

A Submission on Strengthening Indonesian Language Learning through Classroom Resources



About Pondok Bahasa

Pondok Bahasa is a teacher-led initiative established to renew the way Indonesian is taught and learned in Australian schools. Developed by a collective of educators, editors, and production crew from Australia and Indonesia, it produces cinematic, curriculum-aligned resources filmed in Indonesia and designed specifically for the Australian classroom.

The project arose from a shared recognition among teachers that many existing materials are no longer relevant to the students they teach — or reflect the Indonesia of today. While social media and informal online content provide glimpses of contemporary language use, they often lack context or accessibility for early learners. Pondok Bahasa seeks to bridge that gap by combining accurate, level-appropriate language with authentic cultural settings, local voices, and modern pedagogy.



Cinematic
Language
Resources



1. Executive Summary

Australia's Asia capability will be defined not by policy ambition alone, but by the everyday conditions in classrooms — particularly during the middle years of schooling, when language learning most often becomes an elective.

This submission focuses on one practical, achievable lever: improving the quality and accessibility of classroom resources available to teachers of Asian languages, particularly Indonesian. While teacher supply, curriculum structures, and societal attitudes towards languages are also critical, the quality of resources remains one of the most immediate and modifiable factors influencing student engagement and continuity.

By ensuring teachers — especially those new to the profession — have access to engaging, culturally grounded, and imaginative materials, we strengthen both retention and motivation. In turn, more students are likely to continue Indonesian into the senior years, into university study, and ultimately into teaching careers themselves.

2. Focus of the Submission

This submission concentrates on the development of relevant, contemporary learning materials that support teacher capability and student engagement.

We acknowledge that teacher recruitment, addressing a monolingual mindset in community, and coordination across jurisdictions are essential parts of a wider solution. However, this submission focuses on the classroom level — where targeted investment in resource development can yield immediate, measurable improvement.

The purpose here is not to demonstrate that Indonesian language enrolments are in decline — that has already been clearly established elsewhere. Rather, this submission takes a pragmatic lens: it examines what can be done within classrooms to strengthen teacher capability, improve student engagement, and sustain learning where the influence of policy and structural reform is less immediate but highly tangible.

Teachers who are well-supported with engaging materials are more confident in their delivery, more likely to remain in the profession, and better equipped to inspire continued learning. For beginning teachers in particular, having access to strong, classroom-ready resources provides the foundation for success.

3. The Modern Classroom Context

Teachers today create extraordinary learning experiences — often with limited means. Their skill in bringing language and culture to life through imagination, storytelling, and connection remains at the heart of language learning.





Yet, just as artists rely on brushes and pigments, teachers benefit from tools that add richness and dimension to their craft. Video, sound, and motion allow students to hear a range of accents, observe gestures, and experience culture dynamically — things that are difficult to capture through text alone.

High-quality visual and auditory resources amplify what teachers already do well. They extend the classroom beyond static materials, giving students an authentic sense of rhythm, expression, and setting — and providing teachers with a medium that keeps pace with the sensory world their students inhabit.

4. The Middle-Years Opportunity

The sharpest decline in language learning occurs after Year 8, when the subject (in many states and territories) becomes an elective. This transition point represents both a risk and an opportunity.

Investing in well-designed, culturally relevant resources for Years 7–8 (and beyond) can help teachers sustain engagement through this crucial stage. When students see the language as alive, relevant, and achievable, they are far more likely to continue into senior study.

As discussed in *From Sate to Sour: Why Indonesian Studies Lose Flavour After Year Eight* (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2023), this point of transition often determines whether interest in Indonesian continues or fades. The analysis highlights that while structural factors such as timetabling play a role, students' perception of relevance — and teachers' access to engaging materials — are decisive in sustaining participation.

Over time, equipping teachers with strong, engaging resources in these formative years builds momentum that carries through to senior and tertiary levels:

- Greater continuity of learning feeds into university-level language programs, supporting existing investments in tertiary Asia capability.
- A larger cohort of graduates with Indonesian proficiency enlarges the pool of future language teachers.
- As schools expand offerings to meet renewed student demand, teacher supply and student interest reinforce each other in a positive cycle.

This pipeline does not depend on a single initiative, but it can be strengthened through focused attention at this point — the middle years, where engagement is won or lost.

5. Supporting Teacher Confidence and Retention

Confidence grows from a sense of preparedness and purpose. Teachers invest enormous time and care in helping students connect with another language and culture, often drawing on their





own experiences to make lessons meaningful. Having materials they can trust—accurate, adaptable, and visually rich—supports that effort and sustains their enthusiasm across the school year.

Access to accurate, imaginative, and culturally grounded resources enables teachers to focus on what matters most: guiding practice, encouraging curiosity, and creating meaningful connection. While resource quality is not the only factor influencing teacher success, it remains one of the most immediate and supportive measures available within current systems.

Equipped with high-quality materials, teachers are better able to:

- deliver consistent, authentic experiences;
- manage workload more effectively; and
- stay engaged in their profession long term.

6. Building a Sustainable Pathway

When teachers are supported and students remain engaged, participation stabilises across the education system:

1. **Early secondary students** experience success and enjoyment in language learning.
2. **Senior school programs** maintain viable enrolments.
3. **Universities** see a steady flow of students continuing their studies.
4. **Future teachers** emerge from that pipeline, returning to strengthen the next generation of classrooms.

Resource development may seem a small part of this cycle, but it underpins every step. By supporting teachers at the beginning of the process, we invest in the entire chain that sustains Australia's long-term Asia capability.

7. Recommendations

1. **Make the development of contemporary, culturally grounded Asian-language resources a national priority**, ensuring materials are aligned with the Australian Curriculum and relevant to Australian learners.
2. **Support initiatives that provide teachers — particularly in the middle years — with engaging, imaginative, and classroom-ready resources**, helping them connect language and culture in ways that appeal to students' lives and interests.





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3. **Recognise resource quality as a key enabler within broader Asia-capability strategies**, complementing parallel investment in teacher recruitment, training, and tertiary engagement.

8. Conclusion

Asia capability begins in the classroom — with teachers who are confident, supported, and equipped to make language learning come alive.

Providing those teachers with high-quality, authentic, and imaginative materials is a practical step we can take now, while longer-term reforms continue.

It is not the whole answer, but it is an essential part of the foundation — one that will help more students see value in learning Indonesian, more teachers stay in the profession, and more Australians develop the skills and understanding to engage deeply with our region.

