



## The Impact on Language Maintenance and Studies Among Third- and Fourth-Generation Turkish Students in Melbourne, in the Era of COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

The research into the maintenance of the Turkish language amongst third- and fourth-generation of Turkish students enrolled into the study of the heritage language is part of a greater ethnographic study on Family Language Policy (FLP) of second- and third-generation Turkish parents in Melbourne, Australia. The study investigated the strategies implemented by families in promoting language choice and methods towards maintenance practices of the heritage language. The research also begins to reveal the impact of declining enrolment numbers into the study of the Turkish language and its impact on language maintenance. Data was collected on the language beliefs and practices of forty-five bilingual families through participant observation and in-depth interviews amongst intergenerational family members including parents, children, and grandparents. The current research stemmed from the initial study to investigate an extensive element specific to the maintenance and study of the Turkish language. The subsequent research was instigated during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby school closures and remote learning were prominent. Families with students enrolled into the study of the Turkish language took part in an online chat forum discussing the impact onsite school closures had on the maintenance of Turkish studies and the continued declining enrolment numbers. Whilst the family home remains for most migrant communities the main domain for language maintenance, formal studies of language education offer an additional platform derived towards heritage language practice as a further strategy in family language policy and planning. The findings reveal that whilst the study of the Turkish language was once a foundation essential for heritage language maintenance amongst the implementations of first-generation Turkish parents, raising their children bilingual; current data reflects a shift in generations to follow second-generation Turkish. The findings reveal the declining enrolment numbers into the study of the Turkish language as an additional factor to the shift in language preference and language maintenance. **Keywords:** Turkish, language maintenance, language studies, language schools, language education, community language, heritage language, bilingualism, Family Language Policy, Melbourne



## 1. Introduction

Migrant communities in Australia have long established language schools in an effort to serve, as an additional platform to the family home, the implementation towards heritage language maintenance. The Victorian School of Languages (VSL), a government school, commenced its first Saturday class of Community Language Schools (CLS) in 1935, set up by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, to offer Italian and Japanese classes. In 1971, the Saturday school, located inner-Melbourne, became known as the Saturday School of Modern Languages (SSML) and began to include teachings of other languages. In 1988, the school formed its current name, VSL. The year of 1987 saw the Australian government announce federal funding of the National Policy on Languages, including the founding of the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME). The introduction of mainstream schools offering a subject teaching Language Other Than English (LOTE) to primary and secondary students was subsequently established. Currently, VSL offers over 40 languages to students across Victoria, including Turkish. Whilst there were teachings of the Turkish language dating back to an earlier period, following the Cypriot Turkish migration to Australia in the 1940s, and the Turkish migration bilateral agreement between Turkey and Australia in 1967; formal Turkish language schooling commenced in the 1970s. In 1977, AusTurk Education and Cultural Association, also known as AusTurk Language Academy, set up its first Saturday Turkish Language School in Melbourne, Victoria. In the 1980s, Turkish was predominant amongst several educational organisations including AusTurk, VSL and CLS. In the 1990s, a growing number of CLS amongst the Turkish community founded schools, which many families viewed as an asset to foster the Turkish culture and maintain the heritage language. Currently, the Languages Provision in Victorian Government Schools recorded 74 languages studied by students in Victoria through government schools, VSL and accredited CLS, in 2020.

The framework of ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) explores the cultural identity, language maintenance, and collective entity across three variables: institutional support, demographics, and social status, in evaluating the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977). The EV theory investigates the language maintenance, practices, and beliefs of a group, finding that high vitality groups were more likely to maintain their heritage language and culture, whilst those with low vitality were accustomed to experience weakened heritage identity as they assimilate to the culture and language of the migrated country. Families who continued to maintain their heritage culture and identity were more prominent in maintaining their heritage language. Spolsky's (2007, 2012) language policy model of language beliefs (ideology), language practices (ecology), and language management (planning) were explored within the forty-five Turkish families researched. The findings of the impact that community language schools have on the maintenance of the heritage language continue the works of linguists exploring minority languages, across decades, in language maintenance and shift (LMS) within migrant communities (Fishman, 1977, 1991, 2001). Furthermore, studies

within Australia explore the language maintenance, use and preference within migrant communities and the national context (Clyne, 1982, 1991, 2005; Clyne & Kipp, 1999; Kipp et al., 1995; Pauwels, 2005; Lo Bianco, 1987, 2009; Yağmur, de Bot & Korzilius, 1999; Yağmur, 2014). In recent unprecedented times, ongoing research into the shifting onsite learning environment; the specific impact upon the maintenance of CLS and enrolments into the heritage language (amongst current generations) is vital in measuring systematic-related aftermath, and the resources required in supporting minority communities in an environment where the predominate language is English. The importance of community groups maintaining their identity is essential in the existence of the heritage language and ongoing connection to culture. As reflected by Fishman (1996), “the *most important relationship between language and culture that gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language.*”

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Present Study**

The current research is part of an onset of findings revealed from the extensive ethnographic study investigating the FLP among second- and third-generation Turkish parents in Melbourne (Et-Bozkurt & Yağmur, 2022). Parent participants were between 26-52 years of age, and their children ranging from infancy (one-year old) to mid-twenties in age. The study explores the use of language within the family home and families’ preferences and the implementations in the maintenance of the heritage culture and identity. The present, subsequent study investigates family participants’ views towards the impact of CLS and enrolments into the study of the Turkish language as a pre-empt to heritage language maintenance. The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are the language ideologies and practices of Turkish families in Melbourne, particularly towards formal Turkish language studies?
2. How has the shift from onsite educational settings to the platform of remote learning impacted the enrolment of students’ study of the Turkish language?
3. What other factors have contributed to the declining number of student enrolments into the Turkish language?

### **2.2. Participants**

The initial study focused on qualitative data collection of methods, including participant observations of the intergenerational language patterns spoken by parents (all biological parents are Turkish), children, and in some cases, grandparents, within the family home. Additional observational environments included school and social settings. Most families were revisited after a two-year interval. The initial extensive study took place pre-COVID-19 and focused on the FLP of second- and third-generation Turkish parents in Melbourne; the current study stemmed from latter conversations where further data was obtained via informal discussions online during the pandemic.

The subsequent study investigated not only the FLP implementations instilling heritage language maintenance, during school closure restrictions, but also the impact of ongoing study and enrolments into the heritage language amongst third- and fourth-generation Turkish students.

### ***2.3. Data Collection Procedure***

Data was collected through three key procedures which included initial observations and interview questions specific to FLP ideology and practices (pre-COVID), and online chat forums discussing any amendments to FLP and the impact of remote learning (during COVID-19 restrictions). The initial study recorded data where during and after each observation memos were systematically coded for the data analysis stage, reflecting the Ground Theory Approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews were transcribed and consequently coded to derive the language strategies used and views towards Turkish language studies as an additional strategy for language maintenance. The following data collection included note-taking during online discussions as family members spoke in a less formal setting, reflecting their attitudes and beliefs towards language maintenance and studies into the Turkish language, following the onset of the pandemic. Discussions ranged from thirty to sixty minutes, and participants were able to speak in either English or Turkish to accommodate for language preferences.

## **3. Results**

From the forty-five families researched in the case study, almost half (49 per cent) had children who were either attending an independent school where they were studying Turkish as a LOTE subject during weekdays, and/or were enrolled into Turkish classes on Saturdays either with VSL or a CLS. For many of the families, the decision to enroll their children into Turkish classes was solely to learn the Turkish language and be further embedded into the Turkish culture, make friends with peers sharing similar values and customs. Attending either a Saturday language school or a school that taught Turkish served as an additional environment to the family home, offering maintenance of Turkish language use. The data revealed that for many families (69 per cent), their language preference within the family home was Turkish. Additionally, during the initial interview process, when asked about their cultural identity, 49 per cent identified as Turkish, and a further 40 per cent identified themselves as being Turkish-Australian. A total of 89 per cent from all the interviewed participants (n=62 of the 70 participants) resonated either part or their entire entity of identity with their heritage culture.

The data findings revealed that for a majority of families, their heritage and culture was significant to their identity. For many, they continued to live within Turkish communities and formed close bonds, "*family friends*," amongst Turkish peers. The results indicated the following ideologies acknowledged in the FLP process in serving to maintain the heritage language and culture, including: enrolling children into Turkish schools; marrying and maintaining friendships within the Turkish community; living within or at close proximity to Turkish communities;

regular travels to Turkey, and maintaining an awareness of the heritage land, which included keeping up-to-date with news events and watching Turkish television; embracing ongoing celebrations of cultural festivities; establishing an environment and purpose to speak Turkish. However, the practice of these beliefs was not always consistent with initial measures and intentions. Rather, complexities such as the following presented: children commencing school began to learn and speak English, bringing the language within the family home, particularly between conversations amongst siblings; furthermore, the break-down of the family unit and/or new partnerships formed from other cultures with the increase of intercultural relationships. These factors were more consistent with generations that followed the second- and first-generation, who were particularly invested in the maintenance of the Turkish language, bestowing cultural identity and values onto their children. For the first-generation, maintaining the Turkish language within the family home offered minimal challenges as their prime and only language remained Turkish. In order to maintain communications between parents and children, Turkish remained within the family home as the predominate language, and children were enrolled into the study of the Turkish language through necessity. The Turkish community reflected a language shift by 6 per cent in first-generation and 16.1 per cent in second-generation (Clyne & Kipp, 1997).

The data reflects a noticeable shift with second- and third-generation Turkish parents who were not as consistent with the maintenance of the heritage language and culture as first-generation Turkish speakers. Assimilating to the lifestyle and culture in Australia meant that families from second-generation onwards spoke fluent English and had minimal purpose for the use of the Turkish language. A shift in education also reflected change as second-generation were either born in Australia and commenced schooling in Australia, or migrated and completed schooling in Australia. Of the forty-five family participants, 31 per cent had both parents born in Australia (n=14 families), 51 per cent had one parent participant born in Australia (n=23 families), with 18 per cent of cases where both parents were born in Turkey, but migrated to Australia before the age of seven (n=8 families). All second- and third-generation parents researched experienced education in Australia. From the forty-five family participants (n=a total of 90 parents) found that 56 per cent (n=50) completed their secondary education and/or diploma studies, and 44 per cent (n=40) received tertiary degree(s). Whilst for many second-generation Turkish speakers, attending Turkish school was a necessity, for generations to follow a decline in enrolment numbers commenced. According to Ethnic Schools Association of Victoria (ESAV), the number of students enrolled in Turkish found a 68.4 per cent dramatic decrease from data recorded between 1998-2005 (Slaughter & Hajek, 2007), indicating a shift from enrolments into the study of the Turkish language as a strategy towards heritage language maintenance. For generations that followed the first-generation working-class migrants, the need to learn and speak Turkish lessened. The focus shifted towards the implementation of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) framework with the National

Board of Education and Training initiating a languages program in the 1980s, introduced into the curriculum between foundation prep years through to Year 12 secondary, making the study of a LOTE mandatory up to Year 9. For many schools, the program commenced with the teaching of languages, such as Italian, as the more common language taught, particularly amongst government schools. Private schools began to introduce the teaching of languages, such as Japanese, Chinese, and Indonesian, offering students a choice to study one language from the selection. Unless students were attending Turkish classes at “*Saturday School*,” many students were studying a language other than Turkish. The Victorian Curriculum recommends a minimum of 150 minutes per week, at the primary school level, for the study of a LOTE.

For generations following the first-generation, the onset of studying a language within the school curriculum meant that many speakers from second-generation onwards were expected to learn and speak at least three languages: English, Turkish, and the school’s select LOTE. For many families, the mindset presumption that bilingualism would impact the child’s proficiency in English and literacy meant that there became greater emphasis on excelling at English, particularly as it remains to be the only compulsory subject within the curriculum. At least one English study (English, English as an Additional Language [EAL], English language or Literature) is mandatory inclusion into students’ final two years of secondary studies, Victorian Curriculum of Education (VCE) entry score into tertiary, derived as the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR-score). Second- and third-generation parents’ focus shifted towards enhancing English and showing preference for languages other than Turkish to promote opportunities for their children. As one parent reflected in the interview, “*I don’t think I would consider taking our kids to Turkish school. Our son is at a private school, and he’s learning Chinese Mandarin at the moment. I sometimes say to my wife, ‘I think his Chinese will overtake his Turkish soon.’ I prefer that he does sport instead on Saturdays and assimilates that way into the community*” (Family 16, Father). The shift for many second- and third-generation parents, who understand too well the challenges of assimilating into Australia, less weight is added on speaking Turkish and/or attending Turkish classes in an environment where English is the dominant language.

Whilst a decrease of enrolments into the Turkish language found numerous impacting factors, the expectation for children to enhance the proficiency of the English language became prominent. The aim was to focus on English as the core language, particularly in senior secondary studies, following Year 8, once studying a LOTE no longer became mandatory. Further impacting factors into the declining enrolments of the Turkish language study included the view by some families that the VCAA scaling of the VCE Turkish subject, in the final year of secondary schooling did not offer an incentive, despite the ten per cent bonus of additional subjects. Furthermore, the assumption that Mathematics and Science-based subjects provided far greater scaling towards the ATAR. The VCAA and VTAC (Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, Scaling Report for the previous year, 2021, revealed the following subject study scores, to

calculate scaled aggregates for the ATAR. The following table reveals a sample of subjects and their scaled study scores, including the following languages that are taught as both first speaker and second speaker of the language- Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Approximately 40 languages are included as a VCE subject. However, the following languages are not scaled due to either less than ten student enrolments or nil candidates enrolled into the subject state-wide for 2021, as follows: Armenian, Bengali, Bosnian, Classical Hebrew, Croatian, Dutch, Filipino, Hungarian, Indigenous Languages, Indonesian First Language, Japanese First Language, Korean First Language, Maltese, Romanian, Swedish, Tamil, and Yiddish. The table below presents the mean score from the subject study score ranking. The table also reflects the scaled score by the VTAC to calculate the ATAR.

2021 Study	Mean	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
<b>English:</b>								
English	28.1	17	22	28	33	39	45	50
English (EAL)	28.4	16	22	28	34	40	46	50
English Language	32.4	21	27	33	38	43	47	50
Literature	31.3	20	26	31	37	42	46	50
<b>Languages (sample of languages):</b>								
Arabic	29.5	18	23	29	34	39	45	50
Chinese First Language	33.6	22	29	36	41	45	48	50
Chinese Language Culture and Society	31.8	22	27	31	36	41	45	50
Chinese Second Language (Advanced)	37.5	26	33	38	43	47	50	52
Chinese Second Language	39.6	30	36	41	45	48	51	53
Classical Greek	37.5	24	30	36	41	45	48	50
French	39.9	29	35	41	45	49	52	54
German	38.2	27	33	39	44	47	50	52
Greek	33.3	23	28	33	37	42	46	50
Hebrew	40.2	31	37	41	45	48	51	52
Indonesian First Language	-							
Indonesian Second Language	36.6	25	32	37	42	46	48	50
Italian	36.0	26	31	36	41	45	48	50
Japanese First Language	-							
Japanese Second Language	37.1	26	32	38	43	46	49	51
Korean First Language	-							
Korean Second Language	38.2	27	32	37	42	46	49	53
Latin	45.0	35	41	46	50	53	54	55
Macedonian	30.4	21	25	29	32	36	41	50
Portuguese	29.8	16	21	27	33	39	45	50
<b>Turkish</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>50</b>
Vietnamese First Language	32.8	21	27	32	37	42	46	50
Vietnamese Second Language	35.8	23	30	36	41	45	49	50
<b>Mathematics:</b>								
Further Mathematics	27.6	17	22	27	33	38	44	50
Mathematical Methods	33.7	21	28	34	40	45	49	51
Specialist Mathematics	40.5	28	35	42	47	51	54	55

2021 Study	Mean	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
<b>Sciences:</b>								
Biology	30.4	19	25	30	36	41	46	50
Chemistry	33.6	22	28	34	39	44	47	50
Environmental Science	27.7	18	23	28	33	39	44	50
Physics	31.7	20	26	32	37	42	47	50
Psychology	28.3	17	23	28	34	39	45	50

*Source:* Further scaling reports and subject study scores may be obtained- VTAC, 2021

The study score for the 2021 study of the Turkish language, in the final year of schooling, reflects a mean score of 29.9. In comparison with languages such as Italian and Greek, the mean score for Turkish fell lower by 6.1 for Italian and 3.4 for Greek. Subjects such as Specialist Mathematics and Mathematical Methods were scaled higher, however, Further Mathematics, rather, was scaled below the subject score. Furthermore, in the Sciences subject areas, Chemistry and Physics were the two subjects that scaled reasonably higher. In hindsight, these specialist subjects are generally not selected by vast majority of students. To investigate the study of the Turkish language against the subject scaling further, a student who received a study score of 20 for the subject was in fact scaled down to 18. The scaling down was consistent by one to two points. The following table reveals the mean and scaling score for Turkish over the past five years.

Year	Mean	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
2021	29.9	18	23	28	34	39	44	50
2020	29.6	20	24	28	33	37	43	50
2019	29.4	19	23	28	32	37	43	50
2018	28.6	18	23	28	33	39	44	50
2017	30.3	17	22	28	34	39	43	50

*Source:* VCAT, 2017-2021

Table 2 shows that whilst the mean score received was higher in 2017 than the most recent 2021 data, the scaling was slightly lower (one-point) in three subject scores compared to 2017 and 2021 scaling. On average, Turkish was not a subject that necessarily scaled above the study score. In comparison with other subject areas, Turkish was not disadvantaged. However, when viewing a comparative of languages, Turkish did not receive advantageous scaling as most languages, such as Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Indonesian, Italian, Korea, Macedonian, Vietnamese, and Latin which was boosted between five to fifteen points. In fact, Turkish was one of the six languages, from over 40, which were scaled down, including Arabic, Auslan, Chin Hakha, Khmer, and Portuguese. Further factors impacting subject preferences to



study a language are also the differentiation between certain languages taught. Whilst Turkish is offered only as a standard language; such languages as Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean are offered as both first-speaker and second-speaker languages. The 2021 scaling report shows students studying a language as a second-speaker received a higher scaled score than the subject score received. Student's capacity and fluency in the studying the Turkish language may impact those who already do not feel proficient in the language.

The VCAA reveals previous years' enrolment of the final year in secondary schooling and the graded examination assessment results. The following table reflects the Year 12 oral and written assessment enrolments, from the years 2014 to 2020. The data reflects a shift in enrolment numbers, distinctly representative of an ongoing declining pattern.

Year	VCAA Students Enrolled	VCAA Students Assessed
2014	172	159
2015	153	133
2016	152	137
2017	128	116
2018	112	96
2019	111	100
2020	106	100

*Source:* Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2015-2021

Student enrolment numbers into the study of the Turkish language have decreased over the years, from 1845 pupil enrolments at primary and secondary schooling in 2010 to 1074 in 2020, the year of the pandemic spiraling. The declining enrolments into the study of Turkish continue to reveal a concerning pattern of descend as the table below shows. The Department of Education and Training reveal the following data below reflecting the shift of student enrolment numbers into the study of the Turkish language over the past decade.

Schools	2010	2012	2016	2020
State Primary School	652	733	521	424
VSL Primary School	468	431	341	234
State Secondary School	286	254	280	241
VSL Secondary School	439	398	254	175
<b>Total Students Studying Turkish</b>	<b>1845</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>1396</b>	<b>1074</b>

*Source:* DE&T

Upon revisiting families after a two-year interval, and particularly, speaking with families during the global pandemic lockdown restrictions, the present data reveals that for the forty-nine per cent of families who previously had children enrolled into Turkish, all were impacted by the onslaught of COVID-19 and the closure of schools. The shift from face-to-face classroom learning to remote-platform online learning added further implications.

A vast majority had either ceased the enrolment of Turkish in its entirety or did not place as much emphasis on the study of the language, focusing more on core subjects such as English and Mathematics to ensure literacy and numeracy skills did not fall below standard curriculum level. The shift marked the complexities of online learning, particularly for students who may have already been struggling at school. For all forty-nine percent of families who had children enrolled into Turkish school, face-to-face learning ceased. Victoria experienced being the most locked down city in the world with a total of 262 days in ‘lockdown,’ with students losing over 121 days in onsite, face-to-face, learning since March, 2020. Whilst the official data from students’ state standardized testing is yet to be revealed, families acknowledge that their child’s learning was greatly impacted during remote learning. For many families, parents did not wish to add undue stress upon students who were already overwhelmed with online learning that focused on greater independency and isolation. Furthermore, there was also a consistent view across many families in minimizing the amount of screen time and study from home. Some schools had even implemented a no-homework policy and lesson reduction time whilst in remote learning platform. During online discussions, one parent highlighted, *“I don’t want my child to go to school on Saturday and risk them getting COVID, or have them stress over learning from home when I struggle to help them with their studies because I have to work from home as well and can’t help them like a teacher. Even if I wanted to, when schools reopened, I couldn’t take my kids to Saturday school because their school closed down”* (Family 32, Mother). The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and classes moving into remote learning impacted schools such as AusTurk which, for the current school year of 2022, ceased all enrolments and classes.

Whilst AusTurk has ceased all its Turkish classes in 2022, amid decreasing enrolments and the impact of COVID-19, the following table reflects the declining enrolments of students studying Turkish at VSL from primary schooling, through to the final year of secondary, Year 12, over a five-year period.

**Table 5: Total enrolments from primary to secondary schooling, VSL Turkish**

Year	Number of Enrolments
2022	347
2021	410
2020	396
2019	563
2018	542

*Source: VSL, 2022*

The decreasing enrolment numbers of students studying Turkish at VSL continued to show a pattern of decline from 2020, the year the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Over the five-year period, from its peak in 2019 with 563 students to its current year in 2022 with 347 students, found a decrease of 216 students enrolled into Turkish at VSL. The VSL campuses for Turkish enrolments have decreased from ten to eight campuses with regional areas in Victoria, Mildura, and Shepparton, impacted.

The predicament of sending children to Turkish school on Saturdays, in particular, during the era of COVID-19 was also recurring amongst families. Whilst for some families, the decision not to send children to school on Saturdays, prior to COVID-19, was due to an influx of sporting activities held on Saturdays or subject preferences; in the era of COVID, families reported hesitations of sending their child to school, even when onsite learning recommenced, out of fear of COVID exposure. Multiple families revealed that their child had “lost” so much schooling in the past two years from their mainstream education that they did not want to pose further undue pressure with Saturday schooling. As one parent reflected, “*My kids have already stayed at home for their education a year-and-a-half of the past two years, what’s a Saturday going to do for them?*” (Family 23, Father). The sense that Saturday schooling was placed with less value or of importance than their weekday mainstream education was reflected by numerous families who chose to take a pause on Saturday schooling. For a number of families who had children commencing school in the past year or two, the decision to postpone enrolment of Saturday school to later years, once the pandemic had dispersed, was also reflected as a precautionary measure. Whilst there were second- and third-generation Turkish speaking parents who continued to encourage their child’s ongoing attendance in Turkish classes, revealing that their decision to continue with Turkish enrolment was crucial for their child’s enhancement of the heritage language skills, there was also acknowledgement that the learning was interrupted. Parents noted that upon the event of restricted lockdown measures returning to remote learning, Saturday Turkish classes would commence the following week of any given lockdown, to allow teachers ample time for preparation. Inadvertently, the later commencement would result in disrupted learning of at least one week, each lockdown.

The data also revealed further contributing factors to the steep declining enrolments with families reporting gaps in the learning and teaching of Turkish such as an influx of first-generation Turkish speaking teachers’ retirement. Proficiencies in the Turkish language, of both student and teacher capabilities, and the standard of the Turkish curriculum was also reflective in parents’ decision to omit Turkish lessons, particularly the continual detriment of teaching Turkish as a first language to speakers of Turkish as a second language. One parent, refined the sentiment that many parents were articulating with the following predicament:

*“My son studied Turkish up to Year 7, but because he attends a private school, they have Saturday school sports, and the school signs a contract that it’s compulsory they do sports. My daughter went to Turkish school until about Year 9, but she didn’t find it stimulating. The*

*Turkish curriculum is very dry. Our numbers in enrolments into the Turkish subject have declined... We have gone from 300 to 150 students studying Year 12 Turkish... Students and families, rightly so, don't want to study Turkish Year 12 only to have it impact their final score for entrance into university. Most of the teachers on the panel are Turkish-speakers from Australia, not Turkey. And yet they are still teaching these students with the expectations as though Turkish is their first language. For many, it's not... I find kids, in our time, were happy to sit in a classroom and listen, but kids now have limited attention span. The problem is we also have some students who don't want to be there, are not engaged... There has to be an 'istek' (a want). There has to be parental involvement as well... The Year 12 Turkish Examination- not much has changed because these people's views have not changed. Our study scores are not getting any higher, if anything they've declined as well. The median score is 29. People who have been running the curriculum for so long don't want change... Unfortunately, we don't have many young-generation of teachers coming through to Turkish. They're not confident of teaching Turkish, so we're not going anywhere- no progress. Many families don't want their children to have their scores decrease in a subject that is not offering much. If you can see your car is going to crash, do you press the brakes or do you press the accelerator?" (Family 35, Mother).*

The VCAA data continues to reveal the descending trend of student enrolment declining across all schooling years, consistent with students opting out of Turkish studies in their final years. Turkish was considered within the top ten of languages studied in all government schools and VSL until the end of 2006. The most recent report on LOTE programs and language provisions across Victorian government schools in 2020 no longer finds Turkish within the top ten of languages studied. The table below further indicates the numbers across the top ten language enrolments.

Language	Top 10 Enrolments	Percentage (%) of Total Enrolments
	<i>2006</i>	
Italian	93,352	25.7
Indonesian	83,596	23.0
Japanese	68,930	19.0
French	39,814	10.9
German	34,665	9.5
Chinese (Mandarin)	15,007	4.1
Auslan	7,252	2.0
Greek	4,781	1.3
Vietnamese	3,353	0.9
Turkish	2,160	0.6

<b>Table 6: Continue</b>		
<b>Language</b>	<b>Top 10 Enrolments</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of Total Enrolments</b>
	<b>2020</b>	
Chinese (Mandarin)	91,412	19.6
Italian	82,141	17.6
Japanese	80,398	17.3
Indonesian	61,929	13.3
French	53,670	11.5
Auslan	31,355	6.7
Spanish	23,003	4.9
German	19,050	4.1
Vietnamese	2,920	0.6
Aboriginal Languages	2,791	0.6

*Source:* DE&T, 2006; 2020

Student enrolment numbers into the study of the Turkish language began to decrease even prior to the pandemic with a mass exodus of members from the Turkish community at community schools associated with political affiliations. The shift in the student profile at such schools also affected the languages taught, shifting from teaching Turkish to now offering languages such as Arabic and French. In 2020, students enrolled into the study of Turkish consisted of 0.2 per cent with 1,074 students in total. The decline of student enrolments into the study of the Turkish language further highlights the shift in language preferences amongst third- and fourth-generation speakers and a need for ongoing research to the long-term effects of COVID-19 on heritage language maintenance. Clearly, the inevitable pauses to visits to extended family members and the heritage home, due to lockdown restrictions, may have also attributed to the shift in language preferences and patterns.

Furthermore, the VCE Year 12 Turkish Examination was also reflected by some families as being “*too challenging*” and at the detriment of students not only as the study was taught as a first language, but also due to the language barrier posed in the exam paper which required students to respond in both Turkish and English. When speaking to an assessor of the Turkish Examination, they shared their observations of students’ papers. For students who studied Turkish as a second language, their responses to questions in Turkish scored relatively low; whilst for a student who may have migrated to Australia and studied Turkish as a first language, the questions reflecting a response in English did not generally score as high. Inadvertently, a student who may be highly proficient and fluent in Turkish was disadvantaged with the English response section. Ultimately, this factor also contributed to families deciding against the study of Turkish in fear of any risk to the ATAR score.

#### **4. Discussion**

Despite the pause in Turkish Saturday schooling and the decline in enrolment numbers, families felt that there was a shift in the language spoken at home. Families were spending

more time together and as a result communication within the family home altered. With the onset of working from home, with both parents at home (and in many cases, even grandparents' role, particularly in the circumstance of living within the same household), the presence of the home language was more profound. As a result, the dynamic in the family home shifted with more communication. One parent reflects on the impact of lockdown as follows:

*“We’re spending more time at home and altogether that we found ourselves watching a Turkish film every night to pass the time. My husband is more fluent in Turkish and with him working from home, we were speaking more Turkish, whereas in the past the kids would be speaking mainly English because it was mostly them talking to one another or me. All of a sudden, we were all present and instead of resorting to our separate rooms, we spent more time together as a whole family. Yes, they weren’t attending Turkish school, but I felt like they were speaking more Turkish at home. It was like we went back to times when we were kids and spent quality time as a family.”* (Family 43, Mother).

For all families who participated in the discussion forum, the consistent approach of tending to mental health, care and wellbeing was of far greater importance than any learning measures with the closure of onsite schooling. Whilst participation in sporting activities and being outdoors was important for families prior to COVID-19, it became of even greater significance during lockdown restrictions. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Australia saw an increase in psychological distress and the use of mental health services, with an increase in self-harm amongst youth groups (2021). The resounding message between families reflected the precedence of their child’s health and wellbeing above all else.

Furthermore, the impact of technology, including the onslaught of social media platforms and gaming consoles, also reflected a shift in intergenerational dispositions. Families providing commentary on the use of technology as an additive to language maintenance acknowledged that unless technology was used to facilitate and enhance heritage language use and connection, the language choice filtered continued to show preference for English as the source of communication method. The impact of technology on student learning and attention span was also a point of recognition, with one parent sharing:

*“Yes, technology has had its positives, but it also brings negatives with it as well. Our needs today are different. Quality family time is diminishing and as a result, the cultural and language experience is impacted. There’s also a generational aspect. The younger generation’s values and interests are different. They’re resistant, they feel distressed, and that then concerns parents who decide not to put their child through the ordeal of Turkish school. Whereas, with us, our parents dropped us off to Saturday school regardless of whether you were tired or cried.”* (Family 7, Mother).

The use of technology and the adverse effects during remote learning continue to be investigated with ongoing research into the impact of COVID-19 and the risks associated with online learning. Reports of increased emotional and social development challenges continue to prompt the investigation of the negative impact of online learning on both physical and mental health (Halupa, 2016). Studies have found that the move to online learning resulted in a decrease in learning time and a decline in assessment results, particularly for lower achievers (Bird et al., 2021). According to one study, findings showed that nearly half of Australian students were impacted by the move to online study with forty-six per cent in early years and vulnerable groups to be at risk of adverse effects of development and disconnection (Brown et al., 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

Contrary to assumptions made by concerned parents, the link between early years education and learning a language, with even one hour per week of a second language in the early years of primary schooling, benefits reading and literacy levels in English (Clyne, 1995). During COVID-19 restrictions, the remote learning platform placed emphasis on the home learning environment. For those who may have already been struggling, the expectation of greater independent learning brought light to the challenges faced by students. The link between parental involvement, the home family environment and communication revealed not only greater resilience and a sense of belonging, but also served as a sanctuary to foster both wellbeing and identity. In studies of Indigenous communities, findings reveal the significance of cultural identity and belonging to purpose and positive mindset (Wexler, 2009). In addition to the family home, the school environment serves as a platform to protect, accelerate, and promote both identity and belonging. For CLS, the connection between school and the heritage language serves as an asset to the membership of its culture. The importance of communities initiating high vitality strategies to maintain their heritage language, and governments implementing policies to preserve languages, is essential. Whilst the family home remains a significant environment in the sustainability of the heritage language, the success of initiatives such as the ongoing enrolment into Community Language Schools also serves as a successful measure to maintaining heritage languages. A significant number of families conflicted between the association of language as fundamental to identity as culture, and the contrasting view that one may still possess cultural identity without speaking the language. Initiatives into the promotion of Australia's community languages is essential. Ongoing studies reveal that without the fundamental use of explicitly and purposefully speaking the heritage/community language, the link to cultural identity will weaken across generations.

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