

Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond

This submission will present personal experience and opinion related to the current situation for Indonesian language studies in Queensland, as this relates to various topics within the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Allow me to begin with an event from 2021. This was the year that a 31-page submission titled, *'The strategic importance of Indonesian literacy to Queensland: Reinvigorating Indonesian language learning'* was sent to the Queensland Education Department, by BBBIQ, Balai Bahasa dan Budaya Indonesia, Queensland (the Queensland chapter of the Centre for Indonesian Language and Culture), an incorporated association whose membership is made up of Indonesian language teachers, academics and cultural educators. This submission was made because data indicated just how much Indonesian was in crisis in Queensland schools. After two decades of decline and stagnation, research by the authors found that Indonesian language learning will disappear from Queensland high schools in the next few years and is also likely to be discontinued in primary programs thereafter.

Table 1: Number of students learning Indonesian in Queensland schools (Prep-Yr 12) in 2009 and 2018.¹

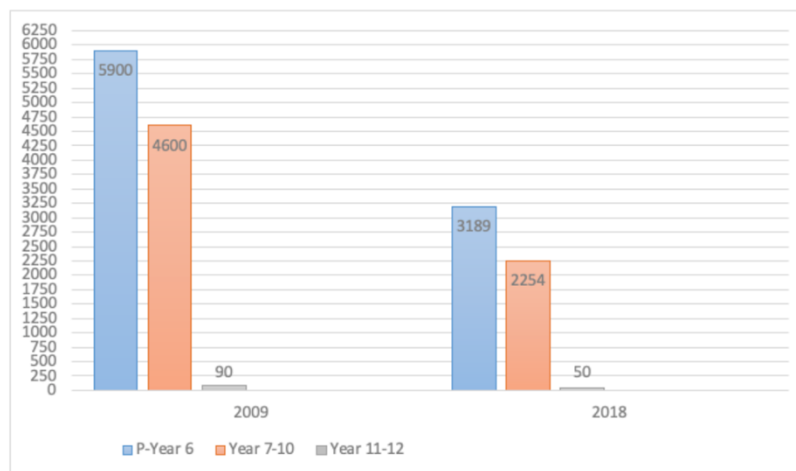


Figure 1. The strategic importance of Indonesian literacy submission, BBBIQ 2021. Note these numbers reflect the era pre introduction of the new syllabus in 2020.

No response was received from the Queensland Education Department at that time or since. Suffice to say that the situation has not improved.

As stated in the **first dot point** of the terms of reference, there are both structural enablers and barriers for Indonesian language programs in Queensland schools. Languages are included in

the national curriculum, so schools across Australia are encouraged to run a language program, this is an enabler. State governments being responsible for education is a barrier. State governments do not have the same priorities as the federal government. The Queensland state government particularly does not seem to consider the negative impact from the loss of language programs in schools. It also seems that which language program a school might provide for students is determined in an almost arbitrary manner.

The only times there has been an uptick in Asian language studies in Queensland is when an external funding source or the federal government has provided targeted funding. E.g. NALSAS, NALSSP.

This leads us to another area that the federal government influences, universities. The situation for Indonesian studies in Queensland is such that it is no longer possible to graduation as an Indonesian teacher in Queensland this there will be no new graduates to fill Indonesian teaching positions, further prompting schools to abandon their Indonesian programs. Anecdotally university staff say “Why would we ask students to study for a job that soon won’t exist”. This is the chicken and egg situation, without more teachers graduating with the necessary language skills how can schools continue to staff their Indonesian programs? The excellent work of ICICIS and the Colombo Pan could be employed to overcome this teacher supply shortfall but this would require interventions such as scholarship grants. In the late 1990s the offer of a scholarship to complete a Dip Ed is what led me into a teaching career. I do not know if this was funded by the state or federal government.

The **second dot point** of the terms of reference asks about models for engagement. It’s all about people power. Several of the Indonesian programs that still exist in Queensland schools are there because they have amazing teachers who are embedded in the school and have the respect of the students and school executive. I don’t know if this can be replicated because it is often the right person in the right place at the right time. One thing, I do know is if a school’s executive is visibly supportive of the language program this certainly helps influence the attitude of the students and families.

In the face of a decline in language learning in Australia, especially for strategic languages like Indonesian, there's a temptation to see AI-powered apps as a simple solution. This is a mistake. The most advanced technology can't replace the inspiring teacher, who is essential for fostering the human motivation required for deep and lasting learning. While technology can be a

powerful tool for assisting with administrative burdens, the real solution to reviving language education is a systemic approach that empowers teachers through technology, rather than replacing them with it. Josh (Adi) Tedjasaputra, *An Inspiring Teacher is the Real App for Learning*.

I have two suggestions for how to support current language teachers through digital technologies. Having participated in the BRIDGE program, I can say that more support is required to make sure that all the selected technologies will work in all states. The platform selected for BRIDGE (Zoom) was not supported by Education Queensland. This made it very difficult to maintain the connection with our sister school. We ended the connection.

There have been some amazing digital resources created by Language Learning Space but there is always a risk with creating resources focused on topics without knowing if these topics will be used by teachers. I would recommend that the production, high quality digital resources that teach grammar and cultural understanding would be much more useful. Digital resources (e.g. short video / supporting worksheets) that a teacher can pick up and use in a unit they have created would be much more useful. For a style example see *Pondok Bahasa* <https://pondokbahasa.com.au/>. Every school has its own assessment style, planning style and expectations for how a teacher will implement these so resources that a teacher can slot into their existing program would be the most useful.

Language teachers need support, because they are constantly having to “sell” the value of their subject to the school community. Unfortunately, we live in a society that has a monolingual mindset. A colleague of mine recently made the decision to only teach social studies refusing to take Indonesian classes, “Teaching social studies is easier, there are no extra demands on my time” she said.

The Australia Awards does provide valuable support for Indonesian teachers, but it seems to be on a very ad hoc basis in Queensland. I am hoping to strengthen the network of Indonesian teachers in Queensland so we all know about the opportunities that are available.

The Indonesian language crisis represents more than an educational challenge; it's a strategic vulnerability. With Indonesia as Australia's third-largest trading partner and closest Asian neighbour, the collapse in language competency threatens diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties that have taken decades to build (The Conversation, 2023).

Fixing this crisis requires us to stop looking for a silver-bullet app and start reinvesting in our teachers. Technology has its place, but it must serve pedagogy, not replace it. Research by

John Hattie consistently identifies teacher effectiveness as one of the most significant factors in student achievement (Hattie, 2014). Josh (Adi) Tedjasaputra, *An Inspiring Teacher is the Real App for Learning*. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/inspiring-teacher-real-app-learning-josh-tedjasaputra-msc-extfc?utm_source=share&utm_medium=guest_mobile_web&utm_campaign=copy.

With regard to **dot point three** in the terms of reference, I can tell you with a fair degree of certainty, that at this point in time, October 2025 in Queensland

In the primary school sector, there are 9 teachers working across 19 schools. In 2026, if intervention by LTQ (Language Teachers Queensland) is not successful, this is likely to drop to 8 teachers and 15 schools.

In the junior and middle secondary school sector, there are 11 teachers working in 8 schools. This is likely to stay steady in 2026 but not in 2027.

In the senior secondary school sector, there are 4 teachers working in 4 schools. This will likely drop to 3 teachers in 3 schools in 2026.

Let me indicate what led to the situation of only having 3-4 schools teaching senior Indonesian in Queensland. In 2018-19 the QCAA (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority) went through major reform and then delivered a new assessment system for senior subjects. At that point I believe there were 9 schools teaching Indonesian language at senior level. Most of these schools were not happy with the new assessment system allocated to Indonesian and promptly dropped the subject. Currently, Senior Indonesian is a 100% external exam which means that students sit two exams in their final term of school and the result from these exams alone determines their grade for the subject. This was not the only choice for QCAA in 2019, but it is the one they went with and thus set the death knell for Senior Indonesian studies. Encouragement for a role back of this 100% external exam style would be one essential step towards keeping Indonesian alive as a viable Senior Subject choice in Queensland.

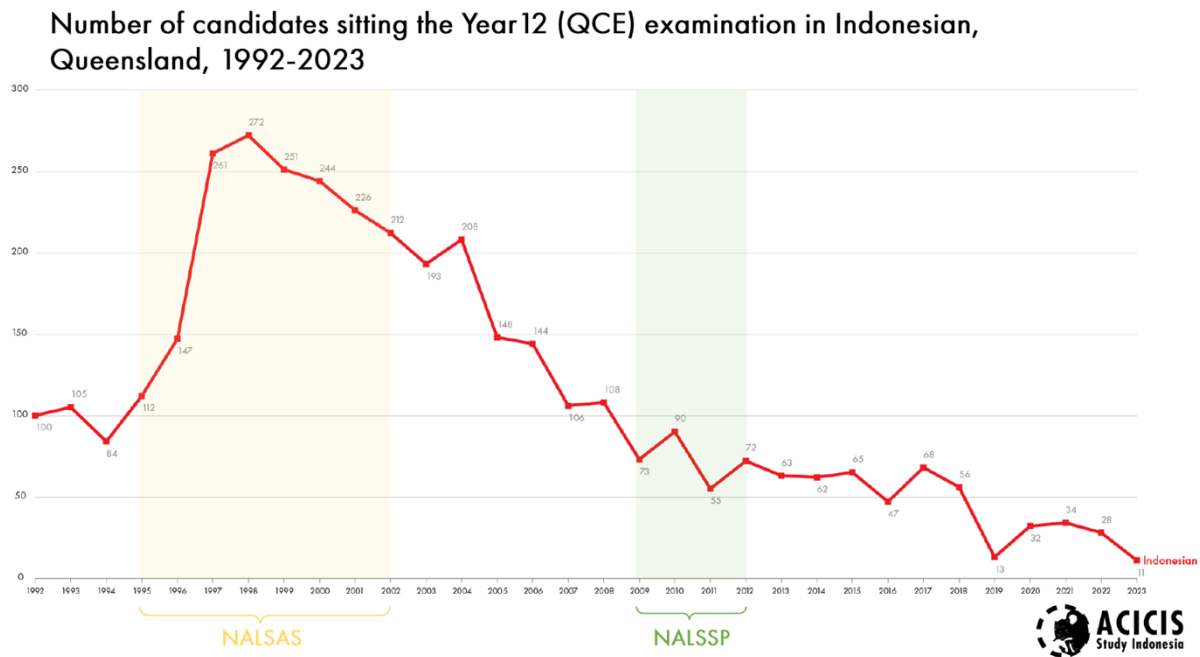


Figure 2, Languages in Queensland Secondary Schools, Liam Prince February 2024.

To stimulate demand in Queensland there needs to be more promotion of the many benefits of learning language throughout students' schooling years, backed up by a supply of teachers. It is clear schools will rarely by choice select Indonesian because for so many people in the community Indonesia is at best unknown at worst clouded by mystery, distrust and misunderstanding. It has been heartening to see Indonesia popping up in a positive manor on prime-time television e.g. ABC, Gardening Australia and more recently Channel 10, the Amazing Race Australia. We need more of this. We need to see more positive news items and entertainment that include Indonesia. We also need to have more people discussing how learning language has enriched in their lives and or career. Normalise the value of language learning.

Improved access to Indonesian language will increase the number of competent Indonesian language users in Queensland who can contribute to the nation's cultural dynamism toward economic prosperity. This goal will only be achieved by ensuring strong pathways and supports are available to both teachers and students.

Turning to **dot point four** with reference to language learning in the community, I know that there is interest in learning Indonesian language among adults because people tell me they want

to learn it and ask where can I do this? This is another volunteering opportunity I am considering taking up, but really should this be left up to depending on people being willing to volunteer their time? *BBBIQ* the association mentioned at the start of this submission should be able to support community members wanting to learn Indonesian but currently *BBBIQ* is made of people who all work full time and would be required to volunteer their time in this capacity. Perhaps the Office of Multicultural Affairs could identify priority languages and provide support for community programs that encourage connection and language learning for countries like Indonesia, that do not have the capacity to do this on its own. Supporting community and ‘grass roots’ associations would also fit with what is asked for in the fourth dot point of the terms of reference.

The **fifth dot point** of the terms of reference asks for expectations in whole-of-government coordination and collaboration, if the various federal departments listed in the dot point were to collaboratively express their concern for the loss of Indonesian language studies in Queensland the state government might take note. This brings me to my recommendation.

My personal recommendation is that the Queensland Government be encouraged to establish a school of languages (possibly in conjunction with the QVA – Queensland Virtual Academy); and that this body be promoted widely so all students are aware of this as an option for their language learning journey. This could be similar to the Victorian School of Languages <https://web.vsl.vic.edu.au/> or NSW School of Languages.

Victorian school of languages school profile: The Victorian School of Languages (VSL) is a government school dedicated to providing exceptional language programs for students in Foundation to 12 who do not have access to these languages at their mainstream schools. We deliver our programs through both face-to-face instruction at centres across Victoria and via Distance Education.

Operating in alignment with government policies and priorities, the VSL plays a key role in helping the Victorian education system achieve its language participation targets.

A School of Languages would not only ensure that students in Queensland continue to have access to a language of their choice but also that Indonesian as a subject continues to be available. Ideally this school of languages would work within the current primary and secondary curriculum but it could be much broader, also offering certificate courses in

language learning which students could study during term time or even in their own time. It could also be a resource centre able to support any school with the presentation of intercultural activities that can be booked by schools throughout the year.

How can Australia build Asia capability across the life course?

Provide opportunities at all life stages to try and capture people's interest no matter when it happens.

It is generally accepted that language learning at a young age is best as young people pick up language easily. If it is not maintained it is also lost just as easily. Having language learning in the school curriculum seems the most logical as young people are in the right place, the classroom. Unfortunately, this is not usually the age when their interest and willingness is at its peak and thus it can lead to a negative perspective towards learning a language. Finally, once becoming an adult, this is when people often come to realise the benefits of learning a language. How many times have I had people say to me just how important it is to learn Indonesian after I answer that ubiquitous question "What do you do?" Unfortunately, this is also usually when there is the least access to language learning.