independent	5.7	17.1	22.9	54.3	35

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Other differences by school sector relate to contact with speakers of additional languages. There were also differences in whether students perceived that studying a language would provide extra points on their ATAR or OP, but the numbers of students who answered this item were small and these differences are not significant.

Students' perceptions of their language teachers in their last year of language study in Year 11 or 12

Students who had studied a language in Year 11 and 12 were asked to consider four statements about the language teacher in the last year they studied a language at school, in Year 11 or 12. The four items used a four-point scale, with 1 indicating 'not at all' and 4 indicating 'to a major extent'. The results are presented in Table 9. Overall, the students were very positive about their language teachers. There were no substantive differences by geolocation or by school sector.

Table 9: Students' perceptions of their language teachers in their last year of language study (Year 11 or 12)

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
The teacher showed an interest in every student.	4.9	13.2	30.6	51.4	144
The teacher helped students with their learning.	3.5	12.5	28.5	55.6	144
The teacher made sure that every student could understand new material.	4.2	14.6	37.5	43.8	144
There was a good relationship between the class and the teacher.	5.6	9.7	20.1	64.6	144

Students' general interest and ability in the language they studied in senior secondary

Students considered four items regarding their interest and ability in studying their chosen senior secondary language while at school and not just when they were in Year 11 and 12. The four items used a four-point scale, with 1 indicating 'not at all' and 4 indicating 'to a major extent'. Close to 90 per cent of students who had studied a language in Year 11 and 12 enjoyed their study of a language while at school to a moderate or major extent. One in ten students said that learning a language at school was not easy at all, and almost 30 per cent found it at least challenging. The distribution of responses is shown in

Table 10.

Table 10: Students' general interest and ability in their chosen language of study

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
I enjoyed studying a language at school.	4.9	6.9	27.8	60.4	144
I used to look forward to my languages classes at school.	6.9	10.4	33.3	49.3	144
When I was studying languages at school I used to receive good grades.	4.2	10.5	31.5	53.8	143
Learning a language at school was easy for me.	9.7	18.8	36.1	35.4	144

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

For students who studied languages in senior secondary, high levels of enjoyment in the language studied correlate with high levels of achievement and perceptions of ease.

There were no differences by geolocation in students' perceptions of their interests and abilities but there were some minor differences by school sector. Students who had attended Catholic schools were more positive about their language study, compared with students who had attended other schools. Fifteen per cent of those who had attended Independent schools said that learning a language was not easy, with more than one-third seeing it at least as challenging (see

Table 11).

Table 11: Students' general interest and ability in their chosen language of study, by school sector

	School sector	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
I enjoyed studying a language at school.	Government	7.8	4.7	29.7	57.8	64
	Catholic	0.0	3.1	18.8	78.1	32
	Independent	4.2	12.5	31.2	52.1	48
I used to look forward to my languages classes at school.	Government	10.9	10.9	32.8	45.3	64
	Catholic	0.0	9.4	18.8	71.9	32
	Independent	6.2	10.4	43.8	39.6	48
When I was studying a language at school I used to receive good grades.	Government	6.2	9.4	31.2	53.1	64
	Catholic	0.0	9.4	21.9	68.8	32
	Independent	4.3	12.8	38.3	44.7	47
Learning a language at school was easy for me.	Government	7.8	18.8	42.2	31.2	64
	Catholic	6.2	18.8	34.4	40.6	32
	Independent	14.6	18.8	29.2	37.6	48

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Table 12: Students' perceptions of their results of secondary school language study, by school sector

School sector	Not as well as most (%)	About the same as most (%)	A little better than most (%)	A lot better than most (%)	Count (n)
Government	10.9	17.2	31.2	40.6	64
Catholic	3.1	18.8	25.0	53.1	32
Independent	10.4	25.0	33.3	31.2	48
All schools	9.0	20.1	30.6	40.3	144

Reasons for not studying a language at senior secondary

As noted earlier, 120 respondents indicated that they did not study languages in Year 11 and 12. These students were asked 13 questions relating to reasons for not studying a language. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 13. The most frequently cited reasons relate to students' perceptions about what was required for their future study or careers, which could be considered strategic or instrumentalist. Other, non-language subjects were seen as either required or more important than a language. There were no differences in reasons for not studying a language by geolocation. Among school sectors, the only

differences relate to the ability of a school to offer a language. Compared with students who had attended Catholic or Independent schools, respondents who had attended Government schools more frequently said that student numbers were too low to offer a language or that a language teacher was not available.

Importantly, not studying a language at senior secondary correlates with lack of importance placed on language study by parents. It is also noteworthy how 'lack of interest' is not the big issue for non-enrolment; in fact, 45 per cent of those who did not study a language at senior secondary were at least moderately interested. This seems to point more to the issue of perceived *utility* of languages, rather than the importance of languages in and of itself.

Table 13: Reasons for not studying a language at senior secondary

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
I needed to take other subjects for the tertiary education course I was interested in.	28.3	22.5	24.2	25.0	120
I chose not to study a language as an elective because I thought other subjects would be easier.	42.9	19.3	24.4	13.4	119
I chose not to study a language as an elective because I thought other subjects would be more useful for my future studies.	14.3	19.3	30.3	36.1	119
I chose not to study a language as an elective because I thought other subjects would be more useful for my future career.	19.3	15.1	33.6	31.9	119
It was important for my parents that I studied a language at school.	81.2	11.1	6.0	1.7	117
I was interested in studying a language while at school.	26.1	29.4	26.1	18.5	119
I chose not to study a language as an elective because I thought other subjects would be more enjoyable.	31.9	20.2	24.4	23.5	119
I chose subjects in Year 12 which maximised my ATAR/OP.	33.1	20.3	29.7	16.9	118
I chose not to study a language because English is the global language so I don't need to learn another language.	65.5	24.4	7.6	2.5	119
I was not able to study a language because there were not enough students to make up a class.	67.2	10.9	10.1	11.8	119

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
I was not able to study a language because there were no teachers in the school available to teach it.	76.7	9.2	5.8	8.3	120
I chose not to study a language because the teaching did not engage me.	49.6	19.3	13.4	17.6	119
I chose not to study a language because the topics and materials used in previous study did not engage me.	39.5	29.4	15.1	16.0	119

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Students who did not study a language in Year 11 and 12 were also asked to describe the main reason for not studying a language at senior secondary. Their responses may have referred to one of the 13 items cited above, or it could have been a new reason. Responses were received from 113 of the 120 students who did not study a language. There was no clear-cut main reason offered by students, although the most frequently cited reasons concerned the availability of a language subject of choice and interest in studying a language.

Provision issues were more frequently cited among those who had attended school in regional, rural and remote locations. Students who had attended schools in a capital city more frequently said that they were not interested in studying a language or other subjects were more important (see

Table 14).

Table 14: Main reason for not studying a language at senior secondary, by geolocation

	Capital city (%)	Regional (%)	Rural and remote (%)	All locations (%)
Too difficult	11.7	7.1	0.0	8.8
Not useful for career/study	10.0	7.1	10.0	8.8
Not as important as other subjects	15.0	2.4	0.0	8.8
Low ATAR	3.3	9.5	10.0	6.2
Not interested	20.0	11.9	10.0	15.9
Only distance available	1.7	7.1	20.0	5.3
Continuity problems	3.3	11.9	10.0	7.1
Language not offered	11.7	23.8	20.0	16.8
Teacher perception	13.3	9.5	10.0	11.5
Other	10.0	9.5	10.0	10.6
Count (n)	60	42	10	113

Note: Geolocation was not available for one respondent.

There were also some differences by school sector. Students who had attended Independent schools most frequently believed that studying a language was too difficult and not as important as other subjects. Students who had attended Government schools cited the teacher as a factor and lack of interest more frequently than students from non-Government schools, and students who had attended Catholic schools cited the lack of language offerings most frequently (see

Table 15).

Table 15: Main reason for not studying a language at senior secondary, by school sector

	Government (%)	Catholic (%)	Independent (%)	All locations (%)
Too difficult	6.2	9.1	15.4	8.8
Not useful for career/study	9.2	9.1	7.7	8.8
Not as important as other subjects	4.6	4.6	23.1	8.8
Low ATAR	3.1	13.6	7.7	6.2
Not interested	18.5	13.6	11.5	15.9
Only distance available	9.2	0.0	0.0	5.3
Continuity problems	6.2	9.1	7.7	7.1
Language not offered	16.9	27.3	7.7	16.8
Teacher perception	16.9	4.6	3.9	11.5
Other	9.2	9.1	15.4	10.6
Count (n)	65	22	26	113

Students not studying a language in Year 11 and 12: Perceptions of their teachers in Year 12

Students who did not study a language at senior secondary were asked to consider four statements about all of their teachers in the last year they were at school. The four items used a four-point scale, with 1 indicating 'not at all' and 4 indicating 'to a major extent'. The resulting statistics were useful to cross-check if students' perception of their teachers was unique to languages or otherwise.

Overall, students were positive about their teachers in general, with the most positive responses saved for the teacher-student relationship (see Table 16). There were no differences in these perceptions by geolocation of the school attended.

Table 16: Students not studying a language: perceptions of their teachers in Year 12

	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
Every teacher I had showed an interest in every student.	5.8	20.8	50.8	22.5	120
Every teacher I had helped students with their learning.	4.2	15.3	50.8	29.7	118
Every teacher I had made sure that every student could understand new material.	5.9	26.1	47.1	21.0	119
There was a good relationship between the class and the teachers I had.	2.5	9.2	42.9	45.4	119

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Students who had attended Catholic schools were more reserved than those who had attended Government or Independent schools about making clear-cut positive or negative judgements of their teachers, tending to select 'to a minor extent' or 'to a moderate extent'.

There was little difference in perceptions between those who had attended Government schools and those who had attended Independent schools, except that 10 per cent of those who had attended Government schools noted that not every teacher showed an interest in every student (see Table 17).

Table 17: Students not studying a language: perceptions of teachers in Year 12, by school sector

	School sector	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	Count (n)
Every teacher I had showed an interest in every student.	Government	10.1	20.3	46.4	23.2	69
	Catholic	0.0	25.0	62.5	12.5	24
	Independent	0.0	18.5	51.9	29.6	27
Every teacher I had helped students with their learning.	Government	6.0	19.4	43.3	31.3	67
	Catholic	0.0	8.3	75.0	16.7	24
	Independent	3.7	11.1	48.1	37	27
Every teacher I had made sure that every student could understand new material.	Government	8.7	29.0	40.6	21.7	69
	Catholic	0.0	29.2	58.3	12.5	24
	Independent	3.8	15.4	53.8	26.9	26
There was a good relationship between the class and the teachers I had.	Government	2.9	13.0	34.8	49.3	69
	Catholic	0.0	0.0	70.8	29.2	24
	Independent	3.8	7.7	38.5	50	26

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

Parent survey

Background information

Parents with at least one child attending a school in Australia were recruited to participate in the survey through the Australian Parents Council (APC), the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and AEF networks. Convenience sampling was used considering time and resource constraints to generating a random sample.

In addition, random sampling of parents is difficult to achieve for a topic that is essentially skewed towards those who speak a language in addition to English. Nonetheless, as explained previously, the usefulness of the resulting data set has not been compromised.

There were 684 respondents overall, of whom 117 did not complete the survey and an additional 33 did not have a child attending a school in Australia. Because the focus of the survey was on parents' attitudes to their children's languages education in general, it was not deemed necessary to sample only parents with at least one child attending senior secondary in Australia. However, all respondents were asked to consider the importance of their child studying a language in Year 11 and 12.

This section contains information on the 534 respondents who were considered in scope for the survey. Information on the parent recruitment sources can be found in Appendix 2.

Respondents were from all jurisdictions in Australia, with Vic the best represented (32 per cent). Of all respondents, 58 per cent speak a language in addition to English. In Vic, ACT and NSW, 63–64 per cent of respondents speak an additional language. In Tas and WA, the proportion is less than half. The jurisdictional distribution of parent respondents is shown in Table 18.

Table 18: Parent respondents by jurisdiction and language background

Jurisdiction	Speak an additional language (n)	Speak English only (n)	Additional language speakers (% of all parents)	Distribution of language speakers (% of all language speakers)
ACT	27	15	64.3	9.0
NSW	59	35	62.8	19.7
NT	6	5	54.5	2.0
Qld	38	35	52.1	12.7
SA	37	29	56.1	12.4
Tas	9	11	45.0	3.0
Vic	95	53	64.2	31.8
WA	28	32	46.7	9.4
Australia	299	215	58.2	100.0

Note: 20 responses had missing values.

Seventy-nine per cent of respondents were female (which was expected given the convenience sampling method and topic of the survey). There was no difference in the proportion of males and females with regards to their language background.

In the survey sample, parents who speak an additional language were more highly educated than were parents who speak English only (see Table 19). Approximately half of all parents hold a bachelor degree, but a greater percentage of parents who speak an additional language (36 per cent) hold a masters degree or doctorate, compared with 19 per cent of those who speak English only.

Table 19: Parent respondents' highest level of education, by language background

	Speak an additional language (%)	Speak English only (%)
Year 11 or below	0.6	5.5
Year 12	0.6	6.4
Traineeship or apprenticeship	1.0	2.7
TAFE qualification	4.5	11.4
Bachelor degree	49.7	52.1
Masters degree	30.6	15.1
Doctorate	5.2	3.7
Other	7.7	3.2
All education levels (n)	310	219

Note: Five responses had missing values.

Overall, 83 per cent of parents reported that their children are studying a language. There is no difference between parents who speak a language in addition to English and those who do not in whether their children are studying a language.

There is an interesting relationship between parent education level and children studying a language. Among those who have no tertiary qualification (i.e. bachelor degree or higher), 88 per cent have children studying a language, compared with 81 per cent of those with a bachelor degree. The difference is related to language background (see

Table 20). All parents with school or VET as their highest education level and who speak an additional language have children studying another language.

Table 20: Parent respondents and children's language study, by language background and by education level

	Language background (%)		Education level (%)		
	Speak an additional language	Speak English only	School/ VET	Bachelor	Post-graduate
A child is studying a language	83.0	82.7	88.2	80.8	83.7
No child is studying a language	17.0	17.3	11.8	19.2	16.3
Number of responses	311	220	85	292	153

Note: Three responses regarding language background had missing values; four responses regarding education level had missing values.

Not all parent respondents studied a language when they were at school. Of those who did study a language, those who report that they speak another language more commonly reported that they enjoyed their language study while at school than did those who do not speak a language (see Table 21).

Of those who speak an additional language, 63 per cent said that they had enjoyed studying a language to a major extent while at school, compared with 34 per cent of those who do not speak an additional language. Of those who only speak English, 9 per cent did not like studying a language 'at all', compared with 4 per cent of additional language speakers.

Furthermore, additional language speakers reported more commonly than English-only speakers that they had 'excelled' in their study of languages: more than 80 per cent of additional language speakers said that they excelled in the study of languages to a moderate or major extent, compared with just under half of English-only speakers. It is not known if the language studied was the language spoken at home.

Table 21: Parent respondents' comments about their own study of a language at school, by language background

	Parent language background	Not at all (%)	To a minor extent (%)	To a moderate extent (%)	To a major extent (%)
I enjoyed studying a language at school in Australia	Speak another language	4.2	7.5	25.7	62.6
	English only	8.7	23.3	34.3	33.7
I excelled in my study of languages at school in Australia	Speak another language	3.8	12.9	37.3	45.9
	English only	27.8	22.5	36.7	13.0

There is a minor relationship between parent education level and the enjoyment of language study when at school. Parents with a bachelor degree more frequently indicated that they enjoyed studying a language

while at school and that they excelled in that study. However, there was little difference between those with a bachelor degree and those with postgraduate qualifications.

A greater difference was observed between those whose highest qualification was school, a VET certificate or a trade qualification and those who had completed a higher education degree. Those with school or a VET qualification more frequently indicated that they did not enjoy studying a language at all. Similarly, those with a school or VET qualification gave a lower assessment of their own achievement in language study while at school (see Table 22). The results indicate that parent respondents' perceptions of their own language study have little influence on whether their children are currently studying a language.

Table 22: Parent respondents' comments about their own study of a language at school, by education level

	Parent education level	Did not study a language at school	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent
I enjoyed studying a language at school in Australia	School/VET	35.3	16.1	23.2	37.5	23.2
	Bachelor	23.3	3.5	12.4	27.4	56.6
	Postgraduate	33.0	6.8	14.6	30.1	48.5
I excelled in my study of languages at school in Australia	School/VET	35.3	17.6	12.9	25.9	7.1
	Bachelor	23.3	9.9	11.6	27.7	26.7
	Postgraduate	33.0	7.8	13.1	24.2	21.6

Note: Responses for 'not at all' to 'to a major extent' sum to 100 per cent; the percentage who did not study a language at school is based on the full sample.

Languages studied by children

Parent respondents were asked which of the six focus languages their children were studying. Overall, 257 parents who speak an additional language and 179 of English-only speakers have children studying at least one language. Among the children of those who speak an additional language, one-third of those studying a language are studying more than one language. Among the children of those who speak English only, 11 per cent of those studying a language are studying more than one language.

The children of additional language speakers who are studying a language most commonly study Japanese (28 per cent) and Italian (27 per cent). The children of English-only speakers who are studying a language most commonly study Japanese (30 per cent) and Chinese (25 per cent) (see

Table 23).

Table 23: Languages studied by children of parent respondents, by parent language background

Language studied	Speak an additional language		Speak English only	
	n	%	N	%
Chinese	41	16.0	44	24.6
French	55	21.4	32	17.9
German	48	18.7	14	7.8
Indonesian	31	12.1	21	11.7
Italian	70	27.2	26	14.5
Japanese	71	27.6	54	30.2
Another language	26	10.1	7	3.9
Total	257	100.0	179	100.0
Studying more than one language	85	33.1	19	10.6

There were also differences in the language studied by children according to parent education level, as shown in Table 24. Even though Japanese is the most commonly studied language overall, this is not the case for those students whose parents hold a postgraduate qualification; French and Chinese are more frequently studied by these young people. The children of parents whose highest education level is school or a VET qualification most frequently study Japanese, followed by Italian.

Table 24: Languages studied by children of parent respondents, by parent education level

Language studied	School/VET		Bachelor		Postgraduate	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Chinese	15	20.5	39	16.6	32	25.2
French	9	12.3	44	18.7	34	26.8
German	6	8.2	32	13.6	25	19.7
Indonesian	5	6.8	35	14.9	12	9.4
Italian	19	26.0	53	22.6	22	17.3
Japanese	22	30.1	75	31.9	28	22.0
Another language	4	5.5	14	6.0	15	11.8
Total	73	100.0	235	100.0	127	100.0
Studying more than one language	12	16.0	57	24.2	26	20.3

Overwhelmingly, languages are being studied at school. Among parents who speak an additional language, 14 per cent have children who are studying a language at a weekend school, compared with fewer than 2

per cent of English-only speakers. For the sample, the languages most commonly studied at weekend school are Chinese (32 per cent of those studying Chinese) and German (29 per cent).

Of parents who speak an additional language, 100 per cent of those studying Italian are studying at school, with 16 per cent also studying Italian at weekend school and 3 per cent in private tuition. In addition, 89 per cent of children studying Japanese are studying at school, 14 per cent at weekend school and 6 per cent through private tuition. It is clear from these figures that the children of parents who speak an additional language engage in language study at more than one location. Among the children of English-only speakers, nearly all language learning occurs at school (see Table 25).

Table 25: Modes of study for languages studied by respondents' children, by parent language background

Language background	Language child is studying	Mode of study				n
		At school (%)	Weekend school (%)	Private tuition (%)	Another location (%)	
Speak an additional language	Chinese	92.7	31.7	9.8	9.8	41
	French	98.2	9.1	3.6	10.9	55
	German	91.7	29.2	6.2	6.2	48
	Indonesian	93.5	9.7	9.7	12.9	31
	Italian	100.0	15.7	2.9	8.6	70
	Japanese	88.7	14.1	5.6	9.9	71
	Another language	84.6	26.9	15.4	26.9	26
	Total	93.8	14.0	4.7	8.2	257
Speak English only	Chinese	95.5	6.8	6.8	2.3	44
	French	93.8	3.1	9.4	6.2	32
	German	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	14
	Indonesian	100.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	21
	Italian	100.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	26
	Japanese	98.1	0.0	1.9	1.9	54
	Another language	85.7	0.0	0.0	14.3	7
	Total	97.2	1.7	3.4	2.8	179

Note: Parents could identify more than one language and more than one location, which results in rows summing to more than 100 per cent and the right column summing to more than the reported totals.

Parents' attitudes to language study

There is a marked difference between parents who are additional language speakers and those who are not when discussing the benefits of language study for their children. Additional language speakers more

frequently than English-only speakers believe it is important for their children to learn a language and to do so at school, and that learning a language helps students in other school subjects. They also more frequently indicated language learning as important for developing understanding of their own and other cultures (see

Table 26).

Table 26: Parents' attitudes toward their children's language study, by language background

	Lang. bkgd.	Not at all (%)	Minor extent (%)	Mod. Extent (%)	Major extent (%)	NA	Count
It is important that my child learns a language	Additional language	0.6	2.6	8.7	88.1	0.0	311
	English	9.7	7.4	25.3	57.6	0.0	217
Language is an important subject for my child to study at school	Additional language	1.9	3.5	12.6	81.3	0.6	310
	English	12.4	9.7	24.0	53.9	0.0	217
It is important that my child studies a language in Year 11 and 12	Additional language	3.9	9.3	27.0	59.2	0.6	311
	English	27.3	15.3	29.6	27.3	0.5	216
By studying another language students learn important skills that help them in the other subjects that they study	Additional language	1.9	3.5	14.5	80.0	0.0	310
	English	11.5	16.6	22.1	48.8	0.9	217
Learning a language will be important in helping my child get the job they want	Additional language	2.6	18.2	45.6	31.6	2.0	307
	English	20.6	25.8	34.0	18.7	1.0	209
Learning a language is useful for developing skills to understand other cultures	Additional language	0.7	2.9	8.1	88.3	0.0	307
	English	4.8	12.4	24.4	58.4	0.0	209
Language learning is useful for my child to understand his or her own culture	Additional language	2.6	4.3	19.0	74.1	0.0	305
	English	19.2	17.3	30.8	31.2	1.4	208
Studying a language will improve the chances of my child entering the postsecondary course they want to do	Additional language	9.4	19.5	32.9	34.5	3.6	307
	English	31.1	20.1	27.3	17.7	3.8	209

Note: The number of missing responses varies by questionnaire item.

In addition, parents were asked if the study of a language would disadvantage their children. Eighty per cent of parents who speak an additional language said that it would not be a disadvantage, compared with 63 per cent of English-only speakers (see Table 27). In addition, among those parents whose highest level of education is school or VET, 26 per cent believe that language study would disadvantage their children, compared with less than 10 per cent of other parents.

Parents with school or VET as their highest education qualification and who speak an additional language, however, indicate much stronger support for their children's language study than their counterparts who speak English only.

Table 27: Parents' comments about language study being a disadvantage for their children, by language background and by education level

	Language background		Education level		
	Speak an additional language (%)	Speak English only (%)	School/ VET (%)	Bachelor (%)	Post-graduate (%)
Studying a language would be a disadvantage	6.4	21.1	25.9	10.7	8.5
Studying a language would not be a disadvantage	80.1	62.8	51.8	76.9	76.5
I'm not sure	13.5	16.1	22.4	12.4	15.0
Count	311	218	85	290	153

Note: Five responses regarding language background had missing values; 6 responses regarding education level had missing values.

Parents also provided reasons for the perceived disadvantage via an open-ended question. A coded version of these reasons is shown in

Table 28. The most common reason compared the study of languages to other subjects in the curriculum: most felt studying a language was not as important. More than half of those with school or VET as their highest education qualification said that other subjects were more important than languages, as did 42 per cent of those who speak English only. The 'other' category, which is high for those parents who speak an additional language and for those with a post-graduate qualification, includes concerns about the starting point for language study ('They should start earlier, for example Year 7, and continue through to Year 12') or school timetable conflicts.

Table 28: Parents' reasons about the disadvantage of language study, by language background and by education level

	Language background		Education level		
	Speak an additional language (%)	Speak English only (%)	School/ VET (%)	Bachelor (%)	Post-graduate (%)
Too difficult/stressful	5.6	16.3	15.0	17.9	0.0
Not useful for career or university	5.6	14.0	5.0	14.3	15.4
Students should follow their interests	5.6	7.0	10.0	7.1	0.0
Language study lowers ATAR	16.7	9.3	5.0	10.7	23.1
Not as important as other subjects	16.7	41.9	55.0	28.6	15.4
[Positive comments]	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.4
Other [not included elsewhere]	38.9	11.6	10.0	21.4	30.8
Count (n)	18	43	20	28	13

The importance placed on various learning areas in Year 11 and 12 differed to some extent by parents' language background. There was little disagreement about the importance of studying English, science and technologies, which most parents rated as moderately important or very important, with little difference within each of those ratings. Similarly, parents were in general agreement about the importance studying health and physical education, although they were less supportive of this learning area overall. There was much greater disagreement between the two groups when commenting on the study of languages: 62 per cent of additional language speakers agreed it was very important, compared with 30 per cent of English-only speakers. Among all the English-only speakers, 27 per cent indicated it was not at all important or of low importance. The learning area with the highest percentage of 'not at all important' responses was languages, as stated by English-only speakers (see

Table 29).

Although not as clearly defined, it appears in

Table 29 that parents who speak an additional language agree that cultural (humanities and social sciences) and artistic learning areas are important for their children to study, and indicate this more frequently than do English-only speakers. There is general agreement on the importance of mathematics study, but 75 per cent of English-only speakers stated it was very important, compared with 60 per cent of additional language speakers.

Table 29: Parents' rating of the importance of each learning area, by language background

Learning area	Lang. bkgd.	Not at all important (%)	Low import (%)	Moderate import (%)	Very important (%)	Count (n)
English	Additional language	0.0	1.0	12.9	86.2	311
	English	0.0	0.5	15.6	83.9	218
Mathematics	Additional language	0.0	3.2	37.0	59.7	308
	English	0.0	1.4	23.5	75.1	217
Science	Additional language	0.3	5.8	43.1	50.8	311
	English	0.5	6.5	45.8	47.2	216
Humanities and social sciences	Additional language	0.0	6.8	45.0	48.2	309
	English	0.0	9.9	52.4	37.7	212
Health and physical education	Additional language	3.6	29.7	44.2	22.4	303
	English	4.7	27.4	47.2	20.8	212
The Arts	Additional language	3.9	23.1	47.4	25.6	308
	English	3.8	29.6	47.9	18.8	213
Languages	Additional language	1.3	5.5	31.0	62.3	310
	English	6.5	20.6	42.5	30.4	214
Technologies	Additional language	1.9	12.0	45.8	40.3	308
	English	1.4	8.3	50.0	40.4	218

Note: The number of missing responses varied by learning area.

There are also differences by parent education level in rating the importance of learning areas (see Table 30). Most parents, regardless of education level, believe that English is very important. Parents with school or VET as their highest education level were least positive about languages study: 11 per cent said it was not at all important, compared with 2 per cent of other parents, and only 24 per cent said it was very important, compared with more than 50 per cent of other parents.

Table 30: Parents' rating of the importance of each learning area, by education level

Learning area	Educ. level	Not at all important (%)	Low import (%)	Moderate import (%)	Very important (%)	Count (n)
English	School	0.0	0.0	12.9	87.1	85
	Bachelor	0.0	1.4	15.2	83.4	290
	Postgrad	0.0	0.0	13.1	86.9	153
Mathematics	School	0.0	1.2	17.6	81.2	85
	Bachelor	0.0	2.4	33.6	64.0	286
	Postgrad	0.0	3.3	35.3	61.4	153
Science	School	0.0	9.5	51.2	39.3	84
	Bachelor	0.7	5.9	45.7	47.8	289
	Postgrad	0.0	4.6	37.9	57.5	153
Humanities and social sciences	School	0.0	10.0	58.8	31.3	80
	Bachelor	0.0	8.7	48.3	43.1	288
	Postgrad	0.0	5.9	42.1	52.0	152
Health and physical education	School	2.4	21.7	49.4	26.5	83
	Bachelor	3.2	31.0	46.1	19.7	284
	Postgrad	6.8	28.6	42.2	22.4	147
The Arts	School	3.7	37.0	45.7	13.6	81
	Bachelor	4.2	26.8	49.5	19.5	287
	Postgrad	3.3	17.8	45.4	33.6	152
Languages	School	11.0	28.0	36.6	24.4	82
	Bachelor	2.8	10.0	37.0	50.2	289

Learning area	Educ. level	Not at all important (%)	Low import (%)	Moderate import (%)	Very important (%)	Count (n)
	Postgrad	0.7	5.3	32.9	61.2	152
Technologies	School	0.0	7.1	42.4	50.6	85
	Bachelor	1.7	12.5	47.8	38.1	289
	Postgrad	2.6	9.3	49.7	38.4	151

Note: The number of missing responses varied by learning area.

Principal survey

Background information

ACER selected a representative sample of secondary schools from around Australia to participate in this research. The sample included 1,200 schools, with the principals of 400 schools to be approached and two replacement schools for each of the 400. Where the principal of an approached school declined to participate, a replacement school was invited to participate. This was to ensure the sample remained representative.

The stratified random sample was based on jurisdiction, geolocation and sector (Government, Catholic or Independent). Sample size was dependent on the number of schools in the region so that each region was proportionally represented according to population of schools.

Only secondary schools or multi-level schools catering for secondary years (such as F–12 schools) were included in the population. Special development schools, specialist subject schools and primary schools were excluded from the sample.

Useable responses were received from 91 school principals or their delegates. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 31. The percentage of government schools in the achieved sample is slightly lower than the percentage in the population of secondary schools, but the difference is small, equivalent to approximately six schools.

Table 31: Distribution of population and achieved sample of principals of schools with secondary enrolments, by school sector

Sector	Population (2013)		Achieved sample (2014)	
	N	%	n	%
Government	1530	56.5	45	49.5
Catholic	1176	43.5	22	24.2
Independent			24	26.4
All sectors	2706	100.0	91	100.0

Note: The Australian Bureau of Statistics does not distinguish between Catholic and Independent schools when reporting by school level (primary, secondary or combined).

Source: ABS (2014). *Schools, Australia 2013*. Canberra. Catalogue no. 4221.0.

Schools in all jurisdictions and sectors were approached, although the timing of contact varied. Applications to conduct research in Government schools were submitted to each jurisdiction's education department; for Catholic schools applications were submitted to the local diocese. The distribution of jurisdictions and sectors of the achieved sample schools was similar to the distribution of schools with secondary enrolments across Australia (see Table 32). There was no response from a school in the NT.

Table 32: Distribution of population and achieved sample of principals of schools with secondary enrolments, by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Population (2013)		Achieved sample (2014)	
	N	%	n	%
ACT	45	1.7	3	3.3
NSW	819	30.3	32	35.6
NT	112	4.1	0	0.0
Qld	503	18.6	13	14.4
SA	233	8.6	10	11.1
Tas	99	3.7	2	2.2
Vic	569	21.0	23	25.6
WA	326	12.0	7	7.8
Australia	2706	100.0	90	100.0

Note: One school did not indicate its jurisdiction.

Source: ABS (2014). *Schools, Australia 2013*. Canberra. Catalogue no. 4221.0.

Languages offered in surveyed schools

Nearly all principals who responded to the survey stated that their schools offer study of at least one language. Three schools of the 91 surveyed do not offer a language: one is a small Government rural school, one is a small Independent rural school, and one is a large Government secondary school in a capital city. The number of languages taught in each responding school is shown in

Figure 3, including the three schools that do not teach a language.

Figure 3:   Number of languages taught in each school, by school sector
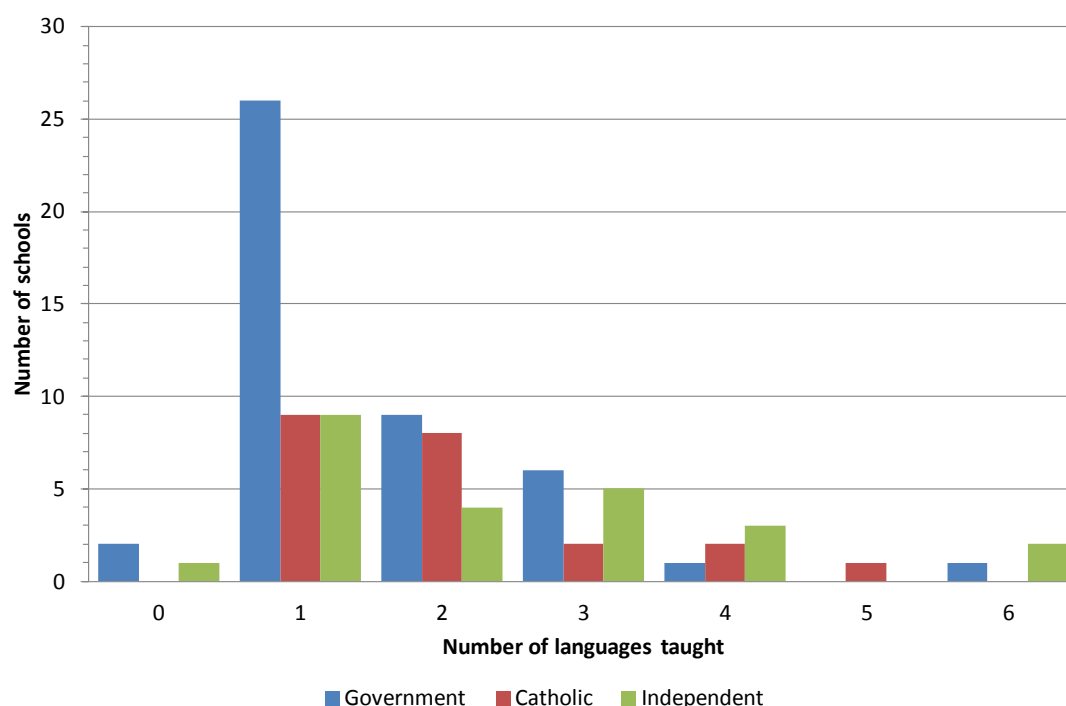
In the Government school sector, more than half of principals reported that the school offers one language only; in the Catholic school sector, nine of 22 schools offer one language only; and in the Independent school sector, nine of 24 schools offer one language only. One Government and two Independent school principals stated that their schools offer six languages.

Four school principals stated that language study is not compulsory at their schools. Three of these schools are senior colleges (Year 11 and 12 only). Nevertheless, these schools do offer language study.The most commonly offered language across all sectors is Japanese, taught in 43 per cent of schools that offer at least one language (see

Table 33). In the Independent school sector, French is taught in 61 per cent of responding schools. In the Catholic school sector, Italian is taught in 77 per cent of responding schools. Of the four most frequently offered languages, two—French and Italian—are European languages and two are Asian—Japanese and Chinese.

Table 33: Languages offered in Australian secondary schools, by school sector

Languages taught	School sector			
	Government	Catholic	Independent	All sectors
Arabic	2	0	0	2
Chinese	11	3	10	24
EAL/D	1	0	0	1
English as a Second Language	0	0	1	1
Foreign Language Exposure	1	0	0	1
French	13	5	14	32
German	6	0	6	12
Greek	0	1	1	2
Indonesian	8	2	3	13
Italian	7	17	2	26
Japanese	16	12	10	38
Kaurna	1	0	0	1
Latin	1	0	3	4
'Modern'	0	0	1	1
Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara	1	0	0	1
Spanish	2	2	4	8
Tagalog	0	1	0	1
Turkish	0	0	1	1
Schools offering a language	43	22	23	88
Languages policy				
School has a policy	18	9	14	41
School does not have a policy	23	12	9	44

Principals of schools in the Independent sector more frequently reported that the school has its own languages policy, as would be expected, although nine of the 23 respondents (39 per cent) stated that the school does not have a separate policy regarding languages. In both the Government and Catholic sectors, fewer than half of principals reported that the school has a separate languages policy.

Supply and demand for language teaching

In those schools that offer at least one language, more than one half of principals stated that the school can meet the demand for language study either fully or to a major extent (see Table 34). In the 13 schools that fully meet the demand for language teaching, five offer one language and four offer two languages. Similarly, in the eight schools that do not meet demand or meet it to a minor extent only, seven schools offer one language and one school offers two languages.

Table 34: Schools' ability to meet demand for language teaching, by school sector

Extent	School sector			
	Government	Catholic	Independent	All sectors
Not at all	1	0	1	2
To a minor extent	4	2	0	6
To a moderate extent	11	7	6	24
To a major extent	21	8	14	43
Fully	6	5	2	13
Number of respondents	43	22	23	88

Reasons for not offering languages

Three principals reported that their schools do not offer languages. Two of the three reported the main reason as difficulty in attracting a teacher to the school because of its location. The third principal reported that there was no demand from parents. When asked if there were plans to offer a language in the future, one school said it planned to, but that principal also stated that staffing was an issue. The principal of the large Government secondary school in a capital city stated that there was no demand from parents for language study so there were no plans to introduce language study at the school.

Promoting language study

Principals use a variety of techniques to promote language study in their schools. Approximately two-thirds of principals stated that they use between three and seven techniques to promote languages, using the school newsletter, information evenings and talking to students and parents most frequently (see Table 35). Approximately half of principals of Government schools stated that their schools offer trips to non-English speaking countries; overseas trips are more frequently available in Catholic (82 per cent) and Independent (65 per cent) schools.

Table 35: Techniques used by schools to promote language study, by school sector

Technique	School sector			
	Government	Catholic	Independent	All sectors
School newsletter	31	19	15	65
School website	20	13	16	49
Information evenings	28	16	18	62
Cultural days	22	9	15	46
Extra classes after school (for parents and students)	5	4	7	16
Career counselling	16	9	7	32
Word of mouth (staff talking to	27	18	18	63

Technique	School sector			
	Government	Catholic	Independent	All sectors
students or parents)				
School trips to a non-English speaking country	21	18	15	54
Developing an international partnership with a school	18	12	12	42
Number of respondents	41	22	23	86

Barriers to the provision of languages in school

Regardless of the demand for language study and how schools promote it, there remain barriers to schools in their ability to offer languages to their students. Staffing issues were reported most frequently, with potential teachers not having the required teaching skills or not having the required language abilities. Questions regarding barriers to the provision of language study were directed to only those principals who had stated that they did not meet the demand for languages or that they met the demand to a minor or moderate extent. The level of demand for language study is also a concern for some principals (see Table 36).

Table 36: Major barriers to the provision of languages in schools, by school sector

Barrier	School sector			
	Government	Catholic	Independent	All sectors
Staff with relevant pedagogical skills	9	3	3	15
Staff with relevant language abilities	9	3	3	15
Amount of time available on the timetable	7	2	1	10
School's geographical location	4	2	1	7
Demographics of school population	4	1	1	6
Level of demand for languages from students	6	3	1	10
Level of demand for languages from parents	4	3	1	8
Number of respondents	18	9	8	35

The principals of the three schools where languages are not taught were more emphatic about the barriers to language study. All three agreed that staffing was a major issue and that the level of demand from both students and parents was a moderate issue.

Influence of system policies

Principals were also asked about system policies related to language teaching and whether those policies limit the school's ability to offer languages. Five principals of 21 Catholic schools and five principals of 23 Independent schools stated that the effect was moderate or major. Among Government school principals, 18 of 44 identified system policies as moderate or major influences on language study.

Government school principals most frequently cited issues related to staffing as the main system policy issue affecting language teaching. In some schools, the availability of teachers is the main issue; in other schools, the staffing formula—in some jurisdictions this is a result of the funding formula—is the main issue. Another major concern is the lack of continuity between the primary school and the secondary school. A number of primary schools may feed students to the local secondary school, and there is no coordination among all the schools in the languages offered.

While there were only five responses from Catholic school principals, the main issue that was cited concerns the restriction placed on languages teaching by the timetable, particularly in relation to other subjects. Among the five responding Independent school principals, the main concern was staffing and the small numbers of students enrolled in some languages.

Principals' opinions of language learning

All principals were asked the extent of their agreement with four statements regarding language learning in general. The greatest level of agreement was with the statement 'learning a language enhances students' level of intercultural understanding'. The lowest level of agreement was with the statement 'language learning provides skills that students can apply across the curriculum'. Nevertheless, more than one half of all principals, regardless of school sector, agreed to a major extent with each statement regarding language learning (see Table 37).

Table 37: Level of principals' agreement with statements about language learning, all school sectors

Learning a language	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent	Count
is important for all students.	0	7	30	54	91
provides a cognitive advantage to students in other learning.	1	7	26	57	91
provides skills that students can apply across the curriculum.	0	16	27	48	91
enhances students' level of intercultural understanding.	0	1	20	70	91

Principals' recommendations to enhance language study

Principals were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended comments regarding language teaching. These comments are in relation to building demand for languages in the school, increasing the supply of

language teachers, and, more generally, on languages in their schools. Seventy five principals commented on building demand, 73 commented on increasing supply and 38 provided additional general comments.

Building demand for languages

Principals recommended three broad approaches to building demand for languages in schools at senior secondary level. The most common recommendation related to teachers, stating that 'quality teachers' in their schools would increase demand for the subject. In this regard, 'quality teachers' refers to teachers with a thorough understanding of and enthusiasm for the languages they are teaching, innovative approaches to language teaching and – as some principals alluded to – native speaker proficiency. Another common recommendation is to make language study compulsory in the junior secondary years, although this would require a greater supply of qualified teachers and inclusion in the timetable. The third general theme relates to wider acceptance of the importance of learning languages, for economic, cognitive or cultural reasons, in Australian society.

Increasing equitable access to quality languages teaching

Principals' recommendations for increasing equitable access to quality languages teaching can be classified into two general areas. One has already been covered: increasing the demand for languages. The general approach suggested relates to teacher training and how universities prepare teachers for the classroom. Some principals recommend that all trainee teachers undertake language study as part of a teaching qualification; other principals recommend that universities offer scholarships and other incentives to prospective language teachers. Once in schools, many language teachers do not remain in the system because there is a lack of professional development and clear career progression that would enable them to continue teaching a language.

A small number of principals recommended that native speakers be allowed to undertake teaching duties in a school, even if they do not have teaching qualifications. Other principals commented that some language teachers do not have the pedagogical skills – including classroom management – to be in a classroom.

Additional comments about languages in schools

In their additional comments, principals offered some further insight into their previous comments about supply and demand for language study. The most frequently discussed area was the curriculum and its relationship to the timetable. Principals noted that the demands of the curriculum – and fitting those demands into the weekly curriculum – make it difficult to offer more than a 'taste' for a language, particularly in the junior secondary years. Principals of surveyed schools with both primary and secondary students mentioned difficulties in encouraging teachers in the lower years to incorporate language study into the curriculum, given the focus on literacy and numeracy.

Related to this issue is the number of languages offered in some schools. In order for schools to meet the demand for a number of languages, some classes operate with a small number of students. This is difficult for schools with limited budgets. Some schools combine small language classes, but then the teacher cannot devote the full period to any single language, negating the positive effects of smaller classes for language study.

Another issue, briefly mentioned in other comments, relates to the languages that students and their parents bring to school. Principals noted that there is not always a match between the languages spoken in the community and the languages offered for study in school, and that this leads to a lack of interest in language study. Principals in the larger jurisdictions suggest a better match of teachers with schools is required, so that language study can be seen as relevant to local needs.

Appendix 1: Sampling strategy for the student survey

Dissemination start: 13 June 2014

Survey close: 9 July 2014

Convenience sampling – the following were directly approach *and* distributed the survey to their members and networks:

- Foundation for Young Australians (staff Google + and networks, senior leadership networks, Facebook, Young People Without Borders list)

- AEF Twitter

- AEF Facebook

- AEF E-News

- University of Melbourne (Twitter and Facebook)

- Australia–Indonesia Youth Association (Twitter)

- Australia–China Youth Dialogue (Twitter)

- Australia–China Youth Association (Twitter)

- Youth Central (Department of Human Services Vic via Twitter)

- Youth Action NSW (Twitter)

- Queensland University of Technology (Twitter and Facebook)

- Australian National University (Engage Asia newsletter)

- Victoria University (College of Education networks)

- University of Technology Sydney (Twitter)

- Flinders University (Twitter and Facebook)

- University of Western Sydney (Social media)

Appendix 2: Sampling strategy for the parent survey

Dissemination start: 11 June 2014

Survey close: 6 July 2014

Convenience sampling – the following were directly approach *and* distributed the survey to their members and networks:

- Australian Parents Council (APC)

- Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO)

- AEF E-News subscribers

- AEF Twitter

- AEF Facebook

Appendix 3: Characteristics of the student survey sample

Gender	n	%
Male	73	27.4
Female	189	71.1
Missing	4	1.5
Total	266	100.0

Age	n	%
18	55	20.7
19	55	20.7
20	44	16.5
21	52	19.5
22	31	11.7
23	6	2.3
24	5	1.9
25 or over	14	5.3
Missing	4	1.5
Total	266	100.0

First language	n	%
English	240	90.2
Another language	26	9.8
Total	266	100.0

Can speak another language	n	%
Yes	141	58.8
No	99	41.3
Total	240	100.0

Note: Includes only those who speak English as a first language.

Jurisdiction	n	%
ACT	4	1.5
NSW	30	11.3
NT	2	0.8
Qld	62	23.3
SA	23	8.6
Tas	2	0.8
Vic	125	47.0
WA	18	6.8
Total	266	100.0

Geolocation	n	%
Capital city	156	58.6
Regional	88	33.1
Rural/remote	20	7.5
Missing	2	0.8
Total	266	100.0

School sector	n	%
Government	133	50.0
Catholic	56	21.1
Independent	77	28.9
Total	266	100.0