

Revitalising Asian Languages Literacy in Our Schools



For over two decades the importance of Asian literacy has been well recognised by successive Australia Governments. Teaching Asian languages in schools in Australia is vital for the social, economic and cultural well-being of life in Australia. It develops students' appreciation and respect of other cultures, customs, and history and ability to communicate across diverse cultures. Importantly it enables Australia to contribute in the future international community the era known as the 'Asian Century'.

However, the recently released report by Asia Education Foundation shows a dramatic decline in Asian literacy in our schools. The report, *The Current State of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean Language Education in Australian Schools: Four Languages, Four Stories*, which was commissioned by the Government found:

- A decline of 5.4% in Asian languages being studied in schools from kindergarten to year 12 during the period 2000-2008;
- Only 5.8% of year 12 students in 2008 completed an Asian language subject, and the declining trend is continuing;
- Only 3%-4% of all Asian language students in year 12 are a second language speaker;
- Indonesian is at risk of not being offered to year 12 by 2020.

The reasons for this decline are predominantly inadequate funding. The 2002 Howard government stopped its funding commitment to the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) strategy in 2002 despite the recommendations of the Review of Studies of Asia in Australian Schools in 2002 recommended the strategy be continued for another quadrennium to capitalise on the gains made since its implementation in 1994. The government had provided just under \$210 million from its implementation in 1994 to its termination. This was compounded by the approach of the current National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) introduced in 2008. This program adopts a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, which doesn't differentiate between the four Asian languages and therefore does not provide adequate funding for an effective teaching program.

The Australian Greens propose to restore Asian literacy in the Australian education system by:

- Increasing funding to previous levels – this is a commitment of an additional \$23.5m per year over four years¹.

Revitalising Asian Languages Literacy in Our Schools



- Collecting quantitative data for continuous evaluation
- Establishing national groups for each language
- Advocating the importance of Asian languages in schools
- Establishing partnerships with international institutions

Background

There are many benefits of speaking an Asian language. The ability to:

- Engage with, participate in and build strong relationships with Asia, a growing international influence;
- Build an understanding the diversity of Asian cultures and regions;
- Communicate sensitively and successfully with non –English speaking people;
- Aid in the development of literacy skills, critical thinking, reasoning, conceptualising, and problem solving;
- Increase career and travel opportunities.

The Rudd Government acknowledges the importance of Asian languages and in 2008, implemented the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP). The NALSSP has a commitment to ensuring primary and secondary schools have adequate infrastructure and resources to support teaching of Asian languages; increase the quality and supply of Asian language teachers; increase the demand for Asian languages by students; and develop a specialised curriculum for advanced students. The government has committed funding of \$62.4 million over four years.

The Greens Initiatives

As the Asia Education Foundation report found, each of the four language's circumstances were different. The Greens recognise the need for separate strategies tailored to each language's circumstance, not the 'one-size-fits-all' approach that is the current method. In order to effectively achieve this, the Greens propose, on top of the current NALSSP strategies, three new initiatives.

Revitalising Asian Languages Literacy in Our Schools



New Quantitative Data Collection

There has been insufficient data collected on Asian languages at schools. It is therefore hard to accurately assess, plan and implement effective initiatives aimed at increasing the number of students learning Asian languages. There needs to be a new data collection measure, which is nationally accepted, so that adequate data can be produced. Areas of importance are: reasons behind students abandoning or continuing their studies; the programs that are currently offered; number of teachers and future graduates; the training of teaching staff; amount of hours needed to study a particular language; transition from primary study to secondary study.

Establishment of National Groups for Each Language

As each of the four languages has such differing requirements, there needs to be a national leadership group for each language. The role of these national groups, based on the new data found from extensive research, would be to:

- Develop, implement and monitor a specific action plan designed for the provision of their language in schools;
- Develop a national curriculum for all schools participating in their language;
- Create three separate streams of their language and identify a specific level of language skills to acquire for each stream of graduating year 12 students;
- Establish renewed rationales for studying their language and a commitment to advocating these rationales;
- Devise recruitment plans for future teachers;
- Develop adequate education for teachers of their language, both new and ongoing;
- Develop new resources, particularly focusing on electronic resources.

Advocacy of the Importance of Asian Languages in Schools

As the cultural persuasions of Australians are towards Europe over Asian, there needs to be a new appreciation of the importance of Asian languages. Educational institutions need to have a commitment to advocating for Asian Languages; focusing on the many benefits that learning a language will produce.

Revitalising Asian Languages Literacy in Our Schools



Partnerships with International Institutions

In order to increase the language skills and proficiency of students studying languages, they need to have stronger contact with native speakers and situations. This can be achieved through partnerships between Australian schools and schools in China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. This could take the form of exchange programs or internships for students, teaching assistants from Asian countries in Australian classrooms, or even virtual interactions.

1 Government spending over 8 years between 1994 – 2002 averaged out at \$29.25m per year; adjusted to 2010 levels this is equivalent to \$36.6m. The proposed additional funding of \$23.5 will bring the current expenditure to equivalent levels to restore and sustain an effective Asian language literacy program in our schools.