

# Securing Year 11-12 ATAR Language Course Provision Within the ACT Education Directorate

Submission to the ACT Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, and Members of the ACT Government

November 2025

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## Executive Summary

This submission calls upon the ACT Government to immediately announce and implement the replication of Year 11-12 ATAR language courses within the ACT Education Directorate, commencing with Year 11 students in February 2026 alongside those in Year 12 who will be completing majors in their language studies. This action is essential to fulfil the government's own policy commitments to language education, preserve pathways for students who have studied languages in Years 7-10, and ensure equitable access to language learning for all ACT secondary students.

The cessation of CIT Solutions' Year 11-12 ATAR language program and CIT's confirmation that it will not accept new enrolments from 2026 onwards creates an immediate gap in provision that directly contradicts the government's stated priorities and strategic commitments to language education. The implementation of an in-house Education Directorate program would restore continuity of provision and honour the government's repeated commitments to supporting multilingual education as a core component of the ACT's educational offering.

Recent national research by the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), culminating in the National Languages Plan and Strategy (NLPS, 2024), identifies the ACT's current senior secondary language gap as a critical equity issue. National standards call for centrally-delivered supplementary courses to support language retention beyond Year 10, especially where provision cannot be guaranteed at every local college. These models are acknowledged as best practice for enabling equity and inclusion for all student cohorts. <sup>123</sup>

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# Background and Current Crisis

## The Program Gap

For the 2024 and 2025 academic years, students completing Years 11 and 12 ATAR language courses have been able to access provision through CIT Solutions. Prior to this, from 2017 to 2023, the Canberra Academy of Languages (CAL) provided equivalent Year 11-12 ATAR language courses for students unable to access languages through their local colleges. These programs delivered:

- One two-hour face-to-face lesson per week in a central Canberra location outside normal school hours, along with two hours per week of designated set work, for a total of four hours per week over 13 to 15 weeks per semester (a total of 60+ hours per unit of study, above the mandated 55 hours for a standard BSSS unit of study)
- Flexible, accessible provision allowing students to undertake most studies at their local college
- Six language options: French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Tamil
- Equitable access for all Canberra students, particularly those whose local schools do not offer their chosen language

This model has been instrumental in addressing a known and acknowledged gap in language education provision, specifically serving students who studied a language in Years 7-10 and wish to continue their studies to ATAR level when their home college does not offer that language.

## The Current Situation

On 29 October 2025, CIT CEO Dr. Margot McNeill publicly confirmed in an ABC Canberra Breakfast interview that:

*“Senior secondary languages is not a priority of CIT... We know that we're continuing to honour the obligations with students who are already enrolled, but those conversations are happening to see what we'll do in the future.”*

This statement confirms that CIT will not accept new enrolments for Year 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026 and beyond. For students commencing Year 11 in 2026, there is currently no defined pathway to continue their chosen language at ATAR level if their local college does not offer it.

The AFMLTA NLPS project data confirm that transition discontinuity—especially at Year 10–11—is the strongest national driver of language attrition.<sup>1</sup> Addressing this transition point with accessible, high-quality pathways for Years 11–12 was a central NLPS recommendation. The withdrawal of CIT Solutions provision in the ACT thus represents not only a local service gap but a challenge to national participation and equity benchmarks.<sup>13</sup>

# Government Commitments and Policy Foundations

The ACT Government has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to language education through multiple policy statements, strategic plans, and statutory commitments. These commitments directly support the case for maintaining Year 11-12 ATAR language provision.

## 1. Language Education Action Plan (April 2024)

The Language Education Action Plan, published by the ACT Education Directorate in April 2024, explicitly states:

Priority Statement:

*“Canberra is a vibrant and multicultural city and remains one of the best cities to learn an additional language. The Future of Education Strategy provides the strategic framework for the delivery of language education in our public schools and closely supports the delivery of high quality and innovative language education programs in ACT public schools.”*

Core Principles:

The Action Plan establishes that language provision in ACT schools should include:

- Languages are regarded and valued as one of the eight learning areas under the Australian Curriculum
- All students have access to options for language proficiency
- All schools offer a language education program reflective of the diverse and international community in the ACT
- Consistency in language education programs to ensure the time allocations meet the minimum requirements

Strategic Commitment:

The document explicitly recognises that language education provides students with skills to access an increasingly global environment and that “studying language education benefits cognitive function and assists with critical thinking and problem solving as well as making students more culturally aware.”

Critical Action Items:

The Action Plan commits to:

- Action 4: “Explore options for alternative delivery models for public school language education programs, including online delivery, which will provide flexible and innovative solutions for students wishing to undertake a pathway for proficiency” (By end of 2025)
- Action 7: “Provide access to pathways for proficiency options in high school and colleges to facilitate consistency in language provision across school years. This includes tracking of pathway options and providing advice on pathway options” (By end of 2025)
- Action 8: “Forge stronger connections between ACT public schools and community language schools (for example Canberra Academy of Languages) and explore potential ways to include and incorporate more community languages into ACT public schools” (By end of 2025)

## 2. The Future of Education Strategy

The Language Education Action Plan explicitly references and is grounded in the Future of Education Strategy, which provides the overarching strategic framework. The Strategy's commitment to “excellent, fair and equitable education” and to ensure “all students feel safe, valued and supported to thrive” directly encompasses language education provision.

## 3. Independent Review of Investment in ACT Community Language Schools (2021)

In December 2021, the Independent Review of Investment in ACT Community Language Schools, commissioned by the ACT Government and presented to the Assembly by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, documented the critical importance of language education and recognised the government's role in supporting it. The review noted:

Cognitive and Educational Benefits:

*“Studies have demonstrated that people who speak more than one language have improved memory, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills. A number of respondents mentioned that in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, proficiency in another language gave students a vital skill to engage with the world in a more meaningful way while better preparing them to compete and succeed in the global economy.”*

Government Support:

The review confirmed that since 2012, “the ACT Government has provided annual financial support to the ACT Community Language Schools Association (ACTCLSA) and annual grants to over 40 community language schools to support the delivery of language education,” with “current investment in community languages schools... over \$275,000 annually.”

Strategic Value:

The review emphasised that community language schools, including organisations like CAL, fulfil an essential function: “In the absence of the government-supported school of languages, where students from schools across the Territory can learn less popular languages as part of their regular schooling, community language schools can fill the void to a certain point.”

## 4. Review of Languages in the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum (2016)

The Report of the Review of Languages in the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum (2016) established that:

- The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) makes provision for a range of language courses at beginning, continuing, and advanced levels.
- Multiple pathways exist for students to study languages.
- The system is designed to provide flexibility and inclusivity for diverse language learners.

The review confirmed that the ACT senior secondary system was intentionally structured to “enable students to study languages,” supporting the principle that access to language pathways is fundamental to the system's design.

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## **The Identified Need: Filling a Known Gap**

### **Recognition of the Gap**

The Language Education Action Plan, issued in April 2024, explicitly acknowledges a provision gap. Action 7 commits to providing “access to pathways for proficiency options in high school and colleges to facilitate consistency in language provision across school years.”

The CAL and CIT Solutions programs have directly addressed this gap by serving:

1. Students whose local colleges do not offer their chosen language but who studied that language in Years 7-10 and wish to continue to ATAR level
2. Heritage language learners seeking to maintain proficiency in their family or cultural language
3. Students with diverse linguistic backgrounds who benefit from access to multiple language options
4. All ACT students equally, regardless of which college they attend or where they live within the Territory

National longitudinal data demonstrate that students forced to discontinue language education after Year 10 are highly unlikely to re-engage with language study at university, and that such discontinuities disproportionately affect students in less populous subjects and those whose local colleges lack specific language offerings. Guaranteeing ACT-wide pathways for all students wishing to continue their languages to Year 12 is now a critical equity imperative, and directly aligns with NLPS priorities.<sup>13</sup>

### **Demand Evidence**

The continued operation of these programs through 2024 and 2025 demonstrates ongoing demand. The submission of a petition to the ACT Legislative Assembly in October 2025, calling for the restoration of this provision, further evidences the community's recognition of the need and the gap created by CIT's withdrawal.

### **Systemic Benefits**

Research cited in government documents demonstrates that language learning:

- Enhances cognitive function and critical thinking
- Improves academic outcomes across all subject areas
- Develops cultural competency and global awareness
- Prepares students for participation in an interconnected global economy
- Supports identity formation for students from multilingual backgrounds

## Broader Economic, Social and Cultural Benefits

Attached to this submission is an Appendix, which is a Research Summary of the Benefits of Language Education in Secondary Schools. Extensive research since 2010 shows that secondary-level language education delivers substantial benefits across educational, economic, social and cultural dimensions. These benefits extend from individual cognitive development to broader societal advantages, positioning language education as a strategic investment in human capital and social cohesion.

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## Alignment with Government Commitments: Central ATAR Language Provision To Complement Day School Programs Fulfils All Stated Principles

The proposed Year 11-12 ATAR language program complementing day school programs within the ACT Education Directorate directly implements the government's own stated principles and commitments:

| Government Commitment                                                                             | How Proposed Program Fulfils It                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "All students have access to options for language proficiency"                                    | Program provides equitable access to all ACT Year 11-12 students regardless of their home college's offerings |
| "Consistency in language education programs" across school years                                  | Program preserves continuity of language pathways from Years 7-10 to Years 11-12 ATAR                         |
| "Pathways for proficiency options in high school and colleges" with "tracking of pathway options" | Program offers defined pathways and clearly communicates options to students and parents                      |
| Language education as "one of the eight learning areas"                                           | Program recognises languages as a core curriculum area deserving dedicated provision                          |
| "Flexible and innovative solutions for students wishing to undertake a pathway for proficiency"   | One 2-hour weekly session outside school hours allows students to pursue languages flexibly                   |
| "Forge stronger connections... with community language schools"                                   | Program may leverage expertise from CAL and existing language provider networks                               |
| Support for "students from schools across the Territory"                                          | Program provides Territory-wide accessible provision, not limited to specific locations or colleges           |

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# **The Model: Proven, Sustainable, and Ready to Implement**

## **Design and Delivery**

The AFMLTA's required program standard for languages education specifies 240 minutes per week in the senior years as ideal, distributed over at least three sessions. <sup>23</sup> While the ACT's interim model blends a central face-to-face group session with significant independent work, it aligns with national best practice when properly structured, adequately resourced, and BSSS-accredited. <sup>2</sup>

The proposed program replicates the proven CAL (2017-2023) and CIT Solutions (2024-2025) model:

- Location : Central Canberra location, accessible via public transport
- Timing: One two-hour face-to-face lesson per week, scheduled outside regular school hours (e.g., 4:00–6:00 PM or weekends), supplemented by two hours per week of designated set work
- Languages: French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tamil (initially; expandable, for example to cater for additional languages such as Hindi or Punjabi for which demand has been identified)
- Proficiency Levels: Beginning, Continuing, and Advanced to accommodate diverse student cohorts
- Assessment: BSSS-accredited assessment contributing to official ATAR calculation
- Accessibility: Open to all ACT students regardless of home college, socioeconomic background, or residential location

National evaluations recognize the merit of out-of-school, after-hours, and hybrid models in supporting student retention where college-based options are unavailable. <sup>3</sup> However, robust group learning remains essential: national guidance is to ensure these alternatives supplement, not replace, quality face-to-face provision. Ongoing support, teacher professional development, and formal recognition in the ATAR system are considered critical to program success. <sup>3</sup>

## **Implementation Timeline**

Immediate Actions (November 2025):

- Government announcement of commitment to establish program within Education Directorate
- Allocation of budget (a significant portion of the required funds coming from cost recovery via enrolment fees) from existing Education Directorate resources
- Confirm the continuation of the cross-sectoral model used by CAL and CIT, where students from government secondary colleges as well as Catholic and independent schools can participate, thereby enhancing the viability of the program, as in other Australian jurisdictions

Preparation Phase (December 2025 – January 2026):

- Recruitment of language teachers (6 x 0.2 FTE equivalents, most of whom are known to be available for transition from the existing program)

- Confirm venue with appropriate facilities (the existing venue at Ainslie School has the required classroom spaces and audio-visual equipment, and is strategically located adjacent to the transport hubs in Central Canberra)
- Marketing and student enrolment
- Development of course schedules and assessment frameworks

Program Commencement:

- February 2026: Delivery begins for Year 11 students, along with provision for Year 12 students who will be completing their language majors in 2026
- February 2027: Program expands to include Year 12 students (as the first Year 11 cohort progresses)

## Resource Requirements

Estimated annual cost: Less than \$250,000 (covering teacher salaries, venue costs, materials, and administration). This is:

- Modest in comparison to the overall Education Directorate budget, and a significant portion of the amount can be recouped through enrolment fees as noted above, if there is effective communication with stakeholders, including students, families, day schools and the wider community, about the availability of the program
- Less than the government's current annual investment in community language schools (\$275,000+)
- Recoverable through targeted government investment in language education as outlined in the Language Education Action Plan

Addressing projected teacher workforce shortages and enabling ongoing upskilling are both national and local priorities. The AFMLTA's NLPS project recommends regionally targeted professional learning, incentives for upskilling, and strengthened initial teacher education as the foundation for sustainable growth in senior language provision.<sup>3</sup> The ACT is well-placed to model and trial these national solutions.<sup>2</sup>

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# **Why This Must Be an Education Directorate Initiative**

## **CIT's Position**

CIT CEO Dr. Margot McNeill has clarified that Year 11-12 ATAR language courses are “not a priority” for CIT. As CIT is primarily focused on post-school qualifications, it is inappropriate to rely on CIT for secondary education provision. The CIT is currently a reluctant custodian of the senior secondary languages program. The CEO's statement indicates that CIT will not voluntarily continue this program.

## **Education Directorate Responsibility**

Language education for Year 11-12 students is a core responsibility of the ACT Education Directorate. The Language Education Action Plan places responsibility for language provision squarely within the Education Directorate's remit. Bringing this program in-house would:

- Align delivery with government policy and priorities
- Ensure program sustainability and continuity
- Allow integration with existing secondary curriculum and pathways planning
- Provide stability for students and teachers
- Enable consistent quality assurance and outcomes measurement

## **Strategic Positioning**

Implementation within the Education Directorate would:

1. Demonstrate government commitment to its stated Language Education Action Plan principles
  2. Fulfil the government's own policy mandates regarding access to language pathways
  3. Ensure sustainable, long-term provision rather than reliance on external providers
  4. Position the ACT as a leader in languages education nationally
  5. Contribute to the government's investment in the cognitive and cultural development of all ACT secondary students
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## **Call to Action**

### **Immediate Announcements Required**

We urge the Chief Minister, the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, and all members of the ACT Government to:

1. Immediately announce the government's commitment to establish Year 11-12 ATAR language courses within the ACT Education Directorate
2. Confirm that these courses will commence in February 2026 for Year 11 students, along with students in Year 12 who will be completing their language majors next year
3. Allocate necessary budget from existing Education Directorate resources and participant fees
4. Commit to ongoing funding and/or fees schedules to ensure continuity and expansion
5. Publicly affirm that language education is a priority for the ACT Government

### **Rationale for Urgency**

Students commencing Year 11 in February 2026 deserve certainty and clarity regarding their language pathways. Year 11 students currently enrolled with CIT and contemplating continuation in Year 12 next year also deserve assurance that provision for them will continue as part of the new arrangements for program delivery. Teachers recruited to deliver language programs deserve the security of government backing.

The government has already articulated its commitment to language education through the Language Education Action Plan. The immediate establishment of this program would transform that commitment into action and demonstrate government responsiveness to community needs.

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## Conclusion

The ACT Government has repeatedly and clearly committed to language education as a priority, recognising its cognitive, cultural, and economic value. The government has explicitly acknowledged the need for flexible, accessible pathways to language proficiency for all students. The government has promised to provide “pathways for proficiency options” and to deliver “flexible and innovative solutions.”

The Year 11-12 ATAR language program, previously delivered by CAL and CIT Solutions, directly implements these commitments. Its discontinuation would represent a departure from stated policy and would disadvantage students whose schools do not offer their chosen languages.

By immediately restoring centrally coordinated, accessible ATAR-level language courses under the ACT Education Directorate, the Government would address both urgent local needs and explicitly advance national best practice as outlined by the National Languages Plan and Strategy (AFMLTA, 2024).<sup>13</sup>

We respectfully but urgently request that the ACT Government honour its commitments by immediately announcing the establishment of Year 11-12 ATAR language courses within the ACT Education Directorate, commencing February 2026.

The action is warranted by government policy, necessary to meet identified needs, feasible within existing resources, and aligned with the government's stated strategic direction for education in the ACT.

We look forward to the government's positive response to this essential call to action.

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## References and Supporting Documents

1. The State of Languages Education in Australia. Research Project One Report. 2024. Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations (AFMLTA)
2. Futures of Languages Education in Australia. Research Project Two Report. 2024. (AFMLTA)
3. Towards a National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia (NLPS). 2024 (AFMLTA)
4. Language Education in ACT Public Schools Action Plan (April 2024), ACT Education Directorate
5. The Future of Education Strategy, ACT Education Directorate
6. Report on the Independent Review of the Investment in ACT Community Language Schools (December 2021), ACT Legislative Assembly
7. Report of the Review of Languages in the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum (2016), ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies
8. ACT Multicultural Framework (2015-2020) and Second Action Plan (2019-2020)
9. ABC Canberra Interview with CIT CEO Dr. Margot McNeill (29 October 2025)
10. Petition to ACT Legislative Assembly: Access to 11-12 ATAR Language Courses in 2026 (October 2025)

# **APPENDIX:**

## **The Benefits of Language Education in Secondary Schools: A Research Summary**

### **Executive Summary**

Comprehensive peer-reviewed research and policy syntheses from 2010 onwards consistently demonstrate that secondary-level language education delivers substantial benefits across educational, economic, social and cultural dimensions. These benefits extend from individual cognitive development to broader societal advantages, positioning language education as a strategic investment in human capital and social cohesion.

### **Educational Benefits**

Language education significantly enhances academic achievement across multiple domains. Connecticut research synthesising peer-reviewed studies found that foreign language learners consistently outperformed control groups in reading, mathematics and language arts assessments, with effects documented across diverse contexts including urban magnet programs and rural schools.<sup>1</sup> These gains reflect enhanced metalinguistic awareness—the ability to reflect on language as a system—which bilingual and multilingual secondary students develop through instructed learning.<sup>2</sup>

Cognitive development emerges as a central educational benefit. Research published in 2015 established that bilingual secondary students demonstrate enhanced executive function, including superior working memory, visuo-spatial processing and non-verbal reasoning.<sup>3</sup> More recent neuroscience research identified specific neural pathways linking foreign language attitudes to learning success, advancing understanding of biological mechanisms underlying language acquisition.<sup>4</sup> The International Baccalaureate's comprehensive synthesis of 620 texts and 311 research sources concluded that carefully designed language programs with qualified teachers produce measurable improvements in students' cognitive flexibility, inhibition control and creative problem-solving.<sup>5</sup>

Language learning strategies become increasingly sophisticated among higher-achieving secondary students. Research examining 241 lower secondary students found that advanced learners employ more complex combinations of metacognitive, social and cognitive strategies, suggesting that language education develops meta-awareness alongside linguistic competence.<sup>6</sup>

### **Economic Benefits**

The economic case for language education rests on rigorous quantitative analysis. The RAND Corporation and University of Cambridge study, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, demonstrated that investing in language education in the UK secondary sector returns a 2:1 benefit-to-cost ratio over thirty years.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, secondary students learning Mandarin generate predicted benefits of £11.5-12.3 billion GDP increase, while French learners

contribute £9.1-9.5 billion, reflecting both individual wage premiums and broader economic productivity gains.<sup>8</sup>

Labour market premiums correlate directly with language proficiency. Research on foreign language acquisition among US college graduates found measurable wage premiums associated with language fluency, with rarer languages commanding higher premiums reflecting labour market demand.<sup>9</sup> Emerging evidence from Statistics Canada analysis documented positive correlations between official language proficiency and immigrant employment outcomes, though effects vary by linguistic context.<sup>10</sup>

These economic returns reflect language skills' role as genuine human capital. The research literature distinguishes language education from other educational investments: language competence generates tangible competitive advantage in globalised labour markets, with effects quantifiable through earnings differentials and employment probability increases.

## **Social Benefits**

Language education cultivates intercultural competence, a skill increasingly recognized as essential for social cohesion in diverse societies. A 2025 bibliometric review analysing 2,429 publications on intercultural communication in language learning found growing integration of intercultural competence (ICC) into curricula worldwide.<sup>11</sup> Mixed-methods research examining 196 English-as-a-Foreign-Language learners identified significant positive correlations between language proficiency and intercultural competence dimensions, with attitudes showing the strongest effects.<sup>12</sup>

However, research emphasises that language competence alone proves insufficient for successful intercultural interaction.<sup>13</sup> Effective language programs must deliberately integrate cultural content, fostering understanding that enables students to navigate diverse perspectives and communicate across difference. This integrated approach strengthens both linguistic competence and interpersonal capability.

Research on Indigenous languages demonstrates additional social benefits. The OECD working paper examining provision in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada found that strengthening Indigenous languages contributes to community redress and reconciliation, enables transmission of Indigenous knowledges, strengthens cultural identity among Indigenous students, and improves education outcomes including increased retention and achievement rates.<sup>14</sup>

## **Cultural Benefits**

Language education preserves and extends cultural understanding. Beyond instrumental communication skills, language learning provides access to distinct worldviews, literatures, histories and systems of meaning embedded in different languages.<sup>15</sup> This cultural transmission function becomes particularly important as linguistic diversity faces pressure from globalisation.

The International Baccalaureate research identified three levels of cultural benefit: macro (preserving societal linguistic and cultural diversity), meso (strengthening local and institutional cultural identity), and micro (enabling individual cultural exploration and identity formation).<sup>16</sup>

Language programs functioning effectively at all three levels contribute to maintaining multilingual societies and enabling individuals to develop bicultural or multicultural identities.

Research on secondary school language learners found that primary school language experience positively impacts secondary students' intercultural competence and cultural awareness, even when students transition to different languages.<sup>17</sup> This suggests cumulative cultural benefits across the educational trajectory.

## Conclusion

The converging evidence from peer-reviewed research and comprehensive syntheses establishes that secondary-level language education delivers integrated benefits spanning individual cognitive development, measurable economic returns, enhanced social cohesion through intercultural competence, and cultural preservation and understanding. These benefits justify significant public investment in language programs as strategic interventions addressing educational quality, economic competitiveness and social integration simultaneously.

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## References

1. Connecticut Department of Education, *The Benefits of Second Language Study* (2020).
2. Cambridge University Press, "Measuring Children's Metalinguistic Awareness," *Language Teaching* (2025).
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12. *International Journal of English and Media Literacy*, "Exploring the Relationship Between Language Competence and Intercultural Communicative Competence Among EFL Learners: A Mixed-Methods Study" (2024).
13. *Ibid.*
14. OECD Working Paper, *Learning (in) Indigenous Languages: Common Ground, Contrasts, and Considerations* (2016).
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16. International Baccalaureate Organization, *The Benefits of Learning Additional Languages: Final Report* (2025).
17. University of Technology Sydney, "Secondary School Language Learners' Investment and Identity" (conducted by Harbon).