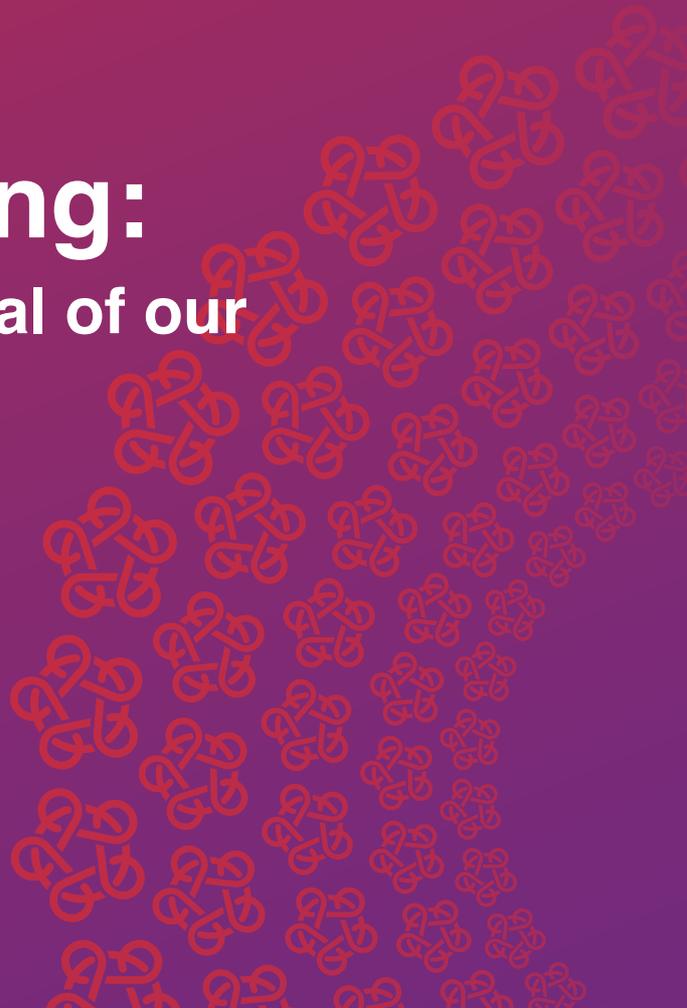




Starting Strong: Nurturing the potential of our Asian under-fives

Elsie Ho, Vivian Cheung and Robert Didham

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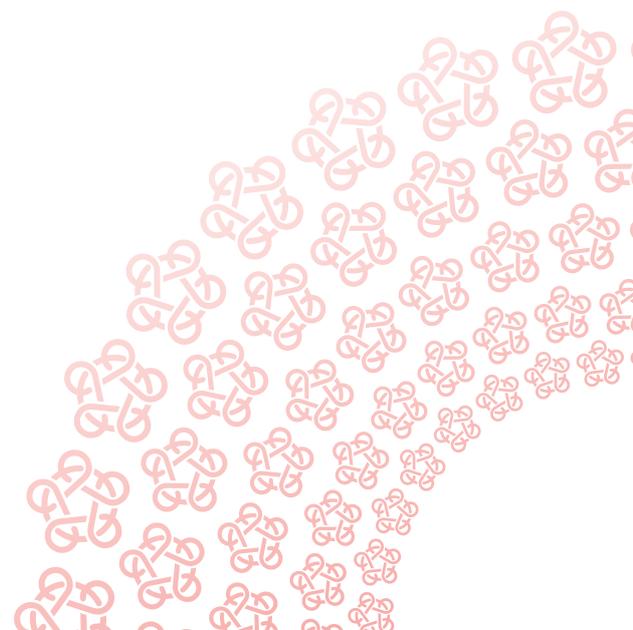


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Call to Action

From Executive Director Simon Draper

A primary focus for the Asia New Zealand Foundation is whether young New Zealanders are being equipped to thrive in Asia. The retention and development of cultural connections and language skills are part of this picture – they are a resource for our future engagement with Asia, and for maintaining a cohesive society.

In July 2017, we released *Losing Momentum: School Leavers' Asia Engagement*. Only eight percent were considered to be 'Asia-ready' – and six out of 10 did not consider Asia-related skills to be important for our future workforce. The report's findings were a sobering reminder that if we don't lift our game in this space, young New Zealanders are going to miss out on opportunities that the rise of Asia's influence and relevance brings.

This new research, *Starting Strong*, focuses on the other end of the pipeline – in particular, children of Asian ethnicity under five years of age. There are significant demographic shifts underway: currently, 18 percent of all New Zealand children under five are of Asian ethnicity. This will rise to 22 percent by 2028. Nine out of 10 of these children are born in New Zealand.

So what are we doing collectively as a society to harness the potential this demographic offers?

We believe for New Zealanders to thrive in Asia, there needs to be a clear pathway for our students. This includes building and nurturing the Asia competence of all New Zealanders as they enter our school system, so that we don't see the kinds of results we are currently getting at the other end of the pipeline.

Our communities also need to affirm parents' permission space to continue to value and nurture the valuable cultural skills of these children as they progress through our education system.

Based on the research findings and our own engagement in this space, the Foundation would make the following call to action:

- Recognising the benefits of having children with diverse languages and cultures growing up in New Zealand is an important first step. Then in a coordinated and deliberate approach we should ensure these cultural and language skills are nurtured and not lost.
- Our data tells us there is widespread support for children speaking more than one language. A National Languages Policy would assist in growing a 'languages culture' within New Zealand where, as it is in the majority of countries in the world, children speak more than one language and grow the cultural competencies that accompany language learning.
- With the New Zealand Association of Language Teachers, the Foundation has made recommendations to develop a 'languages in education' plan through engagement with the community, ensuring language pathways, targeted funding, and developing a quality language teaching force. This study recommends ways we can make a start at the Early Childhood Education level.

As this report notes, this is not just an issue for our educators to address - it is a challenge to our whanau and the wider community.

We look forward to taking this discussion further.

November 2017.



Video comments from Foundation Executive Director Simon Draper.

Executive Summary

This report identifies the opportunities, challenges and implications for our Asian under-five population – and what that means for their families, their communities and early childhood education when it comes to language and cultural maintenance and development. These children will have many advantages and opportunities if they can grow up with high proficiency in both English and their heritage language, and if they can deploy their valuable intercultural skills. There are potential benefits to New Zealand if we can leverage this cultural and linguistic capital within our population – our Asian under-fives are a potentially significant resource to improve and enhance our future engagement with Asia.

Some key points from the research:

1

Eighty-nine percent of Asian under-fives are New Zealand-born.

2

Between 2001 and 2013, the number of Asian under-fives doubled; in 2017, 18 percent of all children under five were of Asian ethnicity; this will rise to 22 percent by 2038.

3

English is the most common language spoken by Asian under-fives. Additionally, many of them also speak an Asian language.

9

People who identify with an Asian ethnicity make up the fastest-growing ethnic population in New Zealand.

4

Parents of Asian under-fives place great importance on heritage language and cultural maintenance. They use their heritage language with their children at home, and in cultural events organised by local heritage communities. However, some parents do not want their children to speak their heritage language at Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres, viewing ECE as an environment for teaching English.

8

The biggest challenge is to increase/maintain heritage language fluency and to enable acquisition of the associated cultural depth as children mature.



7

The largest numerical growth of Asian under-fives has been in Auckland; while the provinces have experienced high percentage growth.

6

The ECE environment is the meeting place of many cultures, enabling children to become familiar with multiple languages and cultures. Families are a great asset for promoting heritage languages and cultures to all children at ECE through involvement in festive celebrations and cultural activities.

5

Some parents observe that after their children start school, English becomes the main language at home and heritage languages are less used.



Video comments from Foundation education director Jeff Johnstone.

Introduction

Asia is home to approximately 60 percent of the global population. Asia is also the fastest growing economic region in the world. Over the past two decades, New Zealand's social, cultural and economic links with Asia have become much stronger than ever before.

In our most recent census in 2013, almost one in eight New Zealand residents (11.8 percent or 471,708 people) identified with one or more Asian ethnicities, compared with one in 15 people (6.4 percent) in 2001. As increasing numbers of people from Asia are living, working and studying in New Zealand, Asia has also become a popular and attractive destination for New Zealanders to live, work, study and travel.¹

As such, enhancing our knowledge, skills and understanding about the histories, societies, cultures and languages of the diverse countries that make up Asia will be vital for enabling New Zealanders to thrive there.

Asian people living in New Zealand often retain their languages, cultures and substantive ties with their home countries.² Their knowledge and familiarity with Asia are valuable assets that can help enhance New Zealand's connections with Asia.³ Over the past 20 to 30 years, this cohort has grown in size and spread. One interesting aspect of this demographic development is the growing subset of under-fives of Asian ethnicity.

Between 2001 and 2013, the number of New Zealand-born Asian children⁴ aged under five doubled, and their share in New Zealand's total under-five population increased from six percent in the 2001 census to 12 percent in the 2013 census. At the same time, the birth rate for women of Asian ethnicities also increased, contributing to the growth in both the size and share of the population of Asian children in the country. The Asian birth rate in New Zealand has increased over the past 10 years from a low point of 44 per 1,000 females of reproductive age (15 to 44 years) in 2006, to 62 in 2012.⁵

The official projections indicate that, as at 30 June 2017, just over 18 percent of all children under five years of age were of an Asian ethnicity, with the median projection showing that this will increase to nearly 22 percent by 2038. This represents an increase from 54,500 to 68,300 Asian children under five over the next two decades.⁶

In pre-school centres, Asian children now make up a significant proportion of those enrolled. They are an increasingly diverse population with a much

¹ Alan Gamlen, "Engaging Asia: The role of the diaspora", *Asia New Zealand Foundation Outlook*, No. 15, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2011; Paul Spoonley and Richard Bedford, *Welcome to our world? Immigration and the reshaping of New Zealand*, Auckland: Dunmore, 2013.

² Elsie Ho, "The changing face of Asian peoples in New Zealand", *New Zealand Population Review*, 41, 2015, pp. 95-118.

³ Robert Didham, "Intersections: Southeast Asia and diaspora engagement", *Asia New Zealand Foundation Outlook*, No. 11, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2009; Robert Didham, "Future potential and the invisible diaspora: New Zealand and South Asia diaspora," *Asia New Zealand Foundation Outlook*, No. 12, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2010; Elsie Ho, Manying Ip and Joanna Lewin, "New Zealand's diaspora in China: Untapped resources", *Asia New Zealand Foundation Outlook*, No. 14, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2010.

⁴ An Asian child or an Asian baby in the context of this report refers to young people who identify with or are identified with one or more ethnicities in the Asian grouping of ethnicities. This detailed description is important for several reasons. First, it emphasises that the term "Asian" is contested. It represents an aggregation of identities based on a geo-political and historical basis, but is applied to people who choose these identifications for many reasons. Some of these reasons may relate to migrant histories, ancestral connections or social environments. Ethnicity as used here is not skin colour or migrant status or necessarily intergenerational. Second, ethnicities can change as social and familial environments change. The key aspect of ethnic identification is that it is regarded as self-identified. This has implications when we come to talk about young children. The way that most pre-school children will express their identity, or have their ethnicities reported by parents and teachers alike, will be premised on what they have been told by other people. While interviews and specialised surveys may be able to elicit how the child thinks of himself/herself, the data against which this is measured is necessarily impacted by how other people choose to perceive that child.

⁵ Ministry of Health, *Report on maternity 2012*, Wellington: Ministry of Health, 2015.

⁶ Statistics New Zealand, *National Ethnic Population Projections: 2013 (base) – 2038 (update)*, Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 2017.

wider range of ethnicities represented. For example, there are more children of Indonesian, Pakistani, Filipino, Chinese, Korean and Indian ethnicities. More recent arrivals include Kachin, Karen, Lhotsampa, Uzbeki and Dari. This trend is particularly apparent in Auckland, but is also observed in other regions throughout the country. Wardlow Friesen's *Beyond the Metropolises* illustrates some of these demographic changes.⁷

Furthermore, Asian children vary extensively in their roots and have a wealth of cultural capital to bring to their peers. Importantly, 89 percent of Asian children are New Zealand born, with some coming from families who have been in New Zealand for many generations. Only one in 10 is born overseas.⁸

Because of increasing inter-ethnic partnering as well as ethnically diverse neighbourhoods and peer groups, many are children of mixed ethnicities. The potential benefits that could be realised from the cultural and linguistic diversity amongst New Zealand's Asian children have yet to be fully explored.

This report examines the demographic, familial and linguistic backgrounds of the Asian under-five population in New Zealand, and explores the perceptions and experiences of parents and early childhood educators regarding maintaining Asian children's heritage languages⁹ and cultures. The report also identifies the opportunities and challenges of leveraging Asian children's cultural capital to improve New Zealand's engagement with Asia.

Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

How has New Zealand's Asian under-five population changed since 2000?

What steps have been taken in early childhood education to support Asian children to maintain their heritage languages and cultures? What opportunities are there to expose all children, of Asian ethnicity or otherwise, to the rich array of Asian languages and cultures? What challenges have been faced?

What are the primary languages spoken in the homes of Asian families with children under five? What steps have been taken by parents to support children to learn their heritage languages and cultures? What challenges have they faced?

How might ethnic communities and wider society help Asian children increase or maintain fluency in their heritage languages? How might New Zealand best harness the languages, cultures and connections offered by our fast-growing Asian younger generation to enhance our cultural competency on Asia?

⁷ Wardlow Friesen, *Beyond the metropolises: The Asian presence in small city New Zealand*, Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2015, <http://www.asianz.org.nz/reports/report/beyond-the-metropolises-the-asian-presence-in-small-city-new-zealand/beyond-the-metropolises-the-asian-presence-in-small-city-new-zealand/>

⁸ These statistics are based on 2013 census and projections. The 2018 census will provide an opportunity to review these findings again.

⁹ In this report, the term "heritage language" refers to the language that someone learns at home as a child, which is a language that the family traditionally speaks and has cultural connections to. The term "home language" is also used in New Zealand, which refers to the language that is spoken by members of a family for everyday interactions at home. There can be more than one heritage language spoken in the home, and the languages spoken at home can include languages other than the heritage language(s). As the section "Fostering Asian under-fives' heritage languages and cultures in the home environment" will show, some multi-ethnic families speak three or more languages at home – other than each parent's heritage language, English is also used, as this is the common language spoken by both parents.

Asian Under-Five Demographics in New Zealand

Key findings:

The Asian population in New Zealand aged under five years almost doubled from 18,378 in 2001 to 35,898 in 2013.

Those with Chinese and Indian ethnicities (which accounted for 70 percent of the total Asian under-five population in 2013) had the greatest numerical increase. The largest percentage increases were recorded for the Burmese and Filipino groups. Growth of the many smaller Asian ethnic groups, such as Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Thai and Indonesian, reflect the increasing diversity within the Asian under-five population.

English is the most common language spoken by Asian children aged under five in New Zealand. Additionally, many of them also speak a variety of Asian languages – if these children continue to use their bilingual or multi-lingual skills as they grow into their adult years, they have the potential to be valuable resources for building engagement with Asia.

The geographic distribution of Asian under-fives varies widely across New Zealand. While Auckland, Canterbury and Wellington have the largest increases in the size of their Asian populations, the share of those under five has decreased in these regions. Southland, Taranaki, Waikato and Bay of Plenty were among the regions which increased their share of the Asian under-five population.

The proportion of Asian children born in New Zealand has increased since 2001. One in five babies born in New Zealand is of Asian ethnicity.

This reflects the changing composition of New Zealand's Asian population - with both an increase in the proportion of women entering child-bearing age, and the tendency for migrants (especially in partnership migration) to have a child soon after arrival.

One in four families with an Asian child under five has one overseas-born and one New Zealand-born parent. Most Asian children under five live in two-parent families, with 68 percent having both parents born overseas and only 6 percent with both parents born in New Zealand.

Almost nine out of 10 Asian under-fives are New Zealand born.



Video comments from report co-author Dr Robert Didham.

The term ‘Asian’ does not describe a coherent ethnic group in New Zealand. It includes people not just of differing and multiple ethnicities, but also differing settlement histories, socio-economic status, English language proficiency and acculturation.¹⁰ The ethnic mosaic of New Zealand’s population is changing rapidly, with people identifying with Asian ethnicities making up the fastest-growing ethnic population in the country over recent decades. Since 2001, Asians have surpassed Pacific people to become New Zealand’s third largest ethnic group, after Europeans and Māori, and are set to surpass Māori by 2020.

The rapid growth of the Asian population as a whole is largely driven by immigration. In 1986, a fundamental change in government policy abolished a traditional source-country preference (the United Kingdom and Europe) and opened up immigration pathways to other countries. This policy change, combined with the subsequent introduction in 1991 of a points selection system which rated prospective migrants on their qualifications, work experience, age and settlement factors, has led to a much larger and diverse flow of people from countries in Asia entering New Zealand.¹¹ Between the censuses of 1986 and 2013, the Asian population in New Zealand increased almost nine-fold, from 53,883 in 1986 to 471,711 in 2013.

The Asian under-five population, mostly New Zealand born, also increased dramatically from 5,871 in 1986 to 35,898 in 2013 (Figure 1). The characteristics of the population were also transformed. In 1986, 10 percent of the Asian population resident in New Zealand were aged under five years, and 15 percent were born overseas. By 2013 this had dropped to less than eight percent, with around 12 percent born overseas.

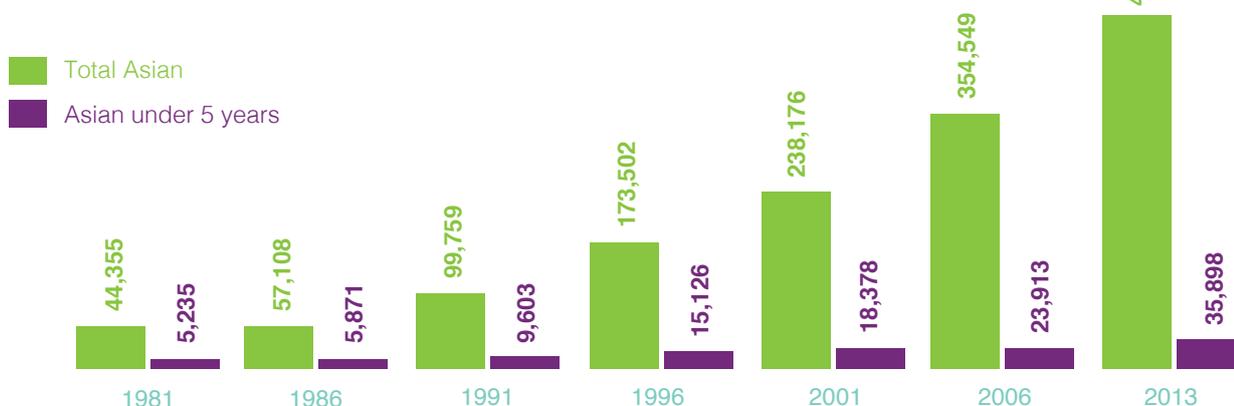
The number of young children with multiple ethnicities has

also increased. In 1986, of the 5,871 children, 2,271 also identified with ethnicities outside the Asian grouping. By 2013, this group had grown to 9,722. But the proportion of multi-ethnic children in the Asian population aged under five years actually dropped from 39 percent in 1986 to 27 percent in 2013.

These two counter-intuitive trends reflect both the radical policy shifts and the growth in education and labour migration which, by its nature and constraints, does not contribute as much to family migration and onshore family formation. In 1986, 22 percent of all Asians were multi-ethnic. By 2013, fewer than nine percent were multi-ethnic. This was largely because of large numbers of recent migrants in the international tertiary student age group and a temporary workforce who were more likely to report a single ethnicity, and much less likely to be partnering locally and forming families.

Similar shifts have occurred among groupings of ethnicities. The consequences for the under-fives is that they are now in an environment with far greater population mobility and transnational connections and therefore living in a society with a much more complex and richer cultural fabric.

Figure 1: Asian population in New Zealand and Asian children under five years of age, 1981-2013 Censuses.



Source: Statistics New Zealand.

¹⁰ Kumanan Rasanathan, David Craig and Rod Perkins, “The novel use of ‘Asian’ as an ethnic category in the New Zealand health sector”, *Ethnicity and Health*, 11(3), 2006, pp. 211-227.

¹¹ Elsie Ho, “The changing face of Asian peoples in New Zealand”, *New Zealand Population Review*, 41, 2015, pp. 95-118; Andrew D. Trlin, “Change and continuity: New Zealand’s immigration policy in the late 1980s” in Andrew D. Trlin and Paul Spoonley (eds.) *New Zealand and international migration. A digest and bibliography*, No. 2, Palmerston North: Department of Sociology, Massey University, 1992, pp. 1-28; Andrew D. Trlin, “For the promotion of economic growth and prosperity: New Zealand’s immigration policy, 1991-1995” in Andrew D. Trlin and Paul Spoonley (eds.) *New Zealand and international migration. A digest and bibliography*, No. 3, Palmerston North & Albany: Department of Sociology, Massey University, 1997, pp. 1-27.

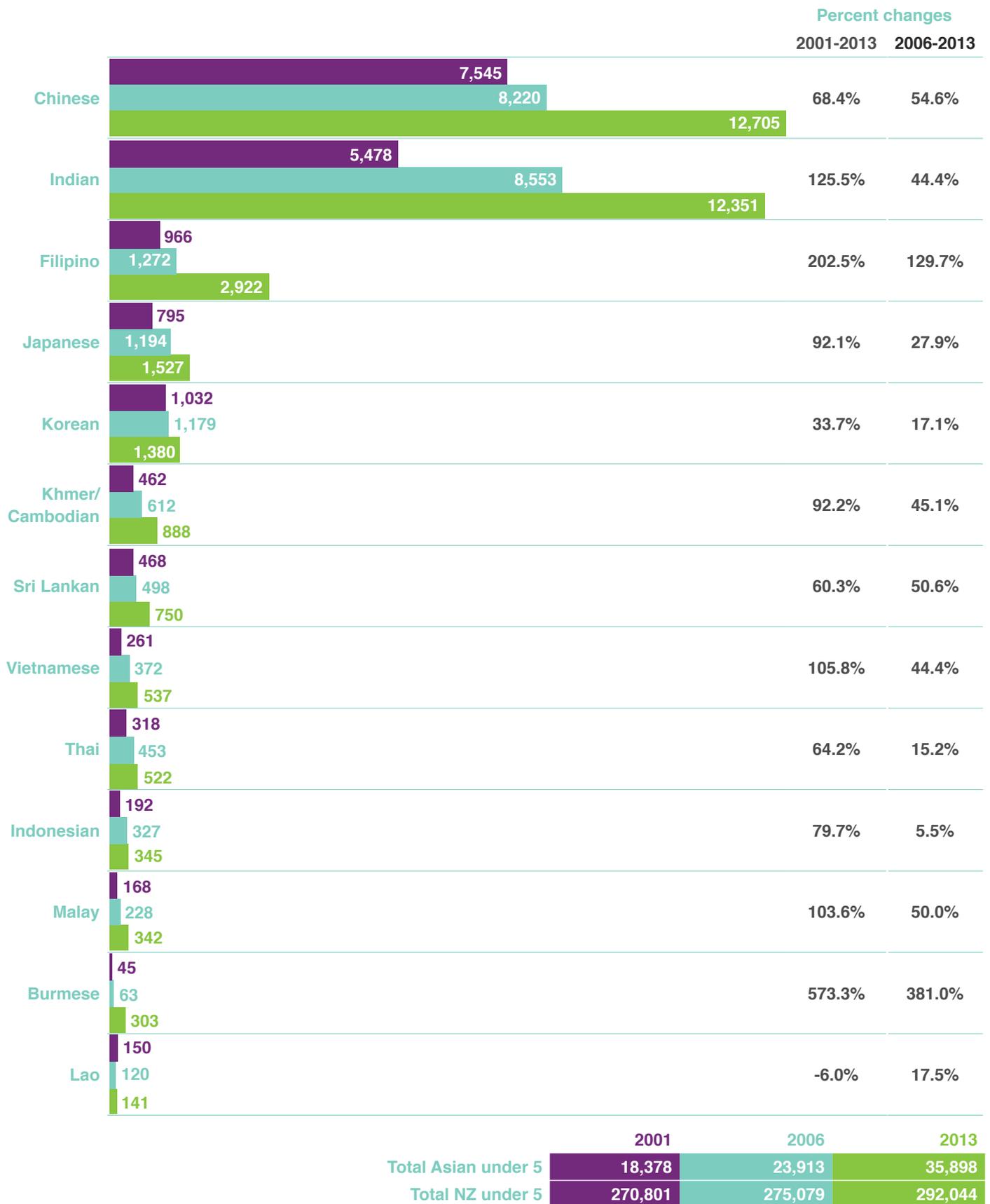
Differential growth of Asian ethnicities

The Asian under-five population has almost doubled since 2001. Moreover, the composition of this grouping has also changed. The growth rates of the various ethnic groups under the broad grouping of 'Asian' vary considerably (Figure 2). The Chinese and Indians, who have been settling in New Zealand since the mid-nineteenth century, remain New Zealand's two largest Asian groups. Children under five years of age in these two groups also had the largest numerical increase between 2001 and 2013, and together they accounted for 70 percent of the Asian under-five population in 2013 (Figure 2). It is important to remember, though, that these two groups are themselves highly diverse.

The under-five population of Korean ethnicity ranked third in 2001, but between 2001 and 2013, the number of children with Filipino ethnicity and those with Japanese ethnicity had grown much faster (202 percent and 92 percent respectively). The number of Korean children under five increased by only 34 percent. Filipino and Japanese children have emerged as the third and fourth largest Asian under-five populations in 2013, behind the Chinese and Indian populations. Figure 2 also shows that many smaller Asian ethnic groups, such as Khmer, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, Malay and Burmese, have all increased in size since 2001, resulting in continuing shifts in the patterns of ethnic diversity within the Asian under-five population.



Figure 2: Asian children under five years of age in selected Asian ethnic groups, 2001, 2006 and 2013 Censuses

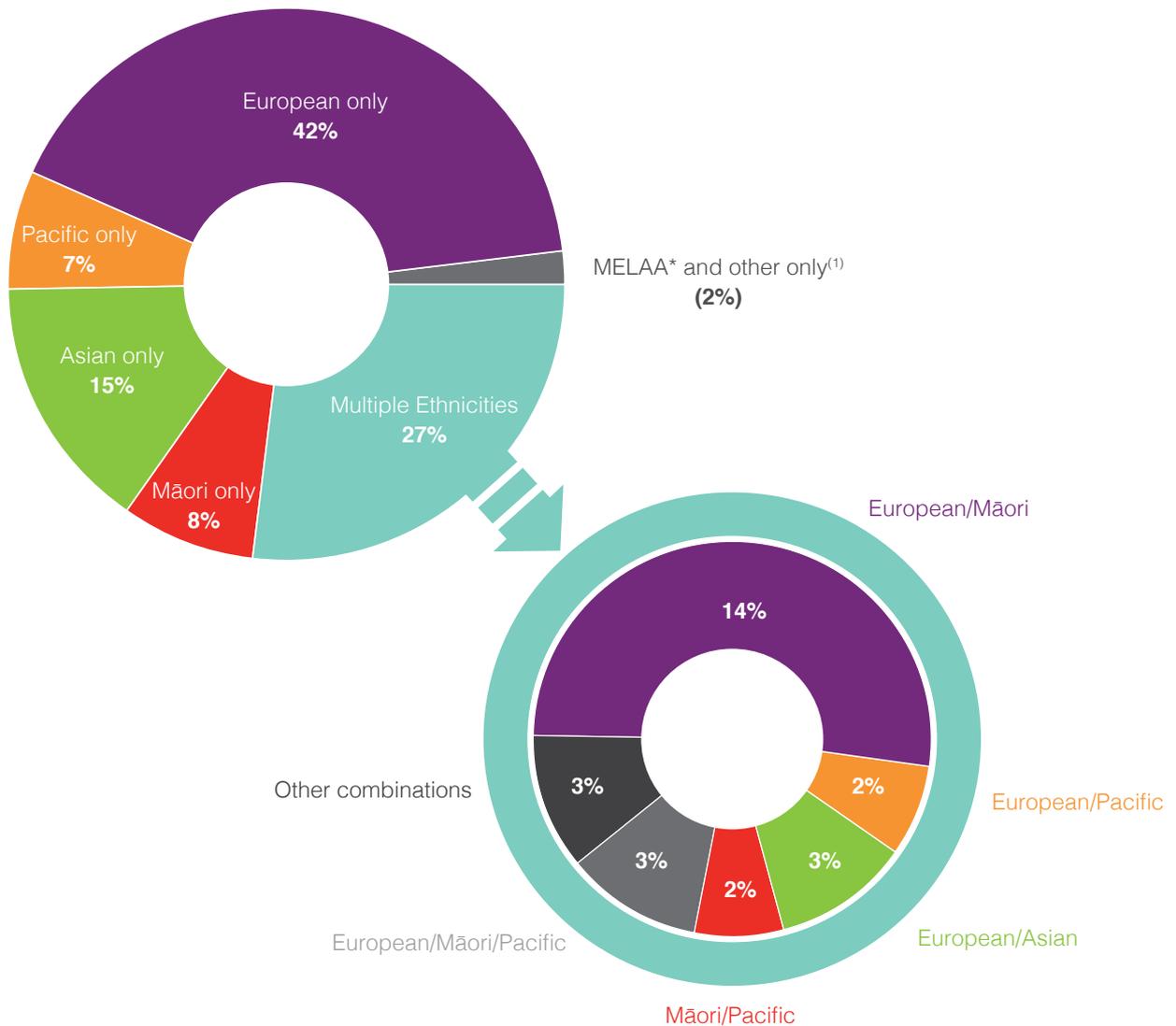


Source: Statistics New Zealand, *Census of Population and Dwellings*.

More babies of Asian ethnicities born in New Zealand

If we look at the ethnic composition of births in New Zealand, we see that nearly 20 percent of all births are babies reported as having at least one Asian ethnicity. Around 15 percent of the babies are recorded as having only Asian ethnicities, but the level of multiple ethnicity continues to increase. In 2016, three percent of births were of both Asian and European ethnicities (Figure 3), with a growing diverse group who were both Asian and Māori or Pacific.

Figure 3: Birth by child's ethnicity, 2016



*MELAA refers to Middle Eastern/Latin American/African

⁽¹⁾ Includes New Zealanders and a small number of births where no ethnic group could be identified.

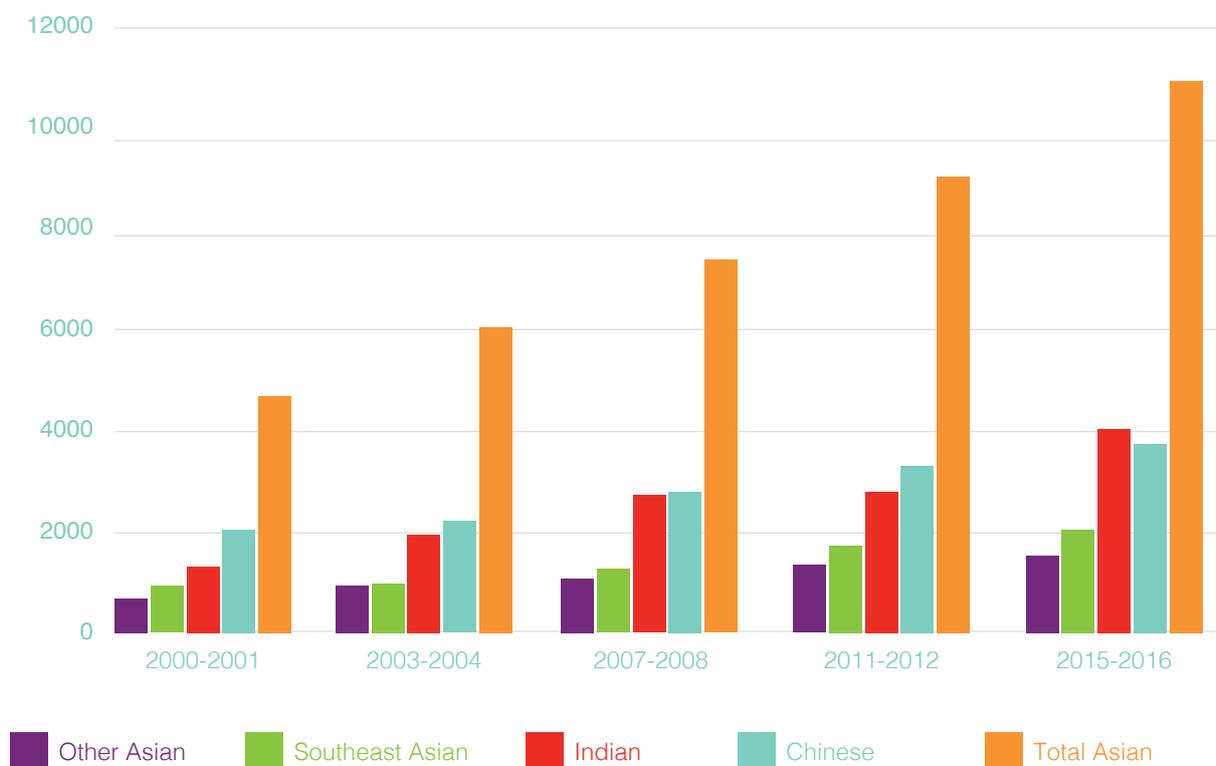
Source: Statistics New Zealand.

Statistics on births between March 2000 and February 2016 produced by Statistics New Zealand show that the number of Asian babies¹² born in New Zealand had more than doubled, from 4,827 (or around eight percent of all births in New Zealand in 2000/01) to 11,127 in 2015/16 (Figure 4), so that now one in five babies born in New Zealand is of Asian ethnicity.

Within the broad Asian grouping, Indians had the largest percentage increase (226 percent), followed

by Southeast Asians, which includes Thai, Khmer and increasingly Filipino babies (159 percent), and Other Asians, which includes Korean, Japanese, Sri Lankan and Afghani babies (122 percent). However, despite these increases, the ethnic diversity of Asian births has changed only slightly. Chinese and Indian babies accounted for around one third each of Asian births, with the remaining third shared approximately evenly between Southeast Asian babies and other Asian ethnic groups.

Figure 4: Number of births by Asian ethnic group, March 2000 – February 2016



Source: Statistics New Zealand. *Vital births.*

¹² An Asian baby is a baby that is registered at birth with one or more ethnicities within the Asian grouping of ethnicities.

In addition, Census data show that the proportion of Asian children born in New Zealand has increased since 2001 (Table 1). This trend is apparent for most Asian groups. In 2013, Burmese, with refugee families

among recent migrants, had the lowest proportion (67 percent) of their under-five population born in New Zealand, whereas Lao, with low levels of family migration, had the highest proportion (100 percent).

Table 1: Asian children under five years of age by ethnic group, number and percent born in New Zealand: 2001, 2006 and 2013 Censuses

Ethnicity	Number born in NZ			Percent of under-five population		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	6,867	7,515	11,637	91.4	92.1	92.6
Indian	4,626	7,248	10,890	84.9	85.7	89.4
Filipino	792	1,038	2,427	82.5	82.2	83.9
Japanese	648	1,026	1,305	81.5	86.2	86.3
Korean	678	903	1,107	65.9	77.4	81.1
Khmer/Cambodian	429	579	831	94.7	96.5	95.9
Sri Lankan	345	426	615	73.7	86.1	83.0
Vietnamese	228	330	477	88.4	90.9	89.8
Thai	258	396	459	81.9	88.6	89.5
Indonesian	144	288	306	75.0	88.9	88.7
Malay	138	183	243	80.7	80.3	71.7
Burmese	18	54	195	42.9	90.0	67.1
Lao	141	114	135	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Asian Under-fives	15,615	20,682	31,491	85.4	87.4	88.8
Total NZ Under-fives	250,011	248,283	261,648	95.6	94.4	95.0

Source: Statistics New Zealand. *Census of Population and Dwellings*.

Sex ratio

In 2013, there were 105 males per 100 females in the Asian under-five population (Table 2). This is very similar to the sex ratio for the total New Zealand population (around 106 males per 100 females). In the three censuses 2001 to 2013, most Asian groups had sex ratios in favour of males, except for Khmer (95 per 100 in 2001; 89 per 100 in 2013), Malay (93 per 100 in 2001; 97 per 100 in 2013), and Lao (92 per 100 in 2001; 88 per 100 in 2013) where there are more girls than boys.

One reason why identifying the sex ratio is important is because the ratio of boys to girls entering Early Childhood Education (ECE) from different ethnic

communities becomes a factor in gender relationships and equity in cultural and linguistic programs. Although the differences are small, any contributing bias in parental uptake for different providers will amplify any differences in geographic distribution of the communities. We can see from these figures that with a few (and interesting) exceptions, the sex ratios do not vary markedly from the national norm. Consequently, any strong gender biases in enrolments at ECE level are not strongly linked to differences in the available pool of students. This suggests a need to understand any underlying sets of cultural drivers that contribute to differences in uptake of ECE opportunities, and a need to understand how students who do so interact with their peers.

Table 2: Asian children under five years of age by ethnic group and sex, and sex ratio: 2001, 2006 and 2013 Censuses

Ethnicity	2001			2006			2013		
	Male	Female	*Sex Ratio	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
Chinese	3,858	3,690	104.6	4,275	3,942	108.5	6,546	6,162	106.2
Indian	2,793	2,685	104.0	4,422	4,134	107.0	6,291	6,063	103.8
Filipino	492	477	103.1	663	606	109.4	1,509	1,416	106.6
Japanese	360	435	82.8	612	582	105.2	780	744	104.8
Korean	540	492	109.8	576	603	95.5	708	672	105.4
Khmer	225	237	94.9	321	291	110.3	417	468	89.1
Sri Lankan	243	222	109.5	252	246	102.4	384	363	105.8
Vietnamese	120	144	83.3	189	183	103.3	282	252	111.9
Thai	147	171	86.0	246	204	120.6	279	243	114.8
Indonesian	96	96	100.0	174	153	113.7	168	177	94.9
Malay	81	87	93.1	129	99	130.3	168	174	96.6
Burmese	21	24	87.5	33	33	100.0	153	150	102.0
Lao	72	78	92.3	66	51	129.4	66	75	88.0
Total Asian under five	9,297	9,081	102.4	12,375	11,538	107.3	18,390	17,511	105.0
Total NZ under five population	138,693	132,108	105.0	140,382	134,694	104.2	149,298	142,746	104.6

*Sex Ratio = Males per 100 females.

Source: Statistics New Zealand. *Census of Population and Dwellings*.

Regional variations

Between 2001 and 2013, the Asian under-five population increased in size in all regions throughout New Zealand (Table 3). The greatest numerical increase was in the Auckland region, where the number of Asian children under five almost doubled, from 11,472 in 2001 to 22,102 in 2013. Besides Auckland, the Asian under-five populations in three regions (Canterbury, Wellington and Waikato) increased by over 1,000 people between 2001 and 2013.

Although the numerical increases in other regions were much less significant, some regions experienced very high percentage increases between 2001 and 2013. For example, the Asian under-five populations in Taranaki, Southland and the West Coast had grown by over 200 percent during this period.

Table 3: Distribution of Asian children under 5 years of age by region, 2001, 2006 and 2013 Censuses

Region	Numbers			Percent change	
	2001	2006	2013	2001-2013	2006-2013
Northland	204	228	345	69.1	51.3
Auckland	11,472	15,483	22,302	94.4	44.0
Waikato	1,023	1,311	2,334	128.2	78.0
Bay of Plenty	534	696	1,155	116.3	66.0
Gisborne	69	93	111	60.9	19.35
Hawke's Bay	258	324	480	86.1	48.2
Taranaki	108	165	366	238.9	121.8
Manawatu-Whanganui	513	603	906	76.6	50.3
Wellington	2,382	2,679	3,726	56.4	39.1
Tasman	36	60	90	150.0	50.0
Nelson	84	90	204	142.9	126.7
Marlborough	45	45	102	126.7	126.7
West Coast	18	27	60	233.3	122.2
Canterbury	1,251	1,635	2,835	126.6	73.4
Otago	303	369	630	107.9	70.7
Southland	75	102	261	248.0	155.9

Source: Statistics New Zealand. *Census of Population and Dwellings*.

Treating different ethnicities as one monolithic Asian group not only hides diversity, it also makes it more difficult to see the underlying cultural wealth within the group and the potential this has for forging links both between communities and with the wider population at a local level. When the total Asian under-five population is broken down by ethnic group, the distribution of the various Asian ethnicities across the 16 regions varies considerably. While Auckland is home to the largest proportion of all ethnicities, the growth rate for some other regions (especially Taranaki and across the South Island) has been much higher. Understanding where different communities prefer to live, how this is changing over time, and why this is so, helps us identify opportunities for building strategies for enhancing New Zealand's confidence and competency in engaging Asia and Asian peoples and cultures.

In each of the three censuses from 2001 to 2013, the largest proportion of Asian ethnic groups lived in the Auckland region (Appendix 1). Ethnic groups which had more than half of their under-five population living in the Auckland region in 2013 were Chinese (67 percent), Indian (65 percent), Korean (69 percent), Sri Lankan (64 percent), Vietnamese (65 percent), Indonesian (51 percent) and Lao (60 percent). In comparison, Malay (45 percent) and Burmese (44 percent) under-five children were least likely to live in the Auckland region in 2013.

To place these distributions into context, in the 2013 Census, Auckland was home to 35 percent of the people under five years of age living in New Zealand.

During this same period, Wellington region's Asian under-five population ranked second in size, and the Canterbury region ranked third. In 2013, more than one in four Burmese and Lao children, and nearly one in five Khmer and Indonesian children, lived in the Wellington region. In addition, one in seven Filipino, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese and Malay, one in eight Thai, and about one in 10 Chinese, Indian and Japanese children aged under five years also lived in this region. The Wellington region also illustrates an important point that is often overlooked: the region is geographically diverse. Families with ethnically diverse and multilingual children are more likely to be found in Porirua than Kapiti, and the Filipino and Khmer communities, for example, have quite a different distribution in the region. Other regions are similarly internally diverse.

In 2013, the Canterbury region was home to one in six Japanese and Malay, and one in eight Filipino and Korean children aged under five. About one in 10 Chinese, Thai and Indonesian children lived in the region. This compared with only four to six percent of Indian, Khmer and Sri Lankan children under five years of age living in the region.

The Waikato region, where the Asian under-five population ranked fourth in 2013, was home to one in five Khmer (reflecting the long and close relationship the Khmer community has with this region), one in 10 Lao, and one in 12 Indian, Filipino and Thai children aged under five. Only small proportions of most Asian groups lived in the other 12 regions, but there are some exceptions. For example, six percent of Japanese children aged under five lived in Otago, five percent of Khmer children in Manawatu-Whanganui, and five percent of Filipino and four percent of Korean children in the Bay of Plenty. In general, there is a connection between where the children live and the work, housing and lifestyle opportunities found in the areas.

Languages

Asian peoples speak a wide variety of languages, and this linguistic diversity is also reflected among children aged under five in New Zealand who have one or both parents of Asian ethnicity (Table 4).¹³ The data presented here is only part of the picture. While in most cases at least one parent speaks at least one language spoken by the child, it cannot be assumed that all family members, including older siblings, also speak the same language(s).

In some cases, children speak the languages of their peer groups outside the family, which can explain

situations in which the child is the only family member fluent in English or knows other languages, such as Samoan, because of the social context of the child.

One of the challenges around developing intercultural competency is the promotion of fluency and literacy in languages and cultural norms of their familial linguistic and ethnic environment, as well as a sound awareness and respect for other linguistic environments.



¹³ Table 4 excludes children who have been coded as having no languages (e.g. too young to talk if they are under one year old and those who have not responded to the question) and languages spoken by fewer than 30 children.

Table 4: Languages spoken by children under five years of age, with one or both parents of Asian ethnicity, 2013 Census

Language	Mother Asian Father Asian		Mother Asian Father non-Asian*		Mother non-Asian* Father Asian		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
English	6,222	6,141	2,862	2,910	1,002	1,020	10,086	10,071	20,151
Sinitic nfd**	1,311	1,278	300	324	30	33	1,641	1,635	3,276
Hindi	879	861	78	84	39	30	996	975	1,971
Yue***	435	441	78	72	15	9	528	522	1,050
Japanese	150	156	228	234	18	12	396	402	798
Panjabi	393	324	21	21	18	18	432	363	795
Korean	273	309	69	93	9	3	351	405	756
Tagalog	279	309	36	39	6	6	321	354	675
Gujarati	210	231	15	12	0	3	225	246	471
Urdu	120	129	3	9	6	3	129	141	270
Khmer	87	90	33	30	12	6	132	126	258
Tamil	102	117	6	6	0	0	108	123	231
Malayalam	108	114	0	0	0	0	108	114	222
Vietnamese	60	54	36	33	9	9	105	90	195
Thai	27	27	57	63	6	0	90	90	180
Persian	60	63	15	15	0	3	75	81	156
Bahasa Indonesia	45	48	27	24	3	0	75	72	147
Telugu	66	75	0	0	0	0	66	75	141
Burmese	60	51	9	6	0	0	69	57	126
Sinhala	63	60	0	0	0	0	63	60	126
Pashto	39	51	6	3	0	0	45	54	99
Nepalese	33	45	6	3	3	3	42	51	93
Bengali	36	51	3	3	0	0	39	54	93
Malay	27	27	6	3	0	0	33	30	63
Marathi	33	21	0	0	0	0	33	21	54
Fiji Hindi	18	15	3	6	0	0	21	21	42
Min	12	18	3	3	0	0	15	21	36
Lao	9	9	9	9	0	0	18	18	36
Tieu-Chow	9	18	0	3	0	0	9	21	30

*Includes ethnicity unidentifiable.

**Sinitic not further defined, includes Northern Chinese, Mandarin.

***Includes Cantonese.

Source: Statistics New Zealand. *Census of Population and Dwellings*.

As Table 4 shows, English is the most common language spoken by Asian children under five years of age in New Zealand. The 10 most common non-English languages spoken by these children in 2013 are Northern Chinese, Hindi, Yue, Japanese, Panjabi, Korean, Tagalog, Gujarati, Urdu and Khmer. In addition, a number of Asian children speak a variety of other South Asian languages (e.g. Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Nepalese, Bengali) and Southeast Asian languages (e.g. Vietnamese, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, Burmese, Malay).

With Asia's growing economic and social importance in an increasingly globalised world, the development of language skills and connections among these bilingual or multi-lingual Asian children could offer New Zealand a valuable resource in its future engagement with the region and its peoples.

The feature most apparent in Table 5 is the centrality of mothers in cultural transmission in this age group¹⁴ - providing a key link in the linguistic and cultural maintenance between the home and the education provider. Another important pathway for intercultural transmission is the successful inter-ethnic partnering of parents and caregivers, but this also introduces difficulties for language retention because it is not common for partners to learn each other's languages in practice.



¹⁴ The family is a crucial site for heritage language and cultural maintenance. Mothers play a vital role because most often they are the primary caregivers of their children, exposing them to the heritage language and culture. Other factors influencing heritage language use and maintenance in the family include grandparents, extended families in the home country, and the attitudes of parents towards heritage language maintenance.

Family context of the Asian under-fives

We have noted the centrality of mothers in cultural transmission and maintenance, which sits alongside transmission and acquisition in other environments, but the wider family context is also important.¹⁵

In the family structure, not all Asian children have Asian parents, and not all Asian parents have Asian children. Among children under five, there are 24,255 children in two-parent families where both parents are of at least one Asian ethnicity. But we also find a further 2,058 who have an Asian father but not an

Asian mother, and 4,620 with an Asian mother but not an Asian father. For 282 Asian children under five, neither parent is Asian. Examples include families with fostered or adopted children, or where the child is of Asian ethnicity but neither of the parents chooses to identify as such. However, among children not of Asian ethnicities, there are also 450 with both parents Asian; 453 with an Asian father; and 1,410 with an Asian mother (Table 5). The latter is another example of the gendered nature of inter-ethnic partnering in New Zealand.

Table 5: Asian under-fives in two-parent families by Asian ethnicity of parents, and other under-fives with an Asian parent, 2013 Census

Ethnicity of father	Ethnicity of child	Mother: Asian	Mother: not Asian	Total children
Asian	Asian	24,255	2,058	26,313
	Not Asian	450	453	903
Not Asian	Asian	4,620	282	4,902
	Not Asian	1,410		1,410
Total children		30,738	2,793	33,531

Note: Includes children under five with ethnicity specified, and ethnicity specified for both parents.

Source: Statistics New Zealand.

¹⁵ The significance of family context, and how that affects language and cultural transmission, will be explained in case studies and vignettes featured in “Maintaining heritage culture and language”. See also Seong Man Park and Mela Sarkar, “Parents’ attitudes towards heritage language maintenance for their children and their efforts to help their children maintain the heritage language: A case study of Korean-Canadian immigrants”, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 20(3), 2007, pp. 223-234; Anne Pauwels, “Maintaining the community language in Australia: Challenges and roles for families”, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 8(2&3), 2005, pp. 124-131.

By far, the majority of Asian children are in two-parent families, with only three percent of all Asian children and one percent of those under five living in one-parent families. Cross-national partnering and family formation is an important feature of New Zealand's migration histories and is reflected among Asian children under five. While 84 percent have an overseas-born mother and 74 percent have an overseas-born father, we find that 68 percent have both parents born overseas. Only six percent of these children have two New Zealand-born parents, many of whom are the children of second-generation New Zealanders. The gender difference in partnering is seen where nine percent of the youngsters have an overseas-born mother and New Zealand-born father, compared with four percent where it is the father who was born overseas but the mother born locally.

One-parent families are relatively rare among Asian under-fives. Across all Asian communities there is some variation, with children of Southeast Asian ethnicities with longer settlement histories and higher rates of inter-ethnic partnering, such as Cambodian and Vietnamese, notably higher at seven and six percent respectively, and those who are children of more recent migrants, such as Filipinos with strong religious and cultural communities, lower at two percent. This same pattern is seen among the under-fives, with two percent of Cambodian and Vietnamese and one percent of Filipino children in one-parent families. Chinese and Indian children under five, whose parents are also largely recent migrants, have a similarly low proportion in one-parent families. The very low levels of Asian children in one-parent families is related to their parents' migration histories, with the majority having arrived recently and through family migration streams.

Two-thirds of the under-five Asian children in one-parent families have an overseas-born parent. This includes transnational families with mothers living in New Zealand supporting students while the father lives abroad.

Sibling relationships are also an important pathway for both cultural maintenance and cultural loss, depending on the extra-familial peer environments. In 73 percent of two-parent families and 57 percent of one-parent families, children under five have at least one sibling living at the same home in the family.

To put these data into context, for the whole New Zealand population, 27 percent of all children and 21.5 percent of those aged under five years live in one-parent families. In 75 percent of two-parent families and 66 percent of one-parent families, children under five have at least one sibling living at the same home as the family.

The remainder of this report examines the implications of this changing demographic landscape in New Zealand, focusing particularly on heritage language maintenance and foreign language uptake within Asian families. We also investigate early childhood education as well as impacts in the community.

Fostering Asian under-fives' heritage languages and cultures in the home environment

Key findings:

Teaching Asian children their heritage language connects them with their cultural traditions and roots and helps maintain connections with relatives in the home country.

Ethnic communities and early childhood services can provide opportunities for promoting Asian cultures and languages beyond the home, but these opportunities are not yet sufficiently recognised or tapped into by families.

The Asian families in this study all place great importance on their heritage languages and cultures. Most families speak at least one Asian language at home. Many Asian parents use their heritage language with their children from birth.

The biggest challenge is to maintain heritage language fluency and connections to their culture as Asian children grow into their adult years.

Asian parents also foster their children's heritage culture and language through reading, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, taking them to visit their extended family in their home country, attending community-based language schools, and participating in cultural events where the heritage language is spoken.

Extended family (in particular the elderly generation) are important and respected people in the family who pass down cultural knowledge and traditions to the younger generation.

In some families, religion is an integral part of family culture and its transmission to children.



Video comments from report
lead author Elsie Ho

Teaching heritage culture and language at home

Learning begins at birth. Therefore, a child's immediate family context plays a fundamental role in fostering the early language development and cultural learning in the child's first years of life.¹⁶

This section investigates the experiences of 24 Asian families with regard to teaching heritage culture and language to their young children - the methods they used, as well as their views about the benefits and challenges of maintaining heritage culture and language. The experiences of these families help in better understanding their practices and concerns, and to further explore how to best support parents in teaching and promoting heritage culture and language in their children's earliest years.

There are substantial variations across families in terms of the methods they use in maintaining heritage languages and cultures, both at home and outside of the home. Concerning the role of ECE in supporting heritage language and cultural maintenance, many parents do not look to ECE for language maintenance. They see that as their own responsibility. This section therefore seeks to go beyond the data, by looking at specific case studies to get a qualitative focus on why that is the case.



¹⁶ Education Review Office, *Literacy in early childhood services: Teaching and learning*, Wellington: Education Review Office, 2011.

Key characteristics of participating Asian families

Interviews were conducted with the families between November 2016 and February 2017. Target participants were parents or grandparents of children aged under five years who identified with one or more Asian ethnicities. Participating families were recruited through early childhood centres as well as from the researchers' networks to ensure that a variety of Asian ethnicities, settlement histories, family backgrounds, household types and geographical locations were included. A total of 25 parents and three grandparents were interviewed. The key characteristics of the participating families are summarised below.



Ethnicity

Ethnicities within families: Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Māori, German, British and New Zealand European.

13 families reported one Asian ethnicity. In 11 families, children were of mixed ethnicity.



Birthplace and settlement history

Forty parents identified with an Asian ethnicity. Five (12.5 percent) were born in New Zealand; 20 (50 percent) are established migrants and have lived in New Zealand for more than 10 years; 15 (37.5 percent) are recent migrants who have lived in New Zealand for less than 10 years.

There were 31 children aged under five years in these families. The majority (94 percent) were born in New Zealand; only two were born overseas.



Household type

The majority of families (87.5 percent) lived in two-generation family households (parents and their children); three lived in three-generation households (grandparents, parents, their brothers and sisters or brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, and children).



Geographical location¹⁷

Fifteen families (63 percent) lived in the Auckland region, seven (29 percent) in Waikato and two (8 percent) in the Bay of Plenty.

¹⁷ Due to the earthquake in the South Island during the time of the research, the Auckland-based researchers were only able to interview parents in the North Island.

Primary languages spoken in the home

A majority of the participating families (87.5 percent) spoke at least one Asian language at home. The parents' ethnic background is a key factor influencing the primary languages spoken in the home.

The three main types of family situation around language included:

Those who mainly spoke an Asian language at home
(11 families)

An Asian language was spoken between the parents and with the child.

In these families, both parents came from the same ethnic group and spoke the same heritage language.

Those who spoke English and one Asian language at home
(10 families)

Found in mixed ethnicity families (that is, parents were from different ethnic groups) where English was the common language spoken by both parents.

In these families, the Asian parent used his/her heritage language with the child in their daily conversations and the non-Asian parent communicated with the child in English.

Those who spoke mainly English at home
(3 families)

In three mixed-ethnicity families, English was the main language spoken at home. The Asian parent taught his/her heritage language to the child occasionally but did not use it every day.

Home culture and core family values

Most participants in the research held the view that Asian family values were core values in their families that they wanted their children to maintain. In some families, religion was an integral part of family culture. Participants placed particular emphasis on the following cultural values, which they also wished to pass on to the next generation:



Respect for elders, looking after one's parents, care for children, spending time with family



Education is highly valued



Work hard and do your best



Be polite, don't hurt others

"Confucius' teachings remain influential in Asian societies today... Filial piety, honouring teachers and respecting elders are cultural values which have had an enormous impact on Chinese civilisation. These values are important in our daily life. We encourage our kids to learn more about these values, and not to let them abandon their Chinese culture completely."

Chinese parent, resident in New Zealand for more than 10 years

"In our culture, the word 'po' is added at the end of a greeting in order to show our respect to older people, even though they are only one year older than me."

Filipino parent, resident in New Zealand for less than five years

"Good manners are important in our culture. Respect older people. You can't start eating until they start... you say thank you after you finish a meal."

Japanese parent, resident in New Zealand for more than 10 years

"Family is very important in our culture. In Korean families, there is a particular term for each relation. So instead of just saying 'hello', we speak in a more respectful way to people who are older than us. When we meet older people, we bow. I am trying to teach my child all these things."

Korean parent, resident in New Zealand for more than 20 years

Religious beliefs and practices

Among some of the participants in our research, religious practices (such as prayers, going to the temple) and attending religious festivals (such as Diwali, Ramadan, Vesak, Pchum Ben, Easter or Eid) were an important part of language and cultural transmission to children.

"Our religion is an important part of our culture. We pray five times a day, that's important. We read the holy book, and we need to understand what's written in it... We celebrate Eid, that's the main festival. And the wedding, that's a big celebration."

Pakistani parent, resident in New Zealand for less than five years

"We teach our children about religion. Since they are still young, we teach them simple things that they are supposed to do... One of the things is praying. When I grew up as a child I saw my Dad praying every day, so I got it from him. We are doing everyday prayers as part of the culture of this family."

Indian parent, resident in New Zealand for less than 10 years

Motivations for maintaining Asian languages and cultures

Although the extent to which an Asian language is used at home differs between families, all participants expressed the desire to have their children learn their heritage language and culture. A fundamental reason cited by many participants is that the heritage language is their children's first connection to them, and to their culture and community.

"We both know it is important for our kids to know their culture and roots, because they are part Indian. It's their identity. It's important for them to know where they come from."

Joint interview with Indian father and Māori mother

"We teach our child Korean from birth, because I want to be able to explain to him that even though he is brought up here, he is a Korean. English is something that he can learn later."

Korean parent

Knowledge of the heritage language and culture also helped children to make connections with their overseas relatives (especially older relatives who do not speak English), and with friends and neighbours who spoke the same language.

"[Cantonese] is my mother tongue... I feel strange if I talk to my kids in English. I feel comfortable speaking Cantonese at home and let my kids learn more Cantonese, because they have to talk to their grandparents who don't know any English. We go back to China every year. So if they can speak Cantonese, they can communicate with the people there."

Chinese parent

"[Speaking Tagalog] is important not just to my child but to all of us, so we do not forget our own language and where we came from. When we visit our country, the Philippines, he will not be out of place with his cousins and friends and he can still communicate with them."

Filipino parent

Additionally, some participants argued that in a globalised society, speaking more than one language had many advantages. They believed that bilingual or multi-lingual children had more opportunities in the future, whether they continued to live in New Zealand, or if they moved overseas for study, travel and work around the world. Some said there might be cognitive benefits too.¹⁸

"We live in a globalised world, so it's good to learn different cultures and languages. In [the] future, my son may want to go to other countries. He will have more opportunities if he knows other cultures and languages."

Korean parent

"If they understand Hindi, that will be an advantage for them if they go back to India for higher studies."

Indian parent

"It is really important, especially in their first two years, to develop these language skills. Being bilingual is good for the brain. It's an asset to be able to speak another language."

Indian parent

¹⁸ Literature suggests learning multiple languages is beneficial for brain development. See Viorica Marian and Anthony Shook, "The cognitive benefits of being bilingual", *Cerebrum*, 2012, http://dana.org/Cerebrum/2012/The_Cognitive_Benefits_of_Being_Bilingual/.

Maintaining heritage culture and language

Culture and language are critical components of children's development. There are several layers of environment that shape a child's language and cultural learning and development including the family, educational setting, community and the wider society.¹⁹ This section discusses these carriers of culture, including family values and religion. It also discusses the crucial role of the family, particularly the parents, in fostering young children's heritage culture and language.

Participants interviewed in this research clearly acknowledged that families were key to maintaining heritage culture and language, and talked about the many methods they used to pass these on to the next generation. The main themes that emerged from these interviews have been synthesised into a series of vignettes and discussed below.²⁰

Using heritage language with children from birth

Most of the participants interviewed - regardless of their family background - agreed that the easiest and the most important factor was to use their heritage languages with their children from birth. Stories, nursery rhymes and songs from their childhood were an important part of their heritage that they wanted to pass on to their children. Participants also often used books, flash cards and DVDs in their heritage language to make the learning more interesting for their children.

"I've always tried to teach my child naturally and make it fun."

Sooji, her husband and their 18-month-old son migrated to New Zealand 12 months ago. Korean is the language the family used at home because "this is the most comfortable language for me and my husband to use". Sooji wanted to create a Korean-speaking environment for her son in his early years because "English is something that he can learn later in life". When he was 11 months old, Sooji started to make flash cards for her son, read Korean children's books to him and taught him Korean songs and phrases - for example "let's wash", and "let's eat". She didn't set a fixed time to teach him every day, but whenever he showed interest.

Sharing language, culture and traditions in mixed-ethnicity families

Participants in mixed-ethnicity families felt it was important to expose their children to the languages, cultures and traditions of both parents. They believed this process benefitted both the parents and the children. Parents benefitted because they need not abandon their culture in favour of their partner's. Children benefitted through inheriting the richness of the cultures of both parents, increasing their cultural literacy and competency.

"My child speaks half-Korean and half-English."

Jihyun migrated to New Zealand with her parents when she was 18. She is Korean and her husband is New Zealand-born Chinese. They have a four-year old son. Jihyun has spoken Korean with her child from birth. Her husband spoke limited Cantonese and preferred to talk to their son in English. The main languages they used at home were Korean and English. Jihyun said: "When the three of us are here, I get really busy because whatever I say in Korean, I quickly translate into English so that my husband is not left out. I think it works, because my child is good in English as well as Korean and the level is quite similar." Both Jihyun and her husband wanted their son to learn Chinese when he grew older because "he's half Chinese - he needs to know his own language".

¹⁹ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University, 1979.

²⁰ Each vignette is created from data derived from several interviews. Pseudonyms are used to preserve anonymity of the participants.

The role of grandparents in promoting culture and language

Three participants from the research lived in three-generation households with their parents or parents-in-law, and several participants lived in close proximity to their parents or parents-in-law, enabling visits several times a week. Having grandparents within the home or living close by not only helped to ease the childcare burden for working parents, but also helped to pass down cultural knowledge and wisdom to the children.

“Everyone at our place speaks Urdu with my child.”

Neha moved to New Zealand four years ago. She lived in a three-generation household comprising her husband, parents-in-law, two brothers-in-law and her daughter, who is now two. Neha’s husband was a 1.5 generation²¹ and had been living in New Zealand for more than 20 years. His family spoke Urdu at home. Neha’s first language was also Urdu. She was happy that her daughter picked up the language naturally as everyone in the family spoke Urdu with her daughter. Neha said it was very important for her daughter to know her heritage language because “by learning language, you learn the culture as well as the country. If you do not know your own language, you will probably not understand as much as others who can speak their own language.”

“We use chopsticks, not forks and knives.”

Mrs Zhang and her husband first visited New Zealand when their first grandson was born. One year later they obtained permanent residency and continued to live in the country. Mrs Zhang is the primary caregiver for her two grandchildren, aged seven and five, because her daughter and son-in-law work full-time.

Mrs Zhang taught her grandchildren Chinese through daily conversation. She sometimes played Chinese music and sang songs with them. She also took on the responsibility of promoting Chinese cultural values to her grandchildren, such as cooking ethnic food, talking about family heritage and traditions, and teaching manners and values such as respecting the elderly and taking care of other family members.

“We encourage our grandchildren to speak Chinese at home. During meal times we use chopsticks, not forks and knives. When our grandson grabs something nice to eat, his parents would remind him: “Have you let Grandma try some of it yet?” This teaches him good manners and how to respect the elderly. When we go out shopping and he picks something he wants to eat, we remind him to not just think of himself, but also his sister. We want to teach him not to be self-centred. He needs to care about his sister and share things with her.”

²¹ The ‘1.5 generation’ comprises people who emigrated to New Zealand as children, usually accompanied by the parents, and who grew up and attended school in the destination country

Maintaining transnational connections with extended family

Most participants, especially first-generation migrants, maintained close ties with their relatives and extended family members in their home country. Parents of several participants travelled to New Zealand after their grandchildren were born and stayed for four to six months to provide post-partum care to their daughters and to take care of grandchildren. Participants acknowledged that these transnational visits were valuable and helped foster intergenerational family bonding between children, parents and grandparents.²² Some participants took their children to visit their home country, to give their children more opportunities to speak the heritage language and to experience the culture, customs and way of life of the people living there. Many participants also encouraged their children to have frequent conversations with their grandparents and other close relatives living overseas, using digital communication technologies.

“It’s important for my children to keep the connection with the older generations.”

Sameer and his wife have been living in New Zealand for more than 10 years. Their two children, aged eight and four, were born in New Zealand. The family spoke Hindi at home because, Sameer said, “it’s very important for my children to learn their own language and also to keep the connection with the older generations”.

Every two years the family returned to India to visit family and relatives. Sameer said: “I want my children to go to India, rather than for Mum and Dad to come here, because when they go to India they are totally speaking Hindi. I want them to see different parts of the country and have that bond, which we cannot have if my parents come here. It’s really important to us that my children are able to communicate effectively with their grandparents, and also with their cousins and friends.”

“We Skype with my parents as often as we can. Even just hearing the language more may help my daughter to learn some Vietnamese words.”

Vietnamese parent



²² Anita Shiu Kei Wong and Elsie Ho, “Transnational childcare among Chinese families in New Zealand” in Amritha Sobrun-Maharaj et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th International Asian and Ethnic Minority Health and Wellbeing Conference*, Auckland: University of Auckland, 2012, pp.46-55.

Local ethnic community participation

Beyond the home, ethnic communities can provide further opportunities to support the learning of heritage languages and cultures.²³ Most participants in the research were engaged with their ethnic communities - two of them were community leaders – and often brought their children to participate in activities that celebrated cultural festivals.

“In India, my family isn’t religious at all. But coming here and seeing that my kids have never or will never know where I came from, that really worries me. So I’ve held on to those cultural things that I would never have done back home, but I’m doing it more when I’m here... I take my kids there and get them familiarised just a little bit.”

Indian parent

“We want to meet more people from our own community. We feel less homesick because it’s not only me and my family here.”

Arvin came to New Zealand on a work visa last year. His wife and two children, aged three and two, joined him two months later. The family lived in a small town of less than 4,000 people. They spoke Tagalog at home. “We don’t speak English at home so my children can still know and understand our own language. If they go outside the house, they can speak English; but at home, when they speak in English even though we talk to them in Tagalog, we’d correct them.”

In the town where the family lived there were three other families from the Philippines, but their children were older and did not play together with Arvin’s children. “We often go to Hamilton where we can meet more Filipinos. We have gatherings with them or have dinner or a party – once every month or so – and we talk in Tagalog. ... Living in a small town it is hard for our kids to find friends with the same age who can speak the same language. Even though they speak Tagalog, different age groups of girls and boys, they don’t play together.”

Attending language/cultural classes to improve heritage language fluency

Heritage language can be maintained by children at community settings through community-based language schools or cultural classes. Four families in this research attended language schools or cultural classes run by their ethnic communities or temples, and two participants were considering sending their children to language classes when they became older.

“I got my daughter going to Cantonese classes when she was two.”

Xiao Yun is fourth-generation Chinese and her husband second-generation Chinese. Both spoke English as their first language. When Xiao Yun was little, her parents sent her to a community-based Chinese school on weekends to learn Cantonese. She thought that was fun as she could play with her cousins after the class. After her daughter was born, Xiao Yun started to speak Cantonese with her. “I got my daughter going to Cantonese classes when she was two,” she said. Now her daughter is four, and attends a bilingual kindergarten, where both English and Mandarin are used. On weekends her daughter goes to Chinese classes where she learns Cantonese. The family is very involved with the local Chinese community. They take part in a lot of activities organised by the local Chinese association, such as Chinese New Year celebrations. Xiao Yun said all these things were an important part of her daughter’s early learning, as they connected her daughter to her important cultural traditions.

²³ Office of Ethnic Communities, *Heritage and Community: Language Celebration Guidelines*, Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 2016.

The role of ECE in building bilingual skills and cultural identity

Except for two children who were about to start early childhood education, all other children in the study were attending ECE centres at the time of interview. Participants commented favourably on the activities organised by centre staff that encouraged sharing and celebration of different cultures represented in the group.

“During Chinese New Year, we got asked to bring some decorations to the centre and show some Chinese fans. The kids enjoyed it.”

Chinese parent

“The kids came home singing a Māori song and clapping hands. The teacher also introduced the concept of waka, and asked the kids to talk about where they came from. Last year there was Samoan cultural week. One child’s mother and grandmother came and they all dressed in their cultural costumes and sang songs.”

Indian parent

One participant helped prepare an activity to share the culture and customs of Indonesia:

“I told stories about our culture and customs. I told children about how birthdays are celebrated in Indonesia. We don’t have cakes, instead we have yellow rice. I brought some Indonesian food. I also taught them how to count from one to 10 in Indonesian.”

Indonesian parent

When asked if ECE should provide some learning opportunities in the children’s heritage languages, most participants did not favour the idea. They felt parents were primarily responsible for teaching and maintaining their children’s heritage languages, whereas ECE’s role was to teach their children English.

“My girl spoke no English when she first went to kindy. But the teachers said: “Don’t worry, she’s going to pick up both languages.” So I’m focusing on my language because it’s more important, and she’s going to learn English when she goes to school anyway. She won’t need to speak Urdu at kindy. It’s more our responsibility.”

Pakistani parent

“I think at ECE, they should revolve around English. I expect my boy to learn Korean culture at home and learn New Zealand culture at ECE, so he can balance them out and keep both cultures as he grows up.”

Korean parent

“How can childcare centres help keep the languages and cultures of every single country? I don’t expect it. You can’t expect childcare centres to do too much. It’s the parents’ and the community’s responsibility.”

Chinese grandmother

Challenges

Home language fluency at risk as children grow older

The findings from this study show that many Asian parents sought to create a family environment that gave their children multiple opportunities to learn their heritage language and culture during their earliest years. Despite having a good start, participants expressed a concern that their children's heritage language proficiency might decline after they started school. Some had already observed that as their children grew older, they seemed to prefer to speak English rather than their heritage language with their siblings and friends of the same ethnicity.

"Other parents have similar concerns too. We want our kids to communicate in Urdu when they're at home, when they're with the family. But they seem to prefer speaking English with their siblings when they play together. It's our job to tell them to speak in Urdu, just so they can practice speaking in Urdu with everyone when they're home."

Pakistani parent

"When we have community activities, the adults speak Hindi but the kids speak English amongst themselves. That's probably because some of them aren't too fluent in Hindi and their parents don't speak Hindi with them all the time. But we find it's really important, so that our children will talk to adults in Hindi in our circle."

Indian parent

"They don't have time. They spend less time at home now, and then they need to do homework - everything in English."

Indonesian parent

Participants who had children at school further observed that after their children started school, English became the main language they used. Even at home, their children were using their heritage language less often.

"When you start going to school, English is obviously the language that you pick up more. This happened to my children. They started off speaking Tamil at home, but once they began school, the home language was just completely forgotten or they just refused to speak it. Then they started to make friends with those who didn't speak Tamil, so English became the main language. Also, there is the fact there is no Tamil taught outside of home."

Indian parent

Most participants in this study wanted to raise their children bilingually – proficient in both English and their heritage language. They believed that as long as their children went to school, there was no risk that they would fail in learning English. The biggest challenge, they said, was to improve and maintain their children's heritage language fluency as they grew into their adult years.

"We have given them a family environment where they can speak and communicate in Chinese. But they also need to improve their English proficiency. Because we are living in an English-speaking environment, they will learn English when they go to school anyway. As parents, we need to encourage them to continue to read Chinese books every day and keep their interest in using the language."

Chinese parent

Lack of opportunities for learning heritage languages and cultures outside the home

Beyond the home, many community organisations in New Zealand have established language schools or organised cultural events to support the learning and maintenance of heritage language and culture. Children can increase their cultural knowledge and heritage language skills by interacting with people who speak the same language. However, the availability of these programs varies by ethnic group and location. In this study, participants from smaller ethnic groups and those living in small towns said it was difficult to find opportunities for their children to learn their heritage language and culture in the community. Even in big cities where such programs were available, distance and finding the time were major barriers to accessing the programs.

“There is a Hindu school but it’s not easily accessible for us. There’s nothing around here. We would have to travel quite a lot to get to those areas. And also the timing, because there are classes that happen during the week, like 4pm. For the majority of working parents like us, having a 4pm session is not helpful. Even if you finish work at 3 o’clock, and pick up your child, you still won’t make it to that centre in time.”

Indian parent



Early Childhood Education responses to linguistically diverse learners

Key findings:

Early Childhood Education (ECE) providers in this research agreed that heritage language maintenance and cultural identity play an important role in children's learning journeys.

Bilingual teachers are a great resource but the registration process and requirement can be laborious for teachers for whom English is not their first language.

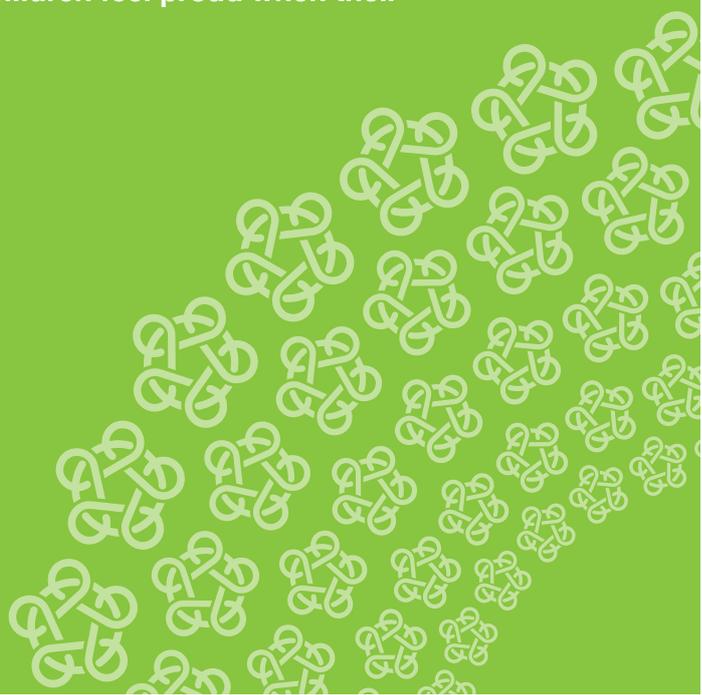
Many Asian parents from the research (especially recent migrants) requested that English be spoken at ECE, even when bilingual teachers were available. They believed that English fluency was essential for children making a smooth transition to school.

Barriers to language and cultural maintenance in ECE included constraints on time, resources and availability of bilingual teachers.

Families are a great asset for maintaining heritage language and culture. Family members are involved in ECE activities such as festive celebrations. Ways of exposing children to Asian languages and cultures in ECE include songs, dance and cultural celebrations. Children feel proud when their cultures are celebrated.



Video comments from report co-author Vivian Cheung.



Early Childhood Education in New Zealand

Early Childhood Education in New Zealand can take many forms,²⁴ but is mostly grouped as either teacher-led or parent-led. Examples of teacher-led education can include kindergarten and home-based education, while parent-led ECE can include play centres and playgroups. Generally, ECE caters for children's education and care before they go into formal learning, which in New Zealand usually means when children start school on turning five years old.²⁵

The Ministry of Education is responsible for setting the ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki*, which was first written in 1996.²⁶ In 2017 *Te Whāriki* was reviewed and updated to reflect the knowledge gained from a considerable amount of early education research and the population changes in New Zealand over the previous two decades.

Te Whāriki is a key part of childhood education as it sets the child on his/her learning journey. The whāriki (or woven mat) is a metaphor where four principles (Empowerment, Holistic Development, Family and Community) are interwoven with the five curriculum strands (Wellbeing, Belonging, Contribution, Communication and Exploration).

Te Whāriki is "underpinned by a vision for children who are competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society".²⁷

One key aspect of the updated *Te Whāriki* is how it sees its role within diverse cultures. Under the 'Treaty of Waitangi' section, it states:

New Zealand is increasingly multicultural. Te Tiriti/the Treaty is seen to be inclusive of all immigrants to New Zealand, whose welcome comes in the context of this partnership. Those working in early childhood education respond to the changing demographic landscape by valuing and supporting the different cultures represented in their settings.²⁸



²⁴ For a detailed description of the many forms of ECE in New Zealand, see parents.education.govt.nz/early-learning/early-childhood-education/different-kinds-of-early-childhood-education/.

²⁵ Schooling is compulsory from ages 6 to 16. See www.education.govt.nz

²⁶ Ministry of Education, *Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum*, Wellington: Ministry of Education, 1996; Ministry of Education, *Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum*, Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2017.

²⁷ Ministry of Education, *Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum*, Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2017.

²⁸ Ministry of Education, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi*, 2017, p. 3.

ECE key findings

For this research project, a series of interviews were conducted at 10 ECE centres.²⁹ This was an attempt to understand the different ways of introducing Asian languages and cultures to New Zealand Asian children and their peers. Ten interviews³⁰ were conducted between November 2016 and February 2017; six were held in the Auckland region, two in Waikato and two in the Bay of Plenty. One ECE provider is a home-based ECE centre which operates in the Auckland, Waikato and Canterbury regions. Almost all interviewees (except the home-based provider) are centre managers or headteachers who also have a role ‘on the floor’ (working with children directly).

On heritage language and maintenance of culture

The ECE centres acknowledged the importance of learning heritage languages, especially the connection to one’s own identity and culture. They supported heritage language maintenance and recognised the advantages of being bilingual/multi-lingual. They suggested many ways that they could promote heritage language maintenance. These included the use of bilingual teachers, better involvement with families/grandparents, and encouraging children who shared the same language to speak in their own language.

Cristina Iftimie was an ESOL teacher in Eastern Europe before she became an ECE teacher in New Zealand.

She has been in the ECE field for 12 years and is now the deputy centre manager and headteacher. Most children in her ECE centre are of Chinese and Indian descent. The centre has teachers who can speak the heritage languages of the children so they can communicate with the families and put them at ease. However, they didn’t use their heritage language apart from phrases such as “go xishou (wash hands)” for children who didn’t know any English. Most Asian parents wanted the staff to speak English.

“Today I spoke to some children and they were telling me about their Chinese names. Often we don’t use children’s Chinese names as parents only wanted us to use their English names. Parents thought it is easier for us to pronounce. But I keep telling parents it is important to maintain the language and culture. It is good to be bilingual and for their brain development. Also, language and culture are part of their identity and it is important. Children need to know who they are and where they came from. And that’s very important to learn that and keep in their hearts.”

²⁹ All ECE centres interviewed for this study were licensed by the Ministry of Education.

³⁰ Due to the earthquakes in South Island during the time of the research, Auckland-based researchers were only able to interview ECE centres in the North Island.

Some centres that were interviewed had bilingual ECE teachers. However, they said heritage language was used as the last resort if the children had no English. Parents specifically asked ECE teachers that English is to be used in ECE, not their heritage language. This request of 'English only' is particularly common for Chinese and Indian parents, and for recent migrants (in contrast to New Zealand-born Asians, or established migrants). The key reason for this, parents said, was to help children learn English so that they could transition smoothly into school life. Parents also thought children could focus on learning English at the ECE centre while parents can speak their heritage language at home (especially for those parents whose first language was not English).

Learning a language at ECE tended to be less formal than at schools. Children can learn through recognising symbols and signs. Participants noted that Asian parents were more focused on academic achievement and expected their children to be able to write their names in English before they entered school. For Asian parents, English was seen as essential for their children to succeed at school. In this research, all ECE centres (with the exception of



the language-specific ECE providers – see page 41) used English as a medium to communicate with the children. Children learned the English alphabet, along with basic Māori words. None of the ECEs that we interviewed deliberately taught other languages (other than English and Māori) to children.

"We speak English to the children. That's the key language we use - after all, we are in New Zealand. We also sing the ABC song for them to learn the alphabet, and also provide pencils and paper for them to practise writing in English. We do teach basic Māori words, but again, Māori words are in the alphabet, too. However, we do sing songs in different languages. One time, we sang 'Happy Birthday' in three languages for a child [English, Māori, and the heritage language of the child]. Kiwi children who were used to just singing this song in English found it fascinating that you could celebrate a birthday in three languages. They wondered if those children received three different presents as well!

ECE teacher

For those children who spoke no English, teachers sometimes needed to learn words in other languages to communicate basic needs. This was to ensure children's needs were met and their culture was respected.

As outlined in *Te Whāriki*,³¹ family involvement is paramount in children's learning. The family's values and aspirations for their children were usually discussed when the child started ECE. Families are important assets in helping children understand and speak their native tongue through shared activity with ECE. These activities included cooking traditional food with children, story-telling and folklore, making traditional crafts and learning dances.



While family involvement is vital, ECE staff also mentioned that children having peers who spoke the same language could help maintain heritage language - though some participants observed that children made friends based on who they liked, and not necessarily on what languages they spoke.

"We celebrate Chinese New Year and Diwali at our centre. The celebrations start with the teachers talking about these festivals a few weeks before the actual event. We find video clips and show the children how they are celebrated in different parts of the world. Children will ask how to make a dumpling or how to perform a celebrative dance. They are genuinely interested in different cultures. Last year, we invited parents to come over and we had a Diwali dancing competition. The children had so much fun dancing with their parents. The year before, we had a Chinese lantern competition. Parents and grandparents showed us how to make dumplings, and how to shape a rangoli pattern. Children are very interested in festive celebrations. They see different colours, smells, music, and they start asking questions. It's an excellent opportunity for them to explore and feel proud of who they are."

ECE teacher

³¹ Ministry of Education, *Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum*, Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2017.

“Even though we have bilingual teachers, we only speak English to the children - as per the parents’ request. Having a peer who speaks the same language does help them maintain their native language. For example, we had a group of Chinese children playing together who speak Chinese to each other. Occasionally, a Kiwi girl wanted to join in, these children would switch and speak English to her. They just switch their language depending on who they play with. We also noticed a group of Indian children playing together, but they speak English to each other. We were interested to know why. The parents said they speak different dialects, so it was easier to communicate in English.

ECE teacher

Language-specific ECE centres

Three of the ECE centres in this study had their own Language and Culture Policy within their centre. Two of them were language-specific ECE providers, and one was home-based.

The two Asian language-specific ECE centres had qualified bilingual teachers on their staff. They used native language as a medium of daily communication with the children. In one particular ECE centre, mat time³² was available in English or Chinese. Children chose which mat time they preferred (with the help of the parents and teacher), and could change between these two options if needed. At another provider, children usually attended only one day a week as these children also went to other mainstream providers. Children who attended this language-specific provider had to have a minimum fluency of the language as English was used minimally there. Both centres used heritage language in daily activities. It was their key medium of communication.

These language-specific ECE centres were different from mainstream providers as they focused on maintaining heritage language abilities. They provided an environment where heritage languages were used on a daily basis, and had the policy, staff and resources to do so.

Home-based education

The idea behind home-based education was to utilise at-home educators (such as parents or grandparents). Qualified ECE teachers made frequent and scheduled visits to the at-home educators and the children and provided support when needed. Some children who used home-based education also attended other ECE centres. It was noted that because at-home educators were more likely to be family members, children had a more natural environment in which to practice their heritage language skills.

All language-specific ECE providers employ teachers who have heritage language abilities, and they also plan activities that support the learning. These activities go beyond cultural celebrations and can include story time about cultural legends and folklore. These activities were embedded in their daily curriculum. They also have a larger selection of language-specific multimedia resources and books when compared with other ECE centres that were interviewed.

All these centres had a specific Language and Culture Policy that detailed how to support children with learning/maintaining heritage language and culture. They also had qualified ECE teachers who speak heritage language and their language skills were strongly utilised in the running of daily activities and in communicating with children. Heritage languages were not only spoken during ‘mat time’ or ‘activity time’, but spoken throughout the day. It is the main medium they communicate with the children.

³² Mat time: where children gather in front of teachers to do activities, such as songs, dance, or listening to stories etc.

Exposing children to different languages and cultures

Children in ECE, of Asian ethnicity and otherwise, had the opportunity to be exposed to different cultures and languages during activities such as festive celebrations. They also learned about different cultures through song and dance. Centres also used multimedia resources and face-to-face interaction.

Multimedia: Children can learn through a variety of ways – such as music, nursery rhymes, songs, and dance movements. Songs are sung in English, Māori and in other languages. YouTube videos and other media channels can be used to demonstrate different cultural activities. For example, children can learn how lanterns are made or how to perform cultural dances.

Face-to-face interactions: These provide an opportunity for children to learn Asian languages and cultures first hand. Face-to-face interactions can include family members participating in centre activities and often goes beyond festive celebrations. Some centres organise cultural days, with guest speakers talking about their culture and conducting arts and craft classes.

“Children get so excited when they go back to their homeland. There were so many things to see; many relatives to meet up with. Often when they came back, they would tell their friends, Kiwi or not, about their journeys. What toys they got, what food they ate. They really enjoyed telling the whole class about their trips back home.”

ECE teacher



Celebrations: These are a central part of children's learning. Cultural festivals, special events such as the Rugby World Cup, Olympics and other major events can spark children's interest in other cultures, as well as New Zealand culture. Leading up to and during such events, ECE centres might ask children to dress up in their favorite team uniforms and they can learn about cultures and customs of that culture. Most ECE centres would also have a platform for families to be involved. These platforms might be a 'Journey Book' displaying photographs of the child at the centre or at home; or computer platforms (such as Storypark, where teachers or families can post images about their learning journey or their holidays back in their homeland).

Challenges

Even though the ECE providers in this study supported heritage language maintenance and culture, they often experienced difficulties in doing so. These included different expectations between the centre and the families, different perceptions around language learning, limited resources available to promote different languages and cultures, and challenges with the training of overseas bilingual teachers.

Families educated overseas have different perceptions and expectations of services that ECE provided. ECE teachers noted that Asian parents are very focused on educational attainment, and these parents saw English proficiency as the key to transition the child to their formal school setting. Some parents also thought children would get confused in learning two languages, though literature has suggested learning multiple languages is beneficial for brain development.³³ Communications could also be strengthened between ECEs and families, especially for families whose first language is not English. Bilingual teachers can help foster the relationships between the centre and families. They can also encourage families in participating in centre activities.

While bilingual teachers can be a valuable resource to support and expose children to other languages and cultures, the registration requirements and process, as well as the costs, are potential barriers for overseas-trained teachers. For example, in order for foreign ECE teachers to become qualified in New Zealand, those whose first language is not English (and if they come from countries where English is not used as a medium of education) must reach a score of 7 in all components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test.³⁴

Other constraints such as time availability (to prepare the curriculum, establish learning outcomes, etc) and the lack of language-specific resources (such as books and multi-media) were also seen as barriers to supporting native language maintenance.



“Having the need of achieving 7 across all bands in IELTS puts off a lot of Asian teachers. Regardless how many Chinese or Indian books or costumes there are in the centre, teachers are the biggest resource.”

(ECE teacher)

“We think it is a great idea for children to maintain their home language. But it is difficult. We try to expose children to different things, not just language and culture. Last week, we had a policeman who came over and talked about safety. Last month, we learned about Tāne, Māori legends, or the environment. There are so many things that we teach the kids. I think it is unrealistic for us to teach children different languages, though I think bilingual teachers are a good resource to expose children to different cultures. Sometimes they do counting or singing in their native language. Children do like to learn different languages, including Māori.”

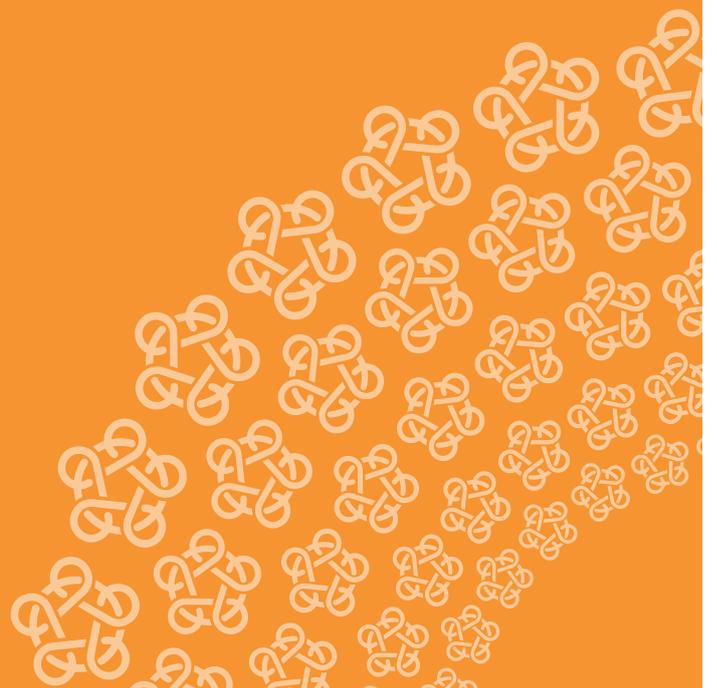
(ECE teacher)

³³ Viorica Marian and Anthony Shook, “The cognitive benefits of being bilingual”, *Cerebrum*, 2012.

³⁴ As a reference, a minimum score of 7 across the four bands (reading, writing, speaking, listening) is also required for all bands for nurses (Nursing Council of New Zealand). As for medical professionals (Medical Council of New Zealand), 7 is required for reading and writing, and 7.5 is required for listening and speaking. See also Education Council, *Registration Policy, Language Proficiency Requirements for teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Section 3, Clause 10, <https://educationcouncil.org.nz/registration-policy>.

Connecting the dots

This report has provided a glimpse into the experiences of Asian families and ECE centres with regard to heritage language and cultural maintenance. It brings to light the potential benefits of leveraging Asian children's cultural and linguistic capital to enhance New Zealand's cultural competency on Asia. Participants in the research all agreed that in today's interconnected world, being bilingual or multi-lingual would have perceived advantages later in life. They emphasised the link between language and culture. Despite both parties agreeing on the benefits of being bilingual or multi-lingual, they also identified the challenges of maintaining heritage language with children as they grow up - especially in New Zealand where English is the dominant language. Some ways to support heritage language and cultural maintenance as identified by participants are discussed in this section.



Managing parents' different expectations on ECE services

All ECE participants in this study acknowledged the importance of learning the heritage language and culture, and supported children using their heritage language both in early education and at home. They also saw the benefits of exposing children to other languages as well as their heritage language at a young age. Parents, who come from increasingly diverse cultural and family backgrounds, can have very different views about the role of early childhood education. For example, many immigrant parents who were educated in Asia are used to very structured learning in Asian educational settings, and may also want a similar educational approach for their children. In addition, parents may not want their children using heritage language in early childhood education. Some indicated that teaching and maintaining children's heritage language is a parental responsibility, and that the job of early childhood teachers is to teach English.

Different expectations can lead to different realisations of educational outcomes for children. ECE service providers need to meet with families and give parents an opportunity to talk about their expectations and concerns. As interviews in this study suggest, an effective strategy is to use bilingual teachers to communicate regularly with parents in their heritage language. Bilingual teachers can help bridge that language barrier, and help parents understand what they feel is best for their children from the ECE perspective.



Video comments from Dai Phonevilay, parent of an Asian under-five.



Sharing knowledge and experience beyond the home

To support children’s heritage language and culture in early childhood services, an essential strategy is to work with parents and members of the extended family (such as grandparents). Parents/grandparents are a child’s first teachers, providing them with the earliest learning experiences in heritage language and culture. As this research shows, parents and grandparents are already involved in cultural activities at ECE centres - sharing aspects of their culture, language, and customs on special occasions. However, they can bring much more experience beyond their involvement with standalone events – for example, by providing on-going and systematic support for heritage language and cultural maintenance with co-ordination from ECE staff.

Although parents who participated in this study wished their children to retain their heritage language, they face many barriers. Early childhood services can help parents develop strategies to support and maintain the heritage language. In addition, easily accessible information, factsheets and resources can be developed. For example, tips on language development for children (such as ages and stages; language/phonics development) can help parents achieve realistic expectations of their children’s language development. The *New Zealand Curriculum* has National Standards for each formative school year³⁵ and for pre-school education, these can be provided in a variety of languages.



(From left) Vivian Cheung (co-author), Victoria (Bethlehem Montessori headteacher) and Michie (a Japanese mother) who was brought up in Germany, where multilingual ability is the norm.

³⁵ Ministry of Education, The New Zealand Curriculum Online, <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/Supporting-parents-and-whanau/Resources>.

Growing more opportunities in the community

Traditionally, ethnic community groups play an important role in promoting heritage language and culture. Some of these organisations offer heritage language classes which provide opportunities for children to learn and utilise their heritage language abilities. Cultural festivals are also important activities organised by ethnic community groups to foster cultural identity and allow children to learn about their roots. Some ethnic communities also have resources such as libraries that store books or toys specific to that language and culture.

Other than ethnic communities (which tend to hold activities that attract people from the same ethnic and language background), mainstream organisations can also offer activities that help support heritage language maintenance or foreign language uptake. An example would be local libraries that host language-specific story time sessions, introducing toddlers and pre-schoolers to other (or their own) cultures and other languages. Plunket also runs ethnic-specific playgroups supported by

local communities. Relevant agencies such as the Brainwave Trust offer workshops to communities and these can help educate parents on the benefits of learning a second language at a young age, and can demystify notions about speech delays for bilingual children. The Asia New Zealand Foundation has content and resources for primary schools about Asian cultures; all of these can be extended to the ECE sectors using child-friendly multimedia formats.

There are benefits to New Zealand if we can leverage the cultural and linguistic capital present among our Asian under-five population, our communities and our early childhood education – all are significant resources that can help improve and enhance our future engagement with Asia. The challenge going forward is how we can be successful in realising this potential.



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Appendix 1: Distribution of Asian children aged under five by ethnic group: top seven regions

1. Auckland Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Auckland		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	4,845	5,466	8,550	64.2	66.5	67.3
Indian	3,525	5,922	8,079	64.4	69.2	65.4
Filipino	555	717	1,401	57.5	56.4	48.0
Japanese	348	537	714	43.8	45.0	46.8
Korean	693	810	948	67.2	68.7	68.7
Khmer	240	300	387	52.0	49.0	43.6
Sri Lankan	255	288	480	54.5	57.8	64.0
Vietnamese	186	261	348	71.3	70.2	64.8
Thai	189	273	249	59.4	60.3	47.7
Indonesian	96	210	177	50.0	64.2	51.3
Malay	81	93	153	48.2	40.8	44.7
Burmese	36	51	132	80.0	81.0	43.6
Lao	87	66	84	58.0	55.0	59.6
Total Asian	11,472	15,483	22,302	62.4	64.8	62.1

2. Wellington Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Wellington		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	1,002	942	1,245	13.3	11.5	9.8
Indian	714	912	1,215	13.0	10.7	9.8
Filipino	132	207	384	13.7	16.3	13.1
Japanese	75	123	120	9.4	10.3	7.9
Korean	33	30	54	3.2	2.5	3.9
Khmer	93	129	171	20.1	21.1	19.3
Sri Lankan	123	117	108	26.3	23.5	14.4
Vietnamese	--	48	78	--	12.9	14.5
Thai	42	36	63	13.2	8.0	12.1
Indonesian	33	39	63	17.2	11.9	18.3
Malay	33	--	51	19.6	--	14.9
Burmese	--	--	84	--	--	27.7
Lao	42	33	36	28.0	27.5	25.5
Total Asian	2,282	2,679	3,726	13.0	11.2	10.4

3. Canterbury Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Canterbury		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	507	597	1,116	6.7	7.3	8.8
Indian	165	261	513	3.0	3.1	4.2
Filipino	75	93	363	7.8	7.3	12.4
Japanese	150	234	279	18.9	19.6	18.3
Korean	174	162	147	16.9	13.7	10.7
Khmer	--	--	36	--	--	4.1
Sri Lankan	--	30	48	--	6.0	6.4
Vietnamese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Thai	30	45	51	9.4	9.9	9.8
Indonesian	--	--	33	--	--	9.6
Malay	--	48	57	--	20.1	16.7
Burmese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lao	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total Asian	1,251	1,635	2,835	6.8	6.8	7.9

4. Waikato Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Waikato		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	360	348	666	4.8	4.2	5.2
Indian	393	468	882	7.2	5.5	7.1
Filipino	48	81	231	5.0	6.4	7.9
Japanese	33	57	72	4.2	4.8	4.7
Korean	51	63	72	4.9	5.3	5.2
Khmer	66	123	171	14.3	20.1	19.3
Sri Lankan	--	--	45	--	--	6.0
Vietnamese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Thai	--	--	42	--	--	8.1
Indonesian	--	--	--	--	--	--
Malay	--	--	--	--	--	--
Burmese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lao	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total Asian	1,023	1,311	2,334	5.6	5.5	6.5

5. Bay of Plenty Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Bay of Plenty		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	135	141	240	1.8	1.7	1.9
Indian	246	345	585	4.5	4.0	4.7
Filipino	39	33	93	4.0	2.6	3.2
Japanese	36	39	54	4.5	3.3	3.5
Korean	--	42	57	--	3.6	4.1
Khmer	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sri Lankan	--	--	--	--	--	--
Vietnamese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Thai	--	--	--	--	--	--
Indonesian	--	--	--	--	--	--
Malay	--	--	--	--	--	--
Burmese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lao	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total Asian	534	696	1,155	2.9	2.9	3.2

6. Manawatu-Whanganui Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Manawatu-Whanganui Region		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	282	258	249	3.7	3.1	2.0
Indian	108	183	255	2.0	2.1	2.1
Filipino	--	--	81	--	--	2.8
Japanese	--	33	45	--	2.8	3.0
Korean	--	--	--	--	--	--
Khmer	--	--	48	--	--	5.4
Sri Lankan	--	--	--	--	--	--
Vietnamese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Thai	--	--	--	--	--	--
Indonesian	--	--	--	--	--	--
Malay	--	--	--	--	--	--
Burmese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lao	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total Asian	513	603	906	2.8	2.5	2.5

7. Otago Region

Ethnicity	Number			% resident in Otago		
	2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
Chinese	126	141	186	1.7	1.7	1.5
Indian	45	69	156	0.8	0.8	1.3
Filipino	--	--	69	--	--	2.4
Japanese	57	75	96	7.2	6.3	6.3
Korean	--	--	--	--	--	--
Khmer	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sri Lankan	--	--	--	--	--	--
Vietnamese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Thai	--	--	--	--	--	--
Indonesian	--	--	--	--	--	--
Malay	--	--	--	--	--	--
Burmese	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lao	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total Asian	303	369	630	1.7	1.5	1.8

Note: Numbers and percentages not given because of very small numbers







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