

Benefits of heritage languages schools for children and teenagers A Summary of Research

Community-based heritage language (HL) schools are organisations established by parents and community members to maintain and teach heritage language and cultural understanding to children and others. These community-run, out-of-hours schools form a key education sector worldwide with an estimated two million students. This is a summary of research (2001-2023)ⁱ into the benefits of HL schools for the young people who attend them.

HL schools develop language There is strong evidence that HL schools develop strong language and literacy in the heritage language and that they for a key 'line of defence' in maintaining language and culture.ⁱⁱ Children gain HL literacy skills which support their learning in mainstream schools.ⁱⁱⁱ They strengthen and value their bilingual repertoires.^{iv} HL schools provide a 'safe place' where children use their languages in playful and creative ways.^v Their use of their range of multilingual resources is called 'translanguaging'^{vi}. For students, is not a 'heritage' language of the past but language for the present and future.^{vii} By forming 'communities of practice' with friends in HL schools they maintain their language into their adult lives.^{viii}

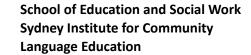
Students gain understanding and confidence in their backgrounds Students gain intercultural skills, an understanding of their heritage and also of the majority culture. The schools provide a safe place in which they gain confidence in and positivity about their identities, hybrid and intercultural. These identities are transnational and global, not just local. HL schools promote psychological wellbeing by providing social and emotional support. There is evidence of a close link between strength of identity and motivation for learning in HL and mainstream school. School attendance correlates with emotional wellbeing.

HL schools promote learning in mainstream schooling Transferable skills are gained in HL schools that support cognitive/ academic achievement.^{xv} Children who attend HL schools achieve higher mainstream school grades in all subjects than those who do not attend.^{xvi} Flexible pedagogies in HL schools support mainstream learning: increased use, post-covid, of online learning, blogs, wikis and other apps has developed multimodal communication and more domains for language use.^{xvii} There is strong evidence that HL schools develop respect and tolerance and citizenship skills.^{xviii} The sense of pride and belonging developed in HL schools impacts positively on children's motivation and learning in mainstream schools.^{xix}

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Benefits of heritage languages schools for families and communities A Summary of Research

Community-based heritage language (HL) schools are organisations established by parents and community members to maintain and teach heritage language and cultural understanding to children and others. These community-run, out-of-hours schools form a key education sector worldwide with an estimated two million students. This is a summary of research (2001-2023) into the benefits of HL schools for the families and communities.

There is strong evidence that HL schools form, support and maintain communities acting as a bridge to mainstream society. This is especially important for emerging communities and refugee groups where other support mechanisms may not exist. The schools support access to healthcare systems, lessen social isolation and provide senses of belonging for parents. They act as community centres for new waves of immigrants in established communities, helping adjustment and overcoming culture shock by providing emotional support. The schools have complex social networks in communities which are not seen as having links. They are an important bridging place between the communities and the wider society. They address the need for leadership, financial and community support. The schools are thus intermediaries between mainstream schools and families, a fact still to be recognised in government policy.

Many studies have documented the ways schools increase family cohesion and intergenerational communication; they are a 'mediating force' between mothers and children reducing the gap and supporting psychological wellbeing. ix They bridge the gap between first-generation parents and second-generation children. x

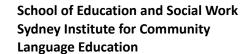
The schools provide educational, economic and social 'capital' for parents and families. xi Parents recognise and appreciate the role of the school in giving this cultural, social and economic capital. xii This is especially important for parents who did not have educational opportunities themselves and for families in lower-income communities. xiii Parents recognise the way schools support the mainstream academic achievement of their children. xiv The evidence for this is also enrolments in HL schools have continued to increase, despite the shift in children from second to third generation learners. xv

There is also a global aspect to this: schools are a connecting point between diverse transnational communities. They help the children develop global and transnational identities, particularly since the growth of international travel and technology. The schools are 'diversity indicating', in that they enable families to see themselves as one of many other ethnolinguistic groups in the wider society. The schools are 'diversity indicating', in that they enable families to see themselves as one of many other ethnolinguistic groups in the wider society.

¹ Nordstrom, J., Cruickshank, K., & Bai, L. (2024) Community language schools: a scoping review of research, 2001 to 2023. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2024.2409184

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The national benefits of heritage languages schools

A Summary of Research

Community-based heritage language (HL) schools are organisations established by parents and community members to maintain and teach heritage language and cultural understanding to children and others. These community-run, out-of-hours schools form a key education sector worldwide with an estimated two million students. This is a summary of research (2001-2023) into the national benefits of HL schools for the broader education sector and society.¹

The HL school sector represents a key and untapped national resource in terms of languages and language education.ⁱⁱ HL schools provide language learning pathways for students aged from 3 to 73 and span all education sectors.ⁱⁱⁱ They offer over 70 languages, most of which are not available in other educational sectors and are key providers of lesser taught languages. ^{iv} They develop the language and cultural knowledge of generations of young people at no cost to the government. A key finding has been that they are an untapped resource for language and educational planning, a resource which acknowledges and builds on diversity of school communities.^v

There is a body of research showing the resource represented by the HL school teachers and leaders. VI The majority of teachers in HL schools bring qualifications from overseas, representing a huge saving for government: Most teachers want to gain accreditation as mainstream school teachers and they thus represent a resource which is important in times of worldwide teacher shortages. VII

Many studies confirm the ways in which HL schools support mainstream schooling and also the students' role in the wider society. HL schools develop respect and tolerance; issues of citizenship ad played out in the schools. X Students gain senses of inclusion in the broader multicultural society as HL schools address perceived shortcomings of mainstream schools in that they value and develop rather than just 'celebrate' cultural diversity. The schools support mainstream schools in the teaching of multicultural perspectives, flexible teaching practices and teaching content through language. Xi

The skills and knowledge gained in HL schools support learning in mainstream education. Xii The conceptual skills and L1 literacy skills transfer to improve educational outcomes in general. HL schools engender strong academic identities. Xiii Children attending HL schools have more positive attitudes to mainstream schooling. Xiv We know that children who attend HL schools perform above average in all subjects in mainstream schools. Xiv The schools counter mainstream narratives of academic failure. Xivi

Studies in HL schools have also had important impacts on educational and linguistic research in general: the work of Blackledge, Creese and others has led to studies of 'translanguaging' and multilingual repertoires across educational sectors. The work of Francis, Archer and Mau has likewise motivated much research into young people's senses of identity and belonging. There have been more than 350 research publications into HL schools since 2001, making this sector a key field of study. The schools since 2001, making this sector as well as the school of study.



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