



A CONTEMPORARY RATIONALE FOR INDONESIAN LANGUAGE AND STUDIES IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS: LITERATURE SCAN



Asia
Education
Foundation



Australian Government



Australia
Indonesia
Institute



This Literature Review was commissioned as part of the 'Why Indonesia matters in our schools: A rationale for Indonesian language learning in Australian education' and prepared by Dr Michelle Kohler, Senior Research Fellow, Research Centre for Languages and Cultures, University of South Australia. The rationale was developed by Asia Education Foundation, Asialink at The University of Melbourne with support from the Australia-Indonesia Institute, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Published December 2021.

BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

Indonesia is Australia's most populous and nearest Asian neighbour, a country of great strategic, economic and cultural importance. The national language of Indonesia, Indonesian or as it is known Bahasa Indonesia, has been taught in Australian universities and schools for over fifty years (Thomas, 2019). Despite having a long-term presence in Australian education, the provision of Indonesian language education has been characterised by instability, with both periods of expansion, and in more recent times, significant contraction.

One of the key recommendations of the national report into the state of Indonesian language education in Australian schools (Kohler & Mahnken, 2010) was to develop a clear and compelling rationale for the study of Indonesian in schools that might resonate more meaningfully with students and the broader community. At the time, and for a number of reasons, this recommendation was not taken up however concern remains that Indonesian language and culture is not sufficiently studied, and that there may be a critical point where the expertise that is needed nationally is significantly diminished or even lost.

The primary purpose of this literature scan is to provide an empirical basis to inform the development of a compelling, contemporary rationale for Indonesian language and culture studies in Australian schools. Unlike a literature review that provides a comprehensive discussion of all relevant literature on the subject, a scan aims to provide a succinct snapshot of the most recent literature and influential statements on the matter.

METHODOLOGY

The literature scan was based on an analysis of recent research, particularly from the 2015-2020 period, related to the state of Indonesian language and culture studies in Australian schools. The analysis focussed on obtaining key insights and gaps or areas where there is limited understanding, that may warrant further research.

The 'literature' reviewed included academic articles and chapters, reports to government and education agencies, personal communication with key academics, and pertinent essays and commentaries in the public domain. The material was considered using content analysis to determine a set of key insights surrounding both well-known and lesser-known aspects of the state of Indonesian language and culture studies in schools. Given the relationship between some matters such as teacher supply and training, program provision, and community perceptions of Indonesia, relevant literature related to the university sector was briefly considered.



DISCUSSION AND KEY INSIGHTS

1. Indonesian language and culture studies in education Indonesian language and culture studies are located within the broader context for languages education and Studies of Asia in Australian schools and universities. Asian languages and Studies of Asia are relatively recent arrivals in the Australian education landscape, being introduced primarily in the 1990s through the national initiatives and targeted strategies funded by successive Commonwealth governments. Several years prior to this, the National Policy on Languages had identified Indonesian as one of various groups of languages for study in Australian education; Indonesian being one of the 'languages of strategic and economic importance' (Lo Bianco, 1987). This positioning was strengthened through the Commonwealth government Asian languages and Studies initiatives that were implemented during the 1990s and early 2000s. The initiatives were designed to foster the learning of the languages of Australia's four largest Asian trading partners (Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean) along with a cross-curriculum focus on Studies of Asia (MCEETYA, 1994). Hence, Indonesian and Studies of Asia have long been associated with an economic rationale for their place in school education.

While the Asian languages and Studies of Asia strategies resulted in substantial increases in programs, teachers and learners engaging in these areas of education, the strategies have attracted some critique over time. In particular the economic rationale underpinning the initiatives was seen as inappropriate for a schooling context, particularly for younger learners, and with some disconnect between the macro policy agenda and the micro context of schools (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009). Studies of retention in language learning into the senior secondary years have shown a gap between the rhetoric of economic gains in studying a language and the personal aspirational reasons that individual learners choose to study one (Curnow & Kohler, 2007). Kohler (2018) suggests that the economic case is particularly problematic for Indonesian in part due to prevailing perceptions in the Australian community that Indonesia remains an agrarian economy with authoritarian control, despite evidence to the contrary.

There is evidence however that macro policy, and the funding attached to it, can influence the decision-making and actions of school leaders in their choice of languages and in particular staffing (Erebus Consulting, 2002). A study of Indonesian in Victorian government schools revealed that in recent years school leaders have felt increasingly uncertain about the expectations of them to provide for language learning (Raymond & Trefalt, 2019). The oscillations in, and current lack of, language education policy at the national level have created somewhat of a vacuum about the status of languages learning in general and of specific languages. Kohler (2020) notes that in the absence of a specific language in education policy, bureaucrats and school leaders have turned to curriculum policy for guidance. The reliance on curriculum policy is however problematic, as it cannot address the values proposition and matters pertaining to program conditions, staffing, teacher training and resourcing. In a climate of policy and resourcing uncertainty, Kohler argues, some languages are likely to be more vulnerable to perceptions of school leaders and communities about their value and may be supplanted by another language perceived as more 'relevant' or marketable, or that is associated with high levels of resourcing.

While the emphasis on economic gains for individuals and the nation was influential in spearheading a period of expansion of Indonesian language and culture studies in the 1990s, Kohler (2020) suggests that it may not be a convincing rationale for current young Australians, particularly those in the primary and junior secondary years. Moreover, Anderson (2017) claims that since 2013, when the Asian Century White Paper (DFAT) was 'shelved', that the 'Asia narrative' has been lost or at least supplanted by a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and 21st Century skills and capabilities narrative that has 'suck[ed] the public policy oxygen for Asian Studies from the room' (Anderson, 2017, p. 53). Writing well before the global pandemic and from a tertiary education perspective, Anderson suggests that the economic case, along with demographic and geographical factors, remains a strong reason for retaining a focus on Asia:

By 2030, two-thirds of the world's population will be in Asia. By 2030, five of the top ten economies will be in Asia. And, even today, Asia remains the most vibrant and dynamic region in the world in the face of an ageing and stagnating Europe and North America.

(Anderson, 2017, p. 54)

Anderson cites the high levels of mobility and interest in the commonwealth government's in-country study initiative, the New Colombo Plan, as a reason for optimism (c.f. Hill 2016). Since that time, there have been substantial geopolitical shifts, racial tensions and a global pandemic restricting travel including at times interstate travel. Given this it is unclear whether such a rationale can be effective, at least in the foreseeable future.

Kohler (2020) suggests that a renewed rationale for Indonesian language and culture will need to move beyond utility orientations and speak to the lifeworlds, imagination and affective side of young people. Kohler's study found that there are distinctive patterns, perceptions and needs at play in Indonesian language education in schools, and that a nuanced understanding and differentiated policy response is needed to improve the situation. This view echoes a recent, comprehensive study of the Victorian Education Department's languages education program, arguably the strongest in Australia. In this study, Lo Bianco (2019) notes that one of the program's key strengths is its commitment to diversity, of languages and purposes for studying them. He argues that 'jurisdictions that recognise that in a multicultural and multilingual society students' motivations for learning languages will be highly differentiated tend to attract more students to language study and retain them for longer through their education careers' (Lo Bianco, 2019, p. 11). Both studies indicate that a renewed rationale for Indonesian language and culture studies will need to speak to various stakeholders and their diverse aspirations, interests and needs.

INSIGHT 1

A differentiated, educational rationale

Indonesian language and culture studies has relied heavily on a macro, economically oriented rationale to promote participation. Such a rationale may no longer resonate with learners, and instead a differentiated, educational orientation may be needed that attends to the diversity of learners and their program contexts in order to strengthen Indonesian language and culture studies in schools.

2. Patterns of provision

In relation to Indonesian language learning, the most comprehensive picture of the nature of program provision was provided in the national report on the state of Indonesian in Australian schools (Kohler & Mahnken, 2010). The report showed that Indonesian had a significant foothold in primary schools, with a reduced presence in junior secondary school, and a smaller number of programs at the senior secondary level. Interestingly, despite the substantial uptake of Indonesian in primary schools through the 1990s, this did not lead to an increase at the senior secondary level, with the number of students studying the language through to the completion of secondary school being about half of those thirty years prior (Kohler & Mahnken, 2010).

A recent review of languages education for the Victorian Education Department considered participation rates across a range of languages over three decades. The study showed some 'recovery' in Indonesian over the period 1991-2018, with an increase from 5.5% to 19.7% of primary schools offering Indonesian, and an increase from 10% to 14% of secondary schools offering Indonesian (Lo Bianco, 2019). It should be noted that 1991-2018 spans just prior to the commencement of NALSAS in 1994 and after its cessation in 2002. These figures therefore represent a 'pre-NALSAS' to 'post-NALSAS' picture showing an overall long-term gain for Indonesian in Victorian Education Department programs since 1991. The figures do not reflect shorter-term fluctuations including the peak achieved during the NALSAS years.

Kohler (2020) conducted a further study to investigate what may have changed in Indonesian language education in the ten year period since the 2010 report. The study confirmed that the profile of Indonesian remains one of widespread and reasonably stable programs in primary, with limited programs in junior secondary and a small number of programs in senior secondary. It was also apparent that further erosion had occurred in both junior and senior secondary levels, with the reduction most pronounced at Year 12 (i.e. from 662 in 1998 to 353 in 2016, or 0.63% to 0.26%). The study focussed on government schools only due to the limited availability and accessibility of data in the Catholic and Independent sectors. In fact, the study reinforces findings of previous reports about the paucity of data related to languages education and specific languages (c.f. Liddicoat et al (2007) and AEF (2010)). Kohler notes that:

The reporting requirements associated with the previous strategies for Asian languages resulted in a nationally coordinated and largely consistent data about programs, student participation and to some extent the number of teachers of Indonesian. Currently, there is no national policy for language education, Asian or otherwise, no reporting requirements, and no centrally collected data. In effect, the data currently available about the teaching of languages including Indonesian is in a more parlous state than it was a decade ago.

(Kohler, 2020, p. 12)

The lack of data, both quantitative and qualitative, makes policy planning and accountability difficult, and hinders the investigation of complex matters and how to address them.

The issue of the relationship between geographic location, socioeconomic profile, programs and student participation rates was noted in the 2010 report on the state of Indonesian language education. While a specific study of this nature has yet to occur, it is an area again noted in a recent study of Indonesian in Victorian Education Department schools. The study indicates that there are perceptions amongst communities, and at times school leaders, often in low socioeconomic status or rural areas, that language learning interferes with English literacy development (Raymond & Trefalt, 2019). Furthermore, many schools in low socioeconomic contexts have a strong vocational education orientation, with English literacy viewed as a priority and languages other than English seen as lacking legitimacy (Black, Wright, & Cruickshank, 2018). Such perceptions remain strong despite findings that bilingualism is a highly desirable skill for young Australians. For example, an analysis of 4.2 million online job vacancy advertisements across Australia found that bilingualism was the second most highly ranked skill needed for employees (Foundation for Young Australia, 2016). Despite a desire for bilingual capabilities, the emphasis in schools on English literacy, general capabilities and STEM, may be reinforcing perceptions that language and culture studies, including of Indonesian, has limited value.

In relation to studies of Asia and specifically Indonesia in school programs, there is even less data available at either state/territory or national levels. Despite the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia (AAEA) in the Australian Curriculum, no data are available as to what content is being taught, by whom, in what ways, or whether teachers are suitably qualified to teach it. According to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), in 2019:

There were limited direct enquiries in relation to the Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia CCP. Some learning area-specific enquiries in AC: L and AC: HASS involved advice about incorporating one or more of the CCP's organising ideas, particularly in the areas of historical connections and cultural influences.

(ACARA, 2020, p. 86)

The only other data available about this aspect of the curriculum is the number of visits to the ACARA website specifically for AAEA, with a total of 30,720 visits in 2019 (ACARA, 2020, p. 89). This figure represents some measure of the level of interest perhaps but does little to indicate the purpose of the 'visit' and what occurred as a result let alone whether the AAEA is being adequately and capably addressed in practice.

While not the primary focus of this paper, it is worth noting parallels with the situation of Indonesian language and culture studies in the tertiary sector. According to Hill (2019) in the early 2000s, there were 23 universities offering Indonesian language and culture courses with approximately 1700 students. Between 2001-2010, there was a steep decline (37%) despite a 40% increase in students in the tertiary sector overall. More recently still, following recent closures of several university programs, the number of Indonesian language programs remaining is approximately nine. Amongst various concerns, there are those who fear that Australia will lose its expertise and capacity to educate future generations of Australians to participate effectively in our region (Crouch, 2020; Hill, 2019).

INSIGHT 2

Quality data to inform action

Indonesian language education in schools is characterised by a broad base narrowing to a sharp peak. There is no available data on the state of Studies of Asia/Indonesia in schools. The fragility of Indonesian language programs may relate to their distribution however this has not been systematically investigated. There are concerns about the potential loss of expertise in Indonesian language and culture studies to the point where the long-term viability of programs may be jeopardised.

3. Quality teaching, training and expertise

The rapid expansion of Asian language and studies programs during the 1990s resulted in difficulties with the supply of appropriately qualified teachers in these areas. The issue of both the sufficient supply of teachers, and the quality of training and teaching practice continue to be challenges.

Being able to reliably source teachers of particular languages is a key concern for school principals in deciding which language to offer in their school. In the case of Indonesian, a lack of suitably qualified teachers may make it more vulnerable to replacement with another language perceived to have a more plentiful and reliable supply of teachers. A recent training program in Queensland highlights some of the difficulties associated with the supply of qualified teachers of Indonesian. The InTI program, established by the University of the Sunshine Coast, was designed to increase the number of school students developing an intercultural capability through exposure to Indonesian language and culture (Curtis, Robertson, & Mahoney, 2019). The program provided places for 15 already qualified teachers (they received 45 applications) to retrain as teachers of Indonesian. Principals provided written support for teachers' participation, and 7 schools indicated they would consider offering Indonesian as a result. Following the program, two schools extended their provision across every year level; however, three principals reneged on plans to introduce a program, and others remained generally unsupportive. Teachers reported that their principals perceived languages as having a low priority, being difficult to sustain and inefficient in terms of maximum use of staffing due to small enrolments (Curtis et al., 2019). The participants also cited difficulties due to the 'insularity of local communities' and the negative attitudes towards Indonesia that were exacerbated by the lack of clear policy and support from the education authority (Curtis et al., 2019, p. 366). There was no appetite for a coordinated approach to teacher supply across schools despite the well-known difficulties in this area. Notwithstanding these obstacles, teachers in the program reported having developed increased sensitivity towards the diversity and learning needs of all students, and new insights about Indonesia and the importance of Asia literacy, becoming unofficial 'Asia literacy ambassadors' (Curtis et al., 2019, p. 367). This study highlights some of the complexities of staffing Indonesian programs showing that despite having suitably qualified teachers, some schools, particularly those in rural or remote areas, chose not to offer Indonesian due to perceptions of school leaders and their communities.

In contrast, a recent study of rural Victoria found that school principals were generally supportive of languages study however were often stymied in their efforts to provide a language program due to a lack of adequate resourcing (Slaughter, Lo Bianco, Aliani, Cross, & Hajek, 2019). In fact the study showed that principals were often very resourceful in supporting their language program and sourcing teachers, reflecting the role of school leaders and the importance of micro level implementation (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leach, 2014). Indonesian was not the focus of this study hence it is not possible to directly compare the two cases but it does indicate again a need to investigate geographical location as a potential factor in program provision.

In relation to qualifications and teaching quality, concerns about the adequacy of teacher preparation programs for language teachers in general have been raised, as follows:

Teachers are not as well prepared in initial teacher education to teach languages effectively. In primary teacher education courses, Languages is typically the only core learning area that is elective or not taught. Languages methodology subjects are usually not differentiated (according to language) in secondary teacher education courses, with all prospective languages teachers undertaking the same methodology class irrespective of the needs of different languages.

(AEF et al., 2014, p. 7)

In relation to Indonesian specifically, beyond pre-service education, there are challenges in teaching practice related to teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical content knowledge (Raymond & Trefalt, 2019). A recent study of the pedagogical practices of primary school Indonesian teachers in South Australia aligns with this view (Fhonna & Yusuf, 2020). The study revealed that primary Indonesian language teaching was largely geared towards vocabulary retention (colours, numbers and animals) in the early primary years. This expanded somewhat in upper primary to a focus on simple sentences and more complex vocabulary topics such as home and school. The authors found that the dominant methodology used by the teachers of Indonesian was grammar-translation with some Total Physical Response (TPR) strategies to support clarification of meaning and retention of vocabulary.

In addition, a recent study of Indonesian language teachers' understandings of culture found that they had limited understandings of culture in general, and a strong 'ethnicity' oriented view of Indonesian culture in particular (Naidu, 2018). Moreover, the teachers lacked knowledge of critical approaches to the teaching of culture in languages education and some had a 'deficit view' of the inclusion of religion in programs (Naidu, 2018, p. 661). This study reinforced the view presented by Kohler (2014) of a tension that exists for teachers of Indonesian between:

...acknowledging the fundamental inseparability of religion and Indonesian language and culture, and the predominantly secular nature of schooling in Australia, where the topic of religion is routinely avoided. (p. 172)

Both Kohler (2014, 2018) and Naidu (2018) indicate that faith in its various forms is an integral dimension of Indonesian language and culture, and represents an untapped resource for teaching that could be of significant interest for learners if handled well. It is an area, however, where teachers have limited expertise and some discomfort, and therefore would require an investment in both pre-service and in-service teacher education.

In terms of Asia literacy and Indonesia-related content in school programs, there have been very few studies that shed light on this aspect of education. One recent study used focus groups with Year 10-12 students in a secondary school in South Australia to explore students' experiences and perceptions of this aspect of the curriculum. The study found that students' perceptions of Asia were highly generalised, largely related to geographical knowledge and dominated by a sense of 'otherness' (Cominos & Soong, 2018). The students who had also studied Chinese language had views that were strongly influenced by this and their exchange trip to China. Older students and students who continued with their language studies demonstrated more nuanced understandings and detailed knowledge, and engagement with broader sources of information than those who ceased learning Chinese in year 10. The continuing language students also made more connections to content in other school subjects including history, biology, geography and English, suggesting some degree of cross-curricula approach. One student was particularly concerned that there appeared to be a contradiction between valorising Asia literacy as a cross-curriculum priority, and at the same time, devaluing subjects such as Asian languages that are directly relevant to it. In general, students had a limited sense of 'Asia within Australia', with students who continued to study a language reporting feeling more at ease with multiculturalism than those who discontinued but with both groups generally perceiving Asia to be 'out there' (Cominos & Soong, 2018, p. 181). Students also reported highly varied approaches in their experiences of Asia literacy, and a lack of coherence or set of framings for making sense of such learning. While this was a small-scale, single site study, the findings indicate the need for a more systematic approach to the teaching of Asia literacy in schools and improved articulation and valuing of the relationship between Asia literacy and languages learning.

A further issue related to Australia's capacity to teach Indonesian and Asia/Indonesia literacy or AAEA, is the capacity of tertiary institutions across Australia to sustain their Indonesian language and Asian Studies programs. There are concerns that the loss of tertiary programs in Indonesian language and culture studies may impact on the capacity of states/territories to supply sufficient teachers for programs in schools. The concern is that a critical mass of expertise cannot be retained with the current demise of programs and that this may lead to Indonesian language programs in schools being replaced or closed (Crouch, 2019; Hill, 2016).

INSIGHT 3

A coordinated plan for teacher supply

Indonesian language and culture studies programs in schools are dependent on a sufficient and reliable supply of suitably qualified teachers. A coordinated approach between local decision makers/school leaders, centralised workforce planners, and universities, both in teacher education and Indonesian/Asian language and culture studies, is needed to address supply issues.

4. Perceptions and prestige

The Australian Curriculum sets out the valued knowledge, skills and understandings regarded as essential for all young Australians. The core learning areas includes Languages and within this Indonesian is one of the languages for which a specific curriculum has been developed, signalling that it is a key language for which there is support. Also within the curriculum are three cross-curricula priorities of which as previously noted is the Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (AAEA) priority. Each foci has a different status; Indonesian is one of many possible languages within the Languages learning area, and AAEA (which may or may not include Indonesia) is a cross-curriculum priority to be embedded in a range of learning areas. Despite the potential for meaningful synergies, the two are not necessarily related in school programs, as each school has the authority to determine its own provision in relation to languages and program content within the broad requirements of the Australian Curriculum (and the respective versions of this in different states and territories).

While states and territories vary in their requirements, the study of a language is generally offered to students in the primary school years (with varied entry points including Reception/ Prep, Year 3, Year 5). At secondary school, studying a language is typically mandated for one or two semesters in the first year and thereafter becomes an optional subject. Schools have the choice as to which languages are offered and can generally elect to change language without consultation with education authorities. The choice of language at the local level often involves some form of consultation with the school community such as a survey or parent forum. In the interest of appearing balanced, secondary schools typically offer two languages, one European and one Asian (Liddicoat et al., 2007). Students usually have a choice of language at the point of enrolment and then choose to continue or not with the same language beyond the first year. A small number of schools offer some languages at ab initio or beginners' level in year 11, and increasingly in year 10, as part of gaining additional credit towards senior secondary certificates. Thus, language learning is strongly associated with choice (Kohler, 2020); the choice as to which language/s are offered, and student choice as to whether they continue to study a language or not.

The culture of choice also impacts on students' perceptions of the value of a subject and whether it represents cultural capital worthy of their investment of time and effort. Kohler (2020) argues that Indonesian is viewed as having limited prestige within a learning area that itself is perceived as having limited value (Liddicoat, Scarino, & Kohler, 2018), and this is likely exacerbated by the socioeconomic profile of Indonesian language programs. This view reflects similar findings from a British study (Coffey, 2018) that revealed the highly influential role of socioeconomic status in determining whether or not students studied a language in secondary school. The study showed that languages such as French, Japanese and Korean, were viewed as valuable cultural capital by middle class students aspiring to become global citizens. For students in lower socioeconomic areas, whose aspirations were locally focussed, the study of any language and culture held little value in their lifeworlds. While Indonesian was not part of this study, it does indicate the need to better understand socioeconomic class and perceptions of prestige in relation to Indonesian language and culture in Australian schools.

These views concur also with findings from a study of retention in languages subjects more broadly into the senior secondary years (AEF et al., 2014). The study found that in relation to languages learning in general, there was a relationship between opportunity to study, certification or recognition of the value of studying a language, and perceptions of value to the individual student. That is, where more subjects were recognised in the certification process, more students studied a language. Furthermore, where mechanisms such as bonus points were available more students studied a language, sometimes taking an additional fifth or sixth subject. There was also a greater take-up in certain languages such as Japanese in Queensland (AEF et al., 2014, p. 5). This may be due to Japanese having the largest proportion of students but there may also be a prestige factor at work. Further investigation however is required to establish the specific causes.

The culture of 'curriculum by choice' particularly in the secondary school years, means that students and their families have a great deal of influence over whether or not young people study a language, and which one/s they study and to what level. Studies of learners' decision-making processes in relation to studying languages generally have indicated a number of factors that influence their choices:

Perceptions of cognitive advantage, like enhancing effective thinking, and a desire to gain cross-cultural skills also influence this cohort of students. Reasons based on the utility of a language, including getting good marks and future work, study and travel plans, are all taken into consideration in these students' decision making. Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) maximisation is not a major factor for this cohort, although the opportunity to gain an ATAR bonus influences some senior languages students. While parents influence students' language study choices in the earlier years of schooling, they do not appear to have a strong influence in the senior secondary years.

(AEF et al., 2014, p. 3)

In this study, over 500 parents were surveyed to explore their attitudes towards the study of languages in general. The results indicated that parents with additional languages themselves were strong supporters of continued language study into the senior years, while those with English only and school/VET as their highest education qualification, were more likely to consider languages as less important for future study or careers than other subjects (AEF et al., 2014). These results reflect findings from other studies that show a disconnect between the rhetoric of economic advantage from language study with the perceptions of parents and learners' own aspirations (Curnow & Kohler, 2007; Taylor & Marsden, 2014). Studies of parental attitudes have focussed on languages learning in general rather than specific languages, and there appears to be no studies of parental attitudes towards the cross-curricula priority of AAEA or Studies of Asia/Indonesia in particular.

Languages and Studies of Asia/AAEA do not exist in a vacuum and there are often strongly held community views about various languages and cultures, their value, significance, place in Australian society and the world. It is often argued that this creates difficulties for Indonesian language and culture as there are prevailing negative perceptions of Indonesia in the Australian community based on a 'string of crises reflecting negatively upon Indonesia' (Hill, 2016, p. 6). This perception is then reflected in decisions made by individual students and their families, as Crouch recounts,

In my former role as a primary school teacher, I had an 11-year-old student tell me that they didn't want to learn Indonesian because their mum and dad said that Indonesians are terrorists. It's pretty hard to reason with an 11-year-old when extensive media coverage of terrorism, general public perceptions and perhaps even their own parents might support this false stereotype.

(Crouch, 2019)

Teachers often cite negative attitudes and a lack of knowledge and understanding about Indonesia amongst students and their families as a major influence on students' choices about engaging with studies of Indonesian language and culture (Raymond & Trefalt, 2019).

Even at the tertiary level, where an economic rationale may have more force, Hill (2016) notes a concerning attitudinal shift among students; a kind of indifference towards Indonesian:

The educational curiosity that greeted Indonesian in Australian schools and universities in the second half of the twentieth century appears to have been replaced by a casual disinterest.

(Hill, 2016, p. 2)

In the Australian community more generally, reports from the Lowy Institute (Kassam, 2020) reveal some backsliding in perceptions of Indonesia particularly in the area of 'trust', with only 36% of people polled agreeing that Indonesia could be trusted to act responsibly in the word (16% less than 2017). There was some improvement in awareness of Indonesia's system of government with a 5-point increase from 2019 to 39% in 2020 of people who agreed that Indonesia is a democracy (an area that has been consistently low since 2013 polling). A further area probed by the poll is that of 'feelings' towards other countries with Indonesia rated at 51% along the scale of coolest (0) to warmest (100). These figures indicate that there is a sustained problem of lack of knowledge and interest among Australians about the nature of contemporary Indonesia and our relationship with it.

INSIGHT 4

Shifting the values proposition

The culture of choice in Australian education means that Indonesian language and culture studies are strongly tied to the decisions and perceptions of learners and their families, and school principals. An alternative narrative is needed to shift perceptions about the purpose and value of studying Indonesian language and culture into the senior secondary years.

5. Future directions

Previous studies have made recommendations about ways to bolster the future of Indonesian language and culture studies in Australian schools. A strong recommendation of both the national study (Kohler & Mahnken, 2010) and a more recent Victorian study (Raymond & Trefalt, 2019), was to establish a working party to oversee a comprehensive Indonesian-specific action plan. While the recommendations were for groups at different levels of government, the common feature is the desire for government intervention and oversight by a stakeholder and expert group to address structural and cultural reform. According to the current President of the Asian Studies Association the situation has become urgent:

Shifting the dire predicament of Indonesian language studies in Australia in my lifetime will require a fundamental change in direction for the education sector across the board - primary schools, high schools and universities. ...It's time for the next Australian government to reverse the Indonesian language disaster on our shores. After all, the "Asian Century" really should be the time to start learning an Asian language.

(Crouch, 2019)

Turner (2017) similarly suggests that a more strategic and collaborative approach is needed between the Australian government, business and education sectors to develop educational policy in languages learning and international skills that will serve the national interest and generate prosperity well into the future. She argues that there is a significant disjuncture between the stated demand for languages expertise in business and trade areas, and Australia's capacity to meet this:

Languages, more than ever, are and will be more in demand in the future, as industry equips itself with a workforce capable of supporting markets and clients. ...only 5.1 per cent of the overall workforce are fluent in one or more Asian languages.

(Turner, 2017, p. 80)

While not only focussed on Indonesian language and culture studies, recommendations such as these point to the need for leadership and cooperation among state/territory and federal governments to rectify the situation for all languages, including Indonesian. The recently announced changes to commonwealth funding to universities for languages units through the Jobs-Ready Graduates package, may have a positive impact on the demand for languages such as Indonesian and for Asian Studies in universities and secondary schooling, however this remains to be seen.

There are also more micro policy initiatives that are having positive impact at the local level through community engagement in Indonesian language and culture learning, and creating positive perceptions of Indonesia more broadly. For example, community-based developments such as the Balai Bahasa (Language Centres) now established in various states/territories. These initiatives are based on a partnership arrangement between local community volunteers, the Indonesian government that provides a modest financial investment, and local education authorities. The Balai Bahasa centres offer a range of Indonesian language and culture services to the local community, for example, the centre in Perth runs a program of Indonesian language classes, an annual Indonesian film festival, a Language Assistant Program for schools, and study tours to Indonesia (Hill, 2016, p. 24). These centres play a vital role in educating the broader community, however are often heavily dependent on a few dedicated individuals. While these initiatives often operate on limited resources, they can prove difficult to sustain long-term and some certainty of funding, albeit small, could ensure sustainability and result in such services and the profile they create for Indonesian language and culture studies, becoming more normalised in the community.

At a more fundamental level, there are also calls for a reimagining of the rationale and discourse associated with the study of Indonesian language and culture. Kohler (2018) suggests that there is a need to reframe Indonesian language programs, shifting away from economic and utilitarian goals to an educational and intercultural orientation. She argues that such a reorientation would require a rethinking of how Indonesia features in the Australian psyche and educational landscape – how young people imagine it and their relationship to it. Kohler (2018, 2020) proposes that the knowledge and belief systems associated with Indonesian language/s and culture/s offer learners new ideas and ways of understanding and engaging in the world; and it is this that has the potential to be valuable to all learners. According to Kohler, 'going there' is more of a conceptual journey than a physical one; and one that would profoundly address learner identity and how they understand their place in Australia and the world. In policy terms, this would require a clear articulation of the place and value of Indonesian language and culture in Australian education, and in curriculum terms, it would have implications for strengthening Indonesian language programs, the cross-curriculum priority of AAEA, and the Intercultural Understanding General Capability.

There is some optimism that communication and information technologies will provide new modes of learning that will enhance students' access and engagement in language learning and use:

Modes of learning not yet invented may emerge to provide opportunities for tomorrow's students to learn languages in ways their current teachers cannot conceive. Tomorrow's learners may approach the challenge of mastering a new language with very different expectations of the learning process than do the current generation.

(Hill, 2016, p. 26)

Kohler (2020) also suggests that the notion of 'going there' will be enhanced through digitally based experiential learning. One of the advantages of Indonesian language and culture learning is the real-time accessibility that is possible due to Indonesia's proximity. Being able to interact with Indonesians of similar ages through a range of technologies offers much potential for more sustained relationships and meaningful language and culture learning at all levels of schooling. Hill (2016) notes that in order to take advantage of these transformative technologies and experiences the next generation of Indonesian language and culture teachers should be recruited and trained as a matter of urgency.

One further development that may be cause for optimism is the changing nature of Indonesia itself. There are dramatic political, economic and cultural changes underway in many areas including technology and digital communications, finance, security and defence, water and environmental management, law, health, arts and education. There are shared realities and challenges for both Indonesia and Australia that could strengthen collaboration in a range of areas:

Like Australia, Indonesia has to find a way to deliver stronger connectivity solutions to the more remote and rural areas, to help small business people, farmers and agribusiness improve productivity and connect more usefully to markets. Working on these common problems could yield some fabulous solutions

(Brown, 2018, p. 56)

The generational and societal transformation occurring in Indonesia represents a major opportunity for reciprocal engagement between young Australians and Indonesians; not only within Indonesia. Prior to the pandemic, Indonesia was among the top ten source countries for international students in Australia. These young Indonesians maintain strong transnational lives through making and consuming popular culture from Indonesia and Asia, and bringing these into the domestic arts and popular culture scene (Scott-Maxwell, 2020). It may be that there is the potential to leverage this resource, as has occurred with Japanese and Korean, to increase the visibility of Indonesian language and culture in the Australian popular culture scene. This could have commercial benefits but more importantly for education, raising the profile of Indonesian language and culture locally, may influence how young people regard it within their own realities:

Asian pop – both in its live and mediated, commercial and non-commercial forms – carves out a space for 'Asia' in Australia that projects a new (or perhaps emerging) rather than old Australia.

(Scott-Maxwell, 2020, p. 33)

This kind of mindset shift is what is needed, argues Kohler (2018), to enable Australians to operate capably and comfortably at home, in the region and the world:

...to really know who we are in Asia and to belong here, we must be capable of genuine reciprocal engagement and this requires embracing the learning of the languages of our region.

(Kohler, 2018, p. 86)

INSIGHT 4

The need for imagination

Indonesia and Asia are changing. A coordinated, strategic and imaginative approach to Indonesian language and culture studies is needed to enable the kinds of experimentation that is necessary for more young Australians to want to be part of this change.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The literature scan has yielded a number of insights about Indonesian language and culture studies in Australian schools. It has also revealed gaps in understanding and areas that require further investigation to develop deeper and more nuanced insights that would inform a renewal of this area of education. Areas that could be investigated include:

1. The profile and place of programs and learners- Indonesian language e.g.
 - a. Who does/does not study Indonesian?
 - b. What is the geographic and socioeconomic distribution of Indonesian language programs?
 - c. What impact does continuity of learning (primary to secondary) have on whether learners study Indonesian? Where continuity is available, who continues and why? Who does not continue and why?
 - d. What place does the Indonesian language program have in the curriculum of schools?
2. The profile and place of programs and learners- Studies of Asia/ Indonesia e.g.
 - a. To what extent is Indonesia part of the curriculum offered by schools? e.g. Who offers a specific or strong formulation of AAEA, with a focus on Indonesia?
 - b. What relationship, if any, is there between AAEA and Indonesian language programs in schools?
 - c. What factors influence schools in whether they offer a Studies of Asia/Indonesia focus in their programs, and if so, how it is offered?
3. Local school decision making e.g.
 - a. What matters do schools consider in choosing which language (including Indonesian) to offer, and to what level? (areas to probe include policy requirements, community profile and expectations, teacher supply and resourcing)
 - b. What processes do schools, particularly school leaders, undertake in making decisions?
 - c. Who is involved in the decision-making process? (including Departmental/Education Authority involvement)
 - d. How do perceptions of Indonesia/Indonesian feature in such decisions?
4. Student decision making e.g.
 - a. What matters do students consider in choosing which language (including Indonesian) to study, and to what level (particularly at critical points of end of primary and junior secondary)?
 - b. What processes do they undertake in making decisions?
 - c. Who is involved in the decision-making process and how do they influence what decisions are made? (including teachers, family, friends)
 - d. How do perceptions of Indonesia/Indonesian feature in their decisions?
 - e. What role do learner aspirations play in whether they choose to study Indonesian?
 - f. How do learners understand the relationship between their study of Indonesian language and the cross-curriculum priority of AAEA?

CONCLUSION

The literature scan indicates that Indonesian language and culture studies have had a somewhat turbulent place in Australian education. The scan shows that there are well-documented reasons for this, as well as areas that are less well understood and that warrant further investigation. It is also evident that a one-size fits all rationale may not be sufficient and that a differentiated, more nuanced and contemporary rationale that foregrounds the educational value of Indonesian language and culture studies for learners is needed to reinvigorate this important aspect of Australian education.

REFERENCES

- ACARA. (2020). Monitoring the effectiveness of the Foundation -Year 10 Australian Curriculum 2019. Retrieved from Sydney:
- AEF. (2010). The current state of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean language education in Australian Schools: Four languages: four stories. Retrieved from Carlton South:
- AEF, Kohler, M., Curnow, T. J., ACER, Spence-Brown, R., & Wardlaw, C. (2014). Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project. Retrieved from Melbourne: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/senior_secondary_languages_education_research_project_final.pdf
- Anderson, K. (2017). Don't look back, Asian Studies has a positive future. In *Disruptive Asia 2017* (Vol. 1, pp. 51-55). Sydney: Asia Society Australia.
- Black, S., Wright, J., & Cruickshank, K. (2018). The struggle for legitimacy: Language provision in two 'residual' comprehensive high schools in Australia. *Critical Studies in Education*, 59(3), 348-363.
- Brown, H. (2018). Bridging a looming digital divide with Indonesia. In G. Earl (Ed.), *Disruptive Asia, 2018: ASEAN Special Issue* (Vol. 2). Sydney: Asia Society Australia.
- Coffey, S. (2018). Choosing to Study Modern Foreign Languages: Discourses of Value as Forms of Cultural Capital. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(4), 462-480.
- Cominos, N., & Soong, H. (2018). 'It's the future!': Students as key stakeholders in Asia literacy. In H. Soong & N. Cominos (Eds.), *Asia Literacy in a Global World, Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects*. Singapore: Springer.
- Crouch, M. (2019). Time to reverse the Indonesian language disaster on our shores. *The Interpreter*, 15 May 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/time-reverse-indonesian-language-disaster-our-shores>
- Crouch, M. (2020). Dumb and dumber: language cuts risk Australia's regional relations. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/dumb-and-dumber-language-cuts-risk-australia-s-regional-relationships-20201214-p56n7h.html>
- Curnow, T. J., & Kohler, M. (2007). Languages are important ... but that's not why I am studying one. *Babel*, 42(2), 20-24,38.
- Curtis, R., Robertson, A., & Mahoney, I. (2019). Intercultural language learning: the Indonesian for Teachers Initiative (InTI) experience. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 19(4), 357-370. doi:10.1080/14708477.2018.1545778
- Erebus Consulting. (2002). Review of studies of Asia in Australian Schools. Retrieved from <http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/nalsas/pdf/reviews/pdf>:
- Fhonna, R., & Yusuf, Y. Q. (2020). Indonesian Language Learning Methods. *Journal of Language and Education*, 6(2), 106-119. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2020.10080>
- Foundation for Young Australia. (2016). The New Basics: Big data. Retrieved from Hill, D. T. (2016). Language as 'Soft Power' in Bilateral Relations: The Case of Indonesian Language in Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 36(3).
- Hill, D. T. (2019). Facing the C21 Indonesian in Australian Universities. In P. Thomas (Ed.), *Talking North: The journey of Australia's first Asian language*. Clayton: Monash University Publishing.
- Kassam, N. (2020). Lowy Institute Poll 2020: Understanding Australian Attitudes to the World. Retrieved from Sydney:
- Kohler, M. (2014). The teaching and learning of Indonesian in Australia: Issues and prospects. In N. Murray & A. Scarino (Eds.), *Dynamic ecologies: A relational perspective on languages education in the Asia-pacific region* (pp. 169-181). New York and London: Springer.
- Kohler, M. (2018). Going there' - reviving Indonesia/n in education. In G. Earl (Ed.), *Disruptive Asia 2018: ASEAN Special Issue* (Vol. 2). Sydney: Asia Society Australia.
- Kohler, M. (2020). Indonesian language education in Australia: patterns of provision and contending ideologies. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*(online 8 July, <https://doi.org/10.1075/aral.19065.koh>).
- Kohler, M., & Mahnken, P. (2010). The Current State of Indonesian Language Education in Australian schools. Retrieved from Canberra:
- Liddicoat, A. J., Scarino, A., Curnow, T. J., Kohler, M., Scrimgeour, A., & Morgan, A. M. (2007). An investigation of the state and nature of languages in Australian schools. Retrieved from Adelaide:
- Liddicoat, A. J., Scarino, A., & Kohler, M. (2018). The impact of school structures and cultures on change in teaching and learning: the case of languages. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 38(1), 3-13. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-017-0021-y>
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Taylor-Leech, K. (2014). Micro language planning for multilingual education: Agency in local contexts. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 15(3), 237-244.
- Lo Bianco, J. (1987). *National Policy on Languages*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2019). Securing the promise: Sustaining, deepening and extending language education for all Victorians. Retrieved from
- Lo Bianco, J., & Slaughter, Y. (2009). *Second languages and Australian Schooling*. Retrieved from Melbourne: MCEETYA. (1994). *National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program*. Canberra: Commonwealth Government of Australia, Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs Retrieved from <http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/nalsas/about.htm>
- Naidu, K. (2018). Attending to 'culture' in intercultural language learning: a study of Indonesian language teachers in Australia. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 1-12.
- Raymond, R., & Trefalt, B. (2019). [Report on the Teaching of Indonesian in Victorian Government Schools: Understanding constraints and opportunities: a qualitative report, : unpublished report for the Victorian Department for Education, Personal communication with author, 3 February 2021].

Scott-Maxwell, A. (2020). K-pop flows and Indonesian student pop scenes: situating live Asian pop music in an 'Asian' Australia. *Media International Australia*, 175(1), 20-35.

Slaughter, Y, Lo Bianco, J., Aliani, R., Cross, R., & Hajek, J. (2019). Language programming in rural and regional Victoria: Making space for local viewpoints in policy development. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 42(3), 274-300.

Taylor, F, & Marsden, E. (2014). Perceptions, attitudes and choosing to study foreign languages in England: An experimental intervention. *Modern Language Journal*, 98, 902-920.

Thomas, P. (Ed.) (2019). *Talking North: The journey of Australia's first Asian language*. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing.

Turner, K. (2017). Australia's language deficit is a threat to its role in the global economy. In G. Earl (Ed.), *Disruptive Asia 2018* (Vol. 2, pp. 79-82). Sydney: Asia Society Australia.

CONTACT

Asia Education Foundation

www.asiaeducation.edu.au

Asialink centre

Level 4 Sidney Myer Asia Centre

The University of Melbourne

Victoria 3010

T: +613 8344 3590

E: aef-support@asialink.unimelb.edu.au

