

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 form 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.^{ix} The schools provide a safe place in which they gain confidence in and positivity about their identities, hybrid and intercultural.^x These identities are transnational and global, not just local.^{xi} HL schools promote psychological wellbeing by providing social and emotional support.^{xii} There is evidence of a close link between strength of identity and motivation for learning in HL and mainstream school.^{xiii} School attendance correlates with emotional wellbeing.^{xiv}

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}

ⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱ Alsahafi, M. (2019). Language maintenance and heritage language education: The case of a weekend Arabic school in New Zealand, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.8n.2p.21>

Liao, L. J., & Larke, P. J. (2008). The voices of thirteen Chinese and Taiwanese parents sharing views about their children attending Chinese heritage schools. *US-China Education Review*, 5(12), 1-8.

-
- iii Pu, C. (2008). *Chinese American children's bilingual and biliteracy development in heritage language and public schools* (Doctor Dissertation). Retrieved from <https://searchproquestcom.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/docview/89140423?accountid=15115&pq-origsite=summon>
- iv Mu, G.M. (2015). A meta-analysis of the correlation between heritage language and ethnic identity, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 36(3), 239-254
- v Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2009b). Meaning-making as dialogic process: official and carnival lives in the language classroom. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 8 (4), 236–253.
- Lytra, V. & Baraç, T. (2008). Language Practices, Language Ideologies and Identity Construction in London Turkish Complementary School, in Vally Lytra & J. Normann Jørgensen (Eds.) *Multilingualism and Identities Across Contexts Cross-disciplinary perspectives on Turkish-speaking youth in Europe* Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism volume 45 University of Copenhagen, Faculty of the Humanities Copenhagen pp. 15.44).
- vi Blackledge, A., & Creese, A., (2010) *Multilingualism: A critical perspective*, London: Continuum.
- vii Lytra, V. (2011). Negotiating language, culture and pupil agency in complementary school classrooms. *Linguistics and Education*, 22(1), 23
- viii Oriyama, K. (2016) Community of Practice and Family Language Policy: Maintaining Heritage Japanese in Sydney—Ten Years Later, *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 10:4, 289-307, DOI: 10.1080/19313152.2016.1198977
- ix Ueno, J. (2001). Detraditionalization: Japanese students in the USA, *Culture and Curriculum*, 14, 1, 76-89.
- x He, A.W. (2004). Identity construction in Chinese heritage language classes. *Pragmatics* 14:2/3.199-216.
- Prokopiou, E. (2007). Understanding the impact of Greek and Pakistani community schools on the development of ethnic minority young persons' cultural and academic identities, PhD Thesis, University of Bedfordshire, UK
- xi Francis, B., Archer, L. and Mau, A. (2010). Speaking of identity? British-Chinese young people's perspectives on language and ethnic identity. In X.L. Curdt-Christiansen & A. Hancock, (Eds). *Learning Chinese in Diasporic Communities: Many pathways to being Chinese*. Pp.203-218. Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- xii Zhou, Y., & Liu, Y. (2024). A “positive” turn in heritage language education: Multilingual children's voices on language learner well-being. *System*, 125, 103446.
- xiii Mokhtatebi Ardakani, M. & Moloney, R. (2017). The role of informal heritage language learning in program building: Persian Community school language learners in Australia. In Kagan, O., Carreira, M., & Chik, C.H. (Eds.). *The Routledge Book of Heritage Language Education: From Innovation to Program building*. Routledge: London.
- xiv Bischoff, S., & Encabo, M. (2017). Lessons for the UN from the US: Complementary schools as partners in sustainable development and equitable education. In *Language and the sustainable development goals: Selected proceedings from the 12th language and development conference, Dakar, Senegal* (pp. 57-64).
- xv Bhatt, A., Bhojani, N., Creese, A., & Martin, P. (2004). Complimentary and mainstream schooling: a case for reciprocity?.
- xvi John Lyon's Charity (2012) *Supplementary Schools: A New Approach*. London: John Lyon's Charity.
- Maylor, U., Glass, K., Issa, T., Kuyok, K. Minty, S., Rose, R., Tanner, E., Finch, S., Low, N., Tylor, E., Tipping, S., Purdon, S., (2010) *Impact of supplementary schools on pupils' attainment: An investigation of what factors contribute to educational improvements, DCSF Research report RR210*, London, London Metropolitan University.
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR210.pdf>
- Barradas, O. & Chen, Y. (2008). How Portuguese and Chinese community schools support educational achievement, in C. Kenner and T. Hickey (Eds.) *Multilingual Europe: Diversity and Learning*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- xvii Nordstrom, J. (2015b). Flexible bilingualism through multimodal practices: studying K-12 community languages online, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 18(4), 395-408
- xviii Szczepek Reed, B., Davies, I., Said, F. F. S., Bengsch, G., & Scally, J. (2020). Arabic complementary schools in the context of Fundamental British Values: A community's ambitions for consensual diversity and the risks of diasporic disconnect. *British Journal of Educational Studies*. ISSN 0007-1005
- xix Kenner, C., Gregory, E., Ruby, M., & Al-Azami, S. (2008). Bilingual learning for second and third generation children. *Language, Culture & Curriculum*, 21(2), 120-137



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.ⁱ

There is strong evidence that HL schools form, support and maintain communities acting as a bridge to mainstream society.ⁱⁱ This is especially important for emerging communities and refugee groups where other support mechanisms may not exist.ⁱⁱⁱ The schools support access to healthcare systems, lessen social isolation and provide senses of belonging for parents.^{iv} They act as community centres for new waves of immigrants in established communities, helping adjustment and overcoming culture shock by providing emotional support.^v The schools have complex social networks in communities which are not seen as having links.^{vi} They are an important bridging place between the communities and the wider society.^{vii} They address the need for leadership, financial and community support.^{viii} 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.^{xvi} They help the children develop global and transnational identities, particularly since the growth of international travel and technology.^{xvii} The schools are ‘diversity indicating’, in that they enable families to see themselves as one of many other ethnolinguistic groups in the wider society.^{xviii}

ⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱ Cruickshank, K., Jung, Y.M., & Bai, L. (2020). *Parallel Lines: Developing Languages, Building Communities: The organization, capacity, curriculum and teaching in NSW Community Languages Schools*. Sydney: Sydney University, SICLE.

ⁱⁱⁱ Aberdeen, G. (2015). *Keeping Refugee Families Connected through Heritage Language Schools*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/22353537/Keeping_Refugee_Families_Connected_through_Heritage_Language_Schools



-
- ^{iv} Ivashinenko, N. (2018). Heritage Language Preservation, Social Networking and Transnational Activities: a study of Russian complementary schools in Scotland PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow
- ^v Lu, X. (2001). Bicultural identity development and Chinese community formation: an ethnographic study of Chinese schools in Chicago, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 12(4), 203–220.
- ^{vi} Ivashinenko, N. (2019). Saturday Russian schools and parents' social networking: two-way cooperation?. *Migration Letters*, 16(2), 165-174.
- ^{vii} Yang, C. (2017). Identity, capital and community language schooling: teenagers at a weekend Chinese school in Melbourne, Australia. Monash University. Thesis. <https://doi.org/10.4225/03/58b3c130a12bc>
- ^{viii} Thorpe, A. (2020). Leadership in non-mainstream education: The case of supplementary and complementary schools, *Management in Education*, 34, 4, 120-131.
- ^{ix} Kim, J. (2011). Korean immigrant mothers' perspectives: The meanings of a Korean heritage language school for their children's American early schooling experiences. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39(2), 133–141.
- ^x Liao, L. Y. J., Larke, P. J., & Hill-Jackson, V. (2017). Bridging two worlds: Experiences of Chinese and Taiwanese Americans attending Chinese heritage schools in Houston. *Heritage Language Journal*, 14(2), 171-187.
- ^{xi} Sun, M., & Braeye, S. (2012). Comparing supplementary ethnic schools and the academic achievement of Chinese immigrant students in Quebec and Flanders. *Diversité urbaine*, 12(1), 105-124.
- ^{xii} Ganassin, S. (2020). *Language Culture and Identity in Two Chinese Community Schools: More than one way of being Chinese?* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- ^{xiii} Paik, S. J., Rahman, Z., Kula, S. M., Saito, L. E., & Witenstein, M. A. (2017). Ethnic Afterschool Programs and Language Schools in Diverse Asian American Communities: Varying Resources, Opportunities, and Educational Experiences (Part 2: How They Differ) *School Community Journal*, 2017, Vol. 27, No. <http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx>.
- ^{xiv} Zhou, M., & Kim, S. (2006). Community forces, social capital, and educational achievement: The case of supplementary education in the Chinese and Korean immigrant communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76(1), 1-29.
- ^{xv} Zhu, D., Hopper, P., & Kulaixi, G. (2020). Heritage Language Maintenance Among Second-generation Chinese-American Children in a Small Chinese Community. *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*. 5, 5, 100-114. doi: 10.11648/j.ijecs.20200505.13
- ^{xvi} Arvanitis, E. (2014). Rethinking intercultural learning spaces: The example of Greek Language Schooling in Australia, *Educational Journal of the University of Patras UNESCO Chair 2014*, 1(1), p. 60-68, ISSN: 2241-9152.
- ^{xvii} Li Wei. (2011). Multilinguality, Multimodality, and Multicompetence: Code-and Modeswitching by Minority Ethnic Children in Complementary Schools. *Modern Language journal*, 95, 3. 370-384.
- ^{xviii} Otcu, B. (2013). Turkishness in New York: Language, ideologies and identities in a community-based school. *Bilingual community education and multilingualism: Beyond heritage languages in a global city*. O. García, Z. Zakharia and B. Otcu. Bristol, Multilingual Matters: 113-127



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.ⁱ

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.^{viii} HL schools develop respect and tolerance; issues of citizenship are played out in the schools.^{ix} 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.^x 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.^{xv} The schools counter mainstream narratives of academic failure.^{xvi}

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.^{xvii} The work of Francis, Archer and Mau has likewise motivated much research into young people's senses of identity and belonging.^{xviii} There have been more than 350 research publications into HL schools since 2001, making this sector a key field of study.^{xix}



-
- ⁱ 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>
- ⁱⁱ Hancock, A., (2018). *Extending the 1+2 language strategy: Complementary schools and their role in language learning in Scotland*. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Cruickshank, K (2019). Community Languages School: Bucking the Trend? In P. Benson, A. Chik and R. Moloney (eds.) *The Multilingual City: Sydney Case Studies*. London: Routledge.
- ^{iv} Baldauf, R. B. (2005). Coordinating government and community support for community language teaching in Australia: Overview with special attention to New South Wales. *International Journal of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism*, 8(2), 132-144
- ^v Aravossitas, T. (2014). Communities taking the lead: mapping heritage language education assets. In P. P. Trifonas & T. Aravossitas (Eds.), *Rethinking Heritage Language Education* (pp. 141-166). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- ^{vi} Minty, S., Maylor, U., Issa, T., Kuyok, K., & Ross, A. (2008). Our Teachers: Teachers in supplementary schools and their aspirations to teach community languages, London, CiLT
- ^{vii} Cruickshank, K. (2021). *The Skills in Question: Professional Learning Strengths and Needs of teachers in NSW Community Languages Schools*. SICLE: Sydney University.
- ^{viii} Conteh, J., S. Riasat, & S. Begum. (2013). Children learning multilingually in home, community and school contexts in Britain. In M. Schwartz & A. Verschik (Eds.), *Successful family language policy: Parents, children and educators in interaction* (pp. 83-102). London: Springer.
- ^{ix} Szczepek Reed, B., Said, F. F. S., & Davies, I. (2017). Heritage schools: A lens through which we may better understand citizenship and citizenship education. *Citizenship Teaching & Learning*, 12(1), 67–89
- ^x Conteh, J. (2010). Making links across complementary and mainstream classrooms for primary children and their teachers, in Lytra, V., & Martin, P. (Eds.) *Sites of Multilingualism: Complementary schools in Britain today*, Trentham Books: Stoke on Trent.
- ^{xi} Bhatt, A., Bhojani, N., Creese, A., & Martin, P. (2004). Complementary and mainstream schooling: a case for reciprocity?
- ^{xii} Issa, T. and Williams, C. (2008) *Realising potential: complementary schools in UK*. Stoke on Trent, Trentham Book
- ^{xiii} Curdt-Christiansen, X.L. & Hancock, A. (Eds.), (2014). *Learning Chinese in Diasporic Communities: Many Pathways to Being Chinese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- ^{xiv} Strand, S. (2007). Surveying the views of pupils attending Supplementary Schools in England, *Educational Research*, 49, 1-19
- ^{xv} Evans, D., & Gillan-Thomas, K. (2015). *Complementary Schools – Descriptive Analysis of Complementary School Pupils’ Characteristics and Attainment in Seven Local Authorities in England 2007/08–2011/12*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- ^{xvi} Creese, A., Lytra, V., Barac, T., Yağcıoğlu-Ali, D, (2007). *Investigating Multilingualism in Turkish Complementary Schools in London*. University of Birmingham.
- ^{xvii} Blackledge, A., & Creese, A., (2010) *Multilingualism: A critical perspective*, London: Continuum.
- ^{xviii} Francis, B., L. Archer, and A. Mau. (2009). Language as capital, or language as identity? Chinese complementary school pupils’ perspectives on the purposes and benefits of complementary schools. *British Educational Research Journal* 25, no. 4: 519–53.
- ^{xix} Nordstrom et al. (2024). op. cit.