

Higher Language Education in Australia: Uncovering Language Positioning

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Abstract : There are around 300 languages spoken in Australia, and more than one-fifth of the population speaks a language other than English at home. The presence of international students in schools raises this number still further. Although the multilingual and multicultural status of Australia has been acknowledged by the government in education policy, the strong focus on English in institutional settings threatens the maintenance and learning of other languages. This is particularly true of universities' language provisions. To cope with the financial impact of Covid-19, the government has cut funding for a number of Asian languages, such as Indonesian, Japanese and Chinese. This issue threatens the maintenance of other languages in Australia and leaves students unprepared for the future job market. By taking account of the current reality of Australia's diverse cultural and lingual makeup, this research intends to uncover the positioning of languages by having a historical look at Australia's language policy and examining the value of languages and the probable impact of Covid-19 on the place of languages taught in Australian universities. A qualitative study will be adopted with language program tutors and course coordinators, with semi-structured interviews and government language policy analysis. This research hopes to provide insights into both the maintenance and learning of international language programs in tertiary language education in Australia and more widely.

Keywords : Australia, COVID-19, higher education sector, language maintenance, language and culture diversity

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