

Australian Early Development Census

Language diversity and the AEDC



About the AEDC

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is an Australian Government Initiative. It is a measure of how young children have developed as they start their first year of full-time school and looks at children as a whole group. Results are reported at the local community, community, state-territory and national level to help create a snapshot of early childhood development.

The census involves teachers of children in their first year of full-time school completing a research tool, the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument based on their observations of the child. The Instrument measures five key areas, or domains of early childhood development.

The AEDC domains are:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge

These domains are measured because they are important areas of child development and also good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes.

The AEDC helps schools, communities and governments to pinpoint the services, resources and support that young children and their families need to help shape the future and wellbeing of children in Australia.

The findings from the AEDC will benefit the whole community helping local schools, community groups and government understand what's working well in the community and what needs to be improved or developed to better support children and their families. Using the results can also help strengthen links between schools, kindergartens, preschools, playgroups, health centres, libraries and other local organisations supporting children and families.

Adapting the Early Development Instrument

The AEDC programme uses an adapted version of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) developed in Canada. The EDI has been adapted for use in many countries including the United States of America, Indonesia, Jamaica, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Egypt, Jordan, Moldova, China and the Philippines.

Validation studies were undertaken to ensure rigorous adaptation of the EDI for Australia, known as the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument. An Indigenous Adaptation Study was also undertaken to assess the cultural validity of the EDI for Indigenous children, and

adapt it to make it relevant to Australia’s diverse population.

Language diversity

The Australian population is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse in the world and this is represented in the children included in the AEDC. The AEDC results reveal a great diversity in the languages spoken by Australian children. There are 323 different languages spoken with the results from the 2018 AEDC showing that:

- 25.3 per cent of all Australian children speak languages other than English at home with 126 different languages spoken.
- 17.2 per cent of Australian Indigenous children speak languages other than English at home with 126 different languages spoken.
- 18.1 per cent of children with a language background other than English (LBOTE)¹ who are also proficient in English², are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) - compared with 94.1 per cent of children who have LBOTE status and who not proficient in English.
- 7.9 per cent of children who are proficient in English and have LBOTE status are developmentally vulnerable on two or more of the AEDC domains, compared with 59.2 per cent who have LBOTE status and are not proficient in English.

Table 1 – Top 10 main languages other than English spoken at home (2018)

Language	Percentage	Language	Percentage
Mandarin	12.0	Cantonese	3.5
Arabic	10.7	Urdu	2.6
Vietnamese	6.1	Unknown	2.5
Hindi	5.6	Korean	2.4
Punjabi	4.5	Spanish	2.3

Building a picture of children’s development

Understanding the local context is an important step when interpreting and using AEDC results. Communities are encouraged to use a mix of data and local knowledge to build a comprehensive picture of children’s development in their community.

Considerations for interpreting AEDC results for children from diverse language backgrounds

In communities where many children speak a language other than English at home, there are particular and complex considerations when working to understand and interpret the AEDC results. The Australian version of the Early Development Instrument aims to measure universal child development trends. It cannot always capture more detailed elements of child development that are important across cultures or the skills that children have in other languages.

The AEDC results tell us about the skills and competencies that children have displayed as they start school. Teachers report on these skills as they are demonstrated by children in English in their school setting (in Australia, this is predominantly an English-speaking environment). The results do not capture the language capacities children display at home or in other contexts where their first language and literacy skills might be strong.

For communities with many children who speak a language other than English at home, it is important to consider the English proficiency levels of those children as a group when interpreting community results. Although the results could show that the community has higher proportions of children developmentally vulnerable in the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain, it is important to remember that the children’s first language and literacy skills have not been measured.

This should also be considered when communities are reviewing results for other AEDC domains. This is because limited English might present barriers for social and emotional skills and a range of communications with children’s teachers and peers.

Understanding community results: insights from national data

Looking at the results for all children in Australia can help communities that have a higher proportion of children from diverse language backgrounds better understand their results. The 2018 national AEDC results show that children who speak a language other than English at home and are not yet proficient in English had higher proportions of developmental vulnerability on all AEDC domains compared with AEDC results for all children. **Research Snapshots**³ provide more information on how the AEDC results have been used in communities where many children speak a language other than English at home.

1 For the AEDC, children are considered LBOTE (Language Background other than English at home and/or have English as a Second Language (ESL) status.

2 Proficient in English refers to what is expected of the average monolingual English speaker in a similar phase of development.

3 www.aedc.gov.au/resources/research-snapshots