



**MONASH**  
University



# Community Languages Australia Parent Project

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# WELCOME



Australia has 1,000 community language schools, who provide language maintenance in 69 languages to in excess of 100,000 school age children.

For close to 25 years, Monash University has supported the education journey of more than 1200 community languages teachers and 125 community languages principals with specific tailor-made languages methodology, instruction and leadership courses. We remain passionate about giving children and their diverse multilingual, multicultural communities the best learning for community languages education.

Every child has the potential to succeed, and deserves the opportunity to grow, develop and realise their bilingual, bicultural identity and social contribution to Australia. Every migrant and immigrant parent, grandparent and caregiver, wants this for their child or children and for this to be a positive contribution in their new homeland.

This lens is what makes the perspective of parents valuable and crucial to better understand when shaping the future and development of community school(s) education in Australia. Parents are a key stakeholder who can provide a comprehensive view into the experience of community language learning of their children in community language schools. They are uniquely positioned to observe, analyse and link together all aspects of their community and provision of this for children's community language education.

This Report a first of its kind in Australia and commissioned by Community Languages Australia attempts to probe deeper into the current issues for community languages schooling and highlight emerging issues that can shape public commentary and debate.

The results conveyed through this Report is that most parents are supportive of the continued work of community language schools; however, some are constrained in their choices, often because of access. And some are concerned that the lack, or poor choice of materials, teacher and principal quality are impacting on children's motivation to continue to learn their community language.

The Australian Community Languages Parents Report is the only one of its kind, analysing this education environment, as perceived by parents. By giving voice to their views, we are optimistic that it will continue to inform public discussion and positively shape the future of multilingual multicultural education in Australia.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Community Languages Australia Parent Project report is the product of a year-long online (Qualtrics) survey study conducted by Faculty of Education, Monash University and commissioned by Community Languages Australia. In this nation-wide project, we examined parents' views on their children studying at Community Language Schools (CLS). In addition to looking at their demographics, we asked parents about:

- the aspirations they have for their children to learn Community Languages (CL);
- the resources at their CLS;
- the quality of the curriculum, teaching materials, and instruction; and
- the challenges parents encounter.

We believe parents play a crucial role in the maintenance of CL and schools as they are the principal decision-makers for their children to learn CL by attending these schools.

Quantitative demographic information revealed that more mothers than fathers completed the survey and a very small portion of responses came from the guardians. The majority of the parents were educated and first-generation immigrants. Their key sources of information about the schools were through their social community, friends, and other parents. They were highly invested in their children maintaining their CL by speaking to them in the CL in their daily communications. They also used a variety of sources including the internet and visiting their home country as ways to keep contact with family and friends back home. They spent between 30 minutes to 2 hours per week helping their children with their CLS homework.

The qualitative and quantitative data brought to light that parents found it challenging to motivate their children to formally learn the CL and that there was a drop in the number of enrolments from year 7 to year 12. The parents connected the reasons for their children's decline in motivation and ultimately attrition rates to:

- instructional methods;
- relationship building of the teachers with the students;
- the amount and quality of the homework;
- the relevance of the teaching materials with the interests of the children,
- the principals' leadership styles; and
- the recognition of the CL by mainstream education and in the ATAR.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONT.



As a result of this information, we found that the parents see themselves as single-handedly supporting their children's CL maintenance, specifically in cases where the cultural practices of the CL were different to the mainstream education.

Thus, we recommend:

1. ongoing education and professional development of CL teachers to help them gain realistic understanding of the learning needs and best practice methods for CL learners;
2. ongoing education and professional development opportunities for the principals as they play a major role in creating optimal educational environments;
3. schools revisiting the relevance of their teaching materials with the cultural identity of CL students living in contemporary Australia; and
4. the recognition of all CLs in the mainstream schools and year 12 ATAR scores.





# RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Community Languages Parent Project was a year-long study that took place from January to December 2019 with the aim to investigate parents' perspectives of the quality of language education in Community Language Schools (CLS) across Australia. This study was timely in that we have witnessed that student enrolments are declining in many CLS despite research establishing the many benefits of Community Languages (CL) learning and maintenance. Some of these benefits are their contribution to children's development of positive self-image, improved mental health, academic success, achievement of greater professional opportunities, and a sense of belonging to their community culture and ancestry (Baker & Jones, 1998; Lotherington, Holland, Sotoudeh, & Zentena, 2008; Nordstrom, 2016; Val & Vinogradova, 2010).

This decline has been anecdotally linked to lack of parental support without any research investigating parents' views and aspirations in this regard. Hence, as a first step, to increase and sustain future student enrolment in CL programs, we found it important to better understand current parental perceptions and aspirations through a large-scale national survey.

In this year-long project, we documented possible decline in student enrolments and identified the triggers that contributed to this. We believe that parents are an integral part of not only the maintenance of children's CL but also the success of a CLS as they are the first point of decision-making for their (usually primary school) children to attend and complete CLS. We examined parental views of CL education across Australia through an anonymous online Qualtrics survey. In this, we gathered quantitative and qualitative data regarding parents':

- demographics (i.e., Biographical Information, Family Data, Language Use);
- aspirations for their children's CL education;
- views on the resources available at their CLS and how these resources contribute to children's dis/continued CL learning;
- views on quality of the curriculum and teaching at their CL; and
- challenges (at the time of data collection) for the continued attendance of their children in CLS.

Data were subjected to quantitative and qualitative (thematic) analyses and are reported in this document. This research has been commissioned by Community Languages Australia.





# DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

With a total of 594 responses from more than 35 languages, the majority of the responses were from Victoria followed by Queensland and New South Wales respectively. The number of mothers who completed the survey was close to 4 times higher than the fathers followed by a small number of guardians. The age of the majority of the respondents ranged between 31-50 years with a high number born overseas and first-generation migrants. Our respondents were educated, with the majority having a graduate or postgraduate university degree. On average, they had between 1 to 2 children attending a CLS with a slight majority of the children being girls.

Figure 1: Location of the CLS

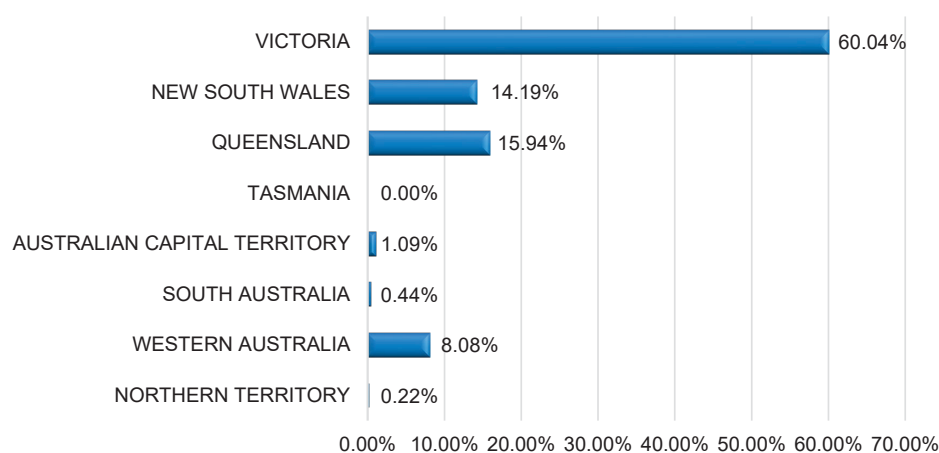
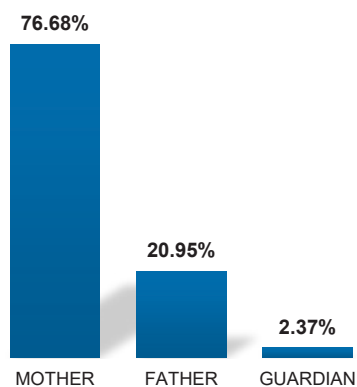


Figure 2: Respondents to the survey





# DEMOGRAPHIC DATA CONT.

Figure 3: Age Range of the respondents

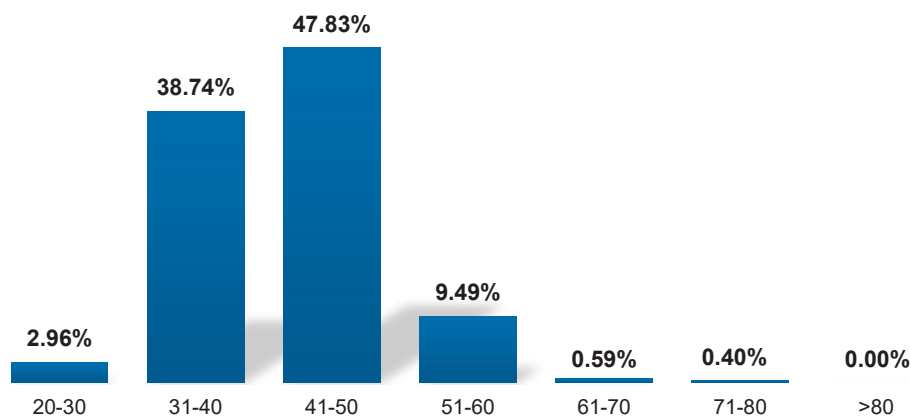


Figure 4: Migrant generation

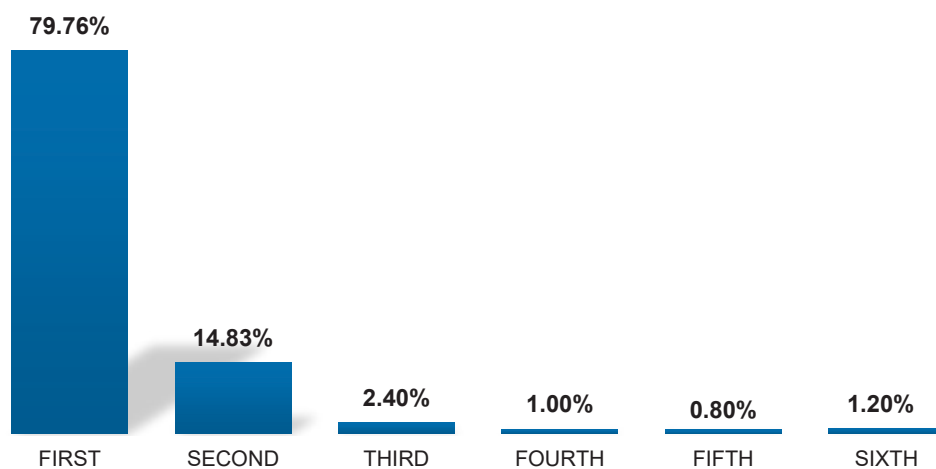
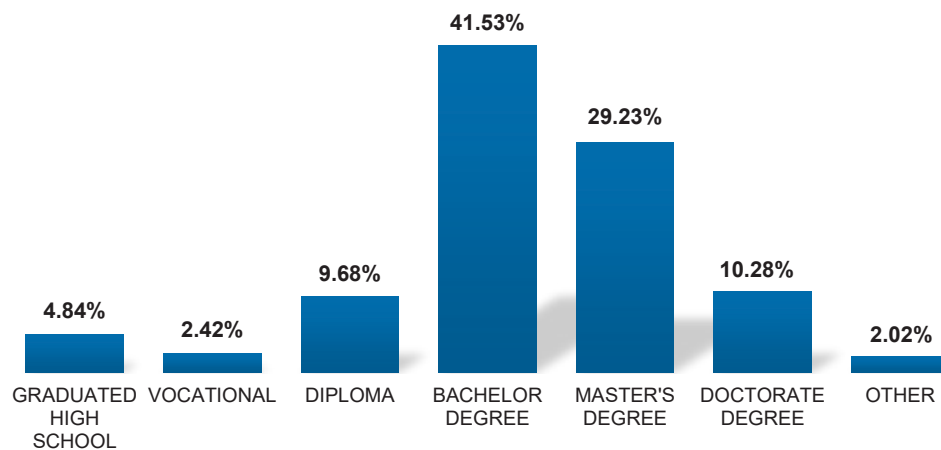


Figure 5: Highest education level of the respondents





# PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN



At home, a greater number of the families reported speaking only their CL and a smaller number used a mix of CL and English in their everyday communications with family members. The majority of the children (79.28%) were also exposed to the CL by visiting the home country to see family and friends from a range of only once in their life to every year at the time of data collection. At home, the most common resources used to support children's CL learning were books (mainly textbooks) and the internet, the most important means of connection with family and friends back home. The next most common resources for language support were music, videos, and television (in that order). In regard to CLS homework, parents spent between 30 minutes to 2 hours per week helping their children complete their homework with the majority of the help coming from mothers.

Figure 6: Languages spoken at home

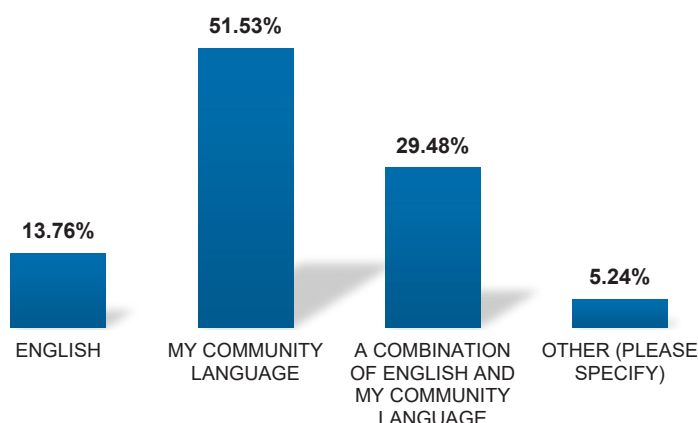
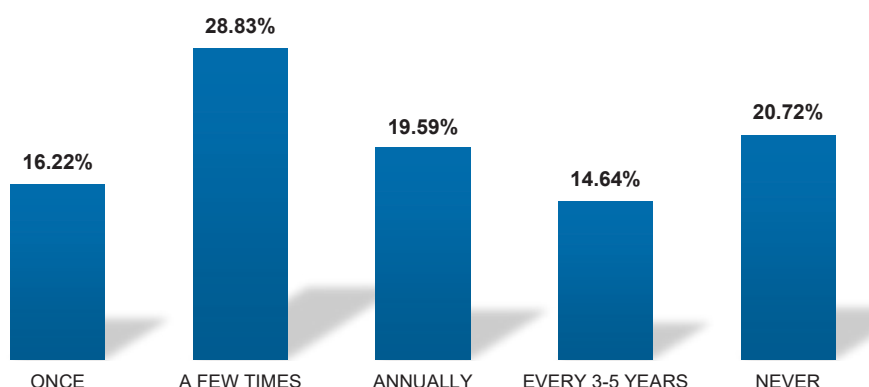


Figure 7: Frequency of visit to home country



# PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY LANGUAGES DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN CONT.

Figure 8: Resources used at home to support CL learning

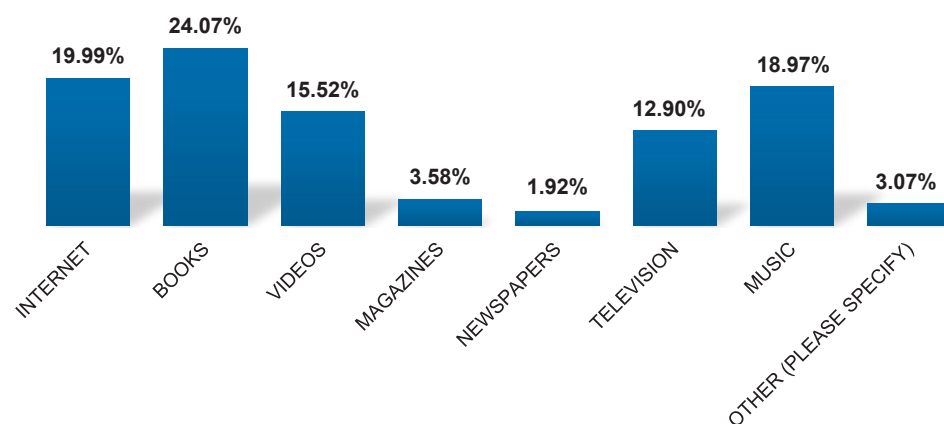


Figure 9: Number of hours per week mother helps out with homework

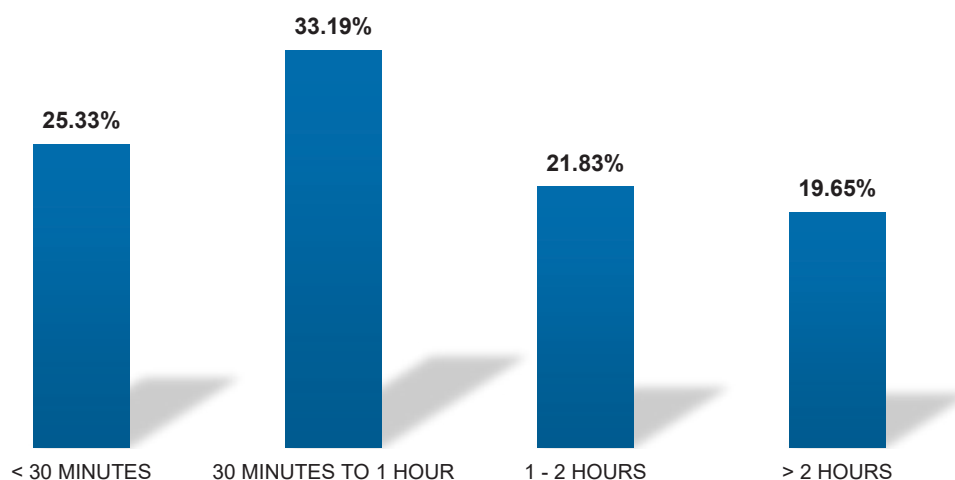
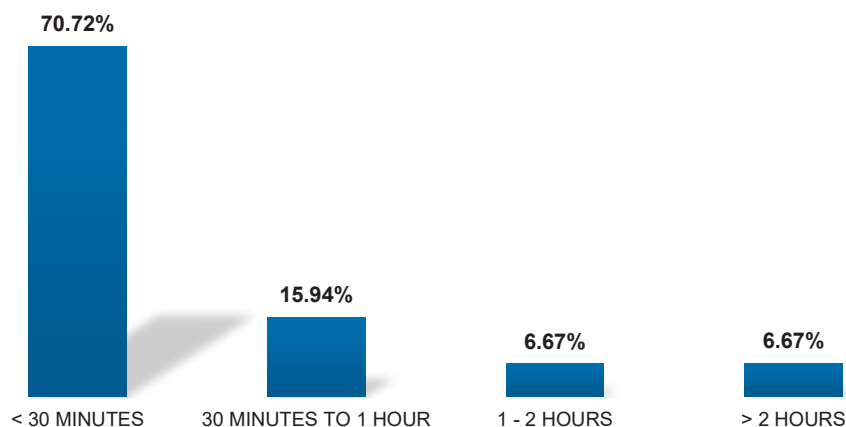


Figure 10: Number of hours per week father helps out with homework





# FACTORS IMPACTING COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL CHOICE FOR PARENTS



Parents emphasized the importance of their children learning the CL at their CLS and the most important factors impacting their school choice were the location of the school, the local community, and their children having friends from the same CL background.

Parents' most common source of information about the schools was through their connections; that is, a friend or another parent. Another strong source was through word of mouth through their church or social community. Internet search, local media, or their local schools did not play a substantial role in this regard, which could imply that the schools are not actively using social media platforms to showcase their achievements and promote their schools. A significant number of the schools required fees the amount of which parents stated to be value for money. The majority of the parents were aware of their CLS being accredited, which did not seem to have a significant impact on their decisions to enrol in the school.

Figure 11: Importance of child attending CLS

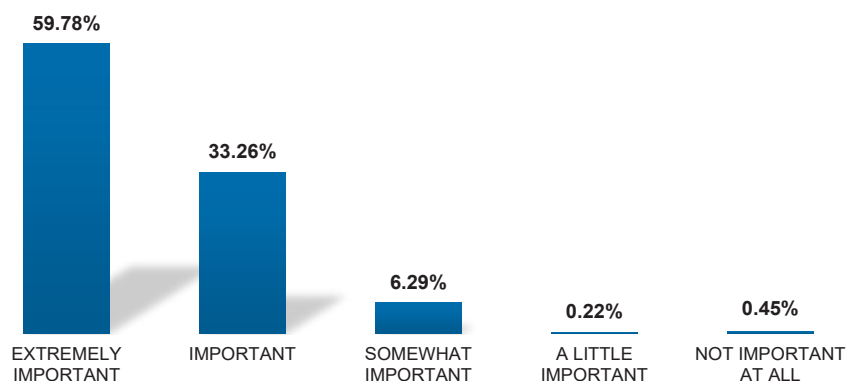
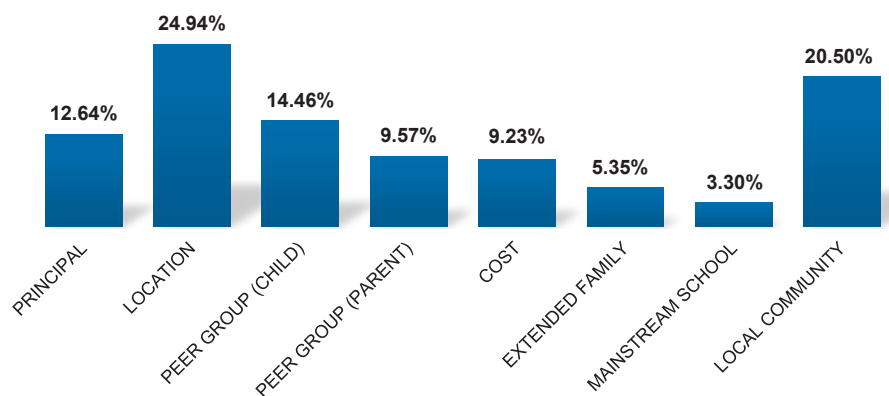


Figure 12: Factors influencing parents' decision to enrol child in CLS



# FACTORS IMPACTING COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL CHOICE FOR PARENTS CONT.

Figure 13: Parents' sources of information about CLS

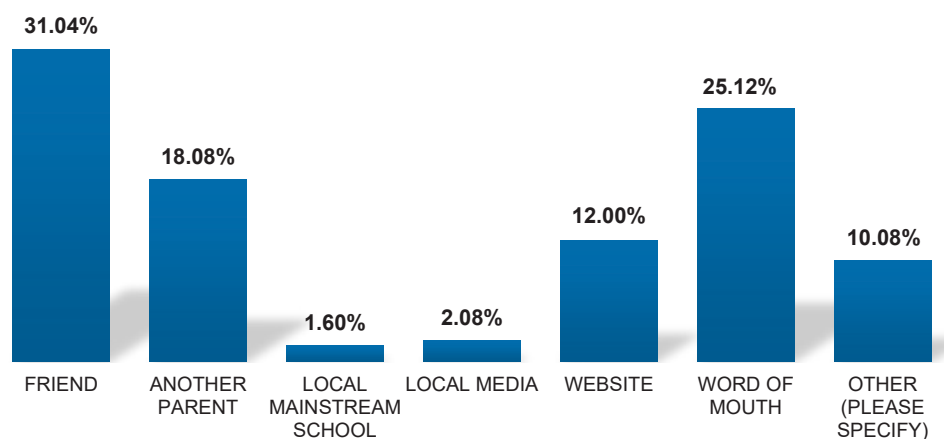


Figure 14: Paying fees at CLS

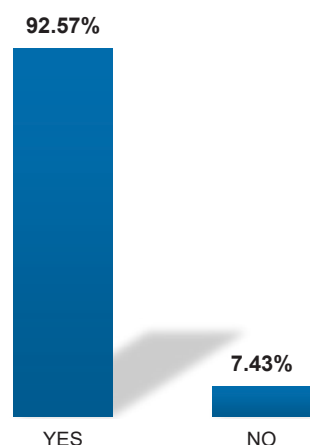
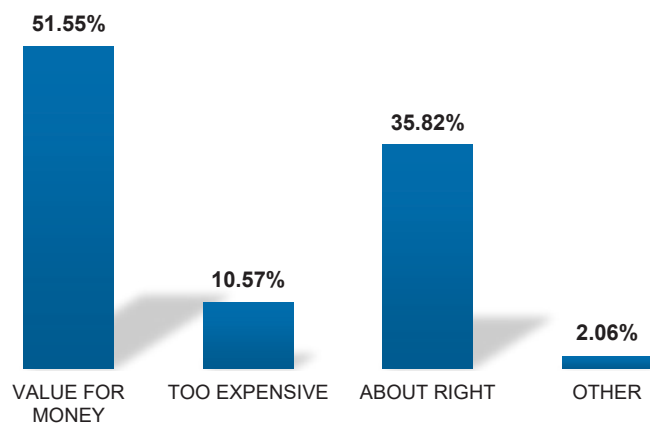


Figure 15: Value of the CLS fees





# FACTORS IMPACTING COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL CHOICE FOR PARENTS CONT.



Figure 16: Parents' awareness of the accreditation of their CLS

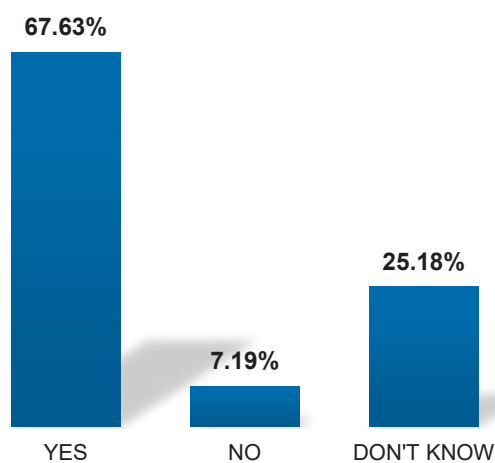
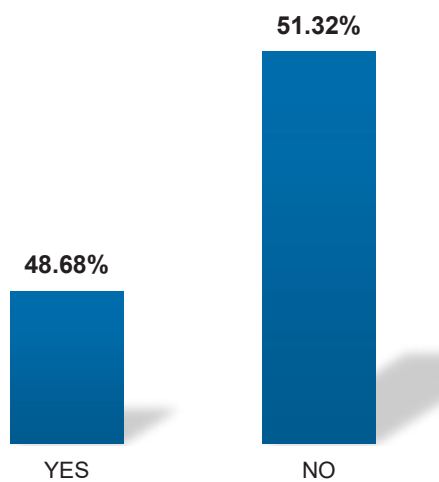


Figure 17: Influence of accreditation on parents' school choice



# PARENTS' VIEWS ON CHILDREN COMPLETING COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL

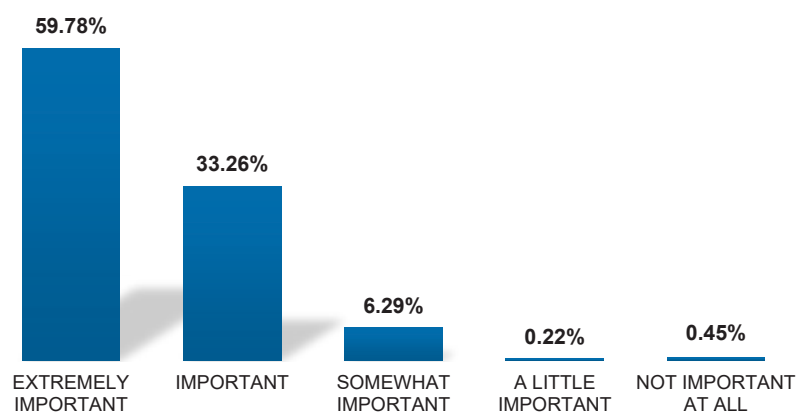


The importance of children completing CLS education was crucial to the parents; however, our numbers show a greater concentration of students at lower levels and a drop in the number of students from year 7 onwards. We also found that the majority of those who studied in year 7 and above had at least one sibling attending CLS at a grade level between kinder and year 5, which could play a role in their continuing to study at the higher levels.

The most important reason for parents' emphasis on their children completing CLS, according to the quantitative data, was that they wanted their children to learn more about their culture and roots. The second and third most important reasons were for their children to be able to communicate with family and friends overseas as well as the ones living in Australia. In line with these, the qualitative data states that intergenerational communication and staying connected to their heritage are the chief motives for these three reasons.

Parents also qualitatively indicated that learning their CL, and bilingualism overall, helps their children to have a sense of belonging to their heritage, embrace diversity and inclusivity, develop enriched understanding of the world, have higher level brain development, gain a higher year 12 ATAR score, and warrant promising career prospects for their children.

Figure 18: Importance of children learning CL by attending CLS





# PARENTS' VIEWS ON CHILDREN COMPLETING COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL CONT.

Figure 19: Importance of having CL classes to high school completion

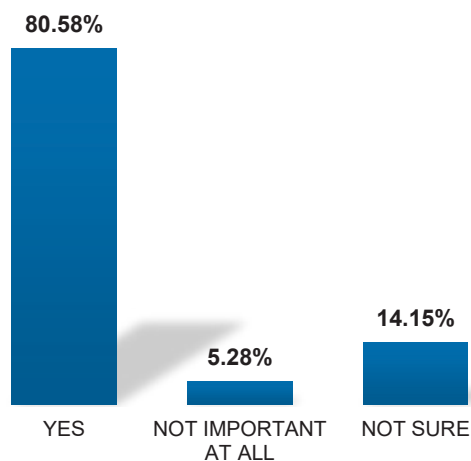
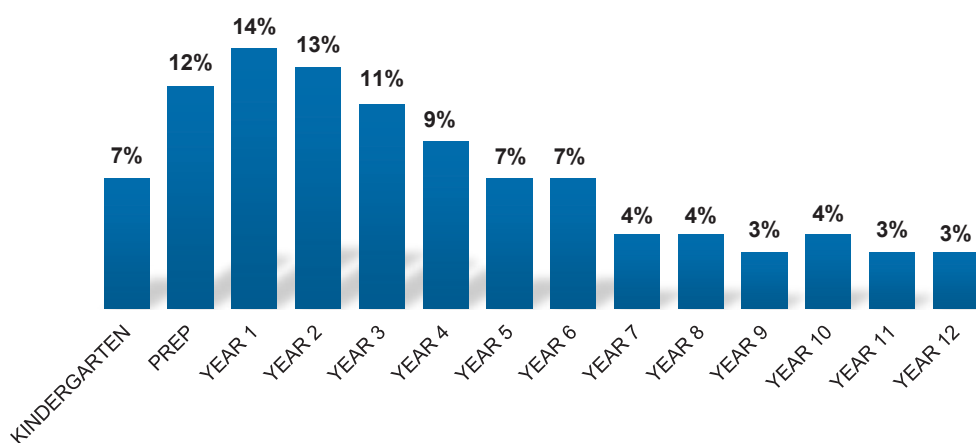


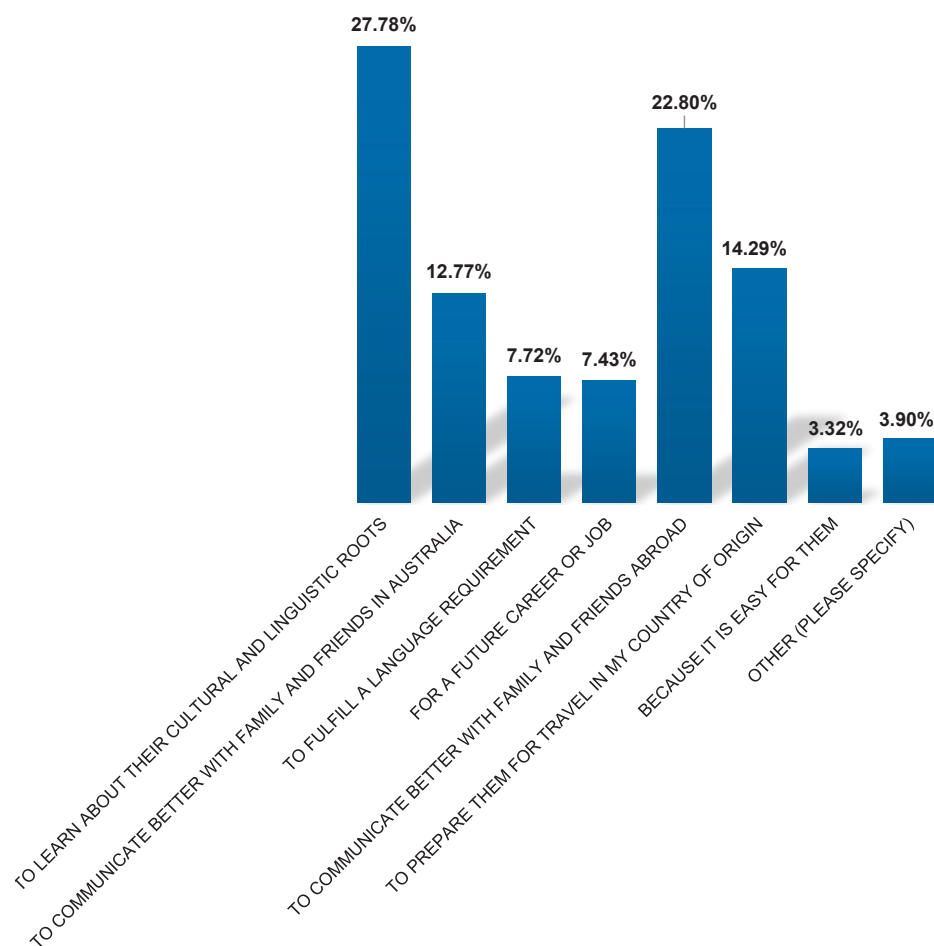
Figure 20: Student Population According to Year Level



# PARENTS' VIEWS ON CHILDREN COMPLETING COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL CONT.



Figure 21: Why parents enrol children in CLS





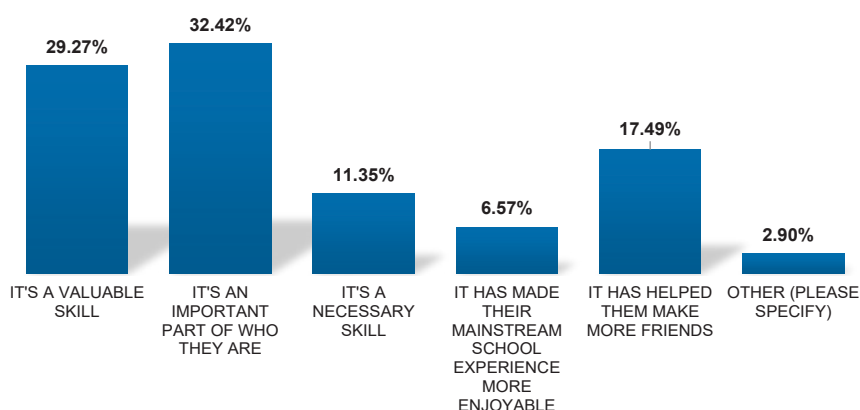
# SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL



Learning CL seems not to have an impact on children's mainstream school experience as reported by the parents. It, however, helps them create friendships with children from the same CL background. The most important reason for children attending their CLS is that it provides them the opportunity to be among people and learn skills and knowledge that aligns with their cultural identity. We should bear in mind that these findings are from the point of view of the parents only. Before drawing final conclusions, a study asking children the same questions is essential to confirm the findings.

In terms of the language skills, parents viewed speaking, listening, and reading as the most important skills for their children to learn and next came writing, vocabulary, and grammar respectively. In terms of the cultural activities, it seems that parents are happy with what is offered at the schools, indicating that there does not appear to be a discrepancy between the cultural activities offered and the ones expected. However, parents emphasized the importance of adding the subject of home country history and geography as well as the explicit teaching of culture. Overall, they requested an equal emphasis on developing children's cultural and linguistic knowledge since some schools tended to devote more time and effort on CL literacy than culture.

Figure 22: Why attending CLS is important for children



# PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL



The qualitative data indicated that the two most equally important expectations of the parents from their CLS were employing *teachers who are interested in the education of their children and using class materials that are interesting to their children*. Followed by these were the use of *class materials that are at the right level* and assigning the right *amount of homework*. Overall, parents attributed their children's interest in dis/continuing CLS to the quality of education at the schools. They especially attributed the quality of education to the teachers, the teaching materials, and homework as these are the very first points of connection with the school for both parents and children.

The parents were unanimous in that there is a strong need to support teachers in their teaching through regular professional development opportunities or any other formal and informal means of ongoing education. The reason for this request was that they believed, in order to keep children at the CLS, an overall and fundamental change in the teaching approaches of the teachers needs to take place.

One common issue reported in highly established languages was the range of diversity in children's both CL competencies and cultural orientation. That is, in a given grade level, for example, third generation children who do not have parents or older family members speaking the CL at home attend the same class as newly arrived migrant children with parents speaking the CL at home. To respond to this diversity, the parents believe that teachers need to have the knowledge and skills to differentiate lessons and homework according to students' CL and cultural competencies. Another strong theme in the qualitative data was the importance of having teachers who are able to build relationships with students (and parents) to keep the learning environment safe and happy. The parents expressed that the teachers tend to teach and communicate with the students in the same way as they themselves learned their first language and disregard the language, culture and identity that the students bring with them into the classrooms.

Qualitative comments also stated that the teaching materials and resources were outdated and needed to become modern and inviting for children, taking into consideration the cultural identity that the students bring with them into the classrooms.

# PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SCHOOL CONT.

They also remarked that homework activities were either too easy and boring or too difficult and time-consuming, which in both cases created lack of interest in the children to attempt their homework. As a result, they stressed the importance of teaching methodology and materials that are fun and engaging, and at the right level for the children.

The more indirect factors that facilitated the above to transpire, was having a *principal who is involved in teaching and learning and teachers from bilingual/bicultural backgrounds* respectively. In addition to these, parents reported the safety of their children at the schools of high concern as they were apprehensive about the wide range of non-teaching individuals and administrative staff present at the schools.

Another highly important matter reported in the qualitative comments was the lack of recognition of the CL in the final year of high school. Parents and children find it difficult to manage the commute, study, and homework time that is required for their children to attend CLS. They view the commitment requirements not being worthwhile for tangible educational prospects, such as ATAR scores. On the other hand, sports activities are strong competitors for CL Education as they could have discernible promises for the future of the children in addition to being fun, relevant, and professionally organized.





# CONCLUDING REMARKS



Overall, the findings of this survey study indicate that, contrary to some common beliefs, parents have a vested interest in their children formally learning their CL at CLS up to completion of schooling. The CLS is where their children are able to build a network of friends and acquaintances that belong to the same ethnic and cultural background as them. This, in turn, promotes children's sense of belonging to their roots, helps them to have stronger connections to their cultural identity, and develops in them stronger self-esteem, self-concept, and self-confidence. Learning a CL also facilitates children's communication with parents and grandparents positively contributing to family cohesion and strengthening intergenerational connections.

The parents in the study are aware of the crucial role that families play in maintaining children's CL. The majority use the CL either purely or mixed with English at home for daily communications. They also actively provide a sense of belonging to their cultural identity by keeping their children connected with family and friends back home via the internet—as reported to be the most highly used means to support CL use at home. In addition to these, at the time of the study, almost 80% of the children had visited their home country at least once in their lifetime, a rich opportunity for them to develop their CL and cultural competencies in an authentic setting.

Despite these, a number of factors strongly compete against parents' aspirations to maintain their children's CL. The greatest challenge for the parents was their children's lack of motivation to study at the CLS, which they strongly attributed to the overall pedagogy at the CLS. That is, qualitative comments demonstrated that teachers need to show stronger interest in building relationships with and supporting students in their CL learning process. Parents also emphasized that for their children to be driven to the CLS, the teaching methodology and the content of the books need to resonate with the lives of children living in Australia. On the contrary, the teaching methodology and the books were found to be tedious and remote from the world that made sense to the children. We should bear in mind that one major issue with the CLS is lack of sufficient trained educators and administrative staff at the school. In most cases, the teachers are often parents of the children, and who have studied the CL back home and tend to teach it as a first language with very little or no training in teaching.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS CONT.

The teaching materials are also developed and distributed by the embassies or a publisher somewhere overseas, which is not suited to the educational needs and culture of the children. For these reasons, parents stated that on-going teacher development and updating the teaching materials as high priority for motivating the children to attend their CLS. An overarching component to all this, according to the parents, is having a school principal who is able to improve the school in ongoing and creative ways.

In addition to keeping children connected to their cultural identity, parents regard the CL as a prominent resource for their children's educational and professional futures. However, as our quantitative and qualitative data indicate, the majority find it difficult for their children to complete their studies at their CLS due to lack of recognition of the languages by the respective education systems. This concern of the parents and, specifically, the children becomes more tangible as they reach higher grades realising that their CL studies will not play a substantial role in their ATAR scores, resulting in them making a strategic decision to discontinue CLS. Added to this is the children's already developed demotivation to study the CL due to the reasons stated above. It goes without saying that lack of recognition of a wide range of CL in the curriculum and ATAR, in addition to its economic and global ramifications, directly contributes to CL loss in the second and third generation migrants as well as disconnections between parents and their children, all of which result in lack of belonging and intergenerational gaps.





# RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on the findings of the current project we recommend the following:

- Ongoing education and professional development of CL teachers is of vital importance for the sustainability of CL schools throughout Australia as they are in direct contact with children, influencing their motivation to dis/continue CLS. As the data demonstrates, despite parents having high aspirations for their children to complete CLS, they will not force them once they see their children lack the necessary motivation to formally study their CL.
- Similar to the teachers, CLS principals need to receive ongoing education and professional development. They are instructional leaders who play a fundamental role in supporting teachers, administrative staff, and students to create optimal and safe educational environments in which their school can thrive. Principals need the necessary training and education in line with their role.
- It is important for schools to revisit the relevance of their teaching materials and activities at all levels. However, we believe that this becomes feasible once the teachers and principals have an in-depth understanding of the educational needs of their CL students.
- Since children (and parents), in addition to being emotionally linked to their CL, have an instrumental purpose in learning their CL, we see it important that all CL be recognised in the mainstream schools and the curriculum.
- It is important to add that in education, student voice refers to the values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of individual students. It is the recommendation of the researchers for this report that a student national survey canvassing the perspective of community languages student experiences and instructional approaches would extend and enhance the findings of this current report. Such a further study would inform policy and community language school providers on the current student experiences, views, choices, interests, passions, and ambitions of learning of their community language.

We would like to conclude by emphasising that the maintenance of CL and the CLS can be achieved through continued partnerships between universities, parents, teachers, principals, students, and the mainstream education system. Merely having aspirations for children to learn their CL is not sufficient to keep the many rich languages and cultures alive. There needs to be mutual collaborations between CL speakers and the wider society along with appreciation for multilingual and multicultural Australia.



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