



Asia Education Foundation



Parent attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools

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Summary

In March-April 2015, the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) published on its [website](#) a survey on parent attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages in Australian schools. A total of 270 responses were received from parents: 240 responses were considered in scope for analysis; 27 respondents did not have a child currently studying at least one Asian language at school (out of scope); and three (3) respondents had previously completed the survey. This document presents key findings and implications based on a detailed analysis of the in-scope responses ($n=240$). The findings act as an indicative baseline of how parents—interested in issues around their child’s Asian language learning—view the learning of Asian languages in schools.

Background to the study

Parents can boost their child’s academic performance by being interested in and actively supporting their learning (Fan & Chen 2001; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Hornby & Lafaee, 2011). In Australia, recent education policy papers and announcements indicate bipartisan support for this view (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012). The Australian Government Department of Education and Training specifies parental engagement as one of four key priorities in the *Students First* policy, describing parents as important influencers in students’ learning (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2015). Fostering positive parental attitudes towards learning is a core aspect of parental engagement.

In the context of language learning, modelling behaviour and attitudes related to the target language and culture has been described as the passive dimension of parental influence (Colletta, 1983; Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999). Research into student demand for languages has revealed that parents have some influence on their child’s attitudes toward languages, even though the extent of this influence is unclear (Curnow, & Kohler, 2007; Curnow, Liddicoat, & Scarino, 2007; Holt, 2006; Hunter, 2013). Moreover, parents can support their child’s language learning even when they themselves do not speak the target language. Encouraging their child to study the target language and communicating positive attitudes about the language and culture are two important dimensions of this support (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999; Prescott & Orton, 2012).

Yet, building and sustaining parental support for language learning remains a challenge for Australian education. In a joint study by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC), the majority (67 per cent) of survey respondents ($n=3274$) agreed that ‘Australian parents do not see the relevance of learning a language’ (ACSSO & APC, 2007, p. 20). With specific reference to Asian languages in Australian schools, there is lack of indicative data on parental attitudes. It remains unknown the degree to which these attitudes reflect or differ from broader attitudes towards language learning in schools. This represents a major gap in the evidence base at a time when Australia’s engagement with the Asia region is increasing, politically, economically, educationally and culturally.

Aim of the study

The present study sought to gain a better understanding of parents’ attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages in Australian schools. It builds on previous studies that have (fully or partially) focused on attitudes towards language learning in schools, including *Attitudes towards the study of languages in Australian schools* (ACSSO & APC, 2007), *Building demand for Asia Literacy: What works* (AEF, 2012) and the Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project led by AEF (unpublished as of May 2015). The findings of this study are expected to assist in guiding future collaborative work with and within the schools sector to foster positive parental attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools.

Key findings

This section provides a top-level summary of key findings from the study. It has been written in a question-and-answer format to reflect some of the main questions that are likely to be asked concerning the study's focus topic. The data analysis has resulted in insightful, though indicative, answers to the following important questions.

Which parents typically find it important that their child learns an Asian language at school?

These parents are most likely to have completed a tertiary qualification, specifically a Bachelor degree or higher. This observation is further supported by the fact that the survey respondents were collectively much more educated than the nationwide average. They are also likely to send their child to a non-government school.

From the perspective of linguistic background and language use, the parents are likely to speak at least one language other than English at home and use this language with their child, even though the frequency of use may vary considerably from one family to another. They see the study of an Asian language as being of equal importance to many other key learning areas, but less important than English, Mathematics and Science. These parents actively encourage their child to study an Asian language and communicate to their child positive views about the importance and/or usefulness of Asian language learning. They also typically support mandatory language studies throughout primary and secondary school.

Importantly, these parents have positive attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages in schools for non-instrumental reasons. They are not convinced that Australian businesses commonly value Asian language skills, despite, in their view, the increasing importance of Asia for Australian business and trade. Their reasons stem from overwhelmingly positive views concerning various aspects of Asia, in particular its cultural diversity and a desire to engage with its peoples and societies. They believe that Australian society can also learn from Asia, culturally, politically, economically or educationally.

Does the education level of parents matter?

It can make a difference and act as an equalising factor regardless of parents' linguistic background and language use. But, it is not a determining factor in parents' positive attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages in schools and the extent to which they support their child's Asian language learning. The relationship between level of education and positive attitudes is not necessarily causal.

Parents with a Bachelor or a Master's degree are more likely to consider it important that their child learns an Asian language than those without tertiary education or those who have completed a traineeship, apprenticeship or technical education qualification. However, there were parents without tertiary qualifications in the sample who consider Asian language learning as being very important for their child, while some highly-educated respondents do not find it important at all.

Does the language background of parents matter?

There is no significant difference between parents whose first language is English and those whose first language is not in terms of attitudes towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, their child's Asian language learning and the benefits of this learning. There is, however, a relationship between these attitudes and parents' language use at home: those who speak at least one language other than English at home—and typically use it with their child—have stronger views about the importance of learning an Asian language than those who do not; they are also more likely to see the multiple educational and intercultural benefits for their child of learning an Asian language.

Parent attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools

Moreover, parents who speak a language other than English at home also express much more positive attitudes towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia than those who do not. This indicates a relationship between these positive attitudes and the extent of their intercultural experiences and exposure. This observation applied consistently across all thematic fields that were covered by the survey concerning attitudes towards Asia, i.e. business, politics, culture, society, history, and people.

Hence, language use matters more than linguistic background when it comes to parents having positive attitudes towards their child's Asian language learning. However, the causal direction of this relationship remains unclear. For example, parents who speak a (not-necessarily-Asian) language other than English at home may have positive attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages, but it is also possible that their child's Asian language study introduced them to the cultures of Asia and further promoted their interest in the region. It appears that both occurrences are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

Will mandatory language learning get more parents to support the learning of Asian languages in schools?

Parents who hold positive attitudes towards their child's learning of an Asian language tend to support mandatory language studies throughout primary and secondary school. The reverse appears to be true: parents who do not consider it important for their child to learn an Asian language at school also do not support mandatory language learning. (Note that mandatory language learning can be implemented at a systemic and/or school level.)

Making language learning mandatory at school would increase the number of students learning a language, but this language may not be an Asian language. And, such an approach may not necessarily foster positive attitudes towards Asian languages among parents – to state otherwise would be to assume causality. However, it does provide increased opportunities for education systems and schools to promote Asian languages and broader awareness of Asia among parents. It also lifts the public profile of languages in Australian education. However, the side-effects of mandatory language learning are yet to be comprehensively researched in Australia.

Nevertheless, the data suggest that other strategies to develop parents' positive attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages may be more effective than mandatory language learning in schools. Some parents in the sample do not encourage their child to learn an Asian language, even though it is mandatory, and communicate negative views to their child about this learning. Where mandatory Asian language learning exists, this must be accompanied by broader strategies to build parents' interest in and valuing of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

Do parents support their child's Asian language learning because they think Australian businesses seek employees who speak an Asian language?

No. Less than 30 per cent of survey respondents believe that Australian businesses seriously value the ability of staff to speak an Asian language; 38 per cent thought they do so occasionally; and the remainder are even less convinced. This stands in contrast to how a substantial majority of respondents (70 per cent) consider it important that their child and other children across Australia learn an Asian language at school. This figure suggests that business needs and expectations are not the main driver behind parents' positive attitudes towards the importance and usefulness of studying an Asian language, even though they recognise that Asia is becoming increasingly important for Australian business and trade.

However, it is also plausible that parents are not sufficiently aware of cases where businesses, including major corporations, do value Asian language skills. The work of [Asialink Business](#), and [Asialink](#) more broadly, would lend support to this possibility. If so, this suggests more of a communication issue rather than an inherently attitudinal one.

So why do parents support their child's Asian language learning?

The parents who support their child's Asian language learning are most likely to do so because they have positive attitudes towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. They are interested in Asian cultures and societies, admire the cultural diversity of the Asia region, and engage and interact with people of Asian background in their personal lives. These positive attitudes correlate strongly with parents' opinions on how important it is for them that their child learns an Asian language at school. This suggests that promoting parents' interest in and engagement with Asia may be a key strategy to boost parental support for Asian language learning in schools.

Overall, the parents surveyed typically agreed with the following statements:

- Australia has a strategic advantage over other western countries because it is close to Asia
- Australian governments should further strengthen their relationships with countries in Asia
- Australia should expand its business links with countries in Asia in the next decade
- Countries in Asia are increasingly important trade and business partners for Australia
- Australia is part of the Asia region
- Australian society can learn from Asia, culturally, politically, economically or educationally.

Parents who speak a language in addition to English are likely to have more positive attitudes towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia than those who do not. Nonetheless, parents, regardless of their linguistic background and language use, hold generally positive attitudes. And, the attitudes of those who speak English only are almost identical to the average results for the entire sample. Hence, (English) monolingualism does not appear to be a decisive factor in determining positive or negative attitudes towards Asia. However, language use, exposure and experiences, regardless of linguistic background, have a significant impact on the development of positive attitudes.

What role does parental engagement in children's Asian language learning play?

Parents who are engaged in their child's Asian language learning are much more likely to see this learning as valuable for their child. Two separate survey items related to parental engagement: 1) communicating one's views on Asian language learning to one's child; and 2) encouraging one's child to study an Asian language. Respondents who scored highly on these two items were much more likely to find Asian language learning important and useful for their child.

Moreover, the two items strongly correlate, which indicates that parental engagement in children's Asian language learning is a key factor in getting parents to value this learning. To lend further support to this observation, there were examples where respondents specified negative views about Asian language learning and communicated these views to their child. AEF's (2015) [*What Works 8: Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools*](#) explored ways in which schools can work with parents to encourage and enable them to support their child's Asian language learning.

Out of all the factors tested in this study that have a potentially significant impact on parents' attitudes towards Asian language learning, parental engagement appears to be the only directly controllable factor at a systemic and school level. Parents' sociolinguistic experiences and education background are determined by a whole array of complex and interconnected variables that are near impossible for schools and school systems to directly influence.

Where to next?

The data suggest that parental engagement is the starting point and should focus on developing parents' positive views towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. Regardless of their diverse backgrounds and experiences, parents need to appreciate Asia in order to value Asian language learning. So, a key question arises: What parental engagement strategies are, or are likely to be, effective in view of a diverse parenthood? This links to the parental engagement literature on tailoring strategies to small and targeted groups for maximum effect (Daniel, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Kim 2009).

In order to determine strategies that work, it is recommended that this study's findings be shared with school leaders and languages teachers. Separate focus groups for school leaders and languages teachers could be convened to discuss the findings within the specific scope of what schools can do to help foster positive parental attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages *and* how the strategies may be tailored depending on context and parents' backgrounds. The focus groups would involve a spread of government, Catholic and independent schools (primary, secondary and combined) from metropolitan, provincial and remote areas.

Furthermore, in order to develop a deeper understanding of this study's findings, it is important to ask parents the following questions:

1. How have you developed an appreciation of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia?
2. How have you come to value (or devalue) your child's Asian language learning?

Finally, the main assumption behind these next steps is that increased take-up of, and proficiency in, Asian languages is vital to Australia's sustainability and competitiveness on a world stage, now and into the future.

Study design

The study employed a quantitative methodology, with a view to gathering indicative baseline data on parental attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools. It is situated entirely within the Australian education context, so its findings are not immediately generalisable to other contexts, even majority English-speaking countries. For the purpose of this study, ‘baseline’ refers to a point-in-time description of a particular occurrence that acts as a basis for further development.

Method

A short, five-minute quantitative survey was developed and placed on AEF’s [website](#). The survey was live for nearly four (4) weeks in March–April 2015. The survey included 24 items and response categories were a mix of (four-point) Likert-scale, rating scale and multiple choice.

To be considered in scope for analysis, respondents needed to be parents who have a child currently studying at least one Asian language at school. There was some variation in the number of survey items completed by in-scope respondents. All responses were completely anonymous.

The survey items were clustered around the following categories:

- Qualifying questions (to determine if respondents were in or out of scope)
- Background (demographic) questions to assist in data analysis
- Importance of learning Asian languages in schools
- Usefulness of learning Asian languages at school
- Broader attitudes towards the peoples and countries of Asia

The focus on importance and usefulness was informed by the hypothesis that attitudes towards language learning are based not only on perceptions of importance, but rather a combination of perceived importance and utility. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while people may view language learning as important, they might not see it as being immediately useful—relative to other pursuits—in their day-to-day lives. Essentially, this relates to the notion of value, or more precisely the relative value, of learning languages, with ‘value’ defined as a combination of perceived importance and utility in the present study. Moreover, the study sought to identify how parents’ responses concerning the value of Asian language learning at school relate to their broader attitudes towards Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia.

Sample description

The responses analysed in this study were all gathered through the survey advertised on AEF’s website. Typically, potential respondents were directed to the website as part of AEF’s usual, broader communication channels (e.g. AEF e-News, Asia Ed-Net, Twitter, and Facebook). Other survey dissemination channels involving supporter organisations (e.g. APC and Asialink Leaders Program) did not yield a sufficient number of responses.

A total of 270 responses were received: 240 responses were considered in scope for analysis; 27 were considered out of scope because the respondents did not have a child currently studying at least one Asian language at school; three (3) respondents had previously completed the survey.

As a whole, the resulting sample was non-representative of *all* parents who have a child currently studying at least one Asian language at school. However, aiming for such representation was neither realistic nor practical given time and cost constraints. Further, true representative samples in Australian languages education research remain typically elusive, and previous studies on Australian attitudes towards languages learning in schools (for example, ACSSO & APC, 2007) led the researchers to believe that the survey would appeal more to some groups of parents and less to others.

Parent attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools

The resulting sample ($n=240$) may be broadly described as parents who are interested in issues around their child's Asian language learning. It would be, however, incorrect to label the entire sample as being favourable towards Asia, as the resulting data does not support such a generalisation. Nevertheless, it is a useful, indicative sub-sample of the broader population of parents who have a child studying an Asian language at school. The insights gleaned from the data analysis can help inform and further discussions around supporting the development of positive parental attitudes towards the learning of Asian languages in Australian schools.

Respondents' linguistic background and language use

As seen in Table 1, English is the mother tongue (first language) of the overwhelming majority of respondents (86 per cent). As a point of reference, 81 per cent of Australians aged five years and over speak only English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2012), even though these two percentages are not directly comparable.

For the purpose of this study, mother tongue and first language are seen as interchangeable terms. However, two respondents answered 'no' to the question 'Is English your mother tongue/first language?' but specified 'English' in a follow-up question on first language. These respondents may have differentiated between their mother tongue and first language.

Table 1: Is English your mother tongue/first language?

Response	Response per cent	Response count
Yes	85.8	206
No	14.2	34
Total responses		240

Of the 14 per cent of respondents that did not specify English as their first language, the most common Asian first languages were Chinese and Indonesian respectively (Table 2). Other Asian languages represented were Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Punjabi, Khmer, Cantonese, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese. Non-Asian first languages in the sample included French, German, Swedish, Portuguese, Greek, Croatian and Italian.

Table 2: If not English, what is your first language?

Response	Response count
Japanese	2
Chinese	7
Indonesian	4
Korean	2
Hindi	1
Other	18
Total responses	34

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The children of parents whose first language is an Asian language commonly taught in Australian schools—Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean—typically study that language at school. In cases where parents' first languages are less commonly taught in Australian schools, such as Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer and Tagalog, the children study a different Asian language, such as Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese.

As to language use—as opposed to first language background—the majority of respondents (77 per cent) speak only English at home. By comparison, this percentage is close to the national average of 81 per cent (ABS, 2012).

The remaining 23 per cent of respondents speak at least one language other than English at home. Of these, the most common languages were Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian respectively (Table 3). Other languages spoken at home include European (German, Swedish, Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Croatian, Dutch, Hungarian and Italian) and Asian languages (Punjabi, Khmer, Cantonese, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese) as well as Afrikaans and AUSLAN.

Table 3: What language other than English do you speak at home?

Response	Response count
Japanese	12
Chinese	8
Indonesian	5
Korean	3
Hindi	2
Other	24
Total responses	54

Given the nature of the sample, it was expected that Asian languages would be overrepresented in the survey items focused on respondents' linguistic backgrounds. Nonetheless, the inclusion of European languages means that data from the sample provide a useful indication of how parents from a variety of linguistic backgrounds view their child's Asian language learning at school.

In many cases where a language other than English is spoken at home, this language is the parents', or one of the parents', first language. Twenty-nine of 34 respondents whose first language is not English speak this language at home with their child, with the frequency of use ranging from 'always' to 'only rarely'. However, 26 respondents whose first language is English also speak another language at home, with the frequency of use ranging from 'always' to 'only rarely'. This language is often the language the child studies at school.

Japanese provides the most obvious example of this occurrence. While only two (2) respondents stated that Japanese is their first language, 12 respondents indicated that they speak at least some Japanese at home. The child studies Japanese at school in nine (9) of these 12 cases.

Most respondents who speak a language other than English use this language—albeit to varying extents—when communicating with their child (Table 4). Six (6) respondents who speak another language at home do not use this language with their child, but presumably use it to interact with other members of the household.

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Table 4: If you speak at least one language other than English at home, do you speak it with your child?

Response	Response count
Yes, always or almost always	8
Yes, often	14
Yes, occasionally	16
Yes, but only rarely	8
No	6
Total responses	52

Overall, the data suggest great linguistic diversity among respondents' households, ranging from English-only to multilingual in addition to the different Asian languages studied by their children at school (see Table 5 below). Many of the respondents' children seem to experience and learn two or more languages in different settings.

Asian language studied by respondents' children

The most commonly studied Asian languages among respondents' children are Indonesian, Japanese and Chinese respectively, the three most popular Asian languages taught in Australian schools. While other Asian languages were mentioned by respondents, these played a quantitatively negligible role.

Table 5: Which Asian language is your child studying? (Respondents requested to select one language only)

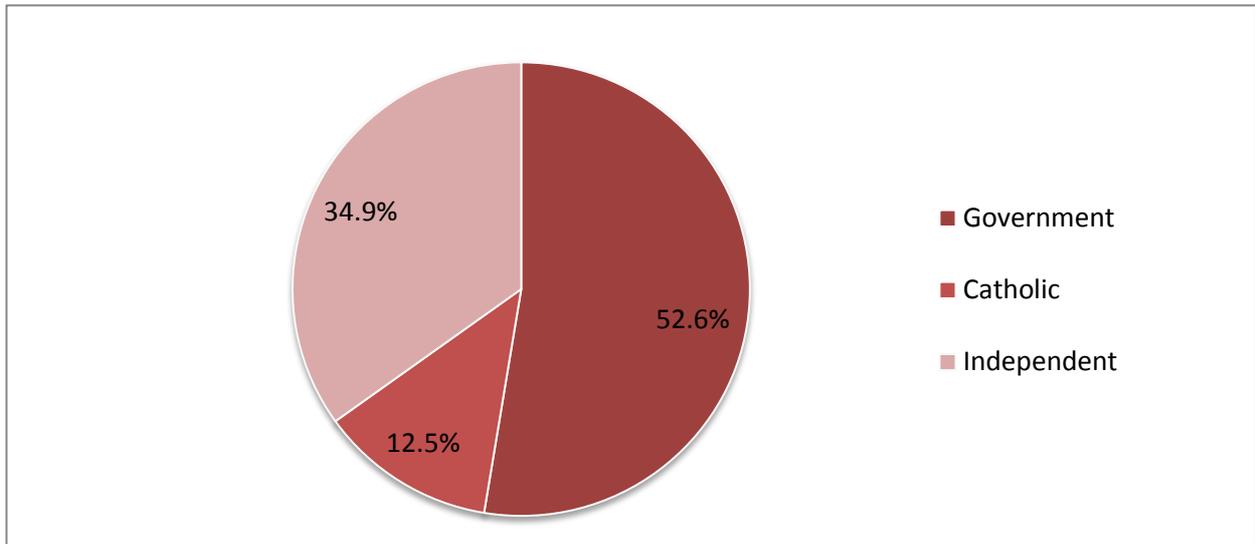
Response	Response per cent	Response count
Japanese	37.5	90
Chinese	20.8	50
Indonesian	39.2	94
Korean	0.8	2
Hindi	0.4	1
Other	1.3	3
Total responses		240

Schools attended by respondents' children

The majority of respondents (53 per cent) send their children to government schools (Figure 1). However, compared to the nationwide average—65 per cent government, 21 per cent Catholic and 14 per cent independent—independent schools are overrepresented in the sample, while government and Catholic schools are underrepresented.

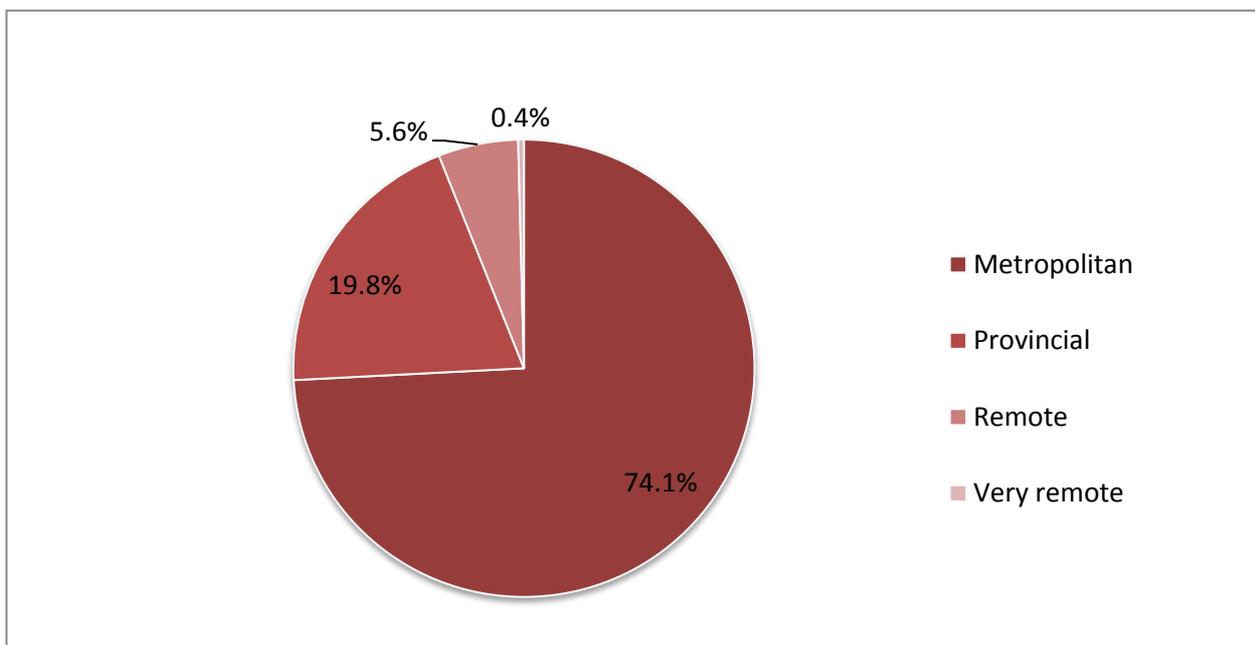
Parent attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools

Figure 1: What kind of school does your child attend?



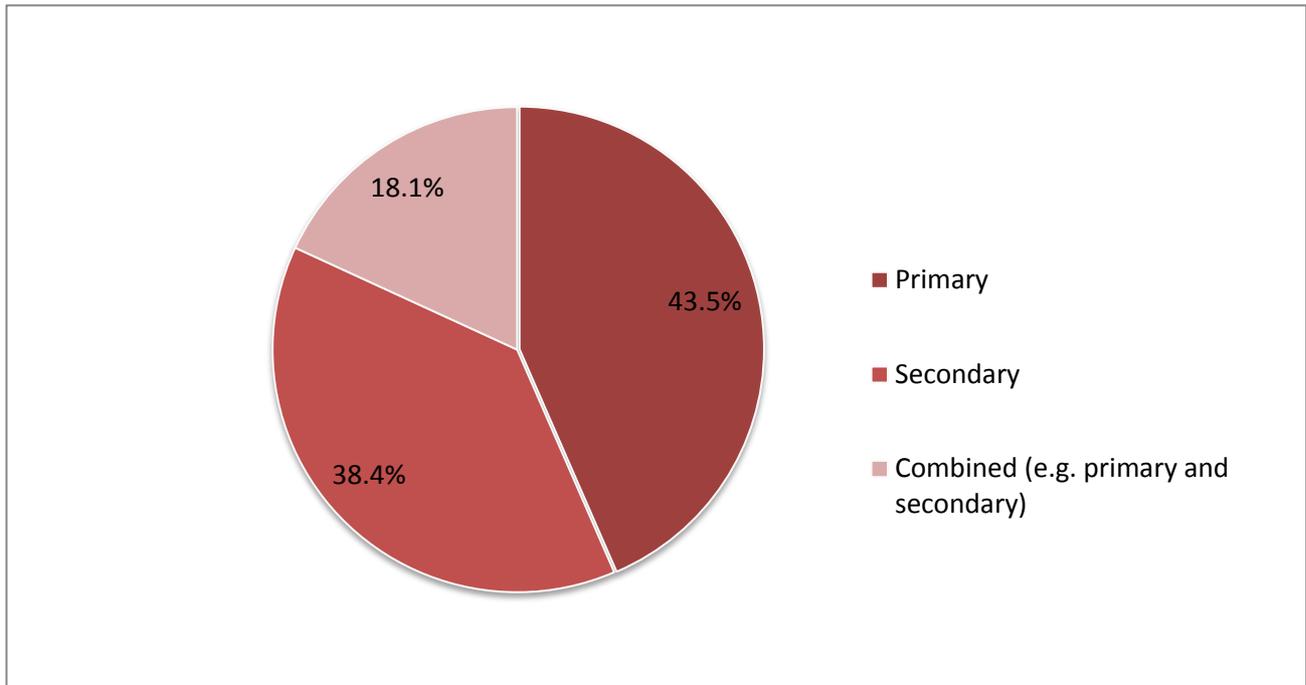
The children of 74 per cent of respondents attend school in a metropolitan area; 20 per cent attend provincial schools while the remainder go to remote or very remote schools (Figure 2). The children of almost 44 per cent of respondents go to primary school, 38 per cent attend secondary school and 18 per cent are enrolled in combined (primary and secondary) schools (Figure 3).

Figure 2: School location



Parent attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools

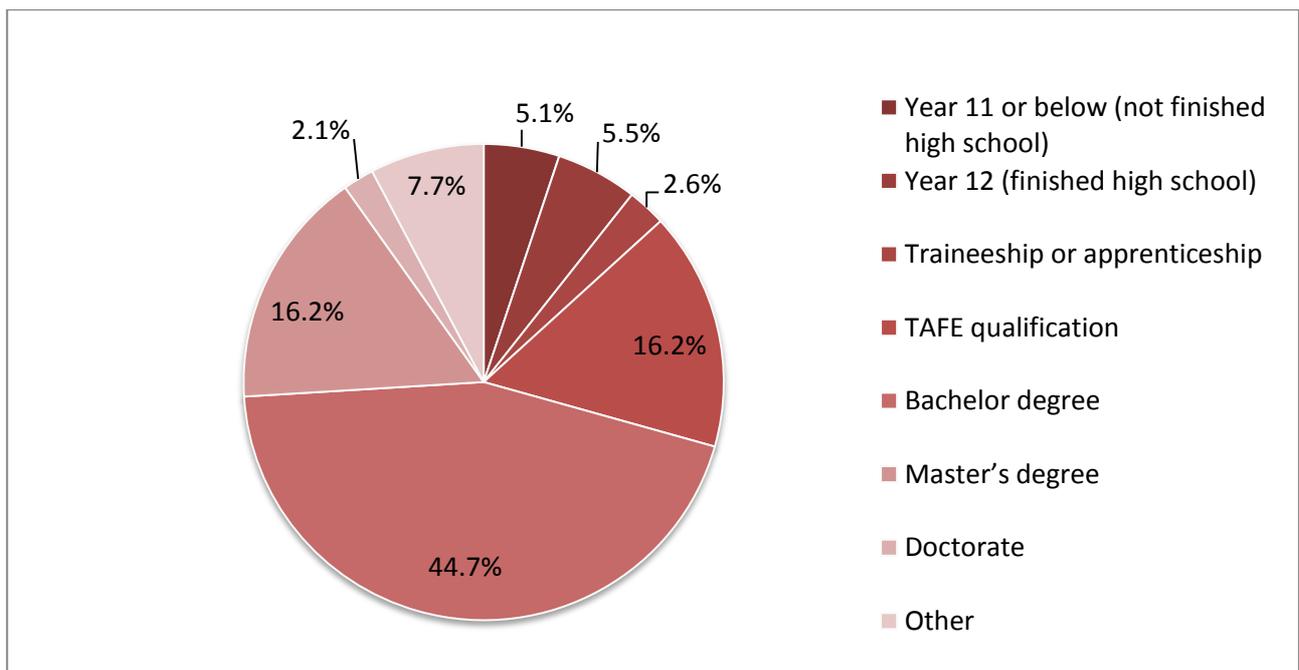
Figure 3: School type



Respondents' education qualification

The resulting sample was significantly more educated than the nationwide average (Figure 4, $n=235$), with 63 per cent possessing a Bachelor degree or higher. However, due to the nature of the survey and sample size, it was still possible to develop insights into the relationship between parents' education level and attitudes towards their child's Asian language learning at school.

Figure 4: What is your highest education qualification?



Data Analysis

School sector and location

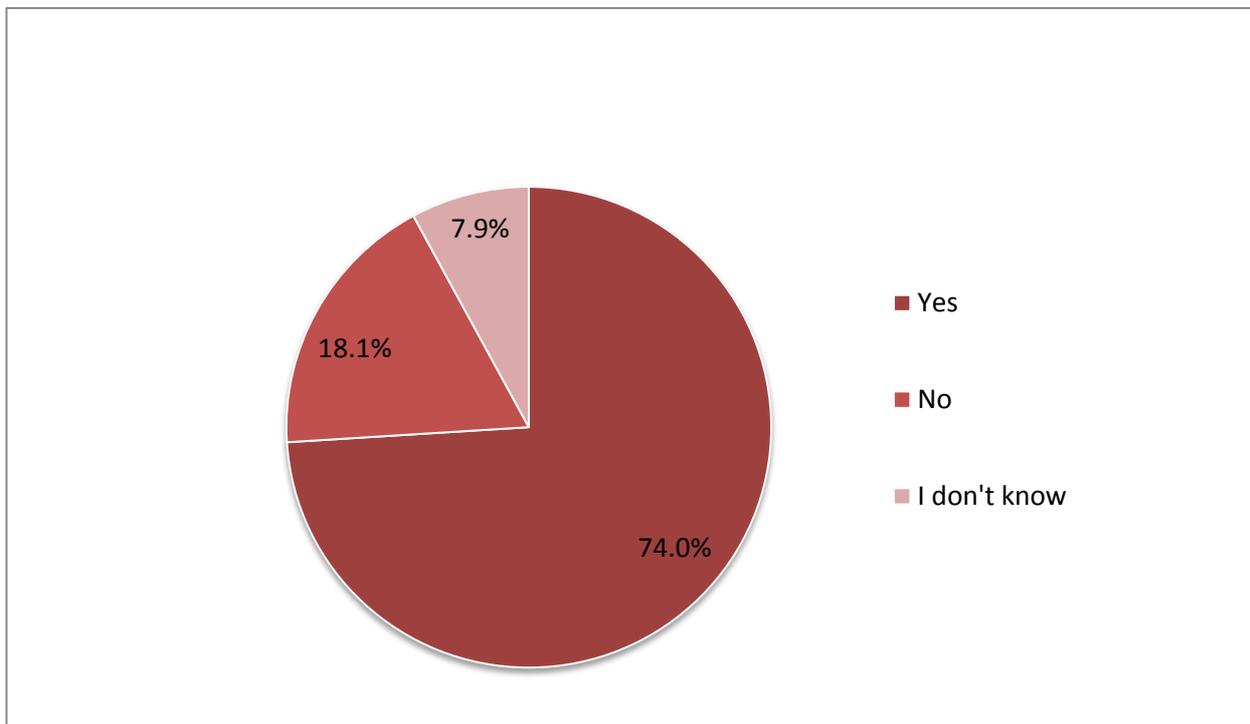
Respondents who send their child to a Catholic school are more likely to consider it important for their child to study an Asian language at school; 82 per cent share such a view, which is significantly above the average of 70 per cent across all respondents. Even when the over-representation of the non-government sector in the sample is factored into the analysis, it appears that parents who send their child to a non-government school are more likely to view Asian language learning as important.

Respondents who send their child to school in a provincial location were more likely to consider it important for their child to study an Asian language at school. However, in view of the sub-sample size and non-representative nature of the entire sample, the implications of this finding are inconclusive.

Mandatory language learning and parents' attitudes

Studying a language at school is mandatory for the children of 74 per cent of respondents; eight (8) per cent did not know whether it is mandatory or not (Figure 5). For this sample, language study is more commonly mandatory in independent schools, with around 83 per cent of independent-school parents stating it is currently mandatory for their child to study a language.

Figure 5: Is it compulsory for your child to currently study a language at school?



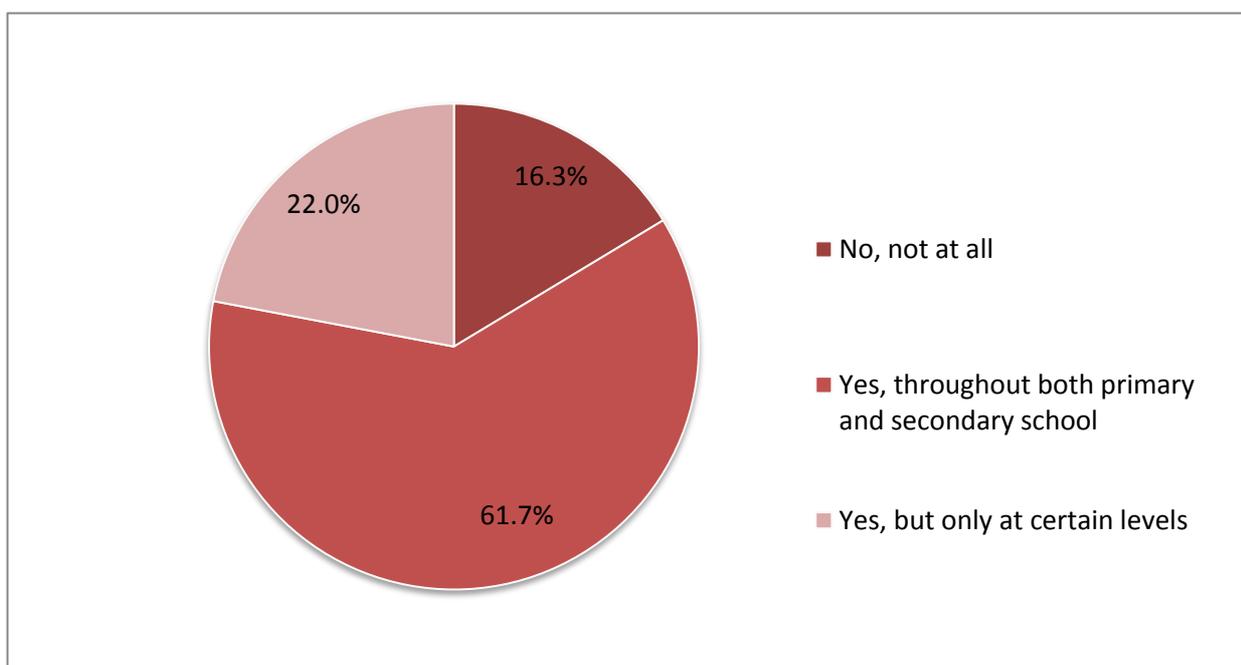
The survey also sought to find out if respondents are supportive of mandatory languages learning at school and how this support, or lack thereof, might relate to their attitudes towards their child's Asian language learning.

The majority of respondents (Figure 6) think language learning should be mandatory at school; 62 per cent think it should be mandatory across both primary and secondary schools. For parents whose first language

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is English, the figure is 60 per cent. Only 16 per cent are against all forms of mandatory language learning at school; this figure is 18 per cent among parents whose first language is English, which indicates that linguistic background does not appear to be a significant factor in whether parents support or oppose mandatory language learning.

Figure 6: Do you think learning a language in addition to English should be compulsory at school?



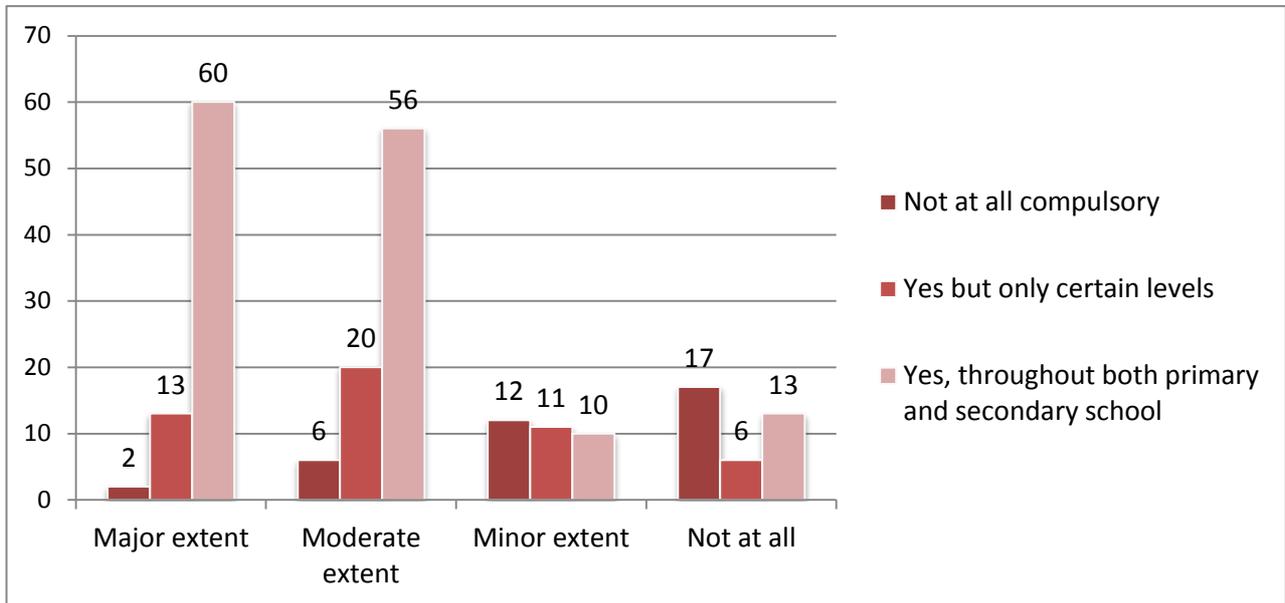
Among those respondents who would prefer mandatory language learning only at certain year levels, the single most commonly stated view is that students should learn a language up to Year 8, 9 or 10. The reasons for this view are unknown. Only a small minority think language learning should be mandatory in primary school or at certain levels after Year 6. Some parents seem to view English literacy as a priority before their child studies another language.

However, research on the cognitive benefits of second language learning indicates that learning a second language can result in changes in the brain's electrical activity, the location of this activity within the brain and the structure of the learners' brains (Osterhout et al., 2008). More recently, neurological evidence points to the advantages of second language learning on tests of auditory attention (Bak, Vega-Mendoza & Sorace, 2014), which is an aspect of literacy.

Figure 7 shows the correlation between parents' views on mandatory language learning and their general attitudes towards their child's Asian language learning. It illustrates that parents who hold positive views about their child's learning of an Asian language are much more likely to support mandatory language studies across both primary and secondary schools. Those respondents who do not consider it important for their child to learn an Asian language at school typically oppose mandatory language learning.

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Figure 7: Correlation between respondents' views on mandatory language learning and the importance of learning an Asian language for their child*



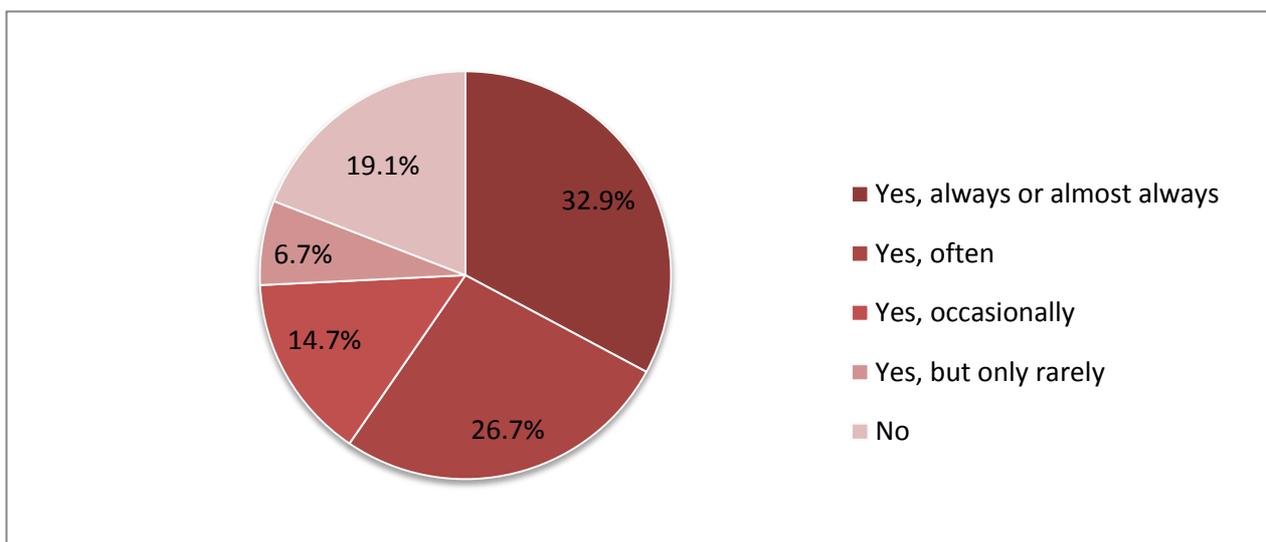
*Based on a cross-tabulation of responses to the following survey items:

- (1) It is important to me that my child learns an Asian language at school. (Response categories: yes, throughout both primary and secondary school; yes, but only at certain levels; not at all compulsory)
- (2) Do you think learning a language in addition to English should be compulsory at school? (Response categories: major extent; moderate extent; minor extent; not at all)

Support of Asian language learning

Approximately 60 per cent of respondents encourage their child to study an Asian language often or (almost) always. Further, 15 per cent do this occasionally. More than one quarter stated that they never (19 per cent) or only rarely (7 per cent) encourage their child to study an Asian language (Figure 8). There was no significant difference in the response patterns of all respondents and those whose first language is English.

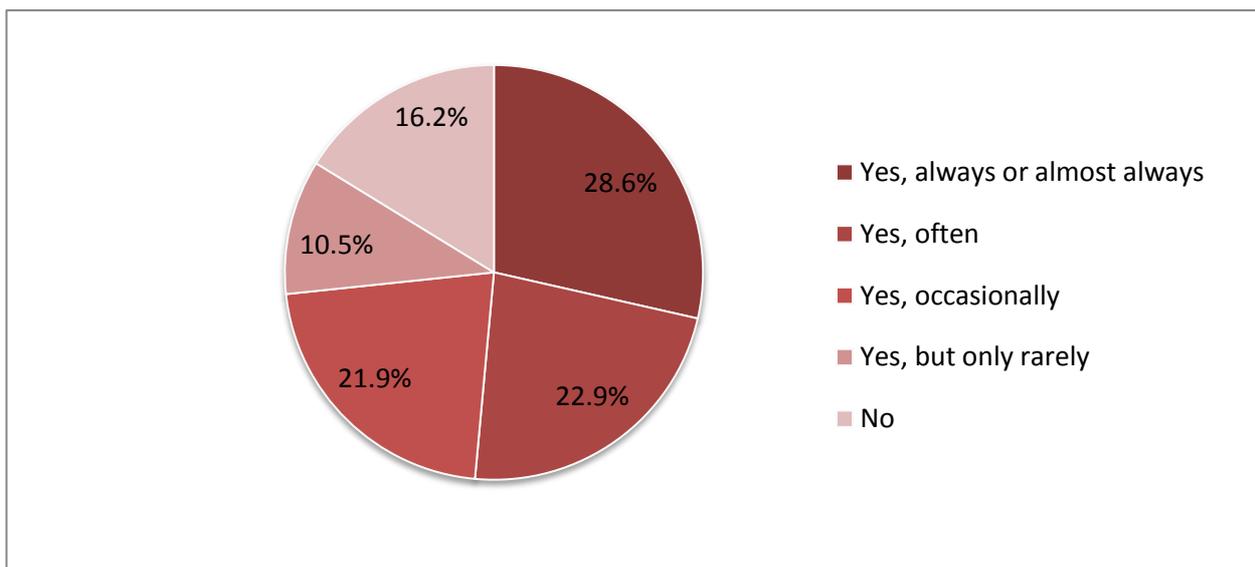
Figure 8: Do you encourage your child to study an Asian language?



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A small majority of responding parents stated that they (almost) always (29 per cent) or often (23 per cent) communicate their views on the importance or usefulness of Asian language learning to their child (Figure 9). Over one quarter engage in such parent-child conversations either only rarely (11 per cent) or not at all (16 per cent). The response patterns among parents whose first language is English are similar, although they are slightly less active in communicating their views on Asian language learning than the average for the entire sample.

Figure 9: Do you communicate your views on the importance or usefulness of Asian language learning to your child?



Respondents who encourage their child to study an Asian language typically communicate to their child their views on the importance or usefulness of Asian language learning. The reverse is also true. This means that the response patterns for these two survey items correlate strongly. This correlation points to parental engagement as an important factor for schools to consider when working with parents to support children's Asian language learning. The survey data show a large overlap between those parents who are involved in their child's Asian language learning and those who find it important that their child learns an Asian language.

However, there were some notable exceptions in the data. For example, a small number of parents who consider studying an Asian language to be not important at all refrain from encouraging their child to study an Asian language *yet* regularly communicate their (seemingly not very supportive) views to their child.

Importance of Asian language learning

Seventy per cent of respondents consider it to be important that their child learns an Asian language at school (to a major or a moderate extent). Only 16 per cent stated that learning an Asian language is not at all important for their child (Figure 10). Responses to this survey item correlate strongly and positively with respondents encouraging their child to study an Asian language. Hence, parents who think it is important for their child to study an Asian language are much more likely to encourage their child to do so (Figure 11).

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Figure 10: Respondents' views on the importance of Asian language learning at school (in per cent)

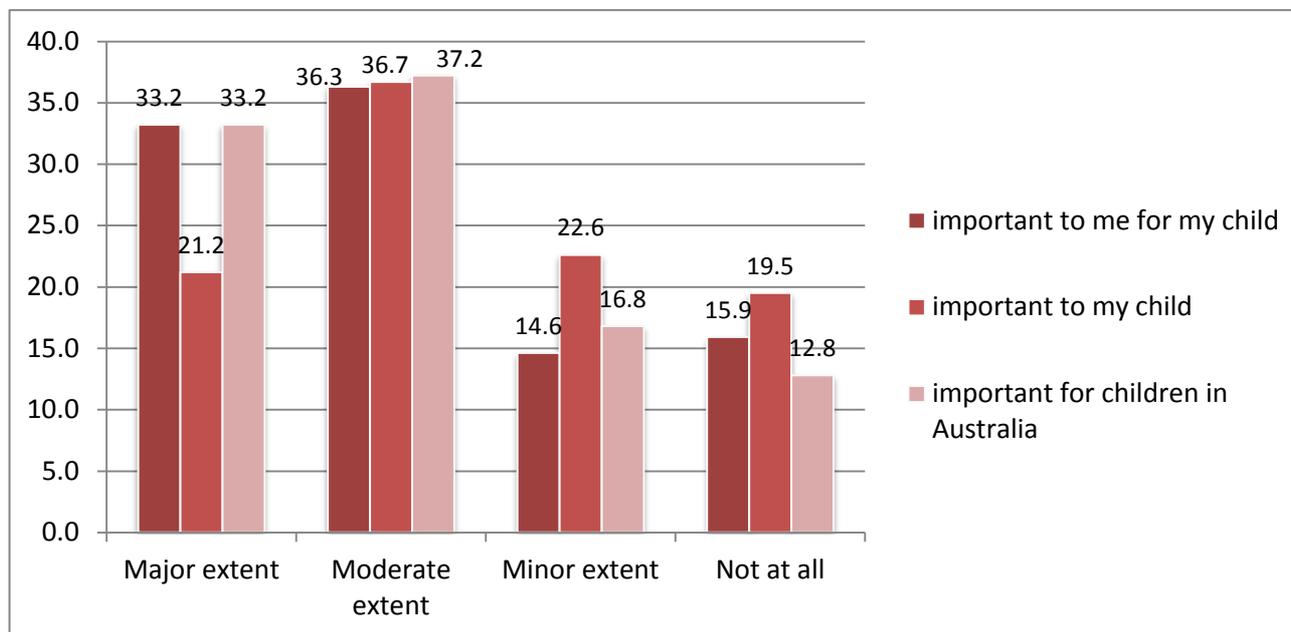
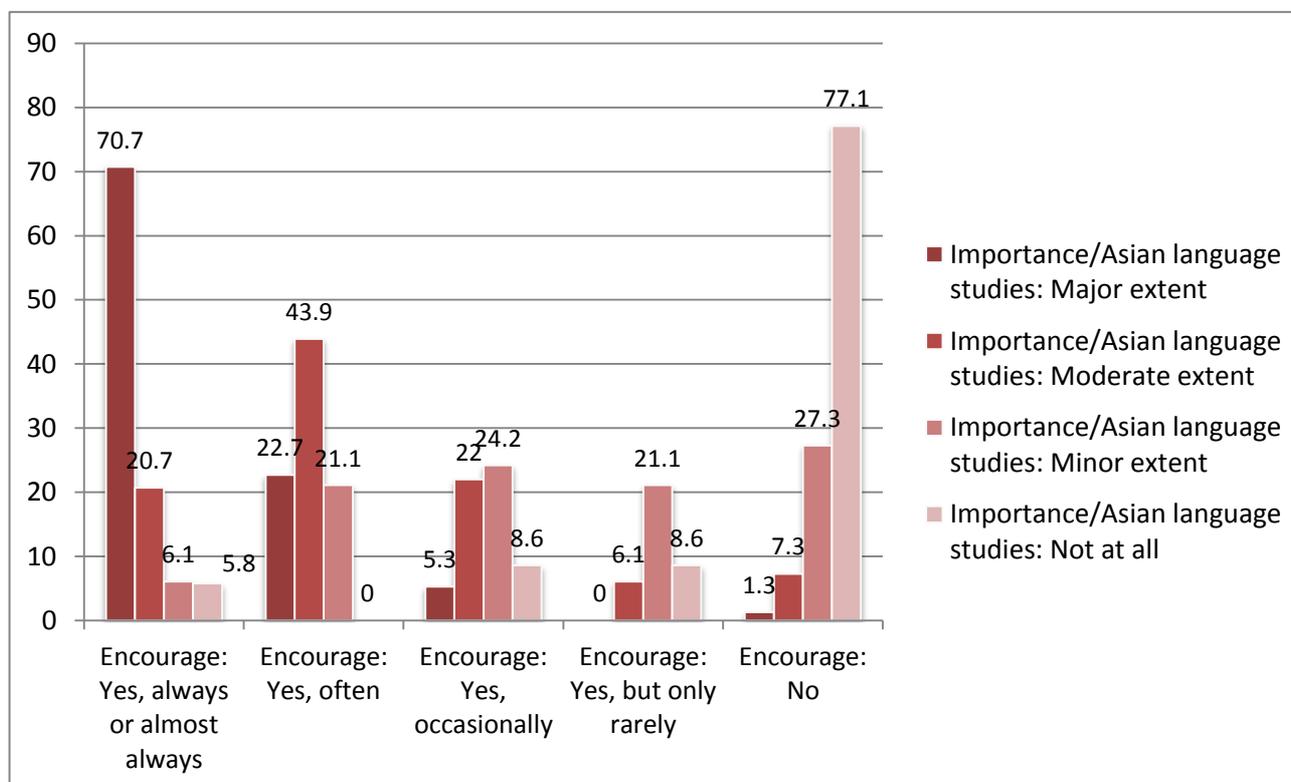


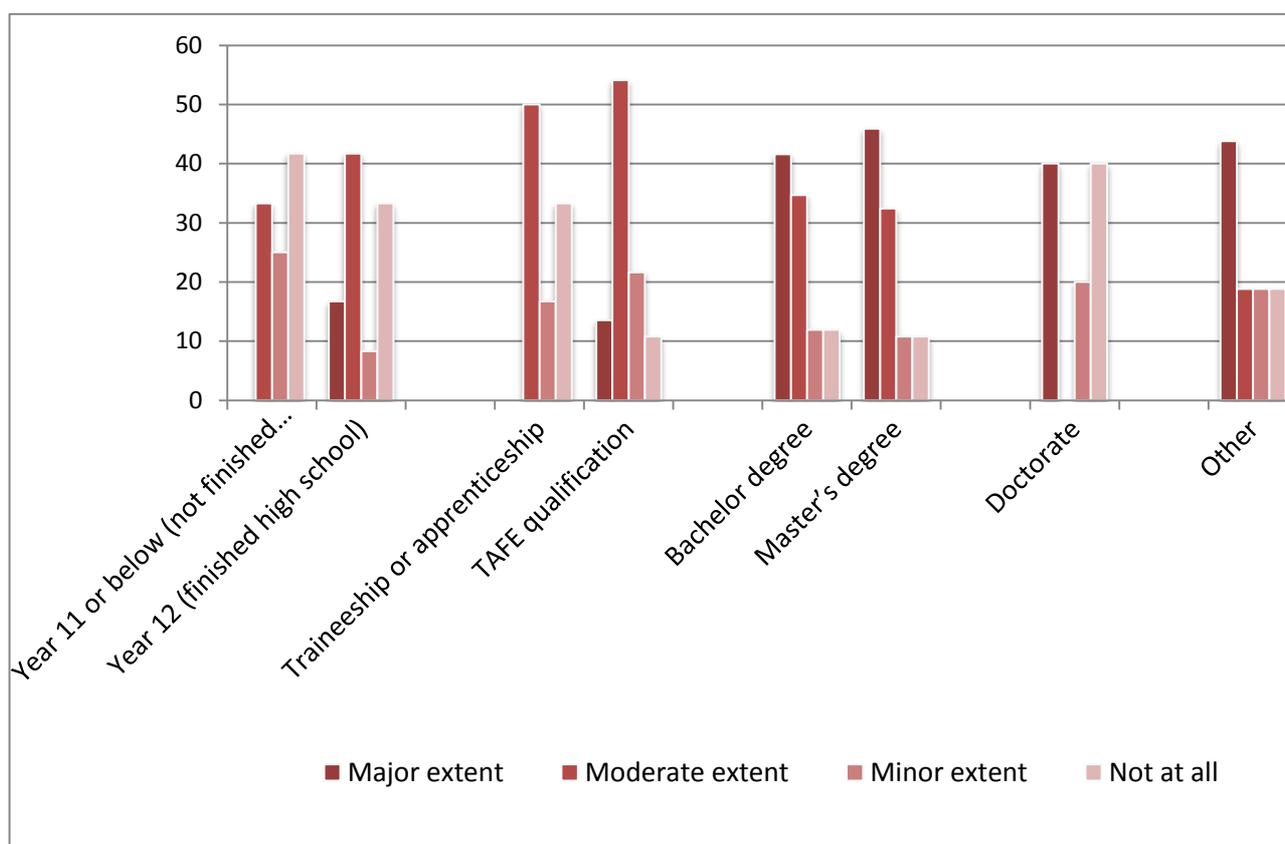
Figure 11: Respondents' views on the importance of Asian language learning at school and the extent to which they encourage their child's Asian language learning (in per cent)



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Respondents with a Bachelor or a Master's degree as their highest educational qualification are overrepresented among those who find it important (to a major or moderate extent) that their child learns an Asian language. Respondents with no tertiary education are overrepresented among those who do not find it important at all. As Figure 12 illustrates, parents with a university degree typically hold significantly more positive views about their child learning an Asian language at school than those with a non-university, post-secondary qualification or no tertiary qualification.

Figure 12: Respondents' views on the importance of their child's Asian language learning (in per cent), by highest education qualification



The data suggest that the general assessment of importance is not primarily linked to respondents' first language background and geo-location, but rather reflects a general appreciation and recognition of Asian languages. The assessment of importance for a respondent's own child typically reflected the assessment for all children in Australia as well as the respondent's perception of the extent to which their child sees Asian language learning as important. This observation applies to both parents whose first language is English and those whose first language is not.

However, parents who speak another language at home, regardless of whether it is their first language or not, have slightly stronger views about the importance of learning an Asian language than the average for the sample. Hence, the assessment of importance seems to do more with language use rather than linguistic background.

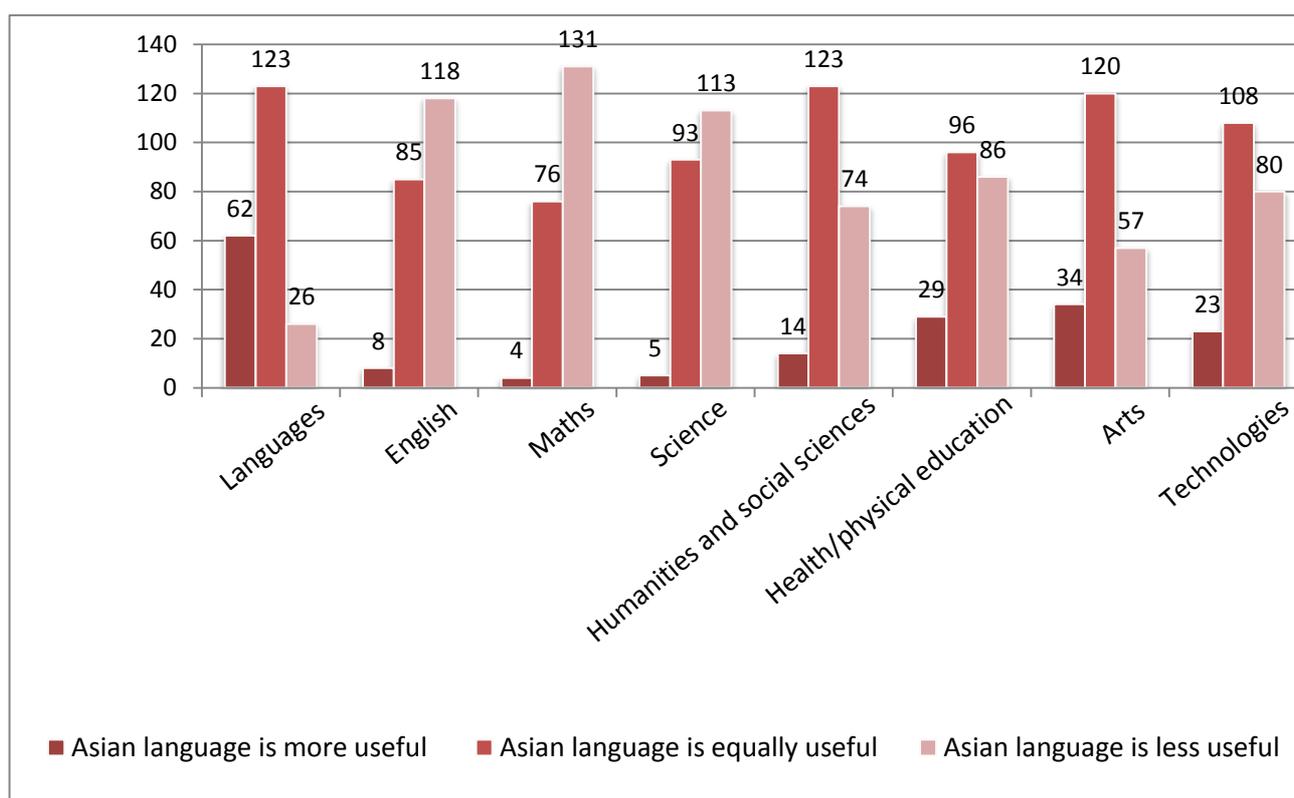
When asked about the importance of studying an Asian language at school in relation to other subjects or learning areas, three learning areas stand out as being of particularly high importance to respondents: Mathematics, English, and Science. The majority of respondents regarded these learning areas as more

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important than Asian languages. However, a substantial minority considered Asian languages as being of equal importance to these three learning areas. For each of the other learning areas, the majority of respondents think that studying an Asian language is of equal importance (Figure 13).

Close to 30 per cent of respondents stated that studying an Asian language is more important than studying another language in addition to English. The reasons for this statistic are inconclusive – on the basis of the whole data set, the sample cannot be generalised as being favourable towards Asia.

Figure 13: Importance of Asian language studies in relation to other subjects/learning areas (n=211)



Usefulness of Asian language learning

Many respondents consider learning an Asian language as being useful for their children in a variety of ways (Table 6). The statement that received the highest (average) approval rate (agree to a major or moderate extent) was 'learning an Asian language will help my child's understanding of other cultures' (86 per cent). This was followed by 'learning an Asian language will help with my child's ability to communicate with people from a particular Asian background' (77 per cent).

Respondents typically considered Asian language learning as helpful for their child's brain power (75 per cent), capacity to be successful in the 21st century (71 per cent) and professional future (73 per cent). The statements with the lowest agreement rates relate to the potential benefits to a child's performance in other subjects (53 per cent) and their post-compulsory education (51 per cent).

The sub-sample of respondents whose first language is English yield very similar, though marginally lower, approval rates across all eight statements. However, respondents who speak at least one language other

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than English at home expressed more positive views, significantly above the average for the entire sample (Table 6).

Table 6: Perceived usefulness of learning an Asian language

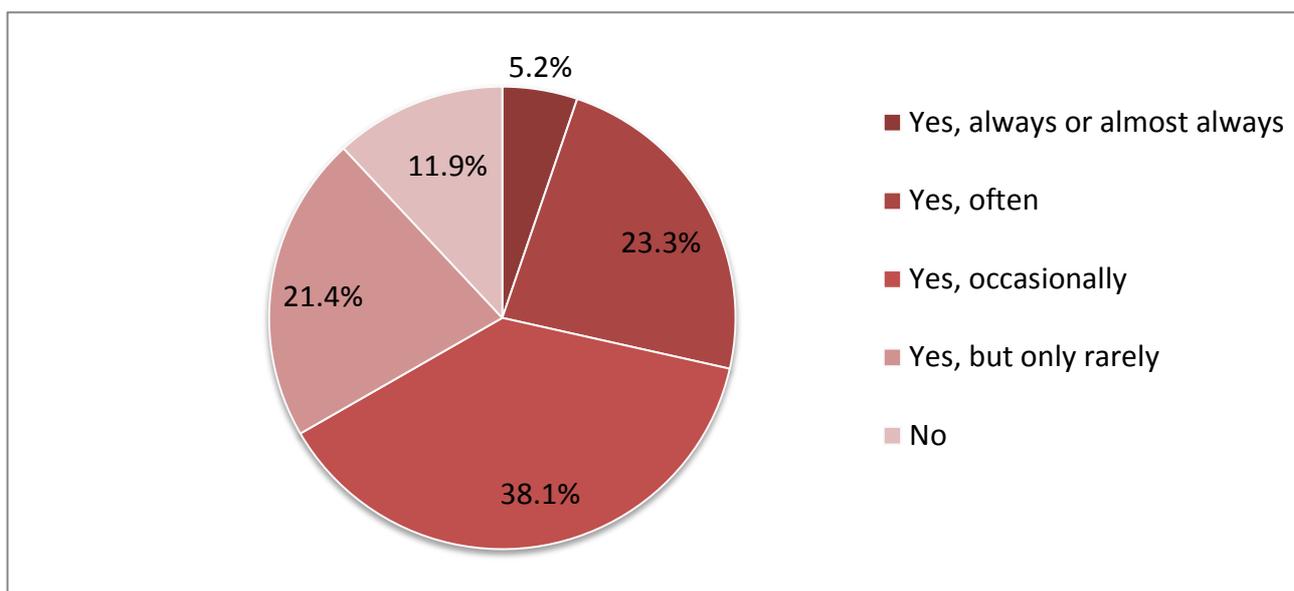
Learning an Asian language will help with my child's ...							
Sub-item	Major extent	Moderate extent	Minor extent	Not at all	Avg. (all)	Avg. (English first lang.)	Avg. (speak another lang.)
professional future	63	94	33	26	2.90	2.86	3.24
post-compulsory education	39	71	61	45	2.48	2.42	3.15
understanding of his/her own culture	69	48	48	51	2.63	2.53	3.33
understanding of other cultures	125	60	24	7	3.40	3.38	3.67
ability to perform in other subjects at school	49	66	56	45	2.55	2.49	3.20
brain power	98	63	37	18	3.12	3.07	3.50
ability to communicate with people from a particular Asian background	110	57	40	9	3.24	3.20	3.67
capacity to be successful in the 21st century	92	61	34	29	3.00	2.96	3.33
Total responses			n=216		n=199		n=46

Australian businesses and Asian language ability

Twenty-nine per cent of respondents think that Australian businesses value the ability to speak an Asian language 'always or almost always' (5 per cent) or 'often' (23 per cent); 33 per cent disagree ('no' or 'only rarely'); 38 per cent selected 'occasionally' (Figure 14). From these figures, it does not appear that parents value Asian language learning (or otherwise) on the basis of what businesses think or do with respect to Asian language ability.

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Figure 14: Do you think Australian business values the ability to speak an Asian language?



Broader attitudes towards Asia

There was generally broad consensus among respondents that Australia-Asia business, trade and intergovernmental relationships are becoming increasingly important now and into the future (Table 7). The average rating for respondents whose first language is English is almost identical to the average rating for the entire sample (across all four statements in Table 7). The average rating for respondents who speak a language other than English was higher across all four statements relating to business and government.

Table 7: Respondents' attitudes towards Asia: business and government

Statement	Major extent	Moderate extent	Minor extent	Not at all	Avg. (all)	Avg. (English first lang.)	Avg. (speak another lang.)	
Australia has a strategic advantage over other western countries because it is close to Asia.	77	81	37	13	3.07	3.03	3.16	
Australian governments should further strengthen their relationships with countries in Asia.	101	73	23	11	3.27	3.25	3.42	
Australia should expand its business links with countries in Asia in the next decade.	104	67	30	7	3.29	3.26	3.44	
Countries in Asia are increasingly important trade and business partners for Australia.	120	62	22	4	3.43	3.41	3.60	
Total responses						<i>n</i> =207	<i>n</i> =182	<i>n</i> =44

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The vast majority of respondents consider Australia to be part of the Asia region and displayed positive attitudes towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (Table 8). Approximately eight in ten respondents, for example, admire the cultural diversity of Asia and are interested in Asian cultures and societies (to a major or moderate extent); 72 per cent think that Australian society can learn from Asia, culturally, politically, economically or educationally. Close to 70 per cent engage and interact with people of Asian background in their personal life.

Table 8: Attitudes towards Asia: culture, society, history and people

Statement	Major extent	Moderate extent	Minor extent	Not at all	Avg. (all)	Avg. (English first lang.)	Avg. (speak another lang.)
I am interested in Asian cultures and societies.	89	74	33	11	3.16	3.10	3.59
I admire the cultural diversity of the Asian region.	91	76	29	11	3.19	3.14	3.50
I engage and interact with people of Asian background in my personal life.	78	69	47	13	3.02	2.94	3.59
Australia is part of the Asia region.	103	58	30	16	3.20	3.19	3.27
The histories of Australia and other countries in the Asia region have been linked from ancient times to the present.	57	73	57	20	2.81	2.79	2.95
Australian society can learn from Asia, culturally, politically, economically or educationally.	78	72	45	12	3.04	2.99	3.34
Total responses					n=207	n=182	n=44

All ten attitude items measuring parents' views on various aspects of Asia correlate positively and mostly quite strongly with each other (Pearson's r coefficient often above 0.5). This correlation suggests that a general notion of openness and interest towards Asia can exist across a range of spheres of social interaction (e.g. cultural, economic, political and interpersonal). Moreover, respondents' attitudes towards Asia, as measured with these ten separate items, correlate quite strongly with their view on how important it is for them that their child learns an Asian language at school (Pearson's r between 0.45 and 0.67). Hence, respondents who scored highly on the attitude items were much more likely to consider it important that their child studies an Asian language at school.

A deeper analysis of the data revealed that parents whose first language is English express, on average, almost identical levels of approval compared with the entire sample. This observation applies to all ten attitude items. However, parents who speak another language at home articulate, on average, more positive attitudes towards Asia. While the causal direction of the relationship between diversity of language use at home and attitudes towards Asia is not clear, this analysis underscores that responding parents who speak at least one language other than English at home are more likely to hold positive views of Asia and consider it important for their child to study an Asian language.

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This seems to indicate that parents' positive attitudes towards their child's Asian language learning at school reflects much more than a calculated and instrumentalist thought process. Rather, the attitudes are a complex combination of cognitive and affective elements that converge with, and are also a product of, parents' context and background. Having positive attitudes towards Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia appears to be the underlying platform for developing positive attitudes towards Asian language learning in schools.

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