

Asian Survey on Confidence and Literacy using the English Language 2005 Report Summary

Wall Street Institute conducted a survey in mid-April 2005 of seven Asian regions – Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand – to assess confidence and literacy using the English language.. These two factors were assessed because of the roles they play in successful language learning.

The survey was conducted from April 19 to 28 April 2005 on the Internet and consisted of a random sample of 16,000 individuals in the above mentioned Asian regions.

An International Advisory Board was established to advise on the survey and drew upon expertise of language academics from the University of Cambridge (UK), University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) (US), Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) (HK), University of Melbourne (Australia) and Murdoch University (Australia).

The survey found that Hong Kong, as a base of English language usage, had deteriorated in comparison to Mainland China and Thailand both of which were regions that traditionally had low English language proficiency.

Another key finding was that Hong Kong also lagged far behind its key regional competitor namely Singapore. WSI believes these findings have ramifications for Hong Kong's future competitiveness as an international commercial centre given the status of English as the universal language of business.

The following are the salient initial findings from the survey.

Finding 1: Self-Rated English Language Ability

Asked to rate their own English language ability, Singaporeans rated themselves highest; Hong Kong second; Korea and Thailand third; and Mainland China, Japan and Taiwan last.

Finding 2: English Ability and Education Level

Among Singaporean graduates 46.6% rated their English as “having no problems” as did 44.4% of Hong Kong graduates. 25.9% of Singaporean graduates rated their English language skills as up to native English speaker level however only 4.8% of Hong Kong graduates gave the same rating.

Finding 3: Interaction with Native Speakers of English

55.4% of Singaporean respondents take every opportunity to interact with native speakers of English. The highest percentage in other regions was 29.6% (Thailand). Hong Kong only ranked fourth with 21.3%, behind Mainland China (23.2%).

Conversely Hong Kong has the highest proportion (68.1%) of respondents who indicated that they would interact with native speakers of English only when required. Japan has the highest percentage (46.3%) of respondents indicating that they would avoid interacting with native speakers of English.

Finding 4: Comfort Level when Interacting with Native Speakers of English

60.1% of Singaporean respondents stated that they felt comfortable when interacting with native speakers of English. Hong Kong lags far behind with 50.5% of respondents did not agree that they feel comfortable when interacting with native speakers of English but when they did interact with native English speaker they were “not too concerned with making mistakes”. In Japan, 56.6% of the respondents felt the same.

On the other hand, about half of the respondents from China, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand were afraid to make mistakes when interacting with native speakers of English.

Finding 5: Reading English Materials

About half (50.79%) of respondents from Hong Kong sometimes read English materials, which is comparable to Korea's 50.1% but falls short of Thailand's 55.84%. On the other hand, Singapore had 71.44% of respondents claiming that they read mostly English materials.

35.61% of respondents in Hong Kong spent less than 2 hours per week reading English materials comparable to China, Korea and Taiwan. Singapore on the other hand had 54.31% of respondents spending more than 10 hours per week reading English materials whilst 39.4% of respondents in Japan and 22.67% from Thailand spent comparable hours reading English materials.

Finding 6: English at Work

77.6% of respondents in Singapore stated that English was an important factor in their productivity at work. Only 49.4% of those from Hong Kong believed English was necessary for productivity, ranking third behind Thailand at 57.8%.

Finding 7: English for General Communications

Whilst 66.4% of Singaporean respondents claimed they used English with friends either very often or all the time, no other regions surveyed came near that level of English language usage.

In Mainland China, 28.9% of respondents sometimes used English to communicate with friends. In Hong Kong, only 27.3% would do so. A notable proportion of Hong Kong respondents (48.9%) stated that they rarely used English to communicate with friends.

~~~~~  
To obtain a full version of the preliminary Survey Report, please contact:

**Wall Street Institute**

Corporate Affairs & Communications Department

Tel: (852) 2308-2887 / (852) 2308-2894

Fax: (852) 2377-1806

Email: [communications@wsi.edu.hk](mailto:communications@wsi.edu.hk)