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Building an Asia-literate Australia: an Australian strategy for Asian language proficiency

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Australia needs half of the population to be fluent in an Asian language within 30 years or risk falling behind other countries, this report has found.

Australia must abandon its monolingual mindset to keep pace with economic and political power houses of China, India, Japan and Indonesia, according to this study by Griffith Asia Institute Director Professor Michael Wesley.

The report says two-thirds of Australians under forty need to speak a second language and the number of Australians studying an Asian language needs to quadruple within a generation. Strong government investment in “human infrastructure” was as crucial as physical infrastructure.

“Most of the world is multilingual and investing more in learning other languages and cultures,” Professor Wesley said. “The knowledge of more than one language gives a person an edge in judgement and competence, by allowing them to see the world from a different perspective.”

The research looked at four phases: a review of current Asian language teaching in Australia; study of past programs promoting and funding Asian language study in Australia; policies used by other countries and lastly, feedback from students, teachers, parents, schools and other stakeholders.

The report outlines the \$11.3 billion, 30 year plan over three implementation phases. It aims to integrate a teaching program from early primary school through to university level.

It's based on five principles:

1. Implement a comprehensive, nation-wide, long-term strategy (commitment of 30 years of funding, establishing National Asian Languages Institute in Canberra)
2. Teach Asian languages and cultures at all education levels (teach from primary school age, including cultural aspects such as music, art, current affairs etc, expand language research and teaching in universities)
3. Build gradually with quality (three target languages Japanese, Indonesian and Mandarin taught in limited number of schools to build quality and expand slowly)

4. Build and maintain student demand for Asian languages education (change perception of languages among students as being too difficult, exchange programs.)
5. Build an adequate supply of world-class Asian Language teachers and resources (scholarships and incentives to encourage specialists teachers, allocation of full time language teachers, professional development opportunities)

The research was co-ordinated and conducted by a task force of Michael Wesley, Adam Illman and Deborah Kessler, with costings by Ruth Gatehouse.

[Read the full text of Building an Asia-literate Australia: an Australian strategy for Asian language proficiency](#) ^[2]

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