

Partnering for the Future

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PASCH Schools: Partners for the future

Last week I was privileged to attend the [3rd Conference of School Principals of PASCH Schools in Southeast Asia](#). A 'PASCH school' is a regular secondary school with a particular emphasis on the learning and teaching of German as an additional language. PASCH schools constitute [a global network](#) of more than 1,700 schools. 'PASCH' stands for 'Schools – Partners of the Future.' Funded by the German government, the [PASCH network](#) was initiated in 2008 in order to offer opportunities [to youths from around the globe to learn German and to develop a positive relationship with modern Germany](#). PASCH supports professional development training for teachers, provides language learning resources for schools, offers scholarships for students to study in Germany, and numerous other virtual and non-virtual exchange and collaboration opportunities, including [global student newspapers](#).

Attended by representatives of various national ministries of education, school principals, German language teachers, industry representatives and former students from across Southeast Asia and Australasia, the conference provided an excellent opportunity to gain an understanding of the state of the art of language education in the region.

Most language teaching efforts across the region are, unsurprisingly, devoted to English. However, there is a clear sense that English is no longer enough. To begin with, the countries of the region are characterized by enormous linguistic diversity and mother tongue education in addition to instruction in the national language is increasingly incorporated into curricula.

Second, with the greater regional integration that the introduction of [the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015](#) promises neighbouring languages are gaining in importance. While as yet weakly integrated in most curricula, their role is set to expand.

Finally, there are other international languages such as Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese or Spanish. Offering the latter in the curriculum is often a niche effort of schools who are trying to differentiate themselves from other schools and who are attempting to provide their students with an additional edge. That teaching international languages other than English is intended to create a small elite group of cultural mediators is best illustrated with the example of Singapore. There, the opportunity to study a third foreign language is offered to students who achieve in the top ten percent in the primary school leaving certificate. Only these top academic achievers are able to pursue a third language in high school by attending a [Ministry](#)

of Education Language Centre (MOELC) in addition to their regular studies. The languages on offer include Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, French, German, Japanese, Malay and Spanish.

While German may seem like a relatively irrelevant language to pursue in Southeast Asia, this is in fact not true for students at PASCH schools. These highly motivated students do so with two main goals in mind: to pursue tertiary education at a university in Germany and/or to pursue employment with a German company. Speakers at the conference included a number of students who had achieved their goal and who spoke about their experiences of learning German in school, participating in exchange programs, studying at a German university and working in a role where their German skills are advantageous.

In addition to achieving personal aims, fostering German skills among a small group of cultural mediators also benefits the wider society, as speakers from various national ministries of education stressed. These benefits are related particularly to knowledge transfer. Interesting examples include partnerships with German companies to deliver an innovative automotive engineering program in a Malaysian college or partnerships between Singaporean polytechnics and German small-to-medium enterprises to deliver a dual vocational training program. In fact, attending industry representatives stressed the importance of combining language skills with strong academic and vocational skills for success in the global workplace.

Finally, a number of school representatives argued that a focus on German had improved overall language education in their school. A teacher from an Australian high school, for instance, mentioned that – in the context of Australia’s notorious ‘monolingual mindset’ – his school’s focus on German has had positive effects on language learning more generally. As students in the German immersion program have discovered the value of learning German, their desire to learn another language has also increased and the school has unexpectedly seen enrolments in its Japanese language program rise, too.

In Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, the positive side-effects of a school’s focus on German are different and relate to improved teacher quality. Speakers from these countries explained that teacher quality – both in terms of proficiency and pedagogy – was a concern. This affects predominantly English language teachers, as English is the most widely taught language. Participating in the professional development opportunities offered by the [PASCH school program](#) has helped to disseminate pedagogy training across languages and thus has resulted in improving the professionalism of English language teachers, too.

Despite their diverse backgrounds all speakers stressed that the problems facing humanity today are global problems and that the world needs to move beyond competition to become an international learning community. Linguistic diversity will inevitably mediate the success of our partnerships for the future.



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